

ANNA MARIA ORTESE

Folletto in Genoa

Translated by Henry Martin

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Folletto in Genoa

The gravity of political events is at times unendurable. And the use of the word “political” is a euphemism. We live in the midst of a war, or a malady, and we watch the advance of a tireless, bludgeoning violence which slithers like tongues of fire over the whole of the earth. At moments the various conflagrations threaten to conjoin. A billow of smoke—of news, confusion and calamity—seems all-pervasive, and is everywhere at large. The sky, even at its bluest, appears to veer towards lead. A bitter heaviness, as though of drunkenness, or as though our lives were about to end (and had proved entirely useless), weighs like a mountain on the human heart.

I found myself in just this state of mind a few years back, owing, I believe, to a fresh act of villainy which was about to be consummated between two lands I will not name, to the detriment of a third and wholly impoverished, not to say “wretched” country, it moreover being clear that these first two nations, in turn, had been spurred and I might say blinded—if such blindness, even more than deliberate, were not self-interested—by two other nations, both of which were far too intelligent to confront one another directly, and I’ll hope to be forgiven for circumlocution. Life on the earth, at this particular moment, struck me not, I’ll say, as unbearable (that stage already had been surpassed) but as utterly despoiled of even the slightest interest,

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like a stone roiling forward from out of eternity and off toward another eternity of stone. My dismay, on this one morning, was in fact so taut that, having made the trip to Genoa to dispense with a piece of highly tedious business (at the District Office of Public Properties), I had forgotten to make my return to the railway station, as surely would have been logical. Especially since it was snowing, in spite, or so I seem to recall, of its being the month of May. In short, I first had gone to the port, where I saw nothing but black on white; and then to the hills, where it was all exactly the same, except in reverse; and finally I had wandered to a dark and squalid quarter of town where I had never been before, it appeared. So by then it must have been close to four in the afternoon—and the season was beginning to reassert its mettle—when I found myself in the act of climbing a run-down stone ramp, hidden behind a tree, and then a flight of stairs, narrower and steeper (perhaps of slate), which was reached by way of a low and decrepit courtyard door; and here still again with no idea of where I might be going. I was tired of this world, quite simply.

On reaching the sixth floor, I encountered the happy surprise of an open door, the last, and of hearing familiar voices, two of them, in the room beyond it: the voices of a man and a woman, in a somewhat rising tone, which I recognized as belonging to Eulalio Ramo and his sister Ruperta Ramo, a seamstress. Ruperta had once been married, long before, to another Ramo (a distant cousin) and that was her only reason for allowing herself to be called by a name which she shared with a brother whom she detested: one of those piercing, venomous and implacable hatreds that sometimes arise between unhappy relatives or other people who share a roof. Ruperta was crazy, by nature and ow-

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ing as well to that ill-conceived marriage, whereas Eulalio—generally addressed as *Signor Lalio*—was a half-wit. What bound them together, aside from her hatred and his timidity, was their mutual solitude, and also his pension, as a civil invalid, which when added to her earnings allowed them both to get by without excessive hardship even in times, like these, which are clearly problematic. They were both about fifty (which at least is how I remembered them from the previous time I had seen them; and that, it seemed, was the state in which I rediscovered them) but both of them looked much older. She, with her squarish face and smallish bones, was short and stout, and must once, now gray, have been brunette. He was tall and lanky, and when younger must have been blond, as indeed he had remained. But blond like a corpse, which is to say with a strangely withered face, half asleep and absent.

I had met them—I had been in that house, as I then recalled, some ten, or was it fifteen years before—at the time when their tragedy was beginning; and now, automatically, I had returned. So that explained the mystery.

But only up to a certain point: the nature of their squabble was quite disconcerting—its subject was a certain Folletto, a “Pixie,” whom Ruperta now wanted to ban from her room, saying she was simply “fed up,” and since when might pixies have lived in that house?—and a wall I seemed to remember as having stood directly in front of the entrance, a red wall, was no longer there. In its place I confronted a short uncarpeted flight of stairs, lit by a very dim bulb. Ruperta stood at the top of those stairs, with an enormous pair of shears in her hand—which was comprehensible, given her profession as a seamstress—and she thrust them about as she shouted:

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“I’ve no more pity to spare! Starting right now, *Stellino mio*, my little star,” her tone derisive, “is nobody’s business but yours, you understand me? You’re to keep him to yourself, downstairs, and he might as well forget about these steps.”

“But please, Rupina, you know I’d never ask you to help take care of him, I can manage that alone,” Lelio, who to me was out of sight, retorted, “but he’ll die without you. Stellino has lived in your room for a hundred and ten years. He was the apple of your eye, and now he can’t do without you... Come on, let him back in.”

The woman made no reply, but violently yanked into place a curtain of shabby damask, in which I promptly recognized the missing “wall.” Meanwhile, however, she had seen me—but unfortunately without recognizing me, or perhaps without seeing any reason to admit to having done so. She quickly grew quite proper, nodding acknowledgment of my presence, and inquired hypocritically *how she might be of help to me...*

At precisely that moment, an utterly curious creature dressed in a brief cape made of old newspapers—these papers aglare with all the more and less alarming reports which had driven my melancholy to a pitch and thereby directed my path to that house—and this cape still further embellished with numerous strips of tattered red plush, which clearly were scraps left over from tailoring—advanced with a halting gait from a part of the room which till then had remained out of sight to me; and on reaching the flight of stairs, he began a laborious climb towards the object of his whole devotion; but the woman had taken off a shoe and hurtled it down at him. Though he had not been hit, Stellino, the aforementioned, stopped in his tracks as though chagrined.

He was a creature I will not attempt to describe. It

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wouldn't be civil to say I know I wouldn't be believed, but surely the tale would arouse all sorts of perplexities. Perplexities, I have to admit, that baffled me as well. He was no taller...than a child just a few years old, and even, in fact, much smaller than that—the size of a doll—and with a body—especially the legs, which peeped from beneath the newspaper print—that resembled the figure of a russet—or grayish?—hare. An abundance of golden-grayish fur, but white around the chin. On his head, a polka-dot kerchief, knotted at the top. His skull was round, beneath that ludicrous scrap of cloth, and his long black ears were pointed. And if ever eyes had attempted to thief the splendor of crystal, and the sweet sadness of the opal and the amethyst, those were Stellino's eyes. He looked at the woman as though to say, "Rupert, dearest mother Rupert, why can't I stay in your room any longer, why can't I have your company? I feel so awful...so truly awful. Your little Stellino will die from it. Please, dearest Rupert, mother Rupert, let me stay with you."

"It's that tooth! I've already told you, and I'm telling you again! So take him to the dentist," Rupert newly screamed, after a moment in which, to me—judging from what struck me as an unnatural silence—she had seemed to be battling with her own emotions. Then, turning in my direction, she repeated, curtly, "Can I help you?"

The telephone rang upstairs in her room and thus disposed of the question, likewise relieving me from quite an outlandish reply: ("I had come to pick up my dress!") A client, perhaps a tourist, calling from one of Genoa's snowy hilltops, was on the phone, as was instantly clear from the flattering, servile tone assumed by Lelio's sister. She bustled, "...but I'm on my way! *Certainement*... I'll be there in a half hour *ma chere*, ..."

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but with a mixture of disdain and sickening affectation that deformed the fine French phrase, concluding, “...*J’en suis tres satisfaite, Madame...*”

Five minutes to dress in a tailored suit that might best have befitted an old gendarme—a suit, moreover, less graced than blasted by a silk tricolor cravat (the Italian flag, though without the coat of arms). And then having grasped a sizable crocodile bag, its open maw unclasped, along with a stocky umbrella which resembled a billy-club, she precipitated down the stairs. Or, better, she appeared to precipitate, given her bulk, though in fact she descended them staidly, and with not so much as a glance at her miserable admirer. She simply insisted, “Out of here! Get him out of here, Lelio, and I mean it; and when he has to make dirt, take him into your room...” Lelio, as she passed, gathered the poor sick creature into his arms.

Folletto’s little pixie face—but “Folletto” is the only description which truly suits him, and moreover the only name by which his species was known in that house—rested in the crook of the poor old half-wit’s arm. And his amethyst eyes (with those glints of crystal) turned now toward Lelio’s sad and wrinkled face, now toward the door through which, just earlier, I had entered and through which Ruperta meanwhile had left. Never before—I can say so quite truthfully—had I seen the eyes of a Christian (or even a pagan) to show such love and supplication for a woman, and all for so horrid a species of woman as this Ruperta; nor had I ever seen so great an indifference to the delicate, frightening love of a pixie, to his ceaseless torment and gentle entreaties, as in the eyes of this terrible seamstress.

Once the woman was gone, Folletto, whom Lelio had set back down on the floor, immediately made his

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dirt, as though until then having retained it out of fear and horror at the thought of a blow that she might have dealt him. He made his dirt under the table, vomiting as well, and then lay sulking beneath a dilapidated wardrobe full of dresses ready to be delivered—as you could tell from the identical plastic covers that protected the shoulders of the garments, and also because the wardrobe had no doors. Lelio, before thinking to deal with the mess, bent down to this poor fantastic creature to speak soothingly to him; and I was happy, knowing my way about the house, to take care of the cleaning up myself. I also opened the door onto the balcony—which at one end surmounted a gully, and at the other end an ancient snow-laden alleyway—to let in a bit of fresh air, which meanwhile had begun to stir.

The world, in that brief space of time, seemed to have changed. It seemed to have grown meeker, and was almost charged with laughter (even in spite of ubiquitous desperation). You no longer remembered, or no longer focused on the day's dark menaces... As though all its oppressions, and all its preposterous sequels of jeers and threats (the marks of hostilities that also, as I myself had seen, scourged the goodness of Nature while strewing their fateful anguish through the miserable lives of human beings) contained a touch of playfulness... As though this World were only joking... An enormous cloud, there toward the west, gray in a cold yellow sky, now seemed Ruperta herself, the woman of hate, receding into the distance with her enormous seamstress' shears.

From Lelio's lips, as at first he knelt and then as he sat on a low chair beside Folletto—who meanwhile seemed to have fallen asleep, or who might have appeared to be stunned by drugs (his amethyst eyes remaining fixed,

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through the open balcony door, on a cloud)—I learned the whole of the tragedy of their recent years. And here I abandoned remembering, since nothing at all of that part of their lives was known to me. It went back further than our uncertain acquaintance. Ruperta, according to Lalio, had once, in Canicatti, the town where they were born, been a lively and very beautiful girl—an utterly regal beauty with whom the fascinating Don Vito Cologero, from Catania, had fallen in love. Finally she had married him. And on moving to her new home in the northern city of Genoa, where her Sicilian husband had emigrated, she had taken along not only her idiot brother, but the delicate Folletto as well. An era of miracles, of a grace that Saint Rosalia herself... She would sing all day long... But Folletto harbored objections, since he loved his Ruperta with a love that declared her unshareable. So Stellino, during the night, had set to “praying.” Sadly enough, and there was proof. (As the idiot talked, Folletto had opened his eyes and seemed to entreat, “Enough, my master, enough! Take pity, and spare me!”) He prayed “to his people.” And soon those prayers were heard. Don Vito met up with another woman, and her name was Constance, which is a name that holds no promise of anything good. For a while he kept up appearances, but finally he confessed: he had promised himself to Constance for life: “You, Ruperta dear, are older than I am, and you have to understand...” The scenes that followed, naturally enough, were fit to send souls to damnation...but things like that can be found in any novel. In any case, Ruperta found succor in her sense of pride, and one fine day, on her own initiative, she told the man she loved that he had to go... “Not, you see, that he *could* go, but that he *had* to go, which is different... It was really splendid. Folletto,” as the idiot further recounted, “couldn’t be-

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lieve his prayers had been answered, but,” Lallo continued, “he had badly sized things up with Ruperta. Along with her womanly happiness, Ruperta had also banished, and forever, her girlishness (since a girl was what, until then, she had always remained inside of herself). To make a long story short, she began to despise her brother, and then, even worse, the poor Folletto, “who,” the idiot explained, “had always lived in the Ramo family home, at first with the brothers and sister, and even earlier with their parents, and their grandparents, and finally back to their great grandparents and that brigand by the name of Giacinto *Ramo* Marino—from before the era of Garibaldi—who had ‘found’ him on the hearth at the time when he bought the house...” “Found him?” I interrupted, fairly befuddled. “Yes, he found him, the mischievous little thing, in front of the fire where he was saying his little ‘prayers’...to the dead, to the genies, to the spirits of the past...all, he said, for the family’s prosperity, but equally”—this, I understood, was Lallo’s suspicion—“to assure the success of his childish pranks on the cats and the finches, to make no mention of assuring the failure of Garibaldi (though later he changed his mind!)”

Yes, because Folletto was a *child*; he had been born a child, and now was dying as a child: an entirely illogical and innocent creature, even in spite, as I had just then heard, of his hundred and twelve years of age... The unification of Italy.

As I listened to the words of this poor demented man—yet hardly more demented and much more gentle than his flaming sister—I subsided into something like drowsiness, a spell that barred me from grasping reality. I could see that this curious fool was dreaming, or taking his revenge on someone; I could see that

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Rupertia was quite unhappy, and that all her unhappiness resided first of all in her “firmness” (not to say her rigidity); and I could see that Stellino—*Stellino mio*—suffered atrociously. Of that there could be no doubt. Though perhaps there was room for doubt as to what he truly was. Gnome, fairy, elf, an angel from the skies? I was nearly afraid to cast a further glance at the space between two chairs where his bed of shredded paper lay. Apparently a beast, a cat, but perhaps an October hare, or a lunar squirrel. But his face—whether of cat, hare or lunar squirrel—wore so sublime an expression of the unloved and loving child: in the snout that grew ever more pointed, and in the splendid amethyst eyes, at their corners two barely perceptible stars which dawned and fled, like memories, like angels of the past. “Ah, little mother, my Rupertia,” the unhappy Folletto would murmur now and then (surely I was dreaming) while from his mouth (the lips and palate of purest ebony) a strand of tenuous golden bubbles trailed down onto the noble little creature’s matted breast... Words, perhaps unformulated thoughts, but not for that reason less real...

(As I write, I vaguely catch the sound of the wind blowing along the stairs: I am still in the sleepy province of Genoa, and a January night is about to fall. I return, absorbed, to telling my tale.)

That tiny emaciated body, forsaken beneath a cape snipped from old newsprint (where one still made out the headlines of a previous world war), and with a kerchief on its head—that kerchief which spoke of the gentleness of human affections, and from which, as well, there sprouted two black, attentive ears—everything about him was laughable... there was nothing one might take seriously... if not for the puny careworn

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hand that rested over his heart, a hand more similar to a sprig of rosemary than to a true human paw (thus my thoughts babbled on), what with its little fingernails all twisted sideways, by now disregarded, no longer groomed, and misshapen. Yes, I could understand that by now he had reached the mark of ONE HUNDRED AND TWELVE YEARS! (as the two mad siblings referred to presumably twelve or eighteen) and that creatures such as these are generally prone at such an age to take their leave, to vanish, and to die! But those wonderful violet eyes, brimming with tears, and continuing still to search about the ceiling or the skies for the monumental woman with whom he had shared his era of happiness... those eyes were those of a being *born a child*: as a member of the race of children: and that as such would die. He would die as the immortal *Pixie*—the immortal *Folletto*—which he was. And only the illness (more psychological than anything else) and the dogged, lunatic suffering, debasement, and often blind reactions of his two pain-ridden masters had made him a creature of Evil—a frightened little creature devoted to naughty pranks. But *Stellino*—the little star—was far from Evil incarnate (and not simply, perhaps, the incarnation of Good): he was the Spirit of Life which once so gladdened our fine and happy families, transfiguring this silly Boot into a mystic Garden! That alone is what he was; and now, along with him, all of it was coming to an end; and rose-blushed Dawn, no matter if every rampart might be battered down, was no longer thinkable!

Lalio, his face now streaked with tears (clearly, even his imbecility was less than total), had taken out a handkerchief edged in black—a mourner's handkerchief—but with a decorative pattern of tiny colorful

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pennants; and while kneeling at the flank of the dying sprite, he dried the creature's eyes... Folletto twitched an ear. He had heard footsteps on the stairs...but they had not come from her!

The half-wit told me (with great decorum, though ever more meekly dropping his head and revealing his withered neck), he told me, or re-evoked, the whole of the enormous tragedy which that ill-considered marriage had brought down upon the house, and which then had lapsed into reprisal against that cunning little creature (who in fact was a *non*-traditional spirit, just as I had supposed—simply vital, impassioned, and full of dreams) and of how in that place, that house, there had ceased to be further room for him. He described all the pains of the pixie's *ruination*, from the time when Ruperta had no longer wanted to keep him in her room, to the slow and ferocious derangement of her soul after Don Vito had set up house with Constance (and Ruperta's youth was forever finished). How she then had begun to torment and mortify Folletto! Perhaps, also, as a way of directing her rage at him, at Lalio: to prove to him that she was *free*, now, of feelings; that she had become a new woman... (such strange vengeance). Upstairs, in Ruperta's room, Stellino was no longer welcome. Whenever she walked through the house on her way to the kitchen, always wielding her enormous shears, his effusions were condemned to absolute blindness, or were rewarded with a kick. Yet Stellino refused to give in: he was always on the wait for her, like a panhandler. "And now," came Lalio's concluding remark, shaping a lie with incredible calm and fellow-feeling, "now we surely didn't need to see things worsened by this infected tooth... He's got an infected tooth; that's what he's dying from... But only, of course... *only if he doesn't take his medicine.*"

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He then stood up to fetch a bowl of water and a teaspoonful of a pinkish powder which he raised to Stellino's black lips.

The pixie emitted a groan, moved only slightly, and the powder and the water spilled across his breast, which was already matted with vomit and tears.

I don't know why it came to mind, given such *distances*, by now insuperable, of nature and time, but I remembered an old southern song that spoke of childhood love, and it reminded me in turn of another: the sublime *Ballad* of Bernart de Ventadorn:

As I see the jocund skylark
rise, upleaping toward the sun,
and then descend forgetfully
to a sweeting who his heart hath won,
so great an envy fills me
for those whose joy I see,
that for my heart not then to faint
with longing, would surely count as wonder...

Which surely had nothing at all to do with Stellino's "martyrdom" ... Yet he too was dying for a skylark: for the delicate love which bound him to the woman who once had been his mother, the immense and brute reality that strides with its shears across the sky, slicing everything into tatters, trampling and humiliating...

So how—or in what—might she inspire such fatal love?

Ah, I thought I knew so much
of love, yet know so little.

Half an hour later, having taken, as God commanded, a bit of that potion for his tooth (allowing that love and a toothache can be much the same), the poor Folletto was asleep, or so Lallo assured me, since by now

the little breast was motionless, whereas his great, gentle (and vaguely cross-eyed) eyes were open and fixed: a strange hypnotic dormancy—or something more than that. “Yes, he’s asleep,” I said to myself, “asleep and dreaming of Paradise, dreaming of his own dear Ruperta, of her youth, when both of them were children, there in their land of flowers—not the frightful Sicily of today, nor this Liguria all thorns and desert—he’s dreaming of the ancient land of flowers of which he was the gentle genie, the grace...”

Farewell, child; farewell Folletto!

It was time for me to go; night was approaching, and everything was extremely peaceful, just as when Lalio too and I myself had been children, and nothing like this leaden sky existed; it had always and only been blue, and there were boughs of almonds everywhere. And Lalio now seemed cheerful, though much more frail and insubstantial...while above us, there in the sky beyond the balcony, and then over the streets as well, an immense and pestilential woman—the poisoned reality of the day—continued to rush into the distance, brandishing her shears...

Once again I hear the wind beneath the door, and I cannot believe, without some special effort, that the pixie ever truly existed. I suppose (in the midst of tears) that the only life he ever knew was lived in the heavens of children—that splendid sky which lies over every Genoa. But then I discern an indescribable lament... the plaint of other Stellinos; and I conclude that the Follettos now on the earth are still quite numerous... or numberless. But here I’ll return to recounting simple facts.

On the following day, October 10, same year, (I had

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spent the night in Genoa, after phoning my family in the outlying province and saying that the papers weren't yet ready and I'd have to wait), I returned—disturbed by the things I had seen, and perhaps incredulous—to the same snow-decked alley.

Perhaps I was hoping that the *house* (as happens in dreams) would no longer be there!

But it was. As dark and rickety as a cardboard set, and the mindless old man was stepping at that very moment through the door, cautiously, holding a shoe box under his arm.

On the balcony, high above (but from where she hadn't seen me), Ruperta thrust so far forward as to risk a fall and was following the figure of her lunatic brother with a painful sneer and a crazed intensity, as though counting his steps.

At a certain point she bellowed (in a voice I don't forget):

“Look at that paw! One of his paws is moving! You just be careful he doesn't run away!”

I was then to notice, with pained commiseration, that the box (emblazoned with the name of a well-known Genoa shoe store) had in fact been badly closed, and one of the legs of the tiny martyr peeped out from one its corners, and from another a small hairy forepaw, moving in uncertain imitation of the tender gestures of children as they wave good-bye to their mothers—a “*ciao, ciao. Mama!*” that would have moved any heart less stony and compressed by age than that of the Seamstress; but the gesture, really, was only a trick of the eye, because Stellino was dead.

I breathed a sigh of relief, though of sad relief.

Shortly afterwards, not very far from the house, the half-wit had found his way to the edge of the dump—where one surveyed a goodly portion of the broken

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pots, and scraps of dresses, and evil chronicles of world events which the Seamstress had left to accumulate there in the course of recent years—and having reached that spot, he dropped to his knees, smiling insipidly, placed the box on the snow, removed his beret... (Please God, let me pray that this is no dream) dribbled on the box a strand of spittle... Then he quickly removed its lid...

And what, here on our native soil, came out of it, if not—bright and light as three notes of joy—a bird... a happy skylark!

It rose trembling into the sky—which once again was azure, unadulterated May, decked with a necklace of almond blossoms—and vanished into the perfect purity of Creation.

All that remained on the ground was an empty shoe box, marked with the name of that well-known Genoese shoe store.

Unexpectedly, since the wind was blowing from the other direction, I again heard the bellowing voice of the Seamstress, first from the right, then from the left:

“Is he dead? Are you telling me the truth? He hasn’t run off?”

“Dead!” replied the wind, rising light and suddenly, speaking for the poor harried half-wit with a voice exactly the same as his own, “Dead, my Sister, and buried!”

“And he’s not to come back home tonight, the old bit of rot, with all his stupid demands!” the Seamstress once more cried.

“Rest easy! He’ll never come home again! He’s now in heaven,” came the response, after a pause, of the halfwit’s voice, drowsy and foolish, the words shot through with a kind of groan—and this time he spoke for himself.

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But the wind, meanwhile—and who can say what ruffles up inside the wind, what voices of desperate children who are finally free, but always anxious again to cast their eyes on the mother who unjustly struck them?—within the wind there was a delicate voice which I seemed to recall; it rose and fell like the cry of a sightless kitten and finally complained:

“Ah, take me back! If only you knew how I love you, my own dear Ruperta; how Stellino, your little star, loves his mother, how your own Folletto adores you. Don’t you remember your baby, dear mother...that year of 1860...don’t you. Mama, remember that spring, with Garibaldi and his soldiers?...”

I wanted to hear no more, and I left that place of snow and flowers, of wickedness and freedom, while saying to myself that the effect of love (the love of elves and halfwits) on the Universe itself, on the tremendous Reality of living a life, must indeed be strange and powerful when the air can begin to churn not only with the cries of children, but as well with the words of a Provençal poet, a Bernart de Ventadorn, or of a heart, like his, which is full of devotion.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANNA MARIA ORTESE was born in Rome on June 13, 1914, one of seven children, and grew up in southern Italy and in Tripoli. Her formal education ended at age thirteen. Her first book, *Angelici dolori*, was issued in 1937. In 1953 her third collection of stories, *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, won the coveted Viareggio prize; thereafter, Ortese's stories, novels, and journalism received many of the most distinguished Italian literary awards, including the Strega and the Fiuggi. Although she lived for many years in Naples following the Second World War, she also resided in Milan, in Rome, and for most of the last twenty years of her life in Rapallo. Ortese's most famous novel, *The Iguana*, was published first in English in 1987 by McPherson & Company, which also published two volumes of her selected stories under the collective title, *A Music Behind the Wall*, likewise translated by Henry Martin. Anna Maria Ortese died in Rapallo on March 9, 1998.

A Music Behind the Wall, Vol. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/rdr4lr7>

A Music Behind the Wall, Vol. 2, <https://tinyurl.com/twjumus>

The Iguana, <https://tinyurl.com/sbxrow4>

“Today, Anna Maria Ortese is considered one of the most authentic and original voices in contemporary European literature. While her work remains impossible to categorize within the rigid boundaries of the literary canon, the new interest that critics from all over the world (and particularly Italy and North America) have shown in her work, and the numerous contributions that have appeared from critics in the past five years, show that many aspects of her fiction and poetry have yet to be discovered and analyzed

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fully. Her sensitivity to the suffering of less fortunate human creatures; her conception of man as a mere “guest” on earth and the necessity to respect and love the entire planet and its creatures; her creation of “a new language” to express the “impossible”; her incredible style of narration—all of these things make Anna Maria Ortese one of the most interesting and original writers of the 20th century.”—Cosetta Sena Reed, entry in U. Chicago’s “Italian Women Writers” webpage: <https://tinyurl.com/sgwq6e4>