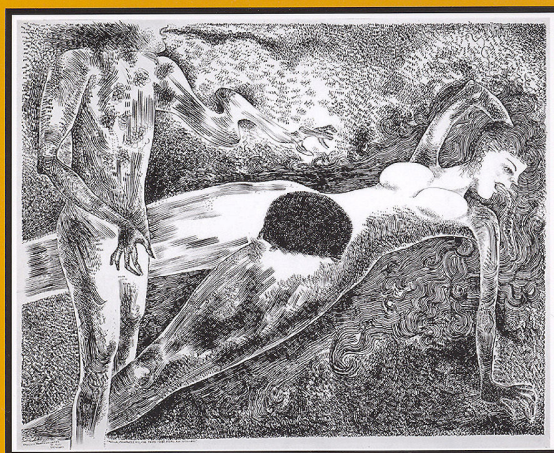


Francesco Lanza

SICILIAN MIMES:

A Gallery of Sly and Rustic Tales



**Introduction and Translation
by Gaetano Cipolla**



The Tall Bride

A man from Bronte was marrying off his daughter who was tall and straight like a maypole. On arriving at the church the bride-to-be could not go in because the door was low and everyone was in a quandary what with the nuptial procession crowding behind her and the priest inside clamoring to hurry up.

"Let me through, Gentlemen!" yelled the Brontese. "My daughter must go in first" and he tried pushing her inside, but, being so tall and straight as if she had swallowed a skewer, her head remained outside.

At that point, some people suggested to cut off the upper part of the door frame, others wanted to remove the lower step, some

wanted to cut off the head of the bride and reattach it once inside, but they did nothing at all.

A man from Adernò who was there on business chanced to pass by, and hearing the commotion, came forward:

"What will you give me if I manage to get her through?"

The father replied:

"If you get her through, I will give you four he-goats, four kids, four wheels of cheese and four molds of ricotta, but make my daughter go through the door."

The man from Adernò raised his arm and whacked the tall bride on the back of her neck. She lowered her head and she went inside.

"Bravo for the man from Adernò," everyone yelled, "who made the Tall One pass through without cutting her head."

The Man from Aidone

One day a man from Aidone quarreled with his donkey for refusing to jump across a ditch and as the animal reared and thrust its head forward, the man accepted the challenge and they fought it out.

They butted heads for quite a while until the donkey was forced to declare himself beaten.

"You, stupid ass!" yelled the man from Aidone out of breath and feeling his head, "for good judgment you may easily beat me, but not for the head: mine is thicker than yours."

The Angel of God

On the day of Saint Alexander, the man from Barrafranca mounted his mule and went to see how his field was growing. The wheat had grown taller than a man and swayed in the breeze, thick and shining like the waves of the sea.

There was no happier man than he and he kept admiring it with his mouth open, oblivious of time. Night came and he was still there, unable to tear himself away from that triumph. And as the moon appeared, he climbed to the top of the hill to admire it better, saying to himself loudly:

"This year the wheat field is more abundant than ever before, you want to bet it's going to produce six bushels of golden wheat?"

A raven nearby was perched on a branch and opening his beak replied:

"More!"

"By Saint Alexander!" the man screamed with joy. "This must be the Angel of God answering me and he's telling me it will produce more. How much more, eight bushels?"

"More, more!" replied the raven.

"Hurrah for the Angel of God!" The man then asked: "How many bushels will I get, ten?"

"More!"

"Twelve?"

"More!"

And so it went for the whole night, with the man raising the count and the other saying, "More, more!"

The Man from Pietraperzia

A man from Pietraperzia lost his pa and everyone was mourning for him crying loudly. They dressed the body, they put him in his death bed and they gave the man from Pietraperzia a candle to hold. He looked around with his jaw hanging and with dry eyes, without uttering a sound.

Someone pulled him by the shirt:

"Why aren't you crying? Don't you see that your father is dead?"

And he:

"How can I cry, if I'm holding a candle in my hand?"

The Man from Mazzarino

A man from Mazzarino kept at his side a sack tightly tied at the top. Once in a while he carefully opened the sack, just enough to blow air into it and then quickly closed it again, tighter than before.

"Say, what are you doing?" someone asked him once.

And he:

"I'm putting aside some breaths for when I may run out."

Horseshoes for Dead Men

Two men from Caropepe who were professional thieves decided to die and lying on a bed, gave no signs of being alive. Folks howled in mourning for them, they dressed them, they displayed them on their death bed and finally placed their bodies in the church. But during the night, the dead men kicked open the coffins and, more alive than before, began to ransack everything of value. Then they broke the bars from the lunettes and

escaped. The next morning, when the church was opened they did not find the bodies nor anything of value. The scandal was huge. "We have to take measures," shouted the fooled parishioners, "because the dead are not dead and perform deeds that only the living perform." They quickly summoned the Town Council and, after much spitting, they issued this proclamation, preceded by trumpets and drums:

"People of Caropepe, from now on whoever wants to die, must think about it twice. Those who are no sure of being dead, let them not die, for those who are such will have their feet shoed like mules."

And from that time onward, that's what they did and as a result, no people of Caropepe have ever died without being truly dead.

The Three Calabrians

Not knowing how to make a living, three Calabrians decided to bring a load of onions to Sicily and, having filled a boat with them, put out to sea.

Now, when they got half way through the Strait, one of the onions slid off the heap and fell into the water and they all screamed in unison:

"Stop, stop, for God's sake! One of the onions fell into the water and if we don't fetch it, it will be lost."

One of them who was the boldest of the group, put down the oars, removed his breeches and his jerkin and yelled, as he dove in:

"Wait here for me, I'll run and fetch it, and bring it back to you."

He quickly disappeared. They waited and waited, but neither he nor the onion resurfaced, and the others who were sly and knew a thing or two, concluded there was some foul play.

"Do you want to see," asked one of them, "that our fine feathered friend stole the onion that belonged to the three of us and ran away with it?"

And the other:

"If that's the case, by God, I'll fix that ill-born scoundrel and before you can say amen I'll bring him back here with the onion in his hand."

And as he said this, he removed his breeches and his jerkin, dove in the water and disappeared.

Some time went by and nobody resurfaced. So the last one said:

"Ah, by God, my fine feathered friends connived to make a fool of me and stole my part of the onion. Now wait and see, I will go in myself and top things off!"

Without thinking twice, he left the boat there to wait for him and angrily dove in; and he too disappeared, and he is still

looking for his fine feathered friends at the bottom of the Strait.

And so it was that three Calabrians lost their lives for an onion.

The Moon and the Man from Piazza

Two men from Mazzarino came out of a tavern late at night both drunk as a kite and to continue their conversation walked with their arms around each other, following their feet's pleasure, moving one step forward and two backward, as though on high seas.

At a certain point, above the bell tower the moon appeared, round like a wheel and shining bright and the two who were stoned, stood there staring at it in amazement.

One of them, who was more soused than the other, thought it was the sun and showing it to his companion said:

"Look, cumpari, the sun just appeared as we were walking and we did not realize it."

The other, who did not want to concede anything, declared:

"No, Sir, that's not the sun, but the moon, because the roosters are not singing."

And the other:

"I'm telling you, that is the sun."

"And I'm telling you, it's the moon."

It's the sun, it's the moon, neither one wanted to admit defeat and were it not for the fact that they could hardly stand up, they would have come to blows. Finally a man from Piazza was passing by, minding his business, and they turned to him to ask his opinion.

"Say, Sir, can you tell us if that is the sun or the moon?"

The man from Piazza replied:

"Golly, I'm not from these parts."

The Man from Castrogiovanni

As the man from Castrogiovanni grew tall and big, his pa told him:

"Now you have to get married, because it is time and you are mature."

And he, who only knew the work of the farm, said:

"Go ahead and marry me as you please. I know nothing of it and I want to mind my own business."

His pa found him a bride with legs straight as a mare's who was as good as bread and possessed every good quality, and told him: "Now that I found you a bride who is fair and blonde as golden grapes, come back to town right away,

for you shall be the rooster in the house
and you shall ride upon the barrel high
and you shall drive your donkey in the hay."

And he asked, scratching his head,
"Oh, do I have to be there, too?"

The Man from Cesarò

The man from Cesarò, as soon as he came home from his commitments, was dying of desire, and throwing his wife on the bed, went at her like an excited bull.

The wife was frightened and put her hand in front to shield herself from his fury, saying:

"Take it easy, my husband, slow down. This way you're going to disembowel me."

But in a frenzy he replied:

"Take you hand away, woman, or else I'll make a hole in it."

About the Translator

Professor Cipolla is a well known authority on Sicily. He is a professor of Italian at St. John's University. He is President and Editor of Arba Sicula, an international organization that promotes Sicilian culture. He has translated *L'origini di lu munnu*, *Don Chisciotti and Sanciu Panza* and *Moral Fables and Other Poems* by Giovanni Meli; *The Poetry of Nino Martoglio*, *Malidittu la lingua/Damned Language* by Vincenzo Ancona; and Nino Provenzano's *Tornu/The Return*. As publisher/editor of Legas, Dr. Cipolla has founded three series of books, two of which deal with Sicilian culture: "Pueti d'Arba Sicula" which has already published 8 volumes, and "Sicilian Studies" with 18 volumes to its credit. The third series deals with "Italian Poetry in Translation" which has published 13 volumes. Dr. Cipolla also edited J. Kirk Bonner's *Introduction to Sicilian Grammar*, and is the author of *The Sounds of Sicilian: a Pronunciation Guide*, (Legas) available on CD. His numerous essays on Sicilian culture are available in his *Siciliana: Studies on the Sicilian Ethos*, published by Legas in 2005.

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