

BOOKS. Festa di piazza by Gian Mauro Costa

Traci Andrighetti (June 20, 2015)

**An Electrifying Mystery in Palermo**

Gian Mauro Costa (b. 1952, Palermo) is an author and journalist. He reported for the Sicilian daily newspaper "L'Ora" until it folded in 1992, at which time he began working for RAI. Costa published



his first mystery, [Yesterday](#) [2], with Sellerio in 2001. After a nine-year absence he returned to the literary world with [Il libro di legno](#) [3] (Sellerio, 2010), which was a finalist for the prestigious Giorgio Scerbanenco Prize. This novel, like all of his subsequent work, features the character of Enzo Baiamonte, an electrical technician and private investigator who lives in Palermo.

In [Festa di piazza](#) [4] (2012), Enzo Baiamonte decides to close his electrician business. Rosa, his seamstress girlfriend, convinces him to finally try to get the private investigator license that he has talked about for some time. Meanwhile, when Enzo accepts a job doing the lighting for the Festival of the Madonna Addolorata, he overhears a strange conversation about a small-time Mafia boss who is planning to sing at the festival. While he's working on the wiring, Enzo begins to put together a string of seemingly unrelated events, including a wrecked truck, a robbery gone wrong, thefts from the tombs of a local cemetery, and, most disturbingly, the return of people who were supposed to be dead...

The language of *Festa di piazza* is best described as a cross between that of Italian authors Andrea Camilleri and Santo Piazzese. More precisely, it's regional Italian—in this case, Sicilian and Sicilian Italian specific to Palermo with a strong neostandard base.

SICILIAN

Costa incorporates a considerable amount of authentic Sicilian words and phrases.

WORD

'u casciamortaru (Ital. **il becchino**; Eng. **the gravedigger**)

In tutte 'ste pellicule c'era sempre 'u casciamortaru che faceva affari d'oro a seguire il pistolero. (In all these films there was always the gravedigger who had the golden opportunity to follow the gunslinger.)

SAYING

Agneddu e sucu e finìu 'u vattiu (Sicilian)

Agnello e sugo ed è finito il battesimo (Italian)

Lamb and sauce and the baptism is over (English)

SICILIAN ITALIAN

Regional Italian, or, in this case, Sicilian Italian, is Italian that has been influenced by the dialect in some way.

FOOD

sparacelli (Ital. **broccoli selvatici**; Eng. **wild broccoli**)

Si erano mangiati zitti zitti la pasta con gli sparacelli, che era uno dei piatti preferiti di Enzo. (They had eaten as quiet as mice the pasta with wild broccoli, which was one of Enzo's favorite dishes.)

PHRASE

Ma a chi appartiene? (Eng. **Who do you belong to?**)

"Ma a chi appartiene?" chiese Enzo, benedicendo l'utilità di quell'espressione tutta palermitana che consentiva di catalogare ogni persona secondo un criterio di appartenenza familiare, di clan o di altro.

("Who do you belong to?" Enzo asked, blessing the utility of that wholly Palermitan expression that allowed for the cataloguing of every individual according to a criterion of familial, clan or other belonging.)

ITALIANIZATION

In this instance, Costa Italianizes an English word, even though there is already an Italian equivalent.

appillola (Ital. **appello**; Eng. **appeal**)

Anche se, da quando non si chiamava più serie C1 e C2, non aveva più lo stesso appeal, anzi appillola come diceva Lo Cascio, parola inglese imparata, insieme a un mucchietto di altre, grazie alle pagine regionali della "Gazzetta dello Sport."

(Even though, since it was no longer called series C1 and C2, it didn't have the same appeal,



or appillola as Lo Cascio would say, an English word learned together with a pile of others, thanks to the regional pages of the “Gazzetta dello Sport.”)

BORROWING

As often occurs when Italians borrow from English, the terms play a different syntactical role or assume a different form in the Italian context.

double face (Eng. **double-faced**)

Li conosceva, ma solo perché era inevitabile per una persona che abitasse in un quartiere come quello della Zisa, non popolare al cento per cento, ma con l’anima double face, tra veracità antica e fremiti modernisti.

(She knew them, but only because it was inevitable for a person who lived in a neighborhood like that of Zisa, not one hundred percent working class, but with a double-faced soul, between ancient veracity and modernist impulses.)

cellofanato (Eng. **cellophaned**, i.e. **wrapped in cellophane**)

Solo un’area centrale appariva più pulita: là dove si trovava il materiale cellofanato che adesso era stato trascinato via insieme a qualche chilo di acari.

(Just a central area seemed cleaner: there where the cellophaned material was located that had now been dragged away together with a few kilos of dust mites.)

APPROXIMATIONS

One of the more entertaining aspects of Italian is the tendency to spell English terms in accordance with Italian orthography and phonology.

uestern (Eng. **westerns**)

“Già, il cinema. Una fissazione, aveva. Gli venne ‘sta mania, dicono, con i uestern, quelli che piacciono tanto a Enzuccio,” fece Lo Cascio, che sapeva, da buon amico, come irritare Baiamonte.

(Yeah, the movies. He had a fixation. He had this mania, they say, for westerns, the ones that little Enzo likes so much,” went Lo Cascio, who knew, like a good friend, how to irritate Baiamonte.)

Scerlokkòms (Eng. **Sherlock Holmes**)

Però, se tu mi dici che di testa non ci sta, non è che ci voglia poi Scerlokkòms...

(But, if you’re telling me that he’s not all there in the head, it’s not like it’ll take Sherlock Holmes...)

COLLOQUIALISM

Common expressions are always an interesting window into a culture, regardless of whether one shares the sentiment they express. Incidentally, this expression derives from an eighteenth-century event sponsored by the Portuguese Embassy at Rome’s Teatro Argentina. Curiously, the freeloaders weren’t the Portuguese because the show was free to them; instead, they were the Romans who pretended to be Portuguese so that they could see the show for free.

come un portoghese allo stadio (Eng. literally, **like a Portuguese person at a stadium**, but it refers to a person who enters an event, in this case a soccer stadium, without paying)

“Ah, ma di che parlate, della festa della Madonnuzza?” si fece largo Ignazino come un portoghese allo stadio.

(“Oh, what are you all taking about, the festival of the Madonnuzza?” Ignazino barged in [to the conversation], like a Portuguese person at a stadium.)

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Links

[1] <http://108.61.128.93/files/39865festadipiazza-732x10241433682991jpg>

[2] <http://www.ibs.it/code/9788838917189/costa-g-mauro/yesterday.html>



[3] http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008S20H96/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B008S20H96&linkCode=as2&tag=italicissima-20&linkId=VN3BW2SFCBJCSSYI

[4] http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B008ER7D0Q/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B008ER7D0Q&linkCode=as2&tag=italicissima-20&linkId=EYZXPAAWRGTSMDEVN