

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON**

University of London

**EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS**

For The Following Qualification:–

*B.A.*

**Italian X113: Realism and Neo-Realism**

**COURSE CODE : ITALX113**

**UNIT VALUE : 0.50**

**DATE : 17-MAY-04**

**TIME : 14.30**

**TIME ALLOWED : 1 Hour 30 Minutes**

Answer ONE question with reference to at least TWO of the following novels: Elio Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia*; Elsa Morante, *L'isola di Arturo*; Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Una vita violenta*.

1. Comment on ANY TWO of the passages below. You need not compare the passages but may do so if you wish. You may consult the English translations provided but your commentary must make reference to the Italian texts.

- (a) – Buonasera, ho con me mio figlio, – disse mia madre entrando.

Essa non divenne invisibile e io vidi la gente, vidi in loro tutta la gente che non avevo visto prima. Vidi, a letto, un malato, un uomo con gli occhi chiusi nella faccia sporca di barba; e vidi cinque o sei donne come suore che sedevano appiè del letto attorno a un secchio posato in terra.

Al solito, mia madre parlò di me anzitutto.

– Ho con me mio figlio, – disse.

E io vidi come lo diceva, vidi come ero guardato dagli altri alle sue parole.

– Un grande figlio avete! – disse una.

– Li ho tutti grandi e questo è il più grande, – mia madre disse.

E la donna chiese:

– Di dove vi è arrivato?

Parlarono di me, al solito, mia madre e le donne, e io vidi ch'esse avevano il secchio pieno di chiocciole nere e prendevano chiocciole una alla volta, succhiavano. Erano donne giovani e anziane, vestite di scuro, e quando avevano succhiato buttavano il guscio di nuovo nel secchio.

– Buon appetito! – disse mia madre.

(‘Good afternoon, I’ve got my son with me’, my mother said as she went in.

She did not become invisible and I saw the people, I saw in them all the people I had not seen before. I saw a sick man in bed, his eyes closed in his face dirty with a beard; and I saw five or six women like nuns sitting at the foot of the bed round a bucket placed on the ground.

As usual my mother spoke mostly about me.

‘I’ve got my son with me’, she said.

And I saw how she said it, saw how I was looked at by the others when she spoke.

‘Your son is grown-up!’ said one.

‘They are all grown-up and this is the eldest’, my mother said.

And the woman asked:

‘Where has he come from?’

As usual my mother and the women spoke about me, and I saw they had the bucket full of black snails and took snails one at a time, sucked them. They were young women and old, dressed in black, and when they had sucked they threw the shells back into the bucket.

‘Enjoy your meal!’, my mother said.)

(Vittorini, *Conversazione in Sicilia*, Part Three, Chapter 25)

(TURN OVER)

- (b) Fin dalla mattina, si metteva in grande movimento per i preparativi della pasta all'uovo, che rifaceva fresca tutti i giorni e che, appena spianata, stendeva ad asciugare su certi travi davanti alla soglia, come uno stendardo. Una mattina presto, ch'ero sceso in cucina piuttosto coi nervi e la vidi intenta ai soliti preparativi, le dichiarai bruscamente che, se la faceva per me, quella pasta tutti i giorni, era in errore: difatti, a me la pasta non piaceva, e non m'era piaciuta mai.

Questo io lo dissi per umiliarla, non perché fosse vero; in realtà, la pasta mi piaceva, non meno di qualsiasi altro cibo. Io, si può dire, mangiavo col medesimo piacere qualsiasi vivanda che fosse commestibile per gli umani: la sola cosa che m'importava, era la quantità, perché avevo sempre un appetito famelico.

– Come! – essa disse a mezza voce, quasi non credesse a quel che udiva, – non ti piace la pasta!!

– No.

– E che ti piace?

Cercai fra me la risposta peggiore, che potesse più di tutte amareggiarla. E ricordandomi dello sdegno da lei mostrato una volta contro il latte di capra, lí per lí inventai:

– La carne di capra!

(Starting in the morning she would be very busy getting ready the egg pasta, which she made fresh each day and, as soon as it was rolled flat, hung it out to dry on some wooden beams near the front door, like a banner. Early one morning, when I had gone down to the kitchen feeling rather irritable and saw her engrossed as usual with the pasta, I told her bluntly that if she was making that pasta every day for me then she was making a mistake: in fact I did not like pasta and never had.

I said this to humiliate her, not because it was true. Actually I like pasta as much as any other food. It could be said that I ate any food humans found edible with equal pleasure: the only thing I cared about was the amount, since I was always ravenous.

'What!' she said in a hushed voice, almost as if she didn't believe what she was hearing. 'You don't like pasta?'

'No'

'What do you like then?'

I searched for the worst answer, the one that would upset her the most. Remembering how she had once been scornful of goat's milk I made up on the spot:

'Goat meat!')

(Morante, *L'isola di Arturo*, Chapter 3)

- (c) Il padre era al tavolo, con Tito e Toto da una parte e dall'altra, zitti pure loro, intenti a raspare col cucchiaino la scodella. Il fratello più grosso mangiava s'un pezzo di panca ch'era presso la porta, un po' in luce, con la scodella tra le ginocchia. La madre, invece, mangiava in piedi, accanto al fornello a carbone.

Appena Tommasino entrò, fece: «Com'è, a 'st'ora?» Tommasino alzò un po' le spalle, più ingelito dentro, nello stomaco, che di fuori, e fece: «Aòh, aaa ma'... » La madre non aggiunse altro e gli preparò la sua scodella di fagioli e cotiche che puzzavano. Tommasino si mise in un angoletto che restava vuoto al tavolo, e cominciò a mangiare. Ma non ce la faceva a mandare giù, e, anzi, gli veniva il vomito. Mangiò quattro bocconi di minestra, schifato, poi addentò la pagnottella secca: sua madre gli fece «Aspetta», e sul pane ci mise due cucchiariate di broccoli freddi. Tommaso riprese il suo pane, e continuò a mangiarlo così condito, piano piano, cercando di vincere il voltastomaco.

(CONTINUED)

(His father was sitting at the table, with Tito and Toto on either side, both of them silent as well, intent on scraping their bowls with their spoons. His eldest brother was eating on a bit of bench near the door, half-lit, his bowl between his knees, whereas his mother was eating standing up, next to the coal-fired cooker.

As soon as Tommasino came in she said: 'What sort of time is this?' Tommaso slightly shrugged his shoulders, colder inside, in his stomach, than outside, and said: 'But mum...' His mother did not say anything else and got ready his bowl of beans and smelly pork rind. Tommaso sat in an empty corner of the table and started eating. But he wasn't able to get the food down, in fact he felt like he was going to throw up. He ate a few mouthfuls of soup, disgusted, and bit into the dry bread. His mother said 'Wait' and put a couple of spoonfuls of cold broccoli on the bread. Tommaso took back the bread and went on eating it with this spread, slowly, trying to overcome his retching.)

(Pasolini, *Una vita violenta*, Part I, Chapter 4)

2. Do these novels support or contradict E.M. Forster's claim that 'the fundamental aspect of the novel is its story-telling aspect'?
3. In what ways and for what purposes is an adolescent boy's perspective on the adult world used?
4. 'The fantastic character of a text resides in a transient and volatile state during the reading of it, one of *indecision* as to whether the narrative belongs to a natural or a supernatural order of things.' (S. LEM) Discuss.
5. What aspects of a novel may be used to determine whether it might be considered realistic or not?
6. 'The novel ... is, by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review.' (M.M. BAKHTIN) Discuss.
7. Is it appropriate to treat novels as 'documents' of the historical period in which they were written?

END OF PAPER