1. Introduction

This article aims at presenting today's literary scene in Sardinia and how some novelists, during the last few decades, drawing their narrative subjects directly from the regional and local culture, are contributing to a new development in Italian literature. These authors' novels very often contain references to Sardinian linguistic, social, anthropological, and historical facts, which can help to understand why readers find these works interesting. The attitude towards regional literatures, including minority languages or dialects, has changed over the past decades. On the one hand we have those who support a national, centralised literature based on the Italian language; on the other those who, on the contrary, show the polycentric character of Italian literature, with its local and regional traditions. Although the latter point of view can already be found in Carlo Dionisotti's *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*[1] (Geography and History of Italian Literature, 1967) as well as in Walter Binni and Natalino Sapegno's *Storia letteraria delle regioni d'Italia*[2] (A Literary History of Italian Regions, 1968), which date back to the 1960s, this approach has recently been confirmed in Alberto Asor Rosa's *Letteratura Italiana* (Italian Literature, 1989). This work dedicates a volume to the literature of each Italian region, among which one can find that of Sardinia, written by Giovanni Pirodda[3]. Understanding literature also means to know and to comprehend the culture and language(s) that lie behind or underneath any particular work.

The fact that Sardinian people have started appreciating and studying their own history, their culture, traditions and languages, but also making them known through books, films and festivals to people outside the island, can partly explain these writers' success. When in a region, in a relatively short period, new museums are opened, frequent cultural or literary festivals are held, different novels are published every year, and new films are directed, one realises something novel is taking place. An important role can be attributed to the cultural policy of the Sardinian local government, which promulgated two laws financing the publishing sector. The first law, enacted in 1952, helped many publishers to start their activity. More recently, in 1998 a new bill supported publishers to print new books by buying a certain number of copies that are then distributed to schools and libraries. Events such as

the “Literary Festival of Gavoi”, to mention one among others, held every year in July since 2003, which lasts three days, hosts famous writers and attracts thousands of people not only from the island, witness to the widespread interest in Sardinian literature. Recently Sardinian directors such as Salvatore Mereu with *Bellas mariposas,* based on Sergio Atzeni’s novel, or Giovanni Columbu with *Su Re*, where local actors, local settings and the Sardinian language are used, have represented a new way of making cinema. In some cases, directors such as Mereu and Columbu, the former with *Sonetaula* (1960) by Giuseppe Fiori and *Bellas Mariposas* (Beautiful Butterflies 1996) by Sergio Atzeni and, the latter, with *Arcipelaghi* (Archipelagos 1995) by Maria Giacobbe, have chosen Sardinian novels as their raw material, thus also contributing to the novels’ success. This new vitality in the arts has attracted mainstream Italian critics’ and media attention. Giacomo Mameli, a journalist, writer and critic, has talked about a Sardinian “Literary Spring... “an extraordinary phase for culture, from literature to cinema.”[4]

2. Sardinian Literature

Sardinia has always had its own literature, which goes back as far as the 11th century. An example of it is the so called “condaghes”, i.e.“a word which derives from the Greek ‘“kontaki”’, which indicated [...] a donation in favour of the church”[5]. Although they have a philological value, the importance of “condaghes” lies in the fact that they represent the first expression of Sardinian literature. *Il Condaghe di San Pietro di Silki* (The Condaghe of Saint Peter of Silki) is most interesting when, with the description of a woman’s behavior, it is reminiscent of Boccaccio’s later tales. In the past the main references to study the literary production of the island were Siotto Pintor’s *Storia della letteratura della Sardegna*[6] (History of the Literature of Sardinia, 1843) and Alberto Alziator’s *Storia della letteratura di Sardegna* (History of the Literature of Sardinia), published in 1954. In 1989 Giovanni Pirodda edited the volume on the history of Sardinian literature, where he supplies an anthology of the most representative writers or works from the 11th century to 1990[7]. In the introduction to his volume he justifies his choice to study a regional literature with these words:

Sardinia, both due to its insularity, and above all because it was alternatively influenced, each time with deep repercussions, by different dominant cultures (at first Pisan and Genoese, then Catalan and Spanish, and finally Piedmontese and Italian) can be integrated with difficulty in a unitary project [...] of the cultural history of the [Italian] peninsula.

On the same page he explains how "the knowledge of Sardinian literary events can give a contribute to the reconstruction of an identity", and how it is important to consider history from a peripheral point of view in an attempt to "overcome and modify history, traditionally seen from the centre."[8]

Pirodda's work, being inserted in a wider history of Italian literature, is extremely important because it instils new life into a different attitude towards regional literatures, which are often considered of secondary importance: "The vision of a history of the Italian literature as a monolithic reality is no longer tenable."[9] On the contrary, for a better understanding of the history and culture of the peoples that inhabit Italy, one needs to read those authors that give voice to peripheral cultures and languages. Experimentation in language(s) and mixing of languages seem to be a feature of contemporary Italian literature and this is particularly true for the island of Sardinia, whose literary tradition has produced works in at least five different languages: Latin, Sardinian, Italian, Catalan and Spanish. Today, overlooking the importance of this multilingual wealth is not considered perhaps the best approach. It would mean being tied to critical perspectives that belong to the 18th and 19th centuries. This change is even more significant when the role that Sardinian writers have gained in the Italian literary scene in the last few decades is taken into consideration.

The interest in contemporary Sardinian writers should not make us forget the enormous success enjoyed in the last century by Sardinian writers such as Grazia Deledda, Antonio Gramsci, Salvatore Satta, Gavino Ledda and Giuseppe Dessì. Grazia Deledda wrote novels dealing with Sardinian ancestral people and their destinies, which seem to be set in a primeval world. Novels such as *Elias Portolu* (1900), *Cenere* (*Ashes,* 1903), *Canne al vento* (*Reeds in the Wind*, 1913), and *La Madre* (*The Mother*, 1920), led her to become the first

Italian woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926. Antonio Gramsci, thanks to his literary as well as political works, became one of the most important figures of 20th-century Italy. Other writers whose achievements became renowned beyond the island were Giuseppe Dessì's *Paese d'ombre* (Village of Shadows, 1972), Gavino Ledda's *Padre Padrone: l'educazione di un pastore* (*My Father, my Father*, 1975), and Salvatore Satta's *Il giorno del giudizio* (*The Day of Judgement*, 1977).

3. The Sardinian Literary Spring

The Sardinian literary scene started changing in the 1980s when novelists such as Giulio Angioni, Salvatore Mannuzzu and Sergio Atzeni published their first novels. Angioni and Atzeni especially felt urged to write novels set in Sardinia by their love for the island, its traditions and history. For the same reasons and in the same period, to confirm a new development in the attention towards Sardinian culture and art, Ilisso publishing house was founded in Nuoro, a town in the centre of Sardinia, in 1985. Its main objective was and still is that of "Publishing volumes of art, archaeology, linguistics,[…] and fiction […] to supply with documents and tell the History and Culture of Sardinia between tradition and contemporaneity."[10] Only seven years later, in 1992, another publisher, in the same town, with the same objectives, was launched: Il Maestrale. Its policy was inspired, from the very beginning, by Sergio Atzeni's dream of having "A Sardinian publisher that one day would manage to land on the continent and sell its books."[11] The fact that this publisher discovered and launched writers such as Atzeni and Niffoi makes us understand the importance that some publishing houses have had in creating this literary phenomenon. As Mario Argiolas, Chairman of the Sardinian Publishers Association, says:

Publishers which operate with a certain continuity in Sardinia are 45, […] a group of them is connected to a publishing activity which pertains to the history of Sardinia, its traditions, its archaeology, […] Then we have those ones that are trying to expand onto a national

market.[12]

However, it is only in the last decades that literary critics, journalists and the academic arena have directed their attention to this literary and cultural phenomenon. In 2006, a book describing the new Sardinian narrative was published: *L'isola che sorprende. La narrative sarda in italiano* (The Island that Surprises. Sardinian Fiction in Italian).[13] It is a complete study of Sardinian literature, written in the Italian language, which takes into consideration the years from 1974 to 2006 and introduces the subject by dealing with Sardinian identity and language and socio-cultural changes since the end of the second world war.

Angioni himself has recently edited an interesting publication, *Cartas de Logu: Scrittori sardi allo specchio*[14](Cartas de logu. Sardinian Writers in the Mirror), where forty-two Sardinian authors express their view on being Sardinian writers today. It is an important contribution to the definition of what it means to talk about Sardinian fiction today. In the introduction to the book Angioni says: "It seems to me that the new strength of literature today, that which can be labeled Sardinian, is also being able to use the identity onions as seasoning, spice or little by little."[15] Milena Agus, in her intervention, asks herself if living in Sardinia gives writing a particular flavor. This is her answer:

In my opinion it is distance. The sea which divides from the Continent or from the Mainland, as we used to say once, it separates, there is nothing to do. What is more, Sardinia is very beautiful and keeps, in spite of the horrible holiday villages and the summer noise, a wilderness and a mystery that are reflected upon writing.[16]

Pietro Clemente, professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Florence and president of the journal *Lares* is certainly one of the first ones to talk about a new spring for Sardinian literature. In 2008, in an article published in the weekly magazine *L'Espresso*, he said: "The explosion of new Sardinian writers represents a new 68."[17] Pietro Clemente,

referring to Sergio Atzeni, adds:

I have read all Sergio Atzeni's works. It seems everything started from him, with Giulio Angioni that has followed him and then this experience has widened. Among all Salvatore Mannuzzu stands out, but the Atzeni phenomenon has produced a beneficial contagion. He's been the one to light the Sardinian contemporary literary fire, which is analysed and studied in other Italian regions.[18]

According to Clemente, in Sardinia today "there are a lot of valid writers. No other region in Italy has this wealth, this national limelight. From literature we are passing to the cinema. It is an unprecedented cultural phenomenon."

When dealing with contemporary literature it is not always easy to understand the real value and importance of authors and their works. Sergio Atzeni seems to be the starting point of this blossoming of new writers, new novels and new works in the island. Giulio Angioni and Salvatore Mannuzzu began writing in the same period, around the last years of the 1970s and 1980s respectively. Other important authors such as Salvatore Niffoi, Marcello Fois, Francesco Abate, Giorgio Todde, Milena Agus, Michela Murgia and Flavio Soriga followed in the next decades.

One of the main reasons, which brought about this cultural change, is above all the people of the island's strong and steady desire to discover and study Sardinians' history, traditions, language and search for a definition of what Sardinia is and what it means to be Sardinian. The wish to make all these studies and research available to Sardinians as well as to the world, through publications, is a natural consequence of this search and, as pointed out in the previous section, this was also the reason for the setting up of new publishers. Thus, on the one hand we have writers wishing to express their being artists through novels; while on the other hand the same writers take an active role in organizing the promotion of literature, as already said, through literary festivals or through collaboration of different kinds. The conclusion of this "virtuous circle" is a series of events that, like in a chain, increase the

beneficial effects one upon the other, leading to an increase in the number of books sold and read by the islanders.

4. The *Sardinian Nouvelle Vague*

Sergio Atzeni is considered, together with Giulio Angioni and Salvatore Mannuzzu, one of the founders of modern Sardinian fiction[19], which is often referred to as Sardinian Nouvelle Vague. In Sergio Atzeni's novels we can find some of the features that are also found in the works of other successful Sardinian writers, such as Niffoi, Fois or Murgia. They sometimes use a special type of Italian, the Sardinian variant, with Sardinian words or expressions, but another important characteristic is that stories are very often taken from Sardinian history or from micro-events, which relate to the micro-history in the many villages on the island. Villages where time seems to have stood still, where traditions are kept for centuries on end, and things as well as people do acquire a transcendent dimension.

Atzeni was born in Capoterra, a village near Cagliari in 1952. He drowned while swimming in the sea of Carloforte when he was only 43. His accidental and tragic death adds an aura of mystery to his life and to his work. He started his career with *L'Apologo del giudice bandito* (Apologue of the Bandit Judge, 1986). In his second novel, *Il figlio di Bakunin*[20] (*Bakunin's Son*, 1991), also available in English[21], the author manages to write about the dramatic changes that have taken place in Sardinia from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1950s by way of a son who interviews people to discover his father's life. *Il quinto passo è l'addio* (The Fifth Step is a Farewell, 1995) is an autobiographical novel. It tells the story of a man who, while on a ferryboat, leaving Sardinia for good, evokes his past experiences in Cagliari, including an unhappy love story and humiliations caused by the corruption and small-mindedness of local politicians and employers.

Atzeni's masterpiece is *Passavamo sulla terra leggeri* (Lightly We Passed on Earth, 1996) published after his death. This novel is an example of how history is transformed into a successful novel. Antonio Setzu is the narrator and also the last but one 'Guardian of Time'

and tells the story to the future guardian. He is asked to preserve the memory of Sardinian history. The central part of the book narrates about Eleonora d'Arborea, her father Mariano IV and the Battle of Sanluri. In this battle, fought in 1409, the Sardinians were defeated by the Spanish. It marked the end of the "Giudicato di Arborea" and the loss of freedom for the island. The author tries to recreate a sense of national pride and identity for Sardinians. Atzeni also uses a reinvented but fascinating language of the ancient Sardinians, which is a purely literary invention. The novel has become a point of reference for the cultural and literary identity of contemporary Sardinia. As Giovanna Cerina says in her introduction to Atzeni's novel: "The narrator uses the plural we that gives a solemn, epic intonation to the story and at the same time a dimension of sharing, of membership, of actualisation of the past."[22]

Atzeni's aim seems to be clear. He wanted Sardinians to be proud of their history and make them understand that there was a time when they were happy and that those times can come back again: "If a word exists to express Sardinians' feelings in the centuries of isolation between the *nuraghe* and the bronze statuettes, maybe this is happiness".[23] It was a period when Sardinian people, though isolated, were free and not dominated by foreign countries as it would have been from that time onwards. One of the most quoted passages, which confirms our point, can be found on the same page:

We passed through earth lightly as water, said Antonio Setzu, as water that runs, springs, down from the basin full of the fountain, slides and winds among moss and ferns, up to the roots of cork and almond trees, and goes slowly down [...] towards the sea, asked by the sun to become vapour and wind dominated cloud and blessed rain.[24]

The reader finds continuous references to Sardinian history. Atzeni mentions places and names only apparently disguised behind an invented language. Tharros was, for instance, a Phoenician town founded in the 8th century B.C. on the coast near Oristano. This is how the writer cites it: "Sul said T'ar r o s. The sentence became the name of the place".[25] The technique he follows is very simple. The word is divided into fragments which pronounced

separately seem to acquire a mysterious meaning. This technique is used throughout the novel. In the following sentence ”Umur of Mu learned to light the fire as Iks did and made the first n’ur a gh e.”; the author mentions the *nuraghes*, stone building dating back to a period spanning from the 18th to the 8th century B.C. During the nuraghi’s civilization, Sardinian society was organised in peaceful villages and important decisions were democratically made by village representatives. By using an epic description of Sardinian history and by ending it when Eleonora d’Arborea was defeated by the Spaniards, Atzeni tries to shed a new light on the past by idealising it and thus making it interesting for the reader. Eleonora d’Arborea, a modern legendary heroine of the past, became judgess of the Giudicato d’Arborea[26] in 1383 and became famous also because she enacted an *ante litteram* constitution called “Carta de Logu”. The document was written in pure Sardinian language, which was, at that time, spoken with only one variant, all over the island. Atzeni chooses for his novel a figure of the past under whose reign Sardinian people were united for the last time.

The title of his last work, *Bellas mariposas* (Beautiful Butterflies, 1996), is in Sardinian. It is a short story told by a young girl from a working class neighbourhood of Cagliari, where the writer uses expressions and words taken from the Sardinian spoken in that area.

Giulio Angioni, professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Cagliari, started his literary career by writing essays on Sardinian folk wisdom and traditions and at the same time began publishing novels. In *A Fogu aintru* (On Fire Within, 1978), a collection of short stories where a mixture of Sardinian and Italian language is used, Angioni deals with the theme of anthropological mutation in such an isolated world as that of Sardinia and its villages. He wrote successful novels, among which *L’Oro di Fraus* (Fraus Gold, 1988), *Il sale sulla ferita* (The Salt on the Wound, 1990), *Assandira* (2004), *Le fiamme di Toledo* (The Flames of Toledo, 2006), *Doppio Cielo* (Double Sky, 2010) are the most famous. In *Le fiamme di Toledo* he narrates the story of Sigismondo Arquer, who had important roles in the administration of Sardinia during the Spanish Kingdom. Sardinia was ruled by Spain from around the 13th to the beginning of the 18th century, when it passed into the hands of the Savoy. Sigismondo was condemned to the stake and charged with heresy in 1571 because he embraced Luther’s theses. He wrote, among his other works, *Sardiniae brevis historia et description,* where he describes his society as corrupt. This novel is an example of how an important historical figure of the Middle Ages in Sardinia is used to build up an emblematic story, which helps the reader to better understand the past as well as the present: “*Le*

fiamme di Toledo is a historical novel, but extremely modern in its content, for the attention addressed to the themes of tolerance and respect towards the other cultures, religions, diversities."[27]

The third major representative of the first novelists of the *Sardinian Nouvelle Vague* is Salvatore Mannuzzu. He was an Italian magistrate until 1976 and a member of the Italian Parliament until 1987. His most important novels are *Procedura* (*Procedure*, 1988), *Un morso di formica* (An Ant's Bite, 1989), *Le ceneri di Montiferro* (The Ashes of Montiferro, 1994), *La ragazza perduta* (The Lost Girl, 2011), and *Snuff* (2013). Mannuzzu's most successful novel is the first one, *Procedura*, which also won Italy's prestigious Viareggio's Prize in 1989. It is a detective story where the nameless narrator is an investigative judge who has to discover Valerio Garau's killer. Garau is a famous and respected attorney from Sassari in the north of Sardinia, who is poisoned to death while having coffee with his lover. The novel revolves around the secrets of Garau, who led a strange life full of strange habits. The novel is set in Sardinia and unfolds in two years, 1978 and 1979, during a critical period for Italy, often referred to as 'years of lead' and marked by a wave of terrorism acts. In the same years Aldo Moro, leader of the governing Christian Democratic Party, was kidnapped and assassinated by The Red Brigades, a terrorist organisation. "Even though *Procedura* [….] apparently does not explore Sardinian people's places, holders of centuries of old traditions; this novel reveals nonetheless certain Sardinian roots that could have an important role in the structure work and in the story that is told."[28]

The detective is sent to Sardinia as a punishment. His first investigations are interwoven also with traditional processions and the rites of the holy week. The whole story is set in a Sardinian background, which the narrator does not understand: "[…] the Sardinian songs that I didn't understand: dating back – I thought – from depths and distances much bigger, from loneliness not less unknown".[29] This is a feature of Mannuzzu's novels where "the great 20th-century themes appear: the action of time on men and on things, on the memory, the difficulty to establish human and elementary relationships, the difficulty to communicate".[30]

Another representative of the Sardinian Literary Spring, especially because his prose contains so many references to Sardinia, is Salvatore Niffoi. If previous writers paved the way for future novelists, Niffoi himself has no doubts in defining his narrative as belonging in style

and content to Sardinia. His prose is, in fact, characterised by a mixture of Italian and Sardinian, both from a lexical and a syntactic point of view. It can be seen, in the original text in the footnote, from the start of his last novel *Pantumas* (Ghosts, 2012): "At *Chentupedes*, at All Souls' Day, souls leave the cemetery of Muriscari and go back to their village to eat and dance with all the saints that don't feel like staying in heaven".[31] In other parts of the narration, Sardinian language replaces Italian completely: "Veni a minde picare amore meu, vene in presse, cuita!"[32] This is, according to the author,[33] a necessary choice in order to have a realistic prose, a prose that comes directly from the place where it originates. His stories are set in an archaic Sardinia, in a timeless dimension. One can better understand what being a Sardinian writer means to him by reading statements like the following:

> *Sardinia is not an island, it's not a language nor a landscape of a single colour. It is composed of 377 islands, each with its own identity. Sardinia is my mother, my real mother. I have a natural mother that gave me birth, but in my island I put down roots.*[34]

When the author talks about 377 islands he is referring to the villages and towns of the whole island, which have been isolated from each other for centuries and where different linguistic variations can be found, as well as different customs and traditions. Niffoi lives in one of these "islands", Orani, a small village in the centre of Barbagia in the province of Nuoro. He graduated with a thesis on Sardinian poetry and his supervisors were Carlo Salinari e Tullio de Mauro.[35] The novelist started his career in 1997, publishing his first work, *Collodoro*, with a small local publisher (Edizioni Solinas) and for his next four novels*, Il viaggio degli inganni* (The Journey of Deceits, 1999), *Il postino di Piracherfa* (The Postman of Piracherfa, 2000), *Cristolu* (2001) and *La sesta ora* (The Sixth Hour, 2003), he passed to Il Maestrale, a bigger Sardinian publisher. In 2005, the novel *La leggenda di Redenta Tiria* (*The Legend of Redenta Tiria*, 2005) was published by Adelphi, which is even more famous and continent-based. The following year, with *La vedova scalza* (The Barefoot Widow, 2006) he won the Campiello Prize, one of the most famous literary prizes awarded in Italy. Other famous novels are *Ritorno a Baraule* (Return to Baraule, 2007), *Il lago dei sogni* (The Lake of Dreams 2011) and *Pantumas* (2012), where the author continues to base his inspiration on Sardinian

anthropological reality. Here is, to give another example of how the writer draws from tradition, that of the vengeance code, the *incipit* of *La vedova scalza*:

They brought him to me in a July morning, skinned and dismembered with the strokes of an axe like a pig... I laid him on a granite table in the yard, that which we used for the great feasts, and I washed him with the jet of the pump...Pthù! Be cursed those that have ripped through his chest to tear his heart up with their hands and kick it like a ball made up of rags.

These are the words of Mintonia Savuccu, tragic heroine of the novel, who loved Micheddu, whose murder causes her to leave the village, but only after having taken revenge for what has been done to her beloved. The revenge code followed in the past in the interior regions of the island imposed to avenge oneself for these offences.

Another representative of the *Sardinian Nouvelle Vague* is the writer, playwright and scriptwriter Marcello Fois. He was born in Nuoro in 1960 and graduated in Bologna, where his first works were published by Granata Press. In 1992 he won the Italo Calvino Prize with his novel *Picta*. However, he becomes successful with novels such as *Sempre caro* (Always Dear, 1998), *Sangue dal Cielo* (Blood from the Sky, 1999), and *L'altro mondo* (The Other World, 2002). In this trilogy, Fois tells the story of Bustianu Satta, an attorney-detective who has to solve some cases of homicide. The author was inspired by a real Sardinian attorney, Sebastiano Satta, who, in the first decade of the 20th century, was also a famous poet.

Marcello Fois is considered one of the most important contemporary authors of detective stories and a reference point for Italian literature. "The pillars of his fiction are four: the root, the poetry, the trait and oral tradition. The root is the identity, […] it is being Sardinian […] The oral tradition is that of the 'contos the foghile.'"[36] "Contos de foghile" means fireplace tales and refers to tales handed town through generations by telling them near the fireplace during cold winters. His first novel, which contains all these elements, is *Nulla* (Nothing, 1997). *Sempre caro* (Always Dear, 1998) was published with the preface by Andrea Camilleri, famous Sicilian writer of detective stories. For *Sangue dal cielo* (1999), the introduction was written by Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, a Catalan writer. In

Memoria del vuoto (*Memory of the Abyss*, 2006), the author uses the story of Samuele Stocchino, one of the most wanted Sardinian bandits during the first years of the 20th century. Samuele takes part in the First World War and manages to escape death several times, but when he comes back to his village he discovers that his brother has been killed by a member of another family. He decides to take revenge and exterminate all members of the Bois family. In Sardinia Samuel Stocchino's life is still surrounded by legend. In this book, Fois tells us about Stocchino's life in a passionate, dramatic way, mixing history, legend and invention. The greatness of Marcello Fois' literary work has been confirmed by his latest novel, *Nel tempo di mezzo* (In the Time in Between), published in 2012 and selected among the five finalist novels of the Campiello Prize. Once again the story is set in Sardinia and the main character, Vincenzo Chironi, is a Sardinian-Friulan that comes back to his island to seek out his relatives and is welcomed by his grandfather and his aunt. On the island he manages to be himself again when he finds his own origins, falling also in love with Cecilia.

Giorgio Todde is an oculist who lives and works in Cagliari. He began his career with the novel *Lo stato delle anime* (The State of the Souls, 2001), with which he started a series of works with the main character Efisio Marini, a detective-embalmer. Efisio Marini really existed in the 19th century. He invented a technique thanks to which it was possible to petrify dead human bodies and then to reverse the petrification. The beginning of the novel is a reference to a suspended timeless life in a Sardinian village:

*In Abinei the stone houses are always the same because nothing multiplies or diminishes in the fossil village. The state of the souls of the community surprises because deaths are compensated with extreme precision by the new born and for this reason houses are the same and the number of households doesn't change. Also the animals, like men, are born and die in the same measure. One enters among the souls of the village through a membrane, as always, and one comes out in the opposite extremity, men and animals, through an arithmetic membrane that closes itself again at once behind those who have passed through.**[37]***

Efisio Marini is the main character of the following novels: *Paura e Carne* (Fear and Flesh, 2003), *L'occhiata letale* (The Lethal Gaze, 2004), *E quale amor non cambia* (And what Love Does not Change, 2005) and *L'estremo delle cose* (The Extreme of Things, 2007).

Giorgio Todde's *La matta bestialità* (The Mad Bestiality), published in 2002, has been translated into French (*La folle bestialité*, 2007)[38] and Spanish (*La loca bestialidad*, 2008).[39] This novel, together with *Ei* (2004), is an example of the author's metaphysical noir fiction. It tells the story of a series of crimes which happen during very hot days. One of the main characters of the novel, Ugolino Stramini, meteorologist, defines a weird social climatology. He maintains that crimes are committed depending on weather conditions. The authors deals with the *matta bestialità*[40] that Dante did not address in *La Divina Commedia,* but only referred to, a mixture of incontinence, malice and violence. In the novel Todde composes an entire canto dedicated to this sin. In his work we find:

A Sardinia carved in the native affection of a narrator characterised by epic and musical tonalities", […] It is a private quest which aims at the reconstruction of the Sardinia "myth" thorough the recovering of the past, the roots, the flavours somehow lost with the century of aggressive tourism.[41]

Other writers such as Milena Agus, Francesco Abate, Michela Murgia, Flavio Soriga, who can be considered the new generation of Sardinian novelists, have just started their literary career, and their success shows how their works can but confirm the good inspiring momentum the island's writers are enjoying in Italy as well as in other countries.

Milena Agus's first novel was *Mentre dorme il pescecane* (While the Shark Sleeps, 2005), where she tells the story of the Sevilla Mendoza family, Sardinian since Palaeolithic times. She became famous with *Mal di pietre* (*From the Land of the Moon*) in 2007, a novel that has been translated into five languages and was among the finalist works of literary prizes such as Strega, Campiello and Stresa di Narrativa. Her success is due to the way she manages to deal with primal events and universal themes: the need to belong, the importance of one's

own ties to a community, the yearning for true love, the quirks of fate, the importance of memories, and the need to create. Her last novels include *Ali di babbo* (Wings of Daddy, 2008), *La contessa di ricotta* (The Cottage Cheese Countess, 2009) and *Sottosopra* (Upside Down. 2011).

Abate first worked as a journalist and disk jockey and then in 1998 his first novel *Mister Dabolina* was published. It is considered "A fascinating thriller with a rap rhythm. With the background of a city and an island without a name: how cannot one recognise Cagliari and the whole Sardinia, the old town centre and the beaches that made it become a totem of international tourism?"[42] In 2003 with *Il cattivo cronista* (The Bad Reporter) and the following year with the novel *L'ultima di campionato* (The Last of the Championship), Abate attracted critics' and readers' attention thanks to the freshness of his fiction. In *Getsgemani* (2006) he describes a society without ideals or unable to pursue them, voted to compromise, and destined to lose itself.

Flavio Soriga's most famous novels are *Diavoli di Nuraiò* (Devils of Nuraiò, 2000), *Sardinia Blues* (2008), and *Nuraghe Beach* (2011). His fiction is deeply rooted in Sardinian tradition, but with a positive attitude towards innovation and modernity. "He reveals a great ability to create characters that, although their being locally deep-rooted, manage to represent a universal human condition."[43] In his first work, a collection of thirteen short stories, he tells the lives of "poor devils of Nuraiò, which is a small village of southern Sardinian plain, so close to Cagliari that the metropolitan life-style is reflected daily on the existence of its inhabitants, but at the same time is strictly isolated from the urban culture by centuries of conservative traditions, of a rural subsistence economy."[44] "Flavio Soriga, with his mixture of traditional registers, dialect cells and spoken language, manages to narrate about emotions and people from villages, in a modern way."[45]

Michela Murgia's debut was the autobiographic novel *Il mondo deve sapere*[46] (The World Must Know, 2006), where she describes the reality of telemarketing operators within a multinational company's call centre where workers are exploited and psychologically manipulated. Her main work, winner of various prizes, (Mondello and Campiello in 2010) is *Accabadora,* where the subjects of euthanasia and adoptions are treated. *Accabadora* is a Sardinian word which derives from accabai, meaning "to finish", i.e. killing a person or animal. In undefined ancient times in Sardinia *Accabadora* is said to be the woman in charge

of deciding when a person, because of his/her precarious state of health and age, could be destined to be “finished” and therefore stop suffering in this world.

5. Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to introduce its readers to the literature written in the Italian language in Sardinia, and point out the importance that a group of successful novelists is acquiring in the Italian literary scene. Therefore, even though only through a quick glance at the main novelists of the Sardinian Literary Spring, the article was intended to make the reader realise that part of the success of these writers is due to the expression of facts belonging to a different culture, a civilization whose details are still to be discovered by a wider audience. Most of the novels quoted have not been translated into foreign languages yet, this process being just started for some works. The attention these authors are attracting day by day makes us think that more and more books will be translated in the future.

Italy is a multicultural and multilingual country, very much like a continent rather than a simple nation. When one tries to look at single regions with a magnifying glass, one then realises that some of them are continents themselves, as Marcello Serra, 20th century Sardinian poet and dramatist, showed for Sardinia in his work *Sardegna quasi un continente* (Sardinia Almost a Continent, 1970).[47] The island is popular among tourists all over the world for its extraordinary beaches and wild nature, but it cannot, however, be identified only with Costa Smeralda, the most renowned destination for celebrities, famous politicians and very wealthy people in the north-east of Sardinia, which is something most Sardinians consider a foreign body. This paper was intended to help to appreciate the literary aspect and the contribution Sardinian writers are making to the new developments of Italian literature. They are introducing new ways of narrating, new stories, using new variations of Italian and Sardinian language, mixing them, and thus experimenting. All these features add a sense of freshness to the national literary scene.

After all, if we take into consideration all the elements that contribute to the success of

Sardinian contemporary literature at a national level as well as international, such as different history, culture, language and traditions, we can very easily come to the conclusion that most of the writers are, with their works, expression of a different ethnic identity. On the island there is a never-ending debate about what it means to be Sardinian, and also a continuous search for signs or symbols which can be used to express what is called *sardità,* the quality of being Sardinian*.* In this sense the blooming of novels by Sardinian writers can be interpreted as expression of their ethnicity, a different way of analysing reality, a different sensibility.

These differences can become the object of attention and interest. Writers coming from a different background are able to give us new uses of language, new visions of reality and life and that seems to be what Sardinian writers are doing now, and that seems also to be what readers are eager to find in the novels.

Michele Broccia

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[8] Ibidem. Page 9.

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[13] See previous note.

[14] Angioni, Giulio. 2007. *Cartas de Logu: Scrittori sardi allo specchio. Cagliari: CUEC.*

[15] Angioni, Giulio. 2007. Page 16.

[16] Translated by the author. Giulio, Angioni. 2007. Page 28

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[18] Translated by the author. “Ho letto tutto Sergio Atzeni, mi sembra che tutto parta da lui, con Giulio Angioni che lo ha seguito e poi si è assistito all’estendersi di queste esperienze. Fra tutti si staglia certo Salvatore Mannuzzu ma il fenomeno-Atzeni ha prodotto un contagio benefico. E’ Atzeni ad aver acceso il fuoco letterario contemporaneo sardo. Che viene analizzato e talvolta invidiato in altre regioni italiane.” Ibidem.

[19] See, for instance, Pirodda, Giovanni. 1992. Page 419 and following. Amendola, Maria Amalia. 2006. Chapter III, from page 145 onwards, includes Gavino Ledda, Marcello Fois and Salvatore Niffoi among “The most significant voices of contemporary Sardinian fiction”. Ledda’s main works belong to the 70s and Fois started writing later in the 90s and therefore he is representative of a new generation.

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[23] Ibidem: page 56..

[24] Ibidem: page 56.

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[26] See Ortu, Giangiacomo. 2005. *La Sardegna dei Giudicati*. Nuoro: Il Maestrale.

[27] Amendola, Amalia Maria. 2006. Page 171.

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[31] Niffoi, Salvatore. 2012. *Pantumas.* Milano. Feltrinelli. Page 13.

[32] Ibidem. Page 17.

[33] CultBook. *La vedova scalza.* Niffoi http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBPjnL5VQRw

[34] Salvatore Niffoi a Ventimila righe sotto i mari: intervista all'autore in (Interview to Salvatore Niffoi) http://librisenzacarta.it/2009/07/17/salvatore-niffoi-a-ventimila-righe-sotto-i-mari-intervista-all-autore/ [accessed 28 June 2013]

[35] Carlo Salinari was a committed Italian literary critic and teacher of Italian literature and Tullio de Mario is one of the most renowned Italian linguists.

[36] Amendola, Amalia Maria. 2006. Page 215.

[37] Todde, Giorgio. 2001. *Lo stato delle anime*. Nuoro: Il Maestrale. Page 5.

[38] Todde Giorgio. 2007. *La folle bestialité*. Paris: Albin Michel edition.

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