

ROSARIO PIPOLO

The Starwatcher

from the Italian Novel "L'ultima neve alla masseria"



OPENING

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Introduction

“The Starwatcher” is an extract from the Italian novel *L'ultima neve alla masseria* written by Rosario Pipolo and published in Italy by Demian Edizioni in 2012. It's been translated into English for the first time for a reading in 2014 at Crypt Gallery of St. Pancras Church in London. This is a special digital edition with cover and artwork by Salvo Bonfiglio.

After fifteen years in Sarajevo, Pietro comes back to his birthplace, in the South of Italy, called by a letter. Travelling to discover the secret of his grandfather's birth, he finds his roots and memory through people and places comparing more generations.

Thus the Starwatcher and the other characters in the book become the unanimous voice in a whispered tribute to the land and the south of the author; and "the last snowfall at the manor farm", which lets the protagonist belong to his father's dreams, keeps Pietro safe from difficulties of the past in his future.

“There are some things one remembers
even though they may never have happened.”

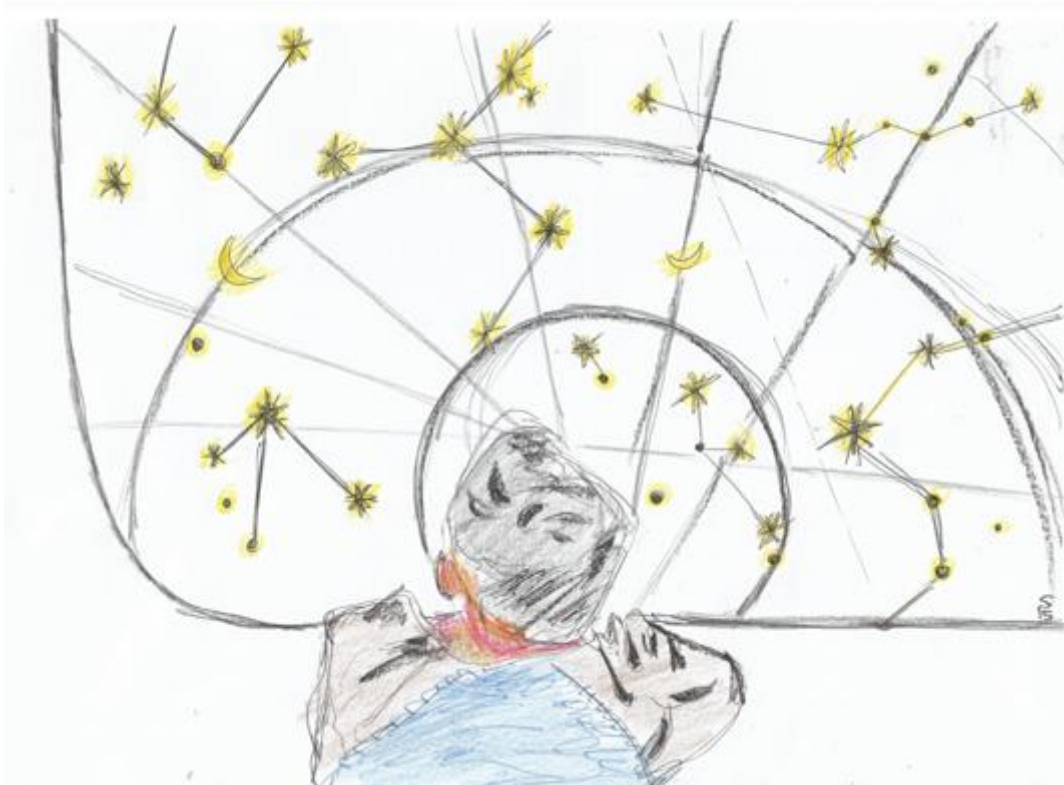
(Harold Pinter)

*In memory of Benedetto and Luca,
two angels at the table of my life.*

I walked a lot. I felt something strange in the landscape. I did not remember a hill in the vicinity of my grandfather's farm.

Intrigued, I moved closer and it was like being wrapped in a deathly silence. It was getting dark. I was going to go back, when I heard someone calling me from the bushes.

- Pietro, Pietro, Pietro. Don't go away. Stay with me.



A familiar voice rang out.

- Who are you?

- Don't be afraid. Do you see the path on your left side?

- Yes, I do.

- Go there and push yourself up to the bushes. Look beyond them, and I'm there .

On one hand I was scared s***less, but on the other hand I wanted to find out who it was. I accepted the invitation and went on to the path. As I approached the bush, I could see a shadow that became more and more human: a freckled face, whitish skin, and shy and bespectacled eyes .

- Silvio!

- Pietro! I recognized the way you walk immediately; fast and even.
- It's unbelievable. It's been a long time since I saw you last. You haven't changed at all.
- Neither have you.
- Don't be silly. I've put on a few pounds now and I can't hide my gray hair anymore.

Silvio burst out laughing and I was amazed. I had known him since he was a child and his shyness had allowed him to fade into the background. I met Silvio during high school. His elder sister Lorenza was my classmate and I often went to her to have private Greek lessons. I made tapes filled with good music she liked to pay her back for them.

When I rang the doorbell, Silvio would come and greet me, followed by his younger brother Nicolino, who would not have left his side for all the money in the world. His little sister Rosarietta crawled on all fours in the house and giggled when she looked at my face.

- Silvio , what are you doing here at this time?

I came back to reality.

- I live here. I'm a starwatcher.

- How? I was sure after you graduated in engineering...



- Pietro, you can understand the way I feel. You struggled to chase your hopes and dreams, working for the love of them. The stars are mine.
- Thinking about it, it was many years ago at Christmas. You got a telescope as a gift. One evening you saved me from a boring Greek translation, by inviting me to the attic of your house to look at the stars.
- My mum brings me good food every day and leaves me a bundle at the bottom of the hill. Guess, what's for dinner tonight?
- What?
- Toasted bread seasoned with oil and sliced tomatoes just how you like it. The way we used to cook it over an open fire.
- I could never forget.

Silvio chipped away at me to stay for dinner with him. We lit the fire and ate toasted bread, a homemade cheese pie and a big slice of pudding, a cake made with bran. My father was not glutton, but he was as soon as my grandmother Rosina started cooking that particular dish.

We stopped for a long time looking at the stars and Silvio explained his theory to me. All of us are taken alive by a star that keeps on shining on us even when we die. Stars are not assigned by chance, but by someone who loves us, and is unbeknownst to us. Silvio's odd theorem persuaded me that there was an act of love behind each star. I glanced upwards at the sky and began to look for my star among those millions of incandescent lapillus cloaking us and I wondered who had assigned me mine.

Silvio assured me it was useless to ask, because it would always remain a secret of the universe. He unveiled his secret to me though: He had given a star to his nephew Mattia, his sister Loenza's son. He pointed it out and then let me look at it through the telescope.

Silvio told me he would have never known the kid in person. He could no longer move from the hill, because as a starwatcher he was obligated not to leave and to watch over the diamonds of the universe.

When I said goodbye, I had a feeling I would never see him again. He showed me the way I had come from, informing me that on the side of the bush the path was lit. In fact Silvio was right but on the dug up road it wasn't electrical lighting providing a glow.

On the edge there were so many flames lit. I turned back and behind me it was suddenly dark.



- You can't go back. You can only go forward now .

A man in his fifties warned me.

- Excuse me, who are you?

- I'm the caretaker of this field. My name is Luca, nice to meet you.

- Why does your face have all these colored spots on it?

- They're the remains of my watercolors. I'm painting.

- Are you an artist?

- No, I paint street art on take-away pizza boxes .

- And now?

- I've been doing it for fifty years. I paint light in the dark now.

- How can you paint in the dark?

- If you turn the light off, you will actually see more light. It's good to get used to the dark.

Then a woman came, dressed in a motorbike gear. She took her helmet off and let her long hair fall down. It was beautiful. I felt like I had seen her before. She smiled at me and turned to the man.

- Uncle, I've just finished patrolling the field. It's all quiet.
- Well, Maddalena. What about Benedetto?
- He fell asleep. I sang him his favorite lullaby.

She said it quietly so as not to wake the baby.

- Also tonight we have done our work.

As I proceeded I was enveloped in the light of dozens of flames, showing me the way. From a distance I heard Silvio's voice reciting those verses of 1894, the same verses I had read as a child on a giant marble in a grove of poplars: "Here, where the thrill of human passions cannot reach and where the insane wickedness of humankind stops, tears and prayers for the dead comfort and lift the spirit ."

About the Author



Rosario Pipolo (www.rosariopipolo.it) is an Italian journalist, blogger and social media manager. Born in Naples in 1973, he graduated cum laude in Foreign Languages from the “Federico II” University of Naples. Journalist contributor to daily press, Tv and Web, he interviewed actors, directors and musicians such as Ken Loach, Dustin Hoffman, Mel Gibson, Whoopi Goldberg, John Turturro, Jack Nicholson, Nicole Kidman, Annie Lennox, Bob Geldof and Julian Lennon. In the 90s he was the president of CinemAvvenire panel at Venice International Film Festival directed by Gillo Pontecorvo and was a contributor to research works about communication and multimedia at the University of Naples.

He published an essay about Harold Pinter as screenwriter for the cinema of Joseph Losey (EdiSu, 1998) and in 2001 lectured in the presence of Pinter himself at the congress “Harold Pinter: from the theatre of menace to the cinema of ashes”, promoted by the University of Florence.

Living in Milan since 2002, he works at External Communication Department of Europ Assistance Italy (Generali Group). He published the novel “L'ultima neve alla masseria” (Demian edizioni, 2012), launched at Crypt Gallery in London, Institute Andaluz de la Juventud in Granada, Milan Design Week 2015, and the eBook “40 storie” (Amazon self-publishing, 2014), a digital diary of his life as blogger.

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from
L'ultima Neve alla Masseria

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Rosario Pipolo

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