

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Davide Rondoni



Life through poetry

One of this year's special guests at the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival is poet, novelist and translator **DAVIDE RONDONI**. He speaks to **Karsten Xuereb** about life's eternal themes and a poet's journey.

How has your relationship with language changed over time, and with each collection of writing leading to the following one?

Indeed, it has changed. It has changed with every deepening of my relationship, and that of my language, with reality and with my work as an artist. I seek a language that is rich but not enigmatic and difficult to comprehend, alive but not literary and "equal to life", as noted by Mario Luzi. Italian is a prime poetic language because it is vast, welcoming and musical. I look for a rhythm that is mine, and a style that does not show off how 'clever' its writing can be. Rather, I practise a style that can envision the world and its mystery. Language games annoy me.

How has your poetry writing related to your prose writing, and that for adults, to younger audiences?

Novel writing is a different form of art. Novels written by poets, and I'd like to think even mine, are characterised by a particular sense of rhythm and a special perspective of the setting. Addressing young audiences demands a softness that resists false sweetness and develops a special sense of care and attention.

Could you say your translation work, of writers like Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Péguy, has influenced your own writing?

Yes, absolutely. When you are smitten by some of the great writers, the fire spreads to your own work. Their visions, their highly intelligent interpretation of life and the mastery of their craft are, together with that of many Italian masters, a precious gift and a resource.

Commentators have noted how your recent collection *La natura del bastardo* has addressed traditional, deep human subjects in very innovative language, seeking new ways forward in grappling with human heartache and experience. Would you agree, and what were the main challenges in this endeavour?

I hope so! I'm not sure what you mean by 'traditional subjects'. Life, death, love, nature, birth, pain, what is mysterious, these are the great eternal themes. They can lead you on forever. We write poetry because we can never define them. But we can always recognise them. The biggest challenge is being true and honest, that is, not contriving to mask oneself by thinking

that the aim of poetry is poetry itself. Rather, it is knowing what is true about life. This means accepting all the challenges, including the challenge of pain, of our limits and also the limit that is our language. This is a special limit because language reaches into something without ever using it up. And this wonderful weakness is also the true way to travel to make life 'ours'. Moreover, as an Italian poet, one has to face up to Dante, Petrarca, Tasso, Leopardi, Ungaretti... Well, that's frightening. But it's another challenge to be lived.

"I don't recreate anything. I gaze deep down into what exists. I go through this world in awe and wonder"

It has been noted that your works engaged with rich human environments and do so by recreating real as well as imaginary ones. Do you

feel you inhabit these places you re/create, in mind as well as spirit, through your writing?

I don't think I recreate anything. I gaze deep down into what exists. I inhabit this world that is not my creation, going through it in awe and wonder. My poetry is the expression of this wonder and my journey of consciousness. God creates, we only compose. I try to compose a perspective of what is real, that respects and gets a full taste of its depth, its dramatic nature and its mystery.

What are your hopes and expectations of the Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival?

I am very curious by nature. I expect all sorts of things to happen! Most of all, I expect to meet people, and poets, who are alive.

The Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, organised by Inizjamed, is taking place on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at Fort St Elmo, Valletta. Entrance is free. Thanks go to the Italian Cultural Centre in Valletta for supporting Rondoni's visit and to Barbara Herzog for facilitating the interview.