

SESTI

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MAN IN THE MOON

As a young student of the Accademia in Venice every autumn I used to go with a friend to a farmhouse in Valdobbiadene for the grape harvest. It was a very old fashioned farm with a traditional family that must have been there forever, little children, older boys and girls, father, mother, uncles and above all the venerable grandparents with the history of the land written on their faces.

During the vendemmia, in the cellar, Silvano the grandfather, overlooked every aspect of the operation with hawk eyes, he would miss nothing. If somebody was doing something wrong he would burst out with a proverb in rhyme that would explain why the job should to be done in a different way. Later I discovered that he used the same method during winemaking “Se movi el vino co la Luna storta el chapa le maladie” “If you move the wine with the wrong Moon it will get sick!”.

Silvano knew thousands of proverbs, songs and many rhymes for every aspect of farming and winemaking, furthermore he knew how to make farm tools, how to assist farm animals during birth, and how to make cheese among many other crafts.

Silvano was an analphabetic, he could hardly write his signature.

This was my first encounter with the power of oral tradition, which has, for thousands of years taught men how to invent a weapon or a plough, how to build a ship and navigate using the stars for orientation likewise farmers always used the cycles of the Moon for the process of agriculture and winemaking.

Time has passed. I have written several books on ancient calendars and on the celestial sphere and I have studied the classics, but when we decided to turn Castello di Argiano into a wine estate, it was Silvano and his traditions that came back to mind and which I follow every day of my life.

That makes me a lunatic, an astronomer and winemaker!

Why not! I rather like to pay tribute to those generations that for centuries have preserved ancient varieties of grapes through wars, famine, plagues, and not only managed to succeed but be able to produce the good food and the cuisine that go with it.

Today “Vino del contadino”, “Farmer’s wine” is looked down on by oenologists (doctors in winemaking), who perhaps, should be grateful that a man like Silvano has served on a silver platter his extraordinary heritage.

Giuseppe Maria Sesti