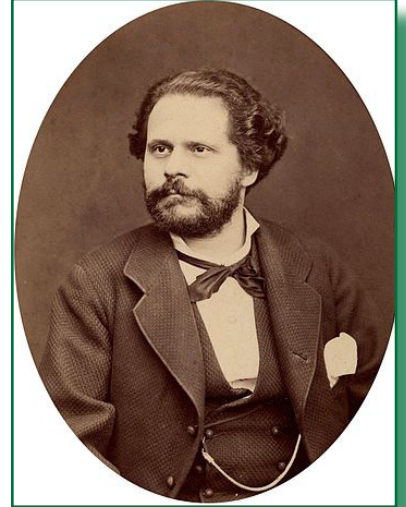


### GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI (1835-1907)

*In the May bulletin, Andy Canepa wrote an informative essay that discussed the source and meaning of Il Cenacolo's motto: ITALA GENTE DALLE MOLTE VITE. The phrase came from an ode composed in 1897 by Giosuè Carducci entitled La Chiesa di Polenta (The Church of Polenta) . Andy gave some interesting interpretations of the Italian phrase, pointing out how it is often difficult to translate phrases plucked from an original literary piece written 118 years ago. For the July bulletin, I thought it would be interesting to explore the life of the poet who wrote that ode, Giosuè Carducci. In addition to this, on July 27, we will celebrate his 180th birthday. (See the ode following, and note the phrases in red.)*

GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI was regarded as the official national poet of modern Italy. He also has the important distinction of being the first Italian literary artist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1906). As the Nobel award committee described in part its reasons for honoring him with this award: "...not only in consideration of his deep learning and critical research, but above all as a tribute to the creative energy, freshness of style, and lyrical force which characterize his poetic masterpieces." By the time he won the Nobel Prize, Carducci had firmly established himself as one of the world's most well-known and influential literary figures, with a large body of distinguished work and a long career of artistic achievement, political activism and religious agitation. He had published several volumes of poetry attracting worldwide critical acclaim. In addition, his prose writings including literary criticism, biographies, speeches and essays filled some 20 volumes. He had also been elected a Senator of Italy in 1890, and was voted a very substantial lifelong pension. The Nobel Prize was merely the capstone of a long, brilliant and highly successful life. Because of illness, he was unable to travel to Sweden to receive the award, but he gratefully accepted it *in absentia*.



Giosuè Carducci was born in Valdicastello (part of Pietrasanta), a small town in the Province of Lucca in the northwest corner of Tuscany on July 27, 1835. His father, a doctor, was an advocate of the unification of Italy and was involved with the Carbonari. Because of his father's radical republican politics, the family was forced to move several times during Carducci's childhood, most of which was spent in the wild Maremma region of southern Tuscany. Eventually, the family finally settled for a few years in Florence.

From an early age, guided by his politically active father, he learned Latin and Greek, and studied the *Iliad* and classical works of Homer. He also energetically read the works of the famous Italian poet, Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837). So, from the time he was in college, he was fascinated with the restrained style of Greek and Roman antiquity, and his mature work reflects a restrained classical style, often using the classical meters of such Latin poets as Horace and Virgil. He also translated Book 9 of Homer's *Iliad* into Italian.

In 1856, he graduated from the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa and began teaching school. The following year, he published his first collection of poems, *Rime* (1857). These were difficult years for Carducci, not only because of the death of his father, but also because of his brother's suicide.

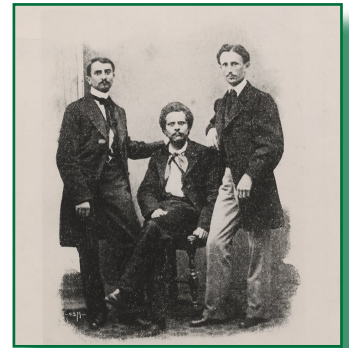
In 1859, he married Elvira Menicucci, and during their married years they had four children. He briefly taught Greek at a high school in Pistoia, and then, in 1860, was appointed Italian Professor at the university in Bologna. Carducci held this position for more than 40 years.

He was a popular lecturer and a fierce critic of literature and society. One of his students was Giovanni Pascoli, who became a poet himself and later succeeded Carducci at the university.

Carducci was an avowed and vocal atheist whose political and artistic views were consistently opposed to Christianity generally and especially to the secular power of the Catholic Church in particular. He was a strong proponent and advocate of the Risorgimento and became a major supporter of the republican cause and opponent of the Church's attempts to weaken and destroy the unification efforts. He said in later years, summarizing this strongly held position of his professional and literary life: "I know neither truth of God nor peace with the Vatican or any priests. They are the real and unaltering enemies of Italy."

This period was a time of revolution in Italy as republicans, inspired and assisted by revolutionary France, struggled to throw off the old tyrannical Hapsburg order and unite and democratize Italy's many separate feudal states and kingdoms. By the mid-1860s, after years of civil war and political struggle, most of the Italian peninsula had been united under a constitutional republican monarchy. However, one of the last vestiges of tyrannical domination on the Italian peninsula was the continued direct political control of Rome and surrounding regions by the Pope. With the military backing of Hapsburg Austria, the Pope held direct secular political power over the Italian provinces known as the Papal States. Naturally, the anti-clerical freethinkers among the republicans found tyrannical rule by the papacy to be as unacceptable as, or even worse than, that by unelected, hereditary nobles. Both impeded human progress by locking power in the hands of those who were long on hereditary or ecclesiastical connections and short on any actual demonstrated merit or ability.

In his youth and in the early years of his appointment at Bologna, Carducci was the center of a group of young men determined to overthrow the prevailing Romanticism in literary form and to return to classical models of literary form. Giuseppe Parini, Vincenzo Monti, and Ugo Foscolo were his masters, and their influence is evident in his first books of poems, *Rime* (1857) [later collected in *Juvenilia* (1880)] and *Levia Gravia* (*Light and Serious Poems*) (1868). Carducci showed both his great power as a poet and his republican, anticlerical feeling in his *Inno a Satana* (*Hymn to Satan*) (1863), and in his *Giambi ed Epodi* (*Iambics and Epodes*) (1867–69), which are chiefly inspired by contemporary politics. The violent, bitter language emphatically reflects Carducci's virile, rebellious character.



His anti-clerical revolutionary zeal is prominently showcased in one of his most famous poems, the deliberately blasphemous and provocative *Inno a Satana* (*Hymn to Satan*). The poem was composed in 1863 as a toast at a dinner party, and was published in 1865. It was republished in 1869 by Bologna's radical newspaper, *Il Popolo*, as a provocation timed to coincide with the First Vatican Ecumenical Council (1869-70), a time when revolutionary fervor directed against the papacy was running high as republicans were pressing both politically and militarily for an end of the Vatican's domination over the Papal States under the military support of the Austrian Hapsburgs.

Reaction to the reappearance of the controversial poem was quite strong. Even some of Carducci's fellow republicans publicly distanced themselves from embracing Satan along with the poet even if they were opposed to the Pope. Moderate newspapers excoriated Carducci for potentially harming the republican cause with such blasphemous and inflammatory writings.

But the republican cause was triumphant, and in 1870, Hapsburg Austrian military support for the Pope collapsed and republican troops marched into Rome, ending by force the papacy's secular political control of the region, except for the Vatican city-state proper. It is quite likely that, as they took the city, at least some of the republican troops had *Inno a Satana* fresh in their minds.

While *Inno a Satana* was extremely effective as a political device, it was not considered by scholars and critics—or even by Carducci himself—to be great art. *Rime Nuove* (*The New Lyrics*) (1887) and *Odi Barbare* (*The Barbarian Odes*) (1877) contain the best of Carducci's poetry: the evocations of the Maremma landscape

and the memories his childhood; the lament for the loss of his only son; the representation of great historical events; and the ambitious attempts to recall the glory of Roman history and the pagan happiness of classical civilization.

Like Carducci's politics, these more advanced poems became revolutionary as well. He was not afraid to undertake bold, daring adventures in his works. *Odi Barbare*, in particular, included brilliant, ground-breaking innovations. Carducci reintroduced old classical Latin poetry styles and meters, especially those of Horace and Virgil, into contemporary Italian-language works. This adaptation of ancient technique to new Italian recalled the pace and flavor of Homer and Virgil and was Carducci's way of honoring both classicism and paganism. It was also an attack on two things he abhorred: the Romanticism in contemporary poetry and the Christianity in contemporary society. Indeed, all of Carducci's work extolled Italian hope and Roman glory and was an assertion of classic reason as opposed to Romantic mysticism and Roman Catholic piety.



Carducci's Nobel Diploma

Carducci was also an excellent translator and translated some of Goethe and Heine into Italian. He also wrote scathing reviews of what he considered trite sentimentalism in the gushing, unoriginal Romantic poetry being churned out and lauded by his contemporaries. His best prose works were equal to his poetry in creativity and expression. Some of these include: *The Development of a National Literature*, *The Varying Fortunes of Dante*, and *Essay on Petrarch*. His poetic imagination and style influenced these pieces just as they did his poetry.

These literary works reflected a courageous move on his part. To undertake such radical innovation in his own work and to so harshly criticize the popular Romantics, Carducci certainly showed he was willing to risk attracting condemnation that could hamper his popularity and his career. But, just as he had helped republican efforts to liberate Italian political life from royalist Hapsburg and Papal domination, Carducci also led the liberation of Italian poetry from sentimental Romanticism, while at the same time offering it the innovation of his re-introduction of the meters of the classics. This was the cutting-edge artistry that brought him the Nobel Prize.

Carducci died in Bologna on February 16, 1907 after a long illness. Fittingly, the Museum of the Risorgimento in Bologna is housed in the Casa Carducci, the house where he died at the age of 71, and contains exhibits detailing the author's life and works.



Casa Carducci, Bologna

Adapted by James J. Boitano, PhD from Encyclopedia Britannica (on-line edition), Nobelprize.org, www.churchofsatan.com/giosue-carducci-poet-statesman.php, <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/giosue-carducci>, and Wikipedia (both English and Italian versions).

LA CHIESA DI POLENTA

Agile e solo vien di colle in colle  
 quasi accennando l'ardüo cipresso.  
 Forse Francesca temprò qui li ardenti  
 occhi al sorriso?

Sta l'erta rupe, e non minaccia :  
 in alto guarda, e ripensa, il barcaiol,  
 torcendo  
 l'ala de' remi in fretta dal notturno  
 Adria: sopra  
 fuma il comignol del villan, che giallo  
 mesce frumento nel fervente rame  
 là dove torva l'aquila del vecchio  
 Guido covava.

Ombra d'un fiore è la beltà, su cui  
 bianca farfalla poesia volteggia:  
 eco di tromba che si perde a valle  
 è la potenza.

Fuga di tempi e barbari silenzi  
 vince e dal flutto de le cose emerge  
 sola, di luce a' secoli affluenti  
 faro, l'idea.

Ecco la chiesa.

E surse ella che ignoti  
 servi morian tra la romana plebe  
 quei che fùr poscia i Polentani e Dante  
 fecegli eterni.

Forse qui Dante inginocchiossi?

L'alta fronte che Dio mirò da presso  
 chiusa  
 entro le palme, ei lacrimava il suo  
 bel San Giovanni;  
 e folgorante il sol rompea da' vasti  
 boschi su 'I mar.  
 Del profugo a la mente  
 ospiti batton lucidi fantasmi  
 dal paradiso:  
 mentre, dal giro de' brevi archi l'ala  
 candida schiusa verso l'oriente,  
 giubila il salmo In exitu cantando  
 Israel de Aegypto.

*Itala gente da le molte vite,*  
 dove che albeggi la tua notte e un'ombra  
 vagoli spersa de' vecchi anni, vedi  
 ivi il poeta.



*Ma su' dischiusi tumuli per quelle  
chiese prostesi in grigio sago i padri,  
sparsi di turpe cenere le chiome  
nere fluenti,  
al bizantino crocefisso, atroce  
ne gli occhi bianchi livida magrezza,  
chieser mercé de l'alta stirpe e de la  
gloria di Roma.*

*Da i capitelli orride forme intruse  
a le memorie di scalpelli argivi,  
sogni efferati e spasimi del bieco  
settentrione,  
imbestiati degeneramenti  
de l'oriente, al guizzo de la fioca  
lampada, in turpe abbracciamento  
attorti,  
zolfo ed inferno  
goffi sputavan su la prosternata  
gregge: di dietro al battistero un fulvo  
picciol cornuto diavolo guardava  
e subsannava.*

*Fuori stridea per monti e piani il verno  
de la barbarie.*

*Rapido saetta  
nero vascello, con i venti e un dio  
ch'ulula a poppa,*

*fuoco saetta ed il furor d'Odino  
su le arridenti di due mari a specchio  
moli e cittadi a Enogiseo le braccia  
bianche porgenti.*

*Ahi, ahi ! Procella d'ispide polledre  
avare ed unne e cavalier tremendi  
sfilano: dietro spigolando allegra  
ride la morte.*

*Gesú, Gesú! Spalancano la tetra  
bocca i sepolcri: a' venti a' nembi al  
sole  
piangono rese anch'esse de' beati  
martiri l'ossa.*

*E quel che avanza il Vinilo barbuto,  
ridiscendendo da i castelli immuni,  
sparte —reliquie, cenere, deserto —  
con l'alabarda.*

*Schiavi percossi e dispogliati, a voi  
oggi la chiesa, patria, casa, tomba,  
unica avanza : qui dimenticate,  
qui non vedete.*

*E qui percossi e dispogliati anch'essi  
i percussori e spogliatori un giorno  
vengano.*

Come ne la spumeggiante  
vendemmia il tino  
ferve, e de' colli italici la bianca  
uva e la nera calpestata e franta  
sé disfacendo il forte e redolente  
vino matura;  
quí, nel conspetto a Dio vendicatore  
e perdonante, vincitori e vinti,  
quei che al Signor pacífico, pregando,  
Teodolinda,  
quei che Gregorio invidiava a' servi  
ceppi tonando nel tuo verbo, o Roma,  
memore forza e amor novo spiranti  
fanno il Comune.

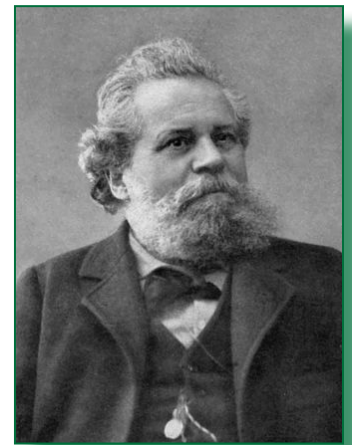
Salve, affacciata al tuo balcon di poggi  
tra Bertinoro alto ridente e il dolce  
pian cui sovrasta fino al mar Cesena  
donna di prodi,  
salve, chiesetta del mio canto! A questa  
madre vegliarda, o tu rinnovellata  
*itala gente da le molte vite,*  
rendi la voce  
de la preghiera: la campana squilli  
ammonitrice : il campanil risorto  
canti di clivo in clivo a la campagna  
Ave Maria.

Ave Maria! Quando su laure corre  
l'umil saluto, i piccioli mortali  
scovrono il capo, curvano la fronte  
Dante ed Aroldo.

Una di flauti lenta melodia  
passa invisibil fra la terra e il cielo:  
spiriti forse che furon, che sono  
e che saranno?

Un oblio lene de la faticosa  
vita, un pensoso sospirar quiete,  
una soave volontà di pianto  
l'anime invade.

Taccion le fiere e gli uomini e le cose,  
roseo 'I tramonto ne l'azzurro sfuma,  
mormoran gli alti vertici ondegianti  
Ave Maria.



Giosuè Carducci  
Luglio 1897