

Donal's introduction to Franco's text in the book edited by Malcolm Pender (due June 2006):

Ciao amore, ciao (Rotpunktverlag 2004) is the fourth novel to be published by Franco Supino (born 1965). The son of Italian immigrants to Switzerland, Supino writes in German. *Ciao amore, ciao* is based on the lives of two real-life singers - the Egyptian-born diva Dalida (1934-1987) and the Italian *cantautore* Luigi Tenco (1938-1967). It is well known that Dalida and Tenco competed at Sanremo in 1967 with a song composed by the protest singer; and that their exit in the qualifying rounds led to Tenco's suicide. Supino's version of this story, with its central characters of Iolanda and Gigi Mai, reflects the failure of the entertainment industry in the late 1960s to respond to the pressing issues of the period; not least the emerging culture of protest. In the chapter presented here **(Chapter 16)**, the two musicians first meet.

Franco Supino

Ciao amore, ciao

Novel

276pp

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www.Rotpunktverlag.ch

Synopsis - translated by Donal McLaughlin

"Ciao amore, ciao" tells the story of the singer Iolanda, a product of the (impoverished) Italian immigrant community in Egypt, who as a young woman soon becomes a star all over Europe. The novel reflects the show-business scene of the 1950s as well as the antithesis of that glamorous world, the movement of the Italian cantautori. In the mid 1960s, Iolanda, used to success (and very much so), makes the acquaintance of the protest singer Gigi Mai. They appear together at the Sanremo Festival with a song composed by Mai which, contrary to all expectations, fails. Later that same night, Gigi Mai kills himself in his hotel room.

The novel is thus also about sudden failure in the entertainment industry of the late 1960s - which chose to ignore the pressing issues of the time and the emerging culture of protest.

The novel is also very much about a search for identity and cultural roots.

The novel is based on the lives of Dalida (1934-1987) and Luigi Tenco (1938-

1967). *Many of the events included are documented; others, simply invented. As such, the novel creates a reality of its own, unlike biographies which seek to document the lives of their subjects.*

Part 1

Iolanda Gigliotti grows up in Egypt as the child of Italian emigrants. In 1956, at the age of 22, she moves to Paris, where she soon manages her break-through as a singer. Within a few years she is a star across Europe.

The text begins with a marketing initiative, organised in 1962 by Iolanda's Italian record company. Accompanied by the radio, press and television, she returns to the home village of her ancestors, a remote village in the mountains of Calabria.

The concert she gives in Serrastretta proves to be a sobering experience. Her instinctive reaction is to interrupt the tour and travel (by car, ship & train) from Serrastretta to Shubra, a suburb of Cairo, - the same journey as that undertaken by her ancestors 100 years previously. Once back home, it is clear to her that the political conditions - with Nasser now in power - have changed dramatically. All Europeans are forced to leave Egypt. Iolanda hopes to find a home for her family in Italy. She flies back and resumes her tour. This proves to be a flop. A nasty campaign, instigated by her rivals, alleges that her claims to be Italian are false. Iolanda retreats to France, where she makes it possible for her family to join her.

Part 2

August, four years later: Iolanda is back in the charts of half of Europe. She is in Rome to record a new song. Her record company introduces her to the promising young protest singer, Luigi Mai. She falls in love with him.

Although both view the event sceptically, they agree to appear together at the 1967 Sanremo Song Festival. Mai has written a political song, 'Ciao amore, ciao', which has migration from the poor South to the rich North as its theme. It is intended to rouse people's feelings and to draw attention to the main social issue in the country. Iolanda supports Luigi's venture. The song touches upon the experiences of her family too.

Part 3

At the Sanremo Festival in 1967: the song crashes out of the competition in the qualifying rounds. Gigi Mai kills himself in his hotel room. Iolanda discovers the body.

Part 4

Five years later, Iolanda returns for a final time to Italy, to Naples, for a TV programme. She meets the French *chanson* singer, Léo Ferré, also of Italian descent, who is now resident in Italy again. Ferré presents his new song, 'Avec le temps'. Iolanda is touched by it. This song captures a feeling which has refused to leave her since Luigi's death.

This television appearance is her last in Italy though she will continue to record

in Italian.

The Italian-Swiss first-person narrator of this tale is constantly on the move: he travels to Serrastretta, to Shubra, to the Piedmont, to Rome, to Sanremo, to Paris. When he was a child, the Sanremo Festival helped him identify himself as an Italian; later, he distances himself from it. He comes to wonder how images relating to our identity mould us. Or might, as his father contends at the end of the novel, he even have focused on the wrong images and examples?