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ITALIAN REALIST DRAMA
(1860-1918)

by

PANAGIOTIS SFYRIS

VOLUME I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

1998

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Abstract

ITALIAN REALIST DRAMA
(1860-1918)

by

Panagiotis Sfyris

Adviser: Professor Marvin Carlson

This dissertation is a study on the esthetics and the sociology of the drama which developed in Italy during the first fifty years of its existence as a unified independent European nation, a period largely defined by the social hegemony of the *borghesia*, the cultural sway of positivism and the literary/artistic trends of realism and *verismo*, the Italian variant of European naturalism. Its purpose is three-fold: It introduces a significant dramatic literature, virtually unknown outside Italy, but also neglected and often dismissed by Italian scholarship. It fills a serious gap in the (Anglo-american) scholarship of nineteenth and early twentieth century Western European drama and, most importantly, it challenges the prevalent idea of Nineteenth Century Italian drama as a cultural lacuna sprawling between the age of Goldoni and the age of Pirandello.

For almost a century this critical misconception has solidified the fallacy that the history of post eighteenth-

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century Italian drama has not been a history of evolution leading from the comedies of Goldoni via the romantic *dramma storico*, *verismo* and the dialect theatre, to the tragicomedy of Pirandello, but a history of a drama maladroitly emulating foreign models and trends. The study of realism/*verismo*, however, shows that there is a direct link between Goldoni and Pirandello; and that the latter constitutes not a case of parthenogenesis in the context of European and Italian drama, but rather the culmination of a dramaturgical tradition which had persistently ventured to disclose, challenge and experiment with the relationship- discrepancy between reality (*realtà*) and truth (*verità*).

The dissertation deals with playwrights whose career illustrates the various stages and aspects of Italian realism/*verismo*: Paolo Giacometti, Teobaldo Ciconi, Paolo Ferrari, Achille Torelli, Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Giacosa, Gerolamo Rovetta, Marco Praga, E.A. Butti, Roberto Bracco, Sabatino Lopez and Dario Niccodemi. It contextualizes the work of these playwrights in the political, social and cultural history of post-*Risorgimento* Italy and pays particular attention to the various Italian literary trends which influenced *verismo* (regional dialect literature, *scapigliatura*, *crepuscolarismo*, etc.). Finally it provides a first perspective in Italian women playwrights, whose dramaturgy does indeed begin and mature with *verismo*.

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CHAPTER 1

REALISM, ROMANTICISM AND THE DRAMA DURING THE RISORGIMENTO (1800-1848)

The 1848 uprising of Italy against the Austrian rule was a turning point in the nationalistic cause of the *Risorgimento*. It brought a turbulent era in the political history of the nation to an end and precipitated the inception of the modern Italian state.[1] For the Italian drama, a paramount cultural contributor to national politics, this historic event has become a terminus ad quem for its departure from the intertwined and conflicting aesthetics of neoclassicism and romanticism.[2] Dispensing with the rigid

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[1] *René Albrecht-Carrié, "Unification Movements," in The Columbia History of the World John A. Garraty and Peter Gay editors (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 905-910; See also, D. Beales, The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy (London, 1981) and Benedetto Croce, A History of Italy (Oxford, 1929).*

[2] *Guido Mazzoni, L' Ottocento (Milano: Vallardi, 1939), 919; Giuseppe Costetti, Il Teatro Italiano nel 1800. (Rome: Cappelli, 1901), 188; Nicola Mangini, "Sui rapporti del teatro italiano col teatro francese nella prima metà dell' Ottocento," Otto/Novecento 12 (January/February 1988), 77. See also, Federico Doglio, ed. "Introduction," Teatro e Risorgimento (Roma: Cappelli, 1965), 31ff.*

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structural and linguistic formalities of the former and the self-conscious excessiveness of the latter, the Italian drama sought to retreat from the languid and for many moribund tradition of Alfieri and his romantic epigones and rehabilitate the realistic legacy of Carlo Goldoni as the seed for the *verismo* drama of the future. Indeed, the rediscovery of Goldoni and the restoration of his work as the platform for the *risorgimento* of the italian drama begets, and runs parallel with, the gradual yet decisive advent of Realism in all aspects of Italian theatre.[3] Upholding the moralistic precepts of Goldoni's neoclassic commedia and employing the compelling theatricality of the contemporary French *pièce bien faite*, the new *dramma borghese* will be looked upon as the *"teatro educatore"* of the nascent Italian state.[4]

For a considerable number of Italian theatre historians, the Italian *dramma borghese* developed as a perfunctory imitation of the French drama. This constitutes, however, a fallacious critical attitude. It understates the contribution of indigenous dramatic and cultural trends, as old as the

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[3]*Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli (1850-1950) (Firenze: Parenti editore, 1958), 29-49.*

[4]*Gustavo Modena, "Il teatro educatore," Scritti e discorsi T. Grandi ed. (Roma: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento, 1957), 244-254. See also his letter to Nicollo Tommaseo (28 August 1841), in Epistolario T. Grandi ed. (Roma: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento, 1955), 43; Giovan Battista Cioni Fortuna, Sull' indole, sui destini e sui bisogni dell' arte drammatica in Italia (Firenze:Tipografia Galileiana, 1842), 35.*

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sophisticated *commedia erudita*, or the *tragedia a fine lieta* of the Rennaisance and Baroque eras, while it completely overlooks the lasting influence of the commedia dell' arte tradition. Indeed, a more circumspect and a-theoretical survey of the extant literature proves otherwise. It not only refutes past assumptions about the quality or the modernity of the pre-*verismo* Italian drama, it also reveals a fascinating interaction between coexisting theatrical trends and literary theories, philosophical programs and sociological systems, foreign aesthetics and national concepts of art. While a gallic or germanic influence, not only on the theatre of Italy, but also on its culture in general (with the exception, perhaps of opera and theatre design), is manifest throughout the century--a development expedited by the political and geostrategic realities prevalent in Europe during the course of the *Ottocento*--the force and the vitality of national artistic traditions always counterbalanced the various imported trends. Such counterbalance occurred either by absorbing or by adapting any qualities or artistic programs appealing to the national taste or amenable to the national cause.[5] So extensive and dynamic was the confluence of national and international aesthetics in Italy, that one may more accurately speak of a singular Italian romanticism or an atypical Italian *dramma borghese*, than classify them under the

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[5] *Costetti, Il Teatro Italiano nel 1800, 136-7.*

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masthead of their European correlatives. Within these parameters, it would be untenable, if not downright erroneous, to explore the realistic drama of the *Ottocento* without considering its forerunners within the cultural milieu of Romanticism, or its theoretical foundations on the philosophical and artistic program of the Enlightenment. For the realistic drama of Italy emerged out of the collusion of now contradictory and now complementary cultural currents, old and new, and its genesis (if not resurrection) is inextricably associated with the political, social and patriotic aspirations of a nation in need of political independence and in search of a national theatre propounding the national ideas of the real, the moral and the beautiful.

The first three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a period of stasis for the Italian drama. The theatre had been retaining its high popular appeal with the cultured middle classes, and although it continued to provide an important forum for the Italian patriots propagating the national cause of independence and unity, Carlo Goldoni, Vittorio Alfieri and a cohort of playwrights italicizing the French dramatic trends were the norm in the theatres of the peninsula. Their work, however, was felt to have become tired and formulaic, domineering rather than inspiring the nation's

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forthcoming talents.[6] Aspiring to their popularity, the young and fashionable playwrights were either emulating the baroque manner of French neoclassical drama, or blending Alfieri's lofty style with the sensations of the French melodrama, by that time avidly translated and produced by Italian theatre companies everywhere.[7]

Yet, the excitement of ephemeral successes did not eclipse the fact that the theatre in Italy not only suffered from the oppressive censorship of the foreign rule, but also from an equally oppressive xenolatry, linguistic disunity, cultural dispersion, all contributing to dramaturgical lenience. Goldoni's comedies and the dialect dramas had to compete with a plethora of adapted French *comédies larmoyantes* and *drames serieux* as well as with the spectacular melodramas of A. W. Iffland and Kotzebue.[8] This unhealthiness of the

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[6] *Cf. Francesco Righetti, Teatro Italiano (Torino, 1828), cited in Mazzoni, ibid., 803.*

[7] *Marvin Carlson, The Italian Stage from Goldoni to D' Annunzio (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 1981), 36ff. See also, Costetti, ibid. chapter I and II, and Mazzoni, 806.*

[8] *Susanna Guggenheim, "Drammi e teorie drammatiche del Diderot e loro fortuna in Italia." Études Italiennes 3 (1921), 27-35, 155-69; Ireneo Sanesi, La Commedia, 474-475; Mangini, Nicola. "Sui rapporti del teatro italiano col teatro francese nella prima metà dell' Ottocento," 77-78. Marvin Carlson, The Italian Stage, ibid.*

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Italian theatre did not remain unnoticed.[9] Young intellectuals, poets, writers and journalists, native and foreigners alike (i.e. Madame de Staël, Stendhal, et al.), inspired by the liberal cultural ramifications of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic conquests, addressed the need for a genuine Italian culture, and espoused the modernization of the native theatre through the development of a national dramatic style.[10] Indeed, the re-creation of a national drama, informed by the modern European cultural trends, yet congenial to the national taste, was deemed a necessity for the intellectual preparation of the national unification.[11]

As the cause of Italy's cultural and political *risorgimento* was undertaken almost exclusively by liberal

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[9] *Cf. Gian Battista Niccolini, Della imitazione nell' arte drammatica (1828). The playwright concludes that the imitation of foreign patterns of dramaturgy, be it Shakespeare or the French neoclassicists and the veneration of anything foreign was detrimental to the advancement of the national theatre, since it would lose its "fisonomia nazionale." See also, Mario Baldini, Il teatro di Gian Battista Niccolini (Firenze, 1907).*

[10] *Among the most inspiring journals espousing the reinvention of Italian drama and the rejuvenation of Italian letters were the bi-monthly La frusta letteraria of Giuseppe Baretti, the Milanese Il caffe of Pietro Verri, and after 1816, Silvio Pellico's Il conciliatore; See also, Stefania De Stefanis Ciccone, "Per una caratterizzazione del giornale del primo ottocento: la cronaca teatrale." Quaderni d' italianistica, vol. 3, No.1 (1982): 26-43; Grazia Avitabile, The Controversy on Romanticism in Italy (New York: Vanni, 1959), 6-12.*

[11] *Cf. Madame de Staël, "On the Manner and Usefulness of Translations," Biblioteca Italiana in Bellorini, Egidio, ed. Discussioni e polemiche sul Romanticismo (1816-1826) (Bari: Laterza, 1943), 3-9. See also, Avitabile, ibid., 13ff.*

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members of the aristocracy and the urban upper-middle classes, it was inevitable that the drama would also surface among their intellectual priorities.[12] Since the "*risorgimento*" of Italian drama became a cultural metier of the *borghesi*, it is self-evident that the drama of the *risorgimento* could only be a *dramma borghese*: Its social foundations were predominantly urban, and its aesthetic orientations, whether neoclassic or romantic, reflected the ethical and cultural concerns of the Italian *borghesia* as well as its republican politics. It was, therefore, incumbent upon its creators to achieve a uniform cultural identity for the class most likely to lead the unified nation. Encouraged as they were by the swift dissemination of the liberal credos throughout Europe, they sought not only to proclaim the new Italy, but also to limn the new Italians. That Carlo Goldoni, a Venetian *borghese* and Vittorio Alfieri, an Astigiano aristocrat, were to provide the legacy for the reinvention of the Italian drama is in itself an evidence of its bourgeois makeup. As a matter of fact, the ideology of the Italian tragedians was not vastly different from the ideology of Carlo Goldoni and his followers. Liberal ethics, moral rectitude, utilitarianism and "active

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[12] *Lucy Riall. The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society and National Unity (New York: Routledge, 1994), 29-34; Pietro Themelly, Il teatro patriottico tra revoluzione e impero. (Roma: Bulzoni, 1991), 93ff; Raffaelle Romanelli, "Political Debate, Social History, and the Italian Borghesia: Changing Perspectives in Historical Research," Journal of Modern History 63 (December 1991), 726ff.*

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romanticism" (civic and national awareness) were the common bonds between tragedy and comedy. The dramaturgy that would ensue from the gradual merging of their aesthetic programs would indeed become the principal and most fecund--culturally and politically--alternative to the monopoly of French drama and its diverse imitations.[13] What differed was the medium and the mode.[14]

The perseverance of French dramatic aesthetics in Italy, however, did not ensue only from France's cultural imperialism, nor was it exclusively the outcome of Napoleon's liberal cultural propaganda. Neoclassicism and its moralistic correlative, it has to be recalled, was an Italian renaissance literary construct, and its current sway over the Italian theatre was largely a case of cultural recycling. It would be more accurate to say that the prevalence of the gallicized variation in Italy was largely owing to the stately yet sensational theatricality of French drama, a dramaturgical property deemed absent from the more circumspect and straitlaced Italian dramaturgy of, say, Vincenzo Monti, Ugo Foscolo and other authors of the Neoclassic school. Notwithstanding their linguistic loftiness, patrician

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[13] *Ireneo Sanesi, Commedia (Milano: Dottor Francesco Vallardi, 1935), 453ff.*

[14] *Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, Il tragico nel mondo borghese (Torino: G. Giapichelli, 1974), 5.*

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characters and rigid structural formula, those tragedies were essentially closet family melodramas, based on classical familial plots, faithful emulations of the Alfierian example.[15] Essentially psychological dramatic canvases, these plays had minimal dramatic action, and though pregnant with bold ideas and real patriotic fervor, they still read as operas without the music, laden with monologues, arias, choruses and recitatives. Despite their grandiloquence, an asset that made many of them popular with the guests at aristocratic salon readings and with the star actors "*delle arene*,"[16] these plays were thematically far from original, since they consistently offered variations on a basic theme: The dissolution of familial or social morality under bizarre or pernicious circumstances, often brought about by the tragic hero's inexorable obsessions with political power and/or sexual prurience. Although these motives are also traceable in the drama of Voltaire or Crébillon, itself not unfettered by improbabilities and plot non-sequiturs, their Italian incarnations had minimized the sensationalism or the risquéness of the story and the dramatic situations never challenged the Italianate sense of decorum. It is essential,

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[15] *Cf. Francesco Paolo Bozzelli, Della imitazione tragica presso gli antichi e presso i moderni (1837), cited in Mazzoni, 819.*

[16] *Teatro da arena is a term usually defining the popular theatre of 19th Century. Kennard calls it a drama "good for Sunday matinees in popular theatres, appealing to simple minds and honest hearts.", p. 204, vol. 2.Cf. Federico Schlitzer, Mondo teatrale dell' Ottocento (Napoli, 1954).*

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though, to observe that these basic themes of the Italian tragedy were for the most part not all that dissimilar to those favored by the realist and verist playwrights of the 1850s and 1860s. In fact, their subtle moralizing and their emphasis on honor, propriety and social virtue offered greater affinity with the theatre of Paolo Ferrari and Acchile Torelli than Italian drama historians care to admit.

The idealistic repercussions of the French Revolution and the ostensibly liberal rationale of Napoleon's conquests, however, fostered the bourgeois fundamentalism of the late eighteenth century *Jacobin drama* in France and allowed its transplant in Italy as well.[17] From Milan to Naples and from Parma to Turin, audiences and artists, for decades tolerating censorship and inaccessibility to the modernity of other European capitals, embraced the French drama, because it offered them fashionable entertainment, opened new intellectual perspectives and confirmed the new civic values which the Italian neoclassic drama previously had not, or had not been allowed to assert. Given the fact that classicism, despite Alfieri and other liberal apologists, came to be identified with Austrian absolutism--a reality more perceptible during the Austrian Restoration[18]--the modern

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[17] *The term generally means the revolutionary drama written in France and Italy around and after French revolution, usually of a patriotic and liberal content.*

[18] *M. Fubini, Romanticismo italiano. Saggi di storia della critica e della letteratura (Bari: Laterza, 1971), 31-2.*

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sentimental bourgeois drama, tragic or comic, became an expression of resistance against the stern cultural alienation imposed by the Austrian crown: a dramatic genre, exciting and edifying, crafted for the new enlightened European *borghesia*, and programmed to stimulate the idealism of the new, post-revolutionary era.[19] This trend, nourished and enforced by Napoleon's cultural policies during his own reign over the peninsula--the founding and patronizing of official *compagnie*, the sponsorship of tours by French acting troupes, the encouragement of dramatic contests and the partial abolishment of censorship--had a far-reaching effect on the fledgling national drama. So long as the native "serious" drama could not escape from the formalities of the native neoclassic dogma, the French alternative with its bourgeois tragicomedies, *comédies larmoyantes* and *drames serieux* not only proved more congenial to the cultural interests of urban Italy, but it also supplied Italian theatre companies, such as the Compagnia Reale Italiana, with a repertory that despite its extravagances seemed more avant-garde, more topical and undoubtedly, for the actors, more accessible and remunerative.[20]

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[19] *Alessandro Galante Garrone, ed. La stampa italiana del Risorgimento (Roma: Laterza, 1979), p. 7, 10.*

[20] *Cf. Mangini, ibid; see also Costetti, ibid., 134; Sanesi, 474.*

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Thus, for the entire first half of the 19th Century, while the Italian drama will be still valued according to the grandiose standards of Alfierian and Metastasian dramaturgy, the Italian theatre will be monopolized by the *tragedie cittadine* and the *drammi urbani* of playwrights who, blending the *italianità* of Goldoni and the urbane sentimentality of Diderot and his followers, would aspire to produce a middle-brow drama, reflective of the current sensibilities and sophisticated enough to attain approval by audiences, authors and actors alike.[21] Notwithstanding the proliferation of verse drama, and the constant profusion of *"classicheggianti"* mythological tragedies,[22] the amalgamation of French

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[21] *Previous historical accounts of 19th century Italian theatre and drama have not been consistent with regard to the terminology applied in order to designate or describe various phenomena and norms, pertinent to the realistic genre or to the Italian theatre in general. Specific terms are used interchangeably and with no attempt at differentiation. Some clarification is therefore necessary. While the term "teatro" is typically used to define the theatre as either an artistic genre or a performing art, the word "dramma" connotes both the dramatic output of a period or the ouevre of an author. Yet in numerous instances, "dramma" is used to name a play which is not tragedy, whether or not it retains many of the tragedy's structural or other traits. The word "commedia" designates the genre of comedy, but it also means any dramatic work in prose that is not a tragedy. Also the term dramma borghese denotes the whole literature of italian dramatic realism, but it also stands for any play except tragedy, serious or comic, dealing with contemporary situations or events. Finally, a series of appellations such as "dramma sentimentale," "lacrimoso," "romancesco," "urbano" and "borghese," or "tragedia borghese", "cittadina," or "cittadinesca," all are used at one time or another to designate what was essentially a sentimental prose melodrama with a bourgeois subject-matter and didactic attitude. These terms will become obsolete during the second half of the century. For crepuscolarismo and the other terms used hereafter, see chapter 4.*

[22] *The term "classicheggiante" defines the pseudo-historical play with a theme taken from the classic or medieval antiquity, or a play conventionally observing the neoclassic rules in the manner of Corneille and Metastasio.*

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sentimental drama and Italian bourgeois comedy became the basis for the creation--or the re-creation since the Renaissance--of the Italian *commedia/dramma borghese*, hybrid dramatic genres, whose development and aesthetic transmutation would exceed romanticism and the *risorgimento*, crystallizing into what is regularly called the modern realist drama of Italy.

Although dismissed and vilified by many a critic, contemporary or modern, as obtuse, mechanic, maudlin, escapist, and irrelevant, the plays of Camillo Federici, F.A. Avelloni, Giovanni Giraud, Alberto Nota, Simeone Antonio Sografi, the Baron Cosenza, Filippo Casari, Giovanni Sabbatini, Francesco dell´ Ongaro and others not only embodied a dramaturgy rich in social commentary and civic ideology, they also formulated a solid social and cultural conscience for a class preparing to free and lead modern Italy.[23] Far from being profit-oriented theatre craftsmen, in the manner of a Pixérécourt or a Kotzebue, a large number of them saw the drama as a teaching implement, not so much for the illiterate

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[23] *The contemporary critical evaluation of the dramma borghese, tragic or comic, betrays a widespread confusion with regard to what critics as Niccolini, or Stendhal appreciated as good drama. While, for example, Camillo Federici, a playwright much vilified as facile and "commercial," was often cited as an example of what was wrong with the Italian theatre, Stendhal, a thoughtful advocate of Italian theatre, presented Federici as the paragon of a tragedian, worthy of being imitated by the new playwrights. Such cases are indicative of the different aesthetic and theoretic approaches during the "querelle" between romantics and neoclassicists, even among people with similar predilections. For a historical survey of early 19th century Italian drama and its currents see F.S. Salfi, Saggio storico-critico della commedia italiana (Berlin: Giorgio Gropius, [1829] 1838), 377ff.*

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and the undemanding, but for the cultured and the informed as well. Since the (re)appearance of the *dramma borghese* as a legitimate genre, a number of its practicing apologists, inspired by the pre-romantic theories of Lessing and Diderot, sought to make their modern dramaturgy the basis for the creation of a new national drama.[24] Others, at the same time sought to use its flexible technique and its pedagogic spirit as a tool of propaganda, in order to address the patriotic agenda of the politically disenfranchised Italian nation.[25] Popular success was a desideratum, as long as it attested to the attainment of their edifying efforts and piloted their thematic choices.

Frequently based on real events, these plays produced a

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[24] *The fact that these plans never materialized is due not to the inappropriateness of the new drama, but rather to the fragmentary nature of the Italian culture during foreign rule, the cultural disparity among the various urban centers and the censored dissemination of ideas. As examples of programmatic theories for the creation of the new dramma borghese, see Giovanni Da Gamerra, "Piano per servire allo stabilimento del nuovo teatro nazionale," Nuovo Teatro, vol. 1 (Venice: Storti, 1790); or, Ildefonso Valdastri, Dissertazione filosofica sulle tragedie cittadinesche (1792), in which he expounds the necessity for a "dramma a tutti i ceti, il quale non esagera nelle sue rappresentazioni la natura umana e non perde efficacia col volger dei tempi e col mutar di governi, poichè i suoi quadri sono ricavati dal fondo più comune dell'umana natura." [a drama for all classes, which does not exaggerate human nature and does not lose its relevance with the change of times or governments, exactly because its situations are derived from the most common depths of human nature.] See also Carlson, Italian Theatre, 43ff; and Susanna Guggenheim, "Drammi e teorie drammatiche del Diderot e loro fortuna in Italia," 155-69. See, finally, Manlio D. Busnelli, Diderot et l'Italie: reflets de vie et de culture italiennes dans la pensée de Diderot. Paris: Librairie ancienne Edouard Champion, 1925.*

[25] *See Pietro Themelly, Il teatro patriottico tra revoluzione e impero., Roma: Bulzoni, 1991. and Doglio, "Introduction".*

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dynamic portrait of a society in ascendance and proclaimed the re-invention of an Italian "*interclassista*" society, freed from political anxieties and social discomfiture.[26] A number of recurrent ideological motives can easily be traced: Nobility by birth is not a social asset to be deferred. Also, humble origins are not a liability, but a condition associated with social egalitarianism and cosmopolitan character; civic virtue is more essential than other social values, in fact, it is the only standard authenticating social progress and political open-mindedness.[27] This reformed republicanism, however, would be contained almost exclusively within the realm of social comedy. Tragedy, still a stronghold of structural, thematic and linguistic conservatism, remained by and large unaffected by this overtly polemic patriotic message, though sporadically (and unsuccessfully) it did adopt prose, aiming at a wider communication of the liberal message. Melchiore Gioja's La Giulia (1800), a proto-documentary tragedy based on real political events, is an isolated experiment to address the public in a manner that would render all the more emphatic the playwright's political message.[28]

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[26] *Themelly, 99, 108.*

[27] *Cf. L.C. Stivanello, "Un comediografo dimenticato." [Federici] L'Ateneo Veneto. 32 fasc. 1 (Jan-Febr. 1909):133, 134.*

[28] *Written for the Società del Teatro Patriotico di Milano, but never actually performed (though published in 1801), the tragedy, analogous to Lessing's Emilia Galotti, was planned to give "a pittura languida e smorta di quelle terribili vicente [the resistance of Italian guerillas against the foreign rule]," opting for a new mode of tragic writing, "riflettendo che una nuova*

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This experiment sired no immediate theoretical debate, nor did it provide a satisfactory model for a linguistically more realistic reformation of the tragic genre, or the *tragedia cittadinesca*.[29] The tendency though for greater realism would reappear stronger in the *tragedie urbane* of the mid-century, when plays like Giovanni Sabbatini's Gli spazzacamini

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barbaria religiosa e civile doveva essere scolpita nella mente dei lettori con una novità letteraria." [an unemotional and lively picture of the terrible events, assuming that a new religious and civil barbarity would be discouraged in the minds of the readers with its literary novelty.] See Doglio, Teatro e Risorgimento, 54; also, "Introduction," ibid., 10-13. The French playwright Antoine Houdar de La Motte in a preface to his tragedy Oedipe had espoused the use of prose for tragedy on the basis of greater verisimilitude, but it is doubtful whether Gioja was familiar with either the work or the theory of La Motte.

[29] *It should be here mentioned that a major and persistent criticism of the risorgimento dramma borghese, comic and tragic, targets the dramatic language of the plays. The preciousness of this language was occasionally thought to render the characters if not quaint and pompous, at least "out of character:" A dramatic diction, ornate and oratorical, sentimental and ostentatious, and therefore hardly realistic. This stultified language, it is argued, runs counter to the progressive realism of the new subject-matter and form, dimming its modernity and underscoring its contrived structure. Informed by more recent and more advanced realistic standards for realism in dramatic diction, this critical reservation is rendered void if one becomes aware of the fact that these authors were not inventing a language, but that they were transcribing a speaking behavior that happened to be ostentatious, ornate and oratorical: the language of a borghesia still reluctant to do away with stultified speech mannerisms. However, as the dramma borghese moves toward a more realistic depiction of life, the language casts off much of its artificiality. Although not yet employing the language of Giovanni Verga, the drama of Sabbatini, dell' Ongaro, Augusto Bon and Martini shows a de-sentimentalization of the dramatic language advancing along with a de-sentimentalization of the dramatic event and a gradual abatement of the comic element. This development, however, accelerates primarily after the ebbing of Romantic drama and after the romantic movement has rendered essential the exploration of the real and the true as complementary sides of the ideal. Cf Nadier, the editor of Pixérécourt's melodramas who would say "On parlait faux, c' etait le character distinctif de l' époque." See also Stivanello, ibid., 134: "... la rettorica fu il pasto quotidiano di quella generazione." [Rhetoric was a daily habit for that generation.] Also see Costetti, 144; Sanesi, 508-9; Also Umberto Bosco, 50. Arcangelo Leone de Castris, "Teatro italiano e teatro europeo nell' Ottocento," Il Veltro 3 (March 1960), 29ff.*

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della Valle d'Aosta (The Chimney-sweeps of Valle d'Aosta, 1840) would begin to document actual social concerns.

The restoration of Austrian rule, an outcome of the Congress of Vienna (June 1815) after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, redefined not only the political priorities of the Italian people, but also accelerated the advent of romanticism and the reorientation of Italian culture and drama. During the critical period 1815-1848 Italian culture would asphyxiate under the sway of Austrian censorship, a policy rounded out with a radical effort to eradicate French influence and propagandize the Germanic *belles lettres*. The proliferation of literary journals, among which the Biblioteca Italiana and its more nationalistic challenger, Il Conciliatore of Silvio Pellico, constituted the main tribunes of the battle between Italian classicism and romanticism, would cultivate--only with short-lived success--the illusion of free speech, while the relentless propaganda of Metternich among the Italian intelligensia was always at work.[30] The regimes and the regional upheavals between 1817 and 1848 would generate and sustain a revolutionary political and social ambience, so rich

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[30] *Besides the aforementioned journals, other important periodicals with a special interest in the history of drama is la Rivista Europea, I teatri, Il censore nuovo dei Teatri, and La Fama. Also see, Ugo Foscolo, "Italian Periodical Literature," Edizione Nazionale delle Opere, Saggi di letteratura Italiana vol. XI, C. Foligno Ed. (Firenze 1958), 327-366. See also Ciccone, ibid., 29. For the Austrian propaganda, see Galante Garrone, La stampa italiana, 22ff; finally, see F. Venturi, La circolazione delle idee, relazione introduttiva agli atti del XXXII Congresso di Storia del Risorgimento (Rome, 1954), 33-52.*

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in idealism and *patriotismo* that it would galvanize the spiritual awakening of the Italian *borghesia*, tendering the prospect of revolution and unification not only as a national necessity, but also as the vindication of the nation's sublime historic past. Politically, the Italian *borghesia* and its intellectual leaders would substitute the desire for political liberalism for the ideal of nationalism, an ideal, that is, which after 1817 would be indelibly aligned with the dogma of romanticism.

Epitomizing *italianità*, modernity and independence, romanticism in its Italian incarnation was a movement of intellectual and political courage.[31] The romantic drama of the period would reflect these socio-cultural controversies in a variety of processes: the abnegation of Greco-roman mythology; the italianization of the romantic aesthetics; the merging of neoclassic ideology with romantic idealism; the re-invention of neoclassic tragedy as the genre par excellence of Italian romanticism; and the rediscovery of Italian history as a cultural disclaimer of foreign intervention and oppression.[32] As early as 1823, Alessandro Manzoni would be

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[31] *Il Conciliatore, foglio scientifico, letterario, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence, 1954), II, 676. See also Carlson, 62; and Egidio Bellorini, "Introduction" to Discussioni e polemiche sul Romanticismo (1816-1826) (Bari: Laterza, 1943).*

[32] *"Dopo tanta ubriacatura per le cose francesi e le idee [germaniche], ... gl' Italiani [riscoprono] nel fondo patterno la loro dignità non solo letteraria, ma nazionale." [After so long a craze for French things and German ideas, ... Italians rediscover in their patrimony not only their literary, but also national*

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aware of the idiosyncratic temperament of Italian romanticism. In his Lettre à M. C[hauvet] sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie (Letter to M. Chauvet on the Unity of Time and Place in Tragedy), the author of Il Conte di Carmagnola (1820) stresses the eclecticism of the Italian romantics, for whom the movement was only a point of departure, *"en laissant au principe et aux doctrines le nom des romantiques, bien que ce nom ne répresente pas pour eux le même ensemble d'idées auquel il a été appliqué chez des autres nations."*[33] In fact Alessandro Manzoni represents the acme of dramatic romanticism in Italy and the theoretical junction between romanticism and the *dramma borghese* as well.

Although Manzoni's romantic realism was an aesthetic coalescence between *illuminismo* idealism and *Sturm-und-drang* revisionism, which only seldom materialized successfully in the writing of tragedy, it had a profound impact on the theatre of his time. His dramatic theory, a neo-conservative and moderate blend of artistic concepts, reflected the aesthetic convictions and philosophical concerns of many of his peers.[34] Manzoni's poetics of the *vero*, and his

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dignity.] Galante Garrone, 27.

[33] *"Applying the term "romantic" only to the principle and the theories, although this term does not connote for them the same set of ideas to which it was applied in other nations.] Alessandro Manzoni, Tutte le opere vol. 2 (Milan: Mondatori, 1957-74), 1676ff. For the distinct nature of Italian Romanticism see Bosco, Realismo Romantico, 48-50.*

[34] *Tonelli, 370.*

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interpretation of history as an eternal reflection of daily experience, had a lasting effect on the consecration of the *dramma storico* as the dramatic tribune of Italian romantic poetics. A champion of the very same ideas that Victor Hugo would later consolidate in his romantic manifesto ("Preface" to Cromwell, 1827), Manzoni sought to explore the reality of human experience through the dramatization of (national) history, insisting on a psychological realism in the portrayal of the historic characters and on literal, almost pictorial, re-creation of the historic event as the supreme register of human truth. Even though his two plays, Il conte di Carmagnola and Adelchi, remain far from complying entirely with the programmatic precepts expounded in his theory (save that of the historic subject-matter), his ideas mapped out and standardized a theoretical justification for the intense realism attempted in the new dramaturgy, that is a realism of dramatic narrative, previously conceded only in the comic *dramma borghese* and its various subgenres. For Manzoni the cardinal dramaturgical principle is, indeed, as De Castris comments, *"il vero, la santità della storia, la moralità intrinseca dei fatti della vita dell'uomo, la verità del reale, che non è il certo, l'oggetivamente scientificamente accertabile, ma la rivelazione, il disvelamento dell'ideale che in quel certo si realizza, l'individuazione di una legge provvidenziale che immane nelle cose dell'uomo e ne consacra*

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i destini."[35] Soon, however, his call for a realistic rendition of the vero, *"di quel misto di grande e di meschino, di ragionevole e di pazzo che si vede negli avvenimenti grandi e piccoli di questo mondo ... il desiderio di conoscere quello che è realmente e di vedere più che si può in noi e nel nostro destino su questa terra"*,[36] was in practice adulterated by the linguistic and structural formulas of the French melodrama and the habitual bathos of the *dramma borghese*.[37]

The historic dramas of Carlo Tebaldi-Fores (1793-1830) and Carlo Marenco (1800-1836), probably the best apologists of the Manzonian theory, also evidence the aesthetic modification his principles underwent: neoclassic structures, emotional rhetoric, and archaic diction. Nonetheless, the insemination of Italian tragedy with realism is already at work and the consequences of Manzoni's realist poetics in the formation of

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[35] *"The true, the sanctity of history, the intrinsic morality of the facts in the life of man, the truth of the real, which is not the fact, the thing which can be corroborated objectively and scientifically, but the revelation, the discovery of the ideal which is realized in this fact, the individualization of a providential law which defines human affairs and preordains human fate."* De Castris, *ibid., 27. See also Arnaldo Di Benedetto, "La storia, le passioni, la vera natura umana (La teoria tragica di A. Manzoni),"* Revue des Études Italiennes, *33 (1987), 74-87.*

[36] *"that which is a mixture of the great and the lowly, of the logical and the weird, which might be observed in the major and minor events of this world... the desire to know that which really exists and to see it now more than ever in us and in our fate on this earth."*

[37] *Letter to the abbot G. Giudici, (7 February 1820) cited in De Castris, ibid., 28; see also Tonelli, 270.*

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the naturalistic tragedy of the late *Ottocento* are evident not only in the work of Pietro Cossa or Gabrielle D'Annunzio, but also in the gradual consecration of realism in acting and theatrical performance as well.[38]

Notwithstanding its aesthetic self-consciousness, the romantic drama did not forfeit its ideological affiliation with the *borghesia*, although the latter proved more willing to read it than to experience it in the theatre. Indeed, the failure of many romantic tragedies in performance either fostered a skepticism on the part of the playwrights with regard to the viability of their dramaturgical endeavors,[39] or deterred them from pursuing further a career in the theatre.[40] The inspirational sway of the romantic drama, nonetheless, and its identification with the progressive force of the nation, altered considerably the rapport between the public and the theatre. From the time of Silvio Pellico's Francesca da Rimini (1815) until Manzoni's Adelchi (1820) and Giambattista Niccolini's Arnaldo da Brescia (1843), the romantic drama would forge not only civic consciousness but also national pride. It is this particular socio-political

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[38] *Ferdinando Taviani, "Alcuni suggerimenti per lo studio della poesia degli attori nell' Ottocento," Quaderni di teatro 21-22 (August-November 1983), 69-95; see also Carlson, The Italian Stage, 90-92;*

[39] *Mazzoni, 942ff*

[40] *Typical is the position of Manzoni, who viewed his plays as drama not written for performance. Realizing the incompatibility between the demands of the theatre and the aesthetic of Romanticism, he ceased writing plays and turned exclusively to prose.*

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agenda that provided a dynamic junction between the romantic drama and the popular theatre. Their interaction, elusive yet vigorous, would accelerate the adjustment of romantic drama to the ever changing historical circumstances.

Indeed, it was the realistic romanticism of Manzoni and Niccolini which furnished the transition to the romantic realism of Martini, Bon and Giacometti, impelling the significant stylistic and thematic streamlining of the *dramma borghese*. Gradually abrogating its subservience to national politics, yet heeding the drastic political changes, it would refocus on social ethics. The political rationale of the Giacobine and Napoleonic years, the critical outlook towards the politics of foreign rule, the antagonism with the religious establishment and the upholding of the *borghesia* as a political partisan caste, ebbed with the beginning of the *risorgimento*. In its updated form, the farcical and the ridiculous of the comic drama gradually dissolved to the sentimental and the sardonic, while its political edge, obtuse when not entirely absent, had a domestic rather than an activist agenda. This political abstemiousness would allow the melodramatization of the genre, a development that would expedite its uncomplicated approximation to the *dramma storico* and the dramma *basso romantico*.

During the later phase of the romantic movement, the *dramma borghese* and the romantic tragedy shared the decoding of reality as a common thematic and philosophical pursuit: a

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tangible reality for the former, a world experienced in its quotidian variety, full of perplexity and social disparities; and a historicized or mystical reality for the latter, the cosmos of the interior reality, beyond appearances, yet explored through them within a historic milieu, not very remote and unreal, but very close in the historic memory. The unrefined and cynical registering of common verities about the human temperament and the social failings of the discrepant present is juxtaposed to the nostalgic evocation of an idealistic (not idealized) past, where the real is not only sought within daily circumstances, but is located within the mystery of the human psyche and its capacity to transcend ephemeral predicaments.[41] For the romantic, the translation of human reality requires the de-mystification of life's mystery, the latter not perceived as an abstraction impossible to understand, but as a fact, little understood.[42] While the sarcastic melodramatic satires of Giuseppe Vollo (1820-1905) embodied an attempt to transcribe life as faithfully as possible, the tragedies of Pellico aimed first at a psychological realism and then a historical realism to unearth the real and the ideal and thus reach the truth. Meanwhile, the tragicomedies of Giacinto Battaglia, Federico dall'Ongaro

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[41] Lander MacClintock. *The Contemporary Drama of Italy*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1920), 5-6.

[42] *Cf Houghton W. Taylor, "Realism and the Romantic Spirit," The Sewanee Review 35 (1927), 339.*

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and Giuseppe Sabbatini along with the *morallegianti*[43] comedies of Carlo Alberto Nota and Giovanni Giraud, opted for the cogent "real-ization" of history or actuality, despite the qualifying penchant for a bathetic exploitation of taboo themes -- adultery, feminism, class determinism, sexuality. Yet again the conventional ethics of propriety and social order were never radically challenged.

Although one can argue about the literary quality of this theatre, it nonetheless offered considerable opportunities for camouflaged protest against national submission and social evils. Evidence for this is the proliferation and popularity of dramatic biographies, mainly during the critical period 1820-1850. Retelling the commendable life of illustrious Italians of the past, preferably women and artists, these plays, more melodramatic than dramatic, stressed the struggle for personal liberty in suffocating domestic milieux, or for free expression within a recalcitrant cultural environment. Escaping the mutilations of the Austrian censor, this hybrid of the *dramma storico* allowed for a subtle yet powerful association between the suffering protagonist and the agonizing "*patria*."[44]

More society-oriented, the *dramma borghese* eschewed the iconoclastic pretensions of the early romantic drama, and

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[43] *The term defines the comedies with a moral or moralistic end.*

[44] *See Costetti, Teatro italiano, ibid., 138-9.*

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preserved only the latter's compassionate spirit and humanistic perspective: a passion for social emendation, class reconciliation and pragmatism. Manzoni's theory of a utilitarian tragedy with a realistic, that is, pragmatic vision was not watered down by the authors of *dramma storico*, despite the aforementioned modification of its esthetics.[45] On the contrary, the latter strived to make the topicality of realistic action conform with the nobler aspirations of the tragic genre. Heroes from the royal and aristocratic strata still abound, but they are not high-flown abstractions; they are what Shelley would call "natural subjects," whose stories have a "national and universal interest." They are rendered not as tragic individuals, but as tragic Italian individuals, true people who call modern Italy into action for liberty and progress.[46] The ideological end, therefore, of the *dramma storico* as the bridge-genre between romantic realism and active romanticism is the portrayal of *Italianità*, the anatomy of the Italian character in its permutations throughout history. The *dramma borghese* as both *dramma storico* and neo-goldonian comedy did indeed exemplify a theatre of the common man, where common connotes the non-mythical, the historical and the political, the verifiable, the perennially modern

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[45] *Luigi Tonelli, L'evoluzione del teatro contemporaneo in Italia (Milano: Remo Sandron Editore, 1913), 30ff.*

[46] *Carlo Cattaneo, Alcuni scritti, 48.*

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human being.[47] Romanticism in Italy did not extol the vision of the individual at odds with the world.[48] Quite the contrary, it endeavored to express the vision of a national community in search of an identity.[49] Ultimately, the basic difference between the romantic tragedy and the *dramma borghese* is one of aesthetic presuppositions of verisimilitude (the polarity *reale-vero*) and not one of disparate ideological concerns.

The establishment of realism as the dominant intellectual and artistic current of unified Italy, and the adoption of the *pièce bien faite* as the major dramatic formula did not effect the immediate and inexorable decline of the romantic dramatic genres. Indeed, the triumph of the *dramma borghese* did not curtail the artistic allure of the tragic genre, nor did historicism and poetry abdicate the Italian drama altogether. In fact, "*verismo storico*," a subtler artistic articulation of *basso romanticismo*, would sustain the early romantics' obsession with the quest for the true and the real, and would furnish the most challenging alternative to the overt naturalism of the late *Ottocento*. The tragedies of Pietro Cossa, Leopoldo Marenco epitomize a dramaturgy of "*bon sens*,"

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[47] *Cf. Siro Ferrone, "Introduction," ibid., xii.*

[48] *Siro Ferrone, "Introduction" to La commedia e il dramma borghese dell' Ottocento vol. 1 (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), xi.*

[49] *Bosco, ibid., 48*

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a poetic or poeticizing drama, upholding the cause of a heightened, allegoric realism.[60] Reinvented as symbolic and introvert realism, it is this allegoric dimension that Gabrielle d'Annunzio would champion at the closing of the century. The neo-romantic *verismo* of his pastoral tragedies and the lyrical linguistic mannerism of his (medievaleggianti) romances, would not only embody the idiosyncratic movement of Italian *decadentismo* and *symbolismo* in the theatre. They would also relegate to the present century a persistent affinity for the "*teatro di poesia*," exemplified in the versified "*basso-romantico*" realism of Sem Benelli and the risorgimento melodramas of Domenico Dumiati. Notwithstanding their vocal resistance to naturalistic aesthetics, D' Annunzio and his disciples are closet *verismo* playwrights, partaking with late naturalism the same, almost fatalistic, world view of passivity and irrationality. Theirs is a theatre purporting to dramatize the unfathomed nature of human psychology, yet enlisting all the tricks and techniques of the early *dramma storico/borghese*, in order to envelop their sanctimonious symbolism: sentimentality, aggressive confrontational dialogue, pithy rhetoric, risqué themes, and a hyperbolic poetry vacillating between the sublime and the decadent.

This development of romantic dramaturgy corroborates the profound realistic infrastructure of romantic drama: the

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[60] *Cf. Sylvio d'Amico, Storia del Teatro drammatico vol. 2 (Milano: Aldo Garzanti, Editore, 1970), 83-85.*

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realism of factual history, the realism of the *risorgimento* experience, the realism of the post-*risorgimento* politics. It also evidences the tremendous impact of the realistic *dramma borghese* on its own eventual "*imborghesimento.*" The esthetic merit of this evolution is still a matter of critical controversy, yet it is uncontestable that the ideal of dramatic realism in its various permutations has been both the fulcrum of Italian romanticism and its esthetic challenger.[51]

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[51] *De Castris, ibid., 29, 30. Luigi Tonelli, Il teatro Italiano dalle origini ai nostri giorni (Milano: Modernissima, 1924), 383ff, 405-407. The term "inborghesimento" means the "bourgeoisation" of a non bourgeois class, but also of an idea, trend, or school of thought. In this context it means the adoption and adaptation of this idea, trend or school of thought by the dominant Italian bourgeoisie.*

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CHAPTER 2

DEPARTING FROM ROMANTICISM: THE MODERN DRAMA OF PAOLO GIACOMETTI AND TEOBALDO CICONI

Paolo Giacometti (1816-1882) and Teobaldo Ciconi (1824-1863), playwrights significantly disparate in artistic vision and poetics, emerge out of the Risorgimento era with their work illustrating the diverse cultural trends that defined the gradual passing of Italian drama from Romanticism to Realism. As their acme coincides with the ultimate phase of Italian nationalism and the earliest stages of the fledgling Italian state, their dramaturgy articulates if not a thorough departure from, at least a significant modification of Romanticism's dramatic program and adumbrates not only the ideology, but also the aesthetic permutations of the emerging Realist movement. Even though the subversion of the Romantic doctrine -- especially in the case of Giacometti -- was intermittently and sometimes fugaciously realized, their endeavor towards a realistic drama of social and ethical

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consequence allowed them to challenge fundamental assumptions about the values and the virtues of the contemporary era. Questioning the essence of modern humanity, they explored the contemporary social phenomena in a manner, so incisive, that quite often their dramaturgical sensibility suggests the sarcasm of the *grotteschi* and the tragicomic ambiguity of the Pirandellian paradox: the social mask and the private face.

Stylistically, their work did not overthrow the melodramatic trappings of the Romantic drama, nor did it jettison the sentimental verbosity of the post-Goldonian dramatic tradition. Now catering to the current popular taste and now conceding to the star-actors' penchant for grandiloquent theatrics, both Giacometti and Ciconi imbued their dramas with a lachrymosity so operatic and a *patetismo* so uncritically platitudinous -- obviously an aesthetic borrowing from the romantic romance and the journalistic *faits divers* -- that later criticism could not help objurgating them as paragons of a Romantic drama in decline. Relegated to the footnotes of Italian theatre history and with their distinctive contribution to the advent of Realism voided, both playwrights have continuously been treated as minor literary figures whose dramaturgy exposes the stylistic misprisions of the Risorgimento theatre rather than the expressive potential of the new drama.

Historically, it is hardly accurate to construe Giacometti, a professional playwright of Scribean industry, as

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a dynamic influence on the evolution of Italian playwriting, or Ciconi as a scrupulous apostle of the Realistic credo, since neither of them was allowed by circumstances to engage in such a lofty mission. Be this as it may, it is still a critical fallacy to deny them the credit of being sires of Realism, even if their talent or their artistic tenacity were not outstanding enough to render them as pioneers of the movement. Since Realism evolved too rapidly as the conduit of the dominant state ideology to be credited as an avant-garde, it is all the more groundless to canvass its history trying to locate a non-conformist *"avanguardia."*

PAOLO GIACOMETTI

Paolo Giacometti being an itinerant and often underpaid "playwright-in-residence" for the touring troupes of "*grandi attori,*" he lived exclusively on his art, composing yearly an average of two plays, more often than not prescribed by and tailored to his patrons' taste.[1] His concessions to the ephemeral show-business realities did not permit him to pursue the art of theatre as a purely artistic calling, unimpeded by

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[1] *Giacometti wrote Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra, Giuditta, Bianca Maria Visconti Maria Antonietta and Renata di Francia for Adelaide Ristori; Arrigo IV o La Chiesa e l'Impero, Michelangelo Buonarroti for Tommaso Salvini. Ernesto Rossi created his L'ultimo dei Duchi di Mantova. For dates see Appendix. For the "collaboration" between Giacometti and actors, Cf. Adelaide Ristori, Ricordi e studi artistici (Torino: Roux, 1887), 183-210; Eugenio Buonaccorsi, "La 'Maria Antonietta' di Paolo Giacometti nelle lettere dell'autore ad Adelaide Ristori (1867-1868)," Bolletino del Museo-Biblioteca dell'Attore n.4 (October 1973), 3-24; and Buonaccorsi, "Introduction," to Paolo Giacometti:Teatro (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1983), 28-29.*

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pressing commercial considerations. Opting, however, to render his prose drama as a chronicle of Italy-in-transition, he sought to articulate not only the modern social trepidations, caused by the ongoing political re-configurations of the *Risorgimento*, but also to assert certain controversial issues --sex equality, juridical reformation, social brotherhood, and so on--which society, he felt, had previously deemed improper for a broader public debate. Mildly but conscientiously challenging the status quo as a believer in the capacity of society to throw off the mask of pretension and show its true liberal temper, Giacometti did initiate and espouse the most notable and original function of Italian realism: not only the deprecation of all that is corrupt and deleterious, but also the upholding of everything that is positive and affirmative for a new society on the rise. Far from pontificating on human frailty as a self-righteous moralizer, Giacometti endorsed moderation, flexibility and tolerance as the antidote to the human impulses of evil. Anticipating Pirandello, he viewed his contemporary world as a bizarre synthesis of contradictions, where the "true" does not always and necessarily connote the "real," and where social appearances are often preferable to the calamitous realities, since the latter are "fictions," ordained by excessive and "inhuman" social recalcitrance, and

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codified as prudery, philistinism and bigotry.[2]

Indeed, Giacometti is after Carlo Goldoni the first professional Italian playwright with strong convictions about the function of the theatre in a re-invented national society, the interaction between social mores and cultural trends and the didactic potential of the stage for a national community in need of a modern identity. Most important, however, were his ideas about the utility of drama not as a mere tool of didacticism, but as an illuminator, a concept not unlike Gustavo Modena's "*teatro educatore.*" It was ideology and civic purposefulness that fostered his work, first as "poeta di compagnia" for acting troupes such as those of Giardini-Woller-Belatti (1840), Luigi Domeniconi (1843), the "Compagnia Reale Sarda" (1848-1851), and later Adelaide Ristori and Tommaso Salvini.[3] Although never controversial or provocative to the point of being branded an iconoclast, Giacometti did not treat the theatre as a debonair pastime exclusively aimed at the cultured social strata of the Italian city-states, nor did he espouse a philosophy of art as an instrument militantly

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[2] *Giacometti is therefore a pioneer in his artistic resolution to tackle intricate social issues. Even if his positivism and polemicism, juxtaposed to the later development of the socially engaged naturalistic drama, appears maudlin and quaint, this does not negate the fact that his popular dramaturgy opened new thematic horizons for the playwrights who would in the ensuing decades adopt the thesis play formula and advocate realism as the official art form of the post-Unitarian Italian society. See Girardi, ibid., 6, 9.*

[3] *Eugenio Buonaccorsi, ed., Paolo Giacometti:Teatro (Genova: Costa & Nolan, 1983), 6, 9; Irineo Sanesi, La Commedia (Milano: Dottor Francesco Vallardi, 1935), 521.*

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antagonizing the dominant ideology. Himself belonging to the country's largely secure upper-middle classes,[4] and having received an education based on the patriotic principles of the romanticized Italian Enlightenment,[5] he had the atypical opportunity to acquire a critical perspective towards the rigid moral codes of the upper social echelons. At the same time he arrived at a more compassionate understanding of the neglected proletariat, which he viewed not only as the great hope of the Unitarian cause, but also as the class most efficient to build a nation on foundations that would be pragmatic, altruistic and moral. As a moderate man of letters, he chose to be a perspicacious purveyor of civilizing messages, a temperate critic of social phenomena, but mainly a visionary of an egalitarian society, where the classes, aware of each other's position within the social structure, would be socially liberal enough to allow the creation of an Italian state devoid of the defects that had marred older societies. It was not that Giacometti was writing political drama. He believed that the theatre is a political art, and as such it should aim at the political emendation of the masses, since as a medium it offered itself as the most effective

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[4] *Cf. Giuseppe Scarsi, "Paolo Giacometti," Novinostra n. 1 and 2 (March/June 1982): 31ff.*

[5] *Carla Bosisio, ed. Memorie inedite di Paolo Giacometti (Genova: Archivio Storico PP Somacchi, 1979). For Giacometti's intellectual formation by the ideals of Risorgimento cf. Enzo Noè Girardi, "Letteratura e teatro da Manzoni a Pirandello," Testo 12 (1986), 9-10.*

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popularizer of modern civic virtues: *"Se (...) non crederete che sia opera di Letterato la mia,"* he wrote in 1857, *"dite che è opera di buon cittadino e mi basta."*[6]

Throughout a career lasting for more than four decades, Giacometti was an idiosyncratic eclectic. Arguing that all genres and all forms are good as long as the story and the message are true to history, the human experience or the human psyche,[7] he sought to create a drama that did not adhere to a specific aesthetic program or stylistic imperative. His prodigious output encompassed the *dramma storico*, the farce, the sentimental drama, the social "intimate" plays or "*drammi intimi*", the pathetic melodrama, the historical biography, the verse tragedy and the comedy of manners.[8] In antithesis to the historic dramas, which remain by and large within the esthetic boundaries of Manzonian romanticism, Giacometti's thesis plays, be they serious or comic, respect all the rules inherited from the Goldonian dramaturgy and the contemporary French model, although they slavishly emulate neither the irony of the former nor the racy extravagance of the latter. It is true that several of Giacometti's critics have found his realism and his characterizations perfunctory. Such

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[6] *"If ... you will not think that my work is the work of a great man of letters, say that it is the work of a good citizen, and that for me is enough." Paolo Giacometti, "Della letteratura drammatica in Italia," Teatro scelto, vol. 1 (Mantova: Negretti, 1857), 31.*

[7] *Giacometti, ibid., 30.*

[8] *For a catalogue of Giacometti's plays see Appendix.*

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strictures, however, typically overlook Giacometti's avowed irreverence for the French practices or undermine his most dauntless dramaturgical faith: namely his faith in theatrical emotionalism as a mechanism highlighting the paradoxes of modern human rapport and distilling strong messages of social reform.[9] Plays such as Per mia madre cieca! (For my blind Mother!), L'indomani dell'ebbro [The Drunkard's Tomorrow] (1862), or Madre e figlia o Le storie intime [Mother and Daughter or Intimate Stories] (1864) might be construed as conventional melodramatic crowd-pleasers, but Giacometti's melodrama relies heavily on the inherent pedagogic strength of his controversial topics. It is true that sentimentality and melodramatics coalesce with his didacticism and amplify the tenor of his rhetoric to the extent that, as his critics argue, Giacometti the politic reformer regularly emerges as a vociferous *predicatore* (preacher)[10]. But these dramaturgical anomalies cease to constitute evidence of an imperfect style, if more recent post-modern esthetics are to be endorsed, since according to the new theory, these stylistic excesses only

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[9] *Cf. Mario Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano Vol. 2 (Firenze: Sansoni, 1981), 682.*

[10] *Raffaello Barbiera, Vite ardenti del teatro, 1700-1900. (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1931), 285. See also Vittorio Bersezio, Il Regno di Vittorio Emanuelle II vols.3 (Torino: Casanova, 1881), 351 (vol. 1) and 224 (vol.3); Roberto Alonge Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo ottocento (Rome: Laterza, 1988), 135ff.*

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bespeak the standards of a cultural milieu revering bravado theatrics, behavioral hyperbole, and overstatement.[11] Striving to be politically correct in a politically incorrect cultural environment, Giacometti saw himself as an artist-healer and his social dramas as therapeutic prescriptions for a people striving for its re-invention and modernization[12]. Although he never entertains the illusion that his theatre will precipitate a propitious change of social and moral attitudes--his prefaces to his collected plays amply elucidate that--he has faith in the power of the medium as an instigator of beneficial debates on the quality of human life. In Giacometti's social drama, it is often the medium itself that functions as his dynamic and thought-provoking raisonneur.[13]

Giacometti's thesis plays thus derive their modernity from the issues he resolved to dramatize and which involve various facets of his contemporary Italian experience: the

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[11] *Cf. Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," in Postmodernism: A Reader Thomas Docherty, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 146ff; also Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 203ff.*

[12] *Cesare Trevisani, Delle condizioni della letteratura italiana nel' ultimo ventennio (Firenze: Andrea Bettini Librajo-Editore, 1967), 97; Barbiera, ibid., 286.*

[13] *"I have just thought of the necessity to castigate the century; and then I realized that the stage, where human injustice and vice reigned triumphant, was the post most appropriate for the combat." [Gia avevo pensato alla necessita di rampognare il secolo; ed allora mi parve che la scena, dove la inumana ingiustizia ed il vizio trionfavano, fosse il luogo piu acconcio alla pugna"]. Giacometti, cited in Bozzola, ibid., 666.*

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class stratification of society and the politics of social integration; the "woman question" and the sociology of the modern family; the distressing incongruities of social legislation and the inflexibility of the judicial or ecclesiastical codes. The interaction between art and life, the clash between high and popular culture, and the deleterious side effects of "a-moral" entertainment on the social mentality of bourgeois Italy fascinate him not as topics for jeremiads, but as indices pointing to the need for a fundamental change in human relationships. Not just a journalist who happens to chronicle contemporary predicaments in terms of theatre, Giacometti is using his personal life as an inventory of dramatic situations.[14] More often than not it is from his personal life that he derives the intent of his critiques, and the courage he prescribes as a weapon against the obstacles of life is the same courage he himself had energized in coping with the adversities in the real world.[15] For Giacometti courage is a factor of change and improvement. Even when the ends of his dramas are bleak or dejected, there always lurks an optimistic faith in the capacity of his argument to change the social mentality, to make a difference, to reform. It is very interesting to observe, that in Giacometti's dramatic microcosm the villain

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[14] *Vittorio Bozzola, "Paolo Giacometti" Nuova Antologia vol. 106, ser. IV (16 August 1903), 662-673.*

[15] *Sanesi, La commedia, ibid., 524ff.*

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as a clearcut figure is conspicuously absent and that the the evil-doers emerge as pathetic or ludicrous victims of the vice they themselves perpetrate. This is not accidental, but perfectly conforms with Giacometti's conviction that if there is ever an adversary, a villain to discomfit, this is the anonymous social body and its instituted philistinism.

Giacometti's intellectual, social and moral anxieties did not assuage with the passing of time, no matter if the post-Unification political developments were often thought to have rendered his convictions extraneous to the new realities. His intentions, exemplified in the prefaces to his collected works, are still valid for the re-evaluation of his dramas, and since they remained solid throughout his career, an examination of five plays out of his extensive oeuvre, will suffice in order to derive conclusions about the nature of his playwriting, since they cover the whole range of his thematic interests and belong to different stages of his career: The social function of the artist and the cultural discrepancies of modern life in Il Poeta e la ballerina [The Poet and the Dancing Girl](1841), his first distinct success; Le tre classi della società (1845) [The Three Social Classes], which expounds his social ideology; Inclinazioni e voti [Inclinations and Vows] (1850), where he explores the idea of celibacy, priesthood and social injustice; La donna [The Woman] (1852) which deals with the "woman problem;" and his most popular work, La morte civile [Civil Death] (1861), a

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dissection of the penal system, its callousness and its devastating impact on human lives.

According to Giuseppe Costetti, Il poeta e la ballerina constitutes a milestone in the history of Italian drama and in Giacometti's career, an original comedy "*veramente italiana di forma e di aspirazioni, sintesi coronatrice dei lavori indirettamente e direttamente rivoluzionari. Senza essere di argomento politico nè storico, [...] la commedia ... è veramente l'ultimo appello alla riscossa.*"[16] A vintage tragicomic parody of the Italian predicaments, the play paid respect to the tradition of the giacobin "*teatro patriotico,*" pregnant with all sorts of patriotic metaphors and meanings[17], accusing his complacent compatriots of bogus "*Italianità.*" Its clamorous success brought serious attention to the young playwright who was looked upon as a precocious theatre virtuoso to reckon with as well as a candid man of strong convictions, who did not fear the silencing

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[16] "*A comedy purely Italian in form and aspirations, a crowning synthesis of revolutionary, both indirectly and directly, works... With a plot, neither political nor historical, the play ... is virtually the last call to the revolt.*" *Giuseppe Costetti, Il teatro italiano nell' Ottocento, 173.*

[17] *According to Alberto Manzi, who in a 1937 article provides a lively account of the play's historical and cultural background, insists on the play's being the first venture towards a thesis play. He goes as far as to suggest that it antedates Eugene Scribe's first attempts at the genre, making Giacometti the inventor of the genre: "Nel Regno delle ballerine: ''Il poeta e la ballerina'' di Paolo Giacometti." Il Giornale di politica e di letteratura 13 (1937): 54-83.*

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intervention of the foreign censor.[18] Giacometti himself was impressed not so much by the play's popularity as by the fact that his satire à clef had obviously stricken a cultural nerve in the ongoing debate about Italy's prospect of recapturing her past cultural and literary glories. In fact, the play generated an extensive controversy about the status of the artist in society and the cultural miseries of occupied Italy, not to mention the ceaseless speculations about the actual people and events alluded in the comedy.[19] Even if for a modern reader its irascible tenor seems quaint and hyperbolic, at that time the play was perceived as a daring and long expected "J' accuse" against the standards of Italians, who playing by the rules of the oppressors, had lost their respect for loftier patriotic aspirations and had ceased to demand superior aesthetic pleasures. Obviously it was not the art of dance per se that Giacometti rebuked, but the prostitution of its eroticism as a cultural anesthetic supplied to arrest cultural maturity and prolong cultural inertia. Giacometti's objection to the "*secolo delle gambe*," the century of legs, does not resonate with the zealotry of the moralist but with

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[18] *Indeed, a substantial number of lines alluding either to the deleterious side effects of foreign cultural policy in Italy's youth or to the superiority of the national spirit, was drastically suppressed, evidence that Giacometti's satire was not looked upon as innocuous entertainment. It is to Giacometti's credit that he did not work hard to camouflage his disgust for the cultural policies of the oppressor. Manzi's essay includes all the play's censored lines, proving Giacometti's subversive rhetoric.*

[19] *Bozzola, ibid., 466; Vittorio Bersezio, Il Regno di Vittorio Emanuelle II, vol. 1, 351.*

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the angst of the socially engaged patriot.[20] And it is not coincidental at all that the play's obnoxious characters happen to belong to those social strata which countenanced or tolerated with minimal resistance the culture of artistic meekness, which the foreign oppressors forcefully monitored.[21]

Indeed, Il Poeta e la ballerina is the most argumentative and the most rhetorical of his satires, not least because instead of arguing his message through plot development and characterization, he adopts a confrontational, almost crudely Shavian, dialectics, downplaying dramatic interest for the sake of the clearly articulated thesis. Calling the play a philosophical comedy, Cesare Trevisani, the first authoritative assessor of Italian drama, rightly reasons that the poet

> *"guardando meno all' arte che al proposito di rimprocciare il secolo de' suoi vizi e delle sue debolezze, cambio spesso e troppo sentitamente la scena in tribuna e [tenendo] a intromettere il sentimento pubblico cola dove fino a qell' ora non si era fatto sentire che il bisogno di promuovere il riso col ridicolo."*[22]

His principal characters, the idealist poet and the pragmatic

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[20] *Buonacorsi, ibid., 7-8ff.*

[21] *The play provoked the negative reaction of many well-known bourgeois, socialites and art patrons, who saw themselves portrayed in the comedy and ridiculed as frivolous and essentially "unpatriotic" pseudo-aesthetes.*

[22] *"Concerned less with art than with the intention to chide the age's depravities and failings, he often and too passionately turned the stage into a tribune [... tending ...] to introduce public sentiment where until now there was no sense but for the need to arouse laughter with ridicule." Cesare Trevisani, Delle condizioni della letteratura italiana nel' ultimo ventennio (Firenze: Andrea Bettini Librajo-Editore, 1867), 94-95.*

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show-woman, emerge not only as uncompromising individuals, striving to counteract each other's credos, but as mouthpieces, double raisonneurs, of Giacometti's cultural affections and disaffections.[23]

Taking place in a hotel lounge, a theatre bar-foyer and the dressing-room of a provincial theatre, the play chronicles the travails of the penurious romantic artist at odds with show-business extravagance; the noble efforts of the poet Leoni to stage a problem-play denouncing the culture of "balleto-cracy"; and in a denouement, suggesting Pirandello's Giants of the Mountain, the failure of the venture and the banishment of the poet from the theatre and the society. Odoardo Leoni, a talented yet overlooked playwright arrives from Rome, "the city of miracles and the city of vices," to an anonymous town and lodges in a hotel where he encounters Marianna. The protagonist of the town's resident company, recently put out of business, not being able to compete with the act of a touring dance celebrity, she agrees to perform in Odoardo's play, "La Ballerina," in which he has resolved to

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[23] *In the preface to the play, written almost fifteen years later, Giacometti purports that he claims only one concession from the critics, to acknowledge his noble aspirations, "di avere in tempi di corruzione e di sonno, pensato alla dignità del teatro italiano indirizzandolo, come meglio per me si poteva, ad un scopo di utilità nazionale." [that "in times of corruption and lethargy I had been thinking about the dignity of Italian theatre orienting it, as best as I could, toward a nationally useful objective."] Paolo Giacometti, "Alcune parole delle quali l'autore raccomanda la lettura" [Preface to] Il poeta e la ballerina in Eligio Possenti, ed., Teatro Italiano vol. IV (Milano: Nuova Accademia editrice, 1960), 36. On the same issue, see Giacometti's confessions in his unpublished Memoirs parts of which are cited in Manzi, ibid., especially p. 62ff.*

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castigate society for being a hostage of a dancer's allure, while ignoring the honest ventures of an artist willing to "educate" his people. The sympathetic actress is however a pragmatist and forecasts that their performance will be hissed and disparaged as an act of artistic malice. Fanny the dancer makes her appearance in her theatre's foyer amidst a gallery of theatre's grotesque habitués, her obnoxious father-agent, her lascivious "patron-friend," marquis Panini, the venal critic-journalist, the money-grubbing "fans," and Giacometti does not miss a chance to excoriate their celebrity obsession. The marquis bribes Odoardo to become Fanny's sycophant bard during her curtain calls, but he instead recites a satire against the pernicious star. When his play finally opens, it is an instant disaster, since Fanny's supporters have decided to hiss the performance. Odoado, desperate and furious, walks on stage and denounces the audience. Some demand Odoardo's arrest, who is saved the last minute thanks to the timely intervention of a friend. He is ordered out of the city, while the crowd venerates the star. But Giacometti has made clear that "*tutti questi applausi prodigati alla ballerina, non valgono un'ora del' esilio di Dante.*"[24]

It is apparent from the episodic structure of the plot that Giacometti consciously sought to compose a philosophical tirade rather than an entertaining slice-of-life about life in

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[24] "*All this applause lavished on the dancer is not worth an hour of Dante's exile.*"

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the theatre or the drama of life. Hilarity is subdued, because the satire draws its strength not from the comedy of the situations, but from the acerbic strictures spicing the dialogue and from the lively mockery of the theatre's parasitic cosmos. Within the various milieux, inside and outside the theatre, Giacometti brings together and puts into interaction all the various social ingredients of the art world: The artist and the public, the creator and the actor, the critic and the showman, the impresario and the devotee, the idealistic intellectual and the materialistic show-biz phenomenon, the theorist and the celebrity. His characters are types, and their depiction, stylized and exaggerated though it is for the purpose of the satire, discharges that same air of familiarity and liveliness encountered, say, in Gogol's Inspector General or Goldoni's Venetian comedies.[25]

Giacometti's poet departs from Rome, but his destination is not disclosed, because this destination is Italy herself. The mission is not exclusively the reformation of a city, a province, a class. It is the reformation of the country, the nation, the people. The celebrity culture he upbraids is suspected as the culture of foreign oppression, a culture conceived, propounded, encouraged and sustained by powers inimical to the Italian renaissance and adverse to any kind of intellectual undertaking with the potential to instill a

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[25] *Buonaccorsi, ibid., 9.*

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critical attitude among the social elites. If Fanny and her superficial glamour reflects the contentment of a society deprived of the ability to opt for substance over triviality and void of intellectual consequence, the unhappy fortunes of the outcast dramatist connote the misery of a society which, divided into cheering masses and cheered idols, has lost the talent to think for itself. Odoardo and Marianna, hapless though they may be, emerge as the voice of reason, and their idealism authenticates the "*Italianità*" the Risorgimento masterminds had professed. The success of the play probably also convinced Giacometti that his drama of ideas had found a broad public to sustain it and that Odoardo Leoni's Italy can be attained, if only reality could inspire the drama, and if the theatre could inspire society.[26]

Il poeta e la ballerina also introduced several of the issues which Giacometti would venture to dramatize in his sociopolitical theatre: class interaction, the power of money, the responsibility of aristocracy, the social complexities of the middle class, the position of the intellectual and the worker within the pattern of a society in the process of modernization. Though not an apologist for a classless society, Giacometti was not an advocate of the old hierarchy

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[26]*The function of the artist as a superior voice of idealistic concerns is a theme that Giacometti reworked in two later plays, Un poema ed una cambiale ["A poem and a bill"] (1843) and Il milionario e l'artista ["The millionaire and the artist"] (1851). In both plays, the protagonists are artist-poets who have a utopian outlook of life, but who are also true to their mission as citizens and patriots.*

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either, but what allowed him to develop a political theory of social reconciliation and "*interclassista*" harmony was the idea of social fraternization, translated not as social equality, but as a social contract, based on the principle of mutual deference and responsible citizenship. Giacometti was a moderate republican, a modern political realist, who viewed the social system as amenable to democratization, but through a meritocratic pattern of civic interaction, where philanthropy, industry and ethos are prized and encouraged. If the working classes have the duty to support social progress with hard work and prudent conduct, the aristocracy is not without responsibilities within Giacometti's polity. They should be the pacesetters of social conciliation, the paragons of scrupulous citizenship and the arbiters of republican human values, by no means an irresponsible elite of wealth. This social program was in perfect harmony with the playwright's view of the theatre as a picture of life, *"l' istoria domestica di una nazione, originale allora appunto che reca l' impronta del popolo, al quale appartiene."*[27] The 1845 social comedy Le tre classi della società embodies Giacometti's first major dramatization of this program, whose multifaceted social

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[27] *"...the domestic history of a nation, therefore a faithful original bearing the mark of the people to which it belongs." Giacometti, Della letteratura drammatica, ibid., 9.*

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repercussions he would revisit several times in his career.[28]

Stylistically, this comedy does not constitute a significant departure from the Goldonian standard, nor is the language free of the moralistic mannerisms abounding in it. Giacometti consciously adopts Goldoni's human typology[29] and choreographs the plot around didactic monologues, boisterous ensembles and lively feuds between men and women, rich and poor, fathers and children, whereas the didactic message emerges in all sorts of pertinent pithy aphorisms. Giacometti does not go for uproarious laughter or scathing attack. His aim is to engage the spectator in an energetic social debate, obviously entertaining but also politic. His principal class types participate in the play's social chess game in duets, each one representing either the exemplary or the unprincipled class member, the judicious or the unscrupulous aristocrat, the pragmatic or the arrivista bourgeois, the solicitous or the amoral proletarian. Of course, the "negative" citizens will be exposed, ridiculed and reformed, while the positive ones will be vindicated, congratulated and invited to work together to remedy social ills. Once again Giacometti advances the tenet that making theatre is a political act, where

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[28] *See the plays Siamo tutti fratelli [We are all Brothers!] (1848), Le metamorfosi politiche [The Political Transformations] (1849), Gli educatori del popolo [The Educators of the People] (1850) and Povertà in guanti bianchi [White Glove Poverty] (1877).*

[29] *Buonaccorsi, ibid., 11.*

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politics and civic ethics have no other scope than the renascence of a humane *Patria*.[30] And typically it is an enlightened aristocrat who will set the rule for the new social infrastructure:

> *"Siamo intesi e persuadiamoci che non e gia il lusso eccessivo e demoralizzatore, quello che possa effettuare i disegni della providenza nel riavicinamneto delle Classi, ma lo possono solamente l'amore, l'umiltà, il benefizio ed un fermo proposito di concorrere tutti a rendere prosperosa e grande la famiglia Italiana."*[31]

Le tre classi della società involves two families, a proletarian and a bourgeois, with different social values but with a single desire for social advancement, respectively associated with a specific quest, wealth for the former ("*denaro*") and nobility status for the latter ("*titolo*"). Two servants à la Goldoni and two members of the aristocracy, the judicious *marchese* Rodolfo, and the conceited *barone* Silvani complete the social picture of the play. The daughter of the hardworking shoemaker Biagio, promised to Roberto, the upholsterer, is wooed with her mother's approval by the baron, whose social status assures her a life of comfort. The maternal ambitions are shared by the family son, an amoral adolescent with an expensive taste in life. A similar

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[30] *Cf. Trevisani, ibid., 97.*

[31] *[...Let's understand and convince ourselves that it is not just the excessive and demoralizing wealth which can bring about the providential designs for the reconciliation of the Classes. But only love, humility, charitability can do that as well as the firm intention to work together for rendering prosperous and great the Italian family.] (Act IV, sc. 15). It is interesting to observe that the words class and italiana are capitalized, obviously an indication of Giacometti's emphasis on their political meaning.*

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situation occurs in the family of the royal cashier, Signor Gismondo, who, leading a prodigal life exceeding his modest means, dissipates the dowry of his wife, pampers his spoiled children and maintains illusions of grandeur, which he hopes will materialize with a title he is about to purchase and with the marriage of his daughter to a dowry-hunting count.

Having established the basic family situation and dramatized the consequences of the flawed heroes' immoderate comportment, the playwright then resolves to bring all the classes together at Gismondo's home and there divulge the ethical shortcomings of the class each family epitomizes. Gismondo has organized a gala party for his noble friends on the occasion of his entitlement and the engagement of his daughter. Biagio's family arrives and presents itself as visiting aristocrats. No sooner have Gismondo's dreams shattered than Biagio's irresponsible children learn their lesson well. It is revealed that the cashier had embezzled state money, and this news precipitates the breaking of the engagement and his imminent social humiliation. The "pseudo-aristocrats" of Biagio cannot keep up appearances successfully and their masquerade is quickly and farcically exposed. Within this social pandemonium, the wise marquis intervenes and as a deus ex machina, undertakes to pay Gismondo's debts and save his family's reputation. The other two "cavalieri" are ridiculed, and the family of Biagio decides to lead a more circumspect and down-to-earth life. Enlisting the familiar

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tricks and gambits of commedia dell'arte and the Goldonian "edifying" anagnorises,[32] Giacometti has no other goal to achieve than to insinuate that inter-class communication is impossible in a duplicitous and materialistic society; and if Italy is to be remade, this social anarchy should collapse and be replaced by a society of principles, a "*ricomponimento dei grandi Corpi Sociali.*"[33]

Giacometti's raisoneur, the marquis Rodolfo, a champion of united and unanimous Italian polity, is perhaps the only genuine romantic figure within the Giacomettian gallery of characters. His humanistic credo:

> *In quanto a me credo ... meno civili d'assai i privilegi, le disparità, le separazioni, che sono di origine barbara. Io vorrei che nella famiglia umana fossimo tutti fratelli, poiche nell' unione stanno la virtù, la fede e la forza. Coloro poi che si elevano da un umile stato sulle ali del ingegno meritano encomio and venerazione, per cui stimo a me superiore l'operaio divenuto poeta o scienziato, e bacio in fronte l'artista, che partitosi dall'officina del proprio padre ed afferrata una tavolozza, seppe conquistare il lauro di Tiziano e di Sanzio.*[34]

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[32] *I.e. the unmasking of the duplicitous "aristocrat characters and their discomfiture; the exposure of Biagio's disguised "pseudo-aristocratic" family; and the exposure of Gismondo's hollow life-style;*

[33] *[A recomposition of the great Social Groups." Paolo Giacometti, "Alcune parole delle quali l' autore raccomanda la lettura," in Buonaccorsi, ibid., 39-40.*

[34] *As for me I consider less civil than most the privileges, the disparities, the divisions, which are of barbarian origin. I would like for us all to be brothers in the human family, because it is in unity that virtue, faith and power exist. Those then who rise from a humble position on the wings of the spirit are worthy of praise and veneration, and thus I find superior to me the worker who has become poet or scientist, and kiss on the forehead the artist who departing from his father's tiny office, and taking a palette, has learnt to conquer the laurels of Tiziano and Sanzio." Act IV, sc. VI, Le tre classi della società, in Buonaccorsi, ibid., 103.*

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is a direct cultural product of all the major ideologies that shaped not only the patriotic concept of the united Italy but Italian Romanticism as well. The Mazzinian precepts and the teachings of the French revolution are here combined to form the essence of Italian liberalism, namely, the branch of the Risorgimento culture that will give rise to the fundamental trends of Italian realism: the movement of reconciliation and the cause of liberal modernization. Obviously, Giacometti was not the only one to have championed this credo, yet he was the only one with enough courage to have it voiced on the stage, not by some embittered *borghese*, but by a spokesman of the elite.[35]

Giacometti's "feminist" drama, that is, a series of "drammi intimi" and tragedies illustrating the "woman question" in a historical and contemporary context, emerges either as a thematic alibi for the creation of pseudo-historical star vehicles -- the most famous ones commissioned by Adelaide Ristori --or as modern show-cases of advanced social sensibilities, pertinent to the status of women within

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[35] *Giacometti's comedy provoked the negative reaction of several aristocrats, who thought the play offensive and subversive. See "Alcune parole," ibid., 40. It was impossible, however, to corroborate whether the play's assertive nationalistic tone was curbed by the foreign censor, for the play's 1860 edition does not allege any censor modifications. It should be noted, however, that, at the time, Giacometti's tirades should have resonated as extremely explicit and seditious.*

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the Italian civic structure.[36] If the historical tragedies do not depart from the conventions of the Romantic drama *à la Italiano*, where the heroine stands for a noble ideal or is the focus of sensational historical pageantry, the "dramma intimo" about women is a dramatic crossbreed of the French *larmoyant* trend with the moralism of *Goldonismo*. Arguably, the Giacomettian "feminist positivism" did not reflect the totality of the current feminist leanings in Italian revolutionary society. To a certain degree, it could be legitimately viewed as an appealing application of "constructive" wishful thinking, since as Buonaccorsi observes, *"la valorizzazione della figura della donna nella drammaturgia italiana nel periodo attorno all' Unità non giunge alla rivendicazione di una radicale emancipazione."*[37]

Giacometti does not, however, decide to honor the perennial stereotypes of the woman-shrew and the woman-saint, in order to manipulate audience expectation and then reach the orthodox conclusions about the "problematic" but reformable function of women in a wisely patterned patriarchal society.

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[36] *Once again Giacometti would revisit the "woman problem" several times in his career. The issue soon proved to be extremely popular, a development not uninfluenced by the predominance of the trendier French paradigms in Italy. The function of woman, la "missione della donna" Giacometti investigates in the following plays Quatro donne in una casa [Four Women in One House] (1842), La donna (1850), La donna in seconde nozze [The woman in Second Marriage] (1851), La colpa vendica la colpa ["Eye for an Eye"] (1854), Madre e figlia [Mother and Daughter] (1864) and Unità morale in famiglia [Moral Unity in the Family] (1869).*

[37] *[The valorization of woman in Italian drama at the period of the Unification does not arrive at the demand for a radical emancipation." Ibid., 15.*

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In lieu of the old society-versus-woman standard, where the woman is some "fallen," yet invariably saintly, dame (not different from that typology perfected by Alexandre Dumas *fils*), Giacometti broaches the alternative "woman-versus-society" and there it is the patriarchal establishment that is held accountable for the inhumane "education" of women as mothers, daughters and wives.[38] Certainly from a contemporary perspective, this attitude is voided as simplistic, patronizing and not even marginally feministic.[39] For the *Risorgimento* society, however, when women's participation in the national cause was an acknowledged actuality, this proto-feminist perspective was thought of as a liberal and enlightened departure from the rigorous moral codes regulating the social station of women.[40] Giacometti, it has to be repeated, is not a social scientist, and thus his plays do not stray from his journalistic precept of reforming-through-informing. On the other hand, he can not be denied the accolade of being the first Italian playwright to re-introduce women not as an exploitative stimulus for melodramatic bathos and/or farcical

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[38] *In the Giacomettian cosmos, the sinful woman is a rare exception, seldom in the limelight, and even then less negative a personality than the man who is presumably the cause of her unworthy conduct.*

[39] *Cf. Sanesi, ibid., 524.*

[40] *Cf. Judith Jeffrey Howard, "The Woman Question in Italy, 1861-1880" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1977), 14-17.*

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titillation, but as a pretext for a more alert investigation of the human situation at large.

Written for the *Compagnia Reale Sarda*, La donna is Giacometti's first earnest excursion in the realm of the "woman predicament."[41] This sentimental comedy not only reflects the dominant social perception of the woman in her familial and matrimonial conditions, but it also anticipates the cultural dynamics of Italy's realistic drama, for which the "woman problem" will prevail as an *idée dominante* until the age of Pirandello and beyond. The dramatic action, conventionally built around the juxtaposition of marital paradigms in order to advance the conservative reformatory axiom, "the man makes the woman,"[42] involves the tensions ensuing in the lives of two young couples, when infidelity and miscommunication desecrate marriage and distort the social image of this institution. The play abounds with truisms and clichés about the nature, the structure and the social value of the contemporary Italian family, yet with a significant difference: the raisonneur is not an elderly pundit, a fatherly figure, or a benevolent onlooker from outside the family picture. Instead his functions have been allocated to two different models of young womanhood, as presumably more

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[41] *La donna, Dramma intimo in tre atti e un prologo (Roma:Edoardo Perino, 1891). All citations are from this edition.*

[42] *For Giacometti's occasional lapses of dramaturgical taste in the play cf. Sanesi, ibid., 525ff.*

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"authoritative" assessors of the female psychology.[43]

La donna begins with a scene where a couple of young girls are engaged in a typical debate about the requirements and the obligations that determine a successful marriage. The prudent Cecilia and the cocky Enrichetta, attracted to, courted by and eventually married to two brothers, Edgardo, a sympathetic yet mercurial gentleman, and Giorgio, a diligent bourgeois, undergo a radical change of mind when after marriage their theories are put on trial. Enrichetta has effortlessly turned into a contemplative housewife, thanks to the persuasion and calm nature of her husband[44], while Cecilia, distressed by Edgardo's erratic behavior, is tempted to put her reputation at risk, almost succumbing to the amorous advances of a socialite. The rest of the play is an endeavor to win back and reform Edgardo, since his own compliance with the family values of society will salvage the honor of his name, his marriage and his financial security.

It is good politics for a popular playwright, concerned with moral instruction but also eager to prove his modernist spirit, to show that in family matters moderation and

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[43] *It is not of course that the male protagonists do not have their share in tossing truisms about family values and sex roles — "punire in altri la nostra medessima colpa. Ecco la giusticia degli uomini, che sanno dimenticare persino le santi leggi della natura," [Punish in other [i.e. women] our own transgression. This is the justice of men, who have learnt to disregard even the sacred laws of nature."] (Act II, sc.III), La Donna, ibid. — is an eloquent case of a man's corrective self-criticism.*

[44] *Achille Torelli would dramatize a similar situation in his seminal comedy, I mariti (Husbands).*

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tolerance can foment the most propitious social revolutions. Even though Giacometti echos the dominant sentiment of the enlightened *borghesia*,[45] he urges a liberalization of the social rules: He demands that society discard as unethical and anachronistic the double standard in evaluating manly or womanly ethos -- Edgardo's *"l' uomo non si disonora come la donna"* vs. Cecilia's *"quanto un uomo ne dà in custodia il proprio nome, bisogna mostrarsene degne, allontanando da noi anche le apparenze della colpa"*[46]--and that women cease to let themselves be taken for granted as financial and social commodities. It is true that the idea of *"la felice riuscita della donna dipende molte volte dall'uomo"* presupposes an image of the woman as a malleable socializable entity, but Giacometti does not convincingly endorse the validity of the argument. And if he does not dare to chock or does not feel like speculating about the prospect of a radical feminist emancipation, he does allow the thought that this prospect, however unorthodox and "extremist," is not a far-fetched improbability any more.

Inclinazioni e voti, essentially an invective against the dogmatic perception of human life and the hypocrisy of clericalism, is another parable for human (in)tolerance. The

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[45] *Buonaccorsi, ibid., 16.*

[46] *["A man's honor does not suffer as much as a woman's" (Act III, sc. VIII); Cecilia: But when a man entrusts his own name to us, we have to prove worthy of it, shunning even the appearances of misconduct (Prologo, p. 12).*

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case here examined is the catholic clergy's vowed chastity, which the playwright abhors as an unnatural principle, at odds with the "inclinations" of human nature, a dogmatic monolith which burdens the ministers of faith and impairs the social corpus as well. Although Giacometti's vehemence against the ecclesiastical establishment does not remain unaffected by the anti-clerical sentiment prevalent among the intellectual supporters of the *Risorgimento*,[47] politics as such is not even remotely an issue. In the preface to the play, "particularly addressed to the Catholic clergy," highlighting the target of his critique, he overstresses the benevolent nature of his tirade:

> *Senza offendere la religione che non entra per nulla nel celibato, io mi sono creduto in diritto di chiedere conto a quei strani legislatori di migliaia d' uomini segregati dall' umano consorzio col pretesto di farne dei santi, mentre in realtà non sono che vittime, o settari, condannati a non avere rapporti colla Società per formare una casta isolata, impassibile, simoniaca, cospiratrice, feroce. [...] Il mio drama ... non impugna un dogma [...] ma combatte con molta riservatezza un articolo di disciplina ecclesiastica ... Ebbi in mira di stenebrare le menti del buon popolo da suoi errori, di guarirlo dai pregiudizi, di metterlo in guardia contro le false credenze, le bacchattonerie, il fanatismo, le pressioni di coscienza, presentandogli, per altra parte, l'immagine certa di quella fede pura che non tormenta, ma consola, che non insegnia l'odio, ma l'amore, che perdona e benedice.*[48]

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[47] *The Pope was opposed to the Italian revolution and the call for national unity. This position kept the anti-catholic sentiment high for many decades after the Risorgimento.*

[48] *"Without offending the religion which is important to the celibate, I have thought it is my right to question those strange legislators of thousands of men, segregated from human society with the pretext of becoming saints, while in fact they are nothing but victims, or sectarians, condemned to avoid contact with Society, thus forming a caste, isolated, impassive, simoniac, conspiratorial, ferocious.... My play does not impugn a dogma, ... but fights with much moderation an article of ecclesiastical discipline... My aim was to*

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With this play the dramatist makes tangible the inhuman and inhumane consequences of obdurate dogma not only on the human psyche, but also in the capacity of man to honor his humanitarian or spiritual mission. Taking its cue from this program, the plot provides Giacometti with a solid opportunity to also inveigh against a wider variety of issues, not least the nefariousness of human actions and the emotional oppression conferred upon women by social and religious bias.[49]

The drama evolves around Laura, a pious young woman, Adele, a Roman church misfit and their entangled destinies. The daughter of a dour and aloof merchant, still in mourning over his wife's death, Laura feels a powerful attraction for Father Abele, an older priest, a remote fixture in her family's past, who reappears in her life after years of absence. His calling however prohibits a consummation of this mutual attraction, although it is made clear that Abele was a

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clear the minds of these good people from their mistakes, to save them from prejudice, to alert them against false creeds, sanctimony, fanaticism, the pressure of conscience, yet presenting to them the positive idea of that pure faith which does not torment, but consoles; which does not teach hate but love, that forgives and blesses." Paolo Giacometti, "Parole dell' autore," in Buonaccorsi, ibid., 122, 124, 125. All citations come from this edition.

[49] ***For example, that the victim of this society, once again, is a woman provides another indication of Giacometti's eccentric feminism but also an evidence of his resolution to uphold the rights of women exposing their mistreatment by the patriarchal establishment. Buonaccorsi, goes as far as to view the drama as a "woman's play," the vindication of a life "tribolata e stroncata da una opressione esercitata a turno dai genitori, da leggi ingiuste, da istituzioni sclerotizzate." "A life tortured and suffocated by the oppression exercised successively by parents, inequitable laws, by sclerotic institutions." Ibid., 19.***

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victim of obdurate family tactics, forced to enter the church without the necessary spiritual preparation or will. Their paths, however, cross again at a girls' conservatory, where Laura is teaching in order to forget her vacuous personal life but also to help her father who is at the time facing the prospect of bankruptcy. Under the surveillance of a sanctimonious director (Maddalena) and a lascivious Jesuit priest (Arcangelo), Laura tries hard not to compromise her ethics and betray the trust of her students. Arcangelo, however, failing in his amorous advances to Laura, vilifies the girl and accuses her of comitting promiscuity with Abele. The girl, ashamed and expelled by the credulous headmaster, attempts suicide by falling into a fountain. She is saved but to no avail. On her deathbed, she forgives the remorseful Maddalena, whose school in the meantime has been closed for charges of corruption and perversion perpetrated by the (paedophile, as it proves) clergyman. Just before expiring, Laura confesses her "forbidden" love for Adele and intimates her resentment for the cruelty of the human law.

Even the plot synopsis can not obscure the recurrent fixtures of the Giacomettian dramaturgy: the polarities (good vs. bad, church vs society, laity vs. church, dogma vs. nature), the equations (the victimizer is a victim), the paradoxes (sinful saints, saintly sinners), the adhesion to moderate resolutions ("*riservatezza*"), the multitude of and

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the empathy for the issues scrutinized.[50] And as usual, Giacometti decides to prove the validity of his argument by teaming and juxtaposing two pairs of individuals: a young devout woman undone by prejudice and a frustrated cleric (Abele) who suffers from scruples of conscience and disdain for his vocation; and two pillars of the social status quo, a bigoted educator and a religious pharisee, whose saintly veneer hides a tormented and tormenting dissolute. In turn, this schematic pairing of characters conforms to an additional pattern of ideological polarities--idealistic youth vs. disillusioned old age, laity and clerical establishment, progressiveness and tartuffism, flesh and spirit--which not only control the structure of the plot, but allow, through a proliferation of pathetic and occasionally graphic peripeties, a "dramatization" of the vices he deplores.[51] As a happy ending, that is a confirmation of the author's presumed optimism (the good are rewarded and the bad are punished), is eschewed, the tragic and morose conclusion discloses both his journalistic pragmatism and his positivist spirit: Poetic justice does not have the impetus necessary to remedy a centuries-old social arteriosclerosis. On the contrary the

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[50] *The issue of priestly celibacy seems to have been a riveting topic for many Italian playwrights, especially during the acme of Verismo. Enrico Anibbale Butti and Roberto Bracco are two playwrights who would later elaborate on the issue for different purposes.*

[51] *Cf. ibid., 18; see also Trevisani, ibid., 98.*

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depiction of human loss as the outcome of extreme doctrines is a better conduit for reformative suggestions.

If the Giacomettian principles are taken at face value, the play resists the characterization as "melodrama," since it does not respect the simplistic formulas of the genre and since the playwright forgoes the archetypal differentiation between villain and prey as "roles" applicable to his characters. Although the proliferation of pathetic plot episodes leading to a tragic conclusion is certainly a dramaturgical choice typical of melodrama, their "theatricality" is genuinely subdued by the personal "drama" of the characters. This effect, achieved by the--almost expressionistic--monological quality of the dialogue,[52] does not of course countermand Giacometti's pedagogic agenda. By shifting the emphasis from the event to the word and thus making the word the carrier of the action, he promotes the main thesis as a parable encompassing a greater area of the human experience and makes the realism of the dramatic situations a reflection of his general philosophy about the human condition. A similar argument can be made about Giacometti's characterization.

Indeed, it is not that the characters wear their melodramatic masks well, allowing the play to circumvent the sentimentality of contemporary Italian drama and survive the

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[52] *Cf. Manfred Pfister, The Theory and Analysis of Drama (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129ff.*

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didacticism of its thesis.[53] On the contrary, what adds a superior artistic and philosophical value to it is the emergence of these characters not as individuals shaped by a priori ideological formulas, but as off-springs of social codes and regulations much given to fostering a facade of humanity and propriety, yet infested with misanthropy and evil. Laura, Abele and Arcangelo are of melodramatic extraction, but Giacometti insinuates that while their outward behavior conforms to an essentially monochromatic outlook of life--a cardinal feature of melodrama--their interior life, their true selfhood, is a tragic and pitiful wreckage, overrun with "inhuman" compunctions and deprived of compassion and nobility.

The social edict to repress our "true" nature in order to attain a "real," that is, sanctioned individuality is, according to Giacometti, the most pernicious assumption of human law. Don Adele's ultimate words:

> *Dio mi aveva creata una santa compagna, gli uomini mi anno sostituito un cadavere.*

do not only apply to the dire tragedy concluding the play, but, on a metaphorical level, they recapitulate the Giacomettian paradox "the true is not real and the real is not true." Recognizing in Giacometti this distinctive "Pirandellian" insight may encourage a reevalution of Italian dramatic history, since it dynamically moves the modernistic

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[53] *Buonaccorsi, ibid., 19ff.*

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origins of Italian drama decades before the emergence of *Ibsenismo* and *Idealismo*. Seeing how far Pirandello took European dramaturgy with his obsessive variations on this theme, this does not of course demonstrate Pirandello's direct debt to Giacometti, but at least shows that Pirandello's playing around with the faces and the masks of the human individual is not a modernist dramaturgical novelty, but an idiosyncratic fixation of Italian post-romantic drama, of which Giacometti is the earliest exponent.

La morte civile, Giacometti's greatest and more lasting success, has prevailed in the histories of Italian drama as a turning point, signifying two important developments: the consolidation of the realist problem play as the dominant genre in Italian dramaturgy and the consummation of the romantic artistic ideal of the theatre as the educational implement of a democratic society. Its closing line -- "*Legislatori, guardate*" -- has, for many critics, resonated not only as a summation of the Giacomettian partiality to didacticism, but more importantly as the primary declaration of the naturalistic/positivistic dogma ("observe and rehabilitate") outside France. Emile Zola, who happened to have seen Tommaso Salvini perform the play at the Odeon in 1877, was among the first champions of the play as a sharp document of the naturalistic program,[54] while Antonio

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[54] *Emile Zola, Le naturalisme au théâtre (Paris: Charpentier, 1881), 137-144.*

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Gramsci, Italy's most astute Marxist critic, acknowledged the play as a paragon of "popular" drama, a drama of ideas which, according to his interpretation, can only be the "representation of passions related to social behavior with dramatic solutions which can depict a 'progressive catharsis,'... which expresses the historical growth immanent in present social behavior."[55] As for Roberto Alonge, this Giacomettian thesis initiates the theatrical history of united Italy, anticipating, its operatic/melodramatic cadences notwithstanding, the political and epistemological intents of the verismo school.[56] Building once again the argument and the plot on his customary pattern of polarities, paradoxes, incongruities and distortions, Giacometti uses this drama of social and emotional conflict to lay the groundwork for this uniquely Italian dramaturgical obsession, the game between reality and truth, appearance and actuality, the face and the mask.

Drawn from painful personal experiences, La morte civile derives its emotional momentum not only from the circumstances

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[55] *Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Cultural Writings David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 361-2. Gramsci's interpretation of catharsis, not to be associated with the Aristotelian term, suggests the "passage from the purely economic (egotistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment." If compared with Giacometti's sociocultural objective, the affinities between the two arguments are more than evident.*

[56] *Roberto Alonge, Teatro e spettacolo, ibid., 135; See also Paola Trivero, "Conflitti tra determinismo e pseudo-idealismo nel teatro italiano di fine Ottocento." Otto/Novecento, 12 (1988), 126-7; also cf. Ermete Zacconi, in Vittorio Pandolfi, ed. Antologia del grande attore (Bari: Laterza, 1954), 367ff.*

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shaping the psychology of the main character, the convict Corrado, but also from two artistic decisions: the development of these experiences within the program of the play (the need for the humanization of the civic laws) and the drama's social setting, which, compromised by prejudice and moral intransigence, looms intolerant and intolerable. In fact, no critic has ever failed to mention the autobiographical overtones of the play as essential for the analysis of its cultural longevity as well as for the evaluation of the playwright in terms of artistry and achievement.[57] Trapped in an unhappy, unloving marriage with an actress for almost twenty years, Giacometti had to suffer the humiliation of adultery. Unable to dissolve the union, since the church did not sanction divorce, he carried on an "illicit" affair, which he could eventually legitimize only after the sudden death of his first wife.[58] The repercussions of these emotional hardships have been identified both in the vehemence of the argument and in the cynical portrayal of the "power" figures

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[57] *Siro Ferrone, ed. La commedia e il dramma borghese dell' Ottocento (Torino: Einaudi, 1979). See introduction, p. 132.*

[58] *Vittorio Bozzola, "La genesi di due commedie celebri," La lettura 16:4 (1 April 1916), 318-321. Giacometti had drawn upon his marital travails for another, earlier, comedy, La colpa vendica la colpa, a play which Raffaello Barbiera claims to have inspired Victorien Sardou's Odette. Cf. Vitte ardenti nel teatro (1700-1900), ibid., 284.*

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in the play, the obstinate cleric and the malignant "people."[59] Giacometti, in fact, has gone so far as to insinuate that "sin" is a very flexible concept for describing a spiritual or physical crime, and therefore amenable to manipulation by those entrusted to adjudicate it; and that the "sinner" is oftentimes less sinful and unrighteous than those professing rectitude and clemency. As a victim of the righteous and their morality, he or she is all the more qualified for atonement and mercy.[60]

It is not that Giacometti condones moral misconduct and dismisses the social codes. He only questions the correctness or the breadth of these definitions as well as the appropriateness, the authority of society to dictate the conditions and the parameters of human behavior. In La morte civile, the arbitrators of morality are proven more invidious and insidious than the damned, while the latter emerge more sincere, merciful and "virtuous." This reversal of moral identities is the most poignant trait of the play, an argument that expands its ideological horizons and disengages it from

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[59] *For Mario Apollonio, this autobiographical root of the play is what allows Giacometti to go beyond his dramaturgical limits, entering in the realm of poetry. Cf. Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano, ibid., 684-5.*

[60] *Even Benedetto Croce who is always negative about the achievements of the early Italian realists conceded that La morte civile is a special case in the history of Italian theatre, especially for its "sollecitudine pietosa" (its compassionate solicitude) with regard to society's humanity. Cf. Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. 5 (Bari:Laterza, 1939), 95.*

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the more conventional functions of the melodramatic genre.[61] The play thus again upholds the regular Giacomettian credo: Open-mindedness conceives tolerance and tolerance begets justice and social clemency, since it is the only safeguard of the values society upholds as its true essence.[62]

The past is a focal factor in the play. If not the catalyst of the characters' motivations and resolutions in the present, it is at least the key to their present predicaments. According to the information revealed in the process of the play (and not in a prologic act as one would expect from Giacometti), Corrado, a Sicilian artisan in love with Rosalia, disregards her family's objections to their wedding, elopes with her and consummates the marriage. As a result of the heated reaction of her family, he kills his brother-in-law, an incident that provokes the unintentional death of Rosalia's mother. Caught, tried, and found guilty for murder, he is imprisoned, leaving his pregnant wife with no familial support or social status, since according to the law, she is the "widow" of a socially dead husband. Rosalia gives birth to a girl, Ada, but being unable to raise her properly, she departs to Calabria, where she finds refuge in the house of doctor Palmieri, himself a widower whose only girl died at birth. There, having to choose *"a vivere o monaca senza vocazione o*

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[61] *Alonge, ibid., 139.*

[62] *Ibid., 140.*

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adultera per illegitimi amori,"[63] she resolves to abdicate her maternity, and give her child, now known as Emma, for adoption to Palmieri, but with the provision that she will always live by her as nurse and company. Thus Emma becomes the daughter of Palmieri's dead wife, and Rosalia his housekeeper.

This peculiar situation begins to scandalize the provincial society of the town, which views the relationship as immoral and unacceptable. The minister of the town, a sinister character, traces Rozalia's past and is ready to seek out Corrado, thus exposing the iniquity of Rosalia and the baseness of Palmieri. "By coincidence," Corrado escapes from prison and, also tracing Rosalia's path, comes to Calabria looking for his "wife and child." The play then dramatizes the heart-breaking reunion of the former husband and wife and its tragic compromising end. Corrado comes to Palmieri's house, meets accidentally with Emma, and, convinced that she is his daughter, resolves to claim his marital rights. Rosalia intervenes, explains to him Emma's social "status," and decides to part with him with the condition that Emma will stay with Palmieri, avoiding thus the stigma of being the daughter of a "civilly dead" convict. Corrado gradually comes to realize the seriousness of his daughter's condition, and as

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[63] *"As a nun without vocation or as an adulteress of illegitimate affairs," Paolo Giacometti, "Parole de autore," in Buonaccorsi, ibid., 338.*

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an ultimate sacrifice he takes poison,[64] so that his "natural" death will free Rosalia from her social burden and secure the moral integrity of his "family." It is now his turn to abdicate "paternity". Granting Rosalia the opportunity to marry Palmieri, he offers Emma/Ada a "mother."

It does not take more than this simple synopsis, to understand that Giacometti's thesis--*"difendere ... la causa dell'umanità e di combattere ogni specie di opressione, molto più quando questa per illudere e fuorviare le classi meno illuminate, si presenta ricoperta dal mano augusto della Religione"*[65]--however legitimate and noble, constitutes only a pedagogic subterfuge, *una macchina della bontà*, which renders his deeper philosophical rationale less controversial for the conservative spectator. After all, he is a popular playwright, a star-vehicle craftsman and can not, or does not want to sabotage his "availing" celebrity and undermine his

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[64] *This poison scene incited a notorious argument between Italian stars, Salvini and Zacconi, similar to the Cocquelin/Irving controversy. Salvini, considering the poison solution contrived and unrealistic (how could a convict and fugitive procure poison?), changed the ending and his Corrado dies of heart-attack, caused by the misery of his existence. Zacconi, a younger star and for many a heir apparent for Salvini's scepter, in an article, published in Scena Illustrata, questioned Salvini's choice, calling it "unrealistic" and incongruous with the plot. Zacconi argues that Corrado, while in prison, was under medical supervision, and since doctors used to leave medicine in his room, he could easily procure a small quantity of poison from there, for use only if the circumstances proved intolerable." The controversy now is viewed as an evidence of the artistic antagonism between "Romantic acting" and Verismo's psychologically motivated characterization. See Pandolfi, ibid., 367ff.*

[65] *"To defend the cause of humanity and fight all kinds of oppression, even more when these, deluding and misleading the less enlightened classes, are presented shrouded by the august veil of Religion." Giacometti, ibid.*

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positivist end: the enfranchisement of liberal morality and the integration of civic humanism, not at the expense of religion, law or ethics, but as modernizing, positive implements to the latter's authority over human conduct and destiny.[66]

Critics of the play have interpreted this reversal of roles and motives in the play--fatherhood/motherhood, social death/spiritual vitality--as a stratagem aiming at the emotional manipulation of an audience eager to be thrilled by astonishing "theatrical" twists of plot.[67] Although one cannot dismiss this argument as entirely untrue, at the same time one can not overlook the idealogical purposes behind Giacometti's technique; namely that society perceives life in black and white; and that human beings, forged and affected by this perception, assume roles--the roles of father/mother, patriot/citizen, moral/amoral--which more often than not desensitize their true humanity. As a consequence, their individuality and truth falls prey to conventions and the codified in ethical and legal "common sense." The religious dogmatist and the narrow-minded law enforcer, Giacometti

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[66] *Alonge, ibid., 140.*

[67] *In this context, the notion of melodrama refers to dramatic technique. Giacometti, as his critics have rightly observed, has opted for a confrontational structure, organizing the scenes into monologues ("arias") and climactic scénes à faire" ("cori"), as a concatenation of duets and soliloquies disposed according to "a tonal montage which is mainly concerned with the emotional equilibrium of the successive scenes." See Ferrone, "Introduzione," ibid., 59ff and Alonge, ibid., 137.*

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argues, are metiers-masks, not natural virtues, and those who assume them in the name of society, hiding their own imperfections, are more sinister and dangerous than those they convict.

Giacometti does not, however, only examine the complexity of "identification" within the realm of society at large. By refocusing the thesis on the rapport between Corrado and his "family", he proceeds as a laboratory anatomist and dissects the social "fictions" about this sanctified social institution.[68] The conventional concepts of "father", "mother" and "child," the right of belonging to a family or the right of possessing the child, the questioning of what constitutes the nucleus and the nexus of family, all submit to a gruesome, almost naturalistic, revisionism. Giacometti transgresses the confines of Italian ideological propriety and advances a kind of social scepticism usually associated with the modernist experiments of Italian *ibsenismo*.

The nucleus of this inquiry is not Corrado but Ada/Emma, the "daughter." She not only defines the "role" of all those involved in the social controversy regarding her familial

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[68] *See the very interesting essay of Cornelia van der Voort, "Il guanto rovesciato: giochi pirandelliani con le strutture famigliari del teatro borghese" in Stefano Milioto, ed, Pirandello e il teatro del suo tempo. (Agrigento: Edizioni del centro nazionale di studi pirandelliani, 1983), 241-251. She speculates that Giacometti's play could not have escaped Pirandello's attention, since it was a popular play, revived and read until the mid-forties. Therefore, she argues, it is highly possible that the "comedy of identities" that Giacometti dramatizes was "borrowed" by Pirandello who then transplanted it in plays such as Il piacere dell' onesta and Tutto per bene.*

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status, but she also becomes the criterion determining the legitimacy of the social status quo. In the course of the agon about parenthood and daughtership between Rosalia and Corrado, the young girl assumes three disparate identities in accordance to the facts produced by the social contenders: She is Ada, the daughter-orphan of a convict and his widow, since Corrado is socially dead; she is Emma, the daughter-orphan of the widower Arrigo Palmieri; she is Emma, the illegitimate daughter of Palmieri and Rosalia; and finally Emma, Corrado's usurped progeny. Normally, the play should clear up all ambiguities and restore the social order, thus validating the dominant social certitudes. Instead, Giacometti builds Emma's "reality" not on a lie, but on a half-truth, a simulation of truth:

> *CORRADO (ripetendo macchinalmente le parole) È tardi! (Con vaneggiamento, o sogno febbrile) Povera donna! nobile uomo! magnanimi cuori!... meritavano un po' di bene, un premio ... e l'ottengono da me...*
> *ROSALIA (fra se consternata) Ah! la mia confessione lo ha reso suicida!*
> *PALMIERI (Muore per noi!)*
> *CORRADO (come sopra) Dite che vengono a prendermi? Ah il delatore... Vile!.. Stolti! il cadavere civile perde il moto... ho terminato di ucciderlo io... Ah! la mia Ada... la mia Ada!...*
> *ROSALIA Chiama sua figlia... (Ad Emma) Egli ha creduto che tu lo fossi... Ah! se lo credesse anche adesso! ... accostati a lui - chiamalo padre, perché muoia in pace!*
> *EMMA Oh sí! (Si acosta a Corrado, e ponendogli la mano sulla fronte, gli dice con grande affetto) Padre, padre mio, guarda la tua Ada.*
> *CORRADO (trasognato) Ada?... (Si alza e la stringe convulsivamente fra le braccia, ma guardando Rosalia e Palmieri, torna in sé e dice) No, no, Emma!... (Act V, scena ultima)*[69]

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[69] *CORRADO (repeating mechanically the words). It is late! (Raving as in a nightmare) Poor woman! noble man! generous hearts!... They deserve some good, a reward ... and they will receive it from me... ROSALIA (to herself, despondent)*

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The natural parents are aware of the girl's identity, the audience shares this knowledge, but the social cosmos of the play, that is the extension of the real world on the stage, is kept from participating in this anagnorisis, and thus shares Ada/Emma's ignorance, who presumably will never know her "true" identity and will never find her real roots: Palmieri solidifies his fatherhood, and Rosalia, the mysterious governess, will be accepted as her "new" mother. As van der Voort wisely concludes, this simulated paternity only exists because of Corrado's "*dissimulata paternità*:"[70] Identity then, and the right to hold a name is nothing but a role, assumed not on any premise of truth, but on the premise of "reality," that is an appearance of truth. Identity, Giacometti implies, is a social commodity negotiated and legitimized not on the basis of truth, tolerable or not, but on the basis of something assumed as a "credible" verity. It is again the grotesque ugliness of human life that Giacometti accuses the social institutions of, and it is this social phenomenon that he observes people to be compliant with, in

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Ah! my confession has made him kill himself! PALMIERI (He dies for us!) CORRADO (as above) Are you saying they're coming to get me? Ah the traitor... You vile!... Idiots! the "civil cadaver" is losing life! I have killed him... Ah! My Ada... My Ada!... ROSALIA He calls his daughter... (To Emma) He took you for her... Ah! If he could only believe it now!... Go near him - call him father, so he can die in peace! EMMA Oh yes! (She approaches Corrado, and putting her hands on his forehead, she tells him with great affection) Father, my father, look at your Ada. CORRADO (as in a dream) Ada?.. (he rises and holds her in his arms convulsively, but looking at Rosalia and Palmieri, he regains control and says) No, no Emma!...

[70] *Cornelia van der Voort, ibid., 247.*

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order to render life livable and respectable.

Giacometti then questions the human condition in a manner probably more simplistic and straightforward than Pirandello, yet sharing the same misgivings that the latter would extensively show in his own morality psycho-dramas. The difference is that Pirandello, caught in the inter-war anxieties of European culture, did not, could not or was not permitted by the moment and the milieu to present an optimistic vision for the ways of the world. Yet his equivocal extrapolations about human affairs stem from the tragicomic reworking of the same issues and social configurations that Giacometti observed in his own dramaturgy. It is not that Pirandello distorts the Giacomettian cosmos in order to ridicule and subvert its positive aspirations. Their difference was not one of contrasting intellectual preoccupations; it was rather one of contradictory perspectives and contrastive anxieties. The stage as a raisonneur, however, still remains their common dramaturgical legacy.[71]

TEOBALDO CICONI

Teobaldo Ciconi as an artist, but also as an idiosyncracy was the antipode of Giacometti. A poet and a

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[71] *Lander MacClintock, "Pirandello the Perfect Pessimist," in* The Age of Pirandello *(Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1951), especially 181ff.*

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dramatist, a translator and a journalist, a critic and a patriot active in the national cause of Independence,[72] Ciconi perfectly embodies the stereotype of the Romantic artist: a chaste visionary and intellectual, an elusive man of unconsummated erotic passions, an ideologue with wider humanistic interests[73], a tuberculosis victim who died young with unqualified literary recognition still eluding him. This melancholy man made comedy of manners his specialty, and although most of his plays enjoyed an estimable success, this proved to be rather ephemeral, since his plays have hardly become staples of the 19th Century Italian repertory. Nowadays Ciconi is a virtual unknown and his plays, unedited and uncollected, exist only in cheap pocket *fin-du-siècle* editions and only in (mainly Italian) library collections. Respectable contemporaries esteemed his work as promising and progressive, but such critical accolades did not suffice to rescue his name from obscurity.

His dramas, however, a hybrid of suave didacticism and stark cynicism, embody an essential antecedent to the realist movement, because in them Ciconi attempted to achieve a strong association between social milieu and individual character and

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[72] *Ciconi adapted and translated plays by Feuillet, Victorien Sardou, Emile Augier, Barrier and Alexandre Dumas, fils.*

[73] *As a journalist Ciconi wrote articles for Epoca and other periodicals of the Risorgimento era. In 1859 he moved to Milan and there with the collaboration of Antonio Ghislanzoni (Verdi's librettist for Aida) he founded the magazine Il Lombardo.*

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also because in them human relationships are justified not only by outward social necessities, but also by psychological longings and obsessions. He is more interested in social psychology, and it is the complexity of human behavior per se that galvanizes his plots. Ciconi shies away from grandiose subject-matter and heroic eras and represents a social reality more appropriate to his experience and more relevant to his contemporaries. Although Ciconi does not abdicate from his right to "teach a lesson," his moralism does not aspire to a drastically therapeutic impact on society: he remains a romantic, so long as he believes that his art is a means conducive to coming to terms with modern ethics and social ideas. Although his social criticism is certainly tamer and less argumentative, especially if compared with later realist playwrights, such as Achille Torelli or Enrico Annibale Butti, the didactic element appears as the subdued articulation of "common sense," recommending and not commanding a specific pattern of social conduct.

His dramatic technique, more solid and often more sophisticated than Giacometti's, attains several of realism's dramaturgical strengths: a journalistic exactness in the rendition of milieu and moment, accurate characterization, multi-faceted social observation and a predisposition for an ironic exposure of social ills. His prose, leaner and less bombastic than Giacometti's, retains a marginal share in romanticism's predilection for flowery diction and declamatory

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sentimentality, yet it is not too far from naturalism's pragmatic, ungarnished idiom. Ciconi, in fact, adheres to a sanitized naturalism: Not a champion of the Dumas fils' preciosity, nor an admirer of the vulgarized "Goldonismo," he opts for a theatrical language that does not mimic contemporaneity but outlines it in a recognizable fashion. Although his dramaturgy does not violate the traditional schema of the contemporary French play--exposition-crisis-resolution--it does not share the advanced stylistics of the Scribean legacy.[74] Ciconi is always unwilling to intrude in his plays as the arbitrator of the outcome. The raisonneur is no stranger among his characters, but his presence is not overwhelming and his "right" argumentation does not necessarily define the rationale of the plot: Although the playwright does not advance a concrete message, he does not silence his faith in moderation as the best measure of individual and social harmony. This moderation allows a more profound grasping of *"verità"* and consequently it is a greater sustainer of *"moralità."* Ciconi espoused these notions as qualitative parts of his dramaturgy, and not as a compass for a pedagogic agenda:

> *[Per moralità intende] "il buon costume, la giustizia naturale, la virtù insomma, e l' amore persuasi ed inculcati alla vita pratica degli uomini per mezzo dell' arte rappresentativa [...] [la verità deriva] dalla perfetta consonanza tra il possibile, l' ente, la natura umana in sè e nelle sue attinenze ... il motivo conformatore*

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[74] *In fact, a case could be made for Ciconi's limited faith in the ideological raison-d'être of this model.*

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della produzione drammatica."[75]

From 1845 and until his death, Ciconi wrote a dozen plays, among which only the earlier ones continue the tradition of the *dramma storico* in the manner of Pellico and Niccolini: The exotic melodramas Il Musulmano, Rondello e il Califfo, the tragic La Speronella and the unpublished Eleonora da Toledo, all met with considerable parochial success as the promising work of a talented amateur, yet they do not prefigure, even remotely, the realistic tendencies and content of his later work. His first significant venture into contemporary drama was the 1857 five-act comedy Le pecorelle smarrite ("The Sheep Gone Astray"). A quasi-Goldonian hide-and-seek comedy, it records the mutual infidelities tarnishing the marriage of a young haute-bourgeois couple until contrition and reform bring them back together to the conjugal nest. It scored a considerable success and introduced a wide variety of Ciconi's dramatic interests and socio-political convictions: an acerbic disposition toward nobility and their class idiosyncrasies (Franco-Italian patois, political conservatism, hypocrisy and "refined" manners), an idealistic

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[75] *"Morality signifies good ethics, **natural justice** (emphasis mine), in a word virtue and love, understood and inculcated within the context of practical human life by way of representational art ... truth [derives] from the perfect agreement between the possible, the being, the human nature in itself and in its associations ... and the substantive motive of the dramatic work." Ciconi's dramatic theory survives in a 1849 series of letters written to Adelaide Ristori, cited in Emilio Mattei, Teobaldo Ciconi: Commediografo, Poeta, Soldato (S. Daniele Friuli: Giuseppe Tabacco, 1924), 102ff. The text cited here is part of the second letter.*

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treatment of art as a cultural function, a tenderness in the treatment of love, a sense of humor in the depiction of characters, and a competent handling of ensembles. His next play, Troppo tardi ["Too Late"] (1858), later also known as Antichi e moderni ("The Old and the New")[76], was an allegorical political farce about the persecution of a sympathetic countess (Italy) by a corrupt count (Austria) and her final vindication. Maintaining that it is "too late" for a peaceful negotiation between "fooled people and fooling masters," the play, in the manner of late 18th Century *giacobin* drama, was a typical propaganda piece abounding in patriotic innuendoes, but as soon as Unification was achieved, its contemporaneity faded away and consequently the play lost its interest. After another political one-act play in verse, I Garibaldini (1860, unpublished), Ciconi produced a series of (tragi)comedies of manners, the first of which was Peccati vecchi e Penitenza nuova ["Old Sins and New Penitence"] (1860). Sentimental and, plot-wise, rather convoluted, the play luxuriates in intrigues about "illegitimate" children, scandalous love affairs, old secrets and far-fetched adventures. Unable to pull all the extravagant storylines together, Ciconi did not have a great success with it, despite

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[76] *Due to the overt patriotic message of the play, the intervention of the censor was immediate and swift. Under the new title and savagely mutilated, the play was allowed performances in the areas of Austrian control until 1866. During World War I, the play was revived as propaganda theatre once more against the Austrians. See Mattei, ibid., 124.*

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the occasional flash of spiritedness and acute psychological observation.[77] The next play, however, Mosche bianche [White Flies] (1860), initiates the mature period of Ciconi, complemented by La rivincita [Reprisal] (1861), La statua di carne [A statue of flesh] (1861) and La figlia unica [The Only Daughter].[78] These four dramas exemplify the Ciconian esthetics at its best and reveal, probably more than Giacometti's best dramas did, the orientations of the upcoming realist movement.[79]

Le mosche bianche[80], a satire of social perceptions about art, class and sex, involves the same "shady" milieu of the *ballerina*, but with an ideological premise different than Giacometti's earlier tirade against its presumed decadence. Ciconi plots against and inverts conventional wisdom about social identities, dispensing with high-minded aphorisms about cheapened modern taste or the damaging "unpatriotic" allure of

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[77] *Trevisani, ibid., 147.*

[78] *Ciconi left two more incomplete plays. The first is called La Gelosia, [Jealousy] a verse adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello. Completed by his friend Edoardo Sonzogno (he wrote the fifth and last act), the play was not a success and to this day remains unpublished. The second play, La festa nazionale ["National Holiday"], is another attempt at political comedy with the effort to establish a national constitution as the topic of its nine scenes.*

[79] *Mattei, ibid., 96; Adolfo Mangini, Il teatro drammatico italiano (1850-1927) (Livorno: Raffaello Giusti, 1927), 24; Costetti, ibid., 202; Raffaello Barbiera, Il salotto della contessa Maffei (Monza: Garzanti, 1944), 255ff; Federico Dall' Ongaro, "Intorno alla natura e all' ufficio dell' arte drammatica." Il politecnico, vol. 19, fasc. 90 (December 1863), 270-1.*

[80] *Teobaldo Ciconi, Le mosche bianche (Milano: Frigerio, n.d.).*

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show-business. Instead, he turns the vilified denizens of this world into uncompromised critics of haute-bourgeois etiquette and amoral conformism. A *"commedia a tesi"* though it is, the play not only sabotages the orthodoxy of current social sensibilities, but also indicates a playwright who, immersed in the psychology of his characters and its social manifestation, is not at all interested in the disclosure of aberrant behavior as evidence of demi-mondaine moral laxity. Certainly Ciconi is not so radical as to defy all the social presumptions about class and virtue. As he legitimizes Leandra, his pugnacious dancer-protagonist, he resists mockery and allows her re-enfranchisement with her exit from the "intimidating" cosmos of show-business. This righteous ending, however, only superficially concedes to the conventional morality of the bourgeois audience, since Ciconi's heroine does not change her outlook or reform her convictions according to the norms of the conformist world. On the contrary, she has proved the shortcomings of her social superiors and it is they who will eventually benefit from her earnestness. In the meantime Ciconi has taunted their self-delusions of class superiority and exposed their fickleness without witless homilies about ethics and standards.

The comedy takes place at a hotel in Redoaro and revolves around Leandra Giardini, an orphaned dancer and an unassuming personality, a "white fly" entrapped in murky social surroundings. The benevolent conduct of Natale Marina, her

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late mother's trustful elderly friend, is misconstrued by the hotel personnel as immoral amorous behavior and the spreading of rumors piques Carlo de Lago, a young count in love with her. Convinced of her lax morals, he offers to establish a "free relationship" with her, an idea which she rejects with abhorrence and resentment. The count's garrulous and cantankerous sister arrives at the hotel and, citing the social obligations attached to their social status, she denounces her brother's "trifle" as unworthy of his title, and forbids him to pursue Leandra any further. The young woman happens to hear the discussion and insists on a private encounter with the countess. Agreeing to sacrifice her love in order to save Carlo's social appearances, she sends him a letter where she declares her love for another man.[81] Overwhelmed by social unfairness, she concludes that her dance and her masks are truer than the human face -- "*Maschere ci vogliono, maschere e belleto. La maschera si confonde col viso; il belleto con rossore*"[82] -- and a more sincere alternative to the established hypocrisy of prim society. Carlo, easily deceived, seeks retribution by compelling her to witness his proposal to another woman, the vivacious daughter

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[81] *Ciconi as a translator of French realist melodramas was obviously familiar with the story of Dumas' Camille. Thus this particular plot development might be a "borrowing" from that famous play. Moreover, Ciconi was very familiar and partial to Verdi's La Traviata, which follows faithfully Dumas' plot.*

[82] *"People want us as masks, masks and make-up. The mask becomes the face; and the make-up becomes our guilt." (Act II, sc. 12); Le mosche bianche, ibid., 38.*

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of a provincial parvenu (who in her turn rejects him). In the final intrigue-ridden act, Carlo finds out that his sister was no saint, but a woman "involved" with a preposterous fop, and this revelation undermines her authority to adjudicate class propriety. He also understands that Leandra has been a victim of malicious hearsay, and repetant, he asks for her forgiveness and acceptance. She is about to reject him, when her mentor Marina offers to adopt her with the condition that she retire from the stage. His comforting ivolvement in the disturbing situation of Leandra manages to restore happiness and calm.

Arguably, Ciconi's best achievement in this comedy is the characterization of Leandra, an assertive and dynamic female portrait, perhaps the first "feminist" of modern Italian drama. Sensitive and pragmatic, thoughtful and sinewy, a romantic and a realist, this dancer is not a variation on the "fallen-woman-with-the-golden-heart" of the French type, or an updated version of the "tamed shrew." Defying categorization, Leandra stands as the first in a series of self-assured women who would command a prominent position in Italian verismo, not only as the conventional threat to the mores and the certainties of a man's world, but as natural forces with the capacity to enforce change, notwithstanding the tragic or the beneficial consequences of their impact.

Certainly this dancer is not an apologist for women's lesser value in the social stock market, nor does she benefit

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from male weakness in order to advance the rights of her sex. Leandra sees herself predominantly as a human being and for those she loves she is not concerned with their social attributes and assets. She cares about the face and not the mask, she speaks of sincerity and abstains from bargaining about status and respect. In the play she is the only character given asides and meditative monologues, and yet these stylistic conventions do not diminish the urgency of her ruminations, nor do they present her line of thought as the didactic argumentation of the raisonneur. When commenting on people's behavior, she tries to see the person behind the costume while inquiring into the probity of social codes:

> *Batto i teatri, e vero. Faccio esporre il mio nome ... mi piego a vendere i prodotti dei miei studii e delle mie fatiche. Ognuno ha il diritto di giudicare l' opera mia ... ma nessuno, vivaddio, ha quello di scandagliare i segreti della mia anima, e di prendere fra le unghie questa povera coscienza di fanciulla onorata per trarne sangue e vergogna... Ma havvi una cosa capite, che non entra in nessun patto di scrittura, in nessun programma di spettacolo, e nella quale servi e padroni, paganti e pagati, siamo tutti al medessimo livello. Questa cosa si chiama l' onore, e l'onore non a bisogno ne dell aria profumata che respirano i polmoni di gran signori, ne degli specchi d'oro che riflettono di ozi, e qualche volta, le colpe delle vostre donne superbe.* (Act I, sc. 8).[83]

It is a deliberate choice to have a dancer, reputedly

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[83] *I do theatre, it's true. I have my name exposed ... I sell the fruits of my studies and my labor. Anyone has the right to judge my work, ... but no one, for God's sake, has the right to sound out the secrets of my soul and compromise my poor honor as a young woman, in order to hurt and humiliate me ... But you all should understand one thing, which does not enter into a piece of writing or a show, and before which, servants and masters, those who pay and those paid, we are all equals. This thing is called honor, and honor ... has no need for the scented air the lungs of highborn breathe, or the gilded mirrors that reflect the idleness and, sometimes, the sins of your haughty women."* Ibid., 15.

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frivolous and carefree, castigate the frivolity and the affectations of the upper classes. Ciconi's social background allowed him to have a first-hand experience of upper-class imperfections,[84] and his liberal views are reactions to these experiences rather than reverberations of a harsh life. Leandra speaks not only as an artist, whose work is taken as morally compromising and unbecoming of a respectable woman. She also speaks as an intuitive creature--as all artists are--able to see behind the mask, that is, able to discern the human psyche and its distortions by obsolete codes of comportment.

Contrary to Giacometti and his high-standard views about the mission of aristocracy as mass educator, Ciconi condones no pretense of superiority due to class privilege, nor does he entertain any ideas about the aristocracy as paragons of social conduct.[85] In his comedy, all aristocrats and their coterie are people with a minimal sense of social responsibility or ideological open-mindedness, and his pro-meritocracy message emerges not from any particular theorizing, but only from the obnoxious demeanor and the laughable fascism of these aristocrats, with their contorted propriety. Ciconi offers the world of the stage as a truer alternative to the untrue, "choreographed" cosmos of counts

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[84] *Ciconi's mother died very young, and his father remarried a countess.*

[85] *Mattei, ibid., 10.*

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and newly-rich: With no respect for their own humanity and more interested in following the way of the world, transmogrified into aberrant anthropoids, "*mostri della natura,*" they have lost the real meaning of life. Analogous ideas regularly appear in Ciconi's subsequent dramas, and most conspicuously so in his next play, La rivincita, where again it will be a woman-artist who will hold the mirror up to the ugliness of the refined classes.

La rivincita[86], perhaps Ciconi's greatest commercial success, has a more acrimonious sociopolitical edge than its predecessor. This time, he opens the play to a broader spectrum of social milieux and lifestyles and his characters represent a larger sample of the post-Risorgimento Italian *borghesia*. Allusions to historical events are scanty, as if Unification were already a reality, and this leaves the unity of the Italian classes as the central problem to resolve. The solution, Ciconi shows, lies not just in the reconciliation between aristocracy and *borghesia*, but in the acknowledgment that the *borghesia* has the power and the mission not only to reform, but also to transform the social landscape into a micro-universe of social grace.

The principal character of this comedy is Maria--again an "orphan"--an accomplished pianist, who nonetheless has lived

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[86]*Teobaldo Ciconi, La rivincita (Milano: Francesco Sanvito, 1873). The play premiered in Florence in 1861, but it was also chosen as the play for the inauguration of the Teatro Manzoni in Milan (11 December 1872).*

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the protected life prescribed for a well-born lady of the provinces, thanks to the kindness of her uncle Pasquale de Po. Betrothed to Count Leoni, an erratic scion of the Florentine aristocracy, she expects the wedding to take place soon, though this prospect is closed by unexpected financial misfortunes of her uncle: Losing all his investments to unfortunate speculations, he has no dowry to bequeath upon his niece. Leoni, upon learning the truth, callously abandons Maria and flees to Milan. Remigio, her distant cousin and a taciturn character, for whom modern life has a poetry only "*per coloro che si arrestano alla vernice delle cose,*" [87] is in love with her, but this is a love that Maria is not willing to accept. She resolves to take up a career as a touring pianist, and Remigio agrees to follow her as companion and confidant. Renowned as Diana Bianchini, Maria comes to Florence for a concert, and comes across Leoni, who upon recognizing Maria, begins to feel remorse for his betrayal. Maria however is not to be a victim again. She offers him her friendship, but not her love. Leoni's love now becomes pathos and when he asks her hand in marriage, she refuses. The marquise Olimpia, her patron and also the cause of her uncle's financial disaster, asks her permission to adopt her. But although Maria as Diana may be willing to marry Leoni, Maria as her true self can give conjugal love only to Remigio. Leoni

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[87] "*...for those who remain at the surface of things;*" *Ibid., 15.*

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acknowledges Maria's dilemma and it is he who gives her away to Remigio. But in the meantime, justice has been served and a union of merit is blessed as a "vindication" of true nobility:

> *PASQUALE: Ecco la nobiltà vera: nobiltà di pensieri e di azioni, la sola accettata, la sola riverita da chi ha il buon senso di anteporre l'aristocrazia del merito all'aristocrazia della nascita."*[88]

Epigrams such as this would abound during the sixties and the early seventies in the plays of Ferrari and Torelli, but in this comedy it is rather the plot and the satire that emerge as Ciconi's most persuasive raisonneur for the rights of the *borghesia*.[89] In La Rivincita, it is as if he realizes his political fantasies: the old decadent oligarchy is receding and the new urban class of artists, artisans and professionals is taking over; aristocracy can find a new meaning and function through its "*imborghesimento;*" and the "orphan" *borghesia* gets social gratification through its acceptance, its "adoption" by the aristocracy. Ciconi posits art as the uniting force bringing the classes together and Maria as the "center" of this microcosm, the person who consolidates the reconciliation. Ciconi feminism, dynamically ensuing from egalitarian, and for those times rather utopian,

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[88] *"This is the real nobility: the nobility of ideas, of action, the only one accepted and cherished by whoever has the good sense to choose the aristocracy by merit over the aristocracy by birth." Ibid., Act IV, 80.*

[89] *Cf. Raffaello Barbiera, Ricordi delle terre dolorose (Milano:Treves, 1918), 224ff.*

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Manzinian axioms, compels him to support Maria's assertiveness and spiritual independence not as a harbinger of the liberal bourgeois society envisioned in the future, but as a phenomenon already evidenced within traditional social structures. From that aspect, then, Maria is not simply a social "reformer," but the quintessential exponent of the new Italian character: a pragmatist ideologue and a product of the social chemistry whose catalyst is not "*realtà*" but "*verità.*"[90]

La figlia unica[91], Ciconi's last and dramaturgically most accomplished comedy, is the play which, more than any other of its period, has approximated the aesthetics of verismo:[92] It is the first modern comedy to introduce a study of social types based on direct and unromanticized observation of the Italian character and the first to survey modern social behavior as an amalgam of natural impulses and

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[90] *It should be observed, however, that Maria's (and Ciconi's) feminist outlook is obfuscated by the dramatist's occasional relapse to the "feminine" sentimentality abounding in the conventional post-Goldonian romantic comedies. This should be viewed as a concession to popular theatre stereotypes (cf Commedia's "inamorata"), and not stressed as a dramaturgical weakness. Indeed, a great deal of the secondary, quasi-melodramatic, text can account for the contradictions ensuing between Maria's diction and thoughts. That the play concedes to acting conventions and to the particular show-business conditions in Italy may be corroborated by the fact that Maria was played by Adelaide Tessero, a respectable actress who specialized in energetic yet dainty ingenues. Actually Ciconi dedicated the printed version of the play to Tessero, the "egregia giovinetta."*

[91] *Teobaldo Ciconi, La figlia unica (Milano: Libreria Paolo Cesati, 1901). The play was presented on 28 November 1862 in Turin at the Teatro Gerbino by the Compagnia Drammatica Belloti-Bon.*

[92] *Mattei, ibid., 177.*

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socio-economic vicissitudes.[93] Freely drawing upon the classic *ménage à trois* of Helen, Paris and Menelaus as well as upon the time-honored motive of the confounded husband -- Molière's George Dandin is a conspicuous paradigm -- Ciconi ventures to undercut the familiar, potentially melodramatic situation of the tempted wife and portray instead a peculiar familial configuration, the situation of a "kept" husband, the "*marito mantenuto*." The tragicomic description of this "irregular" character provides the playwright with ample opportunities to delve deeply into the pathology of the neo-bourgeois *Italianità* and its ludicrous customs, while revisiting and reworking his ideas on class, sex and social opportunism.

The title of the comedy alludes to Elena, the only daughter of the Castellani, provincial nouveaux-riches, who in their effort to raise a modern and urbane child, have produced a spoiled woman. Eager for social advancement, they marry her to Alberto De' Galli, a gentle but rather timid bourgeois, who, exasperated by financial troubles, moves in with his in-laws in Milan, obsequiously catering to their whims. This is a hell for Alberto, not only because his in-laws take every wish of their spoiled daughter for an order, but because they treat him as her servant, inconsiderate of his sensitivity and honor. Moreover, the sophisticated life of Milan has

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[93] *Cf. Dall' Ongaro, ibid., 271.*

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diminished his "urbanity" to their eyes -- so much so, that they have begun to consider him as rather uncouth and rustic! Elena, dazzled by the social niceties of the big city, invites --innocently though--the advances of Count Paride Del Cole, a reckless dandy who compromises her reputation. Alberto's familial fortunes are at the lowest ebb when an old friend of his, Ippolito Grigioni, returns from America. Upon learning about Alberto's miseries, Ippolito resolves to open his friend's mind, save his reputation from ridicule and make him assert his rights within the family.

Alberto following his advice, defies wife and in-laws, and attempts to assert his proper status as the "man" of the family. The situation remains more or less unaltered, until, one day, Alberto realizes that his familial tribulations have become public property and that a satirical daily has made a cartoon out of him. This being the last straw, he challenges the count to a duel, but the latter turns him down, because his honor would not allow him to fight with a "kept" man. Alberto, unable to tolerate this chaos any more, resolves to depart from Milan and enlist with Ippolito in the army fighting against the Austrians. Although she dissaproves, yet too spoiled to admit it, Elena concedes to his departure-separation, which she explains to her parents as a "business trip." Six months later, Alberto and Ippolito happen to seek lodging in a new house which, unbeknownst to them, the Castellani have just purchased. There, Elena meets Alberto,

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but, as he soon finds out, she has drastically changed, asking his forgiveness and compassion. They decide to depart on a long "honeymoon" trip and re-form their life away from family and social vice. Left behind, the Castellani gradually realize that their pedagogic method has failed, and that their daughter almost missed her only chance to happiness.

In La figlia unica *i nobili* and their affectations continue to be Ciconi's scapegoats, although he largely re-orientates his sarcasm against the emerging urbanized caste of the provincial parvenus and their ludicrous failings. It is indeed toward their characterization that Ciconi directs his social observations. As in La rivincita, Ciconi draws the familiar portraits of aristocracy as ruthless pleasure-seekers and ineffectual parasites, but these sterotypical characters constitute part of his social commentary and not a quality of conventional dramaturgy: The counts and the marquis are conventional, because their whole life-style and ideology is built upon and saturated by convention and etiquette. "*Quel de in fronte al cognome, e tutto quello che basta a soddisfare il loro orgoglio,*"[94] argues Ippolito in Act II, and it is through this prism that Ciconi reflects on their capacity to offer a pattern of modern polity or maintain social leadership. The middle class and its new moneyed but unrefined constituents becomes the focus of the satire, but in reference

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[94] *"That "de" before their surname is all it takes to satisfy their vanity." Ciconi, ibid., 32.*

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to the aristocratic models they wish to emulate. Ciconi views their effort to consort with the aristocracy as a deleterious habit that corrodes their self-respect and arrests the assertion of their proper social status more than they care to understand. His parvenus act conventionally, "impolitely" and therefore ludicrously whenever their desire for respectability urges them to simulate refinement; their lack of ethical standards--even when they seek to discriminate between models of behavior within memebers of the same class (i.e. the Castellani condemn Alberto, a minor aristocrat, as "vulgar" while they glamorize his really vulgar antagonists as mannerly)--renders their "predicament" all the more ludicrous and for that matter all the more tragic. Eventually, Ciconi argues, these new *borghesi* fall victims to their lionized superiors, because they fail to earn their respect and because they consciously condone their insidious morals. Aristocrats have lost real social power: The numerous Castellani of Italy have not yet understood that the superiority of the nobles is spurious and their capacity to exist separate and above the other classes is terminally enervated. What is allegorically suggested in La Rivincita is here solid ground for quasi-scientific analysis: The fittest will survive, but gentry is obviously not among them.

Ciconi never lets the farceur override the critic (Dall´ Ongaro calls his satire "*socratica*") and in his effort to make a virtue out of the necessity for the raisonneur, he invents

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Ippolito Grigioni, the character who virtually sets the pace for the radical modification in Alberto's interaction with his family and society at large. In his resourcefulness Ciconi manages to combine the affable moralizer and the devil's lawyer: Not only does he provide an ethical mirror reflecting the indiscretions of the *borghesi*, but as a Faustian intriguer he foments discomfiture and conveys sobering wisdom. His superior knowledge--he has travelled to America after all--entitles him to advance all those ideas that echo what would soon constitute Italy's social *realpolitik* of the *imborghesimento* and to uphold civic peace and civil rights: "*Io difendo una causa santa. Io difendo l' ordine, il diritto, la verità,*" he claims as he judges Italian society and its structures.[95] This *verità* is again the key to the new positivist world.[96]

La statua di carne[97], a stark *dramma-romanzo* written one year before La figlia unica, is a play that has always perplexed Ciconi's critics as elusive and irregular. Compelled

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[95] "*I defend a sacred cause. I defend order, righteousness, truth*" (Act II). Ciconi, *ibid.*, 44.

[96] *Cf. Giorgio Negrelli, "Naturalismo e politica "nazionale" in Italia verso la 'realtà'." Problemi 96 (1993), 4ff.*

[97] *Teobaldo Ciconi, La statua di carne (Milano: Moreo, 1929). Ciconi's "dramma-romanzo in quattro atti e un prologo" was written for Celestina Martini-Peracchi, a beautiful but rather unemotional actress. Ciconi was notoriously in love with her, but this love was not reciprocal. Nonetheless, Peracchi used the play to her advantage and kept it as a most favorite vehicle. The play was made into a silent movie in 1923, evidence of its popularity. See Costetti, ibid., 202.*

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by the romantic and melodramatic elements of this tragicomedy and trying to trace possible autobiographical hints, they have classified it as an aberration not only within his canon, but also within the context of post-Romantic 19th Century Italian drama. Even when they dismiss it as romantic trash, a "*romanticheria da cimitero*," or when it nonplusses them as a sinister piece of social cynicism, incongruous as such with Ciconi's literary reputation as a poised thinker, the play never ceases to intrigue. Summing up this critical perplexity, Cesare Trevisani observes:

> *La statua di carne, parto di un concetto intelettuale erroneo, reca con sè tutti i difetti che ne derivano, e l' esagerazione del pensiero come quella dei sentimenti ne falsa tutti i caratteri, ne falsa los spirito, ne false la società e la morale, e divide appena impercettibilmente la passione vera dalla vera pazzia. [...] E così tutta l' azione, basata sopra un sì stravolto concetto, esce naturalmente da ogni sistema dramatico, e resta una ingegnosa eccentricità nella storia dell' arte, o meglio un parto luminoso di un momento di aberrazione.*[98]

What this analysis and similar others have failed to discern is that at the basis of much of this play lies a concern not with external but with internal emotional and spiritual powers, a determinism regulating people's capacity to think, love, and live.

Reworking the ancient myth of Pygmalion, a story

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[98] *La statua di carne, the child of an erroneous intellectual concept, bears all the defects resulting thereof; moreover, the ideas and the sentiments, both exaggerated, distort all its characters, distort its spirit, distort society and morality, and only imperceptibly do they separate true passion from true madness...Thus the whole action, based on so deviant a concept, naturally resists all dramatic classification, and remains an ingenious eccentricity in the history of art, or rather a brilliant creation of a moment of aberration." Trevisani, ibid., 147-8. See also Croce, ibid., 95.*

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saturated with all sorts of erotic and metaphysical metaphors, Ciconi has created an unconventional psychological melodrama, where although no specific lesson is advanced, he suggests that emotional reform through human communication is a reciprocal exercise of human spirituality [99]. Again it is a woman-artist who will redeem a man of higher status and the social system he represents; and through the assertion of her own humanity, she will overcome as the one human being who can condemn hypocrisy and spiritual hardness, in favor of people's natural (but repressed) ability to give love. In this play the distinctions between the man/maker and the woman/creation, are blurred and Ciconi raises all sorts of questions about the capacity of love to change human life: Who is this "Pygmalion"? Is it the creator who "makes," defines, the creation, or vice versa? And is it love, obsession or self-interest that defines the art of "creating," molding one's love ideal out of another human being? Typically, the playwright abstains from providing a clearcut answer.

The drama begins with a flashback, opening in the gloomy room of Maria, a victim of tuberculosis, at the end of her forlorn life. A girl of the *popolo*, she was married to "Ottaviano," who, unbeknownst to her, was a prodigal dandy, the notorious Conte Paolo di Santa Rosa. Her love, however,

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[99] *The play has acquired a reputation of noble failure as its critics have persistently but in vain searched for a morality thesis in it, failing to appreciate Ciconi's unwillingness to produce one. This position remains to this date unaltered.*

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has redeemed all his vices, and in order to protect the purity of his love, he has forsaken his real identity. As the prologue closes, Maria dies, and "Ottaviano," despondent, resolves to depart for America. Two years later, when a friend writes to him that a young dancer, Noemi Keller, strikingly resembles the dead Maria, Paolo comes back to Italy in order to look for Maria's "alter ego." A quasi-gothic atmosphere of mystery, darkness and decadent eroticism permeates the play, as Ciconi returns once again to the Giacomettian cosmos of the ballerina. But this milieu is now a purgatory of human failings and its decadence is, to coin a term, a *decadence à thèse*: Paolo meets Noemi, and perturbed by her likeness to his wife, sets up a peculiar arrangement with her: She is to stay with him for payment, not as a lover but as an employee; she is to be dressed and made up as Maria; she will call him Ottaviano and he will call her Maria; She will pose as a statue for two hours a day, after which she will be free to do as she pleases. Noemi accepts playing the "part," but the novelty of the situation soon fades away, when Paolo discloses the "realities" behind his macabre fancy.

It is at this moment that the "statue" comes to life, feeling not only sympathy for him, but also a curious sentiment of love. Noemi becomes obsessed with her role and jealous of "Maria," because she gradually falls in love with her own "creator." Transformed by his eccentric yet sincere commitment to the memory of Maria, Noemi retracts from her

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previous life, to dedicate herself to Paolo. He does not respond to this "sacrifice" and his aloofness precipitates her return to her previous life-style. Her readjustment is, nonetheless, as impossible as her union with Paolo. The situation becomes all the more hopeless and pathetic: When she is sexually harassed by an ex-lover, Paolo intervenes and defends her honor, since it was his duty to defend "l' immagine della mia povera morta." In the final act, when Paolo has to fight a duel with her harasser, she comes to realize Paolo's hidden love for her and for the first time in her life she prays for love. In a tragicomic denouement, outside the cemetery where Maria is buried, Paolo witnesses Noemi's tranformation to a real "loving" Maria, when he listens to her praying for his life, an image that recalls the prologue scene. Although Paolo takes this as a sign of love's redeeming power, he refuses to "forget" Maria and begin a new life with Noemi. He resolves to depart again for America, only promising that "someday" he will return to find her "as well."

Paolo, Maria and Noemi are essential agents in this Ciconian endeavor to explore human life, and the Pygmalion myth offers itself as a poignant vehicle for achieving this end. Paolo/Ottaviano is not only the sculptor of Noemi's persona as Maria, he is also the sculptor of his own shelfhood, the creator of his own destiny. Repressing his real social identity, he engages in a guileless love relationship which he has "sculpted" upon soothing falsehoods. He has

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reinvented Maria as "Maria" and the loving life she offers him is not a "real" situation, since it is his "real" wealth that maintains their "penury" comfortable. But as in a melodrama, this staged "reality" of conjugal happiness falls prey to the vicissitudes of nature, and when Maria dies, it is "Maria" that stays with him and haunts him. And it is this "Maria" that Noemi is summoned to recreate with all the outward attributes of this persona. This new "Maria" is not to capture her prototype in a happy moment of existence, but she is to evoke the dead woman captured in the purity of her poverty. Paolo returns in order to assume the fiction of his "Maria" years, because it is as "Ottaviano" that he believes he has felt "true" existence. Noemi, a social *tabula rasa*--*"Nata non so dove, cresciuta non so come, protetta ed allevata non so da chi ne perche... Ecco conte, chi sono e cosa sono,"*[100] Noemi declares upon meeting Paolo--a malleable material for the re-creation of "Maria," enters Paolo's life, eager to assume another part, another role; She is eager to play her part as "Noemi," the debonair "mistress of eighty-nine lovers." As the Pygmalion of her own identity, she assumes to play out Paolo's psycho-erotic fantasy.

While Noemi as a "real" person has enjoyed the world of her profession, incorrigibly exulting in its material

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[100] *"Born I don't know where, raised I don't know how, protected and instructed I don't know by whom and why ... See, count, who I am and what I am"(Act I). Ciconi, ibid., 18.*

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pleasures--Ciconi ironically makes a great deal out of Paolo's being her ninetieth "*amante*"--it is as the "statue," as a performer of a grotesque part, that she gradually becomes cognizant of her true humanity. Even when she attempts a comeback to the "real" world, she only witnesses the dehumanizing cruelty of its denizens and its harassing impact on her individuality. Her subsequent conversion to a contrite believer in "true" love is, regardless of its melodramatic character, a reconfirmation of her redemption not only through the love she has felt for Paolo but also through her realizing the amplitude and the impact of this sentiment on the spirit of society at large. Ciconi suspends poetic justice, and in lieu of reaffirming the "reality" of palpable experience, he opts for the truthfulness of the human quest--Noemi calls this mission a cult of faith--to come to terms with the failings of this experience. Anticipating the *teatro idealista* of late Italian realism by at least three decades, Ciconi attempts to use the realism of the beyond as a better alternative for the comprehension of the modern psyche.[101]

This incessant, proto-Pirandellian see-saw between mask and face, creation and re-creation, identity and persona,[102] this "*aberrazione*" of characterization is what

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[101]*Mattei, ibid., 163.*

[102]*It is tempting to speculate whether Pirandello was conversant with the play, since it retained its popularity well into the twentieth century. Its affinities with Pirandello's thematic motifs, as for example in* <u>*As you desire me*</u> *are too striking to preclude his acquaintance with it.*

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engenders Ciconi's philosophy of life: a concatenation of deceptions leading to a turning point where one has to choose whether to go on with refurbishing these deceptive "realities" or break the chain and seek the true self. The play has no real closure, as if Ciconi, a dying man at the time he was shaping this play, wanted to let it eternally vacillate between the possibility of a happy ending and the prospect of a departure with no return as his own death would be. Rather than speculating what this ending means, it is safer to conclude that as in the play, it is not what you choose but the fact that you tackle the problem that inspires the hope to continue living. It is not a matter of conflict over life and death. It is a matter of whether one lives in peace or at peace with himself and the world.

It might be controversial to retroactively seek elements of Pirandellismo in a work written under vastly different social, political and cultural circumstances, and by a playwright long dismissed as unable to delve so deep in the realm invariably assigned to Pirandello. Yet, it is more fallacious to overlook Ciconi's scattered but persistent fascination with aspects of humanity and society, which have since defined the "realism" of Pirandellian dramaturgy, only because Pirandello organized them into a concrete--*the Maschere Nude*--theatro-philosophical program. Partly because both playwrights involve both tragedy and comedy, partly because they both exhaust melodramatic imagery and formulas to

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subversively develop a social criticism of consequence, and partly because they share an equal obsession with the human perception of reality/truth, it is critically sound to suggest that Ciconi anticipated the total evolution of Italian realism and inadvertently predicted the fulfillment it would attain with Pirandello and Pirandellismo. Probably Ciconi argued too soon for a realistic drama challenging the notions of its realism, and this is an assumption the equivocal critical response to his work has amply corroborated. The new cultural order in Italy wanted a theater *à tesi*, a theatre on and not of, ideas, a theatre written to deregulate the flow of utilitarian social ideology and thus regulate the pace of modernity. Evidently, this *teatro educatore* would emulate not Ciconi's idiosyncratic *verismo*, but Giacometti's experimentations with the *pièce à thèse*. In the 1860s and 1870s, it will be incumbent on two other playwrights to consolidate this edifying nature of Italian realist drama: Paolo Ferrari and Achille Torelli.

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CHAPTER 3

TO MAKE THE ITALIANS: THE SOCIAL DRAMA OF PAOLO FERRARI AND ACHILLE TORELLI

With the dramaturgy of Paolo Ferrari (1841-1889) and Achille Torelli (1841-1922) Italian theatre dynamically enters the age of Verismo, the movement which, as the Italian variant of European Naturalism, would dominate and define the literary and artistic activity in Italy for the most part of its first forty years as a modern European state (1860-1900). As their careers flourished and peaked during the 1860s and 1870s, the most optimistic and the most decisive period for the political and social (re)formation of the Italian nation, their plays have found a niche in Italian theatre histories as reflections of the two most important socio-cultural developments at work in post-Risorgimento Italy: the *imborghesimento*, the bourgeois transmutation of the Italian social and political landscape; and the self-anointment of the various *borghesia* elites as political leaders and pace-setters of modernization.

Predominantly written to assert and not critique the

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ethos and the priorities--family, work, financial security, political moderation and social progressiveness--of this new ruling class, the problem plays of Ferrari and the realistic tragicomedies of Torelli are styled as "entertainment with a cause." Familial and social tensions are dramatized, in order to photograph a social milieu in progress and not a social system in crisis. This new "proto-*verismo*" drama aspires to a balanced, non-controversial representation of modern Italian realities with this balancing connoting not a sanitized and therefore spurious version of this reality in compliance with the bourgeois outlook, but an idea of drama which is still distant from the "scientifically" inquisitive program of later naturalism. Ferrari and Torelli work within the realm of European positivism, but their realism is programed to show what is expedient within bourgeois society rather than what is wrong with it and its values.

A generation older than Torelli and, as an artist, formed by the artistic ideals of Risorgimento Romanticism, Ferrari emerges as an assertive champion of the *teatro educatore* and a driving force in the establishment of the thesis play as the genre par excellence of the new *dramma borghese*. More akin to Giacometti and his drama of social correctness than to Dumas *fils* and the French theatre of social criticism, he conditioned his dramaturgy as a propaganda theatre promoting the cause of bourgeois *italianità* with the Goldonian paradigm of "moral" theatre still a valuable point of reference. His

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habitual moralizing being a target of negative critical reaction from early on in his career, Ferrari would never get tired of reiterating that his function within Italian society was that of a gentleman, a *galantuomo*, "*ritenendo di compiere un dovere dicendo al publico delle verità sacrosante, destinate a trovar eco nelle conscienze ed a non rimanere senza frutto.*"[1] Substituting *gallantuomo* for Giacometti's *patriota*, Ferrari asserts his artistic function not as a builder of national character but as a forger of the "appropriate" modern class consciousness.

Modifying Ferrari's unashamedly moralistic dramaturgical program, Achille Torelli, a better dramatist and a more refined intellectual, will argue for a realist drama of social observation, that is, a theatre which through the faithful reproduction of the modern bourgeois experience will reflect the new tensions between the classes, re-echo the new ethical controversies, and reaffirm the bourgeois' commitment to the cause of liberal progress. Torelli's is a moderate realism and his drama, moral but not polemic, idealistic but not sanctimonious, stays clear of the melodramatic excessiveness of Romantic Realism à la Giacometti. In antithesis to Ferrari and for that matter to his French peers, Torelli is a

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[1]*Professing to be honoring a duty by telling the public about the sacrosanct verities, which are destined to reverberate in the consciences and not to remain useless." Cited in Tancredi Mantovani, "Paolo Ferrari nel centenario della nascita." Nuova Antologia v. 219 (July 1922), 57.*

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political playwright concerned not with social policies but with the modern bourgeois polity of the Positivist era. Introducing political drama in the culture of modern Italy, he becomes not only the first Italian playwright to attempt a sociological dramaturgy, but also the first playwright who will set up the aesthetic and ideological parameters for the verismo drama of Giovanni Verga and Giuseppe Giacosa.

PAOLO FERRARI

It is a conspicuous circumstance in the history of Italian theatre history that Paolo Ferrari scored his first outstanding success with a comedy about Goldoni and his struggle to write for the theatre as an uncompromised man of mission. When Goldoni e le sue sedici commedie nuove [Goldoni and His Sixteen New Comedies] opened in 1853 in Modena, Ferrari was a little known playwright, not very different from the scores of other contemporaries writing innocuous comedies, in dialect or *in lingua*, and in the manner of the Venetian master, or political melodramas inspired by the Risorgimento ideals. This comedy, however, struck the theatre people of the time as so original and refreshing a play that within less than one year not only was it performed throughout the Italian peninsula by well established troupes, but it also catapulted the thirty-year old playwright to the forefront of Italian theatre. For critics and historians, the comedy seemed to inaugurate the *risorgimento* of Italian theatre for a number of

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significant reasons: The play was a comic *dramma storico* with none of the esthetic or ideological excesses of Italian romantic drama, save perhaps its overt moralism, but it was also a "naturalistic" portrait of a social milieu with a particular attention to the detailed depiction of characters, manners, attitudes and socio-cultural domains; it reintroduced the Goldonian dramaturgy not as a pattern amenable only to slavish emulation but also as an invigorating pattern of the kind of drama that a united Italy should aspire to, a popular theatre of strong social and cultural convictions, both a mirror of *italianità* and a pedagogue;[2] and it essayed *commedia* as a genre more modern than historic melodrama and more pertinent to the cultural exigencies of the time. Naturally, Ferrari not only was looked upon as the *iniziatore*, the initiator of the new drama and the greatest hope for Italian theatre at large,[3] but also as the playwright who, introducing *naturalismo* on the stage, extricated national drama from the obsolete mechanisms of Romanticism. These critical assumptions about the artistic potential of Ferrari were succinctly recapitulated in Cesare Trevisani's 1867 essay on the condition of the Italian theatre at the outbreak of the new era:

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[2]*Cf. Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli (1850-1950). (Firenze: Parenti editore, 1958), 45ff.*

[3]*Mantovani, 55; See also Enrico Panzacchi, Lettere ed Arti (Bologna, 1889).*

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> *Il Ferrari ... avendo oramai la convinzione che la società di tutto il mondo civile si reaccosta nel costume e nel pensiero; ed in un certo modo del manifestarlo (conservando sempre oltre i segni esteriori una propria e distinta fisonomia nell' indole e nella natura), ebbe il corragio di scavalcare molti pregiudizi che tenevano inceppato il nostro teatro comico. Da Goldoni prese il fondo e la ragione della commedia; dalla società contemporanea l'indirizzo; dai bisogni e dai difetti di essa lo scopo; dal proprio intuito il sentimento e la formula; dalla conoscenza degli attori, dallo studio del pubblico, da tutti i segreti dell' arte a lui notissimi, la confidenza in se stesso.*[4]

Ferrari would remain solidly within the dramatic and theatrical tradition of the Risorgimento until 1859. Up to that date, his dramatic output will consist of realistic *drammi storici*, populist dialect one-acters and political comedies expressing a kind of moderate liberalism and his faith in a centrist society, where morals and social integrity constitute its principal virtues. Thanks to the popularity of that early work, Ferrari was soon embraced by the Risorgimento political elite as an intellectual leader and propagandizer for the national cause, while his frequent peregrinations to the various Italian cultural centers, where his work was being performed, made him a familiar figure of the theatre community. With the declaration of the Italian kingdom,

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[4] *"Ferrari... believing that the society of the whole civilized world might be rediscovered in custom and thought; and to a certain way [trying] to manifest that(always preserving beyond the exterior appearances an individual and distinct expression in character and disposition), had the courage to depart from many prejudices hampering our non tragic drama. From Goldoni he got the foundations and the rationale of comedy; from contemporary society the trends; from its needs and defects the objective; from his own [theatrical] intuition the sentiment and the form; from his association with actors, from the study of the public, from all the secrets of art he was conversant with, the confidence in himself." Cesare Trevisani, Delle condizioni della letteratura italiana nel' ultimo ventennio (Firenze: Andrea Bettini Librajo-Editore, 1867), 135.*

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Ferrari was among the first who became part of the political establishment.[5] Settling down in Milan, he was appointed History professor at the *Accademia Scientifico-Letteraria*, and active in municipal matters, he practiced cultural and dramatic criticism for a number of journals, while encouraging young artists and writers.[6] In the meantime, however, his drama had changed aesthetic and ideological orientation. Following the Giacomettian paradigm of social drama, Ferrari would become a champion of the moral thesis play and a staple of the Italian repertory until the 1880s. This modification of his dramaturgy would sustain his popularity with the acting companies and the emerging affluent *borghesia*, but it would not benefit his reputation among the critics of the younger generations. As early as 1870, he was thought of as a vociferous reactionary moralizer, capitalizing on the popular audiences' fondness for the problem melodrama à la Dumas *fils* and Augier, while his dramas remained attractive only as a target of opprobrium, put down as banal, derivative, prosy and ultimately untheatrical. Comparisons with the best French

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[5] *For Ferrari's theatre career before settling down to Milan valuable information is provided by Giovanni Canevazzi, "Paolo Ferrari (Lettere ed appunti)," Rivista teatrale italiana 14 (January-February and March-April 1910), 1-14 and 80-85. For his early activity as a theatre director in Modena see Vincenzo Tardini, "Paolo Ferrari filodrammatico," Rivista teatrale italiana 3 (1902), 9-16.*

[6] *For Ferrari as a critic, see Oreste Trebbi, "Paolo Ferrari corrispondente teatrale," L'Archiginnasio 17 (1922), 17ff. According to Trebbi, Ferrari left incomplete an autobiographical opusculum, Memorie di un giornalista teatrale (Memoirs of a Theatre Journalist).*

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plays supporting the repertory of the more prestigious Italian troupes obviously did not help his image. No sooner had Verismo emerged as a potentially innovative alternative for the Italian theatre than Ferrari was seen as an *iniziatore*, yet not the *realizzatore* of verismo drama.[7]

Indeed, Ferrari's post-unitarian *commedia à tesi* has concerned Italian critics not only as a dramaturgy unable to keep up with the pace of evolving Italy, but also as a theatre maladroitly emulating the aesthetic and ideological mannerisms of contemporary French drama. Not unlike Giacometti, Ferrari had constantly voiced his aversion for the "immoral," scandalous fare of the Parisian boulevard theatres, but his disapproval for the drama of Augier and Sardou did not seem to mitigate the objections to his own drama, viewed as unstylish and lacking in *contemporaneity* or *Italianità*.[8] Even though there is an undeniable structural and thematic affinity between his and the French problem play, the theory that holds Ferrari as an obsequious and unthinking adaptor of French

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[7]*Clotilde Castrucci, Il teatro di Paolo Ferrari: saggio critico. (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1898), 10; Luigi Tonelli, Il teatro Italiano dalle origini ai nostri giorni (Milano: Modernissima, 1924), 396. See also Mario Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano. Vol. 2 (Firenze: Sansoni, 1981), 690. For a broader discussion of Ferrari's artistic reputation with regard to his critics and scholars, see Cesare Levi, "Paolo Ferrari nelle sue pubblicazioni," Nuova Antologia 318 (March-April 1925), 293-297, especially, 295ff.*

[8]*Cf. Diego Valeri, "L' efficacia del teatro francese sul teatro di Paolo Ferrari," Rivista d' Italia 12, (February 1909), 257-328.*

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dramatic conventions needs some modification.[9] Since the Modenese playwright was too conscientious an Italian to adopt foreign artistic practices and too prideful an intellectual to adulterate his artistic vision with trends and novelties unbecoming of his sense of Italian culture, it would be more accurate to allow for an unconscious impact of the French example on his art--after all France was the dominant cultural matrix in Europe--and trace possible influences within the parameters of the Italian dramatic tradition. Even if it is necessary to pinpoint a direct model for his dramaturgy within French theatre, this would be neither Dumas *fils* nor Augier, but Victor Hugo, the playwright whose work comes closer to the Romantic realism of Ferrari. This is not because Ferrari's (haute-)bourgeois characters resemble Hugo's historic heroes in their excessive reaction to social conditions, or because both playwrights share a penchant for high-flawn melodramatics and moralistic rhetoricism.[10] On the contrary, their styles and spirits meet in their mutual will to portray unwholesome characters in unwholesome social settings and not unwholesome characters violating and imperiling a seemly social status quo. Other considerations, such as mode of dramatic speech and

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[9] *For an effort in this direction, see Sanesi, La commedia, 563ff, although his skepticism about the merits of Ferrarian drama does not allow him to engage in a more broad-minded discussion of the playwright's esthetics. It is to his credit, however, that he is the only critic to imply Ferrari's debt to other Italian playwrights, primarily Giacometti.*

[10] *For a different opinion see Valesi, 270-1.*

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structure, are rather irrelevant, since Hugo's princes think and behave as "costumed" bourgeois, and Ferrari's aristocrats share the same prejudices with the average *borghese*. Otherwise, Ferrari's dramaturgy retains the noble program of Alfierian poetics and the positivist enthusiasm of Giacometti.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Giacometti was striving towards a serious, that is, non-comic, realist drama long before other Italian playwrights. His experimenting with the dramatization of taboo issues had also showed that there was an Italian public desirous of seeing modern life and *italianità* anatomized on the stage. It might be that Giacometti more often than not utilized melodrama in order to undercut the subversiveness of his themes, or that pathos and sensationalism overwhelmed and enervated the reformative power of the thesis. Yet the fact of the matter is that Giacometti was already a seasoned and esteemed realist at the time of Ferrari's conversion to social drama, and as such a more likely dramaturgical model to emulate. So similar are their techniques and so analogous are their dramaturgical virtues and shortcomings, that Giacometti appears to have had a sway over Ferrari not only as a craftsman, but also as a thinker on the nature and the purpose of the thesis play.[11] There is, however, a substantial difference between Giacometti and Ferrari and this difference has to do with vision and

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[11] *Sanesi, 565, 569.*

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ideological attitude: Whereas Giacometti writes as a man of moral principles, Ferrari pontificates as an inexorable moralist; and whereas Giacometti supports the liberalization, the emancipation of society and its institutions, Ferrari defends tradition, custom and even prejudice as "common sense," safeguards of the public interest; and whereas Giacometti thinks of himself as an informer-reformer, Ferrari takes his artistic function to be interpreting, upholding or shaping the ethical convictions of his audience.[12] Indeed, Ferrari entertains a different interpretation of *teatro educatore*: If for Giacometti to educate means to enlighten and thus reform, for Ferrari it means to strengthen one's rectitude, to reconfirm the benevolence of social customs. It is this shift from enlightenment to instruction that connotes the passing from a "national" to a "social" idea of drama, since having achieved a unified nation, what remains is to achieve a uniform society. For Ferrari this venture towards modernization and homogenization does not signify overthrowing what has been bestowed from past social systems as ethos and idea--*il divorzio dell' intelligenza italiana dalla tradizione domestica*[13]--but relegating it to modernity as a blueprint

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[12] *Cf. Silvana Monti, Il Teatro realista della nuova Italia: 1861-1876. (Rome:Bulzoni, 1978), 100.*

[13] *"...The divorce of Italian mentality from the domestic tradition." Letter to the actor Achille Maieroni, cited in Camillo Antona Traversi, La verità sul teatro italiano dell' ottocento (Udine: Istituto delle edizioni accademiche, 1947), 23.*

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for principled living.[14] *Moralità* as the ethical materialization of *verità* and *dovere* (duty) constitute Ferrari's key assets not only as themes but also as structural elements of his thesis dramaturgy, remaining as such until well into the mid-seventies, when the nascent naturalistic trends not only mellow his rhetoric, but also re-orientate his ideology towards a more moderate and perhaps more complex vision of humanity.

According to Benedetto Croce, *moralità* was both Ferrari's muse and nemesis, what inspired him and what hampered him as an artist and an intellectual.[15] It is very easy to dismiss a moralizing dramaturgy as artless, perfunctory and patronizing, a theatre aimed at below average audiences who entertain a melodramatic vision of the human experience and who expect art to have some meaningful, non-aesthetic impact on their lives. Yet when Ferrari took up the problem play as an instrument for the edification of his compatriots, he could find no reality of general relevance from which to begin his criticism, that is a reality, social or cultural, common for

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[14] *Ferrari's moral ideas about the nature of theatre do not differ from the social ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini, although their political affiliations were antithetical. Mazzini, who had a profound impact on the political thought of the left in Italy, believed that the problem of modern society is a problem of moral (re)education, an education, that is, conceived as an extension of a religious enlightenment. Although Ferrari does not enter into so intense a theorizing, his idea of "moralità" can be related to the Mazzinian socio-philosophical system. Cf. Benedetto Croce, A History of Italy 1871-1915 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 79.*

[15] *Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia Vol. 1 (Bari:Laterza, 1939), 313, 329.*

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all Italians. What he had to work with was some sets of moral codes and some sets of cultural conventions, all vestiges of a distant past, yet the only common ground from which to derive his case of argument. Ferrari, contrary to Giacometti, felt that he had to make, not re-make, the Italians, feeling that the only way to achieve a harmonious society was through the promotion and instillation of an idealized social *realtà*, upon which to pattern a *vera* society whose modern identity would be implemented and regulated by ethics and a sense of *dovere* towards the individual self and the society at large.[16] Unlike Giacometti, Ferrari did not look for followers, nor did he aspire to proselytize same-minded thinkers. He assumed that his thoughts about Italian polity were reflecting the common Italian sense of identity and social mission and under this premise he resolved to ignore stylistics and aesthetic concerns, if these were to compromise

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[16]*Cf. Luigi Capuana, "Rassegna drammatica," La Nazione (13 November 1866), cited in Siro Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga (Roma: Bulzoni, 1972), 41: "...[Lo] scrittore italiano... è costretto a crearsi una società ideale, o meglio, eclettica che abbia un poco della fisionomia di tutte e non rassomigli particolarmente a nessuna; è costretto a vagare nell'indeterminato, a rassegnarsi ad un colorito senza toni precisi, sacrificando insomma, per così dire, l'arte all'arte, nell'attesa di poter ritrarre una società unicamente italiana, che intanto è ancora di là da venire." [The Italian writer is constrained to invent an ideal society, or rather, an eclectic society which bears a slight resemblance to all [the various societies] yet it does not look like any particular one; he is constrained to veer in the indeterminate, to resign himself to [drawing] a colorful picture without precise tones, generally sacrificing, so to speak, art in art, while waiting to be become able to portray a society uniquely Italian, which nonentheless is yet to come.] Capuana, a major theatre critic and theorist, was critical of Ferrari's dramaturgy, but fair enough to acknowledge his sincere effort to create a "national" dramaturgy in a new state without a homogeneous society. The excerpt belongs to Capuana's review of Ferrari's Marriana. For more on Capuana, see below Torelli and especially chapter 4.*

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the efficacy of the moral lesson. Ferrari thinks and debates as a compulsive skeptic, the constituent intellectual of *società*, assessing the process of modernization and regulating the formulation of social ideology.[17] If from a modern perspective, his ideas and his rhetoric seem ostentatious and reactionary, it is because our view of social modernization is utterly different from Ferrari's. For him modernization for Italian society of the 1860s meant to "find itself," and the determinant of that process lies in a notion of idealism as pragmatism/realism. The equation of idealism-realism is the principal generator of Ferrarian social drama, and thus "realism" implies a utilitarian concept of art, not an aesthetic concern for the photographic reportage of modern experience: It is not verisimilitude that galvanizes Ferrari, but *verità* as a moral universality.[18]

Ferrari's idea of "realism" demands some further analysis, if one is to understand his dramaturgical rationale. First of all, he believed that the spirit is the true generator of drama,

> *lo spirito fuori di noi, lo spirito in noi: Dio e l' uomo. Dio in quanto e fuori di quella realta esistente che l' arte ricrea, non entra nella drammatica che come personificazione, sotto umana sembianza; resta dunque l'uomo. L'uomo che ha pensieri, affetti, bisogni, che esterna cio che pensa con segni sensibili, si muove, agisce sul suo teatro, che e il mondo, la vita: l'uomo che esprime i suoi pensieri colla voce e la movenza... [La grande, eccellente*

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[17] *Renato Simoni, "Paolo Ferrari," Corriere della sera 6 April 1922, 3.*

[18] *See Siro Ferrone, "Problemi di drammaturgia," in Siro Ferrone, ed., Teatro dell' Italia unita Atti dei convegni. Firenze 10-11 dicembre 1977 e 4-6 novembre 1978 (Firenze: Il Saggiatore, 1980), 61.*

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> *Arte della drammatica ... dentro la sfera dei mezzi conceduti alla sua attivita non cherchi l'illusione, l'imitazione del reale, ma la ricreazione estetica del reale.*[19]

From this concept stems his idea that an engaged theatre should originate from an idealistic vision of society; and that the playwright should estheticize and consider this society as the "real" one, while approaching the commonly experienced reality as a distorted, but amenable to reformation, version of the real thing.

Translating this concept into artistic praxis within the social, historical and artistic conditions of mid-century Italy, Ferrari establishes *alta borghesia* as the ideal class of "real society" (therefore a paragon for social modernity), but on stage he portrays this class in deep crisis with its (moral) nobility deformed and its social cohesion corroded by individual irresponsibility and meanness of spirit. The inherent moral and ethical integrity of this "ideal" class is continuously tested but seldom, if ever, contested. This ideologically conservative dramaturgical policy also applies to the discussion of social controversies at large. The ethical traditions of society, however reactionary or obsolete

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[19] *"The spirit outside ourselves and the spirit in us: God and man. God, as long as he is outside this existing reality that art re-creates, enters in the art of drama only as a personification, under the semblance of man; What remains then is man. The man who has ideas, emotions, desires, who communicates his thoughts with perceptible gestures, who moves and acts in his own theatre, which is the world, life: the man who expresses his thoughts with voice and movement ... The great, excellent Art of drama does not look for illusion, the imitation of the real, but the aesthetic re-creation of the real."* Leone Fortis, Paolo Ferrari: Ricordi e note *(Milano, 1889), cited in Silvana Monti, 97.*

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they might be, are never challenged in order to be voided, while modern and thus suspicious socio-cultural trends, say divorce or the social rehabilitation of the "sinner," do not deserve his endorsement, because they threaten society's ability to defend its "real" integrity. Realism then is not the objective representation of the distorting tendencies within and against society, but the representation, the manifestation, the justification of the "real," the ideal society: Society, its institutions and its cultural prejudices, are not aberrations but constructs of wisdom. Problems of human communications ensue not because of them, but because of the way people use them in their lives. We don't change society in order to make it conform with our egoistical interests, but we have to "make" the individual social member and condition his or her attitude towards the social body.

What is positivist and paradoxically modern about Ferrari's otherwise orthodox dramatic theory is his belief that putting a question, challenging a particular sphere of human experience is in itself a noble and productive artistic endeavor which may stimulate a social inquiry into the meaning of progress and the shaping of the new experience.[20] What

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[20] *Along these lines move the arguments of Italian critics who defended the moral and utilitarian nature of Ferrari's thesis plays. Their analyses, however, tend towards a quasi-hagiographic description of Ferrari not so much in connection to the drama he wrote as in relation to his image as a mannered, benevolent and common-sensical intellectual celebrity of new Italy. Cf. for example, Simoni, ibid. and Traversi, ibid., 17ff.*

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has instigated serious critical concerns about the value of Ferrari's drama is not the quality of the questions, but the quality of the answers, not the idealization, the esthetization of *realtà*, but the progressive validity of these processes. Ferrari looks backwards or within society to identify the cultural clues for progress and it is his reluctance to look forward, esthetically and culturally, that has tarnished his critical reputation. Ultimately his difference with critics was primarily a difference concerning the definition of *vero* and *reale*, their relevance to the new cultural circumstances, and how these concepts were to be properly manifested on stage.[21]

Structure and dramatic technique are the weakest aspects of Ferrari's dramaturgy. His critics relate the bombast of his "novelistic" rhetoric to his rampant moralizing and view his frequent relapses to the crude *patetismo* of pre-Giacomettian *dramma lachrimoso* as proof of his limited artistic perspicacity.[22] Others have taken him to task for the

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[21]*It is here interesting to observe that Trevisani, who, despite his initial enthusiasm for Ferrari's dramatic initiatives, had grown rather skeptical about their artistic merit, thought that his plays were so realistic that they dated more quickly than they would have if they had rather painted human nature in its generality. This is an indication that for a long period during the Ottocento, the definitions of "reale" and "vero" were still very flexible and that therefore the reviews of realist plays should be just in terms of their authors' personal definitions of the terms. See Trevisani, 142.*

[22]*Silvio d' Amico and Silvana Monti, to name but two of Ferrari's most acrid critics, dismiss Ferrari as a man of the lowest artistic taste, a bourgeois and populist pseudo-intellectual whose plays have more affinities with the cheap serialized romances of the daily papers, the "romanzi d' appendice," than with French realists. Similar views were expressed throughout the rest of the 19th*

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sketchiness and the inconsistency of his characterization, the improbability of the dramatic episodes, or the ubiquitousness of the raisonneur, but they too attribute the anomalous nature of the plays to the prioritization of didacticism.[23] And yet, although the structural roughness of Ferrari's problem plays may legitimize to some degree these persistent critical reservations, his a priori indifference to stylistics and elegance in favor of emphasis and arresting pedagogical effects renders, I think, such criticism irrelevant.[24] Three elements of his technique, however, the "happy ending," the role of the "ingenue," and plot "leitmotifs" deserve some more

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century, but they now read as rather hyperbolic. Cf. Monti, 97ff and Silvio d'Amico in Jolanda Giachetti de Blasi, ed. L'Italia e gli Italiani del secolo XIX (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1930), 305-6.

[23]*Sanesi, 578-9; Roberto Bigazzi, I colori del vero. Vent'anni di narrativa: 1860-1880 (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1969), 84; Ruggero Jacobbi, "Dal regionalismo al "teatro di poesia." in Ferrone, Teatro dell'Italia unita, 15ff. Croce, 325ff.*

[24]*Critics argue that Ferrari's drama seldom enjoyed a broad popular appeal, often citing cases of clamorous failure. Although it can not be seriously argued that Ferrari was a machine constantly producing hit plays, equally it can not be seriously argued that popular reaction is an indication of sound dramaturgy. As far as Italy is concerned, the variety of audience response from town to town towards the same play, the notorious fickleness of theatre-goers and the intrusion of politics and other non-theatrical considerations into the reception of artistic works, all make audience response a very dubious evidence of artistic success. Moreover, Ferrari had personally and dynamically been involved in the production of his plays since early on, so that he was clearly in a position to control the quality of the productions, but also to improve the quality of his writing, if that was the trouble with the show. If one thinks that his popularity started to wane after 1875 — that is, after his prime — it is pertinent to theorize that Ferrari's drama did not undergo a stylistic modification simply because audiences seemed to appreciate the sensational asperity of his dramatic ideas and because actors-managers found his theatre remunerative and "theatrical.*

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detailed examination, since they elucidate the *verismo* symptoms of his dramaturgy.

Ferrari's concept of "happy ending," closely linked to his theory about life being the "theatre" of humankind, does not pertain to any notion of poetic justice, nor does it connote a fortuitous resolution of grave social dilemmas. On the contrary, whether tragic or untragic, comforting or ironic, pathetic or grotesque, this "happy ending" ensues from his deterministic socio-cultural outlook; from the idea that society with its unwritten laws and regulations predetermines the nature and the outcome of human affairs, that society is always vindicated, because people can modify the form but not the substance or the quality of its conventions. This happy ending connotes the victory of society over those challenging its naturally moral laws, and involves now the reformation of the individual social member through the tragic impact of his/her immorality or immodesty, now the restoration of social "justice," that is, the prevailing of social conventions over class or sex prejudices, and now the tragicomic, ambiguous "compliance" of the reformed protagonist with the social laws he/she has sought to defy. Since the playwright functions as the advocate of social wisdom, that is, he identifies with its moral and ethical prescriptions, it then becomes evident that it is the vindication of the playwright that renders the resolution of the thesis play "happy." According to the requirements of realism/naturalism, this intrusion of the

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playwright in the outcome of the play is evidence of "unrealistic" writing, since the playwright manipulates action and characters in order to validate his thesis, and therefore Ferrari's dramaturgy is only loosely affiliated with the realistic dogma. Yet his thesis dramaturgy argues that it is not the author who has determined the outcome, but "realism," its faithful application of society's unalterable rules in the cause-and-effect exposition of the dramatized problematic situation: Since author and "society" agree on the latter's impregnable jurisdiction over the individuals and their fates, it is society as environment and institution with its determining power that emerges as the forger of the drama and not the playwright who only "happens" to have come to terms with society. It is obvious that under this premise the theatre of Ferrari is not completely cut off from the artistic developments of his time as his critics purport. He was consciously moving toward a veristic explanation of the human situation, no matter whether later this veristic perception of the world seemed simplistic or not.

Auxiliary to this concept of naturalism and at the same time a dramaturgical remainder of romantic (melo)drama is the conspicuous role of the "ingenue" as both the play's raisonneur and the link between the realism on the stage and the "realism" of social experience. Typically, it is an innocent but upstanding young female who, while maturing through the grievous incidents of the story, argues for the

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playwright's, that is, society's case. Mario Apollonio was the first among Italian critics to bring attention to this interesting Ferrarian specimen of a dramatic character and the first one to observe that the function of this female role is to lend voice not to the author's moral ideas, but to *la verità*, the naturally expedient laws of society:

> *Come reagente a fare apparir maculato e putrido e falso quello ed ogni altro mondo che si rifiuta alle buone regole che aiutan la morale a coincidere col costume, Paolo Ferrari ha un personaggio costante d'effetto sicuro, quello dell' ingenua: "ruolo" di una teatralità che s'era aperta alle predilezioni romantiche per le anime schiette e pure, non corrotte dalla società, e nello stesso tempo mito di una società fiduciosa di avere in sè la propria medicina. Ogni commedia ha la sua ingenua, ... [ragazze] che recano... il tributo di salvezza al mondo ma corrotto, redimibile.*[25]

Apollonio rightly speculates that in Ferrari's dramatic world there exist two complementary concepts of society, the inherently moral society to which his young heroines belong, and the society of corrupt modernity which he castigates as a decadent simulacrum of the "real" thing. More negative critics have taken this two-fold concept of society as an ineffective moralistic stratagem, since, the playwright's sincere intentions notwithstanding, it only gives comfort to a bourgeois society "*che poteva accetare le sue commedie, ...*

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[25] "*As a catalyst that makes this and any other world, which rebuffs the good rules that help the moral coincide with custom, appear maculate and putrid and false, Paolo Ferrari has a character of guaranteed effectiveness, that of the ingenue: a "role" of a theatricality open to the Romantic predilections for guileless and pure souls, uncorrupted by society, and at the same time a fantasy of a society who is convinced of possessing within itself its own remedy. Every comedy has its own ingenue, ... [young girls] who have the honor of saving a corrupt but redeemable world.*" Mario Apollonio, 687.

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solo come un paravento per la propria ipocrisia, non certo per modelli di comportamento."[26] Ferrari, however, did not think of himself as an artist who made concessions to his audience's wishful thinking, but as one who was taking their pretensions to task, and his heroines-raisonneurs amply echo his reservations about a social environment where respect and integrity are wanting. As we said, Ferrari begins the debate, raises the question, shows the consequences, but does not provide the answer, because the answer lies in the play itself, in the idea that impelled its creation and provided its moral rationale: The play is the proof of the thesis, and not the events and the social interactions dramatized in it.[27]

From 1859 and until his death in 1889, together with *drammi storici*, proverb plays and adaptations of Goldonian comedies, Ferrari wrote some twelve thesis plays, each one coping with a particular social, cultural or ethical problem. As in Giacometti's case, Ferrari's ideas did not undergo any radical modification, although in his later plays, he seems to challenge the realistic precept of journalistic verisimilitude, strikingly anticipating for so early a time the discomfiting paradoxes of the *grotteschi* playwrights. Like

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[26] *"[a society] which could accept his plays ... only as a veneer for their hypocrisy, certainly not as models of comportment." Monti, 99. Also cf. Bigazzi, 84-85.*

[27] *Cf. Croce, 328, 329;*

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Giacometti, he also begins the exploration of *Italianità* with a play (Prosa [Prose]) about art and modernity, yet Ferrari focuses the discussion on the interrelations among art, society and national character with his criticism of vacuous cultural extravagance accommodated within the debate of family values. Il duello (The duel) and Gli uomini seri (The serious men), both plays written and produced in 1868, evidence Ferrari's thesis dramaturgy at its most paradigmatic, as they deal with socio-political ethos, while the 1871 Cause ed effetti (Causes and Effects) is the drama that more than any other epitomizes Ferrari's concept of naturalism. Finally Il ridicolo (The Laughingstock) and Il suicidio (The Suicide), of 1872 and 1875 respectively, deal with particular and "controversial" social and familial situations and illustrate the playwright's attempt at a more challenging application of the realistic tenets. These six *commedie a tesi* are regularly considered as Ferrari's most typical plays, and therefore a broader deliberation on their characteristics may suffice for detecting and deciding Ferrari's status as a realist.[28]

It is with Prosa[29] that the thirty-six-year-old

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[28]*His other thesis plays are: La donna e lo scettico [The woman and the skeptic] (1864), Marianna (1865), Le due dame [The Two Ladies] (1877), Alberto Pregalli (1880) La separazione [The Divorce] (1886); Amore senza stima [Priceless Love] (1868) and Amici e rivali [Friends and Enemies] (1874) are adaptations of Goldoni's La moglie saggia (The Wise Wife) and Il vero amico (The Real Friend).*

[29]*Paolo Ferrari, Prosa in Opere drammatiche vol. 4 (Milano: Libreria editrice, 1878). The play is a reworking of the 1852 drama Il Tartufo moderno, which was presented at the Teatro Communale of Modena by the troupe of Luigi*

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playwright begins his revisionistic inquiry of *Italianità*, making a positively received transition from post-Romantic to modern realism, from the "*altezze della commedia storica .. alla semplice debolezza della commedia sociale, che e maestra al nostro tempo.*"[30] It was indeed an opportune career re-orientation, because the critical political events occuring in the late 1850s facilitated his ascendance as the formidable ideologue sorting out the social and cultural credos of emerging Italy. When Prosa had its premiere in Milan, audience response was so enthusiastic that it precipitated its transfer to Rome, not a small success if one considers the haplessness of its earlier version back in 1852. In 1858, however, circumstances were pregnant with more radical risorgimento sentiments. The prospect of a united nation intensified Ferrari's bourgeois patriotism with a sense of topicality and urgency so transparent that Prosa seemed to express "*l'anima della gioventù italiana.*"[31] More than a mordant attack on the mores of an intelligensia trying to live out the emotional

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Domeniconi with Tommaso Salvini playing the main part. A succès d' estime in Modena, the production was jeered in Bologna and thus it was taken out of the company's repertory. That early version of Prosa remains to this day unpublished, and therefore impossible to assess. Interestingly, Ferrari in his "cenni storici" to Prosa alludes to papal censorship as a possible cause of its failure, since he was forced to change the original title which was taken as subversive, since it seemed reminiscent of Moliere's notorious anti-religious play. Finally, Domeniconi opened the play with the neutral title Camillo.

[30] *"From the heights of historic comedy to the plain failings of social comedy, the teacher to our times..." Yorick, Il teatro di Paolo Ferrari (Milano: C. Aliprandi, 1922), 48.*

[31] *"The soul of Italian youth." Valesi, 280.*

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hyperboles of Romanticism, the play was written as straightforward propaganda in favor of bourgeois family values projecting a model of society, where family, duty and "respectability" constitute indispensable principles of *Italianità*. In a letter to Achille Majeroni, a well-known actor-manager, Ferrari explained his remedial objectives:

> *la Prosa è un fine studio psicologico sulla malattia della immaginazione che oggi fa strage tra i nostri giovani letterati o poeti; malattia d'orgoglio, di vanità, di egoismo, d' accidia: è il divorzio dell'intelligenza italiana dalla tradizione domestica, e il traviamento colpevole fra le simpatie forestiere, di cui ultima conseguenza sarà il suicidio, se la patria tradizione non varrà con la soavità della sua poesia regolare e generosa a richiamarci pentiti al suo connubio. Vedrai questo concetto sgorgare evidente da tutte le parti del lavoro. Pel pubblico grosso, la mia tesi servirà a mostrare come la fonte d' ogni vera poesia e generosa ispirazione stia nella vita del dovere ... La famiglia non è nella mia commedia che la formula più semplice, più perfetta e più artistica della vita del dovere."*[32]

This declaration of programmatic dramaturgy, repeated mutatis mutandis in later letters and prefatory *cenni storici* to his published plays, entails all the key concepts of his theatre: drama as psychological study, art as a beneficial instructor, family and the life of duty as the point of departure for any inquiring venture into the essence of modern *realtà*. That

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[32] *Prosa is a gentle psychological study on the malady of imagination which nowadays goes rampant among our young intellectuals or poets; a malady of arrogance, vanity, selfishness, and tedium: it is the divorce of Italian genius from domestic tradition, and the fatal deviation towards foreign trends, the ultimate consequence of which will be suicide, if the national tradition with the smoothness of its regular and generous poetry will not be capable of getting us back contrite into union. You will see this concept emanate clearly from all the parts of the work. For the unenlightened audiences, my thesis will serve to show how the fountain of all true poetry and benevolent inspiration abides in the life of duty ... In my play, family is not anything if not the simplest, most perfect, most artistic model of the life of duty." Cited in Traversi, 23.*

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these ideas formed the credo of a playwright sincerely concerned about the fortunes of a *borghesia* inured to fighting for, yet inexperienced in exerting their national rights within normal social situations is something that Ferrari's critics invariably tend to overlook when writing about his "abstract" characterizations and social configurations. Focusing on the uneven structure of the play and the ponderousness of the dramatic idiom, they take his social study as fictitious and unrealistic, a banal italianization of French *pièces Z thése*[33] and not as a projection, in dramatic terms, of a society still in the making, a "*presentimento*" of its formation as if that were a fact.[34] Because, indeed, Prosa is a pioneering work in its establishing the thematic nucleus of end-of-the-century bourgeois *verismo*: family-society-love-ethos.[35]

The central character in Prosa is Camillo Blana, a vainglorious bourgeois poetaster, who thinks that his talent

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[33]*Diego Valeri has tried to demonstrate a close relationship between Prosa and well known French realist plays: Augier's Aventurière and Gabrielle, and Octave Feuillet's Dalilah. His rhetoric betrays his conviction that here as elsewhere Ferrari was a consummate plagiarizer more than a mediocre creator, and that his plays merely transliterate French values as Italian. Valeri in fact regurgitates critical views already established when he writes his study (1909) with the difference that he goes into great depths in detecting similarities and analogies between Ferrari's plays and their purported models. Consequently, later critics have more or less taken Valeri's word for granted and thus it has become customary to judge Ferrari not as a special case of a playwright but in comparison with his French peers.*

[34]*G. L. Piccardi, "Il teatro italiano contemporaneo," Nuova Antologia, vol. 6 (November 1877), 710.*

[35]*Cf. Edy Lanza "Autori minori del novecento," Testo 12 (1986), 175.*

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and poetic inspiration have been drained in a "prosaic" uneventful marriage, whereas he should challenge his imagination by travelling, living on the fast line and experiencing strong emotions in romantic relationships with (wealthy) women who defy social norms. Pitying himself as an unacknowledged Italian Byron, whom respectable social conventions have rendered a spiritual wreck, Camillo blames the affection and the kindness of his wife, Elena, a talented former opera singer, as the main cause depressing his genius, even though his idealism does not prevent him from carrying on a clandestine yet romanticized affair with Teresa, a frivolous sort of femme fatale, who for Camillo embodies the ideal muse. To another Italo-French poetaster, Errico Boîsapre, he explains that the *prosa* of his family life has distorted his poetic outlook, thus rendering him "*avvilito, sconfortato, senz' avenire, stanco, mortalmente stanco di vivere.*"[36] Elena who accidentally overhears his misgivings, resolves to set him free of his conjugal obligations and abandons him along with their young daughter.

The rest of the play develops as a sequence of episodes chronicling the falseness of Camillo's life aspirations and the *prosa* of his reckless life-style. His poetry being negatively received, he turns to the theatre, but his plays are hissed and closed down. He has dissipated his considerable

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[36] *"demoralized, discouraged, without a future, tired, mortally tired of living." Prosa Act 1, sc. III, 26.*

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fortune, amassed huge debts and compromised his own reputation. His current social circle, a conceited show-business demi-monde of capricious opera singers, superficial art critics and amoral socialites, far from stimulating his poetic mind, has exasperated him to the point of considering suicide. In the meantime, Elena who has never stopped caring for him, has successfully resumed her singing career under the name of her twin sister, a soprano with an illustrious career in America, yet not longer alive. Aware of Camillo's grave social and artistic failures, she ventures to lift him up from despair, but not before teaching him a lesson. When coming across him, she denies her true identity and letting the doubt linger about who she really is, she exposes to Camillo all the vile shortcomings of "Romantic" life. Once realizing Camillo's resolution to end his life, she sends him their daughter and it is the innocence of the young girl that shows him at last the "poetry" of domestic life and prevents him from suicide. No sooner has Camillo recanted his "unrealistic" vision of good living than his father explains the meaning of bourgeois life "poetry:"

> *La famiglia non è rispetto alla vita del dovere, che ciò che è la domenica rispetto al lavoro. Noi dobbiamo spendere i nostri sei giorni di fatica in alacre operosità o per civiltà, o per la patria, o pel commercio, o per le scienze, o per le arti; e poscia ecco il settimo giorno, la domenica, il giorno della famiglia, per riposarci e riprendere nuova lena. Questa è vera poesia ... (Act V, last scene).*[37]

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[37] *"In the life of duty family is no different from what Sunday is with regard to work. We have the obligation to spend our six days of labor working*

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Evidently, the figurative polarity *prosa-poesia* serves Ferrari and his edifying purposes not only as a means of clearly distinguishing between dutiful life and anything else antithetical to it, but also as a guileless subterfuge expediting a wider anatomy of socio-cultural concerns. The action ostensibly takes place in Triesti and Milan, but Ferrari, far from photographing the particular characteristics of their respective local societies, draws upon all sorts of stereotypes, in order to create a neutral pattern of society in search of some civic identity. The *italianità* of the play's microcosm, whether in cultural or ethical terms, is an amalgam consisting of preconceived notions about the world of art, sex or class attitudes, national cultural self-sufficiency, or the incompatibility between national and foreign socio-cultural customs. It would be, however, simplistic to charge Ferrari with plagiarizing French concepts of society, just because Italian reality was not homogeneous enough to furnish a concrete example of national life; or with succumbing to the generic conventions of melodrama, because his artistic vision is too limited to allow him a more substantial anatomy of a particular social mentality.[38] What in fact Ferrari has

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with zeal for the culture, the country, the commerce, the sciences, the arts; and then comes the seventh day, Sunday, the day for family, the day to rest and regain new vigor. This is the true poetry... Prosa, 170.

[38] *For reservations about dramaturgical and plot discrepancies in Prosa see Sanesi, 569.*

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aspired to achieve is tearing down the pretensions of the romantic world, the disparagement of the romantic social utopias and the substitution of a new "realist" social order for the unrealistic older one.

Camillo Blana, a cultural progeny of (pre-)Risorgimento utopian romanticism, functions as Ferrari's guinea pig, upon which the playwright will test, analyze and determine the validity, the utility and the humaneness of the life-program advocated by romanticism. All the excesses of romantic sociology "romanticized" and culturally promoted as natural norms of living -- emotionalism, pansexualism, agnosticism, nostalgia for imaginary utopias, the nobility of suicide, and so on -- become for Ferrari a target of tragicomic mockery, a cause for defending pragmatism as a saner social program. It is not, therefore, a reactionary conservatism that feeds Ferrari's propensity to moralize, but rather a progressive optimism which informs the parabolic episodes of his play. Redefining the meaning and the purpose of modern life--*prosa* and *poesia* are simplifying signifiers needing not re-definition but new definition--this is essentially the thesis of Prosa.

Trevisani and other critics have seen Ferrari's play as a xenophobic apology of an undetermined *Italianità*, but this interpretation applies more to what they perceive as Ferrari's

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intentions rather than to the actual ends served in the play.[39] Ferrari's rhetoric in fact is not exhausted in deliberating the goodness of this idea or the badness of that custom in terms of ethics and social comportment. On the contrary, he consistently applies a utilitarian method for measuring the humane qualities of modern practices, so that in lieu of inquiring "What is good for an Italian," Ferrari sets forth the question "What is useful--that is, pragmatic, practical, comforting--for an Italian society?" It is true that his utilitarian progressivism, based as it is on bias and popular conventions, emerges rather idiosyncratic and moot, but taken within the cultural circumstances of 1858, his inquiries express with the concerns of a statesman and not the apprehensions of a pedant. This utilitarian dimension of his inquiry comes across very early on in the play and in a language almost identical to that utilized in the final speech: When Camillo irates his father with his "eccentric" dismissal of family as a mere means for procreation, Giacomo, who represents the generation of Italian Enlightenment, asserts that

> *...A parte lo strafalcione di chiamare verità la famiglia, mezzo e non fine dell'esistenza, questa esagerazione può passare, o come novità bizzara, o come specie di riparazione su quei teatri ove da trent' anni si è troppo spesso sbeffegiato quanto ha di più sacro la famiglia; ma io, che ho sempre adorato la famiglia, ti dico poio chiaro e tondo che credo l'uomo destinato a qualche cosa di meglio che alla vita del bigatto da seta, e che per la famiglia non rinnegherò mai o la civiltà o la patria, o il commercio, o l'*

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[39] *Trevisani, 140.*

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industria, o le scienze, o le arti, come che tutta questa roba fosse errore, follia o delitto. (Act I, sc. 1)[40]

It is interesting to observe that Giacomo, who is supposedly a reactionary conservative, views family in a dialectical relationship with the other fields of human action, as a sine qua non for responsible and enlightened citizenship; it is Camillo who, though supposedly modern and open-minded, denies the correlation between private and public life, espousing what he calls a "system of reciprocal independence" between real life and art. Truly enough, Giacomo and later Elena are conceived as champions of the bourgeois spirit, people who view living as a courageous act of self-realization and praise domestic life--the essence of *borghesia* --as alpha and omega of human experience. But this thesis does not connote that family is the ultimate justification of bourgeois existence, but that it is what sustains human life as an experience worth going through. In terms of the plot, Ferrari proves the argument by making Laurina, Camillo's daughter, the savior of his life, the agent forcing him to re-examine his values and respect his life as a *verità*, capable of inspiring happiness and industry. Her means to rescind her

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[40]*Apart from the blunder of calling family a "verità" [the emphasis is Ferrari's], a means and not a purpose of existence, this exaggeration can pass either as a bizarre novelty or as some kind of recourse to that kind of drama that for the past thirty years has too often mocked the sanctity of family; but I who have always cherished family, I tell you clearly and simply that I take man to be destined for something better than the life of a silkworm and that for the sake of family I will never repudiate culture, country, commerce, industry, science or the arts, as if all that stuff were a mistake, some madness or a crime.* Prosa, *19.*

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father's resolution to die is not some touching childish sermon, but a poem that awakens Camillo's desire to honor his "moral obligation" towards her, his obligation to live. And this poem is about the responsibility of the father as poet-citizen where poet and citizen respectively mean creator and patriot:

> *E mi gridi in tuo nome: Or la primiera*
> *Fede dell' Arte ov' è? Corri alla meta!*
> *Non lasciati rapir la tua bandiera,*
> *D'uomo, di cittadino e di poeta!*
>
> *Sorgi e combatti! E mostra un' altra volta*
> *con quel genio civil che Iddio ti dona,*
> *che se ogni altra corona a noi fu tolta,*
> *ben nostra ancor dell' arti è la corona.*[41]

Ferrari does not want anything, if not the making of a national, patriotic *borghesia*.

The playwright has taken no liberties with the structural conventions of melodramatic comedy. As with Giacometti and Ciconi, his dramatic language, while essentially "realistic," is still literary and novelistic, luxuriating in overstatement and magniloquence. Yet these aesthetic excesses prove congenial to Ferrari's propagandistic rationale. So long as the characters are drawn as boldly and articulately as Camillo and Elena, the lack of a naturalistic idiom does not prove as a serious drawback. Of course, compared to Verga and Giacosa,

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[41] *And you shout at me in your name: Where is/ your original faith in Art? Run until the end/ Don't let your banner/ of man, citizen and poet be taken away.// Rise and fight! And once again prove/ with that civil genius that God gives you/ that, even if they have taken us all other crowns,/ the crown of the arts is still ours.* Prosa, *169.*

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Ferrari is a more primitive playwright and not veristic at all. But as we said, Ferrari has a different idea of realism and one must accept and conform with this idea, if one is to assess him as someone with some important things to contribute to Italy's *dramma borghese*.[42]

Il duello[43], one of Ferrari's most enduring successes in the course of the nineteenth century,[44] came about at a time when every single aspiration of the Risorgimento seemed to materialize and the spirit of positivism was already at work exerting an invigorating impact on Italian culture.[45] When the play opened at the Teatro Niccolini in Florence in 1868, nobody could anticipate that it would instigate the first *verismo* controversy in the history of modern Italian drama. Luigi Capuana's panning review in the newspaper La Nazione, a provocative exception among otherwise unanimous critical and popular acclaim,[46] set the grounds for the

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[42] *For an opposite view, cf. Silvio d'Amico, "Il 'teatro teatrale' di Paolo Ferrari," Dramma sacro e profano (Roma: Tumminnelli, 1942), 91-101.*

[43] *Paolo Ferrari, Il duello in Teatro Scelto vol. VIII (Milano: Casa Editrice, 1878).*

[44] *Cf. Paolo Emilio Poesio, "I teatri, " Rassegna storica toscana 12 (1966), 102-3; Mantovani, Nuova Antologia, 53.*

[45] *Italian historians agree that the era of Positivism in Italy officially begins with the publication of Pasquale Villari's article "La filosofia positiva e il metodo storico" in the magazine Il politecnico. For more on positivism and naturalism see chapter 4.*

[46] *Why Capuana's negativism towards Il duello created such a stir among the Florentines applauding Ferrari's sociological study, it is easy to understand since it was for the realism and the artistry of his play that Ferrari was*

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debate about the nature, the esthetics and the purpose of the new movement, the first in-depth inquiry into what the spirit of Realism really is or should be. Although for Capuana the play was nothing more than a convoluted "cloak and sword" melodrama luxuriating in hyperbole, pathos and inverisimilitude, thus a travesty and not a model of realistic drama, his criteria were basically stylistic and his objections had to do with language and dramaturgy. Inevitably his review seemed to invalidate many of the current assumptions about Realism and drama and Ferrari did not abstain from the debate. So strongly did he believe in the realistic temperament of his work, that Capuana's strictures seemed to him not unfair but incomprehensible. In a letter to Ferdinando Martini, a fellow playwright and a critic, written soon after Capuana's review, Ferrari insisted that his dramaturgical purpose was objectivity and clarity of argument:

> *non volendo teorizzare sopra il duello, condussi gli episodi del drama in modo che servissero col sistema della esemplificazione ad esporre al pubblico la mia teoria sopra i giudizî volgari e i pregiudizî umani e sopra le contraddizioni inevitabili tra la Logica assoluta e la Logica pratica.*[47]

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awarded with four thousand lire in the annual Florence concorso, established in 1860 in order to honor the best play contributing to the "risorgimento del teatro italiano." Cf. Siro Ferrone, Teatro Italiano, xlv; and Ugo Pesci, Firenze capitale (1865-1870) (Firenze: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1904), 411ff. With regard to the controversy and Capuana see Antonio Palermo, "La formazione critica di Luigi Capuana." Filologia e letteratura 10 (1964), 374-75.

[47] *"Unwilling to theorize over the duel, I have managed the dramatic episodes in such a way that through exemplification they would expose to the public my own theory on vulgar judgements and human prejudices, as well as on the inevitable contradictions between absolute and practical Logic." Letter cited in Mazzoni, Storia letteraria d' Italia, 989. See also Monti, 100.*

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Capuana's criticism, shared by several later scholars of Italian drama, was that the play had fallen short of accomplishing clarity as a condition for an objective analysis, that the plot was constantly undermining realism and *realtà*, and that performance, not intention, should be the object of a serious review. Be this as it may, Il duello has a particular interest for the history of Italian realism. It is the first play in which Ferrari introduces naturalistic thinking in the justification of human actions, social circumstances and character and the first in which action illustrates the author's point without his direct involvement in the play's thought.[48] Indeed, the play seemed modern, not only because its subject-matter was a sensitive ethical issue for a borghesia obsessed with updating its mores, but also because it was focused on explicating and not just pondering on human actions or social tensions.

Complex personal relationships dominate an intricate story originating from Italy's recent revolutionary past and involving two men whose destinies continuously cross paths. Adriano Gianogi and Rodolfo Sirchi were conspirators during

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[48] *In his cenni storici to the play, Ferrari points to the play's advanced naturalism and autobiographical elements, when he declares that "quasi tutti i momenti piu spiccatti, le frasi piu incisive sulla questione del duello, sono nella mia commedia semplici riproducioni di fatti veri, di parole dette o udite nelle circonstanze in cui dovetti prender parte a qualche quistione d' onore." [In my play almost all the most striking moments, the most incisive phrases on the issue of duelling, are mere reproductions of real events, of words said or heard in circumstances where I had to stand as witness in a matter of honor.]* Prosa, *7.*

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the events of 1848, the former an ideologue and the latter an opportunistic maverick. Caught and imprisoned, Sirchi betrays his comrades to save his life and Gianogi is one of the patriots who suffer the consequences of his cowardliness. After a brief crisis of remorse and an abortive attempt at suicide, Sirchi finds cynicism and opportunism more congenial to his personality, unscrupulously adapting to the circumstances. First he works as a secret service man of the Borbonic regime and abusing his power he persecutes his personal enemies and his political antagonists. With the revolution over, he switches to republicanism, always remaining a man for whom the end justifies the means and evil is a necessary way of making it through life. Years later, that is after the 1860 revolutions, the two men meet again, but this time Gianogi is known as the lawyer Mario Amari, a war veteran honored and decorated by the King for his services to the nation, and a writer of a book proving the futility of duel as a justice-serving practice. Gianogi/Amari has a daughter, Emilia, whose tutor and benefactor, after the death of his own wife, has been the countess Sirchi, a woman who married Sirchi out of deference to her parents, while secretly in love with Gianogi. This sad woman, estranged from her husband, had assumed the role of "mother" in order to exonerate her husband's injustice to Amari. Sirchi provokes Amari to a duel, but when he refuses to accept the challenge, Sirchi hurts himself in order to inculpate Amari as the

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miscreant. Amari takes his case to a tribunal, but, found guilty of attempted murder, is condemned to imprisonment. Not being willing to tolerate another injustice, Amari resolves to retreat from his "progressive" ideas, since fighting a duel would be a legitimate proof of his innocence and honor. While he confronts a member of Sirchi's gang, Sirchi himself duels with captain Denordi, Emilia's fiancé, who has to defend the honor of Emilia when Sirchi claims that Amari is only worthy to fight with "lesser" people. It seems, however, that Sirchi, corrupt and foolhardy though he is, has a redeeming flash of grandeur. During his duel with Denordi, he lets himself be killed, so that Amari's honor can be restored: With Sirchi dead, Amari can make public Sirchi's "hidden" papers that prove his innocence all along, and can also marry Sirchi's widow, who, although aware of her husband's iniquities had kept secret her contempt in order to protect "her daughter's" respect for him. The thesis of the play, which Capuana dismissed as offending any notion of *vita* and *verità*[49], is that the duel, however antiquated it is as a social custom, is nonetheless quite often the only way out from circumstances challenging social order, therefore "useful" as society's last resort to enforce justice, when the law fails the test of fairness.

In Il Duello Ferrari essentially dramatizes the conflict

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[49] *Luigi Capuana, Il teatro Italiano contemporaneo (Palermo: Pedone Lauriel, 1872), 137-158.*

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of two opposing views on the eponymous issue and although at the end he seems to side with the rather conservative notion about the legitimacy of dueling, "poetic justice" is averted --Sirchi's death is clearly a suicide-- and more importantly the social message remains ambiguous. This ambiguity is intentional and carefully orchestrated: It connotes the author's acknowledgement that as in life conflicting social ideas have equal moral weight, so modern drama should mirror this "fact," and that his personal opinion, although clearly articulated, should not come through as the only truth. It is not that Ferrari forsakes his moralistic ideals altogether, but it is the multifaceted illustration of *verità* that decides the argument's *moralità*. Of course, this new dramaturgical initiative is not a corruption, but a modernization of the *teatro educatore* ideal. It means that Ferrari begins to come into terms with a new idea about an author's responsiblity towards modernity: No longer an instructor, the playwright may function more effectively as an informer and, to use modern media jargon, an "infotainer." It is a case of "instructive" naturalism, a method for depicting not only generic social models, but also for projecting achievable social structures for modern Italy. As we said, realism is not an aesthetic for Ferrari, but a medium for social (re)formation.[50]

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[50] *For an opposite view see Bigazzi who argues that "[la psicologia]... è per il Ferrari solo un ulteriore mezzo per attingere ciò a cui sono rivolti i suoi sforzi, la società ... egli sente l' unità dei fattori che compongono il gran corpo sociale, ma ha troppa fiducia nella sua mano taumaturgica che, mentre*

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Yet nowhere are the naturalistic tendencies more evident than in Ferrari's effort to forge strong associations between character development and environment, social behavior and specific milieu, history and modernity. Il duello is a character-driven play and the exploration of the characters' past history is pivotal, not only for the realistic rendition of the story but also for the function of the thesis. Bits and pieces of information about the heroes and the formation of their character are scattered throughout the plot, but Ferrari has also a tedency to sum up these "details" in "narrative" accounts of events and situations already hinted at in various stages during the course of the play. Usually such technique--for some critics a borrowing from opera or popular literature--is evidence of dramaturgical ineptitude, but Ferrari makes a more sophisticated use of it. By having the same piece of information recounted by two or more characters, he equates "realism" with "variety of perspectives:" the greater number of different voices expressing different versions of the same "fact," the more effectively *verità* comes through. Thus realism is achieved through the variety of attitudes towards

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isola in laboratorio i tipi umani ... scompone la realtà in problemi: i tipi sono messi a confronto con i problemi e ... ne disolvono la storicità riportandoli a postulati morali..." [For Ferrari, psychology is an ulterior means for attaining that which is the target of his endeavors, namely, society ... he senses the unity of the factors composing the broad social corpus, but he is so immensely confident in the thaumaturgy of his writing that while he sorts human types as if in a laboratory, ... he breaks reality in problems: the types are set against the problems and destroy their historicity re-introducing them as moral postulates..." Op. cit., 81-2.

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a particular character (usually towards Sirchi), the complexity of responses towards the particular events and the diversity of social backgrounds informing individual reactions to specific circumstances.[51] It is in fact, the same technique that Pirandello himself would refine as a means of proving the impossibility of agreeing upon a common version of reality, but in 1868 Ferrari is availing himself of it as a means of "objective" documentation and not as a means of highlighting people's failure to understand their condition. The character of Sirchi, perhaps Ferrari's most accomplished creation in all his dramaturgy,[52] lends itself as a perfect vehicle for elucidating not only the playwright's *verismo* method, but also the manner with which character, motivation and life experience are interrelated in order to produce a type of human being according to nature and *verità*.[53]

Sirchi, a character whose obvious ancestors in the theatre are Ernani and Tribulet,[54] in addition to being a

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[51]*Cf. Appolonio, Storia del teatro italiano, 689.*

[52]*Croce, 325; Piccardi, 711.*

[53]*Writing of Sirchi, G.L. Piccardi calls him "temperamento italiano per eccellenza, prodotto esotico del nostro ambiente e del nostro tempo." ["An Italian temperament par excellence, a fascinating product of our milieu and our times..."] but this is an argument valid for all of Ferrari's characters in this and his later plays, not at all incongruous with his will to re-create a verità, edifyingly informative and morally efficacious. Piccardi, ibid., 411.*

[54]*Again Valeri traces, although with less persuasion this time, similarities between Sirchi and some characters of Augier's and Feuillet's plays: the characters Montrichard and D' Estrigaud in Augier's Marriage d' Olympe and La contagion respectively as well as others in Feuillet's Montjoye. Ibid., 288-291.*

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reckless rogue, is also a man with a unique sense of self-awareness, a man who is as cruel to himself as to the people around him. And this self-awareness is communicated not only by the self-deprecating remarks scattered throughout his speeches, but also by the manner in which he, or other characters explain his compulsive maliciousness as evidence of innate dastardness and deviant upbringing: He is a virulent malcontent raised by monks and *"[consegnato] al mondo, bambino a vent'anni, corrotto e bigotto, senza salute e senza charattere."*[55] His long-suffering wife gives a more complete analysis of his aberrance as the result of maladjusted living, a common phenomenon of contemporary life:

> *La storia di Sirchi non e una commedia, e un romanzaccio: e il romanzaccio cotidiano di tanti giovinastri - ne vediamo della frotte per le vie - che attraverso ad una fanciulezza viziata prima dai rigorismi monastici, poi dallo sbagliarsi delle curiosità represse, arrivano malamente alla giovinezza; poi attraverso ad una giovinezza dissoluta, accidiosa, consumata nelle incostanze della poltroneria, nei milla vani conati, ieri artisti, oggi cospiratori, domani agenti teatrali, quel altro di soldati, ..., all' ultimo vagabondi, senza scopo, senza fede, arrivano alla virilità, carichi di debiti e di vigliacherie, idrofobi d'invidia e d'impotenza - educati bene sarebbero stati eroi."*[56]

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[55] *"Delivered to the world, a twenty-year-old lad, corrupt and a bigot, with no health and no character..."* Il Duello, *Act II, 49.*

[56] *"Sirchi's story is not a comedy, but an ordinary little story: it is the daily story of countless lads - we see them by the lots in the streets - who through a childhood first perverted by monastic rigors, and then by the unbridled satisfaction of their repressed longings, reach a maladjusted adolescence; then through a dissolute and indolent life, consumed in the ups and downs of idleness, in thousands of futile endeavors, yesterday artists, today gang members, tomorrow*

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And when Mario Amari declines to duel with Sirchi, he associates the duel with psychological debility and social immaturity, the latter a consequence of the former:

> *Quando un uomo stima la sua vita meno del suo cigaro -perchè non ha più nè passato, nè avvenire - abbia il diritto di ricordare al facile egoismo dei duelli, si per sbarazzarsi da una vita che deve nascondere, sia per soffocare le discussioni che potrebbero smascherarlo.*[57]

Evidently, Ferrari is consciously trying to present modern human beings as multi-faceted and complex individuals forged by historical circumstances (revolution, political fluctuations, etc.), social environment (including school and professional life) and natural innate impulses (behavioral determinism), and anatomise their customs as parts of culture also determined by history and circumstance. The message is clear: Social institutions such as the duel continue to exist because there must be something useful in them for society to maintain them (social/ethical determinism) and they will continue to exist as long as human society remains basically unchanged.

In Gli uomini serii, yet another but less popular play from 1868, Ferrari takes to task post-Risorgimento national

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theatre bookers, some soldiers and others journalists or impresarios, eventually drifters with no purpose and no faith, they reach manhood burdened by debts and iniquities, maniacs of jealousy and helplessness - had they been well educated, they would have become heroes. Prosa, act. 1, sc. IV, 27.

[57] *"When a man values his life less than his cigar - because he has no past and no future - he has the right to resort to the facile egoism of duels, either in order to get rid of a life he has to conceal, or in order to suppress discussions that could expose him for what he is..."* Prosa, *Act III, 67.*

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politics and its failure to promote Italy's social progress, while honoring *Italianità* and its cultural heritage.[58] The whole play revolves around Anna, a heiress and a widow, her inheritance and her custodians-relatives. After the death of her father, the family's huge property is in bad shape and therefore an easy target for creditors and speculators. As executors of his testament, the late Ripalaghi Lavena has left his brother Raniero, a conceited duke, Leonardo, the prudent son of another (dead) brother and Sergio, the son of his sister and an ambitious opportunist, both of them in love with Anna. Sergio, considered by family members the master mind among the Ripalaghi, enjoys a more controversial reputation among his political peers, who although respectful of his political vision, do not take his proposals seriously. Nonetheless, with his authority over the family secure, he takes himself as the best suitor of Anna, and his uncle Raniero, who counts on his influence in order to get elected in the Parliament, is only too eager to oblige him, when he asks for her hand. Anna gives also her consent, but this is a decision that will soon put her inheritance in risk.

When the family meets to discuss ways by which to save the property, Sergio and Leonardo propose diametrically opposite ideas. Sergio, eager to use the property of his

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[58] *Paolo Ferrari, Gli uomini serii in Opere drammatiche vol. 5 (Milano: Libreria editrice, 1878). The comedy was written in 1864 but opened at the Teatro delle Loggie by the troupe of Alamanno Morelli four years later.*

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future wife for his political ambitions, is urged by his "political advisors" to pursue a radical, "technocratic" solution: Since a large part of the property is mortgaged or outside the territory of the free Italian kingdom, he proposes to turn the family into a consolidated business company, sell the family art collection to England to procure capital, and repay the creditors by taking them as favored investors in the "company." On the contrary, Leonardo, who thinks that an old family like theirs is not an investment business but Italian cultural capital, with a duty to save and respect patrimony as if it were public property, proposes to the other family members to become the saviors of the family honor. It should be they who will buy the family collection, who should reinvest in the various productive sectors of the property and who should benefit from an utilization of the family business. Sergio's proposal prevails, to the general detriment, his own and his family supporters. The rest of the play turns then to a convoluted comedy of intrigue, in which lawyers and speculators take the lead, until it becomes obvious that Leonardo was the sincere and prudent *Italiano* in the family and Sergio the calculating, reckless and, as it is revealed, womanizing profiteer. After putting down his family kin in order to save appearances, and just before dishonoring irreparably the name of the family, Sergio concedes defeat and agrees to follow Leonardo's plan. In the meantime Anna has become aware of Sergio's duplicity and Leonardo's integrity,

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resolving to marry him instead of Sergio, whose desperate effort to regain her love fails ludicrously. Humiliated but sobered, Sergio has learned what a true *uomo serio* should be.

A political *commedia a tesi*, Gli uomini serii is structured as a modern morality allegory. As the financial travails of a venerable aristocratic family, the comedy's epicenter, are linked and intertwined with the dirty business of politics-as-usual, Ferrari treats the family as a miniature model of Italy and inspects its tensions and contradictions as a sample of the deficiencies marring the nation's modernization. The social "tribe" alluded to in the title of the play represents what is for the *borghesia* the ideal role model for a new type of Italianità. Ferrari, however, is a moderate thinker when it comes to endorsing the "modern," that is, untested patterns of polity, and he therefore hastens to caution that a positivist outlook towards life and society is beneficial only so long as opportunism and self-indulgence are kept in control.

If Leonardo is a paragon of modern manhood and patriotism, Sergio represents a type of citizen that Ferrari dreads to visualize as the prevailing *Italiano*. When Sergio aggressively asserts that

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> *sono un uomo del mio tempo: tremendi problemi, grandi ambiziosi; io sono uno di questi: e salgo su pel mio sentiero ... sentiero angusto, sul quale non si serba l'equilibrio che a patto di correr via, sempre avanti, coll'occhio fisso alla mèta; chi si ferma a guardare dove mette il piede, precipita giù."*[59]

Ferrari can only recommend circumspection, because these *grandi ambiziosi* are not Italians at heart, and thus are detrimental to the *patria*. Yorick, an esteemed conservative critic, a committed champion of utilitarian realism and an apologist for Ferrarian drama, echoes Ferrari's social anxieties when he explains *"gli uomini serii"* as the paragons of the new positivist era, whose outlook is nonetheless not at all always uniform and magnanimous:

> *gli uomini di proposito, sodi, positivi, esperimentati, che non si lasciano uccellare dalle parole ma guardano alle cose, che non corrono dietro alle illusioni, ma pensano, pesano, calcolano, paragonano, e prestano il concorso dell'opera loro soltanto alle imprese utili, vantaggiose, conformi all'indole degli uomini e allo spirito de'tempi ... Vi sono quelli che sacrificano a un idolo solo: l'utilitarismo... [che] hanno messo l'abbaco nell'posto dell'ispirazione, contano, non pensano... [e poi] ci sono gli uomini che sanno conciliare le ragioni dell'utile con le aspirazioni del bello e del buono... Invocano l'avvenire ma rispettano il passato, vogliono che il popolo si trasformi, si migliori, si perfezioni, ma desiderano che la esplicazione di questo progresso si faccia in modo conforme all'indole sua, alle sue tendenze, alle sue speciali attitudini, al suo carattere particolare.*[60]

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[59] *"I am a man of my times: tremendous problems, greatly ambitious; I am one of them: and I go my way ... a rocky way on which you keep the balance only to run further, always forward, with the eyes fixed on the final destination; whoever stops to see where he steps, falls down."* Gli uomini serii *(Act II, sc. VIII).*

[60] *"men of decision, intrepid, positivist, men of experience, who don't let themselves be deceived by words but pay attention to the particulars, who don't pay attention to illusions, but think, ponder, calculate, compare, and orientate their business only toward useful and advantageous enterprises, according to human nature and the modern spirit ... There are those who sacrifice only to one idol: utilitarism, who have replaced inspiration with an abacus, who compute but don't contemplate ... and then there are the men who know how to reconcile*

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Modern society, Ferrari argues, needs this new progressivist spirit, but the new *borghesia*, the new leading class, has to protect the essence of its culture, and its progress should not take place at the expense of its humanity. Given Ferrari's pedagogic temperament and his penchant for tedious speeches especially when politics enter into the discussion of *italianità*, the play is a comedy only in principle, that is, only because it sets out to deride political careerism and its impact on the soul of Italy. Certainly hilarity is not a priority when *società* is at stake, but Ferrari has nonetheless some obligations to meet as a popular "infotainer." With a variety of secondary characters- lawyers, speculators, creditors, activists, foreign socialites and art collectors-- inserted to offer comic relief, Ferrari tries unsuccessfully to raise the energy of the action and amplify its theatricality. These peripheral characters, caricatures rather than types, yet recognizable as fixtures of daily life, matter only as lively tokens of

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utilitarian reasoning with aspiring to the beautiful and the good, who ply the future but also respect the past, who want the nation to change and improve, but who want the realization of this progress to occur in a manner conforming with its nature, its inclinations, its very own attitudes, with its particular character. These are the two species of "serious men." Yorick [P. Coccoluto Ferrigni] Il teatro di Paolo Ferrari (Milano: Aliprandi, 1922), 80-1. The excerpt is part of the review Yorick wrote for the play's first run in Florence. It is pertinent to speculate that due to the close friendship between Ferrari and Yorick, Ferrari's ideas and concepts often found their place in Yorick's articles. I am not suggesting that Yorick was a compromised critic -he was often rather critical of Ferrari's dramaturgy - but only that his reviews often summed up and championed his friend's rationale.

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contemporaneity.[61] However, their chorus-like involvement in the events is too contrived to suggest a function other than that of generating intrigue.

The family as a microcosm displaying the controversies and the anomalies of modern Italianità is revisited in the 1871 play Cause ed effetti.[62] Immediately, this title, with its darwinian nuances, attests to Ferrari's interest in the analytical, "scientific" study of the forces shaping modernity, but this time his upbeat enthusiasm for the corrective impetus of his diatribes has receded in favor of a stark determinism, not unlike that dominating European naturalism. Certainly one should not expect at this early age of Italian verismo a complex interpretation of life from a playwright with the tendency to simplify and compartmentalize social experience as case studies conducive to lessons of civic virtue. Yet compared to Il duello, Cause ed effetti offers a more "logical," that is, a more realistic explanation of the human situation as the effect of choices made or prescribed at a specific *moment* and in a specific *milieu*. The play is therefore an important document of early verismo,

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[61] *Cf. Bigazzi, 78ff.*

[62] *Paolo Ferrari, Cause ed effetti in Opere drammatiche vol. 4 (Milano: Libreria editrice, 1878). The play was written for the company of Pia Marchi and Francesco Ciotti. It opened in Milan at the Teatro Re. The play had a success and it was soon presented throughout the peninsula by various companies, not least that of Alamanno Morelli. In the "cenni storici," Ferrari states that writing the play was for him like a therapeutic session, since it was the death of his daughter that inspired him to transcribe the experience of her loss in the fourth act of the play.*

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because it provides the ideological seeds for the Milanese verismo of Giuseppe Giacosa and Marco Praga.[63]

The play opens at the opulent Florence mansion of Duca Lodovico Castellieri-Estense, where he is to sign a prenuptial arrangment with Marquis Ermanno Olivaria-Gonzaga, the man he has chosen as the most appropriate husband for his young daughter Anna. Everything about this union appears perfect and auspicious, as befits the status and the traditions of *alta borghesia*:

> *LODOVICO: Si, veramente nozze felici, felicissime. Nessuna disparità; mia figlia, duchessa: lo sposo, marchese; mia figlia, una Castellieri-Estense: lo sposo, un Olivaria-Gonzaga; mia figlia, un milione: lo sposo, due; mia figlia, dicianove anni: lo sposo, trenta; belli, simpatici entrambi; due bei nomi, due belle sostanze, due belle persone. Sfido un autore di commedie a immaginare un matrimonio più fortunato per finire una delle sue produzioni. (Act I, sc.1, 10).*[64]

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[63] *Giuseppe Giacosa was in fact one of Ferrari's proteges, actively interested in the development of the young playwright's career. In a speech given in 1898 in the memory of Ferrari almost ten years after his death, Giacosa had asserted that Cause ed effetti and especially the rendition of the forth act constituted a kind of drama ahead of its time, pursuing before all moderns in Italy and abroad, a representation of reality with the least dose of artificiality; in Commemorazione di Paolo Ferrari (Milano: Cogliati, 1899), cited in Valeri, 297. Alda Croce in her collection of Italian Realist drama includes Cause ed effetti as the play introducing the movement. See her introduction to the second volume of Teatro Italiano della seconda metà del Ottocento (Bari:Laterza, 1940), 106.*

[64] *LODOVICO: Yes, a felicitous marriage indeed, most felicitous. There is no disparity; my daughter a duchess, the groom a marquis; my daughter a Castellieri-Estense, the groom an Olivaria-Gonzaga; my daughter worths a million, the groom two; my daughter nineteen-years-old, the groom thirty; both beautiful and sympathetic; two good names, two good fortunes, two good persons; I challenge a playwright to imagine a marriage more fortunate with which to end any of his plays.*

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Behind the appearances of social perfection, however, there lie a whole social class and system in deep moral crisis and the Castellieri-Gonzaga family merger soon exposes a different social *realtà*: immorality, cynicism and deception. Just out of the convent and soon after her social debut, Anna will discover that her marriage has no solid moral foundations and that both her father and husband have bargained her happiness, inconsiderate of her integrity and their own social responsibilities. Even worse, she will gradually discover that both her father and her husband were hypocrites with a superficial regard for "family values," not only sharing a common past of *avventure galanti*, but also competing for the affections of the same woman, the baroness Eulalia Carpineti, a character-catalyst in Anna's life later on. At first innocent, idealistic and romantic, a *piccolo apostolo*, as Ermanno mockingly calls her, Anna has strong convictions about *Italianità* and the duties of her class. Her idealism is shattered when all the secrets of the past take their toll on her life: Ermanno has fathered the child of Eulalia and the latter, with no resources of her own and trying to save the appearances and her reputation, tries to enter in Anna's family as the wife of her father, a prospect that Anna is in no position to tolerate as ethical. Yet Anna has to suffer humiliation and the contempt of Ermanno who, although flexible about his own morals, is too obdurate about Anna's marital duties, and too disrespectful, as it proves, of her sincerity.

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Giving credence to the slightest of evidence, he finds Anna guilty of cheating on him with Arturo, a cousin and childhood soulmate. Their marital relationship disintegrates and Anna, already pregnant, feels the world around her collapsing. She gives birth to a "loveless" girl who, sickly and weak, has little chance of survival. The baby dies because it was the child of an unwholesome union, the deplorable effect of a deplorable cause:

> *una creatura che naque condannata. Dalla gioventù avvizzita di [Ermanno] e dall' acerba adolescenza di Anna, come volete che risultasse un innesto con elementi di vitalità Aggiungete una gestazione viziata dai patêmi, un parto immaturo; un allattamento malsano e interrotto. Date le cause, bisogna subire gli effetti.(Act II, sc. 2).*[65]

Seeking comfort, Anna agrees to adopt the daughter of an unknown dying woman. Going to meet the "donor" in her squalid premises, Anna realizes that the "daughter" she is about to adopt is Ermanna, the natural child of Eulalia and Ermanno. Still a firm believer in the sanctity of family and in the power of love to redeem the sins of the past, Anna adopts Ermanna and forgives Ermanno as Eulalia agonizes on her death bed.

As a play of the early 1870s, Cause ed effetti reflects the transmutation of idealistic melodrama into social tragedy, the transition from the utilitarian realism of *teatro*

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[65] *"A creature born condemned. What with [Ermanno's] withered youth and Anna's unripe adolescence, how could you expect a hale offspring? Add a pregnancy complicated by tribulations, a premature birth and an infirm breastfeeding cut short... Given the causes, we have to suffer the effects...*

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educatore to *verismo*. The social predicament of Anna, her rift with her class and its decadent ways, present Ferrari with the opportunity to make her the raisonneur for his convictions about bourgeois laxity, but also with the perfect situation for his revised dramaturgy: Setting the conscientious individual apart and against society is not just a conventional plot device, but an effective pattern for generating a drama of conflicting ideologies. Answering social decadence with personal rebellion, Anna becomes the purest and thus most adamant embodiment of *Italianità*. Taking her cues from what she perceives as the oxymoronic life styles of her social peers, she transforms herself into a "melodramatic" heroine, a persecuted martyr of the Italian social cause, exploding from a perceptive but laconic idealist to a prosecutor against everything that deceptively passes for Italian:

Io ero in un convento, dove ci mettevano a pane ed acqua solo che avessimo proferite le parole amore, uomo! Un giorno capiti, mi pigli, e mi consegni ad un uomo ... Quest' uomo mi mette di sbalzo nel gran mondo. Cosa vi trovo? Dello spirito si, dell' eleganza, del profumo, ma lo scandalo che si tradisce, che zampilla fuori da tutte le parti; e con lo scandalo la provocazione al male: nei libri prestigio e scandali; nei giornali declamazioni e scandali; ai teatri drammi di passioni disoneste, oppure fanciulle seminude coperte dagli applausi frenetici degli uomini ammodo! Nei palchetti gara di nudità; a Corte nudità; l' abito d' etichetta della dama onesta è il nudo! ... sì, una bella vernice, ma un gran sottostrato d' intrighi indecenti! E poi nulla di sacro, nulla che si salvi dal sogghigno; la virtù, il patriottismo disinteressato, il sudore del popolo, gli scioperi degli operai, che! barzellette! questione di fondi segreti! E da che uscivano i motteggi? Da persone rispettabili, da voi... da voi ... Ah seminate colpa e volete raccogliere virtù! Trovate interessanti e poetiche le cause in casa d' altri, e strillate quando vi capitano sulla

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testa gli effetti?... (Act III, sc.VI, 109-110.)[66]

This inflated rhetoric, critics have found, has frustrated any illusion of realism that the playwright has entertained, yet within the context of the plot and the situation, the melodrama of Anna's accusatory scepticism emerges rather low-key among the hyperbole and the excess of the social decadence depicted and dramatized throughout the play. As the whole modern Italian situation becomes the target of this offensive, Anna's incriminations about the private causes of wrongdoing and their public effects undercut exactly those tenets of bourgeois ethics that Ferrari is held accountable for defending even when society is wrong. The texture of references to *patriottismo disinteressato*, to her own offended *italianità*, is very transparent and ideologically unambiguous: They strike not as a hollow vituperation of the "system," but as a vituperation of the system as it is being abused and

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[66] *I was in a convent, where even the pronouncement of the words love and man was enough for being fed with bread and water. One day I understood, I grew up, and I gave myself to a man...This man pushed me suddenly in the grand world. And what do I find? Sophistication, yes, elegance, perfumes, but also scandals flourishing everywhere; and with scandal comes depravity: in books high society and scandals; in papers offensives and scandals; in the theatre plays of dishonest passions, or scantily dressed girls shrouded by the frenetic applause of fashionable gentlemen! In the gallery boxes an embarassment of nudity; At the court nudity; nudity is the official costume of the honest lady!... Yes, a wonderful facade, but what an indecent net of intrigue underneath! And then nothing sacred, nothing saved from sneering; virtue, pure patriotism, the sweat of the people, the labor strikes, pff! picayunes! esoteric questions! And who is responsible for that? You, you, the respectable people... Ah, you sow vice and you want to reap virtue! You find interesting and poetic the causes (of vice) in other people's houses, and you shriek when the consequences fall on your own heads..."*

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deformed by the errant elites who have the power, the means and the sophistication to provide a model of national character, which is altruistic and sincere. The melodramatic topoi, the disguises, the villainies, the illegitimate children, the orphans and the deceits, do not so much insinuate themselves as trappings of cheap theatricality, but as the expected excessive "effects" of "unnatural," that is, "unrealistic" social behavior. As Anna's child dies, this death, the effect of a coerced, "unnatural" union, suggests that the ultimate victims of social irresponsibility are the perpetrators of the iniquities, the irresponsible *borghesi* themselves. The tragedy befalling Anna's collapsing marriage is not theodicy punishing both the sinner and the innocent, but a natural consequence determined by the facts. The tragic magnitude of these consequences is extreme, unbelievable and "unreal," because people's immoral choices and actions are essentially extreme, unbelievable and contrary to the *vero*. What Ferrari is essentially saying is that people forge and determine their lives as an incomprehensible melodrama, because they resist controlling their darker impulses, because their sophistication is hedonistic with no ethical grounds, and because they underestimate the long-term repercussions of their social irrationality on the quality of their own psyche and life. Certainly, Ferrari never has second thoughts about the possibility of redemption, the innate goodness of the transgressive individuals or the capacity of society to grasp

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verità and backtrack from falsehood through forgiveness and reconciliation. It is by the melodramatic realism of the *effetti* that Ferrari's thesis achieves plenitude of meaning.

Melodrama and naturalism coalesce in the play without major esthetic problems, exactly because melodrama is a facet of the kind of modernity that Ferrari dramatizes and also because it is a complementary part of the naturalistic polarity cause-effect. Irineo Sanesi, Silvana Monti and other Italian critics have been very outspoken about Ferrari's over-use of the *patetico*--the confrontations, the surprises, the misunderstandings, the letters, the disguises, the double-entendres--as an enforcer of the thesis at the expense of realism[67]. However, Ferrari's naturalistic ambitions largely offset his melodramatics, since the play derives its emotional and pedagogical power not from his tirades, but from the very sincerity of his effort to let circumstances and "facts" be the main fulcrum of the social thesis.[68] In fact, his desire to have the play operate as a "documentary" on social crisis, as a diagnosis resulting from the objective analysis of concrete data, compels him to a modification of his rationale: Drama no longer assesses, but inquires into the origins of things, no longer criticizes the moral effectiveness of human

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[67] *Monti, 102, 104; Sanesi, 576; Croce, 321.*

[68] *Since the play was written specifically for a particular troupe of actors, Ferrari's compliance with the stylistic exigencies of a rather outdated star-system demanding "arias" and "duets" should not be overlooked.*

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actions, but also delves deep into the ethical foundations of their causes. It does not authenticate social norms, but it generates ideas. Considering Ferrari's previous achievements as a "realist," Cause ed effetti has a spiritual generosity, atypical of much of the *dramma borghese*.

Compared to modernistic Cause ed effetti, Il ridicolo,[69] Ferrari's tragicomic taking on of the classic theme of cuckoldry, is a step backwards to the Goldonian bourgeois comedy of manners. This *dramma comico* is deliberately constructed by the playwright as a vehicle for demonstrating the self-preserving impulses of society against those human actions threatening its moral integrity. In the preface to the 1874 edition of the play, after having argued about the necessity of *vera arte* to "*provvedere intanto acciocchè dalle umane imperfezioni poste tra loro in continui attriti per le agglomerazioni sociali, risultassero nel minor numero e colle men gravi conseguenze possibili i disordini inseparabili da ogni umano consorzio presente,*"[70] Ferrari maintains that the ridicule menacing the social reputation of

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[69] *Paolo Ferrari, Il ridicolo in Opere drammatiche vol. 21 (Milano: Libreria editrice, 1881). The play opened in October 1872 at the Capranica Theatre of Rome, played by the company of Alamanno Morelli. In the "cenni storici" Ferrari reveals that the play was based on a story he had written ten years earlier, itself based on real events.*

[70] *"Advise in the meantime precaution, so that the disorders — a fixture of modern society— caused from the human imperfections, which social life with its incessant frictions creates and which intrude in people's lives, will be as few as possible and with the least grave consequences possible."*

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the "dishonored" husband is a security valve, a social *valvola di sicurezza*, protecting and guaranteeing the moral quality of marriage.[71] Although not atypical of Ferrari, this particular stance struck his peers as a specious endorsement of social fundamentalism, a thesis at odds with the times, despite its resonance among the lower strata of *media borghesia*. At best the play was thought of as an effectively theatrical comedy in spite of its obsolescent thesis - *sulla quale la società moribonda ha gia detto l' ultima parola, mentre quella che sorge non ha ancor detta la prima*," a comedy "*gia vecchia al momento di nascere*;"[72] at worst, Il ridicolo is a pastiche of old themes and even older plot tricks, with Ferrari's platitudinous arias-tirades undercutting the irony of his observations.[73] Although certainly not a masterpiece, the play emerges as a study of human frailties and insecurities more complex and interesting than its author has intended it to be, a perceptive illustration of the social angst seething underneath the debonair gaiety of belle-Époque.[74]

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[71] *Paolo Ferrari, "Prefazione," Il ridicolo (Milano:Edizioni Bettoni, 1874), cited in Valeri, 301.*

[72] *"...on whom the dying society has already said the last word, while the one still rising has not yet said the first [word], [a comedy] "already dated from the moment of its creation." Piccardi, 712; see also Yorick, 155-6.*

[73] *Mazzoni, 991; Monti, 106.*

[74] *For an overview of Italian drama during the "Belle-Apace," see Luigi Personè, Il teatro italiano della "Belle Apace" (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1972), 27-46.*

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Both the thesis and the action take their cue from the consternation of Federico Braganza, a taciturn haute-bourgeois, about the social correctness of his controversial marriage on the one hand and the firmness of his wife's fidelity on the other. Federico, the son of Senator Raimondo Braganza who is very concerned about the liberal attitudes and ideals of the new Italian state, wants to marry Emma Lafarga, an opera singer, but his decision finds resistance from his father whose second thoughts about the viability of this union stem from the girl's background: The mother of Emma --the temptation to conjecture a deliberate association-by-name between her and Flaubert's Emma Bovary on the part of Ferrari is almost irresistible[75]--was a notorious woman "with a past," with her reputation shadowing the life of her daughter and her husband, a tenor who has fortunately had more impact on Emma than she. What with her upbringing and her less than proper career as an opera starlet, Emma's entrance in the family will not bring kudos to the Branzaga name, since people will be only too eager to look for her "missteps." Francesco dismisses his father's misgivings and makes Emma his wife. Although interrupting her career is a sacrifice that Emma

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[75] *From Ferrari to Torelli and from Giacosa to Praga, the name Emma is the one most frequently given to bourgeoises heroines caught in an adulterous situation, or thought of as women "with a past." The persistent recurrence of this phenomenon and its significance has eluded the attention of Italian theatre critics and historians.*

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happily agrees to, her flawless social performance does not prevent Milan socialites from taking exception to her nonchalant joviality, hardly the sort of behavior that befits a marquise. A series of events occurring during Francesco's absence on a hunting spree appears to confirm their opinions.

During the night of his absence, Luigi, a servant just dismissed by Emma for having attempted to rob the Branzaga numismatic collection, is about to violate the collection again, when he stumbles across Giorgio Metzbourg. He is a German count who has come to the Branzaga mansion in order to meet Lorenza, the young widow of Francesco's older brother, a woman who is thought of as a "saintly" paragon of wifehood, since she has refused to take another husband deferring to the memory of her late husband. Nobody knows, of course, of her clandestine affair with Giorgio, not even Emma who only days before had spent some days with Lorenza in Como. Luigi creates a commotion in order to show that Giorgio was the thief, but Emma who in the meantime has come down to see what was happening, recognizes Giorgio and orders Luigi to set him free.

The situation gets out of Emma's control when the police get involved: People begin to talk and a venal journalist writes an article suggesting an affair between Giorgio and Emma. When Francesco returns, the sensational rumors have spread all over Milan. In a social gathering the day after the event Francesco appears unaware of the gossip and while joking

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about the amorous escapades of his friends, he, a veritable *ridicolo*, is being laughed at behind his back for his ignorance. Once informed about the truth of the matter, he is too hasty to accuse his wife and too eager to make a deal with Luigi in order to save appearances: Since Giorgio denies having ever come to Federigo's house, and though he has proof that Luigi is indeed a thief, he bribes Luigi to lie at the court and confess that the "other man" seen with him was his accomplice. He is also resolved to divorce Emma and challenge Giorgio to a duel.

Giorgio and Lorenza, fearing the scandal menacing her impeccable reputation, hide the truth. Meeting at a hotel, she resolves to leave town and he to return to Germany, obeying his father's demands. Just in time Federigo appears and, making offensive remarks about Giorgio's mother (Giorgio is a natural son), provokes Giorgio to a duel. Only hours before the challenge, Federigo learns from a friend that the man he had chosen to be his *patrigno*, his witness in the duel, was a man whose amorous advances Emma had resisted. Federigo was about to be once again a "ridicolo": He almost had as his witness in fighting his wife's presumed lover, a man whom society also believed to be Emma's lover. It is Senator Gonzaga who as a deus-ex-machina will solve the problem: He has found out the truth about Lorenza and Giorgio, and is in a position to verify Emma's innocence. As for the clandestine lovers, they are to be married, since Giorgio's father has

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given his consent. But what about the marriage of Federigo and Emma? The audience is expected to understand that it is saved, but in fact Ferrari ends their adventure with sardonic ambiguity:

FEDERIGO(pieno di stupore e di vergogna) Che! Emma dunque? ...Oh, mia Emma, ed io potei sospettarti ... potei credere ... Oh mio Dio!
RAIMONDO: Marito irreprensibile di moglie onesta!... Te ne ricordi a Roma?... Ringrazia Dio che non è stato che un sogno, ma se fosse stata realtà?! Sei convertito al salutare terrore del ridicolo? (Act V, sc. IV).[76]

The playwright is only too hasty to congratulate himself for proving the thesis, and logically the play, as a typical *commedia borghese*, should at least show the reconciliation of Emma and Federigo. But neither Federigo nor Emma have the last word. Their relationship remains theoretically unresolved. She speaks no lines of forgiveness, nor does it become clear whether Federigo has conceded defeat to his father's social wisdom.

Deprived of its thesis and with its melodramatic conventions overemphasized, Il ridicolo could be played out as a farce, taunting the cultural hysteria of a leisurely class as it tries to harmonize its old world certainties with current cynicism. Ferrari is as perplexed with modern thinking as Raimondo, his tradionalist raisonneur, and the more he defends the *valvole della società*, the more frustrated he

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[76] *FEDERICO(astonished and ashamed):But! Emma then... Oh, my Emma, and I could suspect you ... I could believe ... Oh my god! RAIMONDO: You irreprehensible husband of an honest wife! Do you remember Rome? ... You should thank God that this was only a dream, but what if it were reality?! Are you convinced that the threat of ridicule is beneficial?"* Il ridicolo, *89.*

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becomes for not being able to grasp the incongruities of the new Italian bourgeois. Here is a man of the theater who has second thoughts about the seemliness of an opera singer ingratiating herself with upper social strata; a Risorgimento liberal who has come to see bourgeois Italy as a social and moral chaos with its *Italianità* a mockery of the revolutionary ideals; a satirist who thinks that his compatriots are so ludicrous in their complacence that satire cannot possibly reflect convincingly their ridiculousness. What is left for him as a playwright is to re-invent comedy as a *processo alla società*, a trial of the bourgeois failures: the venality and the relativised value of *virtù*, the double standards and the backstabbings, jingoism and cynicism, the obsession with appearances and the contempt for social values, the ennui and the despair.

Thrice in the play Ferrari calls attention to Federico's grotesque situation, his being a *"ridicolo,"* before, during and after Emma's "adultery." He is a ridiculous socialite, a ridiculous husband and a ridiculous ideologue: He laughed at his friends' promiscuities, while his own *onore* was a laughingstock. As the witness to his duel with his wife's "lover" he had chosen a man whom society held as Emma's "lover," and to the victorious reactionism of his father, he remains speechless. This Federico is that same bourgeois which five years later Ibsen would call Torvald Helmer and whom Bernard Shaw would deride in his Candida's Reverend James

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Mayor Morell, the Christian Socialist.

Emma is not very much the type of woman whom Ferrari usually prefers as a role model and a raisonneur for bourgeois womanhood, but her social "difference," her unorthodox socialization and socializing as a broken-home child and show-business personality entitle her to be a sharp observer of haute-bourgeois philistinism. Typically, she is a paragon of virtue --Ferrari is very explicit about that-- but, being the "outsider," the scapegoat of "ridiculing" society, her virtue is assessed as virtuoso histrionics, an imitation of the morals "eluding" her social caste. It is ironic that her husband, *il ridicolo*, will be the person articulating the righteous judgement of "society," that is, the arbiter of his own "ridiculousness:"

> *EMMA: ...Ma guardami, Federico:... Come mai non vedono, non sentono questa verità, questa innocenza nel mio volto sicuro, nel corragio con cui sfido il loro occhio a cercarmi sin nell fondo dell' anima...*
> *FEDERICO:... La tua voce, gli sguardi, le lacrime, la tua fisonomia, il tuo accento impetuoso, tutto questo ho veduto una volta! E quando fui trascinato nel tuo dolore, nella tua passione, quando fui ben convinto che mi stava davanti una verità, un' innocenza ... ho veduto calare il sipario...avevi recitato! Era stato un trionfo di grande artista!* (Act III, sc. 4)[77]

The situation, familiar from the sentimental comedies of

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[77] *EMMA:... But Look at me, Federico... How is it they don't see, feel this truth, this innocence in my face, in the courage with which I defy their eyes to look into the bottom of my soul... FEDERICO:... Your voice, your gazes, your tears, your expression, your impetuous haste, I have seen it all before! And though I was immersed in your pain, in your passion, when I was convinced that truth and innocence was before me... I saw the curtain fall... You had been acting! A triumph of a great artist!"*

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Teobaldo Ciconi, is here not so much melodramatic as it is tragicomic: Federico "ridiculously" flaunts his perspicacity in not being deceived by the appearances of Emma's *verità*, while it is hearsay, phenomena and coincidences that inform his outrage at her moral shortcomings. Once her *virtù* is questioned, Emma becomes a cynic herself and it is this cynicism, I think, that Ferrari insinuates in Emma's complete apathy to Federico's remorse. The reconciliating spirit of Cause ed effetti is absent from Il ridicolo and while Anna was the agent of forgiveness, here Emma is the nemesis of a whole social system: She exposes the insecurities of a caste priding itself for its self-confidence and dares to hurt their moral narcissism. Her silence at the end is an act of triumph and for Ferrari, a critic too straitlaced to be hard on the certainties of his audience, a subversive act of social indictment.

Ferrari thought of conservative values not as more sincere or more sympathetic than modern ones but more concrete and more secure. At the same time he understands that these values are dying along with the older generation and it is out of compassion for the moderns that he preaches, sad and indignant, a return to the old social norms:

FEDERICO: Eh! Lascia stare questa maledetta moda di fare il processo alla società! Le ho pagato anch' io il mio tributo!... Come lo sconto oggi! Le idee di mio padre... oibò, idee vecchie!... Perchè erano idee di un vecchio!... Ma le mie idee? Ah! ah! Quelle erano le idee giovani... perchè erano le idee di un fanciullo! [...] Il processo alla società?... Bisogna farlo a nostro egoismo vanitoso e libertino! Non a questa povera diavola della socicietà che colla sua esperienza di settanta secoli trova degli

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espedienti per tenere un po' in freno questa razza di matti! Bisogna diminuire i matti e non abolire le camicie di forza che impediscono ai matti di dar fuoco alla casa! Il duello puh. assurdità sociale... No, camizia di forza! Il ridicolo che colpisce il marito onesto della moglie disonesta! Altra assurdità sociale... No, altra camicia di forza! La società ha inventato prima le religioni, poi i codici civili; oh! sì daverro! tempo perduto!-Ah sì? Ah, voi ridete delle religioni? Voi ridete dei codici? Ridete un po del ridicolo, se vi basta l' animo: di questo gufo dal ceffo satirico, che vi svolazza intorno, e quanto voi spianate il fucile cercandolo, vi si posa piano piano sopra il cappello (Act V, sc. III)[78]

Ferrari needs to convince his spectator and for this he needs to convert his Federico. But again he is at war with himself: At the end everything is resolved, not because of the effectiveness of the thesis, but from the opportune intervention of the father, of the older generation, the "moral values" people who care not only for *verità*, but for appearances as well. Ferrari is a benevolent grumbler, more upset about the inefficacies of his doctrines than with the paradoxes of Italian *borghesi*. He is an anxious playwright and his anxiety is not so much about the failure of his instructions as it is about his own cynicism that he can no

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[78] *FEDERICO: Well, enough of this damned craze to condemn society! I have paid it my dues, too!... How I regret it now! My father's ideas... yes! sure!, old ideas!... Just because they were ideas of an older man!... But my own ideas? Ha! Ha! Those were modern ideas, because they were the ideas of a young man![...] Condemning society... It is our vainglory and liberalism we should condemn! Not that poor devil of a society which with her experience of seventy centuries has found the means to hold back that crazy race of humans. We should decrease the madmen and not abolish the straightjacket that obstructs them from putting their house afire! The duel. Bah! a social absurdity... No it is a straightjacket. The ridicule that befalls an honest man from his dishonest wife! Another social absurdity!... No, it is another straightjacket. Society has first invented religions and then civil laws! Oh sure! a waste of time! Really? Ah, you laugh at religion? You laugh at the laws? Laugh at ridicule, if you have the guts: that owl with the sarcastic face darting around you, and when you mark it with your guns it sits slowly slowly on your hat."*

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longer hide. And it is in his next and perhaps most controversial play, Il suicidio, that he puts his own reactive cynicism to a test.

Although modern critics have been swift to discard Il suicidio[79] as a pompous social melodrama and a failure at that, the play, an indictment of suicide as a pernicious offense to society and humanity, is actually Ferrari's most elusive play. Whether a melodrama or not, Il suicidio is overwhelmed by Ferrari's attempt to maintain an almost Darwinian interpretation of the socio-cultural "data" informing the plot, be it the anomalous psychology of a character or the difficult social adjustment of another, and it is indeed this obsessive "scientific" rationalization of every situation or development that amplifies and overstates its melodramatic disposition. As a late and mature work within Ferrari's oeuvre, Il suicidio makes all the more evident his concern about the ambiguities of modernity, if not his cynical regret for the failure of his "lessons" to alert society of its unconscious sclerosis.

Uberto Camporegio is a perplexed creature, an unhappy and unfulfilled Romantic, a more problematic individual than Prosa's Camillo Blana, who has managed to live out all the excesses of "*romanticismo:*" What with his genetic proclivities

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[79] *Paolo Ferrari, Il suicidio in Opere drammatiche v. 5 (Milano: Libreria Editrice, 1881). The play was performed in 1875 at the Arena Nazionale of Florence by the company of Luigi Belloti-Bon.*

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to inexorable passions -he is an impulsive Sicilian- and what with his materialism and agnosticism, Umberto is a Chatterton-cum-Werther of Italian science. He has studied medicine in order to study the origins of life, and his conclusions negate all metaphysical aspirations; His book, a controversial challenge to the certainties of science, is censured as "Pantheistic" and as a social, political and professional misfit, he has joined a masonic fraternity. Married to a conventional woman, Adele, and with two young children, domestic life is a burden to his psyche, but while he is jealous of his wife's close relationship with a cousin, he maintains an affair with the wife of his best friend. This erratic lifestyle having amassed him huge outstanding debts, he is forced to mitigate his idealism and accept a teaching post at Naples, in 1855 a bastion of foreign-rule conservatism. This compromise along with the reprimanding remarks of one of his "brothers," Attilio Parriani, makes his situation even more intolerable. Even though the cousin offers to pay the debtors seizing his house, Uberto feels emotionally drained and finished. While his family is on the way to Palermo, he takes out a revolver and ostensibly kills himself before the eyes of Attilio.

Uberto is, however, only hurt and while Attilio rushes to bring the news to his family, Uberto is saved by the masons. After being cured in seclusion, he departs for America, where he starts a new and successful life as Doctor Rebout. This is

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the play's *antefatto*, because Ferrari's program is to bring Uberto back, reformed and repentant to "see" the consequences of his suicide. The following acts, in fact, revolve around the pathetic impact of his act on the lives of his wife, son and daughter. Upon hearing the news Adele loses her mind and Laura, Uberto's sad lover, becomes his children's "aunt," taking care of them as if they were her own. From the third Act on, the action takes place twenty years later, in "modern time," with Uberto's adult children suffering strong psychological and social complexes, yet still ignorant of what really caused their father's "death." Clotilde, his daughter, is turning out just like her father, a disgruntled eccentric, impulsive and self-conscious, at war with herself and life. With a mother whose memory stopped in 1855 and for whom she and her brother are still juveniles, Clotilde grows up next to Marcella, Laura's daughter, with Laura's erratic behavior as a model. She is in love with Emilio Grotti, whose uncle, aware of her family's secret, has threatened him with disinheritance if he marries the daughter of a *suicida*. Clotilde resolves to end the affair, unable to suffer poverty as a condition of love.

Giorgio, the son, has also taken after his father, not only physically but also mentally. A letter which his father had left for him with a notary incriminating Adele for carrying on an affair with her cousin advises him to work hard so that, repaying his own debts, he will owe nothing to the

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hated relative. His sister's travails have also deprived him of any desire to fall in love. Such is the situation when Attilio and Uberto alias "Rebout" return to Naples from Paris, the former as a self-made medical celebrity availing himself of Uberto's unpublished medical conclusions, the latter as a celebrated neurologist brought over to Italy to examine Adele and her "special case" of dementia. So changed physically and spiritual is he, that neither Attilio nor his relatives recognize him.

They arrive when Clotilde has run away with Marcella, seeking emotional fulfillment in the life of the artist and joining a company of itinerant actors. As various individuals confer about the incident, Uberto is informed about the "*antifatti*" of his own "death" and experiences with his own eyes the consequences of his crime. Uberto runs after the two fugitives, but they always happen to elude him. Unable to make it in the theatre, they have left for Nice, where they sell flowers in the streets. Uberto cannot recognize his daughter, nor she him, but in a public garden where "Rebout" is explaining his theories on the causes and the effects of suicide -in fact describing the story of his life - he is heard by Clotilde. Running to the hotel, she comes across her relatives, whom Uberto had invited to help him out with his research. Giorgio, seeing Clotilde with Rebout, mistakes their encounter for an affair, and fed up with life, he thinks, just as his father did twenty years ago, of commiting suicide. In

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the final act when father and son come face to face, Uberto sees in Giorgio his older self and in his words the resolution to imitate his father's sin. His reactions gradually reveal to Giorgio his identity. After a passionate recognition scene, Giorgio brings in Adele who, upon hearing Uberto's voice, recovers her sanity as if waking from a dream. Everything seems perfect: A family is reunited, a nightmare has finished, the thesis has been proven. But Ferrari doesn't want a happy end. He wants an ambiguous end: Nothing suggests that happiness is finally at hand.

Only a plot summary as extensive as this one, revealing the various dramatic tendencies and styles -- melodrama, realism, naturalism, tragicomedy and the grotesque-- incessantly canceling each other, can demonstrate Ferrari's conscious effort to provide a modern popular theatre: a theatre abreast with all the new dramatic ideas demarcating character motivation, action development and their signification as imitations of real life; a theatre, that is, seeking to expose the audience to a broader interpretation of its own choices and experiences. Melodrama provides once again the playwright with the essential aesthetic parameters for an audience-friendly defense of his sociological and covertly nationalistic thesis: Bring the modern individual face to face with the social and familial effects of his "choice" to die and put him in an agonizing race to curtail the misfortunes his "death" --essentially an act of egotism-- has inflicted on

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his "survivors." Suicide is wrong for society, Ferrari argues, but more importantly it is an offense to *italianità*, inasmuch as it is not sanctioned by national humanistic ideals, but from a demoralized interpretation of life's mission informed by dogmas alien to Italian social humanism. The melodramatic, then, development of the plot, piling misfortune upon misfortune and injustice upon injustice, seeks to achieve the most extreme manifestation possible of the iniquities the most extreme individual decision can generate.

Congruous with melodramatic emphasis is the "miraculously" redeeming denouement, but, even though poetic justice entails the restoration of Uberto's family and "sanity," it is exactly at this point that realism frustrates the comforting sentimentality of the reunion. Insisting on a deterministic explication of social reality as a cause-and-effect process--a suicide foils the social caliber of a family and this causes its social disenfranchisement which in effect precipitates its moral decline and leads back to iniquity (another suicide) and so forth--Ferrari suggests that the "happy ending" does not presage at all the family's prosperity, that is, Uberto's smooth re-socialization or for that matter his children's swift rehabilitation. What the play has really shown as far as Giorgio and Clotilde are concerned is an unforgiving society, reluctant to embrace and heal the "innocent," a society whose conclusions about the moral standing of its constituents is measured not in terms of

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individual integrity but in terms of "family history," which are held as determining not only their ethical, but also their physical sanity. That Uberto was not killed after all does not countermand the act of his "suicide," nor, obviously, does it cancel its immorality, which means that his social acceptance will be decided not in spite of, but on the grounds of his previous offense against the sanctity of life and the sanctity of family. To regain his family and thus re-claim his social identity, Uberto is forced to commit another suicide, to murder "Dottore Rebout," that is, his identity as a living pioneer of science, the rejection of which had contributed to the original crime. Resuscitating his real selfhood, he should have to confront social indignation for his devastating lie which will again forestall his integration among his peers: The *suicidio* has inexorably predetermined his social stasis and perpetuated his life-long tragic search for identity. I dare to say that Il suicidio and its tragic game with the paradoxes about social identity and social responsibility is the harbinger of post-Verismo Italian *grottesco* drama and the seed of Pirandellismo. The thematic affinity between Il suicidio and Pirandello's Il fu Mattia Pascal, despite the difference of the literary medium, suggests such a link and underscores Ferrari's unappreciated modernity. Ferrari's pedagogic program notwithstanding, suicide is, as in Pirandello's case, a means of exploring the self and its social dimensions.

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Although for Ferrari this exploration is an egoistic praxis of self-validation, a cowardly and calamitous escape from reality and its demands, for Pirandello it is an opportunity for re-building a life, for *trovarsi*. Whereas Ferrari locates the topos for this fulfillment in the family, Pirandello finds this fulfillment within the human self, but both Uberto and Mattia Pascal are allowed to observe the impact of their "death" as a work-in-progress. When the tragic/comic results of their "suicide" takes its toll on their own lives, the redeeming quality of their effort to reacquaint themselves with "real" life is for both playwrights a certitude as deep as their certitude about the ambiguous effect of their endeavor.

Following Il suicidio Ferrari had another major success with Le due dame [Two women] (1877), a play about adultery and bourgeois hypocrisies, but after that his career as well as his popularity went into deep crisis. He wrote eleven more plays before his death in 1889, mostly comedies of manners with vivid local color, one or two thesis plays and a few comedies commissioned by Gemma Cuniberti, a child-star. Ironically, his last success was not a thesis play, but a *dramma storico*, Fulvio Testi. *Verismo* and its hybrid, *Ibsenismo*, made his work not only appear sententious but also

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irrelevant.[80] If today Ferrari is discussed at all, it is only with respect to his early Goldonian comedies, or to his comedies written in the Modenese dialect. His social plays are simply overlooked and his significant contribution to the consolidation of verismo, his irony and his ambiguities are lost among diatribes deploring his moralism. Although it is true that none of his thesis dramas can today possibly attract the interest of a modern audience, this is due not so much to their artlessness as to their thematic irrelevance, a problem that critics have never ceased to stress. Verismo drama however, was not a cultural big bang but the acme of a movement, to which Ferrari gave a national identity and a mission. His realism, whether artificial or not, paved the way for a drama for which *realtà* would provide the initiative, the ideas and the target of the "investigation." His thesis plays not only streamline the political and ideological forces that would shape *verismo*, but they also prepare Italy for a *teatro borghese* relentlessly unsettling the conventional notions of *Italianità*.

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[80] *By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ferrari's reputation among critics was already very low and it is largely due to their condescending attitude that his work has remained neglected by Italian scholars and anthology editors. Silvio d'Amico, Cesare Bozzetti and Siro Ferrone in their anthologies have preferred Goldoni over his commedie a tesi, while Alda Croce is the only one opting for Cause ed effetti. None of Ferrari's plays has ever been translated into English, nor have I been able to trace any production of any of his plays in USA. Modern Italian directors and actors-managers have also shied away from him. In the mid-fifties, Giorgio Strehler was the last director to revive a Ferrari work and typically this work was again Goldoni. In 1973 the same play was broadcast by RAI. Il ridicolo was last produced in 1922 in Rome by Maria Melato and her company to commemorate the centennial of Ferrari's death.*

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ACHILLE TORELLI

For Luigi Capuana and all the major theatre critics attending the opening night of Achille Torelli's I mariti [The Husbands] at the Teatro Niccolini, both the play and the playwright, a twenty-four-year old Risorgimento veteran from Naples, appeared to be suddenly achieving what for generations of Italian intellectuals, from Alfieri to Manzoni, had been a cause and a dream: The (re)generation of national Italian theatre and drama. This social tragicomedy seemed to embody what contemporary thinkers had idealized as the standard of Italian dramaturgy, a modern drama about modern civic issues, literate and stylish, all in all a theatre emancipated from foreign esthetics. More conservative critics saw Torelli as a Messiah harmonizing Risorgimento aspirations with positivist bourgeois values, while liberals canonized the play as the manifesto of bourgeois social revolution with Torelli exemplifying the socially engaged artist at his best. It was in fact one of the rare cases in the history of modern Italian theatre that critics and audience were unanimously enthusiastic about a drama that seemed to break with the past and offer an original impression of *verità*. With a rapsodic "Hoc erat in votis" opening and closing his review of I mariti in La nazione, Capuana vividly communicates the excitement Torelli's play generated among critics and spectators:

> *Finalmente il pubblico italiano può abbandonarsi ad un entusiasmo espansivo senza che vi sia mescolato nè patriottismo malinteso nè il meschino bollore delle parti politiche! Finalmente potrà assaporare*

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> *la soavità di questo entusiasmo e di codeste ammirazioni come si fa di quelle gioie di famiglia e di quelle consolazioni ineffabili che si vorrebbe nascondere agli sguardi di tutti, per paura di vederle diminuire col godimento degli altri! Finalmente, senza dimenticare che l'arte non ha patria, [...] il pubblico potrà sentirsi battere il cuore di quel palpito di egoismo spontaneo che ci fa tremare di commozione quando sappiamo una bell'opera artistica essere nostra e potercene mostrare alteri.*[81]

Alessandro Manzoni and Giuseppe Verdi discerned in Torelli a talent to reckon with, an artist *"[vedendo] nel caos nuovi mondi,"*[82] and Augusto Franchetti, the drama critic of the influential Nuova Antologia was no less enthusiastic. The play was the *capolavoro* of Italian Realism:

> *Abbiamo un bel ritratto della vita italiana, particolarmente delle provincie meridionali. E questa è per noi la maggior lode che possa darsi ad un opera drammatica. Perche la pittura dei tipi generali riesce sempre fredda e scolorita, se non s' incarna in uomini vivi, appartenenti a un tempo e a un paese determinato; è legge, è necessità ineluttabile dell'arte comica, e tutti i veri poeti l' hanno così intesa e praticata.*[83]

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[81] *"Finally the Italian public can abandon itself in extreme enthusiasm without false patriotism or the nasty zeal of political partizanship entering into it! Finally, it will be able to savor the sweetness of the kind of enthusism, the kind of admiration one feels for the happy news in one's family and for the ineffable relief that should be concealed from all others' eyes for fear of seeing them diminish if compared with the pleasure of others! Finally, without forgetting that art has no country, [...] the public will be able to feel its heart beat with that palpitation of spontaneous egoism which makes us tremble with excitement, when we know that this fine work of art is ours and we can show it with pride." Luigi Capuana, Il teatro italiano contemporaneo (Palermo: Pedone Lauriel, 1872), 93.*

[82] *"Discerning new worlds from among the chaos." Cf. the Letter of Giuseppe Verdi to Torelli's father, cited in Ernesto Grassi and Tello Torelli, ed. Achille Torelli: Teatro scelto e inedito (Milano: Edizioni per il Club del Libro, 1961), xvi. See also Antona-Traversi, 51ff.*

[83] *We have a fine canvas of Italian life, particularly that of the southern provinces. And this is for us the greatest compliment we can pay to a dramatic work. Because the picture of generalized types always turns out cold and lifeless, if it is not animated with breathing people, who belong to a specific*

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Nobody in 1867 could possibly predict a less than glorious career for the young playwright, and any suggestion that his "genious" could shortly burn out would have only been dismissed as the wishful thinking of an envious mind. It was then a disheartening disappointment, not only for his champions but for himself as well, that no other play written after I mariti was deemed worthy of the *reformatore del teatro italiano*. As failure became the pattern of his dramatic career, disillusionment, frustration and cynicism took their toll on his self-esteem as an artist and it was not very late in his life that he came to view I mariti as the monster devouring all his other creations. Torelli would write more than one hundred plays before his death in 1922, but only one of them, Scrollina (1881), was to score a considerable success. It was a sorry reversal of fortune for Torelli to be the first victim of a "curse" that for several historians, has prevailed upon Italian *verismo:* the one-hit artist. One has only to think the success history of Verga, Praga and Butti, or for that matter Pietro Mascagni, Ruggiero Leoncavallo and Umberto Giordano in order to admit the veracity of the argument.[84] As early as 1877 Torelli was already thought of as a has-been and his plays hopelessly old-fashioned "*portando*

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time and place; It is a law, an inevitable necessity of dramatic art, and all the real poets have grasped it and applied it. Augusto Franchetti, Rev. of I mariti, by Achille Torelli. Nuova Antologia 6 (December 1867), 808.

[84]*Alonge, 150*

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in se stesse il germe della loro condanna.'[85] Was the bankruptcy of his dramas a symptom of his artistic mediocrity that I mariti had managed to cover up? Or was it a symptom of the crisis of the *risorgimento teatrale* that Capuana acknowledges in 1872?[86] I mariti was not Torelli's first play and all his previous work, social comedies on modern *italianità*, seemed in retrospect the prelude to something really great.

Achille Ferrari was born in a family that for many was already a model for the kind of Italian society he would portray and uphold in his plays. Son of Vinzenzo Torelli, a well-off and cultured bourgeois socialite with important ties to the aristocracy and the cultural elites of Naples, and Anna Tomasi di Lampedusa, a descendant of the exiled Albanian royal family, he grew up in a refined cultural atmosphere among people with wide artistic and political interests, among whom Giuseppe Verdi and his godfather Gaetano Donizetti are the best known outside Italy. No sooner had he celebrated his twentieth birthday than Garibaldi disembarked in Sicely and the dramatic political and military events of the high Risorgimento had a profound impact on the formation of his political and social thought. As a moderate liberal, young Torelli loosened his ties with the conservative circles of the

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[85] *"carrying within themselves the germ of their failure." Piccardi, 713.*

[86] *Luigi Capuana, Il teatro italiano contemporaneo, xxvi-xxx. For more on the issue of the "risorgimento teatrale," see chapter 4.*

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Neapolitan court, and although he initially pursued a career in the city's higher administrative bureaucracy, a norm for young aristocrats, it was *belles lettres* and the theatre that eventually won him over. In 1862 his first play, the one-act Dopo morto (After Dying), was performed at the Naples Niccolini Theater. The success of both this and his second play, Troppa grazia (Too Much Grace) encouraged him to pursue a career in drama. The cultural environment at the time was congenial to artistic pursuits as a means of service to the patriotic cause and thus it did not take long for Torelli to realize that the theatre was a powerful political medium rejuvenatable only if modern drama could picture the Italian experience in the making, as a work-in-progress.

He proved to be right, because part of the success he scored with his third play, Missione di donna (A Woman's Mission), was due to the dynamic bourgeois spirit permeating its theme and plot: The preparation process of the borghesia as the new national elite. Submitted to a *concorso drammatico* sponsored by the Florence *Scuola di declamazione* in 1863, Missione di donna was given the first award. The clamor of this victory stirred around him as positive a publicity as a young author could ever wish for, and Torelli was seen as the successor to Ferrari who ten years earlier had earned the same prize for his Goldoni. In 1864[87], the play was performed in

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[87] *Until 1867 his plays would be performed alternatively in Naples and in Florence.*

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Naples by the compania Alberti under a new title, Il punto d'appogio [The Fulcrum] and its considerable run proved yet again that realism was not only the dramatic mode for the theatre of the future, but that its appeal could be supra-regional and national. In his next plays, such as Gli amori di corte [Court Love Affairs], La verità [Truth] and Gli Onesti [The Honest], Torelli continued to polish and amplify his idea of realism and the more he evolved as a playwright, the more he moved away from the tradition of Giacometti and Ferrari. Summing up Torelli's career before I mariti, Cesare Trevisani views his realism as moral, meaning not that his plays have a particular thesis to prove or advocate, but that the depiction of reality exposes so vividly the failings of modernity that his drama can only be instructive and thus morally useful. The utilitarian idea of theatre that Ferrari espoused exclusively as an end, in Torelli acquires an aesthetic value:

> *Moralista non accigliato, egli non fa il processo della società, ma benevolo e imimparziale, adopera armi cortesi, cercando piuttosto di persuadere per mezzo di temperati risolvimenti, che d'incrudire le piaghe applicandovi la punta... Egli non crea [un personaggio] perchè vada sulla scena a proclamare colla bocca del poeta la verità che esso vuol rendere accetta, ma in tutto l'insieme dell'azione spira la filosofia del suo pensiero in modo, che la pienezza del concetto morale si manifesti equilibrato ugualmente in tutti i personaggi che servono a completarlo e risorvelo."*[88]

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[88] *Not a frowning moralist, he does not castigate society as a judge, but benevolent and impartial, he uses pleasing weapons, trying to persuade by means of moderate answers rather than exacerbate the problem by confronting it head on... He does not create a character in order to have him walk on stage speaking as the poet's mouthpiece the truth the latter wants accepted, but the totality of the action transmits the rationale of his ideas in such a way that the whole moral concept manifests itself equally balanced in all the characters that serve to fulfill and prove it. Cesare Trevisani, 172.*

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Torelli pretends to be neither an *educatore*, nor a watchdog of morality, an arbiter of right or wrong ethics. He is a moralist but not a moralizer, and his basic standard in determining the integrity of changing society is the sincerity and the humanity of the individual in his or her social transactions, the purity of feelings, the unprejudiced and selfless commitment to enrich human life. It is not that negativity and despair do not enter his positivist social tableaux, but whenever they insinuate themselves into his plots, they seem to compromise only fleetingly the happiness or the dignity of his characters. While for Ferrari it is the instituted ethics, *le valvole di società*, that determine the quality of society, for Torelli it is the individual and his social comportment that determine and dignify social morality and ethics. Like Ferrari, his favorite milieu is always upper-bourgeois, a world of domesticated leisure, but also a world with an acute sense of *dovere*, threatened not by moral laxity as happens with Ferrari, but by miscommunication, prejudice, emotional unfulfillment, and tedium, all of them inimical to the bourgeois ideals of social harmony and prosperity. And while for Ferrari the antidote to social malaise is absolute compliance with the ethical norms of society, irrespective of their political correctness, Torelli offers as an alternative the power of love, be it conjugal, maternal or filial, friendship or philanthropy, with self-sacrifice and selflessness facilitating social reconciliation and peace with

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society and the self proper. To Ferrari's aristocratic concept of a bourgeois cosmos, Torelli proposes a meritocratic *borghesia* where moderation and social dialogue safeguard probity in human affairs. "*In conclusione, la morale è l'amore,*" morality is love, asserts one Torellian character and this theme of love constitutes by and large the backbone of his social dramas.[89]

In Torelli's bourgeois mythology love is an omnipotent natural force and a social driving force as well: It sensitizes people's social consciousness and empowers their sense of duty. It can be the motive and the inspiration for one wanting to surpass oneself, to excel and help others excel as well. Real love never devolves into obsession or sexual passion, nor does it motivate a bourgeois' action as a means serving his egotism. Real love is actually the pillar of social propriety, at best the "*valvola*" securing the honor of an individual, a family, a class, and at worst the savior of social appearances, not without a cost for the man or the woman (mainly a woman) who will compromise his or her own reputation for the sake of social *eleganza*. Torelli's bourgeois are not vicious people, nor do they have grave sins to hide or abhorrent secrets to suppress. Certainly they falter and they doubt, they transgress and they misjudge, but

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[89] *Cf. Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, 334ff; Julien Luchaire speaks of Torelli's "culte de l'amour;" "Achille Torelli," Revue Latine 10 (25 Oct. 1902), 628ff.*

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once love is at work, they are prone to forgive and reconciliate, change their attitudes and compromise, even if this afflicts them with ineffable pain and sadness. Torelli's *borghesi* do not overdramatize themselves, they don't go to extremes, they retain control of the situation even if dire circumstances could provoke hyperbole. Not unlike Teobaldo Ciconi, Torelli finds his hypocrites and his amoral characters mainly among the aristocratic strata, but again their immorality or amorality is the outcome of their incapacity to love. One could take Torelli's bourgeois cosmos for a saccharine fantasy[90], where love can inspire kindness and compassion. Certainly, optimism and patriotism were overlapping notions of *italianità* for a playwright still too young and socially protected to be skeptical, but that does not mean that his *borghesia* is a kind of Italian utopia where class tensions and political antagonisms have been eclipsed. In fact, his *borghesi* are not romantics at all, but rather pragmatists who try hard not to structure their lives on dishonesty and self-deception. If there is anything ironic as well as tragic in his dramas, this is the realization that an uncompromised life is untenable and that moderns, whether happy or not, should take pride of themselves for even trying to endure the failings of life. This irony pervades all his pre-1867 comedies and, as Trevisani observes, they all pertain

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[90] *Cf. Apollonio, 696.*

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to a single dramaturgical program, "*anelli della stessa catena [che] recano tutti la soluzione di un problema della scienza della vita.*"[91]

It was inevitable that Il punto d' appoggio[92] would impress its audience as an original contribution to the cause of Italian national theatre, not only because it seemed to move away from the melodramaticity of the *dramma storico* and the Ferrarian *commedia a tesi*, but also because the playwright had managed to decipher modernity, society and politics without recourse to banal sermonizing and pseudo-philosophical bombast. Unpretentious, compact and entertaining, the comedy had some very important conclusions to convey about the political infrastructure of the modern Italian state, with political innuendos expertly scattered through sophisticated conversations about the politics of love.

The plot is uncomplicated and rapid. Giuliano Remigi is an ambitious young lawyer aspiring to a central role in the new political realities of Italy. He is loved and supported by a young widow, the Countess Elena Ottonieri, who becomes his most trusted champion. Her love for him is her "duty" and her duty is her "mission." To realize this mission then she asks

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[91] *"As the rings of a single chain that provide the solution to a specific problem in the science of life." Trevisani, 173.*

[92] *This and the other comedies of Torelli discussed in this chapter are included in Ernesto Grassi and Tello Torelli, eds. Achille Torelli: Teatro scelto e inedito (Milano: Edizioni per il Club del Libro: 1961), from which I cite. In the original Naples production of Il punto d' appoggio the part of Giuliano was played by Tommaso Salvini.*

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for the services of Valerio Sesti, an honorable member of Parliament and a close friend of Giuliano, who despite his love for her, resolves to help with her plans to "promote" Giuliano. Valerio becomes the "fulcrum" of Giuliano's social and political ascension as well as the fulcrum of Elena's love aspirations. Yet Giuliano, once suspicious of Valerio's more frequent encounters with Elena, becomes very antagonistic towards his "supporters," seriously doubting Elena's sincerity and Valerio's friendship. Not for one moment does he doubt that his meteoric success is due to anyone other than himself, nor that Valerio has "compromised" his own career in order to let him solidify his own political status. Giuliano has a father who, obsessed with his son's success as "*Salvatore della Patria*," arranges for him to marry Eugenia, Elena's young niece, whose father Giuliano had successfully defended in a trial. When Elena finds out from Tommaso that Giuliano "is being given away" in marriage with Eugenia, she is ready to do her "duty," acquiescing to Tommaso's wish not to intrude upon Giuliano's bright future. Once again it is Valerio, the "fulcrum," that will "challenge" destiny and restore justice. While Valerio alerts Ottonieri to the misunderstanding, Giuliano takes Elena to task for not raising any objections to his father's initiatives, a perfect pretext, as he thinks, for her to disengage from him and get together with Valerio. Ottonieri "understands" and the play ends on a reconciliatory and yet sardonic note:

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VALERIO, ad Elena.- Non direte che (indicando sè stesso) questo povero punto d' appoggio non abbia fatto il suo dovere fino all' ultimo.[93]

Nothing scabrous or controversial offends the civilized interactions among the characters, even when it seems that their integrity or their hopes are at stake. Manners and propriety, staples of bourgeois identity, are observed even when tensions are high and characters can hardly contain their anger for "being taken for granted." Conversations, always literate, always civilized, ensue as cozy after-dinner chatting, structured around entertaining stories, reminiscences and paradoxes, not as delightful as the repartées of Eugene Scribe or Oscar Wilde, but witty enough to sustain interest for the meaning behind the words. Torelli tries to record modern language as faithfully as possible with its trendy colloquialisms, its banalities, its non sequiturs, its qui pro quos, or to imitate a manner of speech that derives its energy from some "natural" propensity of his characters for aphorisms and epigrams. Luigi Personè takes this as an effort on the part of Torelli to impress as both audacious and edifying,[94] failing, however, to consider that Torelli incorporates this propensity for sophistication in the disposition of his learned *borghesi*, more conspicuously so in the character of Valerio, a man equally at home with words as

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[93] *"Don't say that (indicating himself) this poor fulcrum has not done his duty to the very end!" Act III, 44*

[94] *Personè, 75ff.*

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with affirmative ideas. Torelli is very particular about character consistency (even names--Elena, Valerio [:valiant]--have a figurative function), always looking for that distinctive detail which will render a character appealingly realistic: Elena, for example, is very assertive and her self-reliance is reflected in the boldness of her arguments; Valerio derives his charm from his penchant for theatricalizing his social comportment, while Giuliano is invariably fidgety and leery about other people's commitment to his "mission:"

> *ELENA.- [...] Venite a dire ad una povera donna: "Fanne questo, fanne quello del tuo uomo, logorati intorno alla pianta, perchè poi quando avrà dato il fiore, se lo coglierà un' altra!... Ma andate là!... Me lo tengo com'è, e appena passato il lutto di vedovanza me lo sposo e non bado ad altro! Mi basta e me ne avanza!... E se la patria ne ha bisogno, s'ingegni! Ognuno per sè e Dio per tutti!*
> *VALERIO.- Immoralità!*
> *ELENA.- Morale utilitaria: la vostra!*
> *VALERIO.- Individuale, non colletiva! [...]*
> *GIULIANO, andando a dirglielo sul muso, sordamente, a denti stretti, con gli occhi fuori dell' orbita.- Man non t' accorgi, tu, che quella donna e tutto per me? ... e che non so quello che può nascere? ... proprio tu mi tradisci, tu che dicevi di non avere altro amico, altro fratello che me?*
> *VALERIO.- Ma sei matto!*
> *GIULIANO.- Ah sí? Lei si dà l' aria di preferirti!... E mi manda in Tribunale per isbarazzarsi di me?... per restare sola con te?...(Act I)*[95]

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[95] *ELENA:[...] Come and say to a poor woman: "Do this or that for your man, burn yourself out cultivating the plant, so that later when it flourishes, another woman can harvest it!...Come on!... I will keep it as it is, and when the time of mourning is gone, I will marry him and that's it. It's more than enough for me!... And if the country needs him, it better come up with something else! Each one for himeself and God for all!/ VALERIO: Immorality! ELENA: Yours is a utilitarian moral!/VALERIO: Individualistic, not collective![...]/GIULIANO (approaching to tell him right to his face, without listening, full of anger and with eyes wide open: But don't you understand that this woman means everything to me?... I don't know what may happen next...And it is you who betrays me, you who professed that there was no other friend, no other brother except*

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This excerpt is paradigmatic of Torelli's modern dramatic style. Even when he dispatches moralistic messages, a tint of subversive irony is always there to subdue profundity. The message becomes a sophisticated play with words and meanings:

> *ELENA.- Siette matti voi, quanti siete, col vostro Dovere! Il dovere non è altro che il carabiniere della Morale! Il Dovere si risolve nell'Amore, come l'alba nel sole... Togliete il sole all' alba ed essa muore: togliete l'Amore al Dovere... e non c'è piú! La cosa fata a forza val meno d'una scorza!* (Act I).[96]

Behind the dating machinations that Torelli ostensibly brings to the fore of Il punto d' appoggio, there is a deep concern for the social fortunes of *borghesia* and the quality of its identity, as its transformation to an elite is still in process, insinuates itself in the sporadic but salient allusions to contemporary political proceedings. But Torelli is here exclusively concerned with Italians as citizens and their patriotism as a polity praxis, and it is this aspect of Italian polity that he discreetly deplores.[97]

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me.../VALERIO: But you are crazy! /GIULIANO: Oh, really? She seems to prefer you!... And she sends me to the Tribunal to get rid of me... to be alone with you...

[96] *ELENA: You are the crazy ones, you with your Duty! Duty is only the policeman of morality! Duty dissolves in love, as the dawn with the sun... Take the sun away from dawn and she dies; cut love away from duty, and there is nothing! What is done with force is worthless.*

[97] *I conjecture that Torelli deliberately changed the title from Missione di donna to Punto d' appoggio shifting the emphasis from the love story to the political implications. Probably the former title was less controversial for a state-sponsored competition. Trevisani, in his state-sponsored document on*

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The play presents a *borghesia* up and coming, perhaps a little disoriented but certainly ambitious. This is the world of lawyers and parliament deputies. but also the world of the "fulcrums" and the careerists, the insiders and the connections, a whole new "system" of, to coin a word, bourgeoisocracy. The generation of Giuliano does not take its time, when success is so close at hand, but Torelli, a member of this generation, detects some loss of class dignity or idealistic innocence, a burgeoning political narcissism among the young and willing, a frantic drive for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the national interest. No one is immune to this new political virus: borghesi and "reformed" aristocrats collude to fetch for themselves politically and the national interest is downplayed for the sake of personal interest or even class solidarity. Certainly the interaction between politics and sex is not an original subject in world drama or in Italian theatre for that matter, but for Torelli, a positivist, fostering or condoning this situation at the expense of *Italianità* does not make for an auspicious introduction to socio-political modernity.[98] The playwright

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Italian theatre, mentions the play with its first title and his analysis focuses exclusively on Elena and the love story; See Ibid., op. cit. 174.

[98] *Torelli also wrote another commedia with the suggestive title Amore e politica. Ernesto Grassi provides the information that later in his life Torelli disowned the play. Although it was published by Barbini of Milan, the play was not found at the Rome National Library and therefore I could not verify the date of its production or the plot. The Enciclopedia dello spettacolo does not mention the play among Torelli's oeuvre.*

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can only be ironic about the "verità" of national politics and trenchant about his contemporary "patriots'" self-importance. Giuliano especially becomes all the more tragicomic as his personal happiness has been based not so much on personal merit as on some love stratagem. It can only be a tragic irony that ignoring the real "fulcrum" of his success, he actually lives on self-delusion:

> *VALERIO.- E figuratevi!... Giuliano, con me, è divenuto cupo, freddo, taciturno... Ed io ho chinato il capo alle prevedute conseguenze del punto d'appoggio... Se il pubblico sapesse il vero movente dei magnifici discorsi dell' Onorevole Giuliano Remigi!... Se [i giornali] stampassero domani: l' Onorevole Remifgi ha, con la sua arringa, stritolato l'Onorevole Valerio Sestri, perchè il primo è innamorato della contessa Elena Ottonieri ed è geloso del secondo: che patriottismo! E questo è il più pulito dei retroscena!... Giuliano crede di demolir me, e invece produce la piú benefica evoluzione parlamentare... Innamorato com' è, bramoso di emergere su di me, capirete che riesce un vero atleta...(Act II) [...]*
> *ELENA, con triste sorriso a Valerio. -è questo il compenso? Ah, lo voluto celebre? L' ho voluto grande... e quando sarà grande lo perderete mi diceste... Ma non era meglio che fosse restato oscuro, modesto, ma mio?... (Act III)*[99]

That people despite their social progress and their pretensions to open-mindedness still feel more comfortable

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[99] *VALERIO.- And imagine!... Giuliano has become stern with me, cold, taciturn... And I have acquiesced to the predictable consequences befitting a fulcrum. If only the public knew the real incentive for the magnificent orations of Honorable Giuliano Remigi!... If the newspapers could only publish tomorrow: The Honorable Remigi has trounced with his address the Honorable Valerio Sestri, because the former is in love with Countess Elena Ottonieri and is jealous of the latter: What patriotism! And this is the cleanest thing that's going on behind the scenes. Giuliano believes he is defeating me, while in fact he is causing the most beneficial parliamentary change. Enamored as he is, and desirous of overpowering me, no wonder he has surpassed even himself. [...] ELENA: (smiling sadly to Valerio). This is the compensation? Well, didn't I want him celebrated? I wanted him great... and when he will be great, you will lose him, you told me. Wouldn't it be better, if he remained unknown, unpretentious, but mine?*

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with their self-delusions, "disowning" the truth about themselves and their merits is the theme that Torelli tackles again in La verità.[100] The milieu here is middle-bourgeois, a family of well-to-do professionals, ostensibly respectable people who desire modernity, even though their social ideology is still a relic of the past. The play makes the argument that truth is a relativistic interpretation of tangible realities, subject to the bias and the fallacies of a class or individual.[101] Torelli photographs the relationship of an ostentatious *borghesia* with an "outsider," a young intellectual and idealist from the "mountains," and chronicles his conflict with its philistinism. Paolo Severi (his name connoting moral sincerity), a veteran of the Risorgimento and full of optimism about his integration within the "enlightened" *borghesia*, very quickly realizes that telling the truth is not a social asset and that sincerity will cause his alienation, while lying and dissembling can guarantee his "assimilation." As one character sympathetic to his predicament observes, *"anche coi santi, forse, la verità è un coltello a due tagli."*[102]

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[100] *The play opened in Naples at the Teatro Fiorentini on 25 April 1865 with Tommaso Salvini, the star of the Compagnia Alberti, playing the part of Paolo Severi.*

[101] *It is again surprising how far back in the history of Italian drama goes Pirandello's obsession with truth and "truths."*

[102] *"Perhaps even for the saints truth is a double-edged sword." (Act III).* La verità, *86.*

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Love is again the pretext for social criticism. When Paolo comes to town and stays with his mother's brother, he quickly falls in love with his cousin Evelina and in trouble with the rest of the family. As his straightforward manners offend one after another the members and the friends of his "foster" family, the pattern becomes that Paolo inadvertently exposes their ludicrous pretensions: Falling in love with Evelina, he antagonizes his best friend Adolfo who not only badmouths him to the family, but hints at his immorality. He makes an enemy of his uncles, when he dares to criticize the medicority of his aunt's romantic versifications. And he offends politeness when he makes some innocuous remarks about the age of one of the family's female friends. Double-crossed and vilified as immoral, provincial and persona non grata, Paolo finds it hard to accept the *verità* of urban society:

> *Siete dunque cosí voi uomini?... Il cuore semplice che senza doppiezza, vi dice la verità, voi lo prendete in odio a questo punto?!... Lo volete traditore, perverso, vigliacco, simile al vostro!... E tu, tu voresti ostinarti ad essere buono e sincero, quando tutta la gente ti vuole tristo e bugiardo?... Ma tira via, buffone!... Vogliono la menzogna?!... E tu dagliela!... Entra nel branco!*[103]

Paolo is thrown out of the house and a year passes before he returns there ostensibly "wiser" and more refined: a conscious hypocrite, who can endear himself to the same people who had

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[103]*How can you people be like those people?... A simple unaffected heart is telling you the truth, and for that you begin to hate him?!... You want him a traitor, a fiend, a coward, just like you!.. And you, would you persist in being good and sincere, while people want you mean and a liar?... Well, stupid!... Do they want a lie? Then give it to them!... Join the club!*

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found him vulgar and indecent. In a literary magazine he calls his aunt's published verses in a literary magazine a contribution to Italian poetry. When the family finds out who the "judicious critic" was, their attitude is transformed. Pretending to be in love with Giacinta and her poetry, he makes her push his marriage with Evelina, so that she can be close to him forever. When he writes an article approvingly using the arguments of the University president, he gets tenure and a chair because his thesis was found "well documented." And how do his "new" champions explain his astounding "improvement?" Paolo was a Risorgimento veteran, shot with a bullet in his neck. Ostensibly during his one year absence he had this bullet removed and this "treatment" is supposed to have balanced his humors: Paolo's social awkwardness was essentially a health problem!

The metaphor is conspicuous: The removal of the bullet symbolizes the eradication, the "removal" of Risorgimento idealism from the social mentality of *borghesia*. What should have been a compass for the new society is scorned and uprooted as trivial, ineffectual and anachronistic. Risorgimento idealism had been teaching respect for the *verità* of life and human nature, but Torelli's *borghesi* feel uncomfortable about it. Torelli depicts a *borghesia* suffering from insecurities, a nation striving to assert modernity while clinging to the prejudices of the past. As in Il punto d'appogio he only hints at the political mismanagement of the

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Risorgimento legacy and the unmeritocracy paralyzing state morals, but his anger is hardly suppressed.[104] Speaking to Adolfo, who as a character stands for the *borghesia* gone astray, Paolo relates bitterly what has gone wrong with *Italianità*:

> *Quando io sudavo sangue sui libri, tu, tu rubavi i denari a tuo padre! quando io, sentendo mi spezzare il cuore, lasciavo mia madre per arruolarmi, tu, tu facevi morire di vergogna la tua! quando io ero ferito a Palestro, ad Aspromonte, tu, te la godevi, tu! ed è giusto che io soffra la fame e che tu abbia la mia cattedra... (Act II, 73).*[105]

As the play has an ambiguous closure, one can only speculate about its meaning: Is it that Paolo will eventually improve the social quality of his peers? Is playing the hypocrite he will finally become one, so that his social status won't be challenged? Is playing by the rules a better way to introduce change and improvement? Since Torelli does not preach, all these questions remain unresolved. Bourgeois *italianità* is still a matter of debate and for the young playwright no judgement can be fair for something yet to be achieved.

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[104] *Luchaire draws a parallel between Paolo and Alceste, Moliére's Misanthrope, viewing the play as a social critique. Although there are similarities between the two characters there is nothing to suggest that Torelli has copied Alceste in his Paolo. His criticism in fact is centered in the comedy's love subject-matter. Op. cit., 62. Trevisani, however, approaches the play as a thesis play teaching morality and integrity; 173-4*

[105] *When I was shedding sweat and tears over my books, you were stealing money from your father; when I was leaving my mother to enlist, with my heart beating like crazy, you made yours almost die of shame! when I was wounded at Palestro, at Aspromonte, you were taking it easy! And it really serves me right that I suffer from hunger and that you took my University chair...*

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With Gli onesti[106], the play which more than any of the earlier *commedie* anticipates the *problematica* of I mariti, Torelli portrays the formation of *italianità* as the *imborghesimento* of aristocratic ideology.[107] *Gli onesti* of the title are the men and the women of the new age, the Italians of business, enterprise and law, the liberals and the sophisticated--*il pregiudizio è la tisi degli onesti*, ruminates a "reformed" countess[108]--those who don't believe in absolutes, but who nonetheless strive for moral perfection. The *onesti* are not the Italians who experience an identity crisis, but those who live in crisis because they are seeking

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[106] *The play exists in two versions with different titles, and Gli onesti is the later version. As L'asino di Buridano [freely translated, "A difficult decision"], according to the Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, it was written in two acts and presented at the Nicollini theatre of Florence by the company of Luigi Belloti-Bon at the end of 1865. As Gli onesti and expanded into five acts, it was presented in Naples at the Fiorentini theatre at the end of 1866. During the intervening years, Torelli became active in the Risorgimento. He fought along with other Neapolitan aristocrats in the battle of Custoza as leader of the cavalry. In this battle, which was lost for the Nationalists, Torelli was hit by a bullet and as a war veteran he was decorated for his services to the nation. This experience seems to have had a positive impact on his idealism and thus the revised version of L'asino is more positivist and more polemical. Paolo Severi of Verità is almost a self-portrait of Torelli. Although that play was written before Custoza, it is pertinent to speculate that this self-reference found itself in the play either in the first printed edition of 1875 or in the 1902 edition of his collected works.*

[107] *Gli onesti in Achille Torelli, Teatro v.6 (Milano: Brigola, 1876). I cite from this first edition of the play, because it was not included in Grassi's 1961 collection. This edition is also very interesting, because it provides mise-en-scene information and because it seems to be a reliable document of the way the play was performed. This is very important, because Torelli used to rework his earlier plays especially during the years of theatrical inactivity and the texts he prepared for his own edition of his dramas are more often than not different from the original texts. The other two plays that I have managed to read in their original edition are Colore del Tempo and Scrollina.*

[108] *"Prejudice is the malady of the honest."*

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a new identity. The problem is not one of a stagnant society, but one of a society at a starting point. Fiesoli, a cosmopolitan lawyer, a "honest" bourgeois and the defendant of the new spirit, envisions a society where conscription will be replaced by another national duty: "*tutti avranno l' obbligo di fare qualche cosa,*" all are required to be useful, practical, "realists".[109]

The play is essentially a gentlemanly melodrama and involves the social (re-)education of young aristocrats as leaders of the new Italian society. The baron and the baroness di Rebek, Italian Jewish millionaires, are planning to marry their daughter Isabella to Giusto Fiesoli (again the name connoting uprightness), a lawyer and business associate of her father, a philosophical man almost her father's age. Isabella, a pragmatic woman with ambitions and ideas unconventionally feminist and liberal, is in love with Alberto Sereni, an aristocrat from an old family in decline, the same family that years earlier had taken Giusto Fiesoli from the streets after his parents' loss during the revolutions, providing him with comfort, education and social respectability. Alberto, although also in love with Isabella, has second thoughts about their union, since his much inferior financial status "prohibits" him from aspiring to enter as a *marito* into a "better" house. Isabella resolves to help him out by investing

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[109] *Gli onesti, Act II, 83.*

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his small annuities in her father's business, "other people's money," as he says, so that his penury will not be a hindrance any more. Enter Countess di Saverno, a former actress and an old acquaintance of Fiesoli, always suffering the stigma of her old profession. When the honor of Saverno becomes an issue in the house of di Rebek, after Isabella and the countess have a private discussion on the relative social connotations of *onestà*, Alberto challenges Fiesoli to a duel, because the latter, defending the honor of the Countess, has offended the honor of Isabella. Alberto's true target is Fiesoli whom he wishes to offend, believing that Saverno was working as a mediator with Isabella on his behalf. But in fact, Fiesoli had no plans to marry Isabella. Once aware of the young woman's problem with Alberto, he resolves, as an act of gratitude to his foster parents, to make him inheritor of his fortune. The action gets more complicated when Isabella's mother breaks the moral code of her caste and arranges a rendez-vous with a much younger count at the same time and place appointed for the duel. Her reputation is saved just in time, thanks to the commotion before the duel and because the count she was supposed to meet was called as a witness for Fiesoli. When Alberto learns of Fiesoli's noble intentions, he feels twice as a failure, first because he attempted to kill his benefactor and second because his marriage depends on the money he has not made on his own through the management of his personal fortune. Baron di Rebek intervenes, claiming that the

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prosperity of a marriage is based upon "work" and integrity, not money and that he must either take his daughter as she is or their "friendship" will be interrupted. Only when he sees Lino, another penniless nobleman, marry into the family of a rich lawyer who will help him create his own fortune, does Alberto have a change of mind and he accepts Fiesoli's endowment. As for the latter, he is to marry the Countess di Saverno, and the *imborghesimento* of the old nobility is finally attained.

The concept of *onestà*, illuminated as it is through the plot's diverse story lines, is not so much a morality issue as it is an extension of *verità* and *natura*. For Ferrari it would have been a *valvola di società*, but for Torelli it connotes the most basic ingredient of *italianità*: awareness of one's class *dovere*, a sense of self-respect defying appearances and bias, a sense of justice rooted in the "natural" principles of love and goodness, a disinterested social conduct, the prioritization of one's humanity over decorum. Among the younger characters of the play, Isabella is the first to realize that *onestà* is a means to happiness, and not an appearance of propriety, but Torelli very discreetly implies that Isabella, just like Fiesoli and the Countess Saverno, is not a conventional Italian: Their ideology, according to common sense, is shaped by their "un-italian" sense of morality: Isabella is Jewish and this is a social liability -- *Lui è ebreo, come io sono spiantato; non c' e disonore ne per*

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lui, ne per me!, mocks Lino in act I, speaking of the Baron's race[110]--because she is not expected to share old Italian values, the values that Torelli will prove false and "useless." As a former actress, the Countess Saverno has offended the decorum of *il gran mondo*, as she calls the aristocracy, and therefore her morals can hardly be convincingly authentic; and Fiesoli, the Turk as he is mockingly called, is held to have lost the sense of what is normal in the Italian way of life. In each and every one of these cases, the outsiders are proven more honestly Italian than those asserting Italian cultural purity as an exclusive right. It is the lesson that Torelli has been touting since Punto d' appoggio: It is individuals who should forge societies and not the societies who should forge individuals. When society prevails over the human heart with its prescribed *realtà*, the outcome is unnatural and offensive to *verità*:

> *BARONE.- Il mondo! la gran macchina fotografica che vi fa il ritratto!.-Voi siete come coloro che vanno a farsi fotografare: basta che stiano sotto la lente della macchina, perchè perdano la posa naturale. [...] A costoro non si sa che cosa prenda: la macchina li guarda ed essi diventano duri, serii, funebri, torniti.- Così voi: voi vi credete che ne verrà fuori il ritratto di un uomo onesto, e non ne verrà fuori che la riproduzione d'un posatore contro natura. (Act V, sc. V).*[111]

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[110] *"He is a Jew and I am ruined; No problem either for him or for me."*

[111] *BARON: The world! the great camera that takes a portrait of you! You are like those going to have their picture taken: It does not take more than standing before the machine for them to lose their natural pose. ... These people do not know what it takes: the machine is staring at them and they become , serious, dour, dejected, contorted. So do you: you think that your portrait as an honest man will come out, but what comes out is the reproduction of an unnatural poseur.*

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It is this kind of positivist thinking that makes Trevisani invest so many hopes in Torelli's realistic theatre and it is exactly its triumphant re-application in I mariti that will establish Torelli as the apologist par excellence of Italian *borghesia*.

I mariti

When Torelli presented his I mariti[112] to Luigi Belloti-Bon, neither he nor the actor-manager could possibly imagine that this tragicomedy of manners about "the sentimental education" of a young wife would appear to audiences and critics alike as the masterpiece anticipated from the new Italian theatre: A *commedia* of the new *verità*, a manifesto of the new *borghesia*, a proclamation of social Positivism. Upon reading the play, Belloti-Bon, who was notorious for taking risks with new and innovative talents, was simply intrigued and perplexed by it, not only because it deviated from the dramaturgical norm of the day--Giacometti, Ferrari and the ubiquitous *dramma storico*--but also because

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[112] *I cite from Ferrone's edition of the play included in the second volume of his collection Il teatro italiano: la commedia e il dramma borghese dell'ottocento (Torino: Einaudi, 1979). Ferrone actually reproduces the first 1876 printed edition of the play, very different from the version Torelli authorized in the 1902 edition of his Opere. Ferrone has detected, however, a number of divergences between the 1876 edition and the original "copione" of the play, now at the Biblioteca teatrale del Burcardo in Rome. In fact, there are two manuscripts, one with the changes of the censor, both belonging to Alamanno Morelli. The play opened at the teatro Niccolini of Florence in 27 November 1867.*

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with no distinctive protagonist to dominate the play and without a sensational plot to excite the theatregoer, it impressed him as a novelty difficult to make work. Responding to Torelli, he did not hide his artistic (and commercial) anxieties:

> *Carissimo Torelli, ieri mattina alle 11 mi giunse la tua commedia I mariti, e l'ho letta di un fiato: a un' ora e mezza dopo mezzodí l'aveva terminata e mi lasciava una perplessità straordinaria, non sul merito del lavoro, ma sul successo che può avere sulla scena. É indubitato che i caratteri son ben delineati e mantenuti fino alla fine... Ma? ma ecco i punti interrogativi che faccio a me stesso. Tu dici: che garbuglio fai? e io ti rispondo che ho voluto farti capire che temo che l' interesse del pubblico sia troppo sperperato e che questo possa nuocere al successo. è indubitato però che la commedia è di genere affatto nuovo, che porta con sè un' impronta tutta originale, ardita. Piacente?... mi dirai tu. Sí... risponderò francamente. Piacerà al pubblico? mi chiederai ed io ti risponderò: non lo so... Mai in vita mia mi si presentò una commedia che mi lasciasse più incerto sulla probabilità del successo. Dunque? Dunque, tentiamola.*[113]

It was a wise decision. Not only did the play give the actor-manager one of his greatest commercial successes, but it also gave Torelli the opportunity to demonstrate first that Italian drama could have a future even without mimicking the

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[113] *Dear Torelli, yesterday at eleven in the morning I received your play I mariti and I read it in one sitting: half an hour after noon I had finished it and it left me extraordinarily perplexed, not with regard to the value of the play but with regard to its stage viability. No doubt, the characters are well drawn and consistent until the end. [...] You may say: Why are you complicating things? And I respond to you that the public's interest will be too unfocused and that may affect the success. This goes without question, because the play is absolutely of a new kind, it is all original and daring. Is it entertaining? you will ask me. Yes I will frankly answer you. Are the people going to like it? you will ask me and I will respond to you: I don't know... Never before in my life have I read a play that has left me more uncertain about its potential as a success. What then? Well, let's try it." Letter cited in Antona-Traversi, 58-9. Giuseppina Sullazzi, the actress who created the part of Amelia Gioiosi has recalled that "prima della recita, Achille Torelli era sfiduciatissimo. Non credeva a quella commedia...[before the performance, A.T. was most uneasy. He did not have faith in that play]. Her recollections cited ibid., 59,n.12.*

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formulas of Goldoni or the risqué themes of French boulevardiers, and second that a theatre of social analysis was possible without a superimposed thesis overwhelming plot development and characterization. It is perhaps difficult for a modern reader of I mariti to appreciate its realism as anything more than contrived and schematic, but in 1867 it was this realism that introduced the unsuspecting audiences to a new idea of drama as the medium most amenable to communicate and promulgate the modern values of *borghesia* as well as its social accomplishments. Belloti-Bon's apprehensions about the possible repercussions of this "unmitigated" realism were not completely unjustified: The play not only celebrated the birth of a new social elite, but also knelled the death of its predecessor, an unprecedented undertaking for a theatrical work easily suppressable by the ever alert censor. And if for the actor the play's success managed to disperse all artistic fears, for Torelli it brought kudos from the new class, but also disdain from his aristocratic peers.[114] Whether unconsciously or not, by creating Fabio Regoli (another allusive name suggesting the man of order, of rules), the first hero of Italian bourgeois mythology, Torelli had brought

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[114] *Ernesto Grassi reports that when Torelli returned to Naples after the Florence triumphs, he found all the aristocratic salons closed to him forever, probably because persons and events familiar to Neapolitan aristocrats found their way in the play, although it is impossible for us to trace them in Neapolitan social history. I tend to speculate that the play was also the cause for Torelli's social alienation after success begun to elude him. It can not be only a matter of choice that Torelli returning permanently to Naples supported himself first as a schoolmaster and then as a librarian.*

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revolution to the stage: First he showed that Italy would go ahead with a new leader, a class born from within aristocracy, but with a spirit and energy inherited from the self-made middle classes; second it showed that family and work are not just the nucleus of modern society but also its raison d'etre; and third, the play ushered in Positivism as the ideology not only of the new drama, but of the new society as well. Authenticating I mariti as the emblem of *teatro borghese* Silvana Monti has argued that its success was actually due to its daring political connotations: Torelli

> *si mostra orientato al mantenimento di un'èlite, costituita dalla fusione tra vecchia e nuova classe dirigente, èlite in cui l'aristocrazia avrebbe dovuto essere presente con le sue migliori tradizioni (stile, cultura, senso dell'onore) e la borghesia con la sua laboriosità e col suo moralismo. [...] Lungi dal rispondere alle attese della borghesia del Nord, commerciale e imprenditoriale, che cercava di svincolarsi dai modelli comportamentali aristocratici, Torelli, rispecchiandosi nella realtà del Sud, rivendicava da posizioni arretrate la validità dei compromessi politici e sociali della Destra...*[115]

The critic thus sees in Torelli less of an artist and more of a political ideologue adapting for the stage social history as it happens. The political function of *dramma borghese*, however, does not begin, but culminates in Torelli's center-

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115"...*emerges oriented towards upholding an elite, created from the fusion between the old and the new leading class, an elite in which aristocracy would have had to be present with its best traditions (style, culture, sense of honor) and the borghesia with its industriousness and its sense of morality. [...] Far from corresponding to the expectations of the bourgeoisie of the North, the merchants and the businessmen looking to free themselves from the aristocratic models of behavior, Torelli, feeling himself at ease within the reality of the South, championed from a conservative position the validity of the social and political compromises of the Right.* Monti, 74, 75.

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right sociology: Giacometti[116] and Ciconi were already upholding the bourgeois ideal, while Torelli was still an adolescent.[117]

What distinguishes this play, apart from its overt socio-political content, is its unorthodox departure not only from the formula of the *commedia a tesi*, but also from the pattern of his own previous plays. To begin with the title, Torelli eschews an allusive introduction to a particular situation (as in Punto d´ appoggio) or thesis (Verità), focusing instead on "the husbands," these being the "models" a patriarchal bourgeois society ought to honor as the generators of its prosperity. The role of the husband has a different function from that found either in the comedies of Goldoni or the French *pièces*.[118] Here the husband is a civic asset, a pillar of the family and, therefore, a cornerstone of society. The play actually offers three paradigms of husbandship: Il duca Filippo d´Herrera, the last survivor of an once proud and honorable aristocracy, now aged, dejected and dying; his son Alfredo and his son-in-law Teodoro di Riva, decadent and

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[116] *Especially in La donna*

[117] *Cf. "I mariti non aprivano l´era nuova, ne chiudevano una." [I mariti did not usher a new era, it was the end of an era." See Achile Fiocco, "Achule Torelli alla riforma," Teatro italiano di ieri e di oggi (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli editore, 1958), 42.*

[118] *Monti suggests that the play is patterned after Goldoni´s I rusteghi with influences from Scribe and Augier, but she does not offer, I think, a convincing justification of her argument, since the thematic similarity between the two plays (the representation of types of husbands) is only superficial, as she herself admits. Ibid., 73-4.*

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socially hopeless scions of the privileged classes, dissipating their honor and health; and Fabio Regoli, the self-made bourgeois lawyer and other son-in-law of the duke, the man who reforms and "saves" the house of Herrera. On the distaff side, there are the Duchess Matilda, a matriarch worthy of her husband's love and respect, Giulia, the older daughter and long-suffering wife of Teodoro, Sofia, Alfredo's heart-broken wife and Teodoro's sister and Emma (again an allusion to *bovarismo*), the younger daughter d'Herrera who, as the wife of a "boring" bourgeois, thinks herself "unfortunate," condemned to social "barrenness" and endless ennui. There are also some other characters outside the house of d' Herrera: The Baron and Baroness Edoardo and Rita d' Isola, a loveless couple also exemplifying the ethical decadence of Italian aristocracy; Amelia Gioiosi, a woman "with a past"; and Errico di Riverbella, a naval officer and another laudable model of bourgeois honor. Two other peripheral characters complete the microcosm of I mariti, both extremely important in the symbolic scheme of the play: Felice, an old domestic in the service of d'Herrera from the days of glory, and a *dottore in medicina*. It is the doctor who will diagnose the "physical extinction" of d'Herrera, as it is Felice who will diagnose the "extinction" of aristocracy, victim of time and progress. As the play begins with Felice collecting the mail on New Year's Day, his ruminations do not dispense gossip about the situation in the house of his

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masters. They chronicle history:

> *FELICE* (con un vassoio pieno di biglietti di visita, rimescolandoli) *Al capodanno del 1859 ce ne furono seicentocinquanta. Sono scemati d'anno in anno, e stavolta non supereranno i trecento; di morti ce ne mancheranno una ventina anche stavolta... [...] Ogni giorno peggio! Il duchino da una parte; il marchese dall'altra; la signorina Emma che compie il trifoglio ... e stiamo allegri! Per me, tanto! spero di morire prima di veder la casa in dissoluzione! (Act I, sc.1)*[118]

The first act of the play, a choral episode as it were, introduces all the members of the family d'Herrera and reveals the unhealthiness, literally and figuratively, of entrapping the marital lives of Giulia and Sofia. The two young women, aware of each other's conjugal unhappiness, are trying by their personal example to protect Emma from the mistake to reject Fabio Regoli, the lackluster man "without a title." Emma will eventually marry him only because her parents have wished so, but never does she think of him as a better alternative to the life her sister and sister-in-law have sadly chosen for themselves: Alfredo and Teodoro, dissipating their fortune and honor on women, horses and dubious business, have tainted the name d'Herrera, while making their wives and parents miserable. Teodoro, unjustifiably jealous of his wife, has cut her off from all social functions and entertainments, although he himself has no remorse about pursuing ballet

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[118] *FELICE: (with a tray full of calling cards, remixing them): On the New Year's Day 1859, there were six hundred and fifty of them. They got less year after year, and this time they are no more than three hundred; even today there are twenty missing... dead...[...] Every day it's getting worse! The younger duke on the one hand, the marquis on the other; Miss Emma makes them three ... are't we happy? Why do I care! I hope I'm dead before I see this house destroyed.*

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dancers. Alfredo, whose infant son has recently died--a first indication of d' Herrera decadence--has no respect for Sofia, pursuing Amalia Gioiosi, the young wife of an older and physically impaired man, and neglecting his obligations at home. New Year's Day evolves into a nerve-wrecking occasion for every family member. The parents find their home out of control and their children without respect for their spouses: Giulia and Sofia are deserted by their husbands who cannot wait to join their lovers and Fabio is spurned by Emma because his manners are "ungentlemanly."

Some months pass between Acts I and II. Fabio and Emma, already married, have come to pass some days at Castelletto, the family's country villa, but it soon becomes evident that Emma has only scorn for the values of her husband and, what is more, no respect for the noble heritage of her parents. The movement from town to country is not without symbolic signification, because it is in these polarized spaces that the triumph of the *borghesia* will be decided:[120] This spatial polarity, familiar from the *commedie erudite* and the pastoral tragicomedies of the Italian Renaissance, has indeed

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[120] *The play's open structure of space has overt semantic connotations. The degeneration of the "casa" is enacted in the family's Naples townhouse (Acts I and V), in the house of d'Isola (Act III) and in the family's country villa (Acts II and IV). Castelletto is however important as the space-symbol of reconciliation between Emma and Fabio and thus of the reconciliation between their respective classes. Needless to say, the play's closed time structure (only a few months pass between acts I and II) enables the documentation of aristocratic decline and bourgeois ascendance in their process, a wise choice anyway because it allows the playwright to show the characters develop and change as their new experiences determine their final social standing.*

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a dual function in the development of Torelli's *parabola*:[121] First it functions as a comment on the social predicament of the particular family with the town houses -- veneers of respectability--hiding a society in moral disarray, and the salon of the country villa with its walls decorated with portraits of noble ancestors representing the respectability, the sense of tradition and social security maintained by the older generations of d' Herreras. Second, as Monti argues, each setting not only indicates the life rhythms of aristocrats and bourgeois, but also acquires distinctive functions in relation to the characters' psychology and emotional conflicts.[122] As the old world then crumbles around Emma with its nobility and principles mocked and profaned by its members, it becomes all the more difficult for her to resist Regoli's social sermons as irrelevant, especially when she finds herself unable to disprove him. All nerves and boredom, she keeps a poor childhood friend of hers at a distance, causing her pain and distress; she finds Fabio mediocre and dull in every respect; and when he offers to escort Rita d' Isola to Naples--a woman who in the past had turned down Fabio--she can only be ridiculously sarcastic

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[121] *The characterization is Croce's. The critic suggests that Torelli, although a more modern craftsman, is not that different from Ferrari and therefore reads I mariti as a thesis drama in the manner, say, of Prosa.*

[122] *While the town house, for example, is suffocating Alfredo and Teodoro with its boring New Year's Day formalities and is a loveless household for their wives, for the older aristocrats it is a bastion of morality and social dignity.Monti, 84.*

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about his "gallantry." The act however has been set up as a conjugal ethics session between husband and wife and Fabio, the wise teacher, is never tired of demonstrating to Emma the "facts of life:"

> *EMMA: Sto nervosa, ecco!-Non è mica la Ghita che non amo...*
> *FABIO: Allora chi è?*
> *EMMA: Non lo so!*
> *FABIO: Per caso avrei la disgrazia d´ essere io? Non rispondete? Sapevo che non eravate cieca di passione per me, man non che mi odiaste; se no...*
> *EMMA: Che avreste fatto?*
> *FABIO: Non vi avrei sposata.[...] Perchè vi amo...io! [...] Voi donne non avete a saper niente di tutto questo!-Per esser bella la donna non deve che dare il suo cuore: il resto spetta all´ uomo.- Per lui non basta la sola offerta del cuore, se vuol mantenersi all´altezza dove la natura l´ha posto.- Ma, buon dio, vedeteli questi matrimonii di uomini che non sanno far altro che dirlo!- Passata la luna di miele, le privazioni, il pentimento, gli affanni, la miseria... La miseria!- E sapete che è la miseria? Il disgusto fra gli sposi, l´allontanamento del marito, l´abandono dei figli, la di..so..ne..stà della moglie; perchè su cento donne alle prese col bisogno, novanta divengono disoneste... No, no, credete a me, Emma, l´uomo che sa amare, sa lavorare! [...]Non nacqui punto ricco.- Alla sua morte mio padre mi lasciò in grado di campare del mio; ma mi aveva già data un´ educazione che avrebbe fruttato quel che ci vuole per mantenere una famiglia: l´ eredità che dovrebbero lasciare tutti i padri!- E quell´educazione ha fruttato; ed oggi io sono tanto ricco da poter lasciare la stessa eredità a piú di un figliuolo...se voi sarete tanto compiacente da darmene...[...] Ma siccome al mondo non si può aver tutto, cosí mia moglie non mi ama...*
> *EMMA Sono leggera e non voglio essere altro!*
> *FABIO Oh, v´ingannate!- Se avessi avuto menomamente il dubbio che non poteste mai esser altro che leggera, non vi avrei fatto l´ onore di darvi il mio nome! (La guarda severamente).... (Act II, sc. 1).*[123]

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[123] *EMMA:I am nervous, that´s all! It is not that I do not love Ghita./ FABIO: Then what is the matter?/EMMA: I don´t know! FABIO: Is it perhaps the mischance of being I? You don´t answer? I knew you were not crazy over me, but not that you hated me; if.../EMMA: What would you have done?/FABIO: I would not have married you./EMMA: And why did you marry me?/ FABIO: Because I love you! [...]You women do not have to know anything of all these! For a woman to be good, she has only to give her heart; the rest is up to the man; For him it is not enough to give only his heart, in order to stay up there where nature has ordered him. For God´s sake, see those marriages of men who know nothing else other than*

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Fabio is not only her "educator," but her social redeemer as well. Emma is dialectically led to find the meaning of life not so much in love--this sentiment her class peers have shamelessly desecrated--but in *onestà* and respect for the true social values, of which Fabio Regoli is the exemplary advocate:

> *FABIO: Invece un uomo veramente innamorato e veramente onesto, dice: "Un regno e il suo cuore"; e il regno non mica per me, ma per lei; l'aggiatezza non per me, ma per la salute di chi sarà la madre de' miei figliuoli; la richezza non per me e non per lei, ma per l'educazione, la felicità, la vita della nostra prole!...Ecco come la pensa un uomo veramente innamorato e veramente onesto. (Act II, sc.1).*[124]

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to say I love you. Once the honeymoon is over, privations, regret, sorrow, misery... Misery! Do you know what misery is? The dislike between spouses, the distancing of the husband, the abandonment of the children, the dis-ho-ne-sty of the wife; Because out of a hundred women in distress, ninety become dishonorable... No.No.. believe me Emma , the man who knows how to love, knows how to work! [...] I was not born rich at all. When he died my father left me to make it on my own. But he had already given me an education which would provide me with everything I need to support my family: That's the inheritance that all fathers should bequeath! This education has paid off; and today I am as rich as I need to be in order to leave the same legacy to more than one son... if you will oblige me with giving me any...[...] But since one cannot have everything in life, thus my wife does not love me.../EMMA: I am frivolous and I want to stay that way!/FABIO: You decieve yourself! If I had ever had for a moment the least doubt that you could never be anything else but frivolous, I would not have done you the honor of giving you my name! (Staring at her severely)..."

[124] *FABIO: Instead a man really in love and really honest, says" A kingdom and her heart;" and the kingdom not for me, but for you; all the comforts not for me but for the mother of my children; the wealth not for me or for her, but for the education, the happiness, the life of our children!.. That's how a man really in love and really honest thinks." It is interesting to repeat here Alonge's interpretation of the bourgeois social ideal: "Il proletario è, per definizione etimologica, colui che ha come unica ricchezza la prole; ma l'alto borghese, il borghese arrivato, è colui che lascia una richezza alla prole." [The proletarian is, by etymological definition, he whose only wealth is his offspring; but the hautebourgeois, the thriving bourgeois, is he who leaves wealth to his offspring.] The emphasis is Alonge's. Op. cit. 144.*

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With Fabio off to Naples with d´ Isola, the women of d´Herrera meet again deploring their fate. His sermons are proven by the "facts" of life the d´ Herrera women have to put up with: Teodoro has run after Giulia, always suspicious of adultery. Sofia comes to meet Alfredo so that together they may visit their son´s grave on the anniversary of his death. Instead Alfredo, busy with Gioiosi, sends Baron d´ Isola to cancel the visit. This familial mayhem is the second lesson for Emma who can now compare and contrast Fabio´s merits with the vices of the other husbands, especially when Fabio offers to escort Sofia to the cemetery.

In the third act, the prodigality of the aristocratic "husbands" begins to take its toll on the reputation of their women. Alfredo and D´ Isola, having lost money in gambling, try to outdo each other for the affections and the wealth of Gioiosi. D´ Isola especially does not hide his lascivious interest in Sofia. In the meantime Rita has received a letter from her mother informing her that her husband´s mistress had been seen in public caressing their daughter, an offense to the reputation of their house and the reputation of their daughter as well. Angered and disgusted, she prohibits him from seeing their daughter again, and the Baron coldheartedly acquiesces:

> *BARONE: Obbedisco... Posso avere dei torti, ma pure... ho conservato sempre le forme de´ miei pari...*
> *RITA: Infatti! É la sola cosa che v´ abbiate voi e i vostri pari: la forma! (Il barone se ne va dal fondo.- Essa rimasta sola, senza avvedersene, nella rabbia, straccia la pezzuola di finissima*

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battista; poi ne osserva con ironia la cifra ricamamata). La mia corona di baronessa!... resiste per la consistenza che le dà il ricamo. Ecco la sola cosa che mi resta di non lacerato! (Act III, sc. 3)[125]

Fabio then appears to join Emma, Giulia and their mother who have been invited by Rita to her place. While trying to comfort the woman who years earlier had deemed Fabio beneath her, Rita confides in him her resolution to end her marriage, desperate for having wasted her youth on a man undeserving of her respect. She tries to be intimate with him, but Fabio brings her back to "reality:"

RITA: Io posso darvi parola che sono ancora una donna onesta ... Credetemi, Fabio, io ero nata per essere una buona moglie! -In qualche momento che io dimentico di essergli moglie, non so, torno giovane; - rifluisce la vita nelle mie vene - torno felice, sorridente! - e la mia memoria mi ripete qualche fisionomia che incontrai quanto ero fanciulla... Mi contento di sognarla; si può pretendere di meno? Volete che vi dica di più Ho cominciato a transigere: non mi sembra più colpevole d´ aver un altro nel pensiero ... un altro che non sia mio marito! ... Sento il bisogno di amare e di essere amata... [...] capisco tutto quello che volete dire: l´ eroismo del sacrificio, il sublime del dovere! Belle cose, ma non mi convincono. Sono una povera donna, io!... e tutte le vostre ragioni se ne vanno all´ aria! [...]
FABIO: Allora ne dirò un´ altra: Vostra figlia
RITA (richiamata alla sua dignità: dopo pausa) Grazie... Era difatti la parola che ci voleva!... (Act III, sc. 4).[126]

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[125] *BARONE: I obey... I may have strayed, but at least... I have always honored the etiquette of my equals.../RITA: Really! That is the only thing left to you and your equals.Etiquette! (The baron moves to the exit.- Left alone, and without realizing it in her wrath, she tears her handkerchief, beautifully embroidered; then looking at the pieces with irony at the torn monogram). My crown of a baroness!... It remains because the embroidery was not destroyed. This is the only thing that is left to me not torn apart!*

[126] *RITA: I can give you my word that I am still honest... Believe me Fabio, I was born to be a good wife! When for a moment I forget being his wife, I don´t know, I become young again; life returns back in my veins- I am happy again and smiling! - and my memory recalls some person from my childhood... I am content with dreaming about him; Can I pretend less? Do you want me to say more? I have begun to come to terms! I don´t feel guilty of thinking of somebody*

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Fabio has passed the integrity test once again successfully, a victory which Rita will not hide from Emma, once she comes to the house. While Fabio is looking into Rita's financial documents, she assumes his function as Emma's educator, and becomes the propagandizer of his *onestà* and charisma:

> *RITA: E tu... e te lo dico con tutta l' anima, -tu hai la fortuna di averlo bello, intelligente, nobile, fedele; -fedele sino al punto ch' io ne sono umiliata... - e tu, nossignore, non l' ami, non l' aprezzi, non l' intendi? - Ah senti Emma, la mia amica e troppo priva di bene per poter perdonare e risparmiare chi disconosce il bene come tu fai; e se tu, vedi, se tu seguiterai a disprezzare la fortuna ingiustamente accordata a te sola, la mia amica ti darà tale una punizione che ne piangerai per tutta la vita! - Alla fine poi l' uomo e sempre uomo... e se vogliamo, ci facciamo amare noi... donne![127]*

Torelli here turns the tables and the old maxim--"The good husband makes the good wife"--is disproved.[128] Love and respect is a two-way praxis of human communication, not a marriage contract stipulation. Reciprocal love is the

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else... a man who is not my husband! I feel the need to love and be loved... [...] I understand all the things you want to say: the heroics of sacrifice, the sublimity of duty! Good things, but they don't convince me. I am a pitiful woman! and all your reasoning was in vain! [...]/FABIO: Then I will mention another thing: Your daughter./ RITA (recapturing her dignity; after a pause) Thank you. It was indeed the proper thing to say.

[127] *RITA: And you, and I tell you this with all my soul, you are fortunate to have a handsome, intelligent, noble and loyal husband; loyal to the point I was humiliated by it ... - and you, for God's sake, you don't love him, you don't appreciate him, you don't understand him...- Ah, Listen Emma, my friend is not so good as to be able to forgive and spare the person who deprecates goodness as you do; and beware, if you continue to despise the good fortune exclusively bequeathed to you, my friend will punish you so much, you will cry the rest of your life! In the end, a man is always a man... and if we want, we women can make them love us!*

[128] Cf. Giacometti's *La donna*.

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foundation of the positivist family.

To go back to the plot, Giulia dresses herself up as Rita in order to avoid her husband, who having found a letter of Errico di Riverbella, an old intimate friend of Sofia, is running after Giulia seeking retribution and divorce, mistaking Riverbella as Giulia's old suitor. In the meantime it becomes known that Alfredo has forced Sofia to attend a party with disreputable people -among them Gioiosi and her *demi-monde* friends -- and Giulia, who learns the news about this "entertainment" from Errico, rushes to protect Sofia from disgrace. Teodoro comes to Rita's house, but Giulia has left by a back door. Teodoro learns from a servant that Errico and Giulia have "escaped" together for Castelletto and promises to seek revenge. This pathetic event is not without its didactic purpose. Emma being with Fabio in an adjacent room can still learn from the experience of observing marriages, which are aristocratic "only in form."

In Act IV, the only act during which Emma and Fabio are not present, the action moves back to Castelletto. Torelli now shifts his educational focus to the audience, since it is they who should identify with Sofia, feeling "pity and fear" for her social predicament. Alfredo leaves Sofia alone in the darkness of the night and D' Isola appears, ostensibly to warn her of her husbands shady amusement arrangements, but actually in order to seduce her. Matilde, alerted in time by Riverbella, makes her unexpected appearance and saves Sofia

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from "darkness." It is now the time for the matriarch d' Herrera to teach a social lesson or two.[129] When Matilde inquires d' Isola, the *factotum* of the divertissment, about the guests, the Baron hides the participation of Gioiosi and her women friends, but Errico provides the missing information. The duchess forbids the women--"the one who knows too well and the one who does not know at all"--to enter the house. When she leaves for her room, D'Isola and Errico confront each other and Errico directly accuses him of invidiously arranging the party: Not being able to earn the heart of a honest woman, wearing the "mask of virtue," he wanted to endanger Sofia's honor in order to endear himself to her. D' Izola strikes back by accusing Errico as the "gratis" lover of Gioiosi, the third pretender, after himself and Alfredo, of her affections. A duel between the two men has been called when Teodoro arrives looking for Giulia. D' Izola only informs him that the "lady is there" (meaning Sofia) and Teodoro believing the "lady" to be Giulia, swears to duel with Errico in order to save "his wife's" honor. Matilde however reappears and when Teodoro provokes her by insinuating that Giulia (meaning Sofia) has committed adultery with Errico, the Duchess becomes more determined to arrest corruption in her

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[129] *Torelli has, in fact, a special stage direction for the actress playing Matilde:"Tutta questa scena deve essere eseguita dall' attrice che rappresenta la duchessa con una straordinaria calma, che riveli la gran dama, la quale vuol raggiungere il suo scopo, evitando ogni scandalo.[The actress playing the duchess should execute all this scene with the extraordinary calm that reveals her greatness as a lady who wants to achieve her purpose, avoiding any scandal.]*

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family once and for all. The guests have just arrived, when Matilde authorizes Felice to inform them that "*la duchessa d'Herrera non riceve nessuno.*" What with the imminent danger of the duel and the Duchess's strictures, Torelli has proved that decadence runs too rampant among the aristocracy to be forgiven.

The fifth and last act, divided into two parts, is in itself a microcosm of the play's "parabola." All the principal characters appear in it, except Alfredo, Teodoro and Gioiosi, deliberately left out since the playwright wants to promote the idea that Providence has spared society the embarrassment of a decayed class vegetating at the expense of the new social powers. The first part of the act is actually a prolonged "aria" for the patriarch d'Herrera, who has not reappeared since Act I. Unable to walk because of his gout--another allusion to the "natural" decline of aristocracy, a class that cannot "move" any more[130]--he sits desperate and "alone" in that "cold" Act I salon, surrounded by Felice and Matilde. The duel has taken place and Baron d'Isola has been hurt as badly as the reputation of the d'Herrera. The Duke reads the newspaper reporting the catastrophe of his "honor," but it is as if he reads the death sentence of his class. As the last survivor of a glorious caste, he realizes that he is actually the last of his peers. His grandson is dead and his son,

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[130]*Alonge, 147.*

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Alfredo, is slowly dying -the doctor will promptly corroborate that-- victim of his prodigality:

IL DUCA: [...] (Prendendo una gazzetta dalla tavola presso cui sta seduto) Ecco... ecco a che punto si doveva venire! -(Legge) [...] Per delicatezza noi taciamo la cagione dello scontro: ma non possiamo [fare] a meno di esprimere il disgusto di tutti gli uomini seri per l' abuso che presentemente si fa del duello, a Napoli più che altrove, dove giovani ben nati s' espongono a perdere una vita che potrebbero impiegar meglio, e ufficiali d' onore un' esistenza che dovrebbero spendere interamente pel loro paese." [...] Felice!... Felice! -Supplicate la duchessa di ritornare qui un momento... (Fa per camminare e non può). Non posso io... (Felice va via) Anche lui...Anche lui (accennando Felice) che vide nascere Alfredo, quando poi l' ha visto far mille stravizi... É vero che me n' ha avvertito ... ma doveva insistere... Anche lui ne ha la colpa! -... Non mi riconosco più...Alfredo che sta male... questo scandalo del duello... quella della separazione di Giulia e di Teodoro...Non sono più io...non sono più io... [...] è ormai vecchia questa casa, e si sfascia... Ha fatto il suo tempo... Dio vuol cosí! - [...] Alfredo è malato, non ha fratelli...[...] Dio vuol punirmi di qualche cosa... Non mi ha dato che un figlio solo... e anche questo... forse... (vacilla e sta per cadere).(Act V, sc. 1-2)[131]

Errico di Riverbella assures the Duke that the name of his daughter has not been blemished and that his house is threatened not by ousiders but from within, by those who do not appear: a husband forced to divorce and a husband/son destined to die. Baron d' Isola, with his face scarred by

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[131] *THE DUKE: [...] (Taking a paper from the table near his seat). See... see where we had to come to! (Reads) [...] For the sake of discretion, we won't reveal the reason for the duel: but we cannot resist expressing our regrets for all those serious men who nowadays abuse the duel, in Naples more than anywhere else, where well born young men risk the lives they could make better use of, and waste for honor an existence they should give for their country." [...] Felice!... Felice! -Ask the Duchess to come back here for a moment... (Tries to walk, but he can't). I cannot... (Felice goes) Even he... Even he (pointing at Felice) who saw Alfredo being born, and later saw him commit a thousand mistakes... It is true he warned me ... but he should have insisted... He is to blame, too! -... I don't recognize myself anymore... Alfredo is not well... this scandal with the duel... the separation of Giulia and Theodoro...I don't know ...I am not myself anymore ... [...] This house is already very old, and it is dissolving... It's time is over... God wants it so! [...] Alfredo is sick, he has no brothers [...] God wants to punish me for something... He gave me only one son ... but he, too ... perhaps... (loses his balance and almost falls).*

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Errico's sword, will need Rita's care and assistance. But who will "instruct" Rita to treat her husband as a "lady"? No other than Emma who, "completely" changed by Fabio, advises wisdom and common sense to the very same people who once advised her to cherish her "different" husband. Rita, embittered and cynical, "desires" to visit Paris and Emma intervenes to spare her this social "faux pas:"

> *RITA: Parigi?-Sí, è il desiderio più moderato che mi sia venuto.*
> *EMMA: Ma ti pare bello in questo momento?*
> *RITA: Perchè? Tutti i momenti son buoni per desiderare...*
> *EMMA: Con tuo marito in quello stato?- Che dirà il mondo?*
> *RITA (facendo spallucce) E chi si dà pensiero del mondo!*
> *EMMA: Fabio mi ha insegnato che non basta d'essere onesta, ma che bisogna anche parerlo.*
> *RITA: Fabio ti ha insegnato?*
> *EMMA: Rita, pel bene che ti voglio, questa necessità di veder Parigi non è punto immediata, puoi aspettare; Parigi non si muove di dov'è, e vi andrai quando tuo marito sarà guarito. [...] Non tanto per lui, quanto per te; Guarda Sofia: quante gliene ha fatte mio fratello Alfredo... Non dovrei dirlo, ma pure per persuaderti... E Sofia, ora che Alfredo è malato, non si ricorda più dei torti ricevuti. É proprio delle anime gentili: perdonare ai malati... Me lo faceva notare Fabio per l'appunto stamane...*
> *RITA: Fabio!... (La fissa commossa). [...]*
> *EMMA Partendo, che farai di tua figlia?*
> *RITA La lascerò a mia madre.*
> *EMMA: Conducila con te [...] Per te!-Quando io ti sappia con tua figlia accanto, non starò più in pensiero per te; perchè, vedi, io sento...da qualche giorno a questa parte, che se avessi una figlia, solo la vista di lei mi darebbe tale una forza, qualle non potrebbe nessun'altra cosa al mondo! Conducila con te: sarà il tuo angelo tutelare!*
> *RITA (la fissa estremamente commossa) Come sei fatta saggia! (Le prende le mani e gliele bacia)... (Act V, sc. 3).*[132]

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[132]*RITA: Paris? Yes, this is the most modest desire I have./EMMA: But does it seem right to go now?/RITA:Why? All moments are good for desires.../EMMA:With your husband in such a condition? What will people say?/RITA (raising her arms) And who cares about the world?/EMMA:Fabio has taught me that it's not enough to be honest, it's also necessary to seem so./RITA: Fabio has taught you?/EMMA: Rita, I implore you, this need to see Paris is not pressing, it can wait; Paris does not go away, and you may go when your husband is cured. [...] Not so much for him, as for you; Look at Sophia: Has not she suffered from my brother*

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With Emma's "*education sentimentale*" accomplished, Torelli has only to demonstrate the rosy prospects of the Regoli family. In the final scene, the "reformed" wife and the "reformative" husband remain together and alone on the stage and their intimate conversation will assert the moral value of the two principal bourgeois preoccupations: family and work. Emma is pregnant with Fabio's *prole* and she just cannot find the proper way to break the news. Trying to create the appropriate emotional momentum, she feels the need to show him how their relationship and his "example" have transformed her character and outlook, and Fabio, "the man who knows to love because he knows to work," is no less surprised by the new dynamics galvanizing his private life:

> *FABIO (occupatissimo nell'osservare alcune carte) Oh cara... Cosa ti faccio?.. [...]*
> *EMMA Voglio che tu ti segga: sei più alti di me, e non ci arrivo...*
> *FABIO Non ci arrivi? Dove?*
> *EMMA Al livello dei tuoi occhi...*
> *FABIO O che bisogno c'è del livello?... (Sorride)*
> *EMMA Mi guardi dall'alto, è vero, sei cosí grande tu, e io son cosí poca cosa!*
> *FABIO (con grazia) Ma cosa dice; lei è tutto... lei sta in cima ai miei pensieri... e quindi io sono d'un tanto al disotto di*

Alfredo...I should not tell you, but in order to convince you...And Sophia, now that Alfredo is sick, has erased from her mind everything he has put her through. It is an attribute of gentle souls: they forgive the sick. Fabio made me understand it only today.../RITA (looke at her moved): Fabio! [...]/EMMA: If you leave, what will become of your daughter?/RITA: I will leave her with my mother/EMMA: Take her with you. When I know that your daughter is next to you, I won't be worried about you; because, you see, I have felt, for sometime now, that if I had a daughter, only a look at her would give me more power than nothing else in the world! Take her with you: She will be your guardian angel!/RITA (staring at her extremely moved) How wise you've become! (She takes her hands and kisses them)....

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lei...[133]

The more Fabio tries to keep a low and modest profile, the more Emma vies to convince him of her success in surpassing her own social shortcomings: Maternity has given her a "mission;" socializing and extravagant diversions are meaningless. The woman who a few months earlier was bored even with the idea of spending a few hours with a *borghese* in a quiet country house, is now a rhapsodic advocate of an almost spartan domestic life. Her *imborghesimento* is idyllic, it has the aura of an Arcadian domestic harmony:

> *FABIO Potremmo contentarvi economicamente, se mai!*
> *EMMA Un'idea, una magnifica idea!*
> *FABIO Sentiamo la magnifica idea!*
> *EMMA Si va a passare alcuni giorni a Castelletto! Che ne dici? Il mio Castelletto che è così caro! [...] E poi Castelletto è bello d'ogni stagione. Oh! il mio viale delle querce...Ci andremo a passeggiare...*
> *FABIO Quando farà bel tempo...*
> *EMMA S'intende!-E il ruscello (riaki)*
> *FABIO Non lo troverai!*
> *EMMA Come! me l'hanno rubato?*
> *FABIO No, sarè gelato [...]*
> *EMMA E mi rassegno, sfido! E la mia povera Ghita, la mia sorella di latte... E i fiori!... Sedersi in mezzo ai fiori...[...]*[134]

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[133] *FABIO (very immersed in some papers) My dear.. What is it?/...EMMA: I want you to sit: you are taller and I can't reach you...FABIO: You don't reach what?/EMMA: The level of your eyes.../FABIO: What's the need for a level? (He laughs)/EMMA: You look at me from on high there, it's true. you are so big, and I am such a tiny thing!/FABIO (with grace): But what are you saying?; You are everything... You are up there in my thoughts... and therefore I am beneath you...*

[134] *FABIO: Financially we can make it, you know!/EMMA: I have a wonderful idea!/FABIO: Let's listen to the wonderful idea!/EMMA:Let's go and spend some time at Castelletto! What do you say? My Castelletto which is so dear to me! [...] After all, Castelletto is beautiful in every season. Oh! the path with the oak trees. We will take walks.../FABIO: When the weather is good...EMMA: Of*

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After such a blissful family life planning, the prospect of parenthood insinuates itself as the apotheosis of bourgeois *verità*:

> *EMMA Vieni qui!*
> *FABIO Ancora? Ho tanto da fare, Emma benedetta! (si alza). Sentiamo...*
> *EMMA Non so se sai..che (si guarda le unghie) stamane c'è stato il Bruni da me...*
> *FABIO Il dottore?*
> *EMMA Sí... Mi sentivo...*
> *FABIO Oh dio! stai male?...*
> *EMMA No! No! che paura? non ti spaventare! Te lo dico? Te lo dico?...*
> *FABIO E quando! Che a momenti mi... (Emma gli si accosta all'orrechio e gli mormora due parole; egli dà un grido di gioia). Davvero?*
> *EMMA Davvero! (Nasconde le faccia nel petto di Fabio che la bacia e l'abbraccia).*[135]

As an epic of the arriving *borghesia*, I mariti documents the social merger of aristocracy with the professional middle classes as sincerely as Chekhov will decades later attest the end of the bourgeois era.[136] Torelli decodes the new social

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course! And the stream/FABIO: You won't find it!/EMMA: What! They've stolen it from me?/FABIO: It will be all ice [...]/EMMA: I give up. And my poor Ghita, my sister-friend... And the flowers!...Sitting amidst the flowers...

[135] *EMMA: Come here!/FABIO: What now? I have so much to do, Emma dear! (Gets up). Let's hear it.../EMMA: I don't know if you know... that (she stares at her fingers) today Bruni came.../FABIO: The doctor?/EMMA: Yes, I felt.../EMMA: Oh, my God! Aren't you feeling well?/EMMA: No!No! don't be afraid! Shall I tell you? Shall I tell you?/FABIO: Now! Sometimes I... (Emma approaches him and murmurs something in his ears; he cries out with joy). Really?/EMMA: Really! (She hides her face in Fabio's chest who kisses her and embraces her.)*

[136] *Allonge has detected striking similarities between the situations and the characters of I mariti and The cherry orchard. Although it is true that both plays describe the dissolution of a class and the evolution of another, the ideological premises of the two plays are totally different. For Torelli the*

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messages not as an objective social scientist proving the causes and the effects of this social phenomenon, but as a perceptive descendant of the aristocratic class whose inglorious end he has the authority and the courage to document. The older generation of d'Herrera are the raisonneurs of the playwright, but their function, unlike the conventional raisonneurs of the typical *commedia a tesi*, is not to promulgate his social vision but to concede along with him the bankruptcy of their ideal. It is then a kind of social empiricism and less sentimentality or nostalgia that drives Torelli to portray the elder d' Herreras as the crumbling, albeit still dignified pillars of their class. For the playwright the *imborghesimento* of his social stratum is not only inevitable but also imperative. Modernizing the nation requires the enterprising spirit of individuals willing to prove themselves as dependable leaders; there is no time for the effete eudaemonism of people with no ambition other than holding on to their class entitlements or asserting their legitimacy as the exclusive and infallible proprietors of social leadership. For Torelli, Theodoro, Alfredo and the Baron d'Isola are not legitimate pretenders for the command of

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proletariat has no voice in his drama and it does not challenge the authority of the borghesia in matters civic and cultural. Checkov, however, writes a "comédie humaine" about the end of the aristocracy and the social ascendancy of the lower classes with the middle class represented in the periphery of the central social conflict. Be that as it may, one cannot overlook the fact that Torelli's House d' Herrera and the cherry orchard of Lyubova remain allegorical milieux, points of reference for the transition from one era to another. See Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo ottocento, 148ff.

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modern Italy, nor are they eligible to negotiate the transfer or even the co-ownership of social leadership, pariahs as they are even within their own class. It is striking that in a play with so many frequent changes in character configurations, Fabio Regoli never exchanges a word with any of the younger male members of the d'Herrera family, an effective, I think, dramaturgical choice with obvious political connotations: Not only is Fabio Regoli a superior patriot and better individual than Alfredo or Teodoro, but also his "nobility" is more original than theirs, a quality that makes him not just the true heir of the best aristocratic ideals, but the only heir of their social status. The d'Herrera family would have been a lost dynasty, if it were not to survive through the union of Emma and Fabio and the child this union will produce. The play has begun with a chronicle of death, corruption and decay and ends with the promise of a new life. It has begun with a morose New Year's Day and ends in a sanguine winter day. There are no vicious circles in Torelli's positivist concept of bourgeois cosmos. There is only faith in the survival of the socially fittest.

I mariti then is the first political drama of modern Italian theatre and it would be not only futile but also irrelevant to assess it in terms of "psychological" drama.[137] It is true that reading the reviews of the

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[137] *Silvana Monti explains this as a deficiency not only of the Italian but also of the European theatre in general: "Tutto il teatro prenaturalista italiano*

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original production, one could conclude that the play's greatest modernist asset was the psychological realism of the characterization. Indeed, no critic fails to mention that the key factor for the play's effectiveness was the playwright's success in cloning superlative replicas of real Italians, doing justice to their class mannerisms and ideological equipment.[138] Today such assertions seem hyperbolic and unsupported by the play. Certainly the characters express strong feelings about the kind of behavior they find praiseworthy or repulsive, but seldom do their comments communicate concerns other than class etiquette and ideology. But again for Torelli as for most of the pre-verismo realist playwrights, psychology is conceived in terms of ideology. This perception is a cornerstone of the *commedia a tesi* aesthetic, a *commedia*, that is whose *tesi* is the making of society.

Torelli's departure from a political dramaturgy to one

(ma anche francese ed europeo) fu gravemente limitato dalla mancanza di una scienza sociologico-psicologica, che spiegasse, al di fuori dell' ideologia, il nesso personaggio-ambiente e quello contenuti-forma, su cui si imperniava tutta la ricerca degli autori realisti." [All the pre-naturalistic theatre of Italy (but also of France and Europe) was seriously limited by the lack of a socio-psychological science, which would explain, not in terms of ideology, the nexus character-environment as well as that of content-form, on which realist authors based all their inquiries.] Op. cit., 86.

[138]*The play abounds in asides and a stream of consciousness kind of monologue, structural conventions that no reviewer felt were undercutting the illusion of reality. What is clear, however, is that the original cast contributed immensely to its "realism," since all original cast members were invariably praised for projecting convincingly the class attributes of their characters.*

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restrictively bourgeois is already evident in La moglie[139], a companion play to I mariti. The play presents case studies of three wives, each one documenting respectively a family crisis caused by a loveless conjugal relationship, a marriage of convenience and a marriage threatened by adultery. Each case portrays a different aspect of *bovarismo*: the wife who has no respect for her husband and no emotional feed back from her lover, the bored bourgeois who suffocates under the ethical pressures of marriage, the misunderstood woman. In two of the three situations motherhood is an essential part of the heroines' identity, the one that decides the approval or the disapproval of the playwright, the positive or negative reaction of their respective milieux.

Giorgio is an aloof bourgeois whose wife, Malvina, a "romantic" woman who plays the harp and reads Lamartine, loves Oscar, the husband of Maria, Giorgio's sister. Oscar is also the object of desire for Elena, Malvina's sister and the cause for the enmity between the two sisters. Although more emancipated and pragmatic than either Maria or Malvina, Elena enters into a loveless marriage with a much older count without being able to conceal her feelings for Oscar either from her husband or the family. Malvina's excessive demands on her husband's resources for entertainment and her negligence of her duties as housewife and mother exasperate Giorgio who,

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[139] *Florence, Teatro delle logge, 13 November 1869. Again the play was produced by Luigi Bellotti-Bon.*

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once certain of his wife's passion for his brother in law, asks Maria for help. She in turn asks Oscar to save her brother's marriage and appearances by asking Malvina to become a better wife and mother. He reluctantly agrees and Malvina acquiesces to his "demand" as the ultimate sacrifice for her "lover."

Elena is no less a threat to Maria's happiness but sisterly love demands that Giorgio's happiness is more important than her own. When Giorgio thinks of committing suicide, unable to put up with Malvina's contempt, Maria tricks him into believing that Elena rather than Malvina is Oscar's lover. This is not a lie but also not the whole truth. Although in the past there was a mutual attraction between Elena and Oscar, his marriage to Maria has put an end to their relationship. When Elena tries to reestablish it, she quickly realizes that Oscar is not willing to betray his marriage. In a final scene, Maria and her young son strengthen his resolution to honor his duty as a pater familias, while Giorgio's life does not seem to get any better. The play ends with a pathetic tableau, exemplifying the negative and the positive power of a wife for the social stability and respectability of the borghesia:

Oscar, cinge con un braccio la vita di Maria, e l' uno qua e l' atra di là si chinano a carezzare Oscarino, che seguita a scrivere
Giorgio entra dal fondo. [..] Fissa invidiosamente lo sguardo sul gruppo tutto amore di Oscarino fra i suoi genitori; poi cerca con lo sguardo suo figlio Anselmuccio e lo vede solo, abbandonato, addormentato sul canapè; allora tutto premmuroso, prende il leggero pastrano che ha lasciato sul canape, ne copre Anselmuccio, e siede ai suoi piedi sul canapè, fissandolo

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con lo sguardo altrettanto pietoso che malato. L' orologio suona l' ora...[140]

The play is not action-driven. It is a domestic melodrama of limited dramatic interest, a lachrymose dialectical treatise on conservative notions of womanhood, maternity and sex relationships with a *problematica* one would have thought more congenial to an aging Ferrari than to a thoughtful playwright in his thirties. Insightful observations about the cost of propriety on the psyche of the *borghesia* are undermined by vapid euphuisms in which the familiar bourgeois preoccupations about status and marriage are conveyed as commercial "*affari.*" Elena, for example, the only female character with contempt for the second-class status of women within a class otherwise priding itself on its fair sexual politics --and the play amply demonstrates that -- is all too suddenly transformed into a patronizing critic of her own sex as the real threat to family and mores:

> ELENA.- *La falange di quelli che fanno la corte sollo alle maritate, quelli che non vogliono pagare il dazio alla dogana: i contrabandieri dell' amore. E sia detto sottovoce, che nessuno ci senta; le vere, vere nemiche di una povera ragazza, la loro rovina capitale, siamo noi, noi maritate; il contrabbando è la rovina del commercio, nessuna in piazza può sostenere la concorrenza di noi*

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[140] *Oscar puts his arm around Maria's waist, and both bend over to caress Oscarino who continues writing. Giorgio enters from the background. [...] He fixes an envious stare on the loving group of Oscarino with his parents; then his gaze rests on his son Anselmuccio, alone and neglected, sleeping on the sofa; then he quickly takes the light overcoat he has left on the sofa, covers Anselmuccio with it and sits with his two feet on the sofa, staring at him with a look now pitiful and now sickly. A clock strikes the hour...*

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maritate, e la povera ragazza dichiara fallimento! (Act II)[141]

It is a contrived transformation, because it is she who will threaten the honor of another woman's family. Torelli has in the meantime tried to present her as an embittered idealist trying to compromise society with the same measures with which it has compromised her own integrity, but the effort does not pay off, because the rhetoric of the play is too conservative to allow such subtle ironies to shine through. This discrepancy between rhetoric and intent widens from one play to another, with the critics increasingly resentful of the playwright's style and the public increasingly unsympathetic to his intents.

In retrospect, Torelli seemed to begin losing touch with the times as soon as skepticism and pessimism about the way Italy was modernizing itself entered into the socio-political debates and a sense of social inertia insinuating itself in articles, books and lectures made progress appear arrested. Indeed, as soon as Torelli ceased to portray class conflict or the reformative movement of *borghesia*, his dramaturgy continuously relapsed to sentimentality and his ideological

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[141] *ELENA: The cohortes of those who only woo married women, those who don't want to pay taxes at customs: the love smugglers. And let it be said off the record, now that no one can hear us; the real enemies of a poor girl, their principal threat are we, married women; smuggling is commerce's undoing, a poor girl cannot compete with us in the market and thus she files for bankruptcy!*

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vigor withered to Ferrarian didacticism.[142] Fragilità (Fragility), Triste realtà (Sad Reality), Amore uguaglia (Love Equalizes), I derisi (The ridiculous), Triste passato (Sad Past) and Colore del tempo, all written before 1880, manifest Torelli's turn to a dramaturgy invariably investigating sadness, pessimism, ennui and apathy as symptoms of middle-class stasis. Sentimental and gloomy love stories, bored wives and boring husbands, miscommunication and adulterous scandals, all become predictable Torellian topics, and if there is anything which manages to maintain their interest as something more important than quaint cultural mementos of *Belle èpoque* lassitude[143], it is his willingness to challenge conventional wisdom about the proprieties of bourgeois family, no matter if the plays end with bourgeois peace restored. Certainly Torelli does not want to scandalize, but he is equally unwilling to offer his bourgeois public a justification, a vindication of their conventions. It is true that his new themes are essentially those dominating the dramaturgy of high verismo, but while for Giacosa, Praga and Bracco these themes are worked out to exemplify fin-du-siecle malaise, for Torelli they simply

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[142] *It is interesting that Torelli seemed to regain his dramatic powers with his "trilogia drammatica" Donne antiche" and Donne moderne which like Gli onesti and I mariti are structured around the contrast and comparison of conflicting social attitudes. These plays were initially performed separately (1886 and 1897 respectively) and only later were they published together.*

[143] *Personè, 76ff.*

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provide stories amenable to dialogues deliberating domestic anxieties and conjugal impasses[144]. The more he strives to capture modernity, the more Romantic and old-fashioned he appears to his contemporaries. Often autobiographical references appear here and there as if he wants to convinve by the *verità* of his ideas and emotions. Yet even these personal intimations, sentimental and nostalgic as they read today, evidence only discontentment and defeatism. *"S' era tutti entusiasti al sessantasei, e non si presero infreddature. Il torpore ci ha vinti dacchè siamo indipendenti dallo straniero, e starnutiamo ad ogni soffio di vento,"*[145] laments Pietro, Torelli's persona in Colore del tempo, one of the less fortunate love tragicomedies. This admission of fatigue and emotional vacuousness insinuates itself as late verismo decadence, a striking departure from the positivist attitude of La verità. Benedetto Croce explains this gloomy and decadent dramaturgy as a precursor of Verismo, but neither his audience nor the critics, perhaps not even Torelli himself,

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[144] *In a verse prologue to Colori del tempo (1875), Torelli sardonically refers to his disoriented dramaturgy: "Pubblico mio, fra l' altre t' ho voluto dir questa/Perchè tutti mi appongono che la mia vena è mesta./ Eppure questa volta io la sforzai, la resi/ Ilare...Per far questo non scrissi un dramma a tesi!/Qui non tesi da svolgere, o da scioglier problema,/Ma un colore del tempo: ecco tutto il mio tema..."Achille Torelli, Colori del tempo in Teatro vol.7 (Milano: Libreria Brigola, 1877), 9.*

[145] *In 1866, all were enthusiastic, nothing could keep them down. Torpor defeated us soon after we became independent of foreigners, worn out by the least problem.(Literally: All were so enthusiastic in sixty-six, they wouldn't catch a cold. Torpor has defeated us since our independence from foreigners and now we sneeze at every breeze...)*

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were capable of discerning or caring to discern a dramaturgy anticipating "*quelle correnti spirituali, nelle quali s´ incontrano parecchi artisti modernissimi, che, diversi per altri rispetti e raggiungenti altezze artistiche diverse, hanno in commune la dolcezza dell´ amore e della compassione, e la morbosa sensibilità.*"[146]

Colore del tempo [freely translated as "The Spirit of Time" (1876) is a typical example of his middle-period dramatic concerns and one that may illustrate Croce´s assertions. The autobiographical elements are obvious in this tragicomic story of a confused and tired society for which love has lost any redeeming meaning and in which youth, a casualty of social *affarismo*, feels wronged, betrayed and lost. What with its nostalgia for Risorgimento idealism and its emphasis on the failure to have a mission like that of the older generation--*le anime più giovani sono quelle dei vecchi*[147], he writes--the play, phlegmatic and philosophical, communicates Torelli´s sadness and cynicism for everything that has gone wrong in his life as a citizen and artist. He has invented two young but "aging" Neapolitans, Marcello and Pietro, complementary alter egos of his mind,

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[146] *"Those spiritual currents, in which several modern artists meet, who, although different in many ways and of different artistic aptitudes, share an affinity for the sweetness of love and compassion, and a morbid sensibility."Benedetto Croce, 343.*

[147] *"The youngest souls are those of the old people." This maxim appears both in Colore del Tempo and Donne moderne.*

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whose irresoluteness and latent self-pity declare the frustration of a "lost generation." The two friends have come to the mansion of Marcello's grandmother, a commanding marquise symbolizing the assertiveness of the d'Herrera generation, to throw a reunion party for their fellow-students and friends from the past, only to find that noone will be joining them, because all are "lost:" One has just committed suicide, another has emigrated to America as a menial worker, another has become an underpaid schoolmaster in some remote province and another is serving a prison sentence. It must have been very daring in 1876 to put on a play that so starkly stresses the social failures of the "new" society to live up to its own expectations and it is probably one of the reasons the play failed to find an audience: It was too "realistic" to be acceptable as true.[148]

The only people who come to the party are Clara, another unhappy and "childless" young woman whose baron husband "bought" her to secure her family's seventeen votes he needed to get elected, Maria, her romantic sister cruelly mocked by the two skeptics, and the Baron himself. Marcello has flirted with Clara and although there is mutual attraction, appearances are honored. The Baron however thinks that there is something going on between Pietro and Clara and challenges

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[148] *Decades later, Torelli disowned, I think unwisely, the play and portion of it were transferred almost unchanged to Le donne moderne, whose basic story is the same, but the ideas are diametrically different.*

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Pietro to a duel. Maria, in love with Marcello and hurt by his indifference, faints and as she has to remain in Marcello's house, Clara feels compelled to stay with her sister. Yet the Baron takes this as an excuse for Clara to stay with her "lover." The young woman asks the Baron to "return her to her father" so that his honor and career will be saved, since it is she who will be stigmatized as the adulteress.

But while everything seems hopeless and menacing, suddenly order is restored. Pietro is not fatally hurt and when he returns he halfheartedly proposes to Maria, after Clara has told him that Maria was concerned about his life, while in fact Maria was concerned for Marcello whom she thought of as the Baron's challenger. Marcello denies his love for Clara, who eventually gives the Baron another chance to repair their marriage, restoring mutual respect. The only one who seems to be left out of this arrangement is Marcello, but no one is "really" happy either. Maria still loves Marcello, but marries Pietro. Clara lies to Maria that she has never loved Marcello, although she still does. And Pietro, remaining a "beggar," is forced to sacrifice himself in a wedding he knows will not bring him love.

Torelli is not a courageous enough critic to question society's basic assumptions about itself, and the more aware he seems to be of this artistic weakness, the less defiant of social conventions he becomes. He can only create an impression of social melancholy, suggest the "color" of

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reality; his realism is not even photographic; it is similar to newspaper cartoon realism. The playwright can only go as far as to sketch the tragicomicality of his *borghesi*. A more refined type of this grotesque realism will be much appreciated in the early decades of the twentieth century, more in the grotesque impressionism of Chiarelli and Rosso di San Secondo, and less in the dramas of Tozzi, though no association between Torelli and those later dramatists has ever been attempted. By the early twentieth century Torelli was thought too hopelessly outdated to deserve the status of pioneer, or *caposcuola*, in Italian drama. It might be that Colori del tempo is lackluster theatre, but it is a sincere chronicle of a *borghesia* beginning to feel uneasy with itself, the *borghesia* of *verismo*.

Written in 1881, Scrollina[149] initiates the last and, compared to the middle years of Torelli's career, more felicitous period. A good vehicle for a talented ingenue --the eponymous role was a favorite of Eleonora Duse in the early stages of her career -- the play survived quite successfully into the present century, a harbinger of the theatre that Dario Nicodemi would lovingly tender to the tired World War I bourgeois. Essentially a sentimental story about youth and

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[149] *First performance at the Bologna Arena del Sole by the company of Luigi Monti, 14 July 1881. The play is based on an earlier playlet with the title Scuola degli artisti [School for Artists]. The character of Scrollina and the milieu were not changed in the later drama. The playlet can be found in Scenario 8 (October 1939), 445-47. See also, Croce, 340.*

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love, it owes its freshness and appeal not only to the emotional tenacity of Scrollina, the young model who risks her honor to save the life and happiness of the man she loves unreciprocally, but also to the re-creation of a cosmopolitan world of artists and socialites, a *belle-epoque* configuration that has fascinated theatre artists as diverse as Ibsen, Puccini and Strindberg. "Scrollina" is the sobriquet of Teresa who, when faced with life's adversities, *scrolla*, that is, shrugs her shoulders, submissively adapting to the way of the world. Having suffered a childhood and an adolescence in deep poverty and desperation, she is a model for up-and-coming painters, when an elderly Count Girolamo asks to marry her. Forced by her dying mother, she agrees to the marriage, although she is in love with Arturo di Fornovo, an aristocrat artist for whom she had posed several times. Arturo is in love with Adriana, a niece of Girolamo and wife to Duke Ottavio. When Ottavio becomes suspicious that Adriana is conducting an affair with Arturo, he challenges the latter to a duel, avoided at the last minute by the intervention of Scrollina. While Adriana is in Arturo's studio, Scrollina lies to Ottavio that she and not Adriana is Arturo's lover. Duke Ottavio is however provoked by Bruto Neri--an embittered painter (another alter ego of Torelli)[150] whose early success did not

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[150] *The autobiographical overtones are again apparent in the psychological composition of Bruto, a character who like Crollina has too strong a sense of individual freedom not to be sensitive to the duplicity of modern bourgeois culture. Bruto, for example, correlates his own predicament as an artist fallen*

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continue--with whom Scrollina had shared days of privation in the past when both were struggling to succeed, who wants to defend her when Ottavio offends her honor. Ottavio is presumed dead, Bruto escapes with Veronica, another rich socialite, and Scrollina exits from Arturo's life "dishonored," but resolute in pretending she does not love him so that she will not endanger his happiness with Adriana's side. "*E chi l' ha mai preso sul serio il mio povero onore?*,"[151] she wonders as she leaves the stage.

The drama has no social thesis to defend and the "problem" of honor within the realm of a jaded and idle *borghesia* remains dissociated from any broader criticism of class mores. Torelli thinks here of honor in terms of love and, concerned with the duality love/integrity, he presents Scrollina as a victim not of a particular social system but of her personal identification of love as the meaning of life,

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from the state of critical grace with the sorrows of the individual abused by the prejudices of his peers:BRUTO.- [...] In quanto agli uomini, non sono meno serpi anche loro; vanno a scovare un altro uomo, umile, nascosto, che non pensava neppure di essere qualcosa, e alla prima manifestazione del suo ingengno, lo esaltano, lo divinizzano... E quel povero essere stordito, spaventato dal suo successo geniale, non crede a sè stesso. Ma appena è lí, sul piedistallo, muta di faccia la scena; la gente si pente di avercelo messo; e lí comincia una lotta accanita, feroce..."(Act I) [Bruto.- As for the people, they are no less hypocrites; they go searching for another man, humble, withdrawn, who did not think much of himself, and with the first manifestation of his genious, they exult him, they deify him... And this poor bewildered creature, frightened by his ingenious success, has no faith in himself. Once on top, the scene changes; people regret having him put there; and there begins a merciless, ferocious ordeal.

[151] *"And who has ever taken my poor honor seriously?" Act III, 283.*

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the one and only measure of one's conscience and humanity. Scrollina is not a wronged but a misunderstood human being and the social conventions she disregards have compromised not the sincerity of her feelings but her social image, what others might have called her "real honor." Torelli has resisted the temptation of a happy ending that would vindicate Scrollina's self-sacrifice. Although tacit pathos and self-pity are melodramatic emotionalisms he is unwilling to forego, her courage not to submit to a hopeless amorous arrangement with Arturo manifests Torelli's antipathy for a society which gives no credit to selfless individuals committed to superior ideas of socialization. Scrollima and Bruto have been fighting their *lotta*, their war for survival all their lives, elusive people at odds with a society that has relentlessly challenged their sense of honor, submitting them to all sorts of humiliations. Their capacity to love and sacrifice part of their own rights to happiness and fulfillment in order to protect and sustain the happiness of those they love sets them apart from regular society: "little people" crushed by a culture which has no respect for individuals going against the odds.[152]

Torelli is not a playwright whom critics associate with *verismo* and the truth is that only a handful of his later plays may qualify stylistically as veristic. Certainly conversant with the aesthetic and thematic permutations

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[152]*Condescending to this "romantic" idealism of Scrollina Personè finds the play hopelessly dated. Op. cit., 73.*

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verismo was causing in the field of the novel and the stort story, the playwright could not have remained uninfluenced by its various interconnecting currents. Two one-act plays, L'Israelita and Figlia suavissima (Daughter Dearest), best exemplify Torelli's *verismo*, although neither has any affinity with the folkloric origins of Verga's idiom or the socio-economic preoccupations of Giuseppe Giacosa's metropolitan *verismo*. It is indeed a major change for Torelli when psychological realism supercedes social realism so late in his career, but an even more significant development of his theatre, neglected by modern critics, is its reorientation to a *problematica* already in line with the metaphysical concerns usually attributed to the movements of *crepuscolarismo* and *teatro intimista*.[153] L'Israelita[154] is a chamber play for three female characters with a topic--maternity--which Italian playwrights have found extremely fascinating and controversial. Edita is a young Jewish woman whose marriage had remained childless, but whose desire for maternity has not been diminished. Desperate for a child, she betrays her husband with another man who leaves her pregnant. Her husband, probably sensing that the conceived child was not his own--Torelli does not clarify the issue--becomes reserved and aloof and one day he dies in a dire road accident. Editta

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[153] *For the definition of these movements see chapter 4.*

[154] ***First performance at the Sannazaro theatre of Naples by the Compagnia Drammatica Nazionale on 13 December 1883.***

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recapitulates the points of this sad story to Lidia, her best friend and a married woman, whose life has been turned upside down after she has become intimate with a young marquis, the man who, as it turns out, is Editta's lover and father of her child. This young man, aware of Editta's situation, is eager to legitimize their relationship and his mother comes to Editta's house to assure her of their commitment to accept her in their family. Editta, however, realizes that she never loved the marquis and that since he does not love her either, a reciprocally loveless marriage would be detrimental to them both. She refuses to marry him, resolving to be a mother without ever demanding his support or security.

Filia suavissima[155] is also a psychological study of three generations of women tarnished by dark secrets and suspicions. Carmen, the daughter of Lucia, the widow of a marquis, has suufered inexplicably the hatred of her grandmother at the same time her brother has been enjoying her affections. Carmen has just come back from a convent where she had vowed to remain as a nun, a decision she later felt she was unable to honor. Her return exacerbates the domestic situation and arouses a heated argument between Lucia and her mother-in-law who is accusing her of adultery and naming Carmen the daughter of Mario, the man Carmen herself is in love with and ready to marry. The truth, however, comes out.

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[155] *First performance at the Fiorentini Theatre of Naples by the Compagnia Quillace on 11 February 1898.*

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When Mario officially proposes marriage to Carmen, Lucia cannot possibly consent to this wedding, simply because Carmen is not her own daughter, but her half-sister, the daughter of her own mother. Carmen's father is actually Mario's father, with whom Lucia's mother had an affair when Lucia was newly married. Before dying in childbirth, she makes Lucia promise to hide her "shame" and to raise the child as her own daughter. Lucia's baby had also died at birth, and thus Carmen took the place of that dead daughter.

Motherhood and *dovere*, the two themes that link these one-act plays together, are familiar topoi of melodramatic literature, but for Torelli as well as for more accomplished *veristi* they offer pretexts for the study of more esoteric *verità* of human psyche, since in both cases broader issues such as love, self-awareness and morality are explained in terms of the individual and his or her humanity rather than of social norms. Benedetto Croce's notion about Torelli's *morbosa sensibilità* makes more sense rearding these rather than the earlier plays, since here potentially melodramatic, themes and ideas are symbolically dramatized, allusions to superior emotional and spiritual states of love.[156] Although Croce is correct in treating the plays as manifestations of Torelli's artistic maturity, this maturity did not occur haphazardly. His *verismo* is the consummation of his earlier

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[156]*Croce, 343.*

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social realism, the attainment of a dramaturgical program that did present not individuals as either for or against society, but portrayed them as "compartments" of a complex whole. Editta and Lucia, both assertive women with sense and sensibility much like Ibsen's heroines, are conscious of their social and cultural identities. They understand themselves as being shaped by choices and circumstances, which, whether or not society has deemed them immoral, unethical or unconventional, have determined their spirituality and their sense of social dignity. And this, simply because they are "real," that is, because they were influenced by human passions, natural impulses superior to etiquette and propriety. Motherhood and love then are not just symbols, but natural expressions of emotional and spiritual freedom, a freedom that society cannot actually regulate. Torelli has found the courage to declare that spiritual freedom is the *valvola* of society and not its instituted morality, but when he expresses these ideas, he sounds as if he is regurgitating the basic concepts of *ibsenismo*. Nevertheless L'Israelita and Figlia suavissima and their considerable success did not compell him to experiment more dynamically with the forms of contempory drama.

After 1880 Torelli no longer felt comfortable either with modernity or with his talent to decode its messages. For him a literature of *verità* did not mean simply chronicling crisis and despair, but rather championing those *verità*, which

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through the depiction of a crisis would appear triumphant as better alternatives of socialization. Torelli could not create a theatre without a message, that is, theatre without some benefit for the community. But as we have said this does not mean at all that, like Ferrari, he wanted to "prove" the positive or the negative quality of human institutions. On the contrary, Torelli believed that ideas should insinuate themselves upon audience memebrs not as maxims but as indices of progress, not as regulations but as expressions of freedom. Love and duty are the guarantors of this freedom, and it is this freedom that should characterize modern progressive societies.[157] Torelli probably failed to explore the expressive potential of *verismo*, precisely because *verismo* showed this freedom as untenable within the various bourgeois societies of Italy. After Scrollina he could only feel a playwright without a cause.

Torelli's failure, not only to communicate with his audience, but also to keep up with new literary currents, alienated him from the theatre and damaged his health. Obsessed with failure[158] and exhausted by family problems and ailments, he saw a life's work fall into oblivion. With success and esteem eluding him, he entered public service, first as a lyceum schoolmaster, then as head librarian of

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[157]*Cf. Achille Fiocco, op. cit., 52-53.*

[158]*Cf letter to Antona-Traversi, La verità sul teatro italiano, 60-1; Grassi, xix.*

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Naples' Biblioteca Nazionale --a post he retained until very late in his old age-- and finally as General Manager of the Teatro San Carlo of Naples. Apart from the Opere he had begun publishing in 1902, Torelli also wrote a commentary on the Song of Songs (1892) and essays on art and esthetics: Scienza dell' arte [The Science of Art] (1896) and L' arte e la morale [Art and Morality] (1906). After his death, he was remembered almost exclusively as the author of I Mariti. The play has entered all recent anthologies of modern Italian drama and was made into a film in 1941. Most of the works discussed here enjoyed second careers as radio plays in the fifties and the early sixties, while Scrollina was successfully produced by RAI in 1960. Since then Torelli's dramas have remain unperformed and unstudied.[159]

Be this as it may, Italian Realism came of age with Torelli. As *verismo* conquers the theatre, the romantic ideas of *teatro educatore* and *Italianità* ceased to be relevant. The success of Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana is for many a watermark in the history of Italian *verismo*. Hence, the drama, and occasionally the opera, will not seek to reproduce the experience of a uniform national society, exemplified in the representation of a national *borghesia*. Instead, it will compartmentalize Italian experience and society, and represent the *realtà* of the new age with special attention to the

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[159] *Personè's essay (1973) is, as far as I have managed to detect, the last study of Torelli's theatre.*

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cultural and social discrepancies manifested in metropolitan or provincial social systems. Money, the crisis of *imborghesimento*, class conflict and regional disparity will become the focus of the new drama. With Verga and Giacosa *verismo* becomes synonymous with the search of the social and psychological *verità*.

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CHAPTER 4

VERISMO: ROOTS AND BRANCHES

The Age of Verismo

The attainment of Unification and the formation of the Italian state, a dream and a cause for generations of oppressed Italians, were political events shaped not exclusively by the political and military ventures of the Risorgimento nationalistic elites during the first half of the nineteenth century. As a new European entity Italy came about mainly because Austria and France, the great powers persistently vying with each other for the political control of the peninsula, were entering a period of deep diplomatic crisis, as Prussia, a more vigorous European aggressor, asserted its own geostrategic "rights" within the restless continent, challenging their authority. Indeed, the realization of the Risorgimento aspirations transpired precisely because the historical, cultural and diplomatic circumstances in Europe were by mid-century ripe enough to support not only the desire of oppressed nations for autonomy

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and self-determination, but also their determination to achieve these goals. On 17 March 1861 an Italian parliament proclaimed the kingdom of Italy and Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia became the first king of Italy. It is, however, ironic that neither of the political and spirituals leaders of the Risorgimento, Mazzini or Garibaldi, participated in the first government of the fledgling nation. On 6 June 1861, Cavour, an agile and resourceful protagonist in the struggles of the previous decades, died and although Italy was a reality, complete unification would not be achieved for another ten years. Rome, the whole of Lazio and the Venetian provinces were still outside the "national borders," a large portion of Italians had no right to vote, the church was powerful and inimical to Italian unity and many patriots, especially on the side of the Republicans and the *garibaldini* became disillusioned with the present solution to the political problem. The Pope, supported by the French, had no desire to relinquish Rome and thus his political power, and the Austrians, weakened but still standing tall, abhorred giving up Venice. Within this precarious situation, the slow, moderate diplomacy of the monarchy only seemed to exacerbate the tension between the government and the republicans. For several contemporaries Italy seemed to be losing its idealism, or worse, to be compromising its own political honor.

In 1864 Italy's government moved from Turin to Florence, and the new capital, for centuries a center of tremendous

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intellectual and cultural activity, became the foster home for the new cultural trends that would soon forge Italy's literary and artistic identity. In 1866 Italy, siding with Prussia against Austria, managed to annex the Veneto, thanks to the victories of the Prussian allies and despite its bloody and humiliating defeats on land and sea. Rome had to wait four more years, as it was during the Franco-Prussian War and after the withdrawal of the defeated French from there (20 September 1870) that the city would be declared capital of the united nation.

With independence achieved, it was then time to organize the national society, to establish a flexible and effective administration, to countermand regional economical and social disparities and, all in all, to establish not only a united country, but also a united people. As Giorgio Negrelli observes, the objective became not the creation of the state by the people, but the creation of the people by the state. The Italian *borghesia*, the political winner of the Risorgimento, had the ambition not only to assert its authority and its values within the new state, but also and more importantly to "revolutionize" society and culture according to its own ideology and interests. Ambitious though this class was, it soon came to realize that its socio-cultural goals were not shared by the rest of social strata, the peasantry, the older aristocratic apparatus and the religious establishment, all of which, now from class self-

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interest and now from pressing regional social conflicts were more than eager to challenge the social initiatives of the *borghesia*. Moreover, regional social problems, neglected and unaddressed during the Risorgimento, had resurfaced, very soon becoming a hindrance not only to the national capitalistic progress but also to national unity. Among them no others were more pressing than the indigence of the rural (mostly southern) regions, the rampant illiteracy of the masses and the sclerotic, almost feudal, administrative, judicial and fiscal systems hindering the process of harmonization and cohesion. As the unification and the years of Italy's adjustment to the pace of industrialized Europe coincided with a prolonged period of European economic depression (1873-1895), Italy's transition from agricultural to capitalistic nation was anything but smooth. The social and political strains caused by the process of development were nowhere felt more than in the underdeveloped and resourceless regions of meridional Italy.

For a moment the Right seemed incapable of providing workable solutions to these problems. In fact, it looked as if it offered no solutions at all, and whenever efforts were being undertaken for the attainment of some sort of supraregional homogeneity of customs and public services, resistance from local societies was brusk, violent and counterproductive. Even when certain policies seemed to have some chance of being ratified by local authorities, bribery,

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profiteering, and favoritism countermanded any positive impact on the local economies and societies. With the people illiterate, subject to disease and practically enslaved to the estates of powerful but intransigent landlords, there was little hope for homogeneous progress, and the government seemed unwilling to cope with the problem head on. Especially in the South a bloody civil war between the Fasci Siciliani and the "national" army claimed more deaths than all of the Risorgimento battles. The king himself had no real power, nor was his authority respected in the southern provinces. There the regional elites, loyal to the displaced dynasties and concerned with losing their ancient privileges, were a constant nuisance and posed a threat to unity. The King had no support from the Church either and was thus constrained to rely on the army and the Chamber of Deputies, itself composed of men with conservative, hardly "national" interests.

When in 1876 power passed into the hands of the Left, there was some revival of hope that the government would be more open and more socially conscious, but Agostino Depretis (1813-1887), the new leader supported by the Italian Left, did not actually live up to such expectations. Depretis' regime has become synonymous with the politics of *transformismo*,[1] a system or rather a method aimed at alleviating disparities and differences between parties and classes. In reality, however,

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[1] *F. Chabod, Storia della politica italiana dal 1870 al 1896 vol. 1 (Bari: Laterza, 1965), 86ff, 140-1.*

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the system only aspired to "transform" interest groups and opposition parties into "collaborators." Political corruption, bribery, clientism and opportunistic alliances became staples of Italian politics, so that instead of providing pragmatic solutions to the infant nation's social problems, the system provided a power game for the bourgeois elites who were concerned with maintaining the status quo and their own economic prosperity. Depretis' era, sometimes called as "*il periodo umbertino*" (from the name of King Umberto I, [1878-1900]), was a period of crisis, scandal and parliamentary chaos.

After Depretis' death the situation did not change radically. His successor Francesco Crispi (1818-1901), a former militant follower of Garibaldi, did not put an end to the disreputable practices of *transformismo*, but used it for his own political ends. A rather authoritarian politician - and a role model for Mussolini -- he maintained some of his mentor's radicalism, but his autocratic methods did not advance the status of Italian government and parliament. During his regime essential measures regarding education, health, justice reform, the criminal code and franchise reform in municipal elections were implemented, but at the same time politics as usual prevailed, incapable of redressing the system or serving the interest of the nation. The bankruptcy of Banca Romana, an irregular industrial development, the uncontrollable expansion of the big cities and especially

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Rome; the brutal suppression of regional revolts in Sicily (*Fasci Siciliani*), the raising of taxes to support Crispi's grandiose diplomatic and colonial schemes, his high tariff policy and protectionism; the importation of cheaper agricultural products from Europe and overseas--all these caused serious inflation, and in certain southern areas symptoms of starvation were ubiquitous. The increasing social disparity between rich and poor, North and South, gave way to the formation of labor unions and socialist groups. The theories of Marx and his disciples inevitably encouraged the political awakening of the lower labor classes seeking power through the formation of the party of Italian workers in 1892 and the socialist party of Italian workers in 1893. Public upheavals were suppressed with the use of military force, a situation which aggravated the mistrust of the masses for the government and its bourgeois composition and allowed polemical theorists of marxism and anarchism to manipulate the political consciousness of the proletariat. On 29 July 1900 King Umberto was assassinated by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci as a retaliation for the oppression of the people and the event seemed to provide cause for a less liberal orientation of Italian politics.

With the ascension to the throne of Vittorio Emmanuele III and the rise to power of Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928), however, Italy entered a period of relative political calm and moderate liberalism, terminating the

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political crisis and the authoritarian attitude of the previous decades. His regime, *l'età giolittiana* (1901-1914), was the era of the Italian belle epoque[2] and a period during which civil liberties were more respected and social advances were encouraged. Public life, thanks to the skillful and tolerant leadership of Giolitti, became more civilized and basic social rights were acknowledged and conceded. The socialist movement was empowered and Giolitti maintained a cautious but never oppressive policy towards the new opposition. As Benedetto Croce and Giorgio Negrelli observe, Giolitti governed well because he seemed to have found the ideal balance between the *reale* and the *ideale*, "*un realismo illuminato da un principio ideale:*"[3] An institutional compromise between the political parties was no longer viewed as impossible to achieve.[4] The outbreak of World War I, in fact, changed drastically the social dynamics of the country. The borghesia lost a great deal of its pre-war social prestige and new social powers emerged, most of which would find their

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[2] *See Luigi Personè, Il teatro italiano della "Belle Époque". (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1972), 34. The author claims the period to coincide with the acme of the borghesia, although it is more accurate to say that Italian belle epoque begins at least two decades earlier, during the rule of Depretis.*

[3] *"A realism illuminated by an idealistic principle." Cited in Negrelli, ibid., 20, 22; Benedetto Croce, A History of Italy 1871-1915 (1929; New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 214ff.*

[4] *For a thorough account of Giolitti's regime see William Salomone, Italy in the Giolittian Era: Italian Democracy in the Making (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960).*

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expression in the nationalistic socialism-fascism of Benito Mussolini.[5]

Society and culture: progress and crisis (1871-1914).

With unification and independence achieved, Italy was ready to join other European countries in the pursuit of social modernization and capitalistic development, notwithstanding its chronic political crisis. Although there was no apparent consensus among the various strata and groups as to how or how fast this progress should occur, it was, practically speaking, the ideology and the interests of the *borghesia* that ultimately set the parameters for the kind of culture and social philosophy Italy should adopt as an advanced nation. Certainly among the bourgeois class there was no unanimity as to what ethics and principals directed its ideology as a class claiming for itself the right to govern and shape the identity of the country. The *borghesia* that eventually consolidated its power in the national politics was the group with the least egalitarian social designs and the most "conservative" ideas. The maintainance of the social hierarchy minus the aristocracy and the preservation of their hegemony towered above all other social considerations. Certainly, this pattern of *imborghesimento* was not exclusively Italian, but Italy was among the last of Western European

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[5] *N. Valeri, Da Giolitti a Mussolini (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1967).*

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nations to confront the struggle of the classes and the effects of industrialization. This historical circumstance inevitably complicated social interaction, since various attitudes and opposing movements entered Italy at the same time forcefully trying to cancel each other, impeding, thus, the culture in absorbing and assimilating them. The aristocracy, as a class with a predominantly regional political perspective and devoid of national aspirations, often from weakness and often from resistance to the bourgeois regime, marginalized itself from political action and intellectual activity. The agrarian societies, struck by illiteracy, sickness, superstition and poverty, were not in a position to assert their rights or intervene in the process of development in ways other than rebellion and *brigantaggio* (militia terrorism). Contrary to the other classes, the *borghesia*, rural and metropolitan, had found common grounds of mutual communication and understanding. Although there were inevitable disparities in intellectual achievement and social maturity between the metropolitan centers and the periphery, the effort to emulate the prospering borghesia of the greater European nations armed the local *borghesie* with a willingness to downplay their discrepancies and strive for a homogeneity of attitude and ideology. The fact that they were practically the leaders of the nation and their willingness to maintain this status prevented to a large measure conflicts and antagonisms. The peace maintained among the regional *borghesie*

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allowed the interaction of ideas and the cultural debate to transpire at least until the end of the century, within their realm, irrespective of the autocratic way with which they practiced politics. Indeed, positivism, naturalism, socialism, and their various political, social and cultural branches, grew out of the progressive spirit of the bourgeois class. It was their more advanced intellectuals who were to promote those ideas which would encourage social integration and gradually challenge their own legitimacy as a ruling class.

The most pressing problem facing the new Italian state was not so much the incapacity of the government to propagate and implement social laws "applicable" to all regions and classes, but the vast cultural and social difference between the developed North (*setentrione*) and the underdeveloped South (*meridione*). The more the North seemed to benefit from aggressive industrialization, progress in transportation and social mobility (the creation of a *"piccola borghesia"* from among the thousands of Southern Italians emigrating to the North), the more the South seemed to remain stagnant, unproductive and feudalistic. The so called *"Questione meridionale"* was-- and still is -- a major concern for all post Unitarian governments, since any kind of development seemed to widen rather than close the gap between the regions. The discrepancy not only consistently arrested any attempt at social and economic cohesion; it also challenged the most sacrosanct of the bourgeois aspirations: progress, wealth and

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national peace. The inability to solve this problem was offensive to young intellectuals and even more so to those who, coming from the depressed regions, sought to examine and offer --unfortunately to no avail-- explanations and solutions. This effort led to the development of a whole literary movement, a *"letteratura "meridionalistica."* This literature[6] not only showed the problem as more pressing than previously thought, it also became the intellectual and sociological basis for the development of *verismo* --or at least a branch of *verismo*- as a paramount Italian literary movement with seminal contributions not only to the field of novel and short story but the theatre as well.

This question was not without an impact on the North. The number of people coming to the big settentrional cities

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[6] *Essential works inspired by the "questione meridionale" and which also had a tremendous impact on the social/sociological program of verismo are: Pasquale Villari's Lettere meridionali [Letters from the South] (1875) and l' Inchiesta in Sicilia (Investigation in Sicily) (1877) by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino. It is here pertinent to say that socialism as a political and social movement never found a wide following in the South, nor did it have any lasting or significant influence on Italian literature and drama. As Croce maintains, the poetic hour of socialism had come and gone unperceived, ... in the literature of romantic realism, as for example in the work of Giovanni Verga. [...] Examples of "social" novels and dramas as appeared at the time ...attracted little attention then, and are now forgotten." Ibid., 156, 157. A socialist theatre, nonetheless, developed at the end of the century in Sicily during the political activism of the Fasci Siciliani, although none of the texts has survived. From secondary sources it can be detected that in form these plays were rather naturalistic. It was their content that seemed radical and subversive by the authorities. From plot descriptions which have survived in newspapers "reviews" and other documents, those quite often melodramatic plays were like the American "Living Newspaper" kind of drama developed by the Federal Theatre Project in the late 1930s. The most important "playwright" of that Sicilian drama was Rosario Garibaldi Bosco. For more on the issue, see Gabriello Montemagno, Scena in rivolta: Teatro politico in Sicilia (1860-1960) (Palermo: S.F. Flaccovio editore, 1980), 31-42, especially 36ff.*

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looking for a better life created serious demographic problems and their assimilation in the local societies was not always smooth, at least for those totally unskilled or uneducated. This forced urbanization of hitherto agrarian populations led to the formation of a massive underclass of workers demanding equal rights and better living, but their demands did not move their bourgeois employers to improve their conditions. Filippo Turati (1857-1932) and Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), Italy's first socialist thinkers, gave the labor union a justification for the pursuit of its social rights but it was natural that their "socialism," their sensitivity to the modern social predicaments, would affect the social awareness of several non-socialist intellectuals, even though their writings would only occasionally reflect a politicized criticism of *transformismo*'s failures. What with the dynamic confluence of radical and moderate political and social ideas, the period until 1914 remained for Italy the age of positivism, the age of the bourgeois ideology. *Verismo* as a movement pertaining to the totality of Italian artistic activity was the application of the positivist thought in the nation's culture, a movement which did not remain unaltered, but one which, amenable to new and evolving trends of humanist thought,[7] captured the spirit of the age as well as its sociopolitical and cultural

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[7] *Cf. Alessandro d'Amico, "Il teatro verista e il 'grande attore'," Il Teatro italiano del naturalismo a Pirandello, ed. Alessandro Tinterri (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 25.*

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transmutations.[8] But to understand *verismo* and its cultural implications, it is first important to shed some light on Italian positivism and its theorists, since it was these theories and the debates they stirred that inspired the *veristi* of Italian literature. It was a theory that Italian *borghesia* turned enthusiastically into political and cultural praxis. For Italy positivism meant modernity and the *borghesia* enthusiastically sought to apply its tenets as political and cultural praxis. *Verismo*, the literature of a positivist age, was not so much the last romantic, but the first modern literary and artistic movement of Italy.[9]

Positivism in Italy

Italian culture entered modernity when Western Europe, especially France and Britain, was already the political, scientific and cultural laboratory of Positivism. Founded and propagated by the French empiricist philosopher Auguste Comte, Positivism not only inspired the development of scientific, sociological and historiographical research, but also provided a model and a method for the analysis of the physical and social phenomena of human "reality," without any

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[8] *For a different opinion with regard to literature see Roberto Fedi, Cultura letteraria e società civile nell'Italia unita (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1984), 192ff.*

[9] *Franca Angelini, "Teatro verista in Italia," Naturalismo e verismo: generi, poetiche e techniche Atti del congresso internazionale di studi. 10-13 Feb. 1986 (Catania: Fondazione Verga, 1988), 325.*

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epistemological recourse to metaphysics. In correspondence to the major advances achieved in the field of technology and physical sciences, the philosophical arguments of Comte emphasized an optimism about the unstoppable and beneficent progress of humanity fed and sustained by the faith in the infallibility of the scientific and sociological conclusions based on inquiry, experiment and analysis.[10] The publication of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species (1859) and the sociological philosophy of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) popularized the idea of evolution and transformation, notions which along with similar positivist assertions inevitably affected cultural and literary discourse with significant impact on the field of history, politics and, of course, literature. New scientific and cultural disciplines developed, such as historiography - the sway of Hippolyte Taine's theory about *race, milieu* and *moment* as factors explaining historical and cultural developments cannot be overestimated - sociology and anthropology. In the field of the arts and literature, these new exciting ideas materialized in the movement of realism and naturalism, first in France and then gradually in the rest of Western Europe. Naturalism would dominate literature and criticism for over half a century, interacting with or giving birth to other currents and trends challenging

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[10] *W.M. Simon, European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 3-18.*

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or reacting to its aesthetic or ideological principles.[11]

Comte's positivist system did not overlook art and esthetics and in his Discours sur l'ensemble du positivisme (Discourse on the Totality of Positivism, 1848), the philosopher claimed that in matters artistic reason should be subordinate to feeling and imagination subordinate to reason.[12] While cultivating the idea of beauty, art should aspire to moral perfection, since

> *le positivisme appelle enfin l'art à sa meilleure destination, la culture des sentiments bienveillants, beaucoup plus esthétiques que les instincts de haine et d'oppression, seul chantés jusqu'alors.*[13]

No other philosophy has ever been more committed to universal harmonization and perfection than Positivism,

> *"un doctrine qui [en appellant] l' humanité au perfectionnement universel devait s'incorporer profondément les spéculations les plus propres à développer notre instinct de la perfection. Elle ne les subordonne à l'étude systematique de la réalité, que pour fournir à l'idealité une base objective, indispensable à sa consistance et à sa dignité.*[14]

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[11] *Cf. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (New York: Vintage, 1960), xx.*

[12] *Auguste Comte, Discours sur l' ensemble du positivisme, Paris, 1848, 274.*

[13] *"Positivism finally makes an appeal to art's best goal, the cultivation of the fine sentiments, much more esthetic than the instincts of hate and oppression, exclusively sung until recently."*

[14] *"A doctrine which, in order to induce humanity to universal improvement, should deeply assimilate the theories most suitable to the development of our predisposition to perfection. It subordinates them to the systematic study of reality only to provide ideality with an objective basis, indispensable for its consistency and dignity." Ibid., 294, 299.*

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When positivism was embraced by the intellectuals of the realist/naturalist movement, they appropriated and modified Comte's esthetic ideas. The essence of his argument, however, the commitment to universal moral progress, remained unadulterated.[15]

The preoccupation with Risorgimento did not prevent Italian intellectuals and political thinkers from keeping abreast of the latest cultural developments in Europe, nor did the pressing political exigencies of the Unification process obstruct the development of a positivist mentality among the more sophisticated and more assertive strata of the *borghesia*. Thinkers and university professors were conversant with Comte's theories as well as with the impact of his major works outside France. Darwinian and Spencerian theories about the process of human and social evolution, known respectively as *darwinismo* and *evoluzionismo*, had stimulated no less public interest, galvanizing the development of an Italian school of positivism even before the country attained its nationalistic ends.[16] Customarily, however, positivism is held to enter Italian culture in 1866 with Pasquale Villari (1826-1917), an

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[15] *For more on the issue, cf. Henri, J. Amiel, "Réalisme et positivisme: Divergences entre l'esthétique positiviste et l' esthétique réaliste." The Romanic Review 33 (December 1942), 105-112.*

[16] *As early as 1864 Darwin's seminal opus was translated into Italian by Zanichelli and published in a serial form, while Spencer's sociological conclusions were an inspiration for a large number of intellectuals concerned with the social impasses in post-revolutionary Italy. Cf. Croce, ibid., 151ff.*

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eminent Neapolitan professor of history, whose article "*La filosofia positiva e il metodo storico*" (Positivism and the Historic Method), published in the cultural/scientific journal Il politecnico, proposed the application of scientific empiricism and scientific investigative methods in the study and analysis of (Italian) history as an index for the evolution of the new state.[17] Almost simultaneous was the publication of another article in the first issue of La nuova antologia, Carlo Matteucci's *"Del metodo sperimentale delle scuole di scienze fisiche e naturali"* (On the Experimental Method of the School of the Physical and Natural Sciences), which, although more populistic than scientific, continued the debate on positivism along Villari's line of thought.[18] Both essays had a far-reaching impact on Italian intellectuals, even though it was Villari who, in making the case for Positivism, substituted the term "method" for Comte's "system,"[19] a modification with a profound impact on the socio-philosophical formation of *verismo*, since their advocacy of the "analytical method" inspired the interest of the

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[17] *Pasquale Villari, "La filosofia positiva e il metodo storico," Il politecnico 1 (1866), 1-29.*

[18] *Carlo Matteucci, "Del metodo sperimentale delle scuole di scienze fisiche e naturali." Nuova Antologia 1 (28 February 1866), 210-235.*

[19] *"Il positivismo è quindi un nuovo metodo, non già un nuovo sistema." (Positivism is therefore a new method, certainly not a new system). Villari, ibid., 23.*

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veristi in the "analysis" of truth.[20]

Villari's modification was not arbitrary. Instead of trying to explain positivism as a methodological trend imported from France, he traced its origins within the history of Italian culture, in the scientific empiricism of Galileo, the call to "effectual truth" by Nicolo Macchiavelli and Guicciardini and the historic scientism of Lodovico Vico.[21] Comte, Villari claimed, was not the creator of Positivism, but its first apologist, the first to give this amalgam of ideas and methods a name, the first to form a "doctrine" out of it. Thus he concluded that positivism was not the work of a single authority, but "*un portato dei tempi*," a product of the time, amenable, as such, to various applications and interpretations. Science, then, was the activity by which the human spirit, always in continuous mutation, strives to capture truth (*vero*) in order to attain it. The positivist scientific analysis is a method with which one may distinguish the answerable from the unanswerable human problems. Ultimately, the "analyst" should exclusively occupy himself with the problems amenable to solution:

> *Noi siamo degli uomini che abbiamo rinunziato all' impossibile, e riconosciamo i limiti della ragione, unico mezzo per farla progredire. [...] Il metodo storico non pretende di portare la luce*

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[20] *Cf. the substantial article of Darby Tench, "The Real, the Unreal and the True: Verismo's Hybrid Origins." Romance Languages Annual 5 (1994), 299-306.*

[21] *"A tali antecedenti storici il positivismo italiano amava collegarsi." (Italian positivism liked to associate itself with these historic antecedents). E. P. Lamanna, Nuovo sommario di filosofia (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), 151.*

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su tutti i problemi della metafisica, e molto meno portarla a un tratto, come il metodo sperimentale non pretese nè pretende rispondere a tutte le domand e della scolastica."[22]

The new method is not supposed to replace metaphysics with materialism or skepticism in order to explain the cause of things, social phenomena and historical processes, but to contain metaphysics within the frame of its tangible manifestation, its "*confini naturali.*" This method, then, will bring humanity to the understanding of multifaceted *verità*, the latter studied not as an abstraction, but compartmentalized in distinct *realtà*. Asserting the value of this method for the achievement of modernity, Villari exhorted modern scientists to embrace positivism as an aid to progress, so long as "*ogni sincera ricerca del vero giova del pari a tutti gli uomini, a tutte le scienze, e soddisfa al più sacro dovere dell'uomo.*"[23] Villari looked for a bridge between Hegelian ethics and positive thought, idealism and empiricism, arguing for an ethical interpretation of positivist thought, its relevance for the moral and socio-historical disciplines, the application of the historical method to the moral

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[22] *"We are men who have forsaken the impossible, and we acknowledge the limits of reason, the only means for attaining its progress.[...] The historic method does not claim to shed light on all metaphysical problems —and much less to do so at once— just as the experimental method never claimed nor claims to answer all the problems of the scholastic philosophy."*

[23] *"Every sincere research of the truth is equally beneficial to all people, to all sciences and fulfills the most sacred duty of man."*

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sciences, and the accommodation of the "ideal" in the positivist treatment of "reality." Opting for neither reality or ideality, Villari upheld *"il vero"* as a notion which "partakes of and transcends both."[24]

Not only did Villari put forth the premises of positivist method, he also sought to personally apply them in his own historical and sociological work. Thus he set the pace for a literary and scholarly activity astonishingly rich in quality. It was in fact the results and the conclusions of these works that inspired young authors, poets, novelists but also political scientists and social historians to align themselves with *verismo*, the analytically explained "discovery" of truth. Villari's response to the "social question" or the *"questione meridionale"* led to the writing of Le lettere meridionali (Meridional Letters, 1875) in which, while documenting the harrowing realities of Southern poverty, his conclusions were informed by philosophical, political, and cultural considerations. Franchetti and Sannino's Inchiesta in Sicilia, a revealing sociological collection of "facts" in the manner of Villari, intensified interest in the "improvement" of the social condition. The organization of the *Archivi dello Stato* (National Archives), a huge undertaking of historical research and classification of documents and data, according to the

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[24] *Tench, ibid., 299. The critic actually finds in this idiosyncratically Italian idealistic interpretation of il vero as the earmark which distinguishes from the hyperscientism of French naturalism.*

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postulates of Hyppolite Taine, led to the emergence of a *scuola storica*, whose methods were also applied in the revision of Italian literary history as well as in the insertion of historic facts in the novel and the drama.[25] The political theorist Attilio Brunialti in the *"Prefazione"* to the Biblioteca di Scienze Politiche (Library of Political Sciences, 1884) called for a political evolution of Italy consonant with the *natura* of the country. He spoke of the political scientist as being the impassionate laboratory analyst who *"scruta tranquillamente il proprio soggetto, lo indaga sotto i vari punti di vista, senza prejudici, senza passioni, senza preferenze sentimentali, lungi dalle lotte quotidiane,"*[26] in order to arrive at the exact understanding of reality. If that aim was to be achieved and if no fact was to escape the "analyst's" judgement, Brunialti concluded, it was imperative that the political scientist be conversant with

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[25] *This trend as well its complement of historic darwinism is evident in the hugely popular genre of veristic dramma storico, the best example of which is Paolo Cossa's Nero and the ethnological realism of D'Annunzio's non-symbolist theatre. Cf. Francesco de Sanctis, "Il darwinismo nell' arte," Saggi critici, vol. 3 Ed. Luigi Russo (Bari: Laterza, 1965), 320ff. For D'Annunzio, see Antonio Sorella, "Il 'verismo' di Gabriele d'Annunzio, I verismi regionali, Atti del congresso internazionale di studi. Catania, 27-29 April 1992 (Catania, Biblioteca della fondazione Verga, 1996), 379ff.*

[26] *"He scrutinizes his subject scrupulously, he investigates it from all points of view, without prejudice, without passions, without sentimental bias, which distance him from the daily struggles..."*

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the laws of nature and history.[27]

Cristina Belgioioso, one of Italy's first feminist thinkers, published the *"Della presente condizione delle donne e del loro avvenire"* (On the Present Condition of Women and their Future). Availing herself of the new *"abito di ricorrere a principii filosofici e morali per iscioglíere ogni quesito sociale"*[28] she asserted the rights of women in a humane modern society, not only because *"la condizione della donna è al di sotto del valor suo intellettuale e morale,"* but also because *"la immobilità della condizione femminile è opposta alla natura delle cose e della umana famiglia."*[29] Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), Europe's most influential psychiatrist and physician before Freud, used the historic method, in order to study forms of social and psychopathic deviances and abnormalities as atavistic effects of heredity and environment. His *L'uomo delinquente* (The Criminal, 1876), a

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[27] *For a definition of the "nazione" along the lines of Taine's theory, Negrelli, in explaining the positivist interpretation of Italy, creates the following model: an ethnic unity (race) is formed within a specific socio-cultural environment which informs the history and the identity of the race (milieu) and generates a secular culture which has to interact with the prevailing culture of the continent (moment). I insist on this detail, because it is already noticeable in the realistic dramas of Ferrari and Torelli. Negrelli, ibid., 10.*

[28] *"the new trend to employ philosophical and moral principles in order to solve every social problem."*

[29] *"Women's situation is unworthy of their moral and intellectual merit... the stagnancy of women's condition is incompatible with the nature of things and the nature of humankind. Cristina Belgiojoso, "Della presente condizione delle donne e del loro avvenire," Nuova Antologia 1 (1866), 96, 109.*

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pioneering work of criminal anthropology, was considered for decades an infallible contribution to sociology. It was followed by *Genio e follia* (Genius and Madness), in which in addition to analyzing the limits between genius and madness, often examining historic personalites from the past, Lombroso also examined the psychology of the masses.[30] Paolo Mantegazza with *Fisiologia del piacere* (The Physiology of Pleasure, 1874) and *Fisiologia dell' amore* (Physiology of Love, 1875) explored female psychology and many of his assertions found their way into the numerous adultery cases and "women problems" analyzed by the dramatists of the *teatro borghese*. In the field of ethnography and ethno-anthropology, the contribution of Giuseppe Pitré, whose Storia della poesia popolare (History of Popular Poetry, 1872) and collections of popular stories, legends, traditions from the Italian Southern provinces motivated Verga's *verismo* both as a novelist and a playwright, also enriched and invigorated not only the dialect theatre of Sicily, but also the cultural self-awareness of Italians. Notwithstanding the wealth and the quality of "information" the "renaissance" of positivist culture introduced to Italy's realist poets, artists, musicians, authors and dramatists, *verismo's* greatest critics and champions were a Neapolitan professor of literature and a perceptive young Sicilian writer: Francesco de Sanctis, a

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[30] *Lombroso's pathological types were often copied by the dialect veristi in the plays dealing with the underworld of the big cities.*

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cardinal figure in the history of Italian literary criticism[31] and Luigi Capuana,[32] the novelist, critic and dramatist, an instrumental agent in the italization of French naturalisism, the esthetic formation of *verismo* and the introduction of Ibsen to Italian theatre. Such has been their contribution to the advent of *verismo* that it would be impossible to study or even define *verismo* without taking into consideration De Sanctis' theory on literary realism or Capuana's arguments about the nature, the form and the content of a national *dramma borghese*.

Francesco de Sanctis (1817-1883), a major intellectual and literary critic of united Italy, developed an esthetic and socio-cultural system of overlapping and interacting ideas, informing not only the enlightened *borghesia*'s perception of Italian intellectual history and prospects, but also the socio-scientific rationale of Pasquale Villari and the new generation of Italian positivists, the pro-realism criticism of Luigi Capuana, the neo-idealism of Benedetto Croce's esthetics and even the cultural thinking of the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci. A Risorgimento democrat and an educational reformer, a literary historian and a highly popular lecturer, a social pundit and a sophisticated popularizer of modern philosophical trends, De Sanctis was the model of modern

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[31] *Rene Wellek, "Francesco de Sanctis," A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950 vol.5.*

[32] *Cf. Carlo, A. Madrignani, Capuana e il naturalismo. Bari: Laterza, 1970.*

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citizen and positivist thinker. Deeply influenced by Hegelian philosophy and ethics, he maintained an open-minded critical position towards positivism, its socio-aesthetic assumptions and programs.[33] Even though he did not openly align himself with positivism, he expressed (and criticized) more than any other critic of the time the cultural and literary trends the new philosophical movement was forcing upon the progressive intelligentsia of Italy, always championing a socially conscious and all-inclusive bourgeois nation, a national culture solidly founded on a clear perception of modern *verità*.

Never a man of extremes,[34] De Sanctis evolved and publicized a system of thought which sought to bridge idealism and realism, hegelian philosophy and positivism.[35] His merging of positivism and hegelism as points of reference for his own thinking but also for the interpretation of modernity is clearly laid out in a 1877 essay on L'ideale (The Ideal):

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[33] *See the very informative article of Pietro Mazzamuto, "De Sanctis e il positivismo," in Giuseppe Cuomo, Giuseppe, et al, De Sanctis, e il realismo (Napoli: Giannini Editore, 1978), 101-129.*

[34] *An education minister during the Cavour and Ricasoli conservative administration, De Sanctis had a change of heart after 1864, joining the ranks of the Left, but this political realignment did not affect his critical thought.*

[35] *Gaetano Trezza, an important critic and contemporary of De Sanctis, in his 1874 book La critica moderna(Firenze: Le Monnier), reviews the idealistic dimensions of positivist thought. See pages 5, 14-5, 21, 72. See also M. Rossi, Sviluppi dell' hegelismo in Italia (F. De Sanctis, S. Tomasi, A. Labriola) (Torino: Loescher, 1962). De Sanctis' most influential essays on literature, politics and culture date from the later part of his career, and it is this part of his critical work that exercised a significant influence on the perception and acceptance of realism/verismo in Italy.*

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> *Tempi di transizioni e di nuove elaborazioni sono, quando reale e ideale si separano, anzi si contraddicono. Il reale si fa animalesco e dà la baia all'ideale. L'ideale si fa astratto e si consuma in se stesso, e non comprende più il reale. Realismo e idealismo sono le due esagerazioni di ogni decadenza. La forza centripeta che armonizza reale e ideale, è il vero [...] Tutto ciò che esiste, è vero, non solo ciò che esiste nella natura, ma ancora ciò che esiste nella mente.*[36]

According to Benedetto Croce, positivism insinuated itself in De Sanctis' philosophy as an invigorating complement of idealism.[37] De Sanctis claimed to have retained and elaborated on two doctrines of Hegel's: the idea of becoming, "*il divenire*," and the idea of being, "*l'esistere.*" It is from these two ideas that his positive and positivist reaction to realism emerged, since *il divenire* is the basic concept of evolution/progress/change and *il esistere* connotes the *realtà*, the totality of the living experience.[38] Obviously these two notions are essential concepts in the ideology of both positivism and literary/dramatic realism, and it is because of

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[36] *"Periods of transition and new developments occur, when the real and the ideal separate, or contradict each other. The real becomes animalistic and derides the ideal. The ideal becomes abstract, self-destructive and no longer comprehends the real. Realism and idealism are the two exaggerations of every decadence. The centripetal force harmonizing the real and the ideal is the true [...] All that exists is true, not only that which exists in nature, but also that which exists in the mind." Excerpt cited in N. Cortese ed., I partiti e l'educazione della nuova Italia (Torino: Einaudi, 1960), 153.*

[37] *Benedetto Croce, "Prefazione" in Letteratura italiana nel. sec. XIX (Napoli, 1914), XXVIII, n.2.*

[38] *See Un appendice" to "Zola e l' Assommoir," in L. Russo, ibid. 298. References to the progress of the social and natural sciences, to the science of man —the study, that is, of man not as an abstraction but as an "essere collettivo, classe, popolo, società, umanità," — as well as to the moral purpose of objective sciences appeared throughout his essays from as early as 1858, but never did he synthetise his views or objections to positivism in a single book or essay.*

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this affinity between Hegel's theory and positivist thought that De Sanctis viewed them as not incompatible in terms of realistic artistic creation. As Derby Dench observed, De Sanctis collapsed the real and the ideal, arguing not for a symbiosis, but for a synechdochic absorption of the ideal in realism. In his 1876 essay "*Il principio del realismo*" (The Principle of Realism), after warning against the confusion of empiricism with sensism, he observed that "*reale e ideale sono tutt'e due il vero*" and that *verismo* is a "barbarous" misnomer if by *vero* we understand only what is *reale*.[39]

From Hegel De Sanctis also derived the idea of *calarsi*, of the "sinking" of ideas into art, the sinking of abstract content into a concrete form. For a work of art to be perfect, both content and form should coalesce with one another, as neither of them should remain unassimilated. Transferring this concept to the discussion of politics, modern life and society, the duality content/form --where content means things (*cose*) and not ideas-- manifests itself in the merger of science with life.[40]

Science and life are indeed cornerstones not only for De Sanctis social criticism, but also for his discussion of realism/*verismo*'s political program. He entertained high aspirations for the function of the *borghesia* within the new

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[39] *The real and the ideal together constitute the true." Ibid., 193ff.*

[40] *Cf. V. Gerratana, "Introduzione all' estetica desanctisiana," Società 9 (1953), 22-57.*

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state, emphasizing its responsibility for the social harmonization of the nation, the coming together of the classes, their intellectual and economic cohesion. The manner, however, in which society was asserting itself did not comply with his aspirations and De Sanctis soon became wary of science's (positivism's) capacity to improve society, or to reconcile the liberty of the individual with the compromising nature of the social institutions. In his 1872 speech "*La scienza e la vita*," (Science and Life),[41] De Sanctis castigated precisely that failure of "scientific" society to help integrate the lower classes in the life of the nation as well as its failure to behave as a truly leading class:

> *La vita corre là dove si sente riflessa, colta dal vero, come si trova; quella è la scienza vivente, che fa battere i cori, che ha un azione sulla vita. Oggi la vita si sente attinta da un malore incognito, la cui manifestazione è l'apatia, la noia, il vuoto, e corre per istinto colà dove si parla di materia e di forza, e come ristaurare l'uomo fisico, e come rigenerare l'uomo morale. Letteratura e filosofia, scienze mediche e scienze morali, tutte prendono quel riflesso e quel colore. Rifare il sangue, ricostituire la fibra, rialzare le forze vitali, è il motto non solo della medicina, ma della pedagogia, non solo della storia, ma dell' arte; rialzare le forzi vitali, ritemprare i caratteri, e col sentimento della forza rigenerare il coraggio morale, la sincerità, l'iniziativa, la disciplina, l'uomo virile, e perciò l'uomo libero."*[42]

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[41] *See Russo, ibid., 140-162.*

[42] *"Life runs where it feels reflected, enhanced by reality, as it really is; the living science is that which makes hearts beat, which has an impact on life. Today life seems to touch upon an unknown evil, which manifests itself as apathy, boredom, emptiness, and impulsively heads towards the point where people speak of matter and power, how to restore the natural man, and how to revive the moral man. Literature and philosophy, the medical sciences and the humanities, all of them assume this attitude, this tone: Replenish blood, reconstitute the fiber, restore the vital forces, this is the motto not only of Medicine, but also of education, not only of history, but also of art; restore the vital forces, update the characters and with a forceful attitude regenerate moral courage,*

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It is evident that this call to social action retains all the main sociopolitical principles of realism and it is not accidental that verismo's *problematica*, be it the novel or the drama, contained and explored the same issues that De Sanctis deplored as compromising the spirit of the age.[43] As the Italian *veristi* were not unconcerned about social problems, his theories inevitably propelled them to adopt and adapt his arguments as parameters for the expression of their individual interpretation of *verità*.

De Sanctis' esthetics and positivist idealism prevailed in the veristic theories and writings of Luigi Capuana (1839-

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sincerity, ambition, discipline, the strong and therefore free man."Ibid., 161-2.

[43]*De Sanctis in his own writings on realism focused on the novel, paying only lip service to the drama. This is not because he thought of drama as an inferior art for the purpose of encompassing science/life, but because the drama which would practice Desanctisian realism was to emerge only after his death (1883). For the moment, the theorist approached the problem of realism from the point of view of Zola's naturalistic novel, the author who exemplified, in spite of his own personal assertions on the nature of naturalism, the triumph of Desanctisian realism. The essays "Studio sopra Emilio Zola" (A Study on Emile Zola, 1878), "Zola e l' Assommoir" (1879) and "Il darwinismo nell' arte" (Darwinism in Art, 1883) contain all the major ideas of the critic on the issue of realism, but also his own interpretation of what a literature of the vero really means for modern culture and life. The essays, original published in the periodical Roma, to which De Sanctis was contributor, became textbook material for later critics of realism and prepared the field for verismo. According to these essays, Zola's novels had succeeded in presenting and analyzing the interrelationship between individual character and social environment more sharply than before, because by applying the positivist method in the writing of the novel, he had managed to update realism into a social, not just literary art. But in line with his science-life theme, De Sanctis also argued that Zola, contrary to his claims for scientific objectivity, could not extricate idealism from his naturalism, since it was a set of moral concerns and ideals -the improvement of human society- that informed the creation of his works:"Studio sopra Emilio Zola," ibid., 264, 268.*

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1915).[44] Coming from a solidly bourgeois Sicilian background, Capuana was raised in a conservative cultural environment inimical to controversial ideas and swayed by classicism and Catholic dogma. A self-taught dilettante with poetic ambitions little appreciated in his native land, Capuana experienced a cultural shock, when in 1864 upon his arrival to Florence, he entered a sophisticated bourgeois society already in line with positivist ideology. While exposing himself to the culture of the city as a rather conservative drama critic for the short-lived periodical Rivista italica, Capuana surrendered to the allure of positivist thought, which Pasquale Villari and his disciples were cultivating at the Instituto di Studi Superiori, and enthusiastically participated in the stimulating aesthetic discussions taking place in the city's most prestigious literary salons and cafès. Endearing himself to intellectual leaders and establishing life-long friendships with local and newly arrived ambitious authors, Capuana soon discovered the contemporary realist/naturalist literature of France, an enlightening experience for a young intellectual raised on historic novels and *drammi storici*.

In 1866 Capuana became theatre critic for the journal La nazione and it was from that post that for the next few years he upheld the cause of realism in theatre and drama. Reviewing

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[44] *Cf. Calogero Colicchi, "De Sanctis, Capuana e la poetica del verismo italiano," in De Sanctis, e il realismo, ibid., 753-763.*

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the plays of Ferrari, Torelli and other lesser writers of the late sixties, he sought to develop a theory of modern drama based on the achievements of the contemporary French realists and argued for a native drama committed to the study and revelation of *verità*, emphasizing the positivist's faith in the "scientific" accuracy of "investigation." Italian playwrights, he maintained, should not moralize or simply photograph the various *realtà* of modernity. Instead, they should strive towards a more complex representation of modern social experience, while upholding, not dictating, an idealistic attitude towards society and its institutions.[45] As a drama critic, Capuana was the first Italian

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[45] *Capuana acknowledged that five major forces had shaped his critical thought:1) Gioberti's thoughts 2) Hippolyte Taine, whom Capuana had studied as early as 1865 (Cf. Luigi Capuana, Per l'arte (Catania, 1885), 104, 145);3) Hegel's Phenomenology of the Spirit. Capuana read Hegel's work unsystematically from 1864-5 to 1870-1 [Cf. Luigi Capuana, Spiritismo? (Catania, 1884), 128ff; see also letter to G.A. Cesareo (17 Febrary 1884), published in Luigi Sportelli, ed., Luigi Capuana a G.A.Cesareo (1882-1914) (Biblioteca nazionale di Palermo, 1950), 39]; 4) Angelo Camillo De Meis' Dopo la laurea (After Graduation). In this seminal autobiographical work De Meis explained art along Hegelian lines. Like Hegel he thought that art, like religion, was an inferior manifestation of the spirit and therefore destined to dissolve in philosophy. He theorized then that in the course of time the works of art succeed each other as a series of forms always in decline, the latest less perfect than the previous one. As the content gains in importance while the decline of the form continues, it becomes inevitable that only the content will prevail, dissolving in the absolute idea, the only existing truth.; 5) and most importantly the critical essays of De Sanctis (Saggi critici). De Sanctis' emphasis on the equation art-life, the differentiation between Form and form (Forma means the essence of the work of art, and form the uniqueness of style and language pertinent to a particular work of art) and his idea of "calarsi". Critics have suggested that although Capuana had always tried to synthesize de Sanctis' theories with De Meis, in fact these theories contradict each other, since De Sanctis' theory of form is incompatible with the latter's concept of "a series of forms". See, for example, Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della Nuova Italia, vol. 3 (Bari: Laterza, 1929), 101-118. For more on the critical formation of Capuana see Antonio Palermo, "La formazione critica di Luigi Capuana," Filologia e letteratura 10 (1964), 337-380.*

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critic/theorist who attributed to criticism a function analogous to a scientific activity.[46]

Despite his intentions, Capuana did not manage to compose this theoretical "analysis" of realism in drama. He only wrote a lengthy introduction to the 1872 collection of his La nazione reviews, Il teatro italiano contemporaneo, and this prefatory essay is historically the earliest manifesto of Italian dramatic realism. Even as such, it is a very peculiar piece of critical writing, since its purpose was not to show why Italian drama could succeed, but why its *risorgimento* had failed. Declaring the failure of Italian playwrights to create a drama trenchantly studying human *verità*, unable to overcome melodrama, moralism or regional dramatic conventions, the essay was not organically connected to the arguments of the individual reviews and its pessimistic overtones were in striking contrast to the upbeat tenor of some of the reviews. Yet the critic's insistence upon the "impersonality" of art, the autonomy of the characters from the author, and the domination of art over morality or "science" prevailed both in the introduction and the rest of the book. This was Capuana's first and last critical work exclusively concerned with Italian theatre. Although he never stopped considering drama an essential element of modern Italian culture, he gradually

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[46] *Giorgio Luti, "Capuana e la cultura del suo tempo." La rassegna della letteratura italiana 97 (Sept.-Dec. 1993), 26.*

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became convinced that the novel, rather than the drama, was the genre par excellence for the new positivist literature, since the theatre -or rather the theatre of the time - was deemed incapable of reproducing the totality of life as thoroughly and deeply as the novel could.[47]

Modern drama, Capuana argued, should deal with modern life and the dramatist should take very seriously his responsibility not to betray life with his art:

> *Io innanzi tutto, amo nell´ arte la vita. Quando l´ artista riesce a darmi un personaggio vivente davvero, non so chiedergli altro e lo ringrazio, mi pare che mi abbia dato tutto quel che doveva. Pel solo fatto di essere vivente, quel personaggio è bello; e se opera bene e se predica meglio, non nuoce; torno a ringraziare l´artista. Al pari del personaggio, amo viva l´azione. L´azione, allo stesso modo, pel solo fatto di essere vivente, è bella e morale.*[48]

The study of the *reale* itself will be more than enough for the artist who wants to capture the meaning of contemporary social trends. The importance of life and truth, the autonomy of the

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[47] *Except Il teatro italiano contemporaneo, Capuana´s other major critical works are: Studii sulla letteratura contemporanea I (1880) and II (1882). Per l´ arte (1885), Libri e teatro (1892), Gli "ismi" contemporanei (1898), Cronache letterarie (1899), La scienza della letteratura (1902), Arte e scienza (1903), Lettere all´ assente (1904). Of these Per l´ arte is today regarded as his most important. For a study of Capuana in English, see J. Davies, The realism of Luigi Capuana: Theory and Practice in the Development of Late Nineteenth Century Italian Narrative (London, 1979).*

[48] *More than anything else, I love life in art. When the artist succeeds in giving me a truly living character, I care not to ask him for more and I thank him, I think he´s given me all he should. Simply by being lifelike, this character is beautiful; and if he acts well, and if he is a better declaimer, it does not matter; I thank the artist twice. Next to the character, I love lively action. In the same way action, simply by being lifelike, is good and moral." Op. cit., XXXIII. See also Augusto Franchetti, "Del teatro italiano contemporaneo, secondo i saggi critici di Luigi Capuana e di alcune recenti Commedie francesi, in occasione di Rabagas," Nuova Antologia 21 (Oct. 1872), 439ff.*

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art work from the author/dramatist, the representation of the *vero* through the study of the *reale*, the idea of the real as the enacted ideal, these were the concerns which set the parameters of his dramatic criticism. Moralism is anachronistic and spurious. Only the study of the *vero* is moral and therefore the morality of realism as an esthetic is to be preferred to the morality unnaturally imposed as a program on the form of drama. The esthetic objective of this new drama is the symbiosis of beauty and truth, or the beautiful in the real[49], the discovery of the true and the ideal in the real, the identification of the true in the beautiful and the moral. Capuana, unable to locate this esthetic in the *drammi storici* and the moralistic *commedie* of Giacometti and Ferrari, looked into the contemporary French theatre for references to modern dramatic art. Capuana is defending a moderate realism - his championing of Torelli's drama is evidence of that -- a theatre of style, not vulgarity, and his dramatic ideal calls for a *commedia*

> *"dove agiscano soltanto personaggi di una società che potremmo dire media (non del ceto di mezzo), cioè dove l'aristocrazia e la borghesia dovrebbero incontrarsi volentieri, e dove l'artista potrebbe qualche volta avere il posto d'onore senza temere la comparsa di certe figure che sono il fondiglio dell'umano consorzio."*[50]

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[49] *Rivista Italica, 1865, 369.*

[50] *"[A play] where only characters of a society which we could call moderate (not of the middle class) may appear, that is, there where aristocrats and borghesis could willingly come together, and where the artist could sometimes express his views freely without being intimidated by the presence of certain figures who come from the lowest level of human society."Cf. his review of A.*

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Although he did not approve the "distasteful" sensationalism of the new school of French playwrights, he could not conceal his admiration for their daring to tackle problems and controversies that modernity and progress created daily. Capuana invited the public to be open-minded, refusing to join those abhorring to see on the stage "certain terrible truths of life," although he held that the violation of decorum, or the "profanation" of social institutions should not be uncritically tolerated. Carlo Madrignani, one of Capuana's most authoritative critics, has seen Capuana as the paragon of the positivist bourgeois theatre and at the same time as a social critic who could analyze, through the coverage of the modern theatre, the spirit of the post-heroic, depoliticized but politically conscious Italian cosmos. Capuana denounced anachronistic "moralistic, pedagogic drama," not because the new society had no need to receive instructions of socialization, but because the bourgeois socialization seemed to him already attained:

> *Capuana poteva ritenere superata ogni ipoteca pedagogica, [argues Madrignani], perchè sentiva il teatro come espressione della nuova borghesia vittoriosa ed egemone, a cui s' imponeva il compito di darsi una nuova moralità adeguata alle nuove strutture economiche-politiche. Tutto questo c'è al di sotto del rifiuto politico di Capuana e per questa via egli giunge al discorso esclusivamente estetico, alla volontà di trascurare (almeno in sede teorica) il "contenuto" in favore della forma e di elaborare quindi un estetica pura, cioè..."scientifica."*[51]

Montignani's Teresa Fabiani, La nazione 26 September 1867.

[51] *"Capuana could declare any pedagogic claim as anachronistic, because he saw the theatre as the expression of the new, victorious and hegemonic borghesia,*

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Certainly Capuana departed from these ideas as soon as he adopted naturalism not as a reproduction, but as an artistic interpretation of truth(s), but in the early seventies he was unaffected by the still immature achievements of Italian positivist sociology and ethnology in literature. The appreciation of regional art, and therefore dialect drama, as a cultural manifestation of national *verità* was not then part of his aesthetic. Dialect theatre as a form and as a dramatic language was for Capuana a symptom of malady for a national culture striving for homogeneity. Dialect theatre meant an inferior life, "inferior for its means and its content, inferior because it catered to a certain social class, espousing a local, provincial life, and fragmentation."[52] His acquaintance, however, with the naturalist spirit of Zola's "scientific" literature soon showed him a new way of looking into the heart of society. He ceased to view drama as the mirror of modernity, when the "new" novel appealed to him as a better laboratory of contemporary reality than the theatre. Not only would he come to accept regionalism as a unique field for the research of human *verità*, but the study of the non bourgeois cosmos would be the subject-matter of his

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a theatre needing to implement itself with a new morality adapted to new economical and political structures. All this lies behind Capuana's [call for an apolitical theatre] and by means of it he preferred an exclusively aesthetic discourse, willing to overlook (at least theoretically) "content" in favor of "form," thus evolving a pure, that is "scientific," aesthetic." Carlo A. Madrignani, Capuana e il naturalismo (Bari: Laterza, 1970), 41-42.

[52] *Il teatro Italiano contemporaneo, cit., xxx.*

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own better work as a *verista* dramatist.[53]

Yet Capuana's major contributions to the cause of *verismo* are his critical essays on Zola and Verga included in the Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea (1880-1882). Although in these works he dealt exclusively with the novel and the short story, his conclusions were extraneous neither to the advent nor to the study of dramatic *verismo*, since both French naturalism and Italian *verismo* evolved around the novel before finding their way in the theatre. Again his theories were not systematized and therefore coherence among the various essays was not always successfully maintained. Nonetheless, his basic preoccupations as to the nature and the aesthetic of naturalism/*verismo* can be followed rather easily.

What Zola achieved with his evolving cycle of Rougon-Macquart was, according to Capuana, a caleidoscopic reflection of life's drama, the struggle for survival. Zola's art resisted artifice and his naturalism, penetrating and not cosmetic, had immediacy and social relevance.[54] Although agreeing with Zola's "scientific" usage of art for the

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[53]*As a verista Capuana was not only a writer of short stories and novels. He was also a significant playwright, largely inspired by Verga's resounding success with Cavalleria Rusticana. Interestingly enough, except Malia and Giacinta, his veristic drama, full length plays and one-acters, dates from the early years of twentieth century, the last phase of his career. For a study of Capuana's "vernacular" verismo drama, see Giorgio Pullini, "Luigi Capuana: il teatro in lingua" Lettere italiane 45 no. 1 (1993): 29-50. For his dialect plays, see Pietro Mazzamuto, Introduzione to Luigi Capuana, Teatro dialettale siciliano (Catania: Giannotta, 1974), 7-64.*

[54]*Cf. Luigi Capuana, "L' Assommoir," in Walter Mauro, ed., Capuana: Antologia dagli scritti critici (Bologna: Calderini, 1971), 33.*

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attainment of *verità*, Capuana was still concerned that "science" might imperil and overwhelm the autonomy of art. Scientism was a *"segno del tempo,"* he argued, but

> *"il difficile sta nel mantenere la giustezza delle proporzioni fra gli elementi della scienza e quelli della fantasia, in guisa che la libera natura dell' arte non ne sia tarpata, e il processo della creazione artistica si sottometta a tutte le esigenze del metodo positivo."*[55]

Capuana became consequently very sympathetic to the interest of young Italian writers like Giovanni Verga in the life of the *popolo*, the human experience of the provinces, not only because the observation of this life could enable Italians to depart and distinguish themselves from the art and the social preoccupations of the French, but also because the Italian psyche could be better grasped and analyzed in a milieu which still resisted the hypocrisies of metropolitan life, and where things could "speak of themselves." Thus Verga's short stories about the life in Sicily were according to Capuana a greater artistic achievement than Zola's novels, because scientism was checked and imagination was set free to invent a *vera* illustration of the various *realtà*. Indeed, a veristic art could be perfect only when

> *l'affinità e la coesione d'ogni sua parte divien così completa che il processo della creazione rimane un mistero; quando la sincerità della sua realtà è così evidente, il suo modo e la sua ragion*

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[55] *"A sign of time. The difficulty lies in the maintaining of a balance between the elements of science and those of imagination, so that artistic freedom won't be compromised [by science], and the process of artistic creation may observe all the exigencies of positivism."* *"Une Page d'Amour,"* op. cit., 36-37 and n. 9.

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> *d'essere così necessarie, che la mano dell'artista rimane assolutamente invisibile e l'opera d'arte prende l'aria d' un avvenimento reale, quasi si fosse fatta da sè.*[56]

Life is a more complex phenomenon than science makes it out to be, and therefore science and observation of data should only be a point of departure for the interpretation of its manifestations, the anatomy of the psyche of the modern individual, the impact of passion and desire on the social comportment of moderns. What was then more important was the search for a metaphysical explanation of the powers that inexorably shape individuals' lives, such as destiny, God, or demon. Capuana's arguments had a special weight for the development of one of dramatic verismo's genres, the *dramma popolare*, or the drama dealing with the lower and agrarian strata of Italian society, although they partially explain the development of metropolitan *verismo*, *verismo's dramma borghese*, the genre Capuana had wanted to see flourish at the beginning of his career as a critic.

In order to understand and follow the development of the drama that attempted to define the experience of modernity within the various milieux of the *borghesia*, it is necessary to explore the study of *realtà* through the movement of *scapigliatura*, a seminal trend in the history of Italian

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[56] *"the affinity and the cohesion of each of its parts becomes so complete that the creative process remains a mystery; when the sincerity of its reality is so evident, its mode and its raison d' etre so essential, tha the hand of the artist remains absolutely invisible and the artistic work looks like a real event, almost as if having occurred by itself." "Giovanni Verga," op. cit., 73.*

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literature, largely unknown outside Italy, save perhaps for the name of Arrigo Boito, more famous as an opera librettist for Verdi than for his own literary work. The center of this movement was Milan as Milan would also be the center for the *dramma borghese* of Giacosa, Praga and Rovetta, but its influence was felt no less in other cultural centers of Italy. As a movement it thrived among poets and novelists, and its impact on the theatre has not only been largely ignored by Italian theatre historians, but it has, more surprisingly, been considered non-existent. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that the association of *scapigliatura*, *verismo* and the theatre has never been attempted before, although several critics have traced the development of novelistic *verismo* in the work of the Milanese *scapigliati*. *Scapigliatura*, however, was not irrelevant to the history of Italian theatre, nor to the history of dramatic *verismo*. Both Verga and Capuana spent several years in Milan during the seventies, became acquainted with the representatives of the movement, and inevitably their metropolitan experiences soon found their way in their work, dramatic or non dramatic.[57] At the same time their interest in popular culture led the *scapigliati* to revive the fortunes of Milanese dialect theatre, seeking to make it more relevant to modern *realtà*. Before discussing *verismo* per se, it is essential that

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[57] *See chapter 5 on Verga.*

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scapigliatura be explained as one of its cultural and literary harbingers.

Scapigliatura

Scapigliatura developed in the beginning of the 1860s as the reaction of a new generation of writers, artists and musicians against classicism, romantic idealism, academic art and fashionable culture. As such it expressed dissatisfaction with the political hypocrisies of the haute-bourgeoisie and its cultural philistinism. The word *scapigliatura* was at first used as a pejorative term to define the young "dishevelled" (=*scapigliati*) men who seemed to challenge every notion of bourgeois respectability and whose "unkempt" attitude was thought to be an affront to national cultural decorum. Thus with its emphasis on iconoclasm, excess, libertinism and disrespect for everything held sacred, *scapigliatura* was soon regarded as the Italian equivalent of the Parisian *bohème*, although very few of the Italian *scapigliati* could boast a humble social background justifying their irreverence for "order." The first to use the term was Cletto Arrighi (pseudonym of Carlo Righetti, 1830-1874), who in his 1962 novel Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio (Scapigliatura and February 6) described the scapigliati as an eclectic class of

> *giovani di ambo i sessi fra i venti e trentacinque anni, non più, pieni d'ingegno quasi sempre, più avanzati del loro tempo, indipendenti... pronti al bene quanto al male; irrequieti, travagliati, turbolenti [...] vero pandemonio del secolo; personificazione della follia che sta fuori dai manicomi; serbatoio*

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del disordine, della imprevidenza, dello spirito di rivolta e di opposizione a tutti gli ordini stabiliti.[58]

With a nonchalant life-style camouflaging a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment concerning the social abuses of *Risorgimento* ideals, and with a self-destructive predilection for excess and hyperbole, the *scapigliati* praised the virtues of and indulged in sexual libertinism, alcoholism and drug addiction as antidotes to prudery, bourgeois moderation and religion.[59] Although the movement was later absorbed into *verismo*, its esthetics continued to intrigue and influence writers and playwrights from Verga and Giacosa to d'Annunzio to Pirandello, from Marco Praga to the futurists and the *grotteschi*.[60] What made *scapigliatura* such an influential antecedent of *verismo* was not so much the cultural contact between its pacesetters and, say, Verga or Capuana during their sojourn in the Lombard capital, as it was the

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[58] *"Young people of both sexes, between twenty and thirty-five years old, no older than that, full of a spirit almost always ahead of their time, independent, ... ready for the good and the bad; restless, disturbed, turbulent [...] a true pandemonium of the century; personification of the madness existing outside the mad-houses; an intellectual sect of disorder, recklessness, spirit that revolts and opposes all existing order." Cited in Gaetano Mariani, "Scapigliatura," entry in Vittorio Branca, ed., Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana vol. 3 (Torino: Unione tipografico-Editrice torinese, 1973), 337.*

[59] *For a more extensive historical analysis of scapigliatura in English see G.B. Carsaniga, "Scapigliatura," The Age of Realism Ed. F.W.J. Hemmings (Baltimore: Penguin, 1974).*

[60] *Some critics speak of two and three scapigliatura generations. See P. Scardovi, La seconda e la terza Scapigliatura milanese, Rivista d' Italia 15 March 1924 and 15 January 1925.*

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fascination of the *scapigliati* with the bizarre, the underclass, the social injustices, the paradoxes of modernity, the struggle of classes, the sexual taboos, all in all the fascination for what was considered unorthodox and controversial.[61] Eroticism, sexuality and their subversive impact on the social institutions of the bourgeoisie were typical themes of the *scapigliati* and their novels and short stories derived much of their decadent magnetism from their unconventional depiction of a bourgeoisie at odds with sexual desire and the need for social decorum.[62]

Besides Arrighi, among the major *scapigliati* were Arrigo Boito, Emilio Praga,[63] Igino Ugo Tarchetti, Alberto Cantoni (1841-1906)[64] and Felice Cameroni (1844-1913),[65] all of who, except Tarchetti, proved major forces for the consolidation of realism/*verismo* as a dramaturgy: Cameroni was

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[61] *Another hybrid of scapigliatura developed a literature of nostalgia and mysticism, a nostalgia for a lost communion with nature.*

[62] *These themes would find their way into verismo drama after the mid-eighties, when bourgeois angst and the crisis of the borghesia would constitute the matrix of verismo's new "problematica," so much so that the theme would very soon become the cliché Pirandello and the grotteschi would caricature.*

[63] *Emilio Praga was the father of Marco Praga, a leading verismo playwright. Praga died prematurely from alcohol.*

[64] *Cantoni was a humorist, whom Pirandello thought as a his forerunner.*

[65] *Felice Cameroni had a major influence on Verga and Capuana during the late seventies. As a literary critic of Il sole, Cameroni championed naturalism, Zola but also verismo. He was Zola's translator and representative and a pivotal agent for the premiere of Zola's dramas in Italy. See his letter to Zola, published in Sirro Ferrone, La commedia e il dramma borghese dell' Ottocento vol. 3 (Torino: Einaudi, 1979), 389-90.*

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the man who first championed Zola in Italy and the first to introduce Zola's drama to Italian audiences. Of an older generation, Arrighi, true to the anti-bourgeois sentiment of the movement he led, abandoned the trappings of regular theatre, championing both as a playwright and a manager the cause of dialect theatre as a less pretentious and closer to the *vero* form of social communication.[66] Boito and Praga wrote literary and dramatic criticism for the movement's official periodical, Figaro, and they were also the writers of the Madri galanti (The Galant Mothers, 1863), the only play thought to be directly inspired by *scapigliatura* ideals. This and Giovanni Verga's early and until recently unpublished I nuovi tartuffi (The New Hypocrites, [1865]), are the only dramatic works *scapigliatura* contributed to the history of Italian drama. Due to their long history of obscurity --Madri galanti was a commercial disaster,[67] I nuovi tartuffi was

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[66] *For a discussion of Arrighi's Milanese dialect theatre see G. Farinelli, "Appunti per uno studio sul teatro milanese di Cletto Arrighi," Otto-novecento 2, (1978), 169-177.*

[67] *The play was a humiliating critical and commercial failure for the scapigliati authors. The critical reception was rather unfair, especially if the play is compared with the less artful thesis commedie of the immensely popular Ferrari. The play opened at the Teatro Carignano of Turin in March 1863 and closed after one performance. Assessing the play, the anonymous critic of Figaro, the paper for which both Boito and Praga would later provide articles and criticism, was rather and unnecessarily caustic, calling the play a fiasco and a disgrace (porcheria) with "nessuna verità, nessuna novità, nessuna morale, nessun effetto, nessuno stile, niente, niente."("[a play] with no truth, no innovation, no morals, ineffectual, unstylish, nothing, nothing."). Figaro (4 April 1863), cited ibid., 12ff. It is interesting to observe that a scapigliato critic panned the work of fellow scapigliati. I can speculate that the animosity of the review is not unrelated to some kind of retribution or antagonism among the members of the movement.*

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unsuccessfully submitted to the Florentine "*Concorso Drammatico Nazionale*"of 1866-7 -- neither play can be held as contributing to a reorientation of Italian realism toward *verismo*. While these plays are not masterpieces, their failure to reach an audience can be only justified because of their cynical and subversive message, which must have challenged the socio-political rectitude of their positivist or/and conservative contemporaries.[68] Before dealing more extensively with the plays themselves, it would be pertinent to revisit the dramatic criticism of Arrigo Boito, not only because he was such a prominent *scapigliato*, but also because his reviews, much like Capuana's, anticipated many of *verismo*'s esthetic concerns.

Boito's theatre criticism dates from 1862 to 1867, focusing on an idea of national drama which, while reflecting the individual character of the emerging nation, also demanded its departure from tradition and convention. Boito argued for a drama reflecting the polity of the *borghesi*, yet steering clear of pandering to their wishful thinking about themselves

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[68] *With regard to Verga's play, among the members of the Concorso's jury were Luigi Capuana and Augusto Franchetti, both of moderately conservative convictions. In 1867 Capuana and Verga, who submitted the play from Catania, were not yet acquainted. That committee, whose decision was published in La nazione (28 February 1867), did not confer any awards that year, due to the inferior quality of the submissions. Verga's play is number 19 on the list of 36 entries. For more see Siro Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga (Roma: Bulzoni, 1972), 23ff. For a history of the "concorsi drammatici" as a means for the "risorgimento" of Italian theatre, an enterprise without lasting effects on Italian theatre, see Cipriano Giachetti, "Concorsi drammatici dell'Ottocento," La lettura 42 (1942), 751-755.*

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and society at large. Be this as it may, Boito reads today more as a conservative bourgeois rather than an iconoclastic *scapigliato*, yet at the time of Ferrari's reign his views must have seemed unconventionally modern.[69] Although he agreed with Ferrari in considering the aesthetic value of theatre only as a socially or morally engaged art form, a utilitarian medium of ethical edification, he called for a dramaturgy freed from the straitjacket of moralism. Anticipating Capuana's tenets, he promoted a new form of drama, in which "*i caratteri, i casi, i motti, le scene, l' intrigo [avrebbero dovuto] emanare naturalmente dalla tela e del dialogo, senza maggiori ed ipocrite e più comode maniere,*" preferably emulating the structural methods of the French realists.[70] The *dramma storico* was a dead genre, Boito thought, because it bore no relevance to modernity, but also because it did not provide answers to the problems of real life. He had very little respect for the maturity of his fellow-Milanese as a theatre-going public and thought their reactionary attitude towards modernity a symptom of cultural arrestation.[71] As

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[69] *Boito's reviews appeared in three journals with completely different political affiliations and cultural perspectives: the conservative La perseveranza, the scapigliato Il Figaro and the positivist Il politecnico.*

[70] *"[In which] characters, situations, motivation, scenes, the plot should emanate naturally from within the play and the dialogue, without high-flown, artificial and more convenient formulas." From the "Cronaca drammatica" of La perseveranza (13 October 1863), cited in Silvana Monti, Il Teatro realista della nuova Italia: 1861-1876. (Rome:Bulzoni, 1978), 13.*

[71] *Arrigo Boito, Tutti gli scritti, Piero Nardi, ed. (Milano: Mondatori, 1942), 1865.*

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late as 1866, Boito would still be arguing that Italian society could not develop a realistic drama, because reality was too confusing to grasp and because society *"poca e sparpagliata e confusa non porgeva soggetti, la vita abitudinaria e tranquilla non insegnava l'intrigo, l'assenza totale d'un idioma comune annichiliva il dialogo."*[72] Strangely enough, Boito had found the role of the pragmatist raisonneur an interesting modern dramatic type for replacing the bombastic romantic hero. Although he acknowledged the danger this type risked of becoming the dramatist's conventional voice of conscience, he assessed it as a superior dramaturgical means for providing access to *realtà*, rather than mechanically defending the moral outlook of the play.[73] Besides, he argued, it was up to the playwright's genius to present the raisonneur as a real character and not as a moralizing deus ex machina. Even more emphatic was his insistence on the realistic texture of the dialogue and the plot. If it were impossible for Italian playwrights to write a plain and natural dialogue, a type of speech emulating the *lingua parlata* and not the language of the serial novel, it would be preferable that the playwrights write in verse until

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[72] *"[Italian society], sparse, fragmented and confused did not provide themes, life, ordinary and uneventful, did not teach intrigue, the total absence of a common idiom annihilated the dialogue."* Politecnico, *1866, ibid., 1180*

[73] *On the issue of raisonneur in realistic drama cf. Maurice Gravier, "Les Avatars du 'Raisonneur'," Réalisme et poésie au théatre, Jean Jacquot, ed. (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la recherche scientifique, 1960), 121ff.*

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they master a common Italian idiom.[74] Boito in fact went as far as to defend dialect drama as more faithful to modern reality, because the naturalness of the language could more than any other structural element of the play describe by itself the mores, the sociology, the customs, even the psychology of the characters as effectively as the French authors of the realist mode: The dialect language was then capable of bringing *verismo* into the theatre, because the description of local realities would eventually permit the discovery of a national reality, available to all Italians. This view, so opposite to Capuana's initial skepticism concerning the disrupting influence of dialect theatre on the cause of national drama, emanated from Boito's conviction about the dearth of a national pool of themes, itself a phenomenon explained by the still precarious national situation.

Boito with the collaboration of Emilio Praga, a poet and fellow-*scapigliato* from the most noted of his generation, sought to try and apply his dramaturgical ideas in the social tragicomedy, Le madri galanti, according to Silvana Monti, a spin-off of Eugene Scribe's Le Confident (1826). Despite the authors' polemics against the artificiality and staleness of contemporary theatre, the play does not surprise with any stylistic innovation, but only with the apparent effort to

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[74] *Figaro (3 March 1864), cited ibid., 15.*

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introduce naturalistic dialogue and situation development. Certainly, more than anything else the play betrays Boito's bourgeois outlook, a bourgeois ethic strikingly similar to Achille Torelli's, but even today one can hardly justify the negative reactions following its premiere, all the more so because even its grotesque satire against the aristocracy and its bourgeois emulators were not more severe than, say, Ciconi's or for that matter Giacometti's.[75] The play actually radiates a kind of cynicism and tacit pessimism for the capacity of the *borghesia* to mend its mentality as drastically as it seemed to pursue its social advancement. Even if that cynicism were the only asset of the tragicomedy, it would still suffice as an indication of the way bourgeois *verismo* would develop in the theatre of Giacosa, Praga and Rovetta.

The play deals with the social mannerisms of Milanese haute-bourgeoisie, whose infatuation with fashion, galant pleasures and wealth has made it lose sight of its responsibility to provide society with correct models of behavior, culture and ethics. The countess Anna d'Acqui and Donna Matilde Foschi, are two characteristic members of "good

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[75] *It is actually very hard today to assess Le madri galanti with relation to the authors' intent, since the play both for the target of its satire and the subversiveness of its socio-political innuendos could not possibly escape the censor unscathed. The play was published once in Milan (1863) and had not been available until 1940, when Piero Nardi, Boito's biographer as well as editor of his Tutte le opere (Milano: Mondatori), included it in an appendix of the collection for its "value as a curiosity." See "Nota," op. cit., 1545.*

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society" who, narcissistic and obsessed with their status as "galant socialites," have neglected their daughters, compromised the reputation of their families and therefore offended the etiquette of the social system they so eagerly want to emulate, the aristocracy. When Enrico Salvi, a pragmatic middle-class lawyer whom both women claim for themselves as an "intimate friend," proposes marriage to Camilla, Anna's daughter, the Countess takes this as an offense against her ego and rejects the marriage on the grounds of class incompatibility between Camilla and Enrico. Matilde, just separated from her own husband and enamored with Enrico, her lawyer, takes his proposal to Camilla as a rejection of her affections and resolves to sabotage the union, although her own "unbecoming" status as a flighty divorcèe has seriously undermined the social credentials of her own daughter. During a "sophisticated" social function the coquettish behavior of both women creates a scandal among the other, no less hypocritical and double-faced, guests and the superficiality of their character is exposed, not without an impact on the honor of their own families. Anna's efforts to present Enrico to her husband as a perfidious moneyseeker fail ludicrously and when the Count decides to proceed with his daughter's marriage, she resolves to leave her home. As for Matilde, her reputation is so damaged, and her finances are in such a disarray, that only a departure from Milan can help her avoid the persecution of her creditors and the badmouthing of

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"society." With her husband dead and her daughter destined for a cloistered college, Matilde has every reason to be desperate until Maria, a childless widow and Camilla's aunt, offers to adopt Matilde's daughter and provide for her. Social order is restored, when, just before the wedding, Anna, repentant and changed, comes back to reclaim her position as a mother and social role model. The last scene, with one mother returning and another departing in order to save their daughters, pathetic and cynical as it is, serves the function of asserting the "proper" model for a bourgeois society: respect for the institution of family, respect for the social meaning of marriage, respect for the social superiority of the *borghesia* as opposed to the aristocracy and its hollow pretensions.

There is a significant but less conspicuous idea which could explain better both the failure of the play with its original audience and the subversive meaning of Boito's *problematica*.[76] The play to the degree that its story assimilated recognizable patterns of social reality might have appeared so realistic, that its problem might not have been the misrepresentation but the provocative overexposure of reality. If such was the case, it was rather the shock this social exposure gave to the audience -mirrored in the social

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[76] *A similar destiny befell Giuseppe Giacosa's fascinating political comedy, L'onorevole Hercole Mallardi (The Honorable Hercole Mallardi), a sad failure for so unsentimental and probing a play, despite Duse's appearance in it. But for more, see chapter 5.*

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group of idle scandal-mongers - that must have unsettled it: Things were too bad to be real, and if Boito offered a happy restorative ending, his argument was too caustic for the audience to justify it as not contrived, that is, subversive. Even if that were not the case, the play again betrayed Boito's fears for the social *verità*: The *borghesia* was not up to the task of national leadership. Whatever the case, the play could only be found guilty of not catering to the convictions of the *borghesia* about its own sincerity. As for Boito's (superficial) respect for social institutions, this can be explained by his anti-Ferrarian ideal that the individual makes the society, the very same ideal which made Torelli the herald of positivist *dramma borghese*. Institutions for Boito are malleable cultural customs gaining or losing in value according to the respect individuals, irrespective of their class background, bestow upon them. It is then this subtle challenging of conventional wisdom that metropolitan *verismo* would borrow from the *scapigliati*, a phenomenon of literary interaction which Italian critics have failed, I think, to investigate.[77]

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[77] *Silvana Monti, for example, views the play as a typical dramma borghese à la Ferrari, notwithstanding his opposition as "scapigliato" to the complacence of his contemporary bourgeois theatre. What allows the play to survive above Ferrarian conventionality, Monti argues, is only the unsettling radicalism of the tragicomic situation. See, ibid., 12-13. Renato Simoni, the only other critic who has ever dealt with the play, explains its failure as the consequence of the authors' lack of special talent in tackling social issues dramatically expounded: "La commedia svolge un tema che puo essere comico o tragico, ma non puo essere l'uno e l'altro insieme; e l'errore dei due autori fu da rappresentare in tono blando e con timidezza la galanteria delle madri... Per questo la commedia cadde;*

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The *scapigliati*'s distrust of the borghesi as well as of the way the various "special interests" of the modern nation sought to abuse state institutions amply reverberated in I nuovi tartuffi (The Modern Tartuffs), Giovanni Verga's 1869 political comedy about social corruption and parliamentary philistinism in the bourgeois state of post-Risorgimento Italy. The play, thought to be lost by all of Verga's critics and biographers until 1980,[78] traditional in its structure and dramaturgy, must have shocked the committee members of the *Concorso Ristori* with its bold anti-clericalism and antipathy for the ways of the *borghesia*. From a historical point of view, the comedy has modified the studies of Verga's theatre,

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non abbastanza rispettosa per non irritare, non abbastanza forte per essere tenuta. [...] Ma e curioso osservare come, il Boito e il Praga, non trovino, in questa umanità in miniatura, nessuna cosa piv grave, e pur manchino d' indulgenza! La spiegazione e presto data: quel mondo, quei vizi, non li interessavano che a fior di pelle; il loro sdegno era finto; non era tra il codice civile, il codice morale e il codice delle buone usanze che potevano fremere, soffrire, amare e sfavillare d'ira quei due poeti." [The play treats a theme which could be either comic or tragic, but not both at the same time; and the mistake of the two authors was to represent the gallantries of the two mothers suavely and timidly...The play failed for this reason; too uncouth not to irritate, too weak to endure. [...] But it is curious to observe how Boito and Praga did not find in this miniature cosmos anything more serious, even if they lacked compassion. The explanation is clear: that world, those vices interested them only superficially; their disdain was bogus; those poets were not to agonize, suffer, love and swell with rage over the civil code, the moral code and the utilitarian laws. Renato Simoni, "Arrigo Boito: L' uomo e il poeta," La lettura 18 (1 August 1918), 540-541.

[78] *The play was discovered by the Italian scholar and Verga specialist Carmello Musumarra, in a manuscript not of his own hand, among the unedited papers of the author. Along with it Musumarra also found ten pages written by Verga with information about the "carattere dei personaggi" and the "scenario" of the first two acts, now published along with the play in Carmelo Musumarra, ed. I nuovi Tartuffi di Giovanni Verga (Firenze: Monnier, 1980).*

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not only because it solidly establishes Verga's first official contribution to Italian theatre at least fourteen years ahead of Cavalleria Rusticana,[79] but also because it proved that Verga's affiliation with the *settentrionale* literature, and therefore with *scapigliatura*, coincided with, if not preceded, his alignment with the dramatic tradition of his native Sicily.[80]

The theme of political and religious *tartuffismo*, popular with the playwrights of Ferrari's generation,[81] offered Verga a chance not so much to show off his skills in

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[79] *Needless to say, the play's failure to gain an audience frustrated Verga's ambition to contribute to the risorgimento of Italian theatre as early as Torelli did, but its discussion in the context of verismo's prehistory is revealing, since it shows Verga on line with contemporary dramatic realism, actively concerned with the representation of modernity's realtà.*
For more on Verga's drama, see chapter 5.

[80] *Verga went to Milan at the end of 1872 and it was from there that he published some of his best work. He became an intimate friend of many scapigliati, but his contact with the movement goes back to the early sixties, although this contact seems to have been haphazard and intermittent. I nuovi tartuffi dates from that early period, and I tend to believe that its writing was influenced from this early encounters with the program of the scapigliati. Although there are critics who have traced scapigliatura influences in Verga's narrative work, no Italian critic that I know of has ever viewed I nuovi tartuffi as a scapigliatura play. See, however, Giovanni Nicolai, "Verga e la scapigliatura," Giovanni Verga: Romanzi a stampa del periodo catanese (Firenze: Edizioni delle commnità di lavoro, 1970), 73-78. For Verga's literary encounters in Milan, see G.P. Marchi, Concordanze verghiane (Verona: Fiorini, 1970), 222-3. For Verga and his early rapport with Sicilian drama, see Alfredo Barbina, ed., Teatro verista siciliano (Bologna: Capelli, 1970), 12, n.14. See also the discussion on dialect theatre below and chapter 5.*

[81] *Cf. Il tartufo politico (1852) by Angelo Brofferio, Il tartuffo moderno (later Prosa) by Paolo Ferrari, as well as Tommaso Gherardi del Testa's Le coscienze elastiche (The Elastic Consciences, 1859) and Luigi Suñer's I leggittimisti in Italia (The law-abiders in Italy, 1861). The hypocrites as "maschere" amenable to the critical ridicule of modern Italian playwrights appear in Dell'Ongaro's famous Il politecnico article, cited in chap. 1. Verga was probably familiar with the article, before his arrival to Florence.*

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characterization or situation comedy --as we said its dramaturgy is rather derivative and weak--but to deride the *imborghesimento* of Italian middle-class society, as it prepared to lead the modern nation. The play takes place before and after the parliamentary elections of 1865, when Florence is the capital of Italy and the center of political activity. The comedy deals with the parliamentary rise and fall of Prospero Molmenti, an ingenuous and patriotic wine producer from the Tuscan provinces, who under the pressure of his snobbish family and prey to the machinations of the lawyer Codini, a malicious hypocrite championing the anti-statist forces in Italian politics, participates in the national elections and wins. Once established as a deputy in Florence, nothing seems to go right. Disillusioned with national politics and the system, he also sees his family, especially his son and daughter, losing their sincerity and honor, entrapped in dubious social relationships with rapacious courtesans and dowry-hunting aristocrats. His social worries are the result of Codini's plot to destroy Prospero financially and "socially," so that he will become his puppet in the parliament. Prospero, however, is saved thanks to the sincere involvement of two real friends and enemies of Codini, who not only expose his villainy and designs, but also save Prospero and his children from catastrophe and despair. At the end, and after justice is served, Prospero seems certain to leave politics and reassume a metier more honest, more

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lucrative and more conducive to Italy's prosperity, that of the wine-producer.

Just like Boito and Praga's Le madri galanti, Verga's comedy is generous in tossing out disparaging remarks about the sorry state of the aristocracy, the contradictions of bourgeois life-style, the decadence of pre-revolutionary idealism, the bogus morality of the ruling classes. Contrary to Boito, however, who called himself a *scapigliato romantico* and observed the shortcomings of the *borghesia* from within the social context he castigated, Verga is still a Southern idealist and the disillusionment of the *scapigliati* has not completely imbued his idealistic vision. Disenchantment with the tactics of the *borghesia* and its institutions is evident in the comedy, but as a provincial *borghese* who views reality as an outsider investigating the social "facts," Verga still retains the belief in the capacity of family and friendship to sustain the integrity of the individual, even when society with all its petty politics threatens to compromise. The play's upbeat end does not necessarily connote optimism, but rather the will to keep up the appearance of contentment for a social crisis averted.[82]

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[82]*More than showing young Verga's intellectual agility, I nuovi tartuffi manifested how far back the formation of his sociology could be traced. Indeed, both his country and his city plays, indicate his respect for the passionate sincerity of provincials as well as his mistrust of the borghesi's commitment to social "progress."*

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The dialect drama

No history of *verismo* can ever be complete or accurate if regional/dialect drama, a unique European cultural phenomenon, is not taken into account, not only for the plethora of *realtà* it documented from the time of Ariosto down to Goldoni and Eduardo De Filippo, but also for its rich contribution to the *"problematica"* of *verismo*, both *meridionale* and *settentrionale*, for the truth its practioners sought to capture through the use of regional dialects, in order to arrive to the essence of the various facets of *italianità*. The history of dialect theatre in the age of *verismo* is too vast to do justice in a few lines or pages, but a succinct reference to the generic characteristics of the diverse *"teatri regionali"* is germane to the study and the appreciation of the movement and its dramatists.[83] It is not without significance that the majority of the playwrights studied here wrote dramas in their native dialect (Ferrari, Torelli, Bracco), had their plays translated into dialect (Verga, Capuana), or sought to capture both the individuality of the local culture along with its italianate universality (Rovetta, Bracco). The debate as to whether or not dialect theatre was or could be a dynamic factor in the evolution of national drama can be traced back to the criticism of Boito and Capuana, but it was not before the advent of French

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[83]*A comprehensive study of Italian dialect theory and drama is still missing from Italian bibliography.*

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naturalism and the positivist study of Italy's ethnography, that dialect drama could be appreciated as a matrix and a complement of *verismo* drama.

The emergence of dialect theatre in Italy has always reflected the abiding socio-cultural discrepancies, peculiar to a people with a fragmentary national identity, a people that possess a strong sense of citizenship and regionhood, yet with an atrophied nationalistic consciousness. The differences, cultural, social, political and economic, were not agents of differentiation only between an energetic North and a listless South, a concept of Italian culture in essence partly accurate. They also forged municipal civilizations, distinct from city-state to city-state, even in neighboring regions. The Milanese, the Turinese and the Venetian culture were as disparate from one another as was the culture of Naples from that of Sicily or the Papal states. Each of these cultures was expressed in an idiom peculiar to their political and cultural history, so much so that mutual understanding between the speakers of different dialects was more often than not impossible. This phenomenon was not beyond the theatre's grasp, particularly when endowed with a theatrical form as perceptible of and susceptible to local cultures as the *commedia dell'arte*. It was not then accidental that a great deal of *commedia's* panitalian appeal was its capacity to absorb the various regionalisms, cultural and linguistic, as formulas of its comic thematic stock, but also to base its

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comic effect on presenting their interaction, or more accurately their incompatibility. And while in the beginning the signification of these opposing cultures was restricted to the particular paraphernalia of every mask --a Venetian Pantalone, a Neapolitan Pulcinella, and so on -- with the decline of the masks and the introduction of dialogue in the *commedie*, realism and actuality became more important. The dialect then assumed a more decisive role in the theatre, becoming the agent of both the action and the plot. The traditional masks dropped their conventional names and new characters replaced them. These new characters became the permanent personae of the actors who invented them, not only because as itinerant performers the actors could be more easily identifiable by local audiences, but also because as writers of the pieces they performed in, they had linked their particular persona with a specific social milieu, with a particular aspect of *Italianità*. Goldoni's revolution had a tremendous impact on the development of modern dialect theatre, since the dialect was a sine qua non for the realistic representation of a certain society, its mores and attitudes. Similar innovations also occurred elsewhere, but in order to make the plays adaptable to the linguistic exigencies of other regions, they were more often translated into all the other local dialects rather than "*in lingua*." The trend was so powerful, that even foreign plays were translated directly into local dialects and when the demand for new plays exceeded

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the actors' ability to provide them, journalists and dilettanti professionals would come in to write plays that could capture *realtà* in the making. There was then a time when one could not speak of Italian drama or theatre but of Italian dramas or theatres and when it was equally inaccurate to speak of one Italian *realtà* instead of many "*socialità*" and "*realismi.*" How could it be otherwise when as late as 1870, only 2-3% of the entire Italian population was in a position to speak much less write "in lingua"? Even when the theatre was forced to shy away from regionalism for the sake of "*nazionalizzazione,*" the de-regionalization of the audience(s) was not even remotely attainable.[84] Giorgio Arcoleo, a late 19th century intellectual and cultural critic, would acknowledge that Italy did not form a theatre public, but an "*insieme,*" a miscellany of publics, corresponding to the socio-geographical pieces, composing the "*società nazionale;*" For non-dialect theatre, despite all its quantitative prevalence over the regionals, the unity of audience was yet to be achieved, because *realtà* as a common national experience was yet to be shared by Italians:

> *E tanto più mi son soffermato nell' idea che da noi ancor bisogna che si formi il pubblico, quando ho visto quella stessa gente che, dicorde sulle produzioni in lingua comune, prende gusto alla festività e al brio delle commedie veneziane, alla forza e al carattere delle piemontesi; -ciò che prova che la vita è sminuzzata, malgrado l'unità geografica e politica e non si è ancora raccolta*

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[84] *Bruno Sanguanini, Il pubblico all' italiana: formazione del pubblico e politiche culturali tra Stato e teatro (Milano: F. Angeli, 1989), 228.*

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nella persona di un sol popolo."[85]

The unification of national culture, as a priority of the *Risorgimento*, demanded the unification of people perceived as a cultural entity, and as the dialect theatres seemed to emphasize disparity rather than affinity, it was inevitable that the visionaries of the Risorgimento, actors, authors and critics, agreed in the necessity to promulgate the nationalization of Italian drama, to contain the expansion of regional drama as inimical to the formation of national drama, to achieve the "*disponibilità verso il reale*" through the production of dramas and spectacles "in the name" of the nation.[86] The obsession with the "beautiful, the true and the real" along with the immersion in the political and military problems of the Risorgimento had as a result the attenuation of dialect theatres, whose response to the demand for a national edifying and true art was at worst reactionary against the idea of "national" theatre, while at best insinuating itself as preserving the glory of the past.

The forces opposed to the cause of unity, national (local élites) and foreign (French, Austrian, Spanish) did not remain

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[85] *And I was all the more convinced of the idea that in our country it is necessary that a public be formed, when I saw the same crowd disagree over the productions in the common language, while savoring the conviviality and the verve of the Venetian comedies, the force and the character of the Piemontese ones; - which proves that life is fragmented, despite the geographic and political unification, and that it does not yet speak to the soul of a single people.* Giorgio Arcoleo, Studi e profili *(Milano: Mondatori, 1929), 42.*

[86] *"The readiness for [the discovery of] the real."* Sanguanini, *ibid., 217.*

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uninvolved in this "tradionalist" trend: In Venice, Austrian authorities championed *commedia dell´ arte*, while in Modena *Goldonismo* was as strong as in the capital of Veneto. In Milan, popular types of the local vernacular *commedie*, such as Meneghino and Beltramino were not suppressed as long as they remained apolitical. In Naples, the masters of the *"pulcinellate,"* pandering to the cultural policies of the Borbonic regime, adapted their theatrical offerings to conform with the official culture. Thus the Neapolitan dialect theatre emphasized folklore, pageantry, sentimentality and morality. The melodramatization of the old masks was championed as a reactionary cultural policy, which aimed at creating for Naples a cultural image consonant not with the true history of the city but with its stereotypical romanticized reputation as a quaint tourist destination.[87] In Florence, the comedies of *Stenterello* (*commedia* character) remained popular until the declaration of the Kingdom, while in Sicily local forms of drama and puppet theatre antagonised the dozens of troupes touring the regions with artless playlets and watered-down or Sicilianized adaptations of regular dramas. What these developments had in common was the effort to suppress the revelation of the various contemporary *realtà*, to arrest therefore the representation of actuality in all its dimensions, the development thus of realism as the trend most

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[87] *Siro Ferrone, Il teatro italiano: La commedia e il dramma borghese dell´Ottocento, op. cit., xlix.*

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amenable to reflect modern life, to forge national self-awareness. It was then this kind of "faked" realism that Capuana observed as a quality of dialect drama, detrimental as such to the cause of the *risorgimento* of Italian drama. It is indeed, striking that while in the beginning of the 19th century dialect theatre would be besmirched as unrealistic, or superficially realistic, in the second half of the century it would appear as overrealistic, a gross and sentimental exaggeration of *realtà*.

The renascence of dialect drama as a counterpart to the drama *in lingua* coincided with both the creation of the kingdom and the advent of positivism. This rebirth did not occur everywhere at once, nor did all the traits of the older drama disappear at once. For example, while Milan and Naples had the most active and productive dialect theatre, the renascence of Sicilian drama was a phenomenon of the early twentieth century.[88] While the penchant for sentimentality and didacticism was assimilated in the new dramas challenging realism's pretension to "objectivity," other elements such as stock characters and situations were accommodated as recognizable staples of contemporary life, with their conventionality furnishing the link between the new and the old theatre forms. The ascendancy of the regional *borghesie* and the formation of the *piccola borghesia*, the metropolitan

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[88] *Cf. Giuseppe Petronio, "Il contributo della drammaturgia siciliana al teatro nazionale ed europeo." Problemi 55 (May-August 1979), 214-229.*

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mass of workers, vendors, public servants, artisans, prostitutes and small time criminals, enriched the character gallery of northern dialect theatre, while in Sicily and Naples, the dialect drama remained linked to the tradition of the open theatre, where the action takes place in the centre of a community, rather than within the walls of an attic, or a basement. Even when the action is not "public," the stage becomes a space which, though "walled," still remains an "open," that is non-private place (prison, caffè, courtyard, a store, etc.). This process of updating the "*problematica*" of dialect theatre not only enabled it to compete with the "national" drama *in lingua*, but also made it more amenable to the esthetic and ideological demands of *verismo*. As Giorgio Pullini observes, the idea of character as determined by his or her immediate environment, class and heredity became dominant in *verismo* dialect drama, since the authors based their plays on the assumption that the character had no psychological autonomy, but his or her identity was part of the milieu that shaped and defined their "life." Their involvement in the *realtà* of life gave them a univerally human appeal counterbalancing the loss of their individuality which the vivid depiction of the milieu entailed.[89]

As we mentioned earlier, Turin and Milan were the theatre capitals with the most interactive communication between

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[89] *Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli (1850-1950) (Firenze: Parenti editore, 1958), 119.*

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dialect and *in lingua* theatre, not only because realism and *scapigliatura* furnished dialect drama with a populistic raison d' etre, but also because what with the demographic expansion and the formation of a *piccolo-borghese* subculture, social reality looked more complex and pregnant with contradictions. The clash of the dominant and the popular classes, the despair and the social compromises of the underprivileged, the desire for money and better living conditions, the "struggle for survival" are thus the themes that dominate the drama of Vittorio Bersezio (1828-1900), a writer, journalist and public officer with wide interests and sensitive to social problems.[90] Although initially very polemical against the dialect theatre, he was destined to become one of the most representative dramatists of Turinese theatre and early *verismo*. His 1863 Le miserie d' Monssú Travet (The travails of Mr. Travet) is still considered a classic of dialect *verismo* and is a perennial favorite with audiences.[91] Travetti, a lower public employee, oppressed by the system and abused by

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[90] *It is interesting to relate that Bersezio signed his first dialect commedie under the pen name of Carlo Nugelli, intimidated by social considerations from revealing his identity. Bersezio was also one of the first chronicler of modern Italian history with his Il regno di Vittorio Emmanuele II. Trent' anni di vita italiana (The Reign of Vittorio Emmanuele II. Thirty Years of Italian Life), began in 1878 and finished in 1895. See Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. 1 (Bari: Laterza, 1940), 129-140; and Cesare Bozzetti, ed. Il teatro italiano del secondo Ottocento (Torino: UTET, 1960), 187-194.*

[91] *Bersezio also adapted the play in lingua as Le miserie del signor Travetti. It was also translated into German as well as into other dialects. Alessandro Manzoni saw the play in 1868 and publicly expressed his high regard for its realism.*

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his socially superiors, has become proverbially identified with the common man of the industrial age and it was exactly this success, the response of theatre to modernity, which proved to critics and polemicists of dialect drama that realism, national culture and drama were not irreconcilable forces in the representation of *Italianità*.[92] In Venice, the revival of dialect drama actually meant the modification of *goldonismo*, or rather the attempt to reconcile the sentimental/pedagogic precepts of Goldoni's tradition with the literary and artistic demand for a wider spectrum of social criticism, based on the data of reality. Giacinto Gallina was the most successful Venetian dialect dramatist, although he was always keener to downplay and "sentimentalize" realism than deviate from the patterns and the style of Goldoni.[93] Gallina wrote about thirty comedies, only a handful of them in lingua. His priority was not to represent life in its various minutiae, but to select these elements, which through a farcical or pathetic plot, might provide some moral good. His plays then tended to be more situation or character comedies, rather than "social," that is, their interest lay in the lively portrayal of "real" people rather than in his rendition of a social environment, shaped by conflicting social forces

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[92] *Other characteristic plays of Bersezio are L' mal de pais (The Evil of the Nation, 1864); La prosperità d' Monssù Travet (The fortune of Mr. Travetti, 1870). After 1870 he turned to novels and the drama in lingua.*

[93] *For a comprehensive study of Gallina's drama, see Pullini, ibid., 51-88.*

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and contrasting modern trends. The protagonist in Gallina's theatre is the city's *borghesia* which, contrary to the national mood of the time, is inert, listless and declining, a class incapable of regaining its older glory, impractical and sentimental, living with the nostalgia for the past. Plays like Le barufe in famegia (Family Shenanigans, 1871), Una famegia in rovina (A family in Ruins, 1872), Zente refada (The Newly Rich, 1875), to mention the most critically successful of Gallina's oeuvre, are faithful imitations of the Goldonian model, although admittedly Gallina is a solid craftsman and the borrowings from Goldoni's dramaturgy do not render his work derivative and insipid. Actually two of his later plays, La famegia del santolo (A Saint's Family, 1892) and La base de tuto (The Basis of All Things, 1895), constituted daring departures from his earlier work, not only entering the *"problematica"* of *verismo* -- the crisis of the *borghesia* -- but also touching on those "psychological" subliminal *verità*, (instinct, emotional intelligence, hereditary "problems"), explored by the crepuscolar veristi of late 19th century.

Milan, the major capital of theatre activity during the last quarter of the 19th Century and the center attracting at one time or another all the major exponenents of *verismo*, owed its energetic dialect theatre not only to the theatrical initiatives of Cletto Arrighi but also to the innovative contributions of Edoardo Feravilla (1846-1916) and particularly Carlo Bertolazzi (1870-1916). The son of a minor

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scapigliato poet, Ferravilla came to the theatre at a very early age working with various companies until 1870, when Arrighi accepted him in the *Teatro Milanese* he had just set up to present a "*meneghino*" (Milanese) repertory. Soon a leading attraction of that company, Feravilla was a master of improvisation, able to come up with some lively characterizations, which later became the focus of his comedies. From 1872 until 1880, he created a number of characters with whom he was identified as a performer, and for each one of which he wrote various vaudevilles, parodying the self-consciousness of the Milanese, their megalomania and the excesses of their culture, *scapigliatura* not excluded. For his character Pedrin Bustelli, he wrote El sur Pedrin in guarella (Mr. Pedrin in a Brawl, 1872), for "Pànera" El duell de sur Pànera (Mr. Pànera's Duel), and for Pastizza L'Opera del Maester Pastizza.[94] Unfortunately, the strains of theatre management and the responsibilities of performances did not allow him to develop as a playwright, so that he is today mentioned more as a performer/comedian, than as a "writer."[95]

Carlo Bertolazzi's success as a dialect *verista* was attained in the last decade of 19th Century with El nost

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[94] *His plays always evolved with each performance and different versions exist for each one.*

[95] *For a complete list of his plays see, his Opere, A. Bertolucci, ed. (Milano, Garzanti, 1961). For more on Feravilla, see Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, vol. 5, 201-5.*

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Milan, an "epic" two-part chronicle of the Milanese experience consisting of La povera gent (The Poor People, 1893) and I sciôri (The Gentlemen, 1895), a watermark in the history of *verismo* and the masterpiece of Bertolazzi's career. In fact, Bertolazzi was one of the few who consciously aligned his work with the "authorized" *veristi* such as Verga, Capuana, Giacosa and especially Rovetta, whose protegé he became. The scion of a rich bourgeois family, he studied law, but soon his successes in the theatre and his love for journalism (he was also a drama critic, occasional cabaret actor and co-author of musical comedies) inevitably made him turn to the theatre as a profession. Consolidating his reputation as a dialect dramatist after the success of La gibigianna (The Glare, 1898), a social tragicomedy about the low life of a young couple struggling to survive, he decided to write plays *in lingua* --among them Lulu (1903) and Lorenzo e il suo avvocato (Lorenzo and his Lawyer, 1905), both tragicomic melodramas-- but his efforts met with mediocre success, obliging him to revert back to dialect. But it is with El nost Milan that Bertolazzi has earned his place in the history of *verismo*. The protagonist, as the title reveals, is the city of Milan and each part of the play examines the impact of the city on the lower classes and the *borghesia*. The first play, patterned on the examples of the Southern regional drama, chronicles the lives of a multitude of *piccolo-borghesi*, as they interact with each other in the open space of the city. The story in

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fact presents a slice of life from the visit of a circus troupe, photographed in the space of performance, the lottery hall, the public kitchens and the public shelters. Misery, bitterness, despair, poverty and unfulfilled hopes define the relationships among the characters of this vast metropolitan panorama and Bertolazzi, as Pullini rightly observed, employed many techniques that neo-realist cinema would use in "documenting" the social background of a story.[96] The play essentially follows the relationship between a father and a daughter, torn apart by poverty and despair. The father becomes the murderer of his daughter's rapist, and she becomes a gentleman's kept woman in order to escape *realtà*. A melancholic lyricism juxtaposed to the tragicomic situations, occurring during the sojourn of the circus performers (the metaphor life-circus is part of Bertolazzi's tragicomic irony), highlight the sentimentality of his theatrical cosmos. Yet at the same time, the documentation of reality as a process towards the various *verità*, original and detailed as it is, showed how *verismo* as a dramaturgy had managed to transcend the "cultural" barriers of a local society (Milan), allowing the genuine reproduction of a modern polity in all its diverse complexities.[97] The second part of the play,

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[96] *Pullini, ibid., 124.*

[97] *The play remained popular until the 1950s and Giorgio Strehler was one of the modern directors who advocated Bertolazzi's naturalism, inspiring a revival of his work. See also Siro Ferrone, "Il realismo di Bertolazzi," Il ponte, 11-12 (November-December 1972), 129-32.*

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more conventional and more melodramatically polemical against the injustices of modern life, describes the hypocrisy of the Milanese *borghesi*. The play, ostensibly a social satire targeting the falsehoods of a class much vilified for having betrayed the idealism of united Italy, manages to avoid caricaturing the prejudices of the entire class, but the play, notwithstanding its regional flavor, does not read as more original than the *in lingua* dramas of Rovetta.

The dialect theatre of Naples, a vibrant sector of Italian popular culture culminating in the masterpieces of Eduardo de Filippo, was saved from the state of folklore thanks to Eduardo Scarpetta (1854-1925), Salvatore di Giacomo (1860-1934) and later Roberto Bracco and Vittorio Viviani. Eduardo Scarpetta who came to the theatre as an actor out of necessity, has been credited with restoring and reviving the San Carlino theatre of Naples, famous for being the home of the city's *commedia dell'arte*, but also for professionalizing Neapolitan theatre, with particular attention to directing, designing, and actor preparation. As a playwright, along with his original plays, he also adapted French farces and vaudevilles, always succeeding in creating a vivid atmosphere of *"Neapolitanità,"* which some critics found "unrealistic" or too realistic, therefore far from the reality other playwrights, even Achille Torelli, were thought to have more

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accurately captured.[98] His most original play, Miseria e nobiltà (Poverty and Nobility, 1887), is a brilliant comedy, effectively making use of the theatre-within-the-theatre tricks of the commedia dell'arte and the French *pochades*.[99] An impoverished group of low-lifes agrees to present themselves as nobles to the family of a rich *borghese* in order to propose the marriage of his daughter with Eugenio, a "marchesino." Chaos occurs when the "family" comes to the house of the girl, as misunderstandings, cross-dressings, mistaken identities and various faux pas on the part of the poor impostors almost destroy the plan. The play ends with a string of marriages bringing to an end the impostors' misery with their *imborghesimento* within the *borghesia* proper. The satire stresses both the compromises and the loss of integrity the lower classes must endure in order to secure their survival, but also the persistent obsession of the *borghesia* with aristocracy. This theme, already exhausted by Giacometti, Ciconi, Ferrari and numerous other playwrights, gains in interest not only through the carnavalesque theatricality of the comic episodes, but also through Scarpetta's blunt social

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[98] *For a comprehensive overview of Scarpetta's career see Vittorio Viviani, Storia del teatro napoletano (Napoli: Guida, 1969, 646-76.*

[99] *The play was a national success and Scarpetta's company toured with it to Rome, Milan and elsewhere. As late as 1910 the play was still performed in Naples and it is one of these performances that Maxim Gorky wittnessed at the Teatro Mercadante. The play was also traqnslated into French; It was made into film several times and in 1946 a comic opera was based on it with music by Jacopo Napoli. Cf. Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, vol. VIII, op. cit. 1574-79.*

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criticism which never dissolves to sentimental populism. More important, though, is Scarpetta's effort to write the play in an idiom balancing the richness of Neapolitan dialect with the preciseness and literate elegance of the Italian language, an uncommon dramaturgical experiment at the time. As is the case with Ferravilla,[100] Scarpetta is today more appreciated as a performer than a dramatist, but his contribution to the introduction of realism in the Neapolitan theatre remains uncontested.

Salvatore di Giacomo, a Neapolitan *borghese* who abandoned medicine in order to become one of the most popular voices of Naples's cultural life, was a journalist, a story-teller, a poet, an opera librettist and a playwright. A friend of Torelli -in 1886 he helped Torelli translate I mariti in the local dialect- and Bracco, di Giacomo was the antipode of Scarpetta, a playwright going for the most naturalistic representation of contemporary Naples, colorful and atmospheric, but far from Scarpetta's *"napolitanità,"* which he viewed as spurious folklorism.[101] In 1888 he wrote the drama *in lingua* Malavita (Low Life), which he later translated into Neapolitan under the title 'O voto (The vow). This play, derived from the short story Il voto, was di Giacomo's

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[100] *Ferravilla and Scarpetta were also collaborators, having performed together in Milan and elsewhere.*

[101] *Cf. Benedetto Croce, op. cit., vol. III, 69-95; A. Apicella, "Il mondo dialettale nel teatro di Salvatore di Giacomo," Arena 2 (1954), vol II, No.6, 22-36.*

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theatrical response to Verga's experiment with "open space" dramaturgy, rendering Naples an overpowering presence and catalyst in the lives of disenfranchised citizens. Di Giacomo was a positivist and much of his non-dramatic work explores the local history of his native land in its theatrical, cultural and social aspects. His dialect *verismo* drama, an amalgam of sentimental *drame larmoyante* and photographic realism, dates predominantly from the early years of the twentieth century, although it basically reproduces the same "*problematica*" and dramaturgy of Bersezio and Bertolazzi. Misery, poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, social injustice, rape, social immobility are the topics dramatized most by di Giacomo, whose best and most characteristic play are perhaps the 1900 'O mese mariano, derived from his earlier short story Senza vederlo (Without Seeing Him,1886) and Assunta Spina (1910). The setting here is a public shelter for the poor, another "open" space, where all sorts of social types come together, providing a lively slice of life from the point of view of the have-nots.[102] His tragicomic sentimentality and his acute observation of Neapolitan behavior made di Giacomo extremely popular with his fellow-citizens and formed a dramaturgical recipe that Eduardo De Filippo and Vittorio Viviani would follow and reshape, always looking for the accurate capturing of *realtà*.

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[102] *The play was so successful that in 1910 it was turned into an opera by Umberto Giordano, one of the most representative opera composers of verismo.*

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Last but not least, the Sicilian dialect theatre is the matrix not only of *verismo* as a literary movement, but the point of departure for Italy's greatest playwrights, who also happened to be its greatest literary figures as well: Verga and Pirandello. Both men's fascination with the theatre and the interest they developed in its potential to explore the *realtà* and the *verità* of humanity cannot be explained without considering the dialect theatre of Sicily as a point of reference. Even though they tried to "nationalize" the form and the aesthetic of the dialect drama they were familiar with since early childhood, Verga first and then Pirandello sought to "translate" the primitive realism of popular theatre, Verga deriving from it the essential elements of his *verismo*, Pirandello experimenting with the ironies and the paradoxes of the *"realtà"* which popular dramatic themes encompassed.[103]

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the most popular dramatic genres in Sicily were the *vastasate* and the *opre*, both genres requiring actors, not necessarily professionals, with a talent for story-telling, improvisation and commedia dell'arte role building. It is to note first that the dialect drama in Sicily was predominantly the creation of

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[103] *Pirandello's "dialect drama" falls within the parameters of the renascence of Sicilian dialect theatre during the period 1900-1915, initiated with the Sicilian verismo of Luigi Capuana. On the contrary, Verga did not write dialect theatre, although the structural conventions of this theatre were effectively imitated in his in lingua "Sicilian plays." There will be more on Verga in chapter 5. Cf. Anna Barsotti, "Dialettismo o no: una "questione" tra Verga e Capuana," Trimestre 10 (1977), 100-107*

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literate actors, conversant with the styles and the techniques of the regular theatre presented at the time in Sicily -- Goldoni, Alfieri, Kotzebue, Beaumarchais -- and familiar with the cultural traditions of both the island and the "continent;" and second that these genres, previously considered by Italian historians and ethnologists as folkloric, created by illiterate people for the people, were actually early forms of bourgeois theatre, catering not only to the various lower and middle class *borghesie*, but also to the tastes of the local nobility and the King.[104] The *vastasata* was a hybrid genre evolving out of the situation comedies of commedia dell'arte and the character comedies of Goldoni, who was the most performed playwright by the itinerant dialect acting troupes of the island. The main characters of the *vastasate* were the *facchini*, the porters and the coolies of the various Sicilian cities, descendants of the commedia *zanni* and Goldoni's servants. A typical example of these plays is Biagio Perez and Pietro Corradino's Il cortile degli Aragonesi (The courtyard of the Aragonians),[105] the plot of which follows the love adventures and the little

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[104] *For a comprehensive account of Sicily's theatre during the early part of the 18th Century see Claudio Meldolesi and Ferdinando Taviani, Teatro e spettacolo nel primo Ottocento (Roma: Laterza, 1991), 282-315. In 1800 the king of Sicily officially "legitimized" the genre and a compagnia nazionale was formed, remianing active almost until the late thirties*

[105] *There have survived thirty-four scenari of vastasate, but it is still no certain whether these titles belong to an equal number of plays, or more than one titles apply to the same basic scenario.*

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scandals among the denizens of Palermo's popular quarters, their interaction with the members of the aristocracy and the *borghesia*, their efforts to make it through life by their ingenuity and pragmatism. Credulous *borghesi*, enamored young ladies, narcissistic mothers and step-mothers, but also fishermen, artisans, shop-keepers and petty criminals cross paths in these comedies, but contrary to the populism of other dialect theatres of Italy, the point of view from which events are presented is not that of the people, but that of the *borghesia*, conservative in tone, moralistic and politically far from liberal. Indeed, as Meldolesi observes, these plays were mirrors of bourgeois ideology, showing how *"la borghesia meridionale potesse prendere progressivamente coscienza di sè, attaccando le masse diseredate al seguito dell' aristocrazia e sviluppando, d' altro canto, una nuova sensibilità dirigente."*[106]

What distinguished the *vastasate* even more from a typical farce, bringing it at the same time closer to a kind of proto-*verismo* dramaturgy was the insertion of actuality in the plots. Not only the mores and the manners of a contemporary society, but also bits of "news" concerning contemporary life found their ways into the plays. It was also evident that the

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[106] *"the meridional borghesia could progressively achieve its self-awareness, setting itself against the underprivileged masses [after its struggle with aristocracy], developing, on the other hand, a new hegemonic sensibility." Ibid., 295.*

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actors-authors wanted to provide some "sociological" analysis of these "news," such as the economic depression of the Sicilian provinces, the sensational crimes of women murderers and the activities of notorious outlaws. The *faschini* were played by actors coming from within the lower-middle classes, and being the "raisonneurs" of the plays, their "lines" reflected not the social aspirations of the "characters" but those of the "actors," and this is exactly why improvisation and the skill to come up with an *"aggiornamento,"* an updating of the plot, was essential to the genre. But for the history of Sicilian pre-*verismo*, the identification between actor and character was to prove extremely important, because it was out of the configuration actor-character-life that Sicilian *verismo* would emerge.

The *opra delle puppe* was a unique form of puppet theatre, whose emergence and development runs parallel with the development of the *vastasata* and later *verismo*. This genre made great demands upon the talent of the puppeteer in terms of improvisation, characterization, and story-telling, since the success of the performance -usually taking place in festivals, fairs and carnivals -depended upon the success of the performer not only to "represent" a story, but also to "represent" the story within the social context where the performance was taking place. Its importance for the history of *verismo* as a dramaturgy lies in its theatricality and its emphasis on interplay between reality-as-life and reality-as-

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drama, features which have found a special place in the dramaturgy of Pirandello. It also lies in the function of the performer who should be able to enact life simply by the use of his voice(s) and it is not accidental that many celebrated actors of dialect *verismo* theatre began their careers as performers of *opra*, among them Giovanni Grasso, Sicilian *verismo*'s most accomplished actor-manager.

By the middle of the century, the *vastasate* and the *opre* seemed to have become formulaic and repetitive, despite the effort of local popular actors/authors such as Giuseppe Colombo and Gaetano Marvouglia, who tried to re-invent the genre by stressing the farcical potential of the plots and/or sensationalizing the familiar plots with suspenseful story lines about revenge of honor, duels, persecutions, and other melodramatic contrivances.[107] It was already clear that actors and managers, tired of the same old variations on a theme, were looking for some new dramatic idea, which would be as entertaining as the traditional genres and yet more naturalistic, more open to contemporary life. It was out of the search for this new form that I mafiusi, the play anticipating the advent of Verga's *verismo meridionale*, was born. This proto-*verismo* drama, unique in the history of

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[107] *Colombo devised a variation on the vastasata, the "pasquinata," borrowing its name from Pasquino, the servant character he was most identified with. Gaetano Marvouglia did not invent any hybrid genre, but sought to "re-goldonize" the vastasata, readapting the Cortile degli Aragonesi by downplaying farce and adding violent scenes, which managed to create a tragicomic picture of life, as such more "faithful" to life.*

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Italian theatre, evolved from the collaboration of Gaspare Mosca (1825-?) and Giuseppe Rizzotto (1828-1895), fellow-actors and friends with significant experience in the performance of popular dialect plays.[108] I mafiusi is probably the first specimen of naturalistic theatre in Italy and perhaps in Europe, the first play to document with almost a journalistic attention to detail the environment, the behavior, the (sub-)culture and the language of criminal inmates in a heavy security prison of Palermo, men whose personal relationships are shaped and regulated by the laws of *camorra*, the mafiosi of the Sicilian capital.[109] In fact, so realistic was the rendition of this low-life society on the stage, that after its immensely successful premiere in 1863, along with the enthusiasm for such life-like theatrical experience, there were not a few authorities who thought the play realistic to the extent of being morally corrupting.

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[108] *The mode and the extent of this collaboration is still open to debate, with theatre historians obliged to deal with contradictory historic evidence, often adulterated by pseudo-historical accounts and oral tradition falsifications. For the very complicated story of the play's genesis, see the introduction of Barbina, op. cit. The play in its original edition was in three acts, published under the name of Rizzotto and with the title I mafiusi de la Vicaria di Palermu. Scene popolari in tre atti (Palermo, Nunzia Pisciotta, editore, n.d.). In 1885 a version of the play in lingua was published in Rome as I mafiusi. Commedia in tre atti. Following the success of the play, Rizzotto wrote two sequels and called I mafiusi "a trilogy on the Sicilian low life). He also wrote other plays but none of them were as successful as his first play.*

[109] *The sociological and anthropological content of the play — especially the fascinating information over the ritualistic function of the camorra members and the dialogue's mafia jargon — is still considered a point of reference for the historiography of the mafia movement in 19th century Sicily. Cf. Barbina, Teatro italiano verista, ibid., 5ff.*

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Funny and yet tragic, sensational and yet infused with overt sociopolitical overtones, the drama initially did not have some moral idea to promulgate, but was written simply as a bravura piece for actors who had the skill to enact reality on a stage. Anticipating Hauptmann, the play's protagonist was not a single character but the whole group of the *mafiosi*, with each member attached to a particular story and with a particular reason to justify his situation. The character of Gioacchino Funzazza, the "principled" mafioso, is not so much a hero in the conventional sense of the word as he is the character whose situation, as head of the local prison *camorra*, represents the situation of all the rest. Conceived not as a *dramma*, but as *scene popolari*, the play offered a glimpse at the unspoken *realtà* of the masses.[110]

Originally in two acts, the play was quickly expanded to three with the original material becoming Act II of the play which since then has become known as I mafiusi di la vicaria di Palermu or as I mafiosi, the *in lingua* version Rizzotto prepared in 1885. In this later version the play became a morality tragicomedy built around the fall and rise of Gioacchino, who after committing a crime of honor, goes to prison and gets enmeshed in the life of the *camorra*. When he comes out, he resolves to forget the mafia and lead a moral, "patriotic," life, so that his example, as he says *"sia loro*

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[110] *Cf. Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana or for that matter In portineria, called also scene popolari.*

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di emende, cangiando sistema di vita e darsi ad un stabile lavoro. Perchè il lavoro e l' unico mezzo che può render felice e contento l' individuo, la famiglia e formare la grandezza d' una intiera nazione!"(Act IV).[111] Even in this version, the naturalistic elements have not been downplayed in order to accommodate the edifying message. On the contrary, they have been expanded, embracing a broader spectrum of Sicilian life and society, the world of the housewives, the shopkeepers, the servants, the policemen, and so on. The "public" character of the drama is retained but the plot now becomes the dramatization of the conflict between antithetical social situations and concepts of morality: freedom vs. prison, the honor of free life vs. the honor of *omertà*, (Mafia's code of silence), *verità* versus the falsehoods of *realtà*. The play then is a panopticon from which the authors survey the microcosm of a community whose primary concern, irrespective of any moral judgement, is the struggle to survive. This instinctive rather than premeditated choice of the author(s) to experiment with a play, photographing a particular social situation in a particular time and place, is in itself evidence that the popular theatre was ready for *verismo* long before Verga saw the cultural validity of the

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[111] *"[It] will help them emend their ways, changing their life-style and giving themselves a stable work to do. Because a job is the only means that may render the individual and his family happy and content and help form the greatness of the whole nation."*

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experiment with the naturalistic exploration of human life. Verga, in fact, had only to introduce and refine this need for *realtà* in the *dramma borghese*, "nationalizing," that is, the *italianità* of Sicilian drama.

VERISMO

For the majority of literary critics the age of naturalism is the age of the novel, the genre which more than any other form of written expression lends itself to the panoramic and multi-faceted representation of human experience at a time when humanity becomes incessantly aware of the "realities," the natural and social dynamics, which define its existence and disclose, when analyzed and comprehended, the truth.[112] Not only was naturalism a trend developed by writers concerned with reality as the key to basic truths, it also occurred as a response to the need of advancing or advanced societies to come to terms with the failures their modernization entailed as well as to its determination to grasp the "natural laws" of modernity; to absorb the metaphysical meaning of the new scientific advances; and to improve their understanding of themselves and the complexities

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[112] *It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to survey verismo in its non-dramatic forms. While the study of verismo novel or short story has been and still is exhaustively researched, verismo drama is condescendingly appreciated as a minor case of European dramaturgy and an inferior product of Italian literature. Verismo drama has indeed suffered from the "comparative" examination of its esthetic with regard to foreign examples and other genres, while its assessment based on its own history and esthetic has been moot.*

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of their "struggle for life." More than determining the origins and the conditions of "surviving" through modernization, the authors who made it a priority to investigate the complex phenomena of this struggle in order to arrive at the heart of truth began with the assumption that realities could be compartmentalized as "cases" whose study would provide insights into the understanding of how people "function," or are conditioned to function by unalterable natural "choices" and inevitable socialization agents, pertinent to a specific moment in time. These authors, who, like Zola, believed that their century could only be "naturalistic," would not hesitate to appropriate "science" and its uncontested objectivity in order to legitimize the accuracy of their sociological conclusions, to authenticate the "impersonality" of their research, to give credence to the remedial benefit of their mission.

The naturalistic experiment in literature was indeed based on the optimistic assumption that a "scientifically" investigative art had all the potential to be therapeutic; all it would take to solve human "problems" was to analyze the cause of their creation and deduce the solution from the evidence of the analytic process: We study society because we want to and can change it. Little could they anticipate that their "studies" would only substantiate the naiveté of their optimism, the bankruptcy of their methodology and more critically the stasis of society and humanity even as it moves

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and changes. The epic sweep of the novel could conceal the "failure" of naturalism to complete the task it had set for itself, the explanation of reality for the representation of truth, because the reader's involvement in its process could sustain the illusion of catharsis which its end entailed. The theatre, however, could not by its congenital immediacy sustain this illusion and it is for this special reason that the naturalistic drama came to be identified as the dramaturgy of crisis, pessimism and irresoluteness and, for those challenging its aesthetic, as a failed and inconsequential dramaturgy.[113] Zola, as the best and most intuitive of naturalists in matters aesthetic, managed to sense the weakness of the single novel as a "case study" able to explain truth in its universality and sought to defend the legitimacy of his naturalistic experiment by conceiving and speaking of his work as a "cycle," which only in its totality could claim credit for a comprehensive interpretation of humanity. He was not that acute, however, when he tried to introduce naturalism in the theatre, arguing for the compatibility between the novel and the drama, the easy transition of the "fact" from narrative to action, the idea that placing a natural man in his proper surroundings and analyzing the social and natural causes that make him what he is would bring the audience

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[113] *On the "science of drama," according to Zola's esthetics of the naturalistic theatre cf. Claudio Vicentini, "Disperazione storica e superstizione. La sperimentazione teatrale tra Ottocento e Novecento," Rivista di Estetica 23 (1983), 25ff, 28ff.*

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closer to the truth.[114] Arguing for the manifestation of the cause and its effect on people in their present condition as being the only possible and the only desirable aim for the modern theatre, he inadvertently disclosed the limit of naturalistic drama to reach and explain the effects of the causes on the people in their future condition, "after the curtain." When this was attempted, the play could finally close with a picture of stasis. What then was left for the drama to do was to accentuate the eccentric and the bestial for the sake of shock-as-therapy; the elaboration on eroticism and criminal pathology as a pretense for scientific modernity; the adoption of melodrama's philosophical manicheism in order to explain the struggle between the inexorable "force" and the passive human being. Zola soon realized the "problem" with the ineffectuality of naturalistic drama as a healing medium, and stopped writing, not without resentment, for the theatre. Although he never declared defeat for his naturalistic vision for the theatre, he continued to defend his theory of naturalistic art as a remedial sociological experiment and it is as such that Italian literature sought to adopt it.

Italy's surrender to French naturalism was not, however, to occur without radical changes. As in France the movement grew through the novel and entered the theatre half a decade later. As in France, the Italians sought to capture reality,

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[114] *Emile Zola, "Naturalism on the stage," Playwrights on playwriting Toby Cole ed., 10.*

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but their purpose was not so much to analyze the origins of the social vices they discovered soon after Unification, as it was to drastically interrupt their effects. The aim was to portray life in such a way, that the picture itself would not only divulge the problem, but also posit a question not about its causes and effects, but about the inefficacy of humanity to efface it. Italian *verismo* was anthropocentric and idealistic, its purpose was to study modern humanity as a problem in itself: not to analyze its failure to grasp the causes of its crisis and overcome the compromises of its effects, but to analyze its pretension of not seeing the problem, the pretension of not being able to improve its condition. Italian *verismo* was about inquiry, about the causes and the effects which render the inquiry stagnant and inept.

The definition of *verismo* as neo-realism instead of naturalism might be more germane to the temperament of the drama which dominated the stages of Italy during the reign of King Umberto I, and as such more revealing of its esthetic and ideological departures from the French naturalistic theatre. Italian writers and critics from De Sanctis to Verga and from Capuana to Croce have invariably resented the application of generic terms to describe an artistic trend that aims at analysis, clarity and objectivity, just as dramatists have resented their being classified as a homogeneous group of

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artists with similar artistic perspectives and ideology.[115] Indeed among the theatre critics of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, even among those championing the "new manner" of modern drama--they invariably used expressions like "*arte moderna*," "*arte nuova*," "*forma scenica moderna*," and "*moderno indirizzo dell'arte drammmatica*," when writing on the post-Torelli realistic drama--there was no consensus as to the use of a systematically formulated definition of *verismo*.[116] In reviewing Gerolamo Rovetta's I Barbarò, Giovanni Pozza, the theatre critic of Corriere della sera, came up with a definition of the new drama, trying to distinguish it from the earlier deficient attempts at realism by Ferrari's generation. As it reads today this definition is arguably the best and the most succinct of any of the most

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[115] *This aversion to categorization is a distinct characteristic of Italian intelligentsia, a symptom of its opposition to any cultural or political designation that would downplay the diversity of its artistic aim for the sake of literary criticism methodology, not only because these names "don't correspond to the true nature of things," (De Sanctis, Saggi critici, op. cit., 296), but also because they are "fallacious and confusing pleonasms" (Croce, Letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. 3, op. cit., 11). In fact, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the words verismo and veristi entered Italian literary criticism (and musicology) as a term defining a whole generation of writers, poets, dramatists and composers. In this dissertation it is only for the sake of methodology that the terms verismo and veristi are used.*

[116] *The critics who, after Capuana, expressed their enthusiasm for the expressive and artistic potential of verismo, most of them being among the youngest of journalists and critics, were Giovanni Pozza, Giuseppe Benetti, Marco Praga, Luigi Lodi, Eduardo Boutet, Primo Levi, Gustavo Macchi, Giulio M. Scalinger, Domenico Lanza, Achille Bersellini, Eugenio Zorzi, Antonio Cervi, and Ugo Valcarenghi. The first reaction to verismo came from the critics and the writers of the Florentine periodical Il Marzocco, founded in 1896 by Angiolo Orvieto. Among the most vociferous of anti-veristi were Ugo Ojetti, Adolfo Orvietto, Gabriele d'Annunzio, G.S. Gargano, and P. Mastri.*

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recent ones, an evaluation of *verismo* which does not explain it with regard to its (dubious) connection with the novel, but as an autonomous art:

> *Ciò che la cosidetta scuola nuova domanda non è già, come si crede o si finge di credere, la rinunzia alla curiosità, alla sorpresa, alla commozione, ai mezzi, insomma, di interessare e di divertire. Essa tende soltanto a scemare l'importanza della favola, diventata lo scopo unico del componimento drammatico, per aumentare quella dei personaggi, ridotta oggi a non essere più persone, ma ruoli; tende a distruggere quel convenzionalismo di forme sceniche, di sentimenti e di linguaggio, che rende così uniforme la produzione drammatica odierna, e di tanto inferiore a quella del romanzo, imponendo una più esatta dipendenza logica fra i caratteri e gli avvenimenti, fra il personaggio e l'ambiente, fra il momento e la parola, fra la vita e la scena."*[117]

For these "new school" writers positivism was, according to the teachings of Villari and De Sanctis, a method of investigation rather than a dramaturgical raison d' etre and "science," the new scientific findings, offered them not so much a pretext for sociological theorizing, but rather a repertory of themes and controversies, whose dramatization would suggest not just the cause of a crisis but the cause of

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[117] *What this so-called new school calls for is not just, as some believe or feign to believe, renouncing curiosity, surprise, excitement, the means, generally, of making [theatre] interesting and entertaining. It only tries to downplay the importance of the plot, which has become the sole objective of the dramatic composition, in order to increase the importance of the characters, which today are reduced to exist not as people but as roles; it tries to destroy the conventions of dramatic form, feelings and language, which render contemporary dramatic production uniform and much inferior to contemporary novel, imposing a more exact logical interaction between individuals and events, between the character and the milieu, between the moment and the dialogue, between life and the stage." G[iovanni] P[ozza], "Corriere teatrale," Corriere della sera (29-30 January 1890).*

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the failure to resolve it.[118] While French naturalists were pessimistic because of their fatalistic, deterministic vision of humanity as a slave to irrepressible natural drives and a casualty of modernity, the Italian veristi were pessimistic because they deplored modernity as a lost opportunity for humanity to move forward socially, culturally and spiritually. It should not be forgotten that Italian *verismo* emerged when the nation was still struggling to assert its modern identity, still at odds with old social practices and attitudes, impeding not just its social progress but the implementation of its sociocultural unification.[119] It was then inevitable for *verismo* drama to react against the ineptitude of the country to meet the challenge as it was equally inevitable not to be "realistic," that is, pragmatic. Italian *verismo* was idealistic and the idealism of the *verista* playwright lay in his or her conviction that the drama of *verità* was not an art of demonstration potentially conducive to action, but in itself a praxis of radical social activism conducive to

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[118] *"...[In] nessun altro secolo il riflesso del moto scientifico è stato contanto vivo e fedele sulla produzione teatrale: che in nessun altro secolo verità più dominantrici e più audaci furono proclamate da una ribalta, e problemi di anima e quesiti sociali sono stati additati con sincerità più intensa di situazioni e di parola..." [In no other century was the impact of the scientific movement so vivid and genuine on the theatre: so that in no other century were the most dominant and the most audacious verities proclaimed from the stage, nor were the problems of the soul and the social questions touched upon with more intense truthfulness of situations and messages.] G.M. Scalinger, "Teatro sociologico," Rivista teatrale italiana 4 (1902), 189.*

[119] *Cf. Eligio Possenti, "Panorama del teatro italiano moderno," Teatro italiano vol. IV (Milano: Nuova Accademia editrice, 1960), 16-17.*

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reflection and change. When it soon became obvious that Italy was its own worst enemy, Torelli's positivist realism became "unrealistic" and irrelevant. The neo-realists then, taking their cue from Verga, attempted to redress the spirit of an art losing touch with society, but they too became aware that not only people, but even "science" had failed to do justice to their noble concerns. *Verismo* drama was finally pessimistic not because the assessment of the social *realtà* had proven the impossibility of pervasive progress and happiness, but because as the undistorted reflection of the bourgeois vision and anxieties, it could only reflect that particular class' gloom for the compromise of its humanism, the bankruptcy of its values and the collapse of its "progressive" ideology: *Verismo* was bleak because it was "realistic."

Traditionally, Italian theatre historians date *verismo* from 1884, the year Giovanni Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana, a one-act adaptation of his homonymous short story, opened triumphantly in Turin. They identify the end of its era with the production of Giuseppe Giacosa's Come le foglie (As the Leaves) in 1900, a play which for some knelled the end of the *borghesia* and for others anticipated the collapse of its cosmos with the outbreak of World War I. Like the definition of *verismo*, this chronology, however useful, is rather arbitrary, since it is not justified by the history of the movement, nor by a tenable esthetic explanation other than the fact that the authors of these plays are held to be the two

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pioneers of *verismo* theatre, each one representing one of the two national branches of *verismo*: *verismo settentrionale* (Giacosa) and *verismo meridionale* (Verga). *Scapigliatura* dialect theatre was already a reality when Verga was still writing his veristic novels in the late seventies and early eighties and Zola's Térèse Raquin had been a controversial but resounding success since 1879. Verga had been writing plays since 1865 -- and Giacosa was not a pioneer but a convert to realism/*verismo*, already a master of escapist romantic drama. Even if Verga's agrarian drama is admitted as the official entry of *verismo* in the Italian theatre as a non-dialect native dramatic trend, Giacosa's play for all its veristic, "pessimistic" temper cannot qualify as its final act, because a whole generation of playwrights continued to write drama in the veristic venue even past the years of the War, while the veristic career of Pirandello, the revival of the Sicilian dialect theatre, the veristic beginnings of the *grotteschi* and *verismo* hybrid movements such as *crepuscolarismo* and *intimismo* remain outside the "official story" without a context of reference. Thus it would be preferable to confine *verismo* within the period 1884-1918 with its ending coinciding with the end of the world order whose *verità* it aspired to render tangible.

According to Croce, *verismo* as a literary movement is not a by-product of positivism, but a correlative of the advances achieved in psychology, sociology and the study of nature.

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More than an esthetic, it is an art of interpretation, concerned with the "facts" that reveal the *verità* of humanity, yet going beyond the appearances and looking for the ideal behind what seems appalling, egotistic, trivial, inane and mechanical.[120] *Verismo* is not interested in humanity as an abstraction, nor does it aim at its metaphysical or moral exegesis. It is a movement of social protest, or better, a movement of bourgeois psychoanalysis, bringing to the fore, exposing *borghesia's* mercantilistic mentality and culture -the idolization of money, "*il denaro*"-- its utilitarian ethics, its jingoistic prevarications, its hypocrisies. As a dramaturgy of indictment, *verismo* does not spare the agrarian or petit-bourgeois strata.[121] Their cultural lethargy, their pathetic fatalism, their anachronistic faith in a system of social justice, based on a feudalistic moral concept of honor (l'*onore*), and their maladjusted *imborghesimento* are scrutinized and chronicled more often than not with the detachment of a journalist. *Verismo* then became not just a dramaturgy of the true, but a dramaturgy of the truthful and the realities it chronicled, indubitable, harsh and disconcerting, aborted sensationalism, moralizing or any other sort of tampering with the *verità* of the facts.

Verismo could allow only for a peculiarly Italianate tint

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[120] *Croce, ibid., 13.*

[121] *Giorgio Pullini, Teatro Italiani fra due secoli, op. cit., 132ff.*

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of sentimentality, which did not mean a melodramatic reading of modernity. It connoted the persistent emotionalism in the *fin-de-siécle* Italian psyche, a sense of melancholy, partly pity and partly meekness for the compromises modern life demands as a price for social prosperity. This *sentimentalità* is not so much estheticized as it is politicized by the *veristi*. It became a substitute for any missing notion of idealism, it magnified the enormity of social fallacies, it highlighted the iniquity of complacence. Probably this *sentimentalità*, carried out mostly by means of language, is lost in translation, thus reaching a foreigner as the maudlin "sentimentality" of opera or melodrama.[122] An exact translation would be a "sense of humanity," empathy for the emotional hardships the moderns go through in their effort to attain self-awareness and dignity.[123] In the drama of Ferrari and Torelli, social appearances, the idea of *rispettabilità*, constituted a priority for the struggling *borghesi* against aristocracy. In the drama of the *veristi* *rispettabilità* is an irrelevant, obsolete and essentially

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[122] *For an interesting analysis of the concept of sentimentalità in Italian verismo see Arthur Livingston, "Antipathy or Antithesis? Contemporary Italian Literature in American Culture." Il carroccio (April-May 1917), 355ff.*

[123] *Ruggero Jacobbi speaks for a "sensibilità sociale," devoid ofmoralism and inspired directly from things as they are, the "lacrymae rerum." See his article "Dal regionalismo al 'teatro di poesia,'" in Siro Ferrone, ed., Teatro dell' Italia unita. Atti dei convegni. Firenze 10-11 dicembre 1977 e 4-6 novembre 1978 (Firenze: Il Saggiatore, 1980), 17.*

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inhuman social pretension, an hypocritical ethos showing the courageous struggling of individuals toward social progress, prosperity and most importantly happiness. Happiness is a right to defend, an obligation to the self, the family, the community and the nation, a measure of one's success and emotional fulfillment, a state of life which justifies the most affirmative of the bourgeois values: responsibility, rectitude, honesty, selflessness. The more these values appeared as utopian delusions in a self-destructive and self-contradictory society of "*borghesi affaristi, plebi abbrutite, irregolari, and rifiuti di società,*"[124] the more pessimistically *verismo* presented human affairs and the more cynical it became. The theatre's movement from realism via naturalism to *verismo* was indeed the process of creating an art of disenchantment:

> *In Italia il naturalismo giunse come un vento purificatorio, sembro il mezzo più adatto a superare l'inquietudine regnante dopo la realizzazione degli ideali unitari, e lo spegnersi di quei principi...Chiunque non volesse a bella posta chiudere gli occhi dinanzi alla realtà, restare sordo alla voce della coscienza, non poteva rifiutarsi di compiere un esame obiettivo in sè e intorno a sè, non sentire insorgere un bisogno di sincerità, considerando la convivenza civile nel nostro paese...Da questo momento il dramma non solo interpretava la vita quotidiana, ma entrava a farne parte...e lo spettacolo diveniva consuetudine sempre più allargantesi ad ogni classe."*[125]

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[124] *"Bourgeois opportunists, devitalized masses, misfits and social outcasts."* Croce, *ibid.*, 13.

[125] *"In Italy naturalism came as a purifying wind, it appeared the most effective means for overcoming the uneasiness that reigned after the realization of the unitarian ideals and the decay of those principles. Whoever did not want to deliberately close his eyes to reality, remain deaf to the voice of conscience, could not refuse to undertake the objective examination of what was*

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Complementary to *sentimentalità* was the esthetic of *simplicità* (simplicity), the idea that drama as "a slice of life" should depart from the operatic pseudo-sophisticated mannerisms of the *commedia à tesi* and strive to capture contemporaneity without literary frills. In real life *verità* is elusive and the drama, a drama of *verità*, should capture this elusiveness and represent it either as "evasion," a human choice, or as "intangibility," a natural fact.[126] Early twentieth century critics, polemically averse to *verismo*, viewed its dramaturgy as a better written *commedia à tesi*, voicing the (in)securities of a bourgeoisie pretending to be the best thing that could happen to the modern world, while failing to see the diversity of life beyond the four walls of its salons and boudoirs, the variety of social conflicts beyond adultery, divorce, money, propriety and the "woman problem."[127] It is indeed problematic to depict *verismo* as a moot dramaturgy, especially if one thinks of the artistic energy *verismo* generated--not only in literature, but also in

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going on inside him or around him, had to feel a need for sincerity surging, as he contemplated cohabitation in Italian cities.... From that moment the drama not only interpreted daily life, but it also strove to become part of it.. and the theatre was becoming a habit always more available to every class."Emphasis is mine. Vito Pandolfi, "La missione del naturalismo nel teatro italiano." Dramma 32 (April 1956), 47.

[126] *It is obvious that these ideas of verità, defined by twentieth century critics as "Pirandellian," did not constitute a negation of verismo, but manifested its modernity.*

[127] *Cf. Silvio d'Amico, "Il teatro drammatico dell'Ottocento," L'Italia e gli Italiani del secolo XIX, Jolanda Giachetti de Blasi, ed. (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1930), 309ff.*

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acting, design and music--not only aiming at the approximation of *verità* but also at the critical evaluation of truthfulness. It is pertinent to mention here that the critical problem of *verismo* was not so much its relevance or irrelevance as a purveyor of truth, but rather its not being consonant with its critics' sociopolitical vision which defined their personal idea of what is relevant or irrelevant as drama. As for the playwrights of *verismo*, their target was not the creation of illusion, but the "simple" and "straight" re-creation of the living moment, its truth behind the appearances of *realtà*" and as it emerges from this *realtà*.[128]

Giorgio Pullini, Cesare Bozzetti and several other Italian critics have studied *verismo* as a dramaturgy moving simultaneously towards two different directions with this duality reflecting the geographical and cultural division of Italy into "North" and "South." It is my conviction that it would be more accurate to speak of two different *verismi*, corresponding to the manifestations of the two diverse national *realtà*, the industrialized Northern territories and the disenfranchised Southern societies, and registering the social interactions and mutations within their respective social contexts: the milieu of the *borghesia* and the "*ambiente popolare,*" the milieu of the agrarian and "unsophisticated"

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[128] *Cf. Luigi Capuana's "Ai lettori," to his play Serena, cited in Gianni Oliva, ed., "Introduzione." Ribelli: Dramma inedito. By Luigi Capuana (Roma: Bulzoni, 1981), 13.*

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masses. Bourgeois *verismo* emphasizes the interaction between the world "outside" and the psyche of the *borghesi*, while the "other" *verismo*, esthetically impetuous and more aggressive, "dramatizes" the spirit of a community, a village, or a ghetto. The social identity of the characters decides then both the sociology of the play and the "drama" of its heroes.

In discussing the various regional dialect theatres of Italy, we have already touched on some of the essential characteristics defining the *verismo* of the South. Although these characteristics were connected with the linguistic, esthetic and the popular theatrical tradition of each region, they are also retained in the *drama in lingua*. Despite the fact that the cultural meanings instilled in the dialect fade away once the "nationalized" Italian language becomes the medium of the dramaturgy, the cultural traditions implanted in the story or the action of the play acquire a symbolic, almost ritualistic significance and their folkloric origins do not undermine the social message entailed in the plot or its stage representation.[129] Structurally imitating Greek tragedy, the popular rituals and the open religious "*sacre rappresentazioni*," these plays have a very strong communal spirit and an overwhelming *coralità*, that is the community,

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[129] *A bourgeois problemmatica, similar to that of Northern verismo is not absent from distinctively southern playwrights like Roberto Bracco. On the contrary, a concern for the "questione meridionale" is absent from the dramaturgy of the North, although there are social plays whose characters have a "southern" cultural identity, as they are people forced to emigrate from the south to the north due to the economic depression of their regions.*

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the "people," participate in the "drama" of the characters just like a tragic chorus, it is a "protagonist" as well as a social setting. In fact rituals and rites are juxtaposed to the psychological permutations of the central characters as their lives are forged by their preoccupation with fate, eros and honor. The Easter mass, for example, in Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana, the wedding and the funeral ceremonies in D'Annunzio's Figlia di Jorio, or even the ritualistic representation of daily life in Verga's La lupa (She-Wolf) or Capuana's Malìa (Witchcraft) are not only active participants in the "life" of the situation dramatized; they also provide the mood of the action and contextualize the emotional state of the characters. The theatre of Verga, Capuana, de Roberto, di Giacomo and Bracco, as Pullini explains, *coglie per lo piu conflitti elementari dell' uomo con la fatalità della passione cieca, sensuale, della vilenza degli elementi, con la superstizione, con il richiamo del sangue e l'odio delle famiglie. Il personaggio e solo di fronte ad un destino sordo, e cerca invano aiuto, e complicità, nei suoi simili: il procedimento e spesso lirico, grido, o invocazione disperata.*"[130] This lyricism, an essential component of the

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[130] *perceive the primal conflicts of man for the most part with the fatality of the blind erotic passions, the fatality of the violent natural elements, with superstition, with the call of blood and hate between families. The hero faces an obscure fate alone, seeking in vain for help and succor among his peers. The course [of the tragedy] is often lyrical, a cry or a desperate invocation.*" *Giorgio Pullini, Cinquanta anni di teatro in Italia (Roma: Cappelli, 1960), 7-8. See also Eddy Lanza, "Autori minori del Novecento." Testo 12 (1986), 174.*

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tragic genre, does not compromise the realism of the representation. On the contrary as the manifestation of *sentimentalità*, this lyricism accentuates the tragic dimensions of the drama, even when the play vacillates between comedy and melodrama.[131] In scenes of high tension when the people are a silent chorus and the dialogue seems to bring the overwrought heroes closer to the *verità* and a tragic end, lyricism insinuates itself all the more emphatically as the characters lose touch with each other and their dialogue turns into a disconnected series of desperate monologues -negative critics would call them "arias"- revealing a painful sentiment of isolation and resignation to the call of fate. Usually plays of this kind move forwards rapidly: the action is relentless, the tragic outcome lurks inexorably and the final catastrophe is inevitable and cathartic. Quite often this energy, this sensation of inevitability manifests itself in the dramatic form, chosen by the playwrights. Several *verismo* plays and perhaps among the best are either one-act "scenes" (Cavalleria Rusticana, De Roberto's Il rosario, Bracco's Don Pietro Caruso), or *bozzetti* (dramatic sketches, such as Verga's Caccia a lupo [Wolfhunt]), or (two-act) *scene*

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[131] *There are not many genuine southern verismo comedies. The great majority of the "commedie," or "scene popolari" are mainly tragicomedies. In typical plays of the genre, such as sentimentalità and a populist moralistic rhetoric provide together the element of sadness and indignation counterbalancing the "comicità" or undercutting the tragic potential of the situations.*

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drammatiche (like Verga's La lupa) and it is due to the brevity of the action that the overall effect becomes all the more tragic and excessively emotional, "melodramatic."[132]

In the veristic dramaturgy of the North, whose principal centers are Milan and Turin, with Padua and Venice much less important, the topography is radically different. The drama of the big city takes place in the salon of the *borghesia*, the squalid basement, or the cramped room on the mezzanine floor of an apartment building, in the slums of Milan's peripheries, the dwellings of the *piccola-borghesia*. The dominant theme is the process and the failings of the *imborghesimento*, the loss of human dignity under the social pressures of industrialization, the struggle for social ascendancy, the corruptive influence of money on human relationships, miscommunication and alienation, the monotony of quotidian life, the effort to maintain one's integrity in a hostile and gloomy society of careerists, opportunists and middlemen. When the milieu is bourgeois, the class of lawyers, doctors, middle-rank bankers, the obsession with status and financial

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[132] *Playwrights like Verga and Capuana derived their plays from short stories previously written and published in magazines or, along with other stories in collections whose titles suggest the mood and the milieu the authors tried to "narrate" and register (For example, La lupa was first a short story from the collection Vita dei campi (Life in the Fields). For the interesting interaction between verismo drama and short story see Franca Angelini, "Teatro verista in Italia," op.cit., 328ff. It is equally interesting to observe that the best of verismo operas were one-acters and that the most famous of them had libretti based on the plays, not the short-stories of Verga, Capuana, de Roberto, etc. Cf. Matteo Sansone, Verismo: From Literature to Opera (diss., University of Edinbrough, 1987).*

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security prevails as a force distorting human relationships:[133] adultery and perfidy, the search for sexual and emotional fulfillment "outside" the institutions of family and marriage, the commercialization of marriage as a pre-condition for one's social ambitions, the moral malaise of the idle and the bored, the disgust, finally, at the endless ennui awaiting "marriageable" women, the loss of honor stigmatizing the social fortune of the ambitious, independent woman-- all these "problems" are debated with regard to the search for the *verità*, that hidden meaning of life. Northern bourgeois *verismo* is averse to comedy, the problems are too serious to inspire a satiric mood. Psychoanalysis, platonic love, the secrets of the souls, the rights of the heart (sentimental formulas of the older melodrama) and subconscious desires (the "unspoken") here undergo a prolonged and exhausting investigation, which becomes all the more engrossing when the "woman question," the right of women to social emancipation and independence, her status next to her husband, her "responsibilities and her duties," the meaning of maternity and the social abuses suffered enter the picture of life, challenging the cultural solidity of bourgeois ideology.[134]

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[133] *"Il teatro italiano e il salotto...Il borghese sembra mostrare in ogni occasione che non ci può essere un mito del "borghese" al di sopra della precarietà e dell' illusione del successo." Sanguanini, ibid., 229.*

[134] *Cf. Silvio d'Amico, "La rivolta della donna," Dramma sacro e profano op. cit., 210-224, especially 213ff.*

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Indeed, the woman play, the *"teatro feminista,"* constitutes a special dimension of Italian *verismo*, the dramaturgy that probes deeper than any other type of social theatre into the more metaphysical question of the human condition. This dramaturgy develops more dynamically during the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the social plays of Ibsen --first introduced to Italians by Luigi Capuana and his translation of the Doll House -- reveal the capacity of bourgeois drama to deal with ethical questions going beyond the sensationalism of the ménage-à-trois situation and debating conservative certainties about the limits of spiritual freedom and the superior intangible states of love. As Italian women become more aware of their dramatic skills, *verismo* becomes the movement that offers the first Italian women playwrights the liberty to experiment with presenting a feminist perspective on the modern experience, often daring to touch upon taboo issues, such as rape, violence, divorce, inequality, showing a more unsettling aspect of the contemporary social *realtà*.[135]

Giacosa, Rovetta, Praga and Butti, the most accomplished of the northern *veristi*, exposed with sarcasm the shortcomings of the Italian *imborghesimento* and the futility of the positivist social thinking. The dialect theatre of Milan, Venice and Turin, sensitive to the social anxieties pressing

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[135] *For the women veristi playwrights see below.*

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the lower social strata, quickly absorbed the more inquisitive manner of the *dramma borghese* and began to explain the social conditions they reported with a more politicized set of arguments, incriminating not only the sociopolitical duplicity of the *borghesia*, but also the submissiveness of a diffident proletariat, readier to adopt the hypocrisies of the higher classes than to assert its own rights in the new world.

As documents of Italian sociology, then, the plays of *verismo* manifest the new class configurations and the new tensions defining the interaction between the classes after the *risorgimento* promise of an egalitarian national society proved to have been a utopian concept of socialization, totally incompatible both with the hegemonic ambitions of the *borghesi* and the cultural diffidence of the various proletariats. While in the drama of Giacometti, Ciconi, Ferrari and Torelli it was the social and cultural antagonism between aristocracy and *borghesia* that prevailed as a most crucial issue of Italian polity, *verismo* dispenses with the "*lotta*," the struggle, of aristocrats to hold on to their privileges, and focuses instead on the accelerating conflict between an increasingly self-conscious *borghesia* and an increasingly self-assertive assortment of *piccolo-borghesi*.[136] *Verismo* is indeed a social dramaturgy of anxiety: The drama of a *borghesia* feeling threatened by the

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[136] *Cf. Silvio Lanaro, Nazione e lavoro: saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia, 1870-1925 (Venezia: Marsilio, 1979), 205, 212.*

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prospect of its class devaluation to *piccolo-borghesia*; and the drama of a working class, apprehensive of its entrapment in a situation enforcing the emulation of bourgeois culture, while simultaneously depriving it of the cultural tools - education, better income, access to bureaucracy --germane to their *imborghesimento*. The *commedia* captured the complexities of this tense society as if the social *lotta* was not so much about status and authority as it was about the redefinition of *italianità*, not only as the identity of a nation, a society or a culture, but also as the identity of a way of thinking about the nation, the society and its culture.[137] The tragicomic form of the *commedia*[138]--*"Che dire? Ho riso e ho pianto. Riconobbi la vita!"*, wrote Giacosa of the *commedia*[139]--is

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[137] *Cf. Francesco Bernardini, "La coscienza nazionale nella letteratura drammatica," Rivista teatrale italiana 3 (1902), 29-33. The author cites Roberto Bracco who in a 1900 philological conference argued that "il male che rode alle basi il teatro italiano è l'assenza completa del sentimento d'Italianità." [The evil gnawing from the foundations the Italian theatre is the complete absence of the feeling of Italianità.]*

[138] *"Il dramma borghese...si pretende specchio assoluto d' una Vita in cui commedia e tragedia sono varianti sentimentali della realtà, e non antitesi ...di Norma e di Altro." [The dramma borghese is regarded as the perfect mirror of Life, in which comedy and tragedy are sentimental variants of reality, they do not constitute an antithesis between the Norm and the Other." See note 117.*

[139] *Giuseppe Giacosa, Il giudici del pubblico, Teatro. Piero Nardi, ed. (Milano: Mondatori, 1968), vol. II, 372. This playlet was written by Giacosa as his contribution to a convention on modern theatre and for the history of Italian dramatic theory it is indeed a curiosity. The "play" is ostensibly a civilized after-theatre conversation of sophisticated theatre-goers on the merits and the demerits of Dumas fils' Diane de Lys as a play revealing the verità. The "conversation" becomes all the more interesting when characters of Dumas' play "merge" with the discoursing spectators, so that in the end the fictional characters appear to comment on themselves as both parts of the theatre and "members" of realtà. I think that this obscure playlet, never actually studied by Italian scholars, is the first dramatic document on the issue theatre-life-*

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the perfect form for the chronicling of *Italianità*, and, according to Giorgio Arcoleo, it constitutes the essence of modern Italian life:

> *Siamo oramai in piena commedia; la vita si e resa baffarda ... Nella tragedia lottava l'uomo col Fato, che l' accoppava alle spalle; oggi lottano le libertà tra loro: lí l' ultimo atto era la catastrofe, qui è spesso la riabilitazione... Anche in arte sono oramai cadute le oligarchie, le gerarchie, i privilegi; nasce anche in arte una forma constituzionale, la nuova commedia, che non attinge esclusiva dalla plebe...Come tutte le sfere sociali oggi tendono ad unico centro, e lottano per arrivarvi, non per sovrapporsi, poveri e ricchi, nobili e plebei, doti e analfabeti; come tutte le scienze cooperano a studiare non questa soltanto o quella parte dell'uomo, ma l'uomo intero qual è; cosi tutte le gradazioni e gli elementi della vita si compenetrano nella forma drammatica; e questa ora si chiama Commedia.*
>
> *Commedia, perchè il comico zampilla dal fondo della più grande serietà, la storia di ogni individuo è una perenne oscillazione tra il riso e il pianto, e fin quando ti sembra distrutto un uomo che soccombe, lo vedi a un tratto rialzarsi e prorompere clamor in uno scroscio di risa sulla commedia umana. La grande catastrofe [è quella] del banchiere cui scadono i millioni: la commedia degli interessi soffoca e mortifica la tragedia degli affetti e delle passioni.*
>
> *Commedia, perchè tutto comprende, le gioie e i dolori, le calamità pubbliche e i malanni privati, il sentimento e l'istinto, l'alcova e la tribuna, il grand'uomo in toga e il grand'uomo in pianelle, la lotta coi leoni e quella con le zanzare, il popolo-feccia e il popolo re, ... i vizi misti alle virtù...*
>
> *E questa commedia è seria: sotto alla superficie spumeggiante della vita vi sono scogli e tempeste, sotto maschera d' indifferenza grandi dolori; e avviene come nello spettacolo del carnevale, che si stiracchia extends balordamente sulla quaresima di tante miserie. Ma uscendo dal teatro...oggi dobbiamo vedercela da noi, e ciascuno l'ha da avere, sia comunque, il suo posto nella storia umana. Oggi è il tuo giorno, domani è il mio...*[140]

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roles explored by Pirandello in his "theatre" plays. The phrase says: "What could one say? I have laughed and I have cried. I recognized life."

[140] *We are already living the heyday of commedia; life has become cynical... In tragedy, man was fighting with Fate that would suddenly crush him; today the liberties fight one another: [In tragedy] the last act was the catastrophe, here it is often the rehabilitation.. Even in the Arts the oligarchies, the hierarchies, the privileges are already overthrown. Even in the arts a constitutional form is born, the new commedia, which does not exclusively concern the lower masses... As today all the social spheres seek a single center,*

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Arcoleo's ideas about the *italianità* of commedia, obviously inspired by De Sanctis's positivist aesthetic of content-form, address the rapport between *commedia* and *borghesia*, as if the limits between society and theatre, modernity and *verismo*, are not demarcated, as if the *verità* "intimated" by the *verista* dramatist is already "exposed" by the *realtà* of life, irrespective of whether or not the *borghese*/spectator can identify them in the world around him. Although the debate about whether the bourgeois drama reflected the *verità* of the *borghesia* or their wishful thinking about themselves and the society they had created has not ceased especially among liberal and marxist critics, it is nonetheless pertinent to

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and strive to reach it not in order to superimpose poor and rich, nobles and plebeans, educated and uneducated; as all the sciences collaborate in order to study not only this or that aspect of man, but his totality; thus all the levels and all elements of life find their way into the dramatic form which now is called commedia.

It is called commedia because the comic springs from the depth of the most serious idea, the story of each individual is a perennial oscillation between laughter and tears, and just when you think the man who has fallen is destroyed, you suddenly see him rise at once and burst into uproarious laughter at the human comedy. The great catastrophe is that of the banker who loses his millions: the comedy of interests stifles and mortifies the tragedy of affections and passions.

It is called commedia because it includes everything, the joy and the pain, the public calamities and the private suffering, the sentiment and the instinct, the boudoir and the tribunal, the man in toga and the man in slippers, the struggle with the "lions" and the struggle with the "mosquitos," the lower classes and the dominant classes, ...the vices enmeshed with virtues...

And this comedy is serious: under the gay appearances of life there are dangers and tempests, under the mask of nonchalance there is great suffering; and it occurs as a carnavalesque spectacle that is absrdly extended during a Lent of myriad pains. But coming from the theatre... today we have to look out for ourselves, and each one has, we might say, to cope with his own place in human history. Today is your day, tommorow is mine...Giorgio Arcoleo, "La commedia e la vita di oggi in Italia," Opere, vol. 1 (Milano: Mondatori 1929), 187-8. This paper was read in a conference organized by the Neapolitan "Circolo filologico" in 1891.

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argue that far from tendering, as, for example, in Torelli's early drama, "positive" pictures of the bourgeois experience, the theatre of *verismo* became the voice of the bourgeois unconscious: It dared to convey the insecurities, the complexes, the compulsions and the fixations of a class, too arrogant to openly concede its crisis, too afraid to affront the *verità* of the rising *realtà* (socialism) and too obsequious about respectability to disclose the vacuousness of its socio-cultural egomania.

The drama of *verismo* then is a theatre of revelation, a theatre of exposure. It did for the *borghesia* what the *borghesia* could not do for itself: take the risk to find itself, what Pirandello half a century later would dramatize as *trovarsi:*

> *"La borghesia,* writes Personè, *che avverte potentemente la verità e la vive in segreto, è immersa, dalle circostanze, nell' ipocrisia e nella finzione. Quando va al teatro, si ricrea poichè trova finalmente il modo di riconoscersi e, in tale riconoscimento, di provare le soddisfazioni che le sono concesse soltanto nel sogno, nella fantasia e nei sospiri. Insoma vive [Personè's emphasis]. Il teatro è la sua vita ...un insostituibile mezzo di consapevolezza.*[141]

This *consapevolezza* became an even greater cause for the dramatists of *verismo* when the drama of Ibsen, a fixture of the Italian stage after 1892, initiated the period of

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[141] *"The borghesia, which forcefully perceives the truth and lives it surreptitiously, is immersed, due to circumstances, in hypocrisy and deceit. When it goes to the theatre, it diverts itself so that it can finally find the way to attain self-awareness, and in doing so, feel the joys it allows itself only in dreams, in its imagination, and in its sighs. All in all, it lives. The theatre is its life, an irreplaceable medium of self-awareness. Persone, ibid., 40.*

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verismo's adjustment to the new intellectual currents of Europe, its permutation and partition to hybrid *verismi: Ibsenismo/idealismo, decadentismo/crepuscolarismo, intimismo and grottesco*. These *verismi* did not always follow each other in a direct chronological sequence. They co-existed, interacted and constantly challenged each other, especially when the "scientific" advances of psychology, psychiatry and medicine canceled several of the positivist certainties, when, that is, positivism approximated the spirit of idealism and begun the search for the psyche.[142] The *verità* of the human condition was sought elsewhere, not inside the salon, but inside the psyche and the mind of the individual.

Ibsen and beyond

Although Ibsen spent several years of his life in Italy (1864-1868 and 1878-1884), there is absolutely no evidence of his being acquainted with contemporary Italian drama and

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[142] *"Dal momento che il positivismo venne scoprendo il valore della psiche, la sua azione sempre più autonoma, operativa, efficiente; dal momento che esso riconosce la qualità di fattore sociale sempre più importante e le accorda una grande forza di propulsione, e, se così è lecito esprimersi, di iniziativa; da questo momento appare chiaro che è scomparso l' abisso tra positivismo e idealismo anche sul campo delle scienze umane, e che la Psiche del primo possiede oramai tutti gli attributi dello spirito del secondo ed è una sola cosa con questo."[From the moment that positivism found the value of the soul, its activity became always more autonomous, more dynamic and more efficient; from the moment it acknowledged the quality of social factor as more important and accorded to it a great force of propulsion, and, if it may be stated, of initiative; from that moment it becomes clear that the abyss between positivism and idealism ceases to exist even in the domain of the human sciences, and that the psyche of the former has already all the attributes of the spirit of the latter and that they have become one thing.] Giuseppe Rensi, "La rinascita dell' idealismo."* Critica sociale *15 (1905), 301.*

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theatre, nor did any Italian playwright seem to be aware of his sojourn in Italy or his artistic reputation before 1885. Most Italian critics and theatre historians unanimously agree, however, that the impact of his dramaturgy on Italian *verismo* at the end of the nineteenth century was so immediate and so drastic that no playwright, from Verga to D'Annunzio and from Giacosa to Pirandello, could resist emulating his superior dramatic technique or his daring sociological "*problematica*."[143] Although there is a reference to an 1884 translation of the Doll House from the original Norwegian edition published with a critical introduction by a certain Alfredo Mazza in the periodical La Gazzetta d'Italia, it has been axiomatic that Ibsen's official introduction in Italian theatre occurred only in 1891. The speculation that Italians could possibly have been aware of his dramas through French translations before that date is certainly not groundless. However, it was only in 1891 that Luigi Capuana's translation of the Doll House appeared in serialized form in the theatre magazine Carro di Tespi of Rome, anticipating only by a few months Duse's debut as Nora in Milan as well as the production of Wild Duck by the company of Ernesto Novelli. Within the next few years Ibsen would become a fixture of the Italian stage with several of his plays entering the repertory of the

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[143] *Cf. Giuseppe Verga's opinion on Henrik Ibsen, published in the Danish journal Politiken in 1899, now in Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed. Postille a Verga: Lettere e documenti inediti con XII tavole inedite di Verga fotografo, 2nd ed. (Roma: Bulzoni, 1977), 170.*

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most accomplished of Italian actors and with Max Kantarowitz, a prestigious Milanese publisher, establishing a "Biblioteca Ibsen" (1894), the first (almost complete) Italian edition of the plays.[144]

For the next twenty years Italian drama lived an "Ibsen-mania" with tens of books on Ibsen published each year, with serious sociologists and psychologists publishing scientific articles based on his characters and their psychology,[145] and with a critical discourse about his symbolism, idealism, neo-idealism, feminism and liberalism continuing unabated even after World War I. *Ibsenismo*, a term devised a posteriori in order to describe the reorientation of Italian theatre towards the technique, the themes and the "atmosphere" of Ibsen's dramaturgy, seemed to be the new dominant dramatic mode: While some critics saw this *ibsenismo* as the end of *verismo* and the beginning of a new, more accomplished and more "European" drama, others were perceptive enough to see this trend as an esthetic/philosophic means of invigorating *verismo*, facilitating its move toward the description of a different

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[144] *For a comprehensive account of Ibsen's early theatrical fortune in Italy see Daniela Quarta, "Ibsenismo in Italia: Bracco, Giacosa, Praga. Drammaturgie a confronto," La didascalia nella letteratura teatrale scandinavica: Testo drammatico e sintesi scenica. Atti del VII Convegno Italiano di studi scandinavi. Firenze 21-22-23 Maggio 1986. Merete Kjoller Ritzu, ed. (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1987), 83-90.*

[145] *Cf. Cesare Lombroso, "Il delinquente e il pazzo nel dramma e nel romanzo moderno," Nuova Antologia 163 (1899), 665ff. This essay of the famous Italian scientist discusses the "case" of Ghosts' Oswald as an example of a person suffering the consequences of heredity.*

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sort of *realtà*, which until then Italian playwrights were thought unfit by temperament and cultural intuition to discern. It became consequently a norm to study late Italian *verismo* as a minor hybrid of Ibsen's dramaturgy, while the dramaturgical aptitude of the *veristi* was invariably judged by their degree of success in "emulating" the paradigm of the Norwegian playwright. This line of critical thought seems today rather fallacious and simplistic, not only because there was never some kind of consensus as to what *ibsenismo* really entailed as a dramatic trend, but also because individual Italian playwrights reacted to Ibsen's influence differently, some experimenting with his technique, others pursuing his "idealism/symbolism" and still others emulating his liberal rhetoric or his "feminist" perspective. The issue of *ibsenismo* becomes all the more problematic, inasmuch as *verismo* seemed to assimilate rather than simulate Ibsen's dramaturgy, integrating the controversial spirit of his social argumentation with the Italianate concept of *sentimentalità*. In other words what Ibsen offered to Italians as an alternative to their cynical outlook of bourgeois cosmos was experimentation with the social and ideological certainties of the *borghesia* as the means to arrive at more genuine conclusions about the universal *verità*. Ibsen *gave verismo* a new "method" for investigating the truth of human matters and suggested another kind of "dramatic mood," where things, words and silences provide the clues for the interpretation of

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realtà.[146]

As the Italians' acquaintance with Ibsen's naturalistic theatre was so belated with regard to his artistic evolution, it inevitably coincided with their initiation to his later, more symbolic, dramaturgy. The outcome of this development was the establishment of Ibsen as the case of a playwright for whom external realities were symptoms of deeper truths, positivism and materialism philosophical failures and scientific truth a utopian objective. The dramatization of ideas, emotions and moods seemed all of a sudden a more original way of interpreting human phenomena, certainly more accurate than the evidence provided by the social appearances. The magnitude of *verismo*'s change to a drama perceptive of more "intimate" realities becomes immediately apparent, not only in the evidently more ambitious *"problematica,"* but also in the "discovery" of philosophical abstractions as potentially theatrical.[147] Science, idealism and platonic love, for example, replace to a large extent the adulterous triangles, the criticism of industrialization and the pretensions of modern society. Scientists, doctors, poets, artists, priests and psychiatrists supersede the lawyers,

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[146] *Quarta, ibid., 93. The critic also has proven that the value of ibsenismo as a measure for assessing Italian verismo is rather moot, since the evidence suggests that Italian playwrights familiarized themselves with Ibsen's esthetic not so much through an immediate contact with his work as through his influence on the French naturalists and Hauptmann.*

[147] *Cf. Ruggero Jacobbi, ibid., 23ff.*

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bankers, businessmen and industrialists. The rights of the soul, utopias of science, the power of the subconscious, the power of thought, the concept of "madness," the superiority of spiritual eros, the baseness of sensuality, crimes of thought, the meaning of motherhood, and female sensibility are the issues supplanting debates over divorce, the economics of marriage, the social duty of the wife, the struggle of classes, the social situation of the underprivileged.[148] This shift of Italian theatre toward *idealismo*, a drama of ideas, or a drama of thought, its rupture with the cultural demands of a *borghesia* insistent on a photographic if not escapist reproduction of its experience, seriously affected its public reception. Audiences found the new plays --the dramas of Butti and Bracco and Rovetta -- abstract, unsettling, "immoral," pretentious, subversive and begun to stay away from them.[149] Critics regularly dismissed *idealismo* as pseudo-intellectual, derivative, untheatrical,

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[148] *Dialect theatre remained impervious to post-realistic dramatic movements. In certain cases of the Sicilian tradition realism became more "poetic," closer to the achievements of, say, Lorca than the imagistic "popular" tragedy of D'Annunzio.*

[149] *Luigi Capuana called this new literary emphasis on the spirit and the ideal "cosmopolitismo" or "symbolismo." The term "idealismo" was popularized by Ugo Ojetti. For a succinct account of the literary evolution of these terms see the introduction to Luigi Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, Mario Pomilio, ed. (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1972), 36. Also Luigi Capuana, "Idealismo e cosmopolitanismo," Gli ismi contemporanei, (Catania: Giannotta, 1898), 9ff.*

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sometimes simplistic and sometimes banal.[150] As socialism and marxism entered critical discourse, the same "banal" works seemed irrelevant, effete and inconsequential, while for the *futuristi* they were only worthy of ridicule.[151] Around the turn of the century this new found idealism merged with trends more active in poetry and the novel, decadence and *crepuscolarismo*.[152]

Characteristic of this yet again new *verismo* was the attempt towards the tragic, an emphasis on weariness, pessimism and melancholy, the poetry of the silence, nostalgia

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[150] *Cf. Piero Gobetti, Scritti di critica teatrale, G. Guazzotti, ed. (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1974), 598-601, 680.*

[151] *The development of a Socialist movement in Italy did not produce a socialist drama within the context of teatro borghese. In Sicily, however, there developed a minor dramaturgy dealing with the problems and the disenfranchisement of the Italians participating in the riots and the strikes of the "fasci siciliani," worker unions and societies which opposed the financial pressures from "transformismo" the capitalistic system in the North and sought to assert their rights for better salaries and living conditions. Within this tradition which developed during the final years of the 19th Century, belong the plays of R. Garibaldi Bosco, president of the Palermo Fascio—usually called "scene socialiste"—whose plots were not always fictional, but often inspired by real events. Most popular among these plays on a national scale was La zolfara (The Sulphur-mine, 1895) by Giuseppe Giusti Sinopoli 1866-1923, a respected playwright of the Sicilian dialect theatre. This play rather similar to Hauptmann's The Weavers, has a "choral" structure that resembles that of Verga's Sicilian dramaturgy, although it was written as a typical commedia. Cf. S.F. Romano, "Una fioritura di opere teatrali fra i moti dei Fasci siciliani, Teatro d'oggi 2 No.5-6 (1954), 8-9. For Sinopoli, see Barbina, Teatro verista siciliano, ibid., 351-356.*

[152] *Ferdinando Martini, for example, viewed Idealismo as an hybrid of Italian decadentism, concerned with issues of the spirit and the soul, the ethics of humanity and not just the ethics of society. Comparing idealismo to verismo, he defined the latter as a literature imbued with philosphic materialism, unconcerned with ethical problems. Cf. Il Fanfulla della Domenica [Ferdinando Martini], "La vittoria dell'Idealismo," Fanfulla della domenica (10 May 1896).*

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for a past social glory, the idolization of sadness and impotence.[153] *Crepuscolarismo*, the Italian manifestation of the wider European movement of Decadence, was a hybrid of *scapigliatura* moodiness and symbolist esthetism, best represented by the poetry and up to a certain degree the drama of Gabrielle D'Annunzio. Elements of *crepuscolarismo*, especially the feeling of sadness and estrangement from the "events" of daily life, were already evident in the *verismo* of Achille Torelli, Giuseppe Giacosa, even Giovanni Verga. As a dramaturgical esthetic merged with *sentimentalità*, however, *crepuscolarismo* entered the critical vocabulary a posteriori either to define the symbolist, highly estheticized melodramas of D'Annunzio (for example, La Città morta [The Dead City,], or Butti's drama of ideas, in which "failure," "defeat" and frustration are supposed to evoke the fin-du-siécle sense of malaise, the tragedy of disillusionment. As a veristic sub-genre, *crepuscolarismo* could be called the drama of attempted evasion, the drama of the modern man/woman who knows the "truth," yet consciously pretends not to know it, evading *verità* and trying to "prevent" its disheartening revelation by creating and believing in a "dream:"

> *Un personaggio [explains Antonio Stäuble] cerca di evadere dalla banalità quotidiana verso irrealizzabili sogni, verso grandi passioni, avventure ed eleganze: sogni che riassumono tutto quello che la vita gli ha finora negato; ma il tentativo di evasione*

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[153] *Cf. Adriano Tilgher, "Correnti spirituali nel teatro italiano contemporaneo," La cultura 6 (15 April 1927), 251ff.*

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> *fallisce regolarmente, sia che esso sia stato soltanto vagheggiato, sia che esso sia stato concretamente messo in atto per un certo tempo; il personaggio ritorna nella banalità e non di rado scopre che questa banalità gli offre una felicità più dimessa, ma più sicura; continua però quasi sempre a vivere in lui il ricordo luminoso della tentata evasione, che ha portato qualcosa di nuovo e di inconsueto nella monotonia della sua esistenza.*[154]

How profoundly this esthetic of melancholy has affected not only the technique but also the *"problematica"* of *verismo* is evident in Giuseppe Giacosa's Come le foglie (As the Leaves, 1900), a play which chronicles the crisis of the *borghesia*, its disenchantment and its "eradication" from the national *verità*, but mainly in the drama of Fausto Maria Martini and C.G. Viola.

A later and more sophisticated evolution of crepuscolar *verismo* is *intimismo*, the drama of "silence," the "unspoken," and the "intimated." Giacosa was again the playwright who first took advantage of the "unspoken" and its dramatic

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[154] *"A character tries to escape daily banality with unrealizable dreams, with great passions, adventures and elegant life-style: dreams that entail all the things of which life has until now deprived him. But the effort to escape fails every time, either because that dream was only an illusion, or because it did not last for long; the character returns to banal reality and he often finds that this banality offers him a more modest, yet more secure happiness; but he forever continues to keep alive the luminous memory of the attempted evasion, which has brought something new and unusual into his monotonous existence."* Antonio Stäuble, Il teatro intimista: contributo alla storia del teatro italiano del novecento *(Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1975), 8. See also the entry "Crepuscolarismo,"* Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo, *op. cit., vol. 3, 1705. According to this entry, the term was coined by the Italian novelist and critic Borgese in 1911 in order to describe a kind of Italian poetry that sought to capture the fleeting moment of self-reflection, self-criticism, the moment of "shadow," or even the will to discover that which is modest and "piccolo-borghese." In the theatre, crepuscolarismo is deliberately "anti-theatrical," concerned not with the big picture of life, but only with the melancholy of mediocre lives, the poetry of insignificant things, the "disclosure" of silence and the unspoken.*

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potential. Already, in his one-act play Diritti dell'anima (Rights of the Soul, 1894), the things most important in the problematic relationship of a couple on the verge of a terminal conjugal crisis are those "implied" in the behavior and the "sensitivity" of a woman who claims her right to "love" somebody else "spiritually," without compromising her social integrity, or "respectability." E.A. Butti and more successfully Roberto Bracco (Maschere [Masks] and Il piccolo santo [The Little Saint]) tried to capture the tragic essence of a failed life, but their attempts produced not so much an estheticization of defeat, but a review of modern humanity, as reflected in the clash between human will and desire with the "facts" of life. As a matter of fact, *intimismo* was more a technique rather than a *"problematica,"* a lower key dramaturgy which allows *verità* to develop out of *"parole e atti che ne tramutano le essenze psichologiche come la luce tramuta certe combinazioni chimiche preparate nel buio."* As Bracco explained in the preface of Il piccolo santo, *intimismo* is the dramaturgy of an *ipersensibile osservatore*, a "hypersensitive observer" of human facts, stimulated to find the truth as

"le linee palesi del vero si reassumono nel centro cerebrale di questo osservatore commosso, con quel tanto di più che la sua sesibilità scorge oltre la parvenza delle cose, delle persone, degli ambienti. E tutto quanto la sua sensibilità produce, producendo, per così dire, sé stessa, è precisamente...un complesso sintetico di segni significativi [the emphasis is Bracco's] che racchiude la realtà sostanziale nascosta dietro

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la realtà della superficie.[155]

Intimismo became an Italian trend contemporaneous to Pirandello, peaking around the early thirties, best represented by the dramas of Renato Simoni, Cesare Vico Lodovici and Martini. Their effort to "psycho-analyze" the human *verità*, nonetheless, was preceded and then coincided with the "commercial" theatre of Sabbatino Lopez and Dario Niccodemi, playwrights who, within the parameters of the *commedia borghese*, constantly sought to experiment with the tragicomic and grotesque aspects of modernity and *Italianità*. With these playwrights *verismo* seemed to enter the period of its commercialization, of its decline, as Italian critics would have it, to the level of mass entertainment, a drama for a *borghesia* that no longer was or was thought of as being the social nucleus of Italian modernity. Just before the war, there was a critical trend to call *verismo* ossified, if not dead, a pretentious and superficial theatre of "appearances," formulaic and predictable, a product targeting the pocket and not the soul of the *borghese*, a soothing theatre pandering to his illusions of grandeur, not a theatre of *verità*, but a

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[155] *"Words and actions which change the psychological essences of things as the light changes certain chemical combinations prepared in the dark." The clear lines of truth come together in the center of the mind of this moved observer, so much so that his sensibility goes beyond the appearance of things, people, milieux. And all this his sensibility produces, while it produces, so to speak, itself, it is exactly... a synthetic aggregate of significant signs which imparts the substance of reality, concealed behind the reality of the appearances."* Roberto Bracco, *"Nota introduttiva a* Il piccolo santo *(Palermo: Sandron, 1910), x.*

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theatre passing off the bourgeois *realtà* for the one and indisputable *verità*.

Around the time of the war a reaction to this "unrealistic" realism gained momentum with the *grotteschi* playwrights. Dramatists like Luigi Chiarelli and Pier Maria Rosso di San secondo sought to reclaim *commedia* as the cynical exposure of social appearances, commenting exactly on the inanity of the bourgeois self-deceptions of social and cultural sophistication, the tragicomic, grotesque, contrast between the idle yet petty lifestyle of the *borghesia* (its *maschera*) and its ugly, inhuman *verità* (its *volto* [face]). According to the *grotteschi*, the "drama" of modern bourgeois class was not so much its tenacity in keeping up social appearances, but its essentially tragic state of being convinced that these appearances were actually the only *verità*, that the face and the mask are interchangeable.[156]

With the advent of the *grotteschi*, *verismo* had come a full circle. It was the time of Pirandello, the time of challenging its cardinal principle, that the truth can both be investigated and reached. Far from being an enemy of *verismo*, Pirandello was the apologist of its honorable, yet destined-to-failure, attempt to capture a *verità*, overlooking the "fact" that this *verità* defies understanding as much as it

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[156]*Cf. Silvio d'Amico, "The Italian Theatre After the War," The Theatre in a Changing Europe Thomas H. Dickinson, ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937), 240ff.*

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defies analysis. Pirandello masterminded a drama of the "appearance," a drama of the painful *verità* of the masks. He invented, we may say, a *verismo* of the *realtà*, and investigated the truth of the possible, the probable, the ostensible and the "obvious." With Pirandello *verismo* reached back to its point of departure for the realism of Paolo Giacometti. Even if *verismo* is still denied the status of a pioneer in modern drama, it can not be denied the acknowledgement of being the movement that continuously re-invented itself, not so much because it believed in the necessity of knowing the truth but because it believed in the universal humanity of the effort to pursue this truth, the ever elusive "lacrymae rerum."[157]

Women playwrights and *verismo*

The case of Italian women playwrights before, during or after the age of *verismo* remains even today an obscure part of Italian theatre history, a scholarly phenomenon hard to explain and difficult to accept, especially if one thinks of the vast and ever expanding bibliography on the history, the art and the cultural contribution of Italian actresses from Adelaide Ristori and Eleonora Duse to Irma Grammatica and

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[157] *It is interesting to observe that verismo as neo-realism made its cultural re-appearnce in Italy at the end of World War II as a seminal genre of Italian cinema, approximating the problematica of Giovanni Verga and reconciling this problematica with the marxist esthetic, an artistic development worthy of investigation, if one thinks how Italian marxists had fought verismo as a bogus artistic expression of truth.*

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Marta Alba.[168] Not only is the activity of women dramatists overlooked by the most authoritative Italian theatre historians (such as Silvio d'Amico or Mario Appolonio), but modern Italian scholarship --feminists included-- has been surprisingly reluctant to search for other, unexplored sides of *verismo*, a reluctance not difficult to associate with the low critical fortune of the movement still persisting in the Italian academe. Indeed, the "woman problem," apart from being only a problem for *verismo's problematica*, is also a problem of *verismo* historiography. Not only did the emancipatory spirit of the movement give women writers the impetus to explore the realistic stage as a medium congenial to modern female sensibility, it most importantly enriched the veristic *problematica* with issues and insights about the "woman situation" which no male playwright had been so daring to explore. Women playwrights did not see it as a missicn simply to uphold feminist issues or expose the emotional and spiritual toll that, say, rape or the psychological violence of adultery take on the humanity of women. Nor was the aim just to provide a woman's perspective for the social pressures bedevilling their integrity, their "*rispettabilità*." More than deploring the injustices of their social status, women playwrights sought to express a vision: a vision for

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[168] *Camillo Antona-Traversi in his La verità sul teatro italiano dell'ottocento, op. cit., 364n4 claims that Cesare Levi had published an article on the "donne commediografe" in the Piccolo della sera (10 August 1921), but he does not cite the title of the article. I have not been able to read this article.*

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modernity, a vision for a society determined to confront its contradictions and its failings. Thus, their drama was not a departure from, but a reaffirmation of Modena's *teatro educatore*.

Due to the dearth of pertinent scholarship, the paucity of published texts and the lacunae in the criticism and the production documentation of women's drama, even as cursory a survey of its literature as ours, largely based on secondary sources themselves based on information or scholarly material hard to procure and for that matter to corroborate, can only be problematic. Most of the women who dared to write for the stage were poets, authors or musicians and their work either remained unpublished, or, if published, it was seldom performed. Even those works which were performed, either met with limited popular and critical success, or their performance took place in front of limited audiences or in schools for girls, obviously of pedagogical content. Women playwrights experienced a somewhat better fortune near the end of the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth, but the success of these few did not manage to create a "fashion" for a "feminist" dramaturgy.[159] It should not be hypothesized that it was only the official

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[159] *Cf. Annarita Buttafuoco and Laura Mariani, "I volti di Messalina. Note sull rapporto tra emancipazionismo femminile e teatro," Il Teatro italiano del naturalismo a Pirandello, Alessandro Tinterri, ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 183ff.*

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"patriarchal" criticism of men loathe to concede the stage to women that discouraged women from writing for the theatre. As late as 1909 the idea still prevalent among highly esteemed women intellectuals was that the drama did not constitute a genre compatible with female artistic sensibilities: As Paola Lombroso wrote,

> *[la scrittura drammatica] costituisce una forma letteraria che non ha rispondenza con l'intima natura della donna: è infatti, o deve essere essenzialmente sintetica, intensificativa, rapida: la favola va raccolta in pochi atti, in poche scene, e deve esser messa in azione, e non raccontata. Invece la donna è analitica, descrittiva, prolissa e costretta nei tre e magari nei cinque atti di una commedia si sente a disagio e riesce confusa, scialba, intralciata.*[160]

Whatever the causes of this arrested development, it is, nonetheless, true that even the most successful of Italian women dramatists were more famous for their novels and poems than their plays, which were not thought worthy of critical analysis even by women critics.

The theatre as an art conducive to the dissemination of *Risorgimento's* ideology could not remain unattractive to Italian women intellectuals actively involved in the culture the national cause had inspired. Among the first women to benefit from the liberal ideas of Risorgimento were Teresa

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[160] *"[The drama] is a literary form which is not amenable to the intimate nature of women. Indeed, it is or should be essentially synthetic, intensive, rapid: the story is told in a few acts, in a few scenes, and it should be acted, not narrated. On the contrary the woman is analytical, descriptive, wordy; when constrained by the three or even five acts of a play she feels uncomfortable and becomes vague, dull, nonplussed."* Paola Lombroso, *Caratteri della femminilità (Torino: Bocca, 1909), 32.*

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Bandettini Landucci (1763-1837), Luisa Marenco-Martini-Bernardi, Irma Melany Scodnik (1857-?) and Gualberta Alaide Beccari (1850-1906). Landucci and Marenco, the wife of the famous playwright of *drammi storici* Leopoldo Marenco, wrote neoclassic tragedies that were never actually performed. Scodnik, a woman well-respected for her poetry and her pedagogic writings, wrote several one-acters, also never seen in public.[161] Beccari, however, is a significant figure in Italian cultural history, not only as a playwright, but also as a journalist and a feminist, the founder and editor of La Donna, the first Italian magazine exclusively and seriously concerned with the modern Italian woman, her status, her problems and her needs. La donna was a pioneering journal in that it was the first to assign women writers to review contemporary plays and productions, and the first to provide

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[161] *All the information I have managed to read about women playwrights of the 19th Century comes from an invaluable biographical dictionary, now out of print: Maria Bandini Buti, ed. Poetesse e scrittrici, vols. 2 (Roma: Tosi, 1946). The encyclopedia with all entries bibliographically annotated, is typically organized in an alphabetical order and for those interested in the history of women playwrights it will not be of any use unless they know ahead the names of the women they want to look up. Another source of reference is the entry "Scrittrici" in Camillo Antona Traversi's La verit sul teatro italiano dell' ottocento, op. cit., 363-4, but, again, in most cases he provides names and titles without further information. For an English speaking reader, the only source of information available is a prefatory article written by Natalia Costa-Zalessow for the collection Modern Drama by Women (1880s-1930s), Katherine E. Kelly, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), introducing Amelia Rosselli's Anima (Her Soul), the play translated especially for this collection. Much of the information I relate is derived from these two sources. I have to say, however, that the only scholar who has included some brief reference on women playwrights in Italy is Lander MacClintock in the old but still important The Contemporary Drama of Italy (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1920).*

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a forum for women interested in the theatre and the writing of drama. Beccari was herself a competent playwright, writing social comedies in the vein of Ferrari and Torelli, realistic thesis plays exploring the controversies of "feminist" issues such as the professional status of women and the issue of divorce. As early as 1868 her comedy Fidanzati senza saperlo (Betrothed Without Knowing it) dealt with the precarious situation of women trying to "update" their social situation and overcoming anachronistic preconceptions about womanhood. Un caso di divorzio (A Case of Divorce), performed in Milan in 1881 and published there in 1883, is a timid argument on the ethics of divorce, controversial for the fact that its author was a woman and not for its content, since the second wife of an Italian *borghese* was not a previously married woman. Anna Maria Mozzoni (1840-?), Anna Radius Zuccari (1846-1918) and famous novelists like Matilde Serao (1856-1927) and the Nobel Laureate Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) wrote veristic plays sensitive to social issues that did not exclusively pertain to women, such as poverty, injustice and social miscommunication.[162]

Four women, however, writing for the stage after the 1890s, created a modern kind of drama, not necessarily "feministic," that is, radically emancipational, but often more daring and more "relevant" than the work of established

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[162] *Serao and Deledda actually collaborated with men playwrights in adapting their work for the stage. Their success was limited.*

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playwrights of the same period, such as Praga and Rovetta: Amelia Rosselli (1870-1954), Clarice Tartufari (1868-1933), Corinna Teresa Gray Ubertis (1877-1964) and Annie Vivanti (1868-1942). Amelia Rosselli, the most accomplished and the most successful of the four, had her best, award-winning play, Anima (Her Soul, 1898), performed by the Teatro d'Arte of Turin, eliciting the positive reaction of critics who took the play as a response to Giacosa's Diritti dell' anima (Rights of the Soul). The play deals with the personal drama of Olga de Vellaris, a professional painter, who is deserted by Silvio, her fiance, as soon as he learns from her that she was raped while still an adolescent. Heart-broken and vilified as a "fallen woman," she nonetheless finds the courage to endure the social reprecussions of her broken engagement as well as the marriage of Silvio to another woman, who although "intact," is more than eager to compromise the reputation of her husband as soon as the marriage -"the liberation from her house"- is over. When Olga accepts the marriage proposal of Giorgio, a "modern" man and Silvio's brother-in-law, they agree that their relationship should be more a union of souls than of bodies or social units. Silvio, remorseful about his "unmanly" behavior towards Olga and unable to live with the memory of his "crime," commits suicide. Rosselli's *problematica* was not obviously as simplistically feministic as to show a man, at least for once, suffer for committing the emotional rape of a woman. Far from being a tirade on the

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social mores favoring the protection of men's *"rispettabilità"* over the social integrity of women, the play does not deal so much with the ethics and the tactics of social ascendancy as it promulgates the importance of compassion and "spiritual understanding" for the healthiness of marriage, society and humanity. Rosselli is a better painter of characters than story-teller and in fact her plays are character studies: their concern is the internal drama of modern *borghesi* as they compromise their own happiness in order to make their lives conform with the conventions of society. Rosselli's other plays are Illusione (Illusion, 1901), L' idea fissa (The obsession, 1906), El rèfolo (A Burst of Wind, 1909) and El socio del papà (Daddy's Partner, 1911).[163] All of them deal with post-symbolist *verismo's* basic preoccupation, the blurring of *realtà* with *verità*, the struggle of the individual to make sense out of his/her life, to make a sense out of the "facts," more often illusions than actualities. Revulsion for the deceptions of modernity and pessimism define Rosselli's social vision, but the hope for the free spirit of the times yet to come, lurking beneath even the most desperate of situations, renders the spirit of her dramaturgy as more affirmative than that of the *intimisti* playwrights.

Clarice Tartuffari, the most tenacious and the most

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[163] *The last two are written in the Veneto dialect. El rèfolo is Roselli's only play existing in a modern edition. Cf. Danilo Reato, ed. Amelia Roselli's "Il rèfolo" (Venezia:Filippi, 1981).*

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skeptical of *verismo*'s women playwrights, took theatre very seriously, unimpeded by the uneven success of her plays' productions. Outspoken but rather conservative as a thinker, Tartuffari was immensely suspicious of any modern trend promising a better and happier life, be it socialism, feminism, or anarchism, convinced that the individual was a more important actor of social change than any of the instituted ideologies. According to her plays, most of them published in Italian literary journals, society is its own worst enemy, endorsing liberal and liberating ideas, while punishing those daring to apply them. One of the modern individual's most deplorable shortcomings is his or her effort to "appear" modern, castigating "conventions" and prejudices marring other people's lives, yet holding strongly to them -- Ferrari's social *"valvole"* -- when it becomes incubent upon them to protect their interests, when their *"rispettabilit"* is challenged. Modernity, argued Tartuffari, has substituted new hypocrisies for the older ones, with "being modern" prevailing as the most flagrant of all. This is the idea behind Modernissime (The Most Modern Women, 1902), a play exposing the self-delusions of modern "emancipated" women who, when their interests in men or society are challenged, behave as the most unsophisticated and "bourgeois" of all people. In Dissidio (The Quarrel, 1903), her target is the enlightened bourgeoisie of the Italian academe who, while preaching pseudo-Nitzschean banalities about the independent man and his

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"missions," may too easily go to duel over a trivial insult against Italian culture or too easily take their lives because their social respectability is "mortally" injured. In Logica (Logic, 1903) and Salamandra the self-deceptions of modern borghesia when exposed reveal what modern people fail to acknowledge; namely, that *verit*, however hard to take, is preferable to the comfort of appearances. In general, Tartufari is an idealistic *verista*, more at ease with abstract notions of modern humanity than with the "naturalistic" depiction of life and most of her plays had a better career in Germany than in Italy. Again her dramas have been completely neglected, while her work as a novelist has been respected by no lesser a man than Benedetto Croce.

Corinna Teresa Gray Ubertis, known also by the pen name Trsah, wrote plays dealing with the "facts" of life in the manner of Verga, Giacosa and middle-period Ibsen. Her social drama Il giudice (The Judge, 1902), a success for the troupe of Ermete Zacconi, as well as her few other plays analyze how shallow human moral standards are when interests, passions and ambitions curb people's humanity and natural kindness. In Uberti's metropolitan cosmos of modest hopes and extreme poverty, crime is usually the end of social dramas, because crime insinuates itself as the only catharsis for people whose lives are abused by their social superiors or by their own misjudgements. More political and less judgemental is Annie Vivanti, whose best plays L'invasore (The Invador, 1915) and

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Bocche inutili (Useless Mouths), inspired by the brutal experiences of modern humanity during the years of World War I, exposed the relative value of human morals and ethics when people's lives lose any "social value," as in times of war. In the first play two women, both pregnant after being raped, deal with the issue of "life" in different ways-- one choosing to abort, the other to keep the child. Vivanti does not take sides pro or against the "option" of abortion, but she is adamant in her assertion that humanity is as incompetent to judge the value of "future life" as it is incompetent to secure its own survival. Le bocche inutili is a more expansive elaboration on the issue of war, exposing the barbarity of its tactics and their toll on human dignity. Viviani writes for a nation with no time to think about the "details" of modernity, absorbed as it is in the realities of daily carnage, yet she gives a thinking woman's perspective about the absurdities of a man's world.[164]

Undeniably *verismo* as the first modernist movement in Italian literature gave women the opportunity to communicate, despite the critical prejudices and the reserved audiences, a concept of modernity and humanity that involved women as

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[164] *For the sake of comprehensiveness I cite here the names of the playwrights mentioned by Antona Traversi, although, as I said, it has been extremely hard to find biographical information about them: Adelaide Bernardini Capuana, Enrica Barzilai-Gentili, Francesca Sabbato-Agnetta, Gemma Ferruggia, Ida Finzi (Hayde); Jolanda de Blasi, Zina Tartarini, Giuseppina Ferioli, Luigia Pirani-Barozzi; Gina Pagani, Giuseppina Orefici, Lanfatti Consolo, Lida Nazari-Brochon and Rina Maria Pierazzi.*

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perceptive agents of social progress, anxious not only to assert their social rights and provide role models of modern polity, but also to demonstrate their acumen as observers of *realt*. Reporting the unsettling situations women as human beings are put through due to double moral standards and preconceived notions of womanhood, they were able to adress this experience as an illustration of what has gone wrong with modernity. Their *verit* has yet to be revisited.

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CHAPTER 5

EXPERIMENTING WITH *REALTA'*: GIOVANNI VERGA, GIUSEPPE GIACOSA, GEROLAMO ROVETTA

The late 1870s and the early 1880s were for Italian drama a period of stasis rather than adjustment to the naturalistic temper of the new literature. With Ferrari's and Torelli's drama increasingly dismissed as anachronistic or artistically abortive and with a resurgence of a bogusly realistic *dramma storico*, the *risorgimento* of Italian theatre depressed several critics of Capuana's generation as a utopian aspiration beyond the intellectual potential of the new state. *"Il teatro italiano non può decadere, ha ancora da sorgere,"* Ferdinando Martini would argue,[1] yet the problem was not so much the deplored ineptitude of the playwrights to dare an "impersonal" dramaturgy of *realtà* or to capture the "facts" of the age. The problem was rather their unwillingness to expose the social disasters of the *borghesia* and to reveal, thus, the *verità* of

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[1] *"The Italian theatre cannot decline, because it has yet to rise." Ferdinando Martini, "La fisima del Teatro Nazionale," Al teatro (Firenze: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1895), 171. The essay, one of the most famous in the history of Italian Theatre criticism, was written in 1888.*

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a deep crisis: a crisis of ideology, identity and humanity. Essaying *verismo* in Italian theatre, Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Giacosa and Gerolamo Rovetta sought exactly to re-make the theatre relevant not as a reflection of a class and its *realtà*, but as a translator of the truths behind the mannerisms of a society that unconvincingly purported its contentment with itself and its modus vivendi. Theirs was a drama of social exposure.

Verismo, in fact, occured only when Verga and Giacosa (both established in Milan by the early eighties) sought to break with the past and restart their playwriting careers, championing a new "unconventional" drama, not simply a photographic drama of *realtà*, but a drama of crisis: a drama of the conflict between the *verità* of the individual and the *verità* of his/her social identity, between the *verità* of the soul and the *verità* of the human situation, the conflict between change and *italianità*. For both playwrights, the exposure of intimate social realities was not just the raison d'etre of their dramaturgy, but a means for interpreting the most persistently intriguing of all human enigmas, the capacity of the individual to struggle and survive. Their experimentation with *realtà* soon inspired Rovetta to emulate them and enter the theatre as the nemesis of his self-conscious peers. Embodying the *"epopea"* of the *borghesia*'s social falsehoods, his plays (especially those of his middle-period) challenged the spectators to cope with the demons of

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their social conscience: the corruption of their human integrity into self-interest, the manipulation of their moral values in the name of *"denaro"* and the bargaining of love for the sake of *rispettabilità*.

If Verga and Giacosa explored the *verità* of the individual as a social being, Rovetta explored the *verità* of society as an aggregate of contradicting *realtà*, seeking not the tragedy of human existence, but the tragicomic incongruities of the modern condition. Their theatre for all its emphasis on the *"amara realtà"* of private lives or its non-commitment to the promulgation of an explicit social thesis, was not apolitical or amoral. The social failures of *transformismo*, the economic pressures of capitalism on the disadvantaged--Verga's *vinti* (the defeated)--the decline of the *borghesia* to a depressed *piccolo-borghesia*, the exploitation of the masses by the anonymous bourgeois bureaucracy, or the ethical hollowness of the upper social echelons were by no means peripheral data, relegated to the "social background" of *drammi intimi*, involving some typically melodramatic case of adultery or class discrimination. They constituted an essential part of the social experiences they dramatized and explained the dynamics of the particular social situation these playwrights explored in each and every one of their veristic works. Certainly, their individual styles were as disparate as their personalities, and their *"problematica"* was as diverse as the social milieux that inspired their

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involvement in the search for *verità*. Their vision of the world as analysts of *verità* was neither monochromatic nor charged with sympathy for a particular cause, class, idea; It was the vision of the pragmatist. Their plays constituted the first Italian drama of social *anagnorisis*.

GIOVANNI VERGA

Among theatre scholars outside Italy or the Italian Studies departments of the academe, Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), a cardinal contributor to European naturalism and, along with Alessandro Manzoni and Luigi Pirandello a seminal literary force in the history of Italian literature, paradoxically remains one of the most elusive artists of the nineteenth century.[2] Notwithstanding his status as pioneer of *verismo* and innovator of Italian drama, his name only occasionally appears in the footnotes of Italian opera histories as the literary source for one of opera's most enduring classics, Pietro Mascagni's Cavalleria rusticana.[3] The obscurity of his drama, a phenomenon due partly to the low

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[2]*For an English biography of Giovanni Verga, see Alfred Alexander, Giovanni Verga (London: Grant and Cutler, 1972). For an authoritative study of his life in Italian, see Giulio Cattaneo, Verga (Torino: UTET, 1963) and Gino Raya's Vita di Verga (Roma: Herder, 1990). The Italian bibliography on Verga is vast and growing. Cf. Gino Raya, Bibliografia verghiana (1840-1971) (Roma: Editrice Ciranna, 1972), and R. Luperini, "Indicazioni bibliografiche della critica verghiana dal 1972 al 1981," Pessimismo e verismo di Giovanni Verga 3rd edition (Padova: Liviana, 1982).*

[3]*Cf. Jone, Gaillard, "Cavalleria Rusticana: novella, dramma, melodramma," Modern Language Notes 107i (1992), 178-195.*

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critical fortunes of European naturalism among post-World War II scholars and partly to the overwhelming international expansion of Pirandellian scholarship, has condemned Verga to a minor rank in the Western dramatic canon, a serious scholarly problem since Verga was an artist who sought to reinvent the theatre trying not to imitate, but to "create" a style and an esthetic closer to *verità*.[4] Indeed, his dramaturgical *novità* was not at all the italianization of Zola's naturalistic program, but the experimentation with a new structure, a style of *impersonalità* and *simplicità*.

Verga was born into an affluent and liberal family with ancestral ties to nobility and committed to the national cause of unification. Educated by tutors active in the Risorgimento and sympathetic to the romantic school of literature, he grew up on Foscolo, Manzoni, the historic novels of Dumas père and Eugene Sue as well as on the popular drama of the 1850s, Goldoni, Niccolini and the ubiquitous Kotzebue.[5] Between 1856 and 1857 he wrote his first historic novel, Amore e patria, dealing with the American Revolution but obviously inspired by

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[4]*Cavalleria Rusticana is one of the two of Verga's plays, translated and published in English by Eric Bentley in the first volume of his series The Modern Theatre (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955). The other is Caccia al lupo. See appendix II.*

[5]*Among the papers of Giovanni Verga, there have been found handwritten notebooks with plays and playlets, which, as scholars suggest, are evidence not only of his penchant for the theatre, but also of his having performed them. Conspicuous is a handwritten copy of Kotzebue's The corsair (Il corsaro). See N. Cappellani, Vita di Verga (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1940), 29. It is also interesting to note that Alexandre Dumas, père, was working in Italy at the time of Verga's youth, as the editor of the journal Independente of Naples.*

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Italian nationalism. In 1858 he took up to study Law at the University of Catania, but his poor academic progress made him turn to literature and journalism. Between 1861 and 1869, the year of his sojourn in Florence, Verga wrote two other novels, I carbonari della montagna (The Rebels of the Mountain), dealing with recent Sicilian history and Sulle lagune (Near the Lakes), the story of an Italian girl who falls in love with an Austro-Hungarian officer. After enlisting in the *Guardia Nazionale*, he worked briefly as a journalist of moderate political convictions for political periodicals as Roma degli Italiani, L'Italia contemporanea and L'indipendente. In 1863 Sulle lagune is serialized in the Florentine journal La nuova Europa and the contact with the editorial world of the Tuscan capital made him think seriously of expanding his literary pursuits outside the narrow environment of Sicily. After the failure of the Nuovi Tartuffi (1865) at the Concorso drammatico of 1867, Verga would focus more on his narrative work, but his fascination with the theatre, his desire to establish a career as a playwright, did not abate. As early as 1869 Verga begun working on L'onore (The honor), a play presumably emulating the *commedie a tesi* of Ferrari, which he never managed to complete and which he kept reworking even as late as 1878 and beyond.[6] What has

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[6] *Verga left also incomplete three other plays: La commedia dell'amore (The play of love), the libretto Il mistero (The mystery, 1908 or later) and scenes from Dopo (After), the latter published in 1902, but probably dating from 1875. Commedia dell'amore is also known with the titles Le farfalle (The Butterflies)*

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survived from Verga's Florentine period is a *commedia borghese*, Rose caduche (Brittle Roses),[7] a play which amply evidences the cultural and intellectual influences Verga absorbed as soon as his contact with the positivist literary circles of the city introduced him to

> *un altra atmosfera, di cui non potrebbe farsi alcuna idea chi non l'avesse provato, e per diventare qualche cosa bisogna vivere al contatto di queste illustrazioni, vivere in mezzo a questo movimento incessante, ... respirarne l'aria insomma.*[8]

Indeed, Verga had no problems adapting to this "*movimento*

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and Villa d'Este. This play, planned to form a trilogy with Cavalleria Rusticana and In portineria, was probably conceived about 1887, but Verga was still working on it as late as 1896. Typically scholars have tried to establish thematic links between these incomplete plays and the major novels Verga wrote during the span of his career, but evidence is to scarce to allow any speculation of the kind. For an edition of these plays and an iteresting account of their history, see Lina Jannuzzi and Ninfa Leotta, eds., Giovanni Verga: Prove d' autore (Lecce: Millela, 1983), especially ix-xlvi. See also Gianni Oliva, "Introduction," Verga: Tutto il teatro (Roma: Garzanti, 1987), lxi-lxiv. There, finally, survives, a reference to Nuvole d'Estate (Summer Clouds), a play probably lost.

[7] *Verga wished the play be performed by Salvini's company, but production plans eventually fell through. It was first published in 1928, six years after Verga's death, in the journal Maschere of Catania. It was first performed in 23 January 1960 by the Piccolo Teatro of Palermo. Until the early seventies the play was thought to have been written in the years between 1873 and 1875, but later critics have chronologically established it in 1869. The most convincing argument in favor of this redating is the thematic and plot affinities between the play and the 1866 novel Una peccatrice (A Sinful Woman), published in Turin. For more see below.*

[8] *"A different atmosphere, which one could not possibly conceive, if he did not experience it; and in order to render yourself "somebody" it's necessary to live in contact with these images, to live amongst this incessant movement,...by and large to breathe its air." From Verga's letter to his brother (Florence, 7 May 1869), cited in Lina Perroni, "Lettere di Giovanni Verga," L'Italia letteraria 2, n.30 (27 July 1930). Until recently it was assumed that Verga had paid two visits to Florence, one in 1865 and another in 1869. Gino Raya, however, has demonstrated that this is highly improbable and that Verga came first to Florence in 1869.*

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incessante," and very soon he endeared himself to some of the city's most influential personalities, among them Francesco Dall'Ongaro who became his mentor and Luigi Capuana, his compatriot critic who introduced him to the most eminent literary and theatrical circles. Florence was living at the time the triumph of positivism and bourgeois ideology, and Verga let himself open both to the "new" ideas and the smooth lifestyle of a class eager to disseminate its debonair culture. Verga, certainly, was not ignorant of the fashionable literary trends elaborated in France and exported to the rest of Europe, so that his involvement in the culture of Florence only intensified his resolution to depart from the romantic esthetics of his earlier work and experiment both with realism and the *problematica* of the *borghesia*. I nuovi tartufi had anticipated Verga's theatrical *imborghesimento* and Una peccatrice had already put him in line with the French novel of Dumas fils. and Flaubert. The novel had a rather risqué subject for the tastes of Italian *borghesi*, since it told a story similar to La dame aux camélias, although transposed from the sensual milieux of the demi-monde to the refined salons of the *alta borghesia*. Structured as a *dramma intimo* in three acts, the novel was about the passionate but "impossible" love affair between an ambitious young dramatist and a notorious lady of society, a "*Marguerite dell'aristocrazia*," who commits suicide once she senses that he is tired of her love. Although it did not score a big

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success for Verga, the basic story line, familiar from its countless variations in his contemporary drama, found its way in Rose caduche, a *dramma borghese* which, its failure to reach an audience notwithstanding, meant a great deal to the writer who thought of it as representing the *novità*, the innovation, he so avidly pursued.[9] Notwithstanding its dramaturgical debts to the then fashionable theatre of Torelli, Rose caduche reads today as more interesting than I mariti and its structure anticipates to a large extent the esthetic of *verismo*.

Rose caduche, for all its romantic sentimentality and its melodramatic pomposity,[10] already constitutes a drama of "crisis," with the playwright seriously concerned about the "failure" of *verità*--love, idealism, "poetry"--to prevail over the *realtà* of life (*rispettabilità*, social appearances, the "social interest). Verga attempts to "lower" the upper class milieu of Una peccatrice to a "neutral" social stratum, that of the theatre world (familiar already from the dramas of

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[9] *Cf. the comments of Dall'Ongaro on the drama sent to him by Verga, which the playwright relates in a letter to his mother (2 July 1869): "... È un lavoro belissimo, c'è novità di condotta, delicatezza di disegno e un dialogo poi stupendo davvero, quale voi l'avete e quale non l'ho trovato nei moderni poeti drammatici nostri...bisogna però un pubblico scelto e intelligente che sappia capirlo e degli artisti che sappiano disegnare con precizione tutte le delicate finezze... [Yours is an excellent work, it has an innovative plot, an elegant style and a dialogue really brilliant, [a work] I have not found among our modern dramatists... It needs however a special and perceptive audience which can understand it and actors who can delineate with precision all its fine subtleties.] Emphasis mine. Letter cited in Ferrone, ibid., 56.*

[10] *For a discussion of the play's "romantic realism," see Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga, op. cit., 62ff. For its language, see Barsotti, ibid., 11ff.*

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Ciconi and Ferrari): his heroine is now an actress-"victim" of the bourgeois prejudice (as an actress, she "cannot" be genuine or "real," that is "reputable") and the dramatist of the novel is now a poet, also a victim of society, since the "truths" of his art and the honesty of his sensibility cannot be understood --they are therefore subdued by the prose of bourgeois life (the antithesis with Ferrari's Prosa is here obvious)--by the "people," the nameless multitude his art is supposed to touch and change. Contrary to the positivist paradigms of Ferrari and Torelli, the "victims" of Rose caduche are deprived of the chance to integrate themselves in the society, or to "comply" with its morality. While the lady of society chooses to exonerate her crime of offending the social code by suicide, the "actress" of the play has only one choice, solitude and despair. The play is in fact a *commedia* about the tragedy of life--or better the tragedy of bourgeois life--where the nobility of the spirit (and art) are inexorably compromised by the "facts of life."[11] There looms in the drama a peculiar non-metaphysical fatalism, a sense of fate preordained not by some superior force, but dictated by the "social facts:" the ethics and the customs of the *borghesia*. In the play, "society" is not an immediate actor in the "*dramma intimo*" of the poet and the actress, it is a

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[11]*The reference to the world of art and theatre as a more honest place of existence, already an idea in the drama of Ciconi, betrays the influence of scapigliatura's rhetoric and ideology on Verga's social criticism. Cf. Barsotti, 30.*

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"presence," a "fact," and a "background" which does not interact with the heroes but looms over their relationship. The intimate and "romantic" (that is, unrealistic) duets between the poet and the actress are encompassed by the chorus of class-defined members of the "world," the lawyer, the aristocrat, the valet, the *piccolo-borghese*, the socialite.[12] Every life decision of the couple is "automatically" canceled by the way of this world. Verga directs this clash between the idealists and the "realists" not through the juxtaposition of the two opposed *realtà*, but by enmeshing the "theatre" of society with the "*dramma intimo*," so that the latter can only insinuate itself as a minor and inconsequential tragedy, an "act" in the larger drama of life.[13] In Verga's *commedia*, therefore, the "crisis" occurs not only because two "defeated," "underprivileged" lives get crushed by a *realtà*-imposed fate,[14] but because this omnipotent "fate," society itself, is a "victim" of its own obtuse confidence in the *verità* of the *realtà*, the truth of its prejudices, victims, that is, which, due to their lack of "poetic" sensibility, have no

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[12] *For a definition of the "chorus" along the lines of the bourgeois morality invested by the realists in the commedia, see Ferrone, ibid., 78.*

[13] *Cf. Antony J. de Vito, "Il teatro nell'opera narrativa di Giovanni Verga," Italica 2 (1958), 99ff.*

[14] *In this sense the title becomes allegorical, evoking "fragility" and moroseness.*

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ability to understand their predicament.[15] Rose caduche, then, is not simply an etude of a playwright improvising on the conventions of *dramma borghese* with his new ideas about structure and *problematica*, the duality of the drammatis personae ("chorus"-hero) or the allegoric construction of the plot so that it may take the audience beyond *realtà*." Nor is it an antecedent for Verga's *verismo* practice to derive his dramas from, to "dramatize, his narrative work. If the play has any esthetic or dramaturgical value at all within Verga's canon, this is its status as Verga's first experimentation with taking the melodramatic *commedia borghese* into the realm of the tragic esthetic, an experiment that would define his *verismo* dramaturgy.

With the decline of Florence as a cultural center after the transfer of the capital to Rome, Verga felt uncomfortable and estranged from the city's literary life. At the end of 1872 and with reference letters from Capuana and Dall'Ongaro, Verga came to Milan, the industrial center of bourgeois Italy and a city bursting with all sorts of cultural activities and

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[15] *Cf. IRMA [the actress]: (...) Non è vero che è un furto, un infamia, toglierci la pace del cuore, la reputazione, il sorriso, la fede, tutto quello che abbiamo di buono, tutto quello che abbiamo di santo?... Non è un furto quando si sa che quell'amore, in cambio di chi ci lasciamo togliere tutto, non durerà sempre, non potrà darcelo che un giorno... dei mesi, degli anni... ma che non sarà per sempre? [Isn't it the truth that it's a crime {a theft}, an infamy, to deprive us of peace of heart, reputation, happiness, faith, of everything we hold as good and sacred?... Isn't it a crime when we know that love for which we let ourselves lose everything, will not last forever, won't be ours but for a day, months, years ... but that it won't be so forever? Rose caduche in Giovanni Verga, Teatro (Milano: Mondatori, 1966), 202.*

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with the Teatro alla Scala, the Scapigliati and the energetic publishing houses setting the pace for the artistic trends in the entire nation.[16] Impressed with Milan's vivacity and the wealth of opportunities offered to ambitious writers like him, Verga was soon enthusiastic not only for the *"febbre violenta di vita in tutte le sue più ardenti manifestazioni, l'amore, l'arte, le soddisfazioni del cuore, le misteriose ebbrezze del lavoro,"*[17] but also for his dynamic and stimulating integration in the literary circles he was desirous of belonging to. He forged valuable friendships with influential members of the *scapigliati* (mostly with Boito and Emilio Praga), the cultural press and especially with playwrights representing the whole spectrum of Italian theatre from Cleto Arighi and Paolo Ferrari to Achille Torelli, Gerolamo Rovetta and Giuseppe Giacosa. Thus his Milan period (roughly from 1872 to 1893) became Verga's most productive and the most rewarding period of his career, the formative years of his *verismo* esthetic, the era of his masterpieces. Without disowning his experiments with the esthetic of romantic realism or supplanting his Sicilian cultural heritage with ideas

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[16] *A wonderful account of Milan's cultural world can be found in Giovanna Rosa, Il mito della capitale morale. Letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra Otto e Novecento (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1982).*

[17] *"the violent fever of life in all its most ardent manifestations. love, art, satisfactions of the heart, the mysterious intoxication of work."*

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reflecting a completely bourgeois outlook, much like his *scapigliati* friends Verga could not resist following the "*nuovo corso*," the new direction that his familiarization with French naturalism opened to him.[18]

Through the influence of his friend Felice Cameroni, a most polemical champion of the new art in Italy, Verga immersed himself in the debate of naturalism or neorealism and saw in Zola and the other French writers the perfect example for a literature panoramically explicating the contradictions of modernity and the complexity of life.[19] It was not that Verga had not previously felt the necessity for "new" literature to explore life and society in all its multifariousness, but the naturalistic work of the French revealed to him the way for showing life not as a stasis, a series of pictures put together to make a whole, but life as an incessant movement and society as a drama eternally repeating itself, be it in the villages of the South or the cities of the North, the villas of the *borghesia* or the squalid slums of the *vinti*. This new program came to fruition after his brief return to Sicily in 1879 which reacquainted

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[18] *This borghese esthetic is still evident in his novels Eva (1873), Eros (1875), Tigre reale (A real tiger, 1875) and Nedda (1874), the first novel showing the departure from this esthetic toward naturalism. As we said earlier, Verga kept working on the commedia L'onore throughout the period.*

[19] *It was also during those years that Verga discovered the Russian naturalists (Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoi), Edgar Allan Poe and the new school of naturalistic drama. For more, see G. Garra Agosta, La biblioteca di Giovanni Verga (Catania: Greco, 1977).*

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him with the *realtà* of his fatherland and provided him with priceless images about the drama of life beyond the *realtà* of modernity. As Verga himself explained, this trip became a determining factor for his art, *"un lavoro di ricostruzione intellettuale."* These new experiences gave him the material for the stories of Vita dei Campi (Life in the Plains, 1880) and Novelle rusticane (Rural stories, 1883) as well as for his masterpieces I Malavoglia (The Malavoglia family, 1881) and Mastro-don Gesualdo (1888). These works did not deal only with the people of the fields and the mineries, but also with the paradoxes of the provincial *borghesia*, a class without a progressive culture and ideology, vacillating between the ignorance and the fatalism of the *popolo* and the ossified world of a decadent aristocracy, itself a social remnant, anachronistically surviving into modernity, desperate but "proud." Applying the same "method" of observation to the portrayal of the *vinti* in the metropolitan and bourgeois strata, Verga wrote Il marito di Elena (Elena's Husband, 1982) and the short story collection Per le vie (Through the Streets, 1883), always striving for an all-encompassing exposure of *realtà*. In fact, Verga had mapped out a concrete "cyclical" plan for his narrative output, a concept he would also later seek to apply for his dramatic work. Following the example of Zola, he sought to represent the struggle of life in a series of novels and a series of plays that would encompass the totality of human experience, the whole class

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spectrum and the whole variety of milieux. Under the title I vinti, Verga had planned a five-work cycle, out of which he managed to complete only the first two installments: I Malavoglia and Mastro-don Gesualdo.[20] Equally in the theatre the evolving plan was to produce a cycle moving from the Agrarian experience of Cavalleria Rusticana to the *drammi intimi* of In portineria --also the only ones completed-- to the social exposè of the *alta borghesia* in the unfinished La commedia dell'amore and L'onore. As Verga himself suggested, his aim was to capture

> *[il gran grottesco umano [...] il lato drammatico, o ridicolo o comico di tutte le fisionomie sociali, ognuna colla sua caratteristica, negli sforzi che fanno per andare avanti in mezzo a questa onda immensa che è spinta dai bisogni più volgari o dalla avidità della scienza ad antare avanti, incessantemente, pena la caduta e la vita, pei deboli e maldestri.*[21]

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[20] *We know the titles and the "plot" of the projected other three: La duchessa di Leyra, L'onorevole Scipioni (The Honorable Scipioni), L'uomo di lusso (The Man of Luxury). From the first of these survive a chapter and a half, the others were not even attempted. Verga had expressed his "difficulty" in capturing the cosmos of the alta borghesia, an "elusive" class hiding even from itself. In an interview he had said: Non scriverò mai La Duchessa di Leyra. La gentuccia, sapevo farla parlare; ma questa gente del gran mondo no. Questi per dire una cosa mentiscono due volte; se per esempio hanno debiti, dicono di aver mal di testa..." [I will never write La Duchessa di Leyra. The little people, I knew how to make them speak; but the people of the "great world," no. Those, when they say one thing lie twice; if they have debts, they say they have a headache]. Cited in Vitaliano Brancati, Il borghese e l'immensità. Scritti 1930-1954 (Milano: Bompiani, 1973), 384. This detail is important for our history of Verga's drama, because the characters of this abortive novel were actually the characters of the play L'onore. In that work, the countess has a son Scipione (a character thought to be an antecedent of the hero of L'onorevole Scipioni, a bourgeois hypocrite. It is inviting to speculate that for once it was the drama that informed Verga's narrative and not vice versa, no matter if the effort did not come to fruition.*

[21] *"The grand grotesqueness of humanity ... the dramatic or ridiculous or comic aspect of all social physiognomies, each one with its own characteristics, in their effort to move forward amidst this huge wave propelled by the most base*

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What in fact Verga tried to do with his plays was not just to popularize *verismo* with the adaptation of stories for the stage, but to create an "epic" dramaturgy about the conflict of humanity with the realities and the verities of the social world. As Luigi Capuana had suggested in his Gl'ismi contemporanei, to "represent" was not for Verga the equivalent of photographing, but of "thinking," not of making a judgement, but of grasping that la *"passione che esplode in alto o in basso tra creature popolane o aristocratiche, è cosa elevata, concentramento di forze, complicazione di sentimenti, energia, lotta, catastrofe, dramma insomma."*[22] Passion in Verga's dramaturgy is a dramaturgical element pregnant with all sorts of psychological, spiritual, cultural (milieux-heredity) and even social connotations. It is also an inexorable emotion that not only "interprets" a particular social event (say, adultery, revenge, incest) but also defines the personality of a character and preordains his or her tragic end, no matter whether this end implies death, social ostracism, or solitude. As Giorgio Pullini observed, this

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drives or by the avidity of science to move forward, incessantly, the decline and life [being] a punishment for the weak and the gauche." Cited in Oliva, ibid., xiv.

[22] *"The passion, which explodes high and low in the lives of common people and aristocrats is a superior thing, a concentrate of powers, a complex of emotions, energy, conflict, catastrophe, and finally drama." Luigi Capuana, "Il teatro di Giovanni Verga," in Verga e D'Annunzio, Mario Pomilio, ed. (Bologna: Cappelli, 1972), 183.*

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"passion," expressed either lyrically or "impersonally" (that is without a *tesi* attached to it), is the element that brings Verga's theatre in line with the example of Vittorio Alfieri and the veristic experiments of Pirandello:

> *I personaggi centrali (perchè quasi esclusivamente di essi è fatto il teatro di Verga) sono fissati ognuno ad un suo sentimento-base cui si lega tutta la sua personalità...I sentimenti non hanno sviluppo nè gradazione, ma nascono gia potenziati al massimo e tendono a spiegarsi a piena gola. Si potrebbe richiamare la tradizione della tragedia alfieriana, in cui l'azione comincia alla vigilia di concludersi e i contrasti di passione, ormai incapaci di sopportare il peso della propria violenza, bruciano l'esito finale. Anche il teatro di Verga, sotto le vesti sciatte dei suoi personaggi, che anno dimesso l'antica regalità, e nella parlata locale che ignora auliche asprezze, conserva l'enfasi di questa aspirazione ad'un assoluta grandezza dei sentimenti: i suoi protagonisti difendono la loro passione come una ragione di vita fino alla catarsi tragica. E la foga della loro ossessione li spinge ad effondersi nel canto più che a contrapporsi drammaticamente alle ragioni degli altri, in una sordità alla loro logica che partecipa già della solitudine dei personaggi pirandelliani.*[23]

With this "passionate" drama Verga attempted for the first time to study a "person" in his or her social milieux, with

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[23]*Each one the central characters (because Verga's theatre is almost exclusively a theatre of characters) is fixed on a key-emotion to which their entire personality is attached... The emotions do not evolve or progress, but they emerge already at maximum force tending toward an excessive self-manifestation. One could refer back to the tradition of Alfierian tragedy, in which the action begins just before its conclusion and the contrasting passions, already uncontainable in their violence, precipitate, exploding into the final outcome. Verga's theatre, under the threadbare clothes of his characters, deprived of their ancient grandeur, and with its vernacular language devoid of grandiose harangues, retains the emphasis of this legacy on an absolute greateness of emotions: His heroes defend their passion as a raison d'être until the catharsis of the tragic end. And the fervor of their obsession impels them to pour their hearts out lyrically rather than dramatically contesting other people's judgment, and their obdurate comitment to their own logic a priori partakes of the solitude of Pirandello's characters." Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli:1850-1950, op. cit., 134-5.*

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his or her cultural and hereditary qualities, and yet bare them to their essentials, their souls and their *verità*, and reveal the similarity of human beings inconsiderate of their social state and "fate." The critical reservation then that Verga's veristic *"scene"* were actually typical bourgeois situations expertly "exoticized" with the hyperbolic quaintness of folklore--a sort of orientalism contrived to "shock" the *borghese* with the asperity of the emotions "enacted," the primitiveness of the social configuration presented, and the animalistic passions of "Italians" forsaken from modernity or swayed by inexorable impulses and "bizarre" socio-sexual compulsions--and estheticized with the pathetic emotionalism of opera and melodrama is rather arbitrary and superficial. It prioritizes the "spectacle" over the "drama" and, worse, it considers the spectacle as being itself the drama, in both cases missing the point of Verga's "new art": the demonstration that in matters human the cultural trappings of the *borghese* and the *popolo* are *realtà* irrelevant to the essence of humanity. Verga thought of himself primarily as a psychologist "searching the *vero*" rather than an entertainer à la Giacometti for the impressionable *borghesie*.[24]

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[24] *"Ma non si vede che il naturalismo è un metodo, ... un modo di esprimere il pensiero?... Noi altri detti, non so perchè, naturalisti facciamo della psicologia con la stessa cura e la stessa profondità degli psicologi più acuti [...] Il naturalismo è forma..." [But don't you see that naturalism is a method,... a way of expressing the thought?... The rest of us, called, I don't know why, naturalists attempt at psychology with the same care and the same profundity of the most acute psychologists [...] Naturalism is a form..." Giovanni Verga, interview, Alla scoperta dei letterati, op. cit., 118, 121.*

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With the exception of Dal tuo al mio, Verga's last complete play, his dramatic production, beginning from 1884 with Cavalleria rusticana, escapes from the esthetic of the well-made play, its traditional three or four-act structure, the involvement of the raisonneur and the multifarious plot intrigues. Opting for the drammaturgically more compact two-act pattern and, late in his theatrical career, the *bozzetto*, he came up with the formula *"scene popolari"* (Cavalleria Rusticana, In portineria) or *"scene drammatiche"* (La lupa). These appellations seem invented not to indicate the particular structural novelty, but rather to identify the sociology of the dramas (non-bourgeois strata), to anticipate the mood or the type of catharsis (*drammatiche* meaning both a lugubrious ambience and/or a dire denouement), or to connote the transitoriness of the events--the "scene"--conceived as tragically "insignificant" instances in the larger scheme of life.[25] Verga is very particular in separating the *dramma intimo*, the main "event" of the story, from the "exterior" world, the latter not conceived as just a colorful *tableau vivant*, but as a point of reference for the socio-cultural problems involved in the focal crisis. This exterior cosmos which surrounds--or rather immures--the mystified heroes and heroines never intrudes in the *dramma intimo* or the private personal problem, even though its "presence" as the arbiter of

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[25]*With the exception of the In portineria and the bozzetto Caccia a lupa, the milieu is that of a Southern (Sicilian) society.*

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the communal morality is always implied. Figuratively, the "people" constitutes the social *realtà*, it is the "raisonneur" of the common ethos, the tradition of social correctness. It is there not to provide comic or folkloric relief, as several critics purport, but in order to illustrate the *verità* of a certain pattern of community accustomed not to differentiate between a private and a public conduct of life.[26] As an artist more concerned with the tragedies of the soul than with the deceptive manifestations of *realtà*, Verga did not aspire to a documentaristic, politicized depiction of social history, as, say, the Italian film directors of neorealism would later attempt. He consciously poeticizes the cultural presence of the *popolo*--the church masses, the proverbs, the story-telling, the sounds and sights of nature--so that they become extensions and complements of the *drammi intimi* he is mostly interested in. Just like more familiar European dramatists concerned with a "poetic" naturalism such as Synge and Lorca, Verga has a different outlook of nature and society and in his dramas the natural and social phenomena constitute allegorical dramatic elements without losing their identity as "real," recognizable facets of reality. For Verga, an intellectual of

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[26] *Judging from the huge success of Verga's "southern" plays in their dialect versions not only in Italy, I tend to believe that part of this success is due to the verità with which Sicilianità was represented, to the convincing "documentation" of the local cultural or social experience inherent in Verga's dramas. What was allegedly folkloric for the borghesi, must have seemed convincingly realistic to the local communities, for whom the notion of folklore means esthetically and culturally nothing.*

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moderate political convictions, politicizing *verismo*, vying to render *verismo* a weapon of social criticism, or rather a means of social propaganda, would mean a relapse to a *teatro educatore*, a variation on the Ferrarian concept of moralistic drama with a more radical political twist. Such an artistic prospect would have appeared to him rather superficial and pretentious, because the new drama was supposed to be a drama of *verità* "as it is" and not an art which could be manipulated with "messages" for a particular cause. This would have meant, I think, a violation of *"impersonalità,"* and therefore a corruption of the new drama to a pseudo-positivist piece of propaganda. Even if we had to invent Verga as a politically minded artist, it would be the "folklore" and not the *"dramma intimo"* which would insinuate itself as a statement of reproof for the sorry status of the non-bourgeois community, the forsaken *patria*: Depicting a politically anesthetized milieu of people for whom the *patria* is a peripheral notion of *Italianità*, whose lives are prescribed by superstition, unwritten codes of justice, religious fatalism and a perception of honor as an ideal unrelated to class economics, Verga rendered the rites, the songs, the legends and violent ethics of honor elusive yet highly political indictments of a discrepant society impotent, unwilling or impeded to absorb the ethics of modernity. This folkloric documentation of social *realtà* is not then an evidence of a playwright eager to pander to a borghesia's penchant for exotic otherworldly

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thrills, a picturesquely sensational parody of bourgeois *problematica*.[27] Rather, it accentuates Verga's commitment to presenting as a poet and not as an analyst, a social verità, the social fate of his "vanquished."

It might be that Cavalleria rusticana (1883/4) has become synonymous with *verismo* as the new dramatic form, but the creation, the presentation and the critical promotion of Verga's experiment with popular forms of theatre was the result of a collective effort undertaken by the playwright and his same-minded friends, an unconventional group of people from the ranks of *scapigliatura* and popular culture: Giuseppe Giacosa, Arrigo Boito, the publisher Emilio Treves, the newspaperman and critic Eugenio Torelli-Viollier, the novelist Luigi Gualdo, Luigi Capuana, and last but not least Eleonora Duse. Strange though it may appear, especially when considering the propitious critical and commercial fortune of the play in the years to come,[28] Cavalleria was a theatrical event that almost would not have happened, if it had not been for Verga's artistic tenacity and his resolution to underwrite

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[27] *For this school of interpretation see Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti, Le maschere dell'eroe dall'Alfieri a Pasolini, op. cit.; also cf. Roberto Alonge, Teatro e pattacolo nel secondo ottocento, op. cit., 159.*

[28] *The play remained in Duse's international tour repertory until the end of the century; it was turned into an opera; it was translated into French, German and Spanish and it had a second life as a dialect tragedy for Sicilian acting troupes.*

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the cost of the play's production.[29] By 1883 Verga had made his name as a powerful and innovative writer of the new realistic school and his books, despite their mediocre commercial success, had only consolidated his reputation as a controversial story-teller exposing the unknown social *realtà* exemplifying the *questione meridionale*. His literary celebrity, or rather his notoriety, however, were not trustworthy guarantees for Cesare Rossi, the actor-manager to whom Cavalleria was submitted through Giacosa, a close collaborator of the actor who was responsible for many of his successes as a popular playwright. The peculiar structure of the play (one act lasting less than an hour), the violence of the plot and the costly production design (sets and costumes ethnologically accurate and difficult to procure outside Sicily) and the small faith in the capacity of a bourgeois audience to find some interest in a social milieu outside its own experience had convinced Rossi that the play would be an artistic and financial disaster for his company, and his misgivings had also discouraged Duse, enthusiastic though she was in the beginning about the project. Although the young actress was already a star comparable only to Ristori, her repertory up to that time had been rather conventional and predictable, a career problem already on Duse's mind, and the

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[29] *Still the most cited source of information for the production prehistory of the play is Federico De Roberto, "Stato Civile della 'Cavalleria Rusticana'," Casa Verga e altri saggi verghiani, Carmelo Musumarra, ed. (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1964), 180-213.*

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wildly emotional role of Santuzza, the dejected heroine of Cavalleria offered her not only a chance for bravura emotional theatrics but also for her involvement in the cause of the national theatre, a commitment she honored to the end of her life.[30] What with Rossi's commercial calculations, however, and his unwillingness to challenge the theatrical taste of an audience still stubbornly inimical to realism or to modern acting style, Duse's commitment to the project seemed to wane. It was, in fact, Giacosa and her co-star in Rossi's company, Flavio Andò (himself convinced by Giacosa's optimism for the production's popular success) who turned Cavalleria's fortunes around. Just as in the case of I mariti and Belloti-Bon, Rossi reluctantly agreed to go on with the production.[31] It was not, of course that Verga himself ignored the theatrical

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[30] *In October 1883 Verga, after finishing the dramatization of Cavalleria rusticana in Catania, came to Rome for the opening of Giacosa's La sirena (The siren), a play written exclusively for Duse. It was on that occasion that Verga met Duse for the first time, although the actress had been on Verga's mind since the inception of Cavalleria as a play, not only as the ideal interpreter of his heroine, Santuzza, but as the main motivation for its writing. Count Giuseppe Primoli, an aristocrat patron of the theatre and a close friend of Giacosa and Verga, secretly in love with Duse, had also taken interest in the play and had opened negotiations with a Roman company about producing it there, but Verga had opted for Rossi. Giacosa was also convinced that Duse was the ideal star for the play —"Most of all she is full of pride, and more than pride, the senses dominate her in a frightful way," he had written of her—and the only one who could possibly guarantee at least an artistic success. For Duse and her involvement in Cavalleria see William Weaver, Duse: A Biography (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 40ff.*

[31] *Although Verga had acquiesced to his condition of financing the production and waiving his opening night royalties, Rossi timidly chose only to direct the play yielding his starring "part" (Alfio) to Tebaldo Checchi (stage name of Tebaldo Marchetti), Duse's husband at the time but a less prominent member of his company. For himself he reserved the part of a secondary comic character (Zio Bazio, a smutty stall-keeper).*

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realities of the time or that his faith in the "newness" of his Sicilian drama had obscured his pragmatism as an artist. For all his anxiousness to see the play performed by no lesser an artist than Duse and his desire to reacquaint himself with the theatre after a hiatus of some twelve years, he was well aware that the stakes were high and that the comparisons between Verga the story-teller and Verga the playwright would be inevitable and decisive for his career in the theatre. Not only that, but with the exception of Giacosa and Capuana, most of the play's other readers predicted a fiasco and recommended its cancellation.[32]

The day before the play's opening at the Teatro Carignano of Turin, Giuseppe Giacosa, aware of the high expectations Verga's play had generated yet also apprehensive of the audience's aversions to "experiments" in the theatre, wrote an article which, published in the Gazzetta Piemontese, has become a historic document of Italian theatre history, the declaration of *verismo:*

> *Domani sera al teatro Carignano sarà rappresentato un lavoro drammatico di G. Verga. E' questo un fatto artistico di grande importanza e il mondo letterario di tutta Italia ha gli occhi su di noi.[...E]gli è tenuto in conto di uno dei più saldi sostenitori dell'arte nuova e la sua austerità artistica gli guadagnò più*

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[32]*Boito thought the play "untheatrical;" Treves, Verga's discoverer and publisher yet by taste and culture a man attracted to the dramas of the old school, found the play too daring for the stage, Torelli-Tollier was cautiously optimistic and Luigi Gualdo, a novelist obscure today but very eminent at the time, was hesitant and abstained from any predictions whether optimistic or pessimistic. It was due to these dissuading opinions as well as to the vacillations of Rossi that the production, originally scheduled for 15 November 1883), was postponed until the second week of January 1884 (1/15/1884)*

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aderenti che non avrebbero potuto dieci libri di polemica.

Dal romanzo e dalla novella egli, non so s'io debba dire sale o scende ora al teatro. Certo l'impresa che sta per tentare è delle ardue e basterebbe alla sua gloria l'averla tentata. Tutti gridano che il teatro va riformato e ricondotto a forme più semplici, più sincere, in una parola più vicina alla realtà...

Il Verga, conscio delle difficoltà dell'impresa non scende in campo con un'opera di gran mole, ma bensí con poche scene in un atto. Egli scelse l'ambiente rusticano perchè i congegni della vita vi sono assai meno complicati, ed è quindi meno temerario il tentare di metterli in azione rinunziando ai vieti ammiinicoli della tradizione teatrale.

Il pubblico ha per lo più un falso concetto della novità, e la fa quasi tutta consistere nell fatto. Chi trova una combinazione di avvenimenti non prima trovata è tenuto per novatore e lo effetto artistico più pregiato è quello della sorpresa. Ciò parve falso al Verga e pare anche a me.

Questo teatro che mira sopratutto a sorprendere è un teatro di decadenza. Questo ingrossare gli effetti e la parola e quasi la voce per farli più evidenti e per ottenere più effetti, spianna troppo la via ai mediocri. Si provi, quando l'elemento o fantastico o poetico è bandito dal dramma, si provi a fare che la gente discorra come realmente discorre nella vita, e si muova ed agisca come si suol muoversi ed agire ogni giorno. I colpi di scena e le tirate non sono della vita reale. Le maggiori tragedie seguono nella vita con terribile semplicità. Chi compie un atto di vendetta non lo fa precedere da un discorso, e chi si ammazza non lo dice. Ne verrà n repertorio drammatico che darà meno occasione di applausi e più continuità di commozione, che sbalordirà di meno e farà pensare di più.

[...] La novità del Verga non consiste nel fare di più, ma, forse nel fare di meno, certo nel fare diversamente. Non ardisco pronostici. In Verga può avere sbagliato e non è un uomo da impermalirsi se un pubblico coscienzioso come il nostro glielo dice, né da scoraggiarsi se egli stesso se ne persuade. Ma, qualunque sorte tocchi alla rappresentazione, segni il Verga e segneremo tutti noi la data di domani. Chissà che fra dieci anni, ...non si possa dire, accennando alla Cavalleria rusticana: si è cominciato di là.[33]

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[33] *Tomorrow evening at the teatro Carignano a dramatic work of G. Verga will be performed. This is an artistic event of great importance and the literary world all over Italy has its eyes on us. [...] He is considered as one of the firmest champions of the new art and his artistic austerity has earned him more adherents than even ten books of polemics could have done./ I don't know if I can say that he now ascends or descends to the theatre from the novel and the short story. Certainly, the endeavor he is about to undertake is most arduous and it would be to his credit for even having undertaken it. Everybody argues that the theatre is being reformed and led towards more simpler and more sincere forms, in a word, closer to the truth.../Verga, conscious of the effort's difficulties, does not enter the battlefield with a play of great dimensions, but contrarily*

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Whether the play was going to be a milestone or not, this was not among Verga's priorities on opening night, more desperately hoping for an ephemeral but career-wise decisive success. On 14 January 1884, Verga did not go to the Teatro Carignano, having chosen to attend an operetta performance in a nearby theatre.[34] Disproving all apprehensions and predictions of doom, the performance captivated the audience from beginning to end and finished with a rapturous audience

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with a few scenes in one act. He chose the milieu of the peasants because in it the patterns of life are much less complicated, and therefore less foolhardy appears the effort to set them in dramatic action, renouncing the obsolete pretexts of traditional theatre./ For the most part the audience has a false concept of newness almost always associated with the plot. Whoever comes up with a combination of events not previously encountered is held as an innovator and the artistic effect most appreciated is that of surprise. This seems false both to Verga and me./This theatre which, above everything else, aims at surprise is a decadent theatre. That tendency to heighten the effects and the dialogue and in practice the voice in order to make them more evident and thus attain more effects, opens too widely the way for mediocrities. When the fantastic or the poetic element is banished from the theatre, there remains the effort to make people speak as they really speak in their lives, to make them move and act as they usually move and act every day. Theatrical tricks and tirades are not part of real life. The greatest tragedies follow life with a most unsettling simplicity. Whoever commits an act of revenge does not usher it with a lecture, and whoever commits a murder does not announce it. There will come a dramatic repertory which will offer less opportunities for applause and more for emotional consistency, which will be less astounding and more conducive to thought. [...] Verga's newness does not consist of doing more, but rather in doing less, and certainly in doing it all in a completely new way. I do not rush to prognosis. Verga may have got it wrong and he is not a man who will take umbrage if a conscientious audience such as our own tells him so, nor will he be disheartened if he is convinced that it is right. But, whatever may be in store, tomorrow's date will be a date to remember both for Verga and us all. Who knows if in ten years from now we will not be able to say, alluding to Cavalleria Rusticana: It all started then." Giuseppe Giacosa, Gazzetta Piemontese, reprinted in Siro Ferrone, Il teatro italiano, vol. 5, ibid., 390-1.

[34]*Due to the play's short duration, Rossi had programmed a curtain riser, a Spanish farce adapted as La società dei tredici (The Club of Thirteen). The theatre was sold out.*

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in standing ovation. As Torelli-Viollier reported the next day for the Corriere della sera,

L'attenzione profonda fino dal principio, continuò sino alla scena fra la Duse e il Checchi (Santuzza e compar Alfio). A questa scena proruppero applausi fragorosi e generali, che si rinovarono di scena in scena sino alla fine. Calato il sipario, gli applausi e le acclamazioni continuarono insistenti, entusiastici. "Fuori l'autore!" si gridava, "Viva Verga!" Era vero e proprio entusiasmo... Giacosa ed alcuni amici venuti da Milano per assistere a questa interessante prima rappresentazione riuscirono a trovarlo e gli annunziarono l'inaspettata vittoria. [...] Il lavoro è assolutamente teatrale, assolutamente scenico, e tutti gli effetti sono esclusivamente teatrali e scenici. Non c'è niente di letterario, di romantico. La retorica è al tutto bandita. Cavalleria Rusticana promette nel Verga un autore drammatico vero e potente."[35]

The same pattern of reception was repeated in all performances not only there but also in Florence, Milan and Rome. It was taken up by other touring companies and inspired all sorts of parodies and burlesque *bozzetti*. It launched Verga's brief albeit significant international career and made him the first Italian playwright after Goldoni to attain an estimable reputation outside Italy.[36]

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[35] *"The rapt attention [of the audience] since the beginning, continued up to the scene between Duse and Checchi (Santuzza and compar Alfio). During that scene clamorous and general applause began to explode, marking every scene until the end. With the fall of the curtain, the applause and the ovations continued enthusiastically unabated. The public called for the author, shouting "Viva Verga!" A veritable enthusiasm indeed... Giacosa and some other friends who came from Milan for this interesting premiere managed to locate him and informed him of the unexpected triumph. [...] The play is absolutely theatrical, absolutely spectacular... Nothing bookish or romantic. Rhetoric was altogether banished. Cavalleria rusticana promises in Verga a true and powerful dramatist." Eugenio Torelli-Viollier, Corriere della sera, 15 January 1884, cited in De Roberto, ibid., 209-210.*

[36] *The play was performed in 1888 by the Théâtre Libre of Antoine without success and later, in 1909, by the Antoine company at the Odéon. Duse performed it twice in Paris (1897 and 1898) and many other prominent actresses followed her*

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Cavalleria rusticana is an emotionally violent drama of revenge, carefully structured according to the stylistic conventions of classic tragedy--late point of attack, linear development of episodes (scene), stichomythia, open space, ritualistic lyricism and chorality, comic relief and symbolic gesticulation[37]--and the epico-lyrical tradition of Sicilian popular religious theatre *(sacra rappresentazione)*--allegory of incidents, figurative language, polycentric arrangement of

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example. For Verga's fortune on the Parisian stage see the very informative book of Renée Lelièvre, Le théâtre dramatique italien en France (1851-1940 (Paris: Arman Colin, 1959), 72-78. In a letter of Zola to Verga (3 June 1884), the French writer expressed his favorable view of the play but did not hide his apprehensions for the play's unsuitability to the taste of Paris spectators as well as for the play's italianità: "...Voici mes craintes: d'abord, le titre qui ne serait pas compris et qu'il faudrait absolument changer [!];
à changer également les appellations de dame, d'oncle, de tante, trop typiques; puis, ce qui est le plus grave, l'esprit général, les traits de moeurs comme l'oreille mordue, devant lesquels nos bourgeois resteraient béants; enfin le cadre italien lui-même, si déshonoré chez nous par les peintres et les faiseurs d'opéras, qu'on ne peut plus risquer le costume de chez vous sans avoir l'air d'un faiseur de romances." ["These are my reservations: First, the title would be incomprehensible and therefore it must absolutely change; change the designations [gna, zio, zia], they are too conventional; then, and what is more serious, [change] the general spirit of the play, the presentation of customs as the bitten ear, which will perplex and bore our bourgeois; finally the Italian ambience, so abused here by painters and opera composers, that it would be impossible to present the local custom without rendering it as a novelist would." Practically Zola asked for a gallicization of the play and strangely enough was very happy to oblige. Verga went to Paris desirous of a production there writing to his translator that he would "be happy even with a fiasco." Nothing came out then. When the play was eventually staged by Antoine after the recommendation of Zola, none of the changes he had suggested in his letter mentioned above had been made. According to the documents produced by Lelièvre, the play failed for political reasons (diplomatic problems between France and Italy), but also because the critics reviewing the premiere based their criticism on esthetic principles more consonant with the conventions of the French well-made play. See ibid., 77.

[37] For an analytic linguistic and structural analysis of the play, cf Barsotti, ibid., 48, although she attempts its comparative study with I mafiusi (see chapter 4).

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action, the emphasis of Christian Passion as a figure of *"passione"*--although the esthetic of these dramaturgical antecedents was obligatorily modified to conform with the theatrical conventions and the performance practices of the *dramma borghese:* small cast, the accommodation of the cyclical drama within the Italian stage, the choreographed representation of "violence," the accentuation of the private "problem" over the social one, the theatricalized exegesis of the ritualistic/symbolic customs, and an italian language based on a regional-dialect syntax and a selectively "characteristic" regional vocabulary.[38]

The story, a ferocious fait divers about betrayal and a crime of honor in a remote Sicilian village on an Easter day, is not completely devoid of socio-political connotations or allusions to the social conflict between the haves and the have nots. The ethos of honor or the morally "expurgating"

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[38] *Verga had acknowledged that he "borrowed" this hybrid idiom from Capuana's narrative, then refining it so that it would suit the veristic esthetic of his own work. See Oliva, op. cit., xiii. In this "forma popolare" of Italian language Verga saw primarily a vivid theatricality and used it both in his "popolare" narrative and dramas. Several critics have argued that the transfer of this "novelistic" idiom from narrative to the theatre is evidence that Verga's theatre is essential "novelistic" and "literary." It is my conviction that the opposite is true: His narrative is "dramatic" and not his dramas "novelistic." The fact that the source of his theatre was the short story is irrelevant to the discussion of theatricality in his prose and drama. In 1975 Giorgio Prosperi, an Italian director revived Cavalleria Rusticana in a production staged at the open theatre of Taormina. In that production, he used dialogue from the short story, "dramatizing" thus what in the actual play is only narrated. This artistic choice shows again how persistent is among Italian critics and artists the condescending attitude toward Verga the playwright. Prosperi presented Cavalleria in a double bill with La lupa. For more see Giorgio Prosperi, "Teatro verghiano: Due restauri," Rivista italiana di drammaturgia 1 (1976), 3-24.*

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operation of the vendetta ensue in the drama as cultural substitutes of codified civil law and state-controlled authority and as such they embody legitimate sociopolitical statements. Involved in this "intimate" social drama are Turridu, a young man who after coming back from his army service, had found his fiancee Lola married to Alfio, a "rich" itinerant cart-owner. Lola's betrayal made him seek solace and love in Santuzza, a young woman of most modest means, "hostage" to the patriarchal house of her father and brothers but sincerely in love with him. Although Santuzza was well aware of Turridu's previous engagement to Lola, it was beyond her imagination that Turridu could betray her honor especially when he has "compromised" her. Turridu, however, did not prove himself worthy of such love. Still secretly in love with Lola and taking advantage of her husband's frequent absences, he resumes the relationship, to Santuzza's desperation, already ashamed of her pregnancy. Having spied on Turridu on Easter eve and perturbed by his disloyalty, her own "revenge" becomes the catalyst of the "tragedy." The nine scenes of the play entail Santuzza's exposure of Turridu's infidelity to his mother, Turridu's "unmanly" denial of his sin, his confrontation with Santuzza that motivates her revenge, her disclosure to Alfio of Lola's sacrilegious adultery with Turridu during the *"santa festa,"* and Alfio's vendetta. The "crime" becomes public when Alfio bites Turridu's ear, a ritualistic gesture showing the death of friendship and the

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challenge to clear their as well as Lola's honor by means of duel. The fight takes place off-stage (as the classic theatre tradition prescribes for situations of violence) and the play concludes with a rapid choral *scena* "prognosticating" and "announcing" the cathartic end of the "passion," in an atmosphere pregnant with religious agony:

LA ZIA FILOMENA (avvicinandosi) O Gesummaria! Gesummaria!
LA GNA'NUNZIA Ma dov'è andato ora mio figlio?
COMARE CAMILLA (accostandosi all'orrecchio di suo marito) O ch'è stato?
LO ZIO BRASI (piano) Non hai visto, sciocca, quando gli ha morsicato l'orecchio? Vuol dire, o io ammazzo voi, o voi ammazzate me.
COMARE CAMILLA O Maria Santissima del pericolo!
LA GNA'NUNZIA (sempre di più in più smarrita) Ma dov'è andato mio figlio Turiddu? Ma che vuol dire tutto questo?
LA GNA'LOLA Vuol dire che facciamo la mala Pasqua, gna' Nunzia! E il vino che abbiamo bevuto insieme ci andrà tutto in veleno!
PIPUZZA (accorre dal fondo, gridando) Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu! Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!
Tutti corrono verso il fondo, vociando; la gna' Nunzia colle mani nei capelli, fuori di sè. Due carabinieri attraversano correndo la scena. Cala la tela.[39]

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[39] *"LA ZIA FILOMENA (approaching) Oh Jesus Christ and Holy Mary! Jesus Christ and Holy Mary!/LA GNA'NUNZIA But where has my son gone now?/COMARE CAMILLA (going close to her husband's ear) What's all this?/LO ZIO BRASI (with low voice) Didn't you notice, silly woman, when he bit into his ear? It means, I kill you or you kill me./COMARE CAMILLA O Saint Mary-of-the-perils!/LA GNA' NUNZIA (always increasingly overcome) Where has my son Turiddu gone? What's this all about?/LA GNA' LOLA Our Easter is bad, that's what it means gna' Nunzia! And the wine we have been drinking together, to poison it will all turn!/PIPUZZA (running up from the rear, screaming) They've killed compare Turiddu! They've killed compare Turiddu! All run towards the rear, talking and shouting; la gna'Nunzia with her hands in her hair, is beside herself. Two policemen run across the stage. The curtain falls." I cite from the text edited by Siro Ferrone, Il teatro italiano, op. cit., 143.*

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Experimenting with the function of the milieu (social-cultural) within the public and the private sphere of life as well as in the mentality and psychology of the individual, irrespective of his or her financial status, his or her social standing, was probably Verga's most expedient initiative for the dramaturgy of *verismo*. As both the exposé of the social offence and the *"dramma intimo"* of Cavalleria transpire *"all'aperto,"* in the open air and at the center of the community, the milieu featured as omnipresent and omnipotent, prescribing the ethical mien of this introverted cosmos and the intensity with which it abides by its rigid code of morality. The milieu is not only the forger of the people's identity, it is also an extenuation of their self-centered universe, a constituent of the "social chorus." With the intimate bourgeois salon and its standards of respectability being replaced by the "village" and its policy of *"onore,"* Verga renders the *"piazzetta del villagio,"* the public square, as a figurative domain defining the outcome in the drama of Santuzza and Turiddu. Verga's secondary text setting up this domain photographs, in fact, the topography of a typical morality play with the realm of human life encompassed by the "mansions" of the powers regulating human action, the State and God:

> La piazzetta del villagio, irregolare. In fondo, a sinistra, il viale alberato che conduce alla chiesuola, e il muro di un orto che chiude la piazzetta...Al primo piano, a destra, la bettola della gna' Nunzia, colla frasca appesa all'uscio... All'altra cantonata la caserma dei carabinieri, a due piani, collo stema sul

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portoncino...[40]

While the State, for all its pompous presence, is a peripheral monitor of public life and a nonessential arbitrator in matters private and familial--the *carabinieri* are muted walk-ons, sympathetic figures outside the community[41]--God and the church (paganistically venerated) define the mentality, the behaviour and the psychology of the *popolo*, informing their moral judgement, their speech and their social logic. The world of Santuzza and its culture is theocratic: Fatalism, a metaphysical extension of divinity as superior justice, enters their interpretation of life as theodicy, especially when the individual's moral transgression has violated the ethics protecting the insitution of family and marriage. The coincidence of the social tragedy with the Passion rites of Easter, aside from its allegoric function, underscores this

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[40] *An irregular village square. On the left at back, a tree-lined lane leading to the small church, and the wall of an orchard marking the boundary of the square... In the foreground, the tavern of gna' Nunzia...On the other side of the square the two-story police station, with the crown insignia over the entrance door...* Cavalleria rusticana, *ibid., 125. Emphasis mine.*

[41] *Cf. COMPAR ALFIO Mia moglie sa che la berretta la porto a modo mio (battendo sulla tasca del petto); e qui ci porto il giudizio per mia moglie, e per gli altri anche (due carabinieri escono dalla caserma e si allontanano pel viale della chiesa). I miei interessi me li guardo io, da me, senza bisogno di quelli del pennacchio. E in paese tutti lo sano, grazie a Dio! (suona la messa una seconda volta). [My wife knows that I wear my cap in my own way {ie. I know how to deal with my life} (he strikes himself on his breast pocket hiding his knife}); and here I carry my judgment for my wife and all the others (two policemen with their plumed caps on come out of the station and walk away by the church lane). My own interests, I know how to take care of them myself, without assistance from our friends with the feathers! And in the village, everybody knows that, thanks be to God! (The church bell tolls a second time).] Ibid., Scene I, 128.*

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theocracy as a pervasive cultural referent and conveys the "primitive" *realtà* of this Sicilian polity as a "political" problem, the resistance of these people toward accepting a secular outlook of *italianità*, toward explaining their lives in terms of an ethics imposed by the state and not ordained by the "nature of things."[42] Religion then as a milieu defines the stasis of society in a moment outside the time of modernity and dictates a manner of life defying explanation according to conventional, less "chivalrous," standards of socialization. In interpreting Verga's intentions with the meticulous theatricalization of this milieu according to the sociological tenets of *verismo*, Ferrone appraises it in terms of semiotics, and construes it as the key for the explication of Cavalleria as a socio-psychological drama:

> *Dalla religione rituale, dai "miti" della storia sacra [questi contadini] ricavano un linguaggio (applicato per ogni argomento con trasposizioni e metafore) che permette di operare una chiara distinzione tra positivo e negativo, tra i rispettosi della tradizione e i colpevoli che la ifrangono. Tutto è visto in chiave di religiosità poichè tale è l'ottica di una società "primitiva" e contadina [...] Il rinvio religioso non è comunque inteso da Verga in senso sacrale o mistico, ma ricondotto al metro spirituale dei contadini, come strumento espressivo laico, anche se venato di superstizione. Si toglie ogni valore assoluto allo schema ideologico della storia sacra, che è utilizzata soggetivamente secondo i bisogni relativi ad ogni personaggio.[Nei momenti decisivi del dramma, la stretta identificazione del giudizio passionale con le categorie sacrali non avviene per proclamare la superiore validità di quest'ultime sugli eventi umani, ma è un tentativo del personaggio di avvalorare con un appiglio al rito, alla "legge," il proprio grido disperato le cui conseguenze non possono che essere*

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[42] *Cf. Barsotti, Verga drammaturgo, op. cit., 62.*

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umane e materiali.[43]

Verga completed the theatrical adaptation of his famous short story within two days. This did not imply, however, that the dramatization process was haphazard or that the writer was only eager to capitalize on the fame of the story, inconsiderate of the problems that its transfer from one medium to the other would entail.[44] Neither Verga nor the

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[43] *"From the rituals of religion, from the "myths" of the sacred history, these peasants derive a language (applicable in every argument with transpositions and metaphors), which amply operates a clear distinction between positive and negative, between those who honor the tradition and the sinners who transgress it. Everything is seen from a religious perspective, since such is the perspective of a "primitive" and agrarian society [...] Therefore the religious context is not intended by Verga in a sacral or mystic sense, but it is scaled down to the spiritual ken of the peasants, as an instrument of popular expression, despite its being imbued with superstition. The ideological context of the sacred history is deprived of all absolute significance, since this history is used subjectively, according to the respective needs of each character. In the decisive moments of the drama, the straightforard identification of the Passion-informed judgement with the sacral categories does not occur in order to proclaim the superiority of the rites over human events, but it is an attempt on the part of the character to valorize with its appeal to the rite, to the "law," its [the character's] own desperation, whose consequences can only be human and physical. Ferrone, ibid., 144ff. For an example, cf. the final scene cited above.*

[44] *Cavalleria Rusticana as a short story was first published in the periodical Fanfula of Rome (14 March 1880) and was included in the collection Vita dei campi, published in the same year in Milan. The play version was first published in another famous literary journal of Rome La cronaca bizantina (1 February 1884) with a dedication to Giuseppe Giacosa. As I have stated earlier most of the Italian criticism written on the play is concerned with its "difference" (inferiority) from the short story, but it is, I think, interesting to point out the major differences between the two forms of Cavalleria Rusticana: The protagonist in the play is Santuzza, replacing Turiddu whose perspective informed the narration of the story. In the play overt references to the Sicilian social conflicts have been eliminated, while the short story derives its power from this "realistic" description of the social situation. In the story Lola had left Turiddu because of his indigence and Santuzza was not the poor victim of Turiddu's caprice, but the daughter of a well-off local family. On the contrary, the play's Turiddu is not destitute but operates with his mother a wine tavern. The story includes a very detailed description of the duel which in the play is only "announced" and reported. The chorus of popolo was invented exclusively for*

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play's first readers were manifestly concerned with the liberties taken with regard to the content of the story and the shift of focus from one character to another because evidently they were all concerned with the newness of the form and the potential of the drama to provide a new model of realistic dramaturgy. What perplexed them as a novelty was, in fact, the "simplicity" of the story, the conciseness of the situation, the linearity of its "drama" and its inherent *sicilianità*," the "theatrical" and sensational use of this culture in the play,[45] namely, the culture that Verga had felt he had a mission to promulgate.[46] Certainly, as several critics have maintained, Zola's naturalistic catechism had provided Verga with a theoretical basis for his experiment to "affirm the [new] genre" in the theatre and insist on the

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the play and the allusions to the politics of the time, very conspicuous in the story, are rather elusive in the drama. Lola is more important in the story than in the play and Turiddu's mother does not appear in the story at all, but only in a brief reference to Turiddu's economic status. Thus while in the story we have Turiddu's drama explained mostly in socio-economic terms, in the play Santuzza's drama is emphatically psychological.

[45] *Cf. Capuana's letter to Verga after his first reading of the adaption: "Uno che abbia la mano fatta a tutte le malizie della scena non avrebbe saputo adattare meglio di quello che tu hai fatto la tua novella al teatro. C' è tutto: l'ambiente, la rapidità dell'azione, l'effetto." [Even a writer well imured to the plights of the stage would not have managed better than you did in the way you adapted your story for the theatre. It has everything: the milieu, the rapidity of action, the effect." Cited in Oliva, ibid., xxxix.*

[46] *Verga always thought that this mission would remain incomplete if this culture were kept away from the theatre. This fascination with sicilianità had remained with Verga since his early youth. As de Roberto reveals, the "action" of Cavalleria Rusticana had stayed in Verga's mind since his early childhood, when conflicts of honor, such as Turiddu's and Alfio's, had been part of his immediate social experience, fascinating him with their peculiar notion of "chivalry." Ibid., 181-4.*

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naturalistic and hence veristic illusion of reality. Yet Verga's true motive was rather the demonstration of an "authentic" (that is, *vera*) *italianità*.[47] This demonstration would introduce the *borghesia*--the new social apparatus of the nation--to a "native" and "atemporal" socio-cultural situation which maintained the kind of ethical system and prized the kind of moral conduct that the borghesia itself liked to claim as its own "unprecedented" cultural accomplishment. It was not that Cavalleria bogusly revealed a rustic society imitating the manners and the morality of a culturally self-important *borghesia*. On the contrary, its success and the impression it made on the national psyche was due to the revelation of the genuine national truth: it was the *borghesia* that "impulsively" emulated the social manner of the forgotten

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[47] *In an article titled "Sicilia verista e Sicilia vera," which the Neapolitan critic Eduardo Boutet published in 1894 in the Roman journal Don Chisciote, Verga's pursuit of authenticity was polemically contested. Although his article had the purpose to assess his contemporary Sicilian literature, Boutet paid special attention to Verga's work, accusing him of a folkloric, therefore non substantive representation of the social situation prevalent in the region. He found the various versions of Cavalleria "di maniera" (mannered), apolitical and "arcadian," therefore exploitative and irrelevant to the times. His arguments created a literary controversy as Capuana undertook the task to defend Verga and Verismo in the same journal. His own two basic arguments were first that Boutet judged Verga's play not on its own merits, but on the operatic version of Mascagni and second that his opinion were heavily politicized--the article was written during the bloody upheavals of the Fasci siciliani--and corresponded to the immediate social reality and not to the social situation in "normality." If Verga had politicized his drama, he appeared to argue, then objectivity, essential to the esthetic and the problematica of verismo, would have been lost. Boutet's article, which influenced to a large extent the critical reception of Verga's theatre, and Capuana's response are now found in Luigi Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, op. cit., 117-25. On the controversy cf. G. Mazzacurati, Forma e ideologia (Napoli, 1974), 176-216. For a critical overview of Verga's theatre along the arguments of Boutet, cf. Guido Nicastro, Teatro e società in Sicilia (Bulzoni: Roma, n.d.), 37-54.*

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popolo, it was that *italianità* which, irrespective of the disparate milieu (north-south) and moment (modernity vs. stasis), had certified the cultural unity of the race. It might have been that the sensational documentation of the Sicilian *realtà* and the "exotic" beauty of the picture enticed the audience as much as Santuzza's "recognizable" psychological dilemmas. But it is equally true that in the passions and the convictions of Verga's *siciliani*, the *borghese* could discover the passions and the convictions of his caste.[48] With Cavalleria Verga achieved *verismo*'s first accomplishment: the creation of a theatre encouraging the anagnorisis of *verità*, be it national or *intima;* and the exposure of the crisis that the conciliation with this *verità* compelled.

The success of Cavalleria misled Verga into believing that the time was ripe for "objective" drama and that his experiment with the representation of life in situations capturing a particular social experience was not a "novelty" that would keep the audiences away. Indeed, he felt that the felicitous reception of his first "*scene popolare*" had proved

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[48] *For a different view, cf. Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga, ibid., 110ff who characteristically claims that "Verga prendeva in esame un mondo sociale rinchiuso in se stesso, senza velleità anatagonistiche nei confronti delle altre classi, e quindi accettabile per la borghesia, che preferiva vedere le classi inferiori rappresentate dal contadino siciliano piuttosto che dall'operaio del nord. [Verga explored an introverted social world, without vain yet threatening aspirations in its confrontation with the other classes, and therefore acceptable by the bourgeoisie which prefered to see the lower classes represented by the Sicilian peasant than by the worker of the North.] See also Bozzetti, ibid., 33.*

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the maturity of the audience for more challenging revelations of *realtà* and that it had also "authorized" the continuation of his reforms. Rather than capitalizing on the popularity of *sicilianità*, he had decided that his new play should inquire into a vastly dissimilar milieu and that as an installment in his cyclical chronicle of the modern *vinti* it should connect more tightly with the more immediate environment of the *borghesia*. For Verga the continuation of the reform was a duty that he undertook with some trepidations. In a letter from Milan to Salvatore Paola (17 January 1885), the playwright was candid about the artistic challenges facing him in the immediate future:

> *Ora mi sento grave sulle spalle il fardello del poco che ho fatto e del molto che s'aspettano, gravissimo il compito che mi sono imposto, e ardua la meta e forse anche presuntuoso l'ardire pella riforma che vagheggio. Sento il molto che ci è da fare ancora, e non da me solo, ma da tutti quanti, al giorno d'oggi, pel romanzo e pel dramma, e nello stesso tempo mi sento vecchio e sfinito. Credimi che in questi momenti ce ne vuole del coraggio per andare innanzi, ed è naturale il rimpianto degli ozii tranquilli e dell'oscurità senza tentazioni audacissime. Ma dall'altro canto non saprei più vivere adesso senza questa febbre e questa tortura, e una volta messo il piede su questa via bisogna andare avanti finchè non ci si rompe il collo...Io sto scrivendo un drammetino in due atti che mi sembra di qualche effetto; e calcolatamente ho voluto che non sia d'argomento siciliano.*[49]

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[49] *Now I feel heavy on my shoulders the burden of the little I've done and the great deal that is expected of me, the obligation I have undertaken is most vexatious and the course is arduous. Perhaps even the fact that I venture the reform I desire is presumptuous. I now feel how much there is still to be done, not only by me, but by all like me, for the novel and the drama, and at the same time I feel old and drained. Believe me in moments like these the courage to go ahead is crucial, and it is natural to feel nostalgic for the tranquil idleness and the trivialities without audacious temptations. On the other hand, I would not be able to live now without this fever and this torture. Once you begin this course, you should go ahead as long as you don't break your neck... I am writing a little drama in two acts which seems to me quite effective; and I deliberately*

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The "drammetino" that Verga alluded to was In portineria (At the Porter's Lodge), a *"dramma intimo"* conceived as a model for the new drama of *semplicità*, what Gianni Oliva has successfully defined as the dramaturgy that is the based on the "effect of the non-effect," *"l'effetto del non effetto."*[50] The play was a great departure from the grand passions of Cavalleria and the escapist melodramas of the teatro borghese and with it the playwright sought to "transcribe" rather in the manner of a perceptive journalist the dull rhythms and the sights of the metropolitan *piccola-borghesia*, the repetitive, lackluster life of the dim apartment buildings; an undramatic and uneventful life, yet unperceptively dispiriting and tragic. In fact so successful was the rendition of the milieu and its "vanquished" cosmos that the play, against all expectations, failed ludicrously and did not survive its opening night.[51] Raffaello Barbiera

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wanted that it have not a Sicilian plot. Letter cited in Verga, De Roberto, Capuana. Catalogo della mostra di Catania (Catania: Giannotta, 1955), 140.

[50] *In portineria opened on 16 May 1885 at the Manzoni theatre of Milan, performed by the Compania Nazionale of Enrico Reinach and Olga Lugo. On 1 December 1886 the play was produced by the company of Cesare Rossi at the Teatro Valle of Rome with Duse and Andò in the two principal roles. Although Verga was certain that only Duse could do justice to the part, this production did not have a better fortune than the original. The play was based on the short story Il canarino del n. 15 (The canary of no. 15), originally published in Domenica letteraria and then included in the collection Per le vie.*

[51] *Cf. Felice Cameroni, "Rassegna drammatica," Il Sole (17 May 1885): "Verga si è illuso che la società colta milanese fosse ormai sazia di volature retoriche, di "panzane" giudiziarie, di drammi ad effetto, ecc. Ha creduto possibile la riduzione di scene popolari tutta semplicità e naturalezza. Nessuno*

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of L'illustrazione italiana found that the realistic plot lacked the "elements" necessary for a "theatrical production," Felice Cameroni of Il Sole found the failure symptomatic of the audience's immaturity to grasp a theatre moving away from the *"mandolinate liriche ed i drammi a intreccio;*[52]"and Torelli-Treves of Corriere della sera reported the restlessness of the audiences after the first scenes, the murmurs the jeerings, the "basta." "The curtain fell amidst a melee of disapprovals.[53] Verga disheartened by the failure, disgusted with the audiences and exasperated by the ineptitude of the current actors to "feel" the new drama, could not reconcile himself with the idea that his experiment was irrelevant to the times, devoid of fresh ideas, worthy of such an unconditional rejection. In his letters written to Luigi Capuana a month or two after the closing of the play in Milan, the author was adamant about the stylistic and thematic importance of the play. His justifications of the play's originality betray his concern for a dramatic esthetic more

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di quei soliti artifici con tanto di barba che fanno restare l'orbetto colla bocca aperta in attesa dello scioglimento imprevisto." [Verga deceived himself by believing that the cultured Milanese society was already satiated with high-flown rhetoric, moralistic fairy tales, sensational dramas, etc. He believed possible the dramatization of his "scene popolari" with simplicity and naturalness. There was none of these customary and most boring tricks which make the little gathering wait with open mouth the surprising end.] Cited in Ferrone, ibid., 167. For the "shock effect" of the play's naturalistic mise-en-scène, see Salvatore Barzilai, Palcoscenico e platea (Milano: Garzanti, 1940), 89-93.

[52] *"Sentimental lyricism and plays of intrigue."*

[53] *See Raya, ibid., 205; Ferrone, 182-3.*

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akin to *intimismo* and the theatre of Bracco than to the naturalistic precepts of *verismo*:

> *In portineria è venuta così perchè così l'ho voluta. E mi pare che se ha ragione d'essere lo deve in quella forma e in quella misura o non essere affatto. Ho voluto che il dramma fosse intimo rigorosamente, tutto a sfumature d'interpretazione, come succede realmente nella vita; ed era, in questo senso, un altro passo nella ricerca del vero... Ho voluto appunto il poco rilievo delle passioni, e la semplicità del disegno, non tanto per far contrasto al quadro così diverso di Cavalleria Rusticana, quanto per rendere schiettamente e sinceramente il diverso ambiente che mi ero proposto di colorire...Il quadro cambiava, anche nella tecnica, direi, della forma, ma l'intendimento era il medesimo proporsi di ritrarre un'altra faccia della vita popolare, fare per la gente minuta della città quello che avevo fatto per i contadini siciliani."*[54]

From the standard *problematica* of *dramma borghese* Verga retrieved its most abused theme, the love triangle, but rather than availing himself of its melodramatic potential, he transformed it into a drama of conflict between the *verità* of the tacit erotic passion and the *realtà* of imminent physical and emotional demise. The drama of the *dramma* is the unreciprocal love of Màlia, a dying young woman, for Carlini, a compassionate young subordinate at a printing plant, who is however in love with Gilda, Màlia's older sister, an extrovert

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[54] *"In portineria materialized just as I wanted it. And I think that if there is some reason for it to exist, this is due to that form and that proportion, otherwise there was absolutely no reason for it to be. I wanted the drama to be rigorously intimate, resisting interpretation as it happens in life; and it was, in this sense, another step in the research for the truth... I went exactly for the understatement of passions, and the simplicity of the design, not so much in order to contrast it with the different scope of Cavalleria Rusticana, as to render simply and sincerely the diverse milieu that I had undertaken to color. The scope changed even with respect to the technique, I would say, of form, but the intention was the same objective—to portray another facet of common life, to do for the "little people" of the city what I had done for the Sicilian peasants." Verga De Roberto Capuana, ibid., 134-5.*

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and "compromisingly" flirtatious seamstress, anxious to rise above her status and less ready to comply with the fate of her social peers. The dying woman, aware of the impossibility of her love for Carlini, keeps her passion undisclosed, more worried about people feeling pity for her than about her physical disability. When Gilda repudiates Carlini's affection, Màlia feels more intensely the need of love, but Carlini's response leaves her disillusioned and more despondent than before. When at the end Carlini admits once again his infatuation with Gilda--who in the meantime has been thrown out of the house by her father for compromising her name and his reputation--Màlia breaks down. Resigned to her fate of "lovelessness," her will for life is completely spent. Dying, she has only the power to whisper *"Basta, basta, per carità."*[55]

Màlia's *realtà* might be the all too few square meters of the porter's lodge, but her loneliness, her reclusiveness is not a personal choice or a condition determined by her physical debility and spiritual lassitude. It is rather a *realtà* inflicted upon her by her social milieu, the pitying neighbors, the commiserating parents, the unemotional sister, her "sympathetic" love interest. In the short story the figurative equation of Màlia with a "canary," a creature full

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[55] *"Enough, enough, for mercy..." I cite from Oliva's edition, ibid., 275. In the story version, Màlia's situation was more pathetic, because she was not a victim of tuberculosis, but a crippled rachitic.*

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of life but with no "free life," deprived of access to the world, placed the emphasis on the state of "imprisonment," the state in which you are conditioned to believe you are alive only because you live and breathe. On the contrary, the play shifts the emphasis to the "incarcerating" milieu, a society with limited perspectives, short-term aspirations and astringent social values, an underclass reconciled with the idea that it is perfectly all right to be alive without "living." Verga's play then becomes a study of social oppression and the *"dramma intimo"* of Màlia is not her unreciprocated love for a lackluster man but her "conflict" with "facts" that inhibit her humanity and enervate her volition to live. Her death is not the typical final effect of sickness but an act of emancipation, a choice of gaining autonomy, of asserting dignity and *verità*. In Cavalleria the "choral" social milieu with its ritualized ethical traditions circumscribed the focal adulterous situation prescribing the manner and the means of moral retribution and social cleansing, but this milieu is defined as a "culture" that the individuals are de facto obliged to dignify and implement as a "life style," and where any trespass of theirs cannot be condoned. In Portineria, on the contrary, the milieu does not embody a culture but it exists as an extraneous *realtà*, a fact "irrelevant" and yet deleterious to the individual's psyche. Although nobody in the play is self-effacingly concerned with Màlia as a person with passions and hopes (and not as an

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invalid), even when they involve themselves in her "problem," their interest does not extend beyond the search of its solution through marriage, phony spiritualism and religion. Rather effectively, Verga "implies" Màlia's emotional frustrations through her reaction, or more accurate non-reaction, to those superficial efforts to rehabilitate her as an emotional invalid, as if she herself were unaware of her predicament or as if she had consented to their support. The great drama of In portineria is that the world "thinks" and acts on behalf of her but in spite of her, and this "irrelevance" is what makes her finally chose the dignity of non-existence over the compromises of unsolicited "compassion:"

> *GIUSEPPINA [Màlia's mother]: Ecco la medicina... Non la vuoi più adesso?*
> *MALIA (sempre più abbattuta): Non so... Sollevami il capo, mamma...*
> *CARLINI (affettandosi ad aiutarla): Ecco, ecco!*
> *MALIA (respingendolo colle mani tremanti): No!...Lei, no!...*
> *GIUSEPPINA: Perchè poveretto? è così buono!*
> *Màlia scuote il capo dolorasemente, e lo china sul petto, mentre delle lagrime le scendono più per le guance. [...]*
> *GIUSEPPINA:...Vuoi riposare un momento ora?*
> *Màlia fa cenno di sì, chiudendo gli occhi.*
> *GILDA: Povera Màlia!... Signore Iddio!...*
> *CARLINI: Lei non ha visto niente! Oggi poi è stata una giornataccia!...E anche la sua visita!... Che vuole? E' naturale... Mi sono sentito rimescolare io pure, appena l'ho vista entrare...*
> *GILDA: Oh... Non merito tanto...*
> *CARLINI: Che vuol farci, è così...Penso a quei bei tempi che si era tutti qui, felici e contenti... Lei non se ne rammenta neppure forse...*
> *GILDA: Oh!... a che giova ormai?...*
> *CARLINI: Ecco! Non vuol nemmeno sentirne parlare!...*
> *MA'LIA: Basta, basta, per carità!...*
> *GILDA: Basta, so Carlini!...Vede, quella poveretta!...*
> *Volgendosi alla Màlia che si scompone sempre più in viso, ed è rimasta immobile col capo chino sul petto.*
> *Ïàlia! Ïàlia!*

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Gridando
Ah, mamma!...la Màlia! [...] (Act II, sc. 10)[56]

The tragic event of Màlia's death does not communicate Verga's pessimism for the "defeated." Her death is a free person's triumph over deception, indignity and bondage to a "vanquished" cosmos already "expecting" her death, a cosmos at peace with its miseries and its limitations, and strengthened by the sentimental nostalgia for a happy time that never was. Màlia has come into terms with their "smallness" as much as they have come to terms with her "death." Her *"basta"* is not a cry of resignation but of gratifying liberation: the victory of her *verità* over their *realtà*.

The experiment with the "unspoken" and intangible aspects of *realtà* was for Verga an exhilarating artistic experience, regardless of whether or not he was conscious of his *"intimismo."* Despite the failure of the play or the critical reservations about the theatricality of "intimate" *realtà*,

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[56] *"GIUSEPPINA: Here is the medicine... Don't you want it anymore?/MALIA (always frailer): I don't know... Raise my head, mother.../CARLINI (eager to help her): Here, here! MALIA (pushing him away with trembling hands): Not you, No!.../GIUSEPPINA: Why? He is so good, poor thing!/MALIA shakes her head as if in pain, and bends it toward her chest, while tears run down her cheeks. [...]/GILDA: Poor Màlia!... My God!.../CARLINI: And you haven't seen anything! Really today it was quite horrible!... And even your visit!... What can be done? It is natural. Even I felt agitated as as soon as I saw you coming.../GILDA: Oh, I don't deserve this.../CARLINI: Whatever we may do, nothing will change...I think of the good times when we were all here, happy and content...Perhaps you don't even recall...GILDA: Oh!.. what is the point of all this now?/CARLINI: I see! You don't even want me to speak about this!.../MALIA: That's enough, that's enough, Mercy!.../GILDA: That's enough Mr. Carlini! Can't you see, that poor girl!... (Turning her eyes to Màlia whose face becomes always more pallid. She rests motionless with her head leaning to her chest.) Màlia! Màlia! (Screaming) Oh, mother!... Màlia!" Oliva, ibid., 274-5.*

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both Giacosa and Rovetta were quick in continuing this experiment in their own work. Their proto-*intimismo* was not a revision of *verismo*, but a complement to *verismo's problematica*. But in the summer of 1885 Verga was still too sensitive both about the arrestation of the experiment and the lack of an appreciative audience, an audience willing to empathize with and not laugh at the ugliness of *realtà*:

> *[...la figura sbiadita e semplice della mia povera Màlia,* he wrote to Capuana, *...parvemi che dovesse communicare ad altri la condizione malinconica della sua natura timida e dolente, e che l'ambiente tutto di quella stanza dove si senta il morto, dovesse avere per tutti quelli che pure hanno assistito ai tristi e semplici spettacoli di simili scene l'efficacia drammatica del colpo di coltello e del morso all'orrechio. Invece hanno riso a quella informe che ricorda colla madre le quotidiane abitudini domestiche come per attaccarsi alla vita, e sogna la festa dei campi, il San Giorgio cogli occhi offuscati dalla morte. Ma non ne parliamo più.'*[57]

The mediocre success of Duse's interpretation of the part solidified Verga's belief that the theatre as a performing art was beneath his own artistic program as a playwright and

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[57] *"I thought that the languishing and plain figure of my poor Màlia ... could communicate to the others the melancholic condition of her timid and doleful nature and that the whole atmosphere of that room where you can feel death could have on all those who have experienced sad and simple incidents in similar situations a dramatic impact similar to that of knife stabing or ear biting. Instead, they laughed at that ordinary woman who recalls with her mother the daily domestic habits in her effort to hold on to life, and dreams of the fair in the fields and St. George with eyes dimmed by death. But enough of this matter..." Letter cited in Oliva, ibid., xliv-xlv.*

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therefore a form that could not accommodate the *problematica* of *realtà*. After 1885 his veristic reform focused primarily on the narrative, as nothing materialized complete out of his dramaturgical experiments with the social appearances of the *borghesia*.

Until very recently the genesis of La lupa (The She-wolf, 1896) as a play was a minor yet intriguing philological problem for Verga's scholars. The prevalent assumption among Italian critics was that the dramatization of the short story included in the collection Vita dei campi materialized not out of Verga's particular interest in the story, but rather out of the need to capitalize on the revived fame of Cavalleria rusticana after the tremendous and for Verga rather controversial success of Mascagni's opera.[58] Giulio Ricordi, one of the most famous Italian music publishers, envious of Mascagni's commercial triomph, asked Verga to adapt La lupa as a libretto and arranged for Giacomo Puccini, already a quite reputable composer, to furnish the music for the new opera "*a soggetto siciliano.*" For that collaboration Verga between 1891

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[58] *Cavalleria Rusticana as an opera version had a libretto that followed very closely Verga's play even in terms of language and dramaturgical technique. The librettists Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci were actually proud of their "fidelity" to the original source, but neither Verga nor the critics shared their opinions. The international commercial success of the opera did not bring Verga any royalties and the playwright got involved in a long litigation process with the composer, the librettists and Sanzoni, the music publisher of the opera. At the end Verga won and his compensation of royalties past was very substantial. But the process, as he reveals in the letters, was painful and emotionally taxing. See Raya, ibid., especially the chapter "1890-1" and Jone Gaillard, ibid., especially, 187ff.*

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and 1896 prepared two prose versions of the libretto which then he versified with the assistance and in some cases collaboration of his friend De Roberto. What with Puccini's immersion in the preparation of La Bohéme and Tosca and what with his rather ambivalent feelings about his own appropriateness as a composer of an opera on a "Siciliano" theme he "could not feel," his collaboration with Verga fell through. The libretto had to wait until 1932 when an obscure composer, Pierantonio Tasca, set it (without success) to music.[59] Verga kept reworking the prose version while his collaboration with Puccini was presumably still on and it is this version that eventually became the *"Scene drammatiche in due atti"* that premiered at the Teatro Gerbino of Turin on 27 January 1896.[60] Be all this as it may, this "official" account presents only part of La lupa's pre-history. In fact, gna Pina's erotic passion had intrigued Verga the playwright long before Ricordi's overtures for an opera collaboration. Existing documents corroborate the fact that La lupa is not

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[59] *For a well documented account of the aborted collaboration Verga-Puccini see Barbina, ibid., 152-6 and Mosco Carner, Puccini: A Critical Biography (London, 1974)???. Puccini composed some parts for La lupa, but used them in his score for La Bohéme. The libretto exists in two editions (1919, 1932). The latter edition coincided with the opera's performance.*

[60] *The play was produced by the troupe of Flavio Andò and Claudio Leigheb. The part of gna Pina ("La lupa") was played by Olga Reiter. The part was once again destined for Duse, but at the time her romantic and professional involvement with D'Annunzio had attenuated her interest in verismo drama. The production was warmly received, but the triumph of Cavalleria was not repeated. The play was first published in 1896 along with Cavalleria rusticana and In portineria in a reverse chronological order.*

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the end of *verismo's* tradition nor the last effort of Verga to reform Italian theatre along *verismo's* lines. The play does not look back to the *problematica* of Cavalleria, but constitutes, so to speak, an experiment on the experiment, an elaboration on the "method" applied in the 1884 play, a confrontation with the esthetics of his own *verismo* and an inquiry into *verismo* as a potentially poetic dramaturgy.[61]

According to Capuana and Verga, the character of gna Pina was based on a real person, one of those eccentric social outcasts living feared and derided on the margins of agrarian societies.[62] That anonymous woman of the local Sicilian *realtà* became for Verga a symbol of tragic eroticism, an earthy "victim" of overpowering socio-sexual forces, an antagonizer of destiny, a case study of "animalistic passions" informed, instigated and then fatally repressed by the primitivism of the milieu. Gna Pina is a swarthy sensual young widow, whose carnal sexuality and independent social spirit have scandalized the small community of her village, but have also "compromised" the reputation of her daughter Mara as a marriageable woman. Timid and "ashamed" of her mother's deviation from the social norm and its rigid concept of

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[61] *This inquiry in the context of south-western European drama is usually attributed to Federico Garcia Lorca. A comparative examination of the two dramaturgies (Verga-Lorca), which I find analogous in more ways than one, does not exist among Verga's critical studies. As for Spain, the obscurity of Verga as a playwright has impeded such criticism.*

[62] *Cf. Barsotti, ibid., 101.*

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womanhood--Pina is a religious agnostic, she has no apprehensions about working alone with men in the fields and does not partake in the "duties" of housewives--Mara has evolved into a scared and introvert human being. When Nanni Lasca, a handsome, poor, ambitious and self-conscious young man comes to work in Pina's fields, the she-wolf becomes infatuated with him and rumors about her erotic passion not only scandalize the community, but also precipitate her own social marginalization. Unable to suppress her love for Nanni she forces her daughter to marry him and Mara, despite her opposition to the "immoral" union, acquiesces to her mother's will. The night of the nuptial arrangement with Nanni, Pina becomes his lover. The second act opens several years later on an Easter Sunday. Mara and Nanni have lived happily together and have had children, while Pina, who has given all her possessions to Mara and Nanni, has moved to a hut in the woods in order to silence the rumors and save Mara's *"casa."* Her return on a Good Friday to the house unsettles Mara's happiness and threatens the morality of the community once again. After a violent confrontation with her daughter and son-in-law Pina refuses to go away because the "devil has brought them together for their mutual catastrophe." In a moment of fury, Nanni takes an axe and kills her, "cutting" thus his "bond" with the "devil."

Gna Pina's pathos as another tragic articulation of Sicilian psyche lending itself to dramatization must have been

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on Verga's mind since 1886 and his good friend Capuana must also have been aware of his intent to pursue the theatrical adaptation of the short story. What intimidated Verga, however, was not so much the story's sexual overtones or its sensational end, but rather the question of whether the yet unwritten play would be a more complex experimentation with *verità*, or just an unimaginative recycling of Cavalleria. To Capuana's question about the prospect of a play on La lupa, Verga's response was rather ambivalent, undoubtedly informed by the still recent nasty experience with In portineria: *La lupa la vedo e la sento molto, ma vedo anche che è difficile assai, se non impossibile; e pel momento bisogna rassegnarsi anche a pensare alla question d'argent.*"[63] Notwithstanding the expressed reservations, the important thing remained that La lupa presented Verga with a legitimate case of *verismo problematica* and that future developments both in his art and the naturalistic theatre in general would keep the project among Verga's priorities and would strengthen his resolution to "see" it as a play.

Among these developments was the production of Cavalleria at the Théâtre Libre in 1888 and most importantly the publication, French translation and presentation of Leon

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[63] *"I can see and feel La lupa a lot, but I also see how difficult, if not impossible it is; and for the moment I have also to resign myself to the "question d'argent."" Letter (4 January 1887) cited in Oliva, ibid., xlvii. Despite Verga's financial considerations alluded in the letter, documents prove that at the time he was immersed in the completion of his second novel in the cycle of the "vinti."*

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Tolstoy's The Power of Darkness (1886), one of the masterpieces of Russian naturalism and one of Antoine's major commercial successes. This agrarian drama about greed, lust and incestuous adultery had striking thematic and plot similarities with the story of La lupa and it is pertinent to speculate that Verga knew the play from the French translation prepared for Antoine's production.[64] In a letter to Felice Cameroni, dated 8 April 1890, Verga related his familiarity with the play and this document can hardly be considered as unreliable evidence of Verga's renewed interest in the "difficult problem" of La lupa:

> *Non leggo altro per ora, onde non intorbidarmi e sbigottirmi lo spirito. La puissance des ténebres di Tolstoi la conosco da un pezzo e la trovo una delle più belle, alte e forti concezioni letterarie e teatrali, insisto, come intendo e come deve essere presto o tardi. In Italia nessuno e nessuno dei comici, chiamiamoli così, avrà mai il senso, la coscienza e il coraggio di un'arte siffatta.*[65]

Written to prove the "idiocy of peasant life," Tolstoy's play shared several esthetic and linguistic characteristics with

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[64] *See Ferrone, ibid., 233ff. Ferrone stated that these similarities between La lupa and Tolstoy's drama stirred an European interest in Verga, but I have not been able to corroborate this statement. The short story was written five years before The Power of Darkness but it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish whether Tolstoy was familiar with Italian literature or Verga's story.*

[65] *"For the time being I read nothing more, so that my spirit won't be dazed and confused. I know Tolstoy's [The Power of Darkness] by heart, and I find it one of the most beautiful, most outstanding and most powerful literary or theatrical conceptions, I repeat, as I understand it and as it should be sooner or later. In Italy, absolutely none of the theatre artists, let's call them so, will ever have the sense, the consciousness and the courage of such an art." Letter cited in Maria Borgese, "Lettere inedite di Giovanni Verga," Occidente (January-April 1935), 18.*

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Verga's Sicilian *verismo:* a language imitating the manner and the cadences of peasant idiolect pregnant with proverbs, religious symbolisms and metaphors from the daily experience of the natural world; a forbidding social environment and a cultural milieu steeped in superstition, fatalism and theology; an atmosphere of impending social doom and a pervasive sense of "immorality" as a sign of social and cultural stagnancy. The folkloric elements embedded in the tragic development of the stories not only intensified the central drama taking place, but also contributed to the ritualistic representation of the drama as a fatality forged by some mischievous force of destiny and less by the individual's choice. As Ferrone remarks,

> *il dramma di Tolstoi offriva a Verga il grande esempio di una ulteriore dilatazione tragica degli stessi temi drammatici, le cui motivazioni sono però sempre più sottratte all'ambiente e ricondotte a misteriose tensioni superiori. Le colpe di Nanni e la Lupa paiono non riconducibili alla loro responsabilità, frutto più di un malefico sortilegio che di scelte individuali, così come [the protagonists of Tolstoy's play] sono più vittime che colpevoli... Dallo stesso testo venivano a Verga anche suggestioni utili per la messa a punto di un linguaggio che servisse all'analisi delle radici materialistiche dei sentimenti. L'energia bestiale e istintiva del dialogo poteva essergli utile per un quadro passionale e violento come quello della lupa ...[con le sue] espressioni metaforiche [e] le comparazioni elementari e rozze.*[66]

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[66] *Tolstoy's play offered to Verga a great example of a more modern tragic dilation of the same dramatic themes, whose motivations however are always more detached from the milieu and more attributed to superior mysterious tensions. The sins of Nanni and the She-wolf do not seem accredited to them, effects of an evil spell rather than personal choices, just like the protagonists of Tolstoy's play are victims rather than sinners... From that same text Verga derived useful ideas for the employment of a language that would serve for the analysis of the materialistic roots of the emotions. The animalistic and impulsive energy of [Tolstoy's] language could be useful to him for the passionate and violent milieu of* La lupa*... with his metaphors, [and his] coarse and elemental comparisons.*

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The paradigm thus of Tolstoy became for Verga a sort of evidence that corroborated the artistic validity of his own experiment not only with the *problematica* but also with the stylistics of his veristic reforms.

The structure of La lupa is simple and authentic. The two acts develop episodically as seemingly independent *"scene"*, since their only nexus is the character of gna Pina and not the unity of action or time. Compared to the second act which is focused almost exclusively on the social calamities threatening Nanni's family with gna Pina's return to the site of the "crime" and the "retribution" entailed in her murder, the first act is a plotless kind of social ritual: a concatenation of folkloric epico-lyric episodes--storytelling, jesting, singing, dancing--in which the protagonist is a chorus "compartmentalized" into nine minor characters, the "voice of the community" and the moral judges of gna Pina's sacrilege. The content of the folkloric elements always refers to her, either to her personality or her "situation," now to the unseemliness of her erotic passion, now to her bestial sexuality and now to the enormity of her social abnormality.

Ibid., 235.

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While, for example, the play begins with a peasant woman telling the story of a Circe-like *maga* (sorceress) tempting and then destroying her "Christian" male victims, the obvious psychoerotic connotations of the sobriquet "she-wolf" pervade the dialogue of this first act: it is a name that gna Pina herself has adopted as an "alter ego" but while for the chorus the name alludes to the unhuman personality of the heroine, for the latter it connotes irrationality and vengeance.[67] The dark symbolism of the folkloric activity which to a large extent foreshadows gna Pina's transgression is underscored by a natural environment, partly arcadian and partly gothic --a moonlit hot summer evening--which even though it contributes to the lyricism of the bucolic tableau, also accentuates the eroticism of the "time." This naturalistic synthesis of social cultural and natural elements--Barsotti compares it to the biblical scenes before Isaac's (here Mara's) sacrifice[68]--establishes then a menacing antecedent for the eruption of Pina's *dramma intimo*. This folkloric milieu becomes "irrelevant" after the consummation of Pina's sin and thus the second act, the aftermath of the sin and the core of the play,

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[67] *All the editions of Lupa's text include an annotated list of the dramatis personae, in which Verga describes in detail the appearance and the "character" of each role with definitions based on a vocabulary formulated by words suggesting the world of the animals or a pagan community: For example, for Zia Filomena, the narrator of the "maga" tale, Verga suggests that she speak as an "oracle," or that Malerba be with the face of an ape, or that Nunzio be as thin and dark as a cricket.*

[68] *Cf. Barsotti, 124ff.*

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is imbued with a plethora of religious, apocalyptic and fatalistic, linguistic and non-linguistic, "signs."[69] The structure is more compact and the action more concentrated: The chorus is reduced to a peripheral "character" reacting to the intimate drama and the triangular confrontation between mother, daughter and husband/lover dominates the action until the end.[70]

In La lupa there are actually three interrelated *drammi intimi*: Pina's drama involves her social estrangement, her obsessive eros for Nanni that pushes her to the "sacrifice" of her daughter and the tyranny of her self-awareness as a sinner deprived of redemption; Nanni's dramma is primarily his selling out to Pina's pathos for the improvement of his economic and social position, so that his final murderous act is exactly what he alludes to as the breach of his contract with the devil; finally, Mara's *dramma* is her victimization by her mother and husband, her self-contempt that derives from her awareness that her honor was a commodity in the "deal" between Pina and Nanni, and therefore from the awareness of her social "abnormality." Although the excessive behavior of gna Pina and her overpowering authority over the lives of Nanni and Mara is the cause of their personal, emotional and

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[69] *Ferrone, ibid., 210ff.*

[70] *In the original production scene 8 of act II was deleted for the sake of brevity. This scene, in which Janu, a wise old man, intervenes to interrupt the violent behavior of Nanni, was restored in the published edition of the play.*

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social, predicament, Verga's intention was not to titillate the audience with the "spectacle" of a pathetic adultery crime, but rather to trace the elusive motives of this excess and psychoanalyze these characters within the cultural parameters of their society.[71] The three separate *drammi intimi* sink into a broader human tragedy: the evasion of social *realtà*--asserting one's own rights beyond the "demands" of one's community--and the liberation from one's own *verità* (the evasion of the self). As a symptom but also as a consequence of a person's bondage to unmitigated pathos, adultery compromises the humanity of the three characters not so much because it is a pattern of behavior uncondoned by the culture, but because it has deprived them of spiritual freedom and emotional peace. As Mara solicits moral support from the community she feels she belongs to--the "enemy" of her mother-

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[71] *When the publisher Treves asked Verga to submit a prologue for the first edition of his plays after the presentation of La lupa, the author refused to oblige. In a letter explaining the reasons of his refusal (7 May 1896), he deplored the reception of the play as a "dramma borghese" and among other things he said: "Figurati che proprio intorno a questa Lupa si è fatta la leggenda che essa acconsente al matrimonio della figlia con Nanni per averlo a prezzo di quella concessione. Inutile che le parole e il fatto [emphasis mine] dicano al contrario... Basta il primo così detto critico distratto a mettere in giro la corbelleria. E tutti gli altri a raccoglierla ciecamente, dietro come tante pecore...E chi vuol capire a modo suo anche quello che non è detto, poi, non c'è che fare, neanche con due prefazioni. Ora, un'opera d'arte deve "cantare" da sè. E se la Lupa non canta peggio per lei." [Imagine that even around this Lupa a myth has been created that she consents to Nanni's marriage with her daughter in order to have him as the price for this concession. It is irrelevant that the dialogue and the story argue the opposite...It does not take more than the first imperceptive so-called critic for the nonsense to spread and for all the others to adopt it blindly just like a flock of sheep...And whoever wants to understand in his own way even what is not said, then again, there is nothing to do, not even with two prefaces. Now, a work of art must stand on its own. And if La lupa can't stand on its own, too bad for it.] Cited in Oliva. ibid., 1.*

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-and vindication from God and fate for all the iniquities she has suffered from the sin infesting her married life, her *dramma intimo* begins with her realization that her life is tied to Nanni's honor just as his is tied to her mother's *roba* (property). Although it is not clear whether Mara is aware of the sin committed before her wedding, the suspected *realtà* of this sin shadows her happiness and makes it all harder for her to accept her indebtedness to her mother for "conceding" Nanni to her. Mara cannot rationalize about her familial predicament and her violent emotions erupt whenever she has to confront her inability to explain the mysterious bond linking Nanni with gna Pina. She cannot prove their "sin," nor can she reason about its impact on her own psyche, but she can only feel it: The *realtà* of the transgression is not palpable and the more aware she becomes of her inability to deal with it in physical terms, the more aware she becomes of her enslavement to this *realtà*, for all her efforts to shun it in her life. Mara's unhappiness stems from her conviction that her husband is not spiritually bonded to her as she is to him, that the *verità* of their union is an appearance, a mere *realtà* whose deceptiveness will be tragically exposed once Pina returns to "steal" her "peace." This "peace" connotes an idea of happiness built upon the reconciliation with the illusions of *realtà*, a condition of existence which "requires" the acceptance of *realtà* as *verità*:

MARA (col cuore riboccante) [to Nanni] Voglio dirvelo! Mi avete dato

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> *tante pene! Tanto mi avete fatto penare, senza saperlo voi stesso!.. [...] No, non andare in collera. (Sorridendogli amorevolmente) Vedete che mi confesso io stessa con voi?...Prima ero io che non vi volevo bene... Sapete...m'ero messa una cosa in testa... una brutta cosa!... (Con impeto di tenerezza e le lagrime agli occhi) Ma ora no! Ora siete il padre dei miei figli!...Ora il Signore mi ha fatto la grazia! [...] Per questo mi calpestate soto i piedi? perchè sapete che vi voglio bene?... perchè fate di me tutto quello che volete?...Mi fate morire disperata.... Non vi credo! Non vi credo più! Come volete che vi creda? Vi ho visto con q u e s t i occhi!...la faccia che avevi!...tutti e due...Vi pare che sia cieca? Cosa siete andato a dirgli al confessore?*[72]

When the contradiction between *realtà* and *verità* frustrates her "certainties" (that is, her illusions) and her peace, when the "sin" appears to her eyes not just as a fact but as a subliminal and therefore more threatening "spiritual crime," the pursuit of peace turns to a pursuit of justice (revenge), to the pursuit of her emancipation from the *verità* of the "sin."[73]

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[72] *I quote from Barbina's edition. Act II scenes 1, 5, 7. MARA (extremely emotional) [to Nanni] I want to tell you! You have caused me a lot of pain. You have made me suffer, but you ignored it! [...] Don't get angry (Smiling to him bitterly) Don't you see? I confess everyhting to you! At first, it was me who did not love you... You know... I had an idea in my mind, an ugly idea!... (With impetuous tenderness and tears in the eyes) But not now! Now you are the father of my children!...Now Jesus has done me a favor! [...] So, that's why you walked over me! You knew I loved you? Why do you treat me so badly? I will die of despair... I don't believe you. I don't believe you any more! How could you want me to believe you? I have seen you [both] with my own eyes! How strange your face was!...both of you... Do you think I'm blind? Whad did you go to say to your confessor?*

[73] *When Nanni kills gna Pina, Mara is not on stage. In Act II, scene 8, she alludes to the break up of her "casa" (home) and refers to her son as an "orphan." Mara is figuratively speaking, the house of sin and therefore her "freedom" implies her liberation from the bonds of "sin."*

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Nanni's nemesis after the *"ora tragica"* of the seduction is neither Mara with her apprehensions and her insecurities, nor gna Pina demanding respect and "gratitude," but his own conscience, not because he has repented for his sin --on the contrary, Verga is very clear about his attraction to Pina[74]--but because he understands his entrapment in a social situation compromising his honor as well as his manhood. Nanni had always identified freedom with money (*roba*) and name (*onore*), but the exchange of his *verità* for the materialistic *realtà* has not brought him the prosperity he so much desired. The seduction and his bondage to the property of his wife have compromised his self-respect and his railing after gna Pina's reappearance in his life expresses not so much his will to break with the past and assert his new social rights as husband and father, but on the contrary his unwillingness to face the *verità* of his selling out not only to gna Pina's eros but also to gna Pina's property. His murderous act at the end of the play is not exactly what he purports it to be, an act of liberation, but rather an act of desperation; a desperation informed by his acknowledgement that his attachment to gna Pina is not the cause of her own depravity but the result of his own offense to himself. Gna Pina's murder does not liberate him, nor does it avenge his loss of *onore*. At the end he is the only culprit, the guilt is

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[74]*Act II, scene 8.*

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all his own and rather than liberating himself, he has exonerated his "antagonist," gna Pina. It is he who has given her "freedom" as it is he who has deprived himself of the comforting *realtà*/illusion of being the victim. The crime that ends Verga's play is not then a crime of honor, but a futile crime of evading his torturing *verità*: His never being "free," never having the guts--*Non ti basta l'animo,'* shouts gna Pina at him--to be a man of his own.

> *NANNI:...E quella scommunicata che non posso togliermela d'adosso?...Non vado più neppure alla vigna, per sfuggirla!...*
> *JANU: Che paura hai, se non c'è nulla di male?*
> *NANNI:(borbotando) Che paura ho... che paura ho... (eccitatissimo) Lo sapete anche voi che donna è quella!...come la chiamano!...che donna è!...che vi fa dannar l'anima come vuol lei!...[...] Non posso neanche vendere. E' roba della dote!...(Smaniando) Sono legato stretto, vi dico!...mani e piedi!... Bisogna romperla d'un colpo questa catena...[...]*
> *PINA: Ah se ti bastasse l'animo!...Sei buono soltanto a far impazzire gli altri, tu! Ma a toglierli dalle penne con un colpo solo non ti basta l'animo.*[75]

The cause of suffering for Gna Pina lies in her awareness that her search for freedom from her passions, her social situation, even from herself is futile. While Mara and Nanni realize the futility of their pursuits and their *realtà* always

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[75] *NANNI: ...And that excommunicated woman I cannot get rid of?...I don't even go to the vineyards any more, in order to avoid her!...JANU: Why are you afraid, if there is nothing wrong?/NANNI (grumbling) Why I am afraid...Why I am afraid... (very excited) You too know what kind of woman she is!...how they call her! what sort of woman she is!...who damns your soul as she likes it! [...] I cannot even sell [the property]. It is part of the dowry!... (Erupting) I'm telling you, I am tied! Hands and legs!.. I have to break this chain at once... [...] PINA Ah If only you had guts!... You're good only for driving other people crazy! But you don't have the guts to save them from torture all at once.*

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at the end of their search, gna Pina's tragedy begins exactly from this awareness and involves her hopeless attempt to overstep its limits. Verga has created her as an untamed force of nature, an independent spirit fighting against the restrictions of her independence imposed by society, "fate" and her own natural desires. Although customs and morals cannot subdue the freedom inside her psyche or kill her "passion" for life, her obsession for Nanni has managed to impair her greatest source of power, her confidence in her independent spirit. Nanni is for gna Pina a challenge to her freedom and her desire for him remains always a reminder of her weakness in protecting this freedom. She does not live on illusions of *realtà*. On the contrary, it is her *verità*, this identification with freedom, that compels her to provoke Nanni and thus her own death. Freedom and death are for gna Pina absolutes and as such beyond the grasp of conventional humanity. Her death would mean her rediscovery of this freedom, her deliverance from the social as well as carnal necessities. The more she finds her self unable to get rid of her eros for Nanni, the more this lack of freedom kills in her any desire to live. For her Nanni is obliged to find the courage to "liberate her," because he was the one to withhold her capacity, or rather her freedom to live. It is only fair and "just" that he give her back what she always owned: her spirit. La lupa is then a play about the pursuit of this freedom, tragically proving the futility of this pursuit, its

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"unrealism." Locating the social *realtà* in the *verità* of the psyche, Verga took *verismo* one step closer to symbolism and gna Pina's struggle with the demons of her own psyche is in and by itself a symbolic representation of humanity's destiny to struggle with the impalpable forces that compromise its *verità*.[76]

After La lupa Verga distanced himself from the theatre. What with the discouraging reception of the play, his longer sojourn in Sicily, his alienation from the theatrical centers of Italy, and his extensive but incomplete efforts to continue his grand narrative cycle of the *vinti*, drama was not a priority any more, not even as an experiment. The controversy that emerged between Capuana and Ojetti over the artistic merit of *verismo* and the esthetics of his own drama probably convinced him that his experiment with *realtà* had run its course and that his reforms could not be implemented in a theatre hostage to the star-system and averse to all kinds of experimentation.[77] In fact, during the few last years of the century, Verga saw his literary popularity drop and his *verismo* esthetics be demeaned by the new criticism affiliated

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[76] *Cf. Natale Tedesco, Il cielo di carta, ibid., 41ff.*

[77] *Contrary to what was going on in Europe at the time, Italy never had an art theatre like Antoine's in Paris or Brahm's in Berlin and there are a number of critics who associate the "poor" theatrical tradition in modern Italy with the lack of non-commercial theatres. See Alonge, ibid., 183ff. For Verga's misgivings about the theatre see Ferrone, ibid., 253ff. For the controversy on La lupa and verismo see Tedesco's article "'La Lupa' di Verga tra storia della cultura e dello spettacolo ed esame testuale (La posizione del 'Marzocco' e la polemica Ojetti-Capuana), in Il cielo di carta, ibid., 31ff.*

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with the trends of symbolism, idealism or even socialism, a development that cost Verga his energy and his involvement in things literary. A short-lived revival of interest in his work during the very first years of the new century impelled him to resume work and out of his new activity came two *bozzetti* (one-act sketches) Caccia al lupo (Wolf-hunt) and Caccia alla volpe (Fox-hunt) both presented together in 1901 at the Manzoni theatre of Milan.[78] Caccia al lupo is the tragicomic story of a peasant's trick on his adulterous wife and her lover, when he "traps" them together in his own home. Caccia alla volpe, the less felicitous play of the two, is a similar but comically treated situation set in an aristocratic milieu. A gallant officer organizes a hunt in order to "remove" his antagonist in a love affair, thus staying alone with the lady, but at the end he frustrates his own plans in order to test the fidelity of his lover. These short plays, whose commercial success was very limited, did not continue Verga's experimentation with style and technique, and their *problematica*, the problem of adultery studied in a Sicilian and a bourgeois milieu, was already conventional not only in respect to his own earlier dramaturgy but also to the contemporary *dramma borghese*.

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[78] *La caccia al lupo is based on an obscure short story with the same title published in 1897 in a Catanese journal. La caccia alla volpe is thought to be an original creation, although there is some evidence that this play was also based on a short story never published and now lost. Cf. Natalino Sapegno, Ritratto di Manzoni ed altri saggi (Bari: Laterza, 1961), 272. See also the very interesting book of Paolo Maria Sipala, L'ultimo Verga (Catania: Bonanno, 1969).*

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Dal tuo al mio[78] (Thine and Mine, 1903) was Verga's last and for a time a most controversial play. Rather than illustrating a critical social *realtà* with no effort on his part to broach a modifying model of socialization, he projected an ambiguous vision of *Italianità* with the "rite of passage" from the past to the future, from the old to the new world, demystifying a most disconcerting *verità*: the end of idealism and ideology, the bankruptcy of "onore" and the hegemony of "denaro" as the catalyst of human and social affairs. Begun and completed within a period of prolonged socio-political crisis demarcated by the violent tactics of *transformismo*, the riotous protests of the working classes, the alarming (for the *borghesia)* rise of socialism and the bloody conflicts between regular armies and irridentist *Faschi* in Sicily, the *commedia* was deliberately programmed to document social crisis as a crisis of identity and humanity and not to indict or vindicate a particular political model.[80] With the title implying exactly the transition from one social status to another, the transmutation from a class

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[78] *The play was written in the winter of 1903 and presented for the first time at the Teatro Manzoni of Milan by the company of Oreste Calabresi at the end of November 1903. The production was not an unqualified success and most critics tried to identify the political stance of the author. For this controversy see below. The play remained unpublished during Verga's lifetime, although in 1905 he adapted it to a novel, first serialized in Nuova Antologia and then published by Treves in 1906. The play was first published in 1952 by Mondadori along with the rest of his dramaturgy.*

[80] *Cf. Achille Mango, "Dal tuo al mio" Il ponte 1 (1967_, 131.*

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society to an economics-driven one, the play did not exemplify a class problem--the struggle of classes--but the problem of class, that is, the crisis of class as a social entity defined by common outlook and pursuits, and its annulment as an ideal by the self-interest of the modern individual.[81]

Entwined in the play are two story lines, a *"dramma intimo"* about the love between the daughter of Barone Navarra and Luciano, the radical *capopopolo* of the miners working in his decrepit *zolfara* (the sulphur mine); and a larger social drama involving the decline of the old sicilian class of aristocratic landlords, the ruthless ascendancy of the industrial *borghesia*--the challenger of the old hierarchy--and the threatening revolt of a destitute yet politically immature labor proletariat, the latter more a chess piece in the power struggle between feudalism and industrialism rather than a social force to reckon with. The antagonism of the individuals as representatives of their respective financial rather than social strata frustrates the social standing of the young people involved in the *dramma intimo* in the same way that this socially problematic love affair divulges the bogusness of class doctrines when self-interest is at stake. Baron Navarra whose mining business is on the brink of collapse and flooding and whose underpaid and famished workers can barely subsist tries to save the dowry of his two daughters, Lisa and Nina,

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[81] *For a somewhat different opinion on the issue, cf. Luigi Russo, "Verga, il poeta della povera gente,"* Belfagor *7 (1952), 206ff.*

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and the appearances of prosperity by arranging the marriage of Nina with the son of Rametta, a self-made former worker at Navarra's *zolfara* and now an aggressive business competitor. The first act takes place before Lisa's engagement, when the family of the anxious landlord is expecting Rametta and his son. The agressive parvenu, once aware of the serious problems bedeviling the function of the mine and the finances of Navarra, blocks the engagement. Family problems should not enter in business and so he lends Navarra money to pay off his debts, knowing that the Baron will not be able to return the loan. With circumstances not disproving his expectations, Rametta expropriates Navarra's *zolfara*, relegating him to a "salaried" manager of his former property, practically responsible for the appalling situation of the increasingly restless miners, though it is now Rametta that is unwilling to improve their lot. The baron experiences a second blow when his younger daughter Lisa, in love with Luciano, defies his objections, and after eloping with him, she marries him. And while Rametta tries through manoeuvering, corruption and intimidation to assert once and forever his appropriation of the mine, to augment his profits, and pacify the miners without conceding to their demands for better payments, his efforts are frustrated when the miners, stirred up by Luciano, refuse to work and threaten to take extreme measures. When it becomes apparent that this threat will materialize with burning down the *zolfara*'s premises, the dynamics of the

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situation change drastically, as the "decision" to set their workplace afire was not authorized or anticipated by Luciano, who is now "concerned" about the dowry of his wife. When the workers go on with their plan and riot, Luciano, instinctively acting for his "interests," joins the police forces and with a gun he begins firing at his "brothers" by the side of his former enemy, Navarra. The play does not end with the victory of the "traitors," nor with the prospect of the rioters' vindication. It ends with the shrill sounds of the police forces and with the problem unsettled: The struggle for survival is not, nor will ever be, over.[82]

The world of Dal tuo al mio is the "class-less" world of the unscrupulous or amoral individual, the world of the vanquished by the ideology of *denaro*. It is not that Verga's characters do not defend the ideological patrimony of their class or that they do not profess morality and altruism. But for Verga grandiose declarations of honesty, duty and responsibility are fatuous hypocrisies obscuring the moral vacuousness of modernity or distorting the *realtà* of the *cose*, that "my" survival is more vital than "yours." In a society of economics, Verga deplored, even the "winners" are essentially

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[82]*Guglielminetti reads the intervention of the "forces" as the function of a deu ex machina, "quella di rimettere ordine e justizia tra gli uomini, i quali per cecità ed ostinazione non sono più in grado di reggersi per conto proprio...", (that of restoring order and justice among people, who due to their blindness and obstinacy are not any more in a position to support themselves..." Ibid., 252. See also, Anna Barsotti, "Sul dramma verghiano: 'Dal tuo al mio'," Problemi 71 (Sept-Dec. 1984), 276ff.*

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vinti, because their survival, whether or not they sense it, has destroyed their natural goodness, their individuality. Even as proprietors, they are actually victims of their "property."[83] Even though Verga's equation of engaged ideology with demagogy did not impress audiences as interesting or unsettling, the critics, rather than judging the play on its own merits, sought to "establish" the playwright's own political message.[84] Some found him reactionary and insensitive to the economic plights of the underprivileged, a Sicilian landowning *borghese* scared by the people's demand for equality and therefore a hypocrite of an artist contradicting his previous socially conscious work. Others, on the contrary, were surprised by Verga's socialist/marxist rhetoric, by his endorsing a subversively populist call to insurgency against social order.[85] Although Verga was a man of moderate political convictions opposed to any form of "organized" demonstration of solidarity to the underprivileged masses, the "problem" that ensued about the

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[83] *Verga had dealt with the "paradox" of property in a short story, La roba (Reaches), included in the collection Novelle rusticane.*

[84] *For the history of the play's reception and the controversy that followed see Gino Raya, Vita di Giovanni Verga, ibid., 445ff.*

[85] *The controversy was of a brief duration, but Verga's scholars continued to be intrigued by Verga's "ambiguous" political message. For Verga as a moderate skeptic, cf. Romano Luperini, Pessimismo e verismo in Giovanni Verga (Padua: Kuvabam, 1968), 187. For Verga's "marxist concept" of social drama, see Vittorio Frosini, "Mito e storia nel teatro di Verga," Galleria 15 (Jan.-Apr.1965), 126. For a balanced critique of the issue see Marziano Guglielminetti, "Fra epica e commedia: il drama sociale (Verga, Bracco, Oriani)," Sigma 1/2 (1976), 251-256.*

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politics of his play perplexed him as fatuous and extraneous to its more important message, which was the dehumanizing segregation of society between those who can "afford" progress and those who cannot.

In the preface to the novel that followed the play, Verga did not try to defend his political credo as a citizen, but the fairness of his work as a chronicle of *verità*:

> *Se il teatro e la novella, col descrivere la vita qual'è, compiono una missione umanitaria, io ho fatto la mia parte in pro degli umili e dei diseredati da un pezzo, senza bisogno di predicar l'odio e di negare la patria in nome dell'umanità...I Luciani d'oggi e di domani non li ho inventati io.*"[86]

Indeed, Verga rather than "condemning" or "upholding" a particular social arrangement or a particular system of social ethics, argued for the re-humanization of *Italianità*. Half a century earlier or so, Giacometti had dignified social harmony as the condition warranting the national and social *risorgimento* of Italy, but in 1903 such a position would seem, due to the actual social circumstances, innocuously utopian, and Verga had made a reputation for his "objective" interpretation of the times. True to his reputation, he did not wish Dal tuo al mio to convey an unpragmatic picture of social perfection, much less to convey the social dissolution

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[86] *"If the theatre and the novel, by describing life as is, carry out a humanitarian mission, I have done my share for the sake of the humble and the underprivileged, with no need to preach hate and forsake the country in the name of humanity... It is not I that has invented the Lucianos of today and tomorrow. Cited in Oliva, ibid., lviii.*

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of Italy as an emerging *realtà*.[87] Instead of "legitimizing" any of these options, Verga chose to leave the play "inconclusive," projecting the "survival" of society, but not the manner with which this survival would materialize.

This projection was not based on some "positivist" notion of deterministic materialism, as Luperini, Ferrone or Raya would argue,[88] but on the study of the antecedent socio-economic *verità* that inform the background of the characters who participate in the "struggle," namely Navarra, Luciano and Rametta. It might be that Navarra stands for the reactionary class of Sicilian nobility, but his "noble" status, although not openly disputed, was not congenital to his ancestors, but rather the result of "work," social *arrivismo* and political pragmatism (that is, exploitation of the political situation.) In the stage directions, Verga is very particular about the salon of the Baron with the *"ritratti di antenati alle pareti, tipi fra il contadino e il nobiluccio di provincia, in parrucca e spasino, oppure in toga."*[89] The information is of the utmost importance because it sets Navarra's origins on a par with those of his social antagonists. While waiting for the "engagement" between the son of the latter and the

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[87] *Barsotti, Problemi, ibid., 271-2.*

[88] *Luperini, ibid.; Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga, op. cit., 289; Raya, ibid., 448; Nicastro, ibid., 61-79.*

[89] *"Portraits of the ancestors on the walls, types falling somewhere between the peasant and the minor aristocrat, with wigs and spades, or in toga]. I read from Oliva's edition, ibid., 355.*

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daughter of the former--the union between the classes--the discussion that takes place reveals not only the humble origins of the Navarra family but their failure to hold on to the property they had acquired or to secure the interests of the future generations. Rametta, a man as ambitious as the ancestors of Navarra, coveted the property of his master *"sin da quando vi lavorava a cottino,"* and following their example, has been able *"all giorno d'oggi ...fare quello che vuole. Certamente egli deve tutto al proprio lavoro,...figlio delle sue opere."*[90] Now that his dreams have come true and is able to replace the older dominant forces, he finds himself challenged by none other than a worker applying the same principles he himself had used in order to "arrive." Luciano who was raised in the house of Navarra has become quite conversant with the attitudes of authority and although his "mind" is with the workers of the *zolfara*, his "heart" is with Lisa, the daughter of the master. When the time comes to choose sides, the fundamentalist becomes pragmatist (just like Navarra and Rametta) and this transition from idealist to "realist" is as logical and natural--Raya would call it "biological"--as the transition from one era to another. The play then does not chronicle the tragic outcome of a social

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[90] *"Since the time he worked there, paid by the hour [...] Today he [can] do whatever he wants...Certainly he owes everything to his own work... he is the son of his work." And another character completes Rametta's portrait by che [quelli che nascono senza titoli e senza beni di fortuna, vogliono quelli degli altri." [Those born without titles and property, covet those of the others]. Act I, sc. IV, Ibid., 367, 369.*

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"anomaly" but the *"cose"* as they have always stood.[91]

The advent of motion picture did not leave Verga indifferent to the visual and communicative potential of the medium. Like Pirandello, he became very leery about the artistic value of cinema, but his less than enthusiastic opinion of it did not prevent him from writing screenplays adapted from his own plays and short stories.[92] Other than that, Verga's career was virtually over by 1905. He passed the last few years of his life at his home in Catania with some sporadic excursions to public literary life. In 1903 an article by Benedetto Croce on his literary output was the first important assessment of his work, setting the pace for the huge bibliography that has developed since. In 1919 Luigi Russo published the first monography on him and in 1920 he was honored in Rome by the State, which for his contribution to the arts, nominated him senator for life.[93] After Verga's

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[91] *The people have very little to say in the play. Presented as a chorus of a few cautious spokesmen for the cause of the miners, their importance in the development of the events is inconsequential even at the end, when, again, their "initiative" to burn the mine, does not precipitate the vindication of their action, but the "union" of interests, the reaction of the individual against the authority of the mass. Their struggle, as Barsotti observes, does not succeed because it is not informed by "ideology," but by hunger, that is the interest of the individual for survival.*

[92] *Verga's surviving screenplays based on his plays are Caccia al lupo, Caccia alla volpe and a fragment from Cavalleria rusticana. These are now edited by Oliva, ibid. See also Gino Raya, Verga e il cinema (Roma: Herder, 1984) and Sipala, ibid., 70-74. Screen adaptations of his plays and stories, prepared by others, proliferated during the last years of the silent era. Cavalleria was also refilmed in 1939 with a screenplay by Rosso di San Secondo.*

[93] *At that ceremony, the central speech was given by Luigi Pirandello. This essay is now included in Pirandello's collected works.*

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death, Federico De Roberto became the champion of his friend's poetics, but as we said, his contribution as a playwright has always been overlooked or underappreciated. Several of his plays were adapted for the radio and television, but his experimentation with *realtà* has not become part of the modern Italian repertory.[94]

Certainly Italian scholars are not blameless for the disenfranchisement of Verga from the modern Western dramatic (or literary) canon. On the contrary, the problem with Verga's absence from contemporary theatre lies not so much in the esthetic inferiority of his dramaturgy, as in the reluctance of Italian scholars to approach his plays without comparing and contrasting them to his prose work.[95] As several of these critics sought to examine Verga's *verismo* from a marxist perspective and explore the sociopolitical relevance of the work with regard to his contemporary social and cultural "facts," the plays were invariably viewed as sanitized,

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[94] *In 1965 Franco Zeffirelli and Anna Magnani in collaboration with the Teatro della Pergola of Florence scored an international success with La lupa. The last stop of their tour was London's Aldwich Theatre (2 June 1966). In 1975 Cavalleria Rusticana and La lupa were staged together at the open theatre of Taormina by Giorgio Prosperi. For the concept of those productions see his article, op. cit. This is, as far as I know, the last major revival of the plays.*

[95] *Indeed, it became a pattern for virtually all modern Italian critics to approach his dramas with their original sources as a point of reference for the evaluation of his success in preserving their sociological significance of his adaptations for the theatre. For an illuminating criticism of this approach and an analysis of Verga's major plays emphasizing their difference and not their inferiority, see Ottavio Spadaro, "'Cavalleria Rusticana':Un'altra ipotesi drammaturgica." Rivista italiana di drammaturgia 2 (September 1977), 100ff.*

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depoliticized versions of the "superior" originals, bourgeois *commedie* transposing and photographing the mannerisms and the ideology of the *borghesia* within social milieux which in reality had no cultural or social affinities with the predominantly settentrional spectator.[96] As a consequence the plays have been studied as inferior, unoriginal cases of *dramma borghese*, operatic or melodramatic concessions to the taste of the dominant class, innocuously folkloric interpretations of *realtà*. Verga the dramatist is still judged a minor artist and his dramaturgy a minor venture in a minor artistic struggle for *verità*.

GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

As a playwright Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) remained to the end of his career a solicitous eclectic, an artist infallibly conscious of the contemporary spirit and as such an experimenter with diverse dramatic styles and trends, from the *dramma storico* to the *commedia borghese*, from verse to prose, from melodrama to opera and *verismo* drama. Yet, eclecticism

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[96] *Cf., for example, Silvana Monti, "Il teatro di Verga e la società della nuova Italia," Problemi 4-5 (1967), 174-186; Giorgio Bárberi Squarotti, "La finzione verista: Il teatro del Verga," Le maschere dell'eroe dall'Alfieri a Pasolini (Lecce: Milela, 1990), 241-264; or Ferrone's book Il teatro di Verga, op. cit.; Although rather outdated, Ferrone's book still remains the best and most comprehensive analysis of Verga's theatre to date. Anna Barsotti's Verga Drammaturgo: Tra commedia borghese e teatro verista siciliano (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1974), is a good start for those wanting to view Verga's drama with regard to the theatrical conventions of the time and its relationship with the dialect theatre of Sicily.*

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was not what critics such as Croce, D'Amico and others saw in his work. For their taste, Giacosa was a versatile mediocrity, a superficial playwright with "his ear to the ground for the prevailing mode," a popularizer of modernity rather than an original genius of dramaturgy, an artist-"epitome of the moral bourgeois."[97] Even at the peak of his fame, for the majority of his critics he was an elusive artist and his elusiveness was the consequence of his eclecticism. To offset Giacosa's insusceptibility to categorization, other, more conventional (but for his literary reputation rather detrimental), designations were coined. In the beginning, he was the heir to Ferrari, then an expert emulator of Manzonian *dramma storico* and later a hackneyed ibsenist. After his death none of these characterizations meant anything to anybody outside Italian theatre. While only one or two of his plays survived in the repertory of Italian troupes until well into the 1960s, Giacosa's international reputation rests today on the librettos he co-authored with Luigi Illica--another obscure, today, playwright of *verismo*--for Puccini's most popular operas, Manon Lescaut (1893), Bohéme (1896), Tosca (1900) and

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[97] *Cf. Lander MacClintock, The Age of Pirandello (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951), 19, 21. MacClintock's condescending views reflect if not paraphrase the opinions of Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. 2, op. cit., 214-5, 228; See also, Silvio D'Amico, "Il teatro drammatico dell'Ottocento," in Jolanda Giachetti de Blasi, ed., L'Italia e gli Italiani del secolo XIX, op. cit., 312-13.*

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Madama Butterfly (1904).[98] The problem of Giacosa the playwright, however, has yet to be solved. Although there have been several critics who have ventured to reassess his legacy, Croce's aphorisms have persevered, so that for some more recent scholars who have revisited his work, to explain Giacosa's poetics has been as important as to undermine the negativism of Croce and his disciples.[99] Whatever the presumed merits or demerits of his theatre, for the history of Italian naturalism Giacosa is a pivotal figure, since it was with his plays that the *commedia borghese* typically entered and exited the age of *verismo*.[100] If not exactly a pioneer, Giacosa became *verismo*'s most consummate advocate and a harbinger of the movement's permutations in matters of esthetics and *problematica*.[101]

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[98] *Cf. Roberto Alonge, "Un insospettato drammaturgo di respiro europeo: Giacomo Puccini," Il castello di Elsinor 2 (1988), 77ff. Illica wrote the prose version of the librettos which then Giacosa versified.*

[99] *In recent years there has been a rather positive resurgence of scholarship on Giacosa. The most comprehensive of critical studies, although replete with bibliographical errata, is Anna Barsotti, Giuseppe Giacosa (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1977). See also, Luisa Mirone, La famiglia a teatro. Conflitti e compromessi familiari sulle scene del secondo Ottocento (Torino: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1991) and Pierluigi Pellini, "L'ultimo Giacosa: intertestualità e ricenzione" Otto/Novecento 19 (1995). 41-73.*

[100] *Cf. Mario Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano, op. cit., 703-4.*

[101] *Giacosa wrote twenty-eight play out of which one is lost (its title was Affari di banca [Banking Business]). A complete edition of his plays was prepared by Piero Nardi and published in two volumes (Milano: Mondadori, 1948). All my references to the plays discussed are from that edition, unless otherwise noted. Nardi also authored Giacosa's biography. La vita e i tempi di Giuseppe Giacosa (Milano: Mondadori, 1949) remains to this day the most authoritative book on the*

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In the early eighties, when Verga was still thinking seriously about resuming playwriting, Giacosa was already an established and successful playwright. At that time, however, his reputation was built upon a series of entertaining *drammi storici* about a romanticized medieval Italy, realistic comedies and tragicomedies on the bourgeois *problematica* of Ferrari and Torelli, proverbs à la Musset and romantic verse one-acts. Young Giacosa was not a cerebral artist or a theory-driven intellectual and the positivist literary debates about, say, the polarity content/form were indifferent or rather irrelevant to him and his artistic ambitions. For him the theatre was not just a vocation, but a vocation which was also a craft and a business, and it was among his priorities to master his craft, while using the prevalent dramatic trends of his time to his own benefit. Giacosa never thought of selling out to the average audience's taste, or succumbing to possible pressures from actors-managers for profitable vehicles. He wanted to succeed as a theatre artist, regardless of genres and modes. His primary concern was to excel in whatever genre interested him at a particular moment, despite the fact that his *drammi storici* were incomparably more successful with critics and audiences than his early realistic works. As for his rapport with contemporary theatre companies, he was regarded by actors as an innovative and more modern playwright

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playwright.

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even for genres resisting stylistic experimentation. His eclecticism did not by any means imply a rupture with modern European literary developments or his indifference to the modern *problematica* espoused by several of his more controversial contemporaries. On the contrary, Giacosa was probably one of the most informed and inquisitive artists of his generation and, his conservative political convictions notwithstanding, an intellectual supportive of the ideas that positivism and naturalism introduced to the performing arts. The fact that for several years this modernist perspective did not inform his work in ways more original or provocative than those exemplified in the work of, say, Torelli and Augier (Giacosa had a superb knowledge of French which he spoke as perfectly as his native language), is no evidence of lackadaisical artistry or commercialism. For *pre-verismo* Giacosa, the theatre was more important than the drama, not because he was reluctant to move the latter toward a more unsettling representation of *realtà*, but because the former as a medium of direct communication with the collective psyche of the *borghesia* offered him more opportunities for experimentation with its *realtà* as an audience and not as a subject of sociological inquiry. Playing around with its fantasies, self-deceptions and emotional anxieties entailed or reflected in the escapist medieval *dramma storico*, the romantic *dramma borghese* and the moralizing proverb drama enabled Giacosa to perceive the *verità* that this audience

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wanted to escape from: the *verità* of its own self.

Giacosa was born into a sophisticated and well-off piemontese family. His father, besides being an accomplished lawyer, was also a gifted amateur poet and this talent young Giacosa discovered and cultivated from a very young age as well. He had the best education possible at the time and although he was "preordained" to follow his father's profession, young Giuseppe was a mediocre student of Law and soon after an even more mediocre practitioner. Some early success in amateur theatrics as a playwright convinced him that a metier as prosaic as the lawyer's was incompatible with his intellectual inclinations. While still at the university of Torino, he forged strong friendships with members of the Torinese and Milanese *scapigliatura*, especially with people such as Bersezio, Boito and Emilio Praga and his initiation into the spirit, the esthetic and the *problematica* of the controversial movement empowered him in his resolve to dispense with law altogether and involve himself in literature and the arts.[102] The impact of this movement on his artistic mentality was drastic enough to insinuate itself into his first play, Al pianoforte (By the Piano, 1870), a strikingly original one-act monologue about the "intimate" interrelationship of art, love and music in the esoteric cosmos of a young man assessing his thoughts and emotions,

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[102] *For Giacosa's rapport with scapigliatura see Piero Nardi, ibid., 117-138, especially 128ff.*

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while listening to the music played at the piano by his anonymous lover.[103] Lui (He) and Lei (She) communicate through his words and her music. The play is ostensibly structured as a "melodramatic" soliloquy, that is, as a monologue accentuated and "allegorized" by the notes of that elusive "mute" lover. Soon the intimate confessions extricated from the psyche of the "romantic" hero obfuscate the "realism" of the situation, so that by the end it becomes difficult to argue whether the romantic encounter took place in *realtà* or was the enactment of Lui's emotional *verità*. Such is the ruminative ambience of Al pianoforte, that the play today seems to have overstepped realism/*verismo*'s boundaries, auguring the latest phase of verismo's evolution, that crepuscolar intimismo of Butti, D'Annunzio or even the grotteschi, but most impressively Pirandello's own first and unknown one-acter, Perche? (Why). The play, rather than decoding the "nature of things," according to the program of *scapigliatura* realism or for that matter *verismo*, deals with the poetry of things, the substance of spiritual *verismo*, the

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[103] *For a more recent analysis of Giacosa's beginnings as a playwright see Donatella Ravanello, "Inizio di Giacosa drammaturgo," Lettere italiane 89 (Jan.-Mar. 1987), 44-52. In this informative article, the scholar argues that the play is actually a "declaration of poetics," a "metafora del mondo in cui Giacosa vede il teatro: esso rappresenta eventi quotidiani, vissuti dall'umanità nelle case o nelle strade e percepibili con i sensi fisici; in realtà, però, tali eventi non accadono, sono simulati, appartengono alla dimensione fantastica, inconscia, creativa dell'autore." [A metaphor of the world through which Giacosa views the theatre: this represents quotidian events which people live in their homes or in the streets and perceptible with the senses; in reality, however, these events do not occur, they are simulated, they belong to the author's fantastic, unconscious, creative zone.] Ibid., 50.*

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inexplicable vicissitudes of *verità*.[104]

Giacosa calls for an elegant, dimly lit, bourgeois salon, sparely furnished with a table, an armchair and a piano. This spacious milieu is filled only with the voice of Lui, pondering on the endless yet "alluring" ennui of social life, where art is taken for a pastime and where love is a word very hard to say and also mean. Lui expresses all sorts of intimations about the repetitiveness of refined life, and the vain search for happiness in things and relationships, until, at the end, a tragedy of the soul steals through the sophisticated "conversation with the self:" The brother of Lui was in love with that same "anonymous" Lei and when on a "night like this" Lui confides in him his love for Lei, a week later that brother "dies." That *dramma intimo* rests unfinished in Lui's narrative, who once again reverts to self-confession and day-dreaming:

> *Lui:...Che brutte memorie, non è vero? Ebbene, queste cose non le direi con nessuna altra donna al mondo, chè temerei profanarle, ma con voi... Quella sera uscendo, mi son confidato a lui, e gli ho detto tutto quello che pensavo...E' vero che lo sapete?*
> *Lei (torna al pianoforte)*
> *Lui: E lui mi parlo con tanta effusione! Povero ragazzo!—Suonate qualche cosa di più allegro...Quest'estate voglio tornare in montagna, ma...su, su, alto... voglio traversare un ghiacciaio per vedere di cambiare la pelle...se potessi cambiare anche il di dentro! Ebbene, se potessi anche...non lo cambierei. Più mi guardo attorno, più mi accorgo che non mi darei per nessun altro. [...]*
> *Lei (smette di suonare a poco a poco [...]torna ad appoggiarsi alla spalliera della poltrona di Lui [...] con una mano gli carezza i capelli).*
> *Lui Come e bella questa musica! (Volgendosi di scatto). Ah! sei tu?*

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[104] *For Giacosa as a poet of things see Apollonio, ibid., 703.*

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(Le fa un bacio in fronte). Lo sai che ti voglio bene! [105]

While Giacosa dispells the ambiguity about the *realtà* of the monologue, another ambiguity concerning the identity of Lei insinuates itself, challenging the notion of whether the piano player has been a fixture of Lui's imagination embodied as a living muse for his ruminations, or a "real" woman who becomes an ideal figure for as long as the dream lasts. The problem, that is, becomes whether the spectator is introduced to a "dream representation" ending with Lui's awakening, or to a real event fragmented by an imperceptible transfer in Lui's mind. For Giacosa the solution to this dramaturgical enigma is as "irrelevant" as the relationship between the *realtà* of the event and the *verità* of its interpretation. For years the play was for Giacosa's critics a puzzling sort of playwriting, a unique case among Giacosa's dramaturgy, considered unrelated to the sort of theatre Italians usually wrote according to realistic precepts, or to the sort of plays that Giacosa

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[105] *He:...What sad memories, isn't it true? Well, I would not say such things to another woman in the world, for fear that I offend her, but with you... Leaving that night, I confided in him, and I told him what I was thinking... You really know, don't you?/ She returns to the piano/He: And he talked to me with such effusion! Poor boy!— Play something merrier...This summer I want to go back to the mountain, but up, up, high...I want to traverse an iceberg, desirous of changing my skin... If only I could also change what's inside me! Well, even if I could...I would not change it. The more I look around, the more I realize that I would not exchange me for some other person.[...]/She gradually stops playing...comes to see on the arm of his armchair...with a hand she caresses his hair./ He: How beautiful this music is! (Turning suddenly). Ah! it's you (He kisses her on the forehead). You know I love you!* Giuseppe Giacosa, Teatro vol. 1, *ibid., 8.*

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himself had chosen to write, before and during his *verismo* phase.[106] Far from being a curiosity among Giacosa's "conventional" theatre, the play is the first experiment with the discrepancy and the simultaneous complementarity between *realtà* and *verità*, an experiment continued with his romantic *drammi storici* and his *commedie borghesi*.[107]

Giacosa first appeared as a professional playwright in 1872 with a "proverb" presented by the company Belloti-Bon and then with the publication of his *dramma storico* Una partita a scacchi in La nuova Antologia. This play, a "*leggenda medievale*" (medieval legend) as Giacosa called it, was first staged in Naples a year later by none other than Achille Torelli. The overwhelming success of that production brought Giacosa fame, critical esteem and popularity, but more importantly convinced him that the *dramma storico*, already considered a moribund kind of theatre, had the potential to offer perspectives of *Italianità* more complex and more modern than the mythologized representations of history, which was usually treated as a morality epic for the new nation.

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[106] *Cf. Nardi who calls the play a monologue which lacks the usual form of drama, the dialogue, but to which the dramatic vision of reality as a class of contradictions is not extraneous. Ibid., 143; or Anna Barsotti who finds the play an autobiographical exercise between poetry and drama without being either. It is, however, comparable to the dramatic style of Ferrari and Torelli. Op. cit., 6, 9.*

[107] *Although the play was written in 1870, it was published in 1873 along with two proverbs and two drammi storici under the title Scene e commedie (Torino: Tipografia Favale). This publication followed his already successful introduction to professional theatre with Una partita di schacchi (A chess game). See below.*

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Certainly the medieval themes offered themselves to pictorial realism and their popularity reflected the taste of modern audiences for pageantry and spectacle, but Giacosa's interest in this retro medieval esthetic was far from perfunctory.[108] These *leggende* were actually studies of upper-bourgeois customs and social rituals, portraits of a chronologically earlier national *borghesia*, but with mannerisms, ideology and imperfections analogous to those distinguishing the assertive and self-conscious *borghesi* of the 1870s. Written in verse, these were essentially love stories with a romantic or idealistic flair, yet Giacosa's painstaking "reproduction" of a past social *realtà* exposed him as a subtle analyst of human character and motivation, when life makes it imperative that people save their integrity without violating class decorum. Giacosa's medieval *borghesia* is a cosmos of detached and reclusive individuals with straightforward and simple (yet not uncomplicated) sets of ethics, a group already afraid of its present and future, not a decadent class, but a class living in an age of undetectable

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[108] *Giacosa was very interested in art and for sometime he had been an art critic for the periodical L'arte in Italia. A neo-medievalist trend in architecture, the fine arts and archeological studies had developed at the time in Giacosa's native region, known as the "Scuola di Rivara." Giacosa was very involved in the activities of that group and became a close friend with several of its members, not least with Federico Pastoris, to whom Partita a scacchi was dedicated. His research on the medieval past of the region was almost a life-long enterprise. Well after the end of his medieval period as a playwright he published three books on the architecture and the feudal castles of Canavese d'Ivrea. Even during his verismo years, he wrote a medieval dramma storico La signora di Challant for Sarah Bernardt, later also performed by Duse.*

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cultural and ethical decadence.[109] From 1872 to 1880 Giacosa wrote a handful of *leggende*, more or less commercially successful, but for all these plays the "realistic" simulation of *realtà*, be it historic or legendary, remained his priority as a reliable "*problematica*" for the experimentation with the realities of borghesia's verità.[110]

The proverbs and the *commedie a tesi* of Giacosa did not depart from the dramaturgy of Ferrari and Torelli.[111] However, the influence of *scapigliatura* skepticism about the deceptions of positivism and the sincerity of modernity,

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[109] *Cf. Apollonio, ibid., 701.*

[110] *In chronological order these plays are, except those already mentioned, Il trionfo d'amore (The triumph of love, 1875), Il fratello d'armi (Brother in Arms, 1877) Il conte rosso (The red count, 1880). In the same vein we may also include the comedy Il marito amante della moglie (The Husband in Love with his Wife, 1876), although the action takes place in the 17th century. Giacosa's poetic drama has not been studied thoroughly, usually a priori dismissed as commercial or unimportant theatre. Barsotti's book on Giacosa is the only one, as far as I know, containing a study of that dramaturgy, except, of course, Nardi's biography.*

[111] *The early social dramas of Giacosa did not prove popular with audiences, nor was the playwright very proud of them. Indeed of all the commedie written between 1872 and 1875, Giacosa published only one, La gente di spirito (The Slick Set, 1873) in the Scene e commedie volume. The other commedies, in chronological order, were: Affari di Banca, I figli del marchese Arturo (Marquis Arthur's Sons, 1873), Intrighi eleganti (Elegant Intrigues, 1873/4), Gli annoiati (The Bored, 1874) and Teresa (1875). These plays were published for the first time by Nardi and their unavailability before 1949 partly explains the lack of pertinent criticism. Again Nardi and Barsotti are the only scholars to deal extensively with these plays. In 1879 Giacosa rewrote Teresa as Luisa and published it. The "problematica" of these works shows that there is some connection between early and late Giacosa, but their obscurity may explain Croce's negativity, who could only know the proverbs and the "leggende" as antecedents of Giacosa's verismo.*

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extensively modified the plays' critical spirit.[112] Although they conventionally end with an affirmation of the prevalent "correct" ideology, Giacosa does not have faith either in the moral authority of society as a paragon for the individual's private life, or in the power of the individual to remedy social and moral ills. Usually such an end entails a compromise between the interests of the society and the exigencies of private life, but this compromise does not imply a vindication of the morally correct *borghesia* in the manner of Torelli or a castigation of the individual who does not comply with the ethical norms in the manner of Ferrari. Like Boito and the *scapigliati* he pokes fun at the hypocrisies of salon society and its culture of superficial refinement, but the *drammi intimi* of the frustrated *borghesi*--typically young, restless and easily victimized by the way of the world--are treated seriously and with compassion. The grand world is not portrayed as the enemy of the trusting individual, desirous of his corruption and fall, but as a hopeless culture of appearances contradicting and corrupting the norms and the institutions it ostensibly venerates. Actually Giacosa's pessimism in this early phase of his experimentation with the discrepancies of bourgeois *realtà* insinuates itself in his habitual depiction of modern *borghesia* as preposterously dull and uninteresting, a money-driven assortment of conformists

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[112] *Cf. Barsotti, ibid., 63.*

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and *affaristi* with the least deference for idealism and love as something deeper than self-serving moralism and salaciousness. A "raisonneur" character from Intrighi galanti offers a picture that pretty much exemplifies the cultural milieux of the *borghesia* that the rest of the *commedie* reprove:

> *Questa gente, curiosa e inquieta, vive di una vita fittizia e piccina; soffre dolori microscopici e gioisce di allegrezze malsane. Un inezia, un motto, uno sguardo, un sorriso, la dimenticanza di una...grottesca convenienza, un puntiglio infantile e cocciuto, cose tutte che ...assumono per costoro l'importanza di un avvenimento e il nome pomposo di dolori e di gioie...Codesta abitudine delle passioni piccole, vi attutisce la capacità delle grandi; e, come la bufera che sradica la quercia e piega l'alberello, così le grande sciagure, che ci uccidono, noi, passano su costoro sfiorandoli e curvandoli appena...Questa setta ha degli usi proprii, un arte propria, una propria politica, il proprio giornale, il proprio gergo...*[113]

This cynical pessimism prefigures the hopelessness of his veristic plays. Several critics have found it rather superficial and melodramatic. The truth is that his *commedie*

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[113]*This world, eccentric and restless, lives a fraudulent and shallow life; it feels microscopic sorrows and relishes unwholesome distractions. A triviality, a phrase, a look, a smile, the omission of a grotesque convenience, an infantile recalcitrance, all these things assume for them the importance of a serious event, and the pompous name of pain and joy... This habit of trifling passions mitigates their capacity for greater ones; and, like the gale which uproots the oak and bends the small tree, thus the great disasters that bedevil people like us, transpire in their lives hardly touching them or bending them... This sector has its own customs,, its own art, its own politics, its own newspaper, its own vernacular..." Act II, scene 13.* Giacosa, Teatro *vol.2, ibid., 791-2.*

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are not so much melodramas per se as they are vituperations against the melodramatization of modern life by the *borghesi* themselves.

By the early eighties Giacosa had matured from a congenial celebrity of modern theatre to an articulate cultural pundit, sought out by literary societies from all over the peninsula. Concurrent to his activities in the theatre and the lecture circuit was his journalistic collaboration with prestigious periodicals and a visiting porfessorship at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Torino. This incessant involvement in the cultural process of Italy kept Giacosa alert to all major literary and artistic advancements that naturalism had brought about in Europe and (especially) in France. His association with *scapigliatura* had kept him updated with the latest esthetic and "scientific" inquiries of the movement, but Giacosa was also in personal contact with several French naturalists and his familiarization with the new French poetics occured mainly through his regular correspondence with them.[114] Indeed, the impact of its new ideas about the relationship of the theatre with society materialized in his departure from the *dramma storico* and the *commedia a tesi* and his orientation to a new sort of realism, pertinent not to some "idea" about society and humanity but to

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[114]*Cf. Nardi, ibid., 402-3. See also Giorgio di Rienzo and Giorgio Mirandola, "Inediti francesi nell'archivio di Giuseppe Giacosa," Studi francesi 36 (Sep.-Dec. 1968), 458-468; and René Ternois, Zola et ses amis italiens. Documents inédits (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1967), 86-7.*

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the concrete experience of *realtà*. Until then Giacosa had studied private affairs and *drammi intimi* from the perspective of the larger society and more or less in accordance with the prevailing ideology of the borghesia. With his conversion to the literature of *verità*, his experiment with a dramaturgy of social analysis entailed his shifting from the social problem to the private conflict. The *dramma intimo* gradually evolved as the epitome of the social question and a wider social crisis would not be debated but insinuated.[115] The catalyst in the alignment of Giacosa with the esthetics and the *problematica* of verismo became, in fact, his rapport and interaction with Giovanni Verga and Eleonora Duse. By 1884 the great actress was like Giacosa on the threshold of a new stage in her career and she became the first artist not only to inspire, but also to champion his effort for a drama faithful to the spirit of modernity.[116] It was Verga, however, and his own experiments with the representation of reality and

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[115] *For more on this issue see Barsotti, ibid., 205-9.*

[116] *Giacosa met Duse for the first time in 1880, when the company of Rossi presented his Conte rosso, but the actress who at the time was playing a secondary part was not strongly impressed on his memory. They became closer friends a couple of years later, when Duse, already a famous star in Rossi's company, scored a personal success with two of Giacosa's plays, Il filo (The string, 1883) and Zampa del gatto (The Cat's Paw). That success encouraged Duse to establish a collaboration with the playwright and it was through this collaboration that Duse met Arrigo Boito, her future lover, already Giacosa's closest friend apart from Verga. Unfortunately, that collaboration did not prove very fruitful. His Sirena (Sirene) was a disaster and his L'onorevole Ercole Mallardi (The honorable Ercole Mallardi, 1884) did not last two performances. Three years later, that collaboration would produce Tristi amori, Giacosa's first bona fide veristic drama (for a discussion of this play see below). For the Duse-Giacosa relationship see Weaver, Duse, ibid., 41, 48, 60ff.*

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truth, that gave Giacosa the impetus as well as the esthetics for transforming *dramma borghese* to a laboratory of *realtà*.[117]

L'Onorevole Ercole Mallardi (1884) and Resa a discrezione (Surrendered at Discretion, 1886), a political and a social comedy respectively, embody Giacosa's apprenticeship as a *verista*. Neither play became a popular success, yet their commercial failure did not discourage him. On the contrary, it convinced him that his representation of reality was indeed truthful enough to disturb rather than enthuse a public accustomed to the ideological simplifications of *commedia a tesi*. Stylistically, Giacosa has not entirely freed himself from the sophisticated rhetoric and the conventional characterization techniques of the typical thesis play, but the overall effect of each *commedia* evidences his attention to the impassive analysis of human motivation, milieu and "culture," without resorting to the implication of a particular *tesi* or to melodramatic moralizing invectives. Of the two plays, Resa a discrezione is the least innovative, more akin to the *problematica* of Boito and Torelli and much less in line with an intrigue-less model of dramaturgy. The milieu is again the idle and frivolous class of *alto-borghesi*, who eventually fall prey to their own erroneous conduct of

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[117] *According to Nardi and Barsotti, the artistic dependence of Giacosa on Verga's esthetics predates the occasion of Cavalleria rusticana, although the fruits of this influence become apparent after 1884. Barsotti, ibid., 130.*

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life. Basically the story relates the defeat of a "consciously" heartless woman by her love for a man she had wagered that she could conquer. Elena claims to her "sophisticated" friends that not only can she make a young and idealistic scientist fall in love with her, but that she can also make him "cancel" his professional ambitions and humanistic plans. Against all odds, her scheme appears to succeed, until she finds herself hoping for its frustration and in love with her victim. At the happy end not only does she repent, but she is also forgiven for her "indiscreet" exploitation of the spirit and the feeling of the man who "trusted" her. Their union declares the triumph of love, yet nothing implies the amendment of Elena's class or even the reformation of her peers. Giacosa had dramatized similar situations in such early *commedie* as Intrighi eleganti and Gli annoiati, but the difference of this play lies not only in the more complex psychology of the characters. It is more apparent in the replacement of the raisonneur by the pragmatic self-criticism attempted by the members of the class that Giacosa rebukes not so much for its irresponsibility, as for its lack of courage to mature and to challenge the falsehoods of its lifestyle.[118] That sophisticated milieu, Giacosa argues,

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[118] *Cf. ELENA: Noi mettiamo ogni studio a dare il peggior concetto possibile dei nostri costumi. Tolleriamo in casa dei discorsi che ci farebbero arrossire a leggerli...Riconduciamo a casa, la notte, nella nostra carozza, seduto al nostro fianco, un uomo che passò la serata a dirci che siamo belle...Ostentiamo una dimestichezza universale, senza intimità, senza poesia...amiamo scherzare col fuoco. In apparenza siamo cinicamente corrotte, lo siamo timidamente in realtà.*

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renders people able to realize and identify the imperfections of their attitudes, yet also unable to prioritize their true emotional needs over the refinement of their social deportment. This "weakness" humanizes a class which the earlier *dramma borghese* has countless times dehuminized and conventionalized as a stock villain persecuting or compromising the "lesser" classes or its own more sensible *onesti*. This weakness, this addiction to galant ennui, is revealed not to be ridiculed as a vice, but to be "accepted" as a social *verità*, which however can be amended; not because the happy ending demands an optimistic resolution of a social or romantic conflict, but because one's awareness of psychological and social *verità* may precipitate one's emancipation from the trappings of *realtà*. As Barsotti rightly argues, "*l'umanità di tali personaggi ci impedisce di giudicare globalmente, e in modo negativo, la società cui appartengono: Giacosa, rilevandone le sfumature e i contrasti interni, dimostra di aver in gran parte superato l'antico moralismo per una maggiore preoccupazione di verità... La*

In fondo siamo scoraggiate. Parliamo d'amore ad ogni momento perchè non ci crediamo più. L'amore è morto e seppellito." [ELENA: We do anything possible to corrupt our customs as much as possible. In our homes we tolerate discussions which even reading them would make us blush.. At night we take home in our carriage, sitting next to us a man who all night long kept on telling us how beautiful we are...We presume a familiarity with everything, without intimacy, without poetry...we love to play with fire. On the surface we are cinically corrupt, but in reality we are frighteningly so. In fact we are disheartened. We talk about love every moment because we don't believe in it any more. Love is dead and buried.] Act I, sc.1. Giacosa, Teatro, vol. II, ibid., 87-88.

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polemica s'interiorizza."[119]

More than Resa a discrezione, the earlier play, L'Onorevole Ercole Malladri divulges Giacosa's resolve to substitute an impersonal exposure of Italian reality for the positivist moralisms demanded by the public of *dramma borghese*. According to Mariano Rumor, the play *"aprì [a Giacosa] la via a scoprire un'altra faccia della realtà, vista non più con occhio commosso e benigno ma con la chiarezza e l'oggettività del critico.*"[120] Just like Cavalleria rusticana, this cynical *commedia* was not so much about a *dramma intimo* of honor as it was a reflection on the crisis of modern *italianità*, this time bared in all its enormity through the politics of *transformismo* that the play "explains." Just as in Verga's I tartuffi moderni, the milieu is the behind-the-scenes mechanisms creating, "electing" and then manipulating the new servants of the public interest, the latter, of course, being not idealist visionaries, but unscrupulous jingoists. Giacosa's *tartuffi*, however, are not

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[119] *The humanity of such characters impedes us from judging globally and in a negative way, the society to which they belong: Giacosa, exposing their subtleties and their internal conflicts, shows that to a large extent he has surmounted the earlier moralism for the sake of a greater preoccupation with truth...The [social] criticism becomes internalized." Ibid., 140.*

[120] *[The play] opened for Giacosa the way to discover another facet of reality, this time viewed not with an impassioned and benign eye but with the clarity and the objectivity of a critic.* Mariano Rumor, Giuseppe Giacosa *(Padova: Cedam, 1940), 52.*

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like Verga's, political parasites exterminatable by some intrepid ideologue working for the political health of society. They embody the political system proper as a *realtà* accepted, fostered and sustained not only by the special interests, but also by those same politicians, who are rebuked as the most detrimental special interest of all. Giacosa does not play one political ideology against the other. *Borghese* though he was, the stigma of moral corruption and ideological philistinism tarnishes the whole spectrum of republican democracy from the religious right to the radical left, from the compromising moderates to the venal reactionaries. L'*Onorevole* Ercole Malladri of the title is an hypocrite of a politician in-the-making and the play represents the successful recycling of a shady and dishonorable *borghese* to a shadier "honorable" debuty. The farce of Malladri's election is laid out in order to convey the tragic decadence of *italianità* and not simply to entertain. And entertain the *borghesi* Giacosa did not. The play, written, as we said, for Duse, failed, causing a furor among partizans of all leanings who found it libelous, if not downright subversive.[121]

Ercole Malladri is a provincial minor aristocrat married

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[121]*Giacosa had not anticipated a negative reaction of that sort. In a letter to his friend and famous Italian poet Antonio Fogazzaro, the playwright vented his disappointment for the ill fortune of his commedia blaming the "realism" of his portrayal of the "reale corruzione" as the cause of failure. According to the playwright, the play stirred a political controversy, as all the parties tried to establish what real life deputy was the model for Giacosa's Ercole Mallardi. See Barsotti, ibid., 131.*

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to Vittoria, the daughter of Fabrizio Luppi, a pragmatist of the older generation of aristocrats, and a decent woman deeply in love with her husband. Their marriage, however, is not a happy one, not only because Malladri pursued it simply in order to improve his social status and to "finance" his political ambitions with Vittoria's dowry, but also because, without feeling the least affection for his wife, he has led her to believe that the malfunction of their relationship has been her own responsibility. The subterfuge he has used in order to protract undisturbed his adulterous affairs with other women and especially Giorgina, a widowed friend of Vittoria, is the alleged involvement of the latter in a most compromising situation which resulted to Ercole's embroilment in a duel for the defence of her reputation. Although the truth was that Ercole had fought for the sake of Giorgina, he maintains a publicly "unobtrusive" cold relationship with his wife, inculpating her for attempted adultery and thus sustaining her sense of guilt but also "gratitude" for his having saved the happy appearances of their marriage. What with her father's suspicions of Ercole's duplicity and the accumulating evidence of his falsehood, Vittoria does not want to believe the "facts," with her "compunction" obliging her to concede to Ercole's *"realtà."* When Malladri decides to run for deputy, he realizes that he needs the services of Vittoria and the prestige of her impeccable reputation as the daughter of the local leader. In order to exploit her once again, he

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pretends that his "anger" has dissipated and that her conduct after the duel has earned her his forgiveness and love. At the same time his affair with Giorgina continues undisturbed. When politics become the focus of Ercole and Vittoria's life, her *dramma intimo* is overshadowed from the grotesque spectacle of political campaign and manoeuvering for the benefit of Ercole's success. Eager to support the ambitions of her husband, she opens her house to all sorts of "*politicanti*," opportunists, party proxies and intermediaries, even to Ercole's opponent in that "fatal" duel (who in the meantime has become his "ally" for the sake, of course, of his own political interests).

The magnitude of political corruption is exposed, when Ercole willfully "sides" with or promises to "support" all the special interests demanding his engagement to their ranks, inconsiderate of the fact that these interests vie against each other. The "patriots" parading in Malladri's house are as ludicrous as Gogol's provincial authorities in Inspector General: There is a commendatore Grappola, a rich proprietor and the local "moderate" leader who's come to protect his interests while deploring the modern political world of the "*intriganti*;" a "radical" pharmacist who compares the power (that is, the self-serving exploitation) of politics to the dosage of the ingredients in the medicines he concocts; and a "catholic" cleric-candle manufacturer who wants Malladri to buy candles from him in order to light them up on the day of

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his "victory." With the support of these venal "leaders" secured, Ercole turns to Vittoria who happily acquiesces to his "call" for victory and procures the desirable endorsement, just when she learns all about his infidelity, his inveterate lies about the events that had kept them "apart." To her desperation she "understands" that there is no way for her to escape from her husband and that she has now to keep up the appearances of the happy home for the sake of the "honorable patriot." Malladri is indeed elected and Vittoria realizes that this victory brings the end of her idealism. With all the "aides" and well-wishers around her congratulating the deputy for his "deserved" victory, she realizes her true "guilt"--making Ercole "somebody"--as well as the *verità* of a whole social system:

> *ERCOLE (avvicinandosi a Vittoria e Fabrizio). Sono stato eletto.*
> *FRAPPINI Che semplicità, eh? Tre parole: sono stato eletto. Dicono tutto. Com'è pallida la duchessa!*
> *GRAPPOLA L'emozione. [....] (inchinando Vittoria) Dev'essere una grande compiacenza per lei, vedere riconosciuto e coronato il merito dell'uomo che ella elesse a compagno della sua vita.*
> *FABRIZIO Sissignore, una grande compiacenza per noi tutti.*
> *GRAPPOLA L'ingegno e il carattere del nostro nuovo deputato...*
> *FRAPPINI Signori... presidente di tre società operaie, vado altero di poter affermare che l'esultanza nostra è l'esultanza di tutti gli onesti. Il nostro collegio sanziona il proprio valore mandando in parlamento un nome che ne sarà decoro, un intelletto che ne sarà consiglio, un carattere che ne sarà esempio [...] Se è vero che i popoli hanno i governi che si meritano, lo stesso si può, e con più ragione, asserire dei collegi elettorali e dei loro rappresentanti. Ebbene, o signori, felice il collegio che meritò di essere rappresentato da un Ercole Malladri...E poichè, o signori, la nostra adunanza è onorata dalla presenza del nostro debutato, non solo, ma altresì da quella della nobile donna che può attestarne e che ne premia le private virtù...*
> *VITTORIA Ah, ah, ah, ah! ...*
> *FRAPPINI...lasciate che io, interpretando i vostri e gli affetti dell'uomo felice che può affissarsi in lei con sicura compiacenza,*

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vi proponga di bere alla salute della duchessa di Serrarsa [...]
VITTORIA [to her father] Andiamo, andiamo, andiamo. [...]
GRAPPOLA Commozione...
FRAPPINI Come piangeva!
GRAPPOLA Si adorano... Che bell'esempio però...
BARELLI Tradizione di famiglia.
FRAPPINI Ha commosso anche me...
FALVIERI Eh! Sono le virtù private che fanno i grandi cittadini![122]

Giacosa's sarcasm penetrates through the empty rhetoric of the toasts and the congratulatory remarks of the *"onesti"* gathered in this final scene, but the effort here is not to mock the self-aggrandizing *politicanti* of the modern state or to emphasize the tragicomic discrepancy between the public persona and the private person of Ercole Malladri. On the contrary, the playwright gradually unveils the tragic *verità*

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[122] *ERCOLE (nearing Vittoria and Fabrizio) I have been elected. FRAPPINI What simplicity, eh? I have been elected: A few words that say everything. How pallid the duchess is!/GRAPPOLA The excitement ...(leaning towards Vittoria) It must be a great joy for you to see the man you've chosen for your life's mate recognized and honored for his merit./FABRIZIO Indeed, a great pleasure for us all, Sir./GRAPPOLA The mind and the character of our new deputy.../FRAPPINI Gentlemen, Mister president of three worker's unions, I have the honor to be able to affirm that our elation is the elation of all honest people. Our county honors itself by sending to Parliament a man who will be its pride, an intellect which will be its best advisor, a character, a character who will be exemplary. [...] If its' true that the people have the government they deserve, the same can be argued and more rightly so for the electoral counties and their representatives. Indeed, fortunate is the county that deserved to be represented by Ercole Malladri...Indeed, gentlemen, our gathering is honored not only by the presence of our deputy, but also from the presence of the noble woman who can attest to the merit of her husband and who cherishes the virtues of his private life.../Vittoria [laughs and cries]...FRAPPINI... Allow me then, interpreting your sentiments and the sentiments of the happy man who can securely depend on you with gratitude, to ask you all to drink to the health of the Duchess of Serrarsa [...]/ VITTORIA [to her father] Let's go. let's go, let's go./ [...] GRAPPOLA What an emotional moment for her!/ FRAPPINI How she cried! GRAPPOLA They adore each other... What a good example they make!...BARELLI A family tradition./ FRAPPINI She even moved me to tears.../FALVIERI Well! It is the private virtues that the great citizens make! Act IV, sc. 14. Giacosa, Teatro vol. 2, Ibid., 1005-1007.*

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that explains not only the ethical malaise beleaguering the *patria*, but also the dissolution of those institutions--family and marriage--that the (corrupt) system is supposed to honor and sustain. This *verità* is the "necessity" to keep up a deceptive *realtà*, an appearance of honesty, sincerity, and morality in order to save not just the appearance of a state faring well, but also the image of the happy and successful bourgeois family, namely, the nucleus of this progressive *"patria."* The *dramma intimo* of Vittoria is not a sentimental "intrigue" which Giacosa exploits in order to underline the antithesis between the sincere woman-victim and the insincere society-victimizer. Nor is this antithesis underlined in order to generate sympathy for the misfortunes of the dutiful (and consequently the revulsion of the really "honest" *borghese*), or antipathy for those offending the ideas they supposedly defend.[123] Her problem is not a social problem, but a symptom of a problematic society, a society that condones and encourages deceit and exploitation, as long as the "appearance" of good citizenship and moral integrity succeed in perpetuating the delusive *realtà* of a progressive humanity. Just like Victoria who is constrained to pretend and live next to the man she no more "respects" only for the sake of his image and certainly to the detriment of her own integrity, the *borghese*, Giacosa implies, is compelled to comply by the

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[123] *For an opposite view see Nardi, ibid., 507.*

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system, not because fighting against it would entail his social marginalization or stagnation, but because there is simply no life outside the system. The *realtà* imposed on his life is the illusion that he is not separate from the system, but that he is the system, that the system cannot exist without him. Italian polity like the marriage of Vittoria is a trap and the *verità* about it is that there is no escape from its *realtà*.[124] The drama of human entrapment in states compromising one's freedom and integrity only for the sake of society's self-image as well as the drama of attempting to break the rules and preserve what is left of one's own sense of *verità* would become the basic themes of Giacosa's *verismo*. The crisis the individual undergoes once becoming aware of his social illusions and the compromises with which he afflicts his own life in order to be able to "survive" the crisis of his society is what animates Giacosa's idealism in the four last plays of his theatre career: Tristi Amori (Sad Love, 1887), Diritti dell'anima (Rights of the Soul, 1894), Come le foglie (As the leaves, 1900) and Il più forte (The Stronger, 1904).

With writing Tristi amori Giacosa believed that his maturity as a playwright but also as a reformer of his own drama had been attained. As a play insinuating the impasses of

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[124]*It is not accident, I think, that Giacosa's first play directly influenced by the esthetic of verismo, Tristi amori, concludes with the prospect of a situation similar to that of Ercole Malladri. For more see below.*

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a bourgeois marriage marred by the "untragic" *realtà* of adultery, it was programmed to affect the audience not only as a chronicle of a typical *crisi borghese*, but also as an experiment de-romanticizing and de-sentimentalizing the *problematica* of this most abused dramatic situation.[125] Not many of the play's first readers, however, shared his enthusiasm for the newness of this drama, and Duse, for whom Giacosa had written it, had convinced herself that Tristi amori would indeed misfire.[126] Strikingly enough, the pre-production history of the play entailed the same trepidations that had preceded Cavalleria's premiere, but the triumph of Verga's peasant tragedy was not repeated when the play opened at the Teatro Nazionale of Rome. The conservative public of Italy's capital was not prepared for Giacosa's departure from the romantic fantasies of his medieval tragicomedies and the sight of a servant interrupting a pathetic encounter between adulterous lovers in order to check with her lady shop-list expenses was as scandalous a let down of audience expectations as the sight of a compromised husband keeping his faithless wife in house for the sake of propriety.[127] The play was

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[125] *See Giacosa's letter to Arrigo Boito, cited in Nardi, ibid., 580ff.*

[126] *Duse had aggreed to stage the play out of favor for Arrigo Boito whith whom she had become rather intimate by 1887. See Weaver, ibid. 69.*

[127] *For an account of the play's reception in Rome see Giovanni Verga, "La prima rappresentazione dei 'Tristi amori'," La lettura 2 (October 1902), 868-9. See also Salvatore Barzilai, Palcoscenico e platea op. cit., 102-6; and Weaver, ibid.*

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given a second chance in Turin, and it was there that critics and audiences legitimized it as a personal triumph for Duse and Giacosa as well as a masterpiece of Italian playwrighting.[128] Certainly, it was not the play's *bovarismo* that had caused so contradictory a reaction among theatre audiences, nor was the fact that the play defended, at the expense of bourgeois common sense, a kind of humanity disrespectful of basic assumptions about the sanctity of family life and spousal *"dovere."* If it is necessary to track down a particular cause explaining the controversial reception of the *commedia* or the non-conformism of Giacosa's *verismo*, it would be more accurate to identify this cause in his resistance to harmonizing his social criticism and his dramaturgy with the positivist and "moral" image of the *borghesia* as that was codified and upheld in, say, Torelli's Mariti. In Ercole Malladri the playwright had challenged this image, but the purpose there was to vent his objections to the

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[128] *Tristi amori è la comedia più moderna ed originale che non solo il teatro italiano, ma il francese di questi ultimi anni possa vantare. Possa essere il principio di un vero risorgimento come è il primo lavoro di un grande commediografo uscito dal bozzolo di un poeta...[Giacosa] s'è studiato di rappresentare l'uomo qual è oggi, soprafatto dalla concorrenza della vita sociale, forma anatomica in decadenza, esposto a mille influenze irresistibili..." [Tristi amori is the most modern and most original play that not only the Italian, but also the French theatre of the last years can boast. It might well be the beginning of a true "risorgimento" as it is the first play of a great playwright that came out of a poet's cocoon. Giacosa has painstakingly sought to represent man as he is today, tyrannized by the challenges of social life, a humanoid in decadence, exposed to myriad irresistible influences...]* Giovanni Pozza, Cronache teatrali (1886-1913) G.A. Cibotto ed. (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1971), 59, 61-62. See also G.C. Molineri, "Tristi amori," Gazzetta piemontese 2-3 December 1887; Cesare Molinari, L'attrice divina. Eleonora Duse nel teatro italiano fra i due secoli (Roma: Bulzoni, 1985), 130ff; and Weaver, ibid.

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politicization and exploitation of family values for the sake of maintaining the appearance of this image as pristine as possible. That play had closed with the insinuation that Vittoria would abide by her social duty, both because for society an adulterous husband is not a "threat" to social infra-structure and because a betrayed wife, for all the injustice suffered, would not risk the her reputation by exposing her inadvertent collusion in Ercole's dirty politics. Whatever the case, the finality of her entrapment to a loveless marriage of convenience was only implied. In Tristi amori, where politics is not even a peripheral concern and adultery is the offense of the wife, the entrapment of Emma Scarli, Vittoria's counterpart, in an appearance of marriage is an irrevocable *verità*. What is at stake within this play's social parameters is not just the preservation of family, but the reputation of a *borghese* husband, that is the reputation of the social entity that constitutes the driving force of positivist society, and therefore the reputation of society itself. The emphasis is not on the drama of the husband, but on the drama of the *borghese*. Adultery, too, is not a bourgeois crisis, but again a symptom of a *borghesia* in crisis. The diversity, then, of response to Giacosa's *verismo* can be attributed to the diverse degree of self-awareness characterizing the culture of the various *borghesie* which first communicated with the play; and to the diverse degree of willingness to shun the positivist mythos of an assertive

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borghesia (realtà) or to be reconciled with their *verità* of a class with an identity crisis. For Giacosa, adultery is not the anomaly destabilizing society. It is the occasion demonstrating the anomalies of this society: miscommunication, lovelessness, passionlessness, lifelessness, the pursuit of *denaro*. It is not the romantic sin redeemed by the genuine search for fulfillment and understanding. It is as prosaic, trivial and uninspiring an engagement as balancing the budget of a household in which food is the only thing shared. No sympathies are here conveyed by the playwright for this or that *triste* ("sad") victim of social decline.[129] Tristi amori is not a play of commiseration, but a drama of "facts."[130]

Plot-wise the play subverts not only the positivist mentality, but also the whole social system that Torelli

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[129] *For a different view see Luigi Personè, Il teatro italiano della 'Belle Époque', ibid., 98ff.; and Barsotti, ibid., 205ff.*

[130] *Cf. Giacosa's letter to Arrigo Boito (19 November 1886), cited in Nardi. ibid., 567: "Gli amori tristi nella commedia sono tre. Quello della moglie per l'amante, quello dell'amante per la moglie, quello del marito per la moglie...Il titolo ideale per me sarebbe quello che esprimesse l'innocenza finale di tutti quanti nel nuocersi. Perchè in fondo, nella commedia, hanno ragione tutti e tre, locchè segue pure spessissimo nella vita." [The sad loves of the play are three. The love of the wife for the lover, that of the lover for the wife, that of the husband for the wife... The ideal title for me would be that which could express the innocence of all parties in the final catastrophe. Because in the play, all three are essentially right, which is besides exactly what happens most often in life.] It is interesting to notice that Giacosa does not consider a "forth" realtà, the love of the wife for the husband.*

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envisioned in his Mariti.[131] Torelli's Fabio Regoli, the self-made and self-assertive lawyer, is the earlier and more optimistic self of Giacosa's Giulio Scarli, the hard-working, self-effacing *borghese*, whose wife Emma has begun an affair with his younger and rather monotonous assistant Fabricio Arcieri, the estranged son of a broken and decadent aristocrat, Ettore Arcieri. Nowhere does Giacosa suggest the reasons that brought Emma and Fabrizio together, nor has their illicit affair a redeeming value for either of them. The only common link keeping them together, for all their crisis of "guilt" and sense of "sin," is the unspoken desire to escape--she from the *piccolo-borghese* and uneventful cosmos of her husband, he from the constant pressures of his venal father and the conventions of the class whose rights he has abdicated.[132] Emma feels this affair suffocating her, not because she does not love Fabrizio, but because her sense of commitment to her family is incongruous with her real and discrepant feelings for her husband and daughter: She can only feel "esteem" for Giulio but it is Gemma, her daughter, that she really loves, her sole excuse for maintaining Giulio's illusion of a happy family.

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[131] *I am not suggesting that Giacosa deliberately attempted this subversion. For some interesting parallelisms and contrasts between Giacosa and Torelli see Roberto Alonge, Teatro e spettacolo nel secondo ottocento, ibid., 160-172.*

[132] *According to the reviews of the original production, Duse's appearance suggested a "working" woman of mediocre means, a "servant" rather than the wife of a well-off lawyer. Cf. Molineri, ibid., 3.*

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The catalyst in Emma's relationship with Giulio will be Arcieri who, aware of his son's affair, puts pressure on her to convince Fabrizio to marry another rich woman in order to have his own outstanding debts paid; otherwise, this affair could be publicized, a professional catastrophe for Giulio and a compromising predicament for Emma. Fabrizio decides not to fall victim to his father's self-serving blackmailing and resolves to leave the town, asking Emma to join him. The way things are, however, and the urgency of their common decision to leave everything behind, reveals to them not just their weak will, but their own delusions about the emotional strength, the *verità*, of their affair. Giulio finds out about Emma's infidelity and when he takes Gemma away for a "walk," so that the child won't see her mother go, Fabrizio challenges Emma for the last time to depart with him, but Emma has to think of Gemma's future rather than her own.[133] At the end, Giulio "consents" to keep Emma "employed" as Gemma's mother, but the marriage will continue to be what it has always been: an appearance, a charitable "association" for the social benefit of the daughter:

> *GIULIO: [A Emma] Non sei andata via... Hai fatto bene. C'è la bambina! Capisci che non perdono. C'è la memoria che non si può distruggere. Ho creduto che tu andassi: e non te lo avrei impedito! Ma così potrò far meglio la parte mia, che è di procacciare uno stato a Gemma. Se un giorno sarà ricca, potrà forse sposare un uomo che non sia costretto a dare tutto il suo tempo al lavoro, e chi sa... che non le riesca più facile essere un'onesta donna... Noi*

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[133] *Gemma's name is a composite of Emma and the initial letter G of Giulio's name.*

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siamo due associati in un' opera utile, e sarà così per tutta la vita! Queste cose non finiscono...si trascinano disperatamente. Ora chiama Gemma, e quando sarà pronto, chiamerai anche me. Io vado nello studio. Il mio posto è là! (Si avvia allo studio. Emma rimane immobile.)[134]

The settlement Giulio and Emma arrive at has a sociologically charged parabolic meaning, since not only does it deliver a message about the bankruptcy of *borghesia* as an idea and a system of values, but it also presages the dissolution of the family into a social mechanism whose sole function will be to sustain the appearance of this old idea, while preparing a new type of *borghese* for whom status and money are not "projects" to be accomplished, but rather a *realtà* that would enable him restore his class to its previous glory. More than being a pessimistic closure to a social drama played out as a domestic *dramma intimo*, Giulio's solution operates as a promise for the renewal of his caste, a prospect which, however, necessitates the sacrifice of personal happiness, the *transformismo* of love to a bond of interest and the operation of family as a private company producing a new

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[134]*GIULIO: (to Emma) You did not leave... You did well. It's the child, too! You understand that I don't forgive. Nobody can destroy memory. I believed you would leave: and I did not prevent you! Yet this way I can play better my part, which is to vouchsafe a social status for Emma. If one day she will be rich, perhaps she will be able to marry a man who won't be constrained to devote all his time to his work, and who knows... it will be easier thus for her to be an honest woman.. We are two associates for a worthwhile causem and so it will be for our whole life! These things have no end... they are desperately going on and on. Now, call Gemma, and when dinner is ready, call me, too. I go to my office. My post is there! (Goes to the office. Emman remains motionless). Act III. Giacosa, Teatro, ibid., 335-6.*

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generation of *borghesi* conditioned to maintain the same social system that their parents have failed to defend but also to understand.[135]

The play ultimately is not a social melodrama about the triumphant husband and the defeated adulteress who has to sacrifice what is left of her compromised humanity in order to save the reputation of the "innocent" daughter. The *tristezza* suggested in the title is not a sentimental figure for a love that failed, but rather a critical commentary expressing disenchantment for the failure of love to flourish in a class priding itself for its capacity to "earn" happiness through work, profit and social respectability. Alonge is right when he suggests that Giacosa finds the Torellian *borghesia* of Fabio Regoli/Giulio Scarli an essentially failed cosmos, for all its social hegemony and financial progress.[136] It is

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[135] *For a different discussion of Tristi amori as a pessimistic diatribe on the crisis of the borghesia in economic terms, see mainly Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli, ibid., 221-225.*

[136] *"Il matrimonio è borghese, ma il grande amore è fuori dal matrimonio. E sopratutto al di fuori del quotidiano. Giulio Scarli sa trovare parole poetiche per cantare il fascino della dura realtà degli affari, per dire l'esaltazione del suo sforzo umano e sociale, della sua lotta nel mondo per crescere e costruirsi...Il self-made man vive per il futuro, investe per i figli, progetta la felicità dei propri discendenti non potendo garantire la propria...La vittoria nel futuro è pagata anticipatamente con il rischio dello scacco e della frustrazione nel presente. Giulio si accetta nella propria sconfitta ma così facendo riformula i ruoli, distribuisce le funzioni, inchioda le parti al proprio destino storico...senza gioia e senza amore. Senza illusioni e senza mistificazioni. E' una verità ostica da accettare, ma è anche un punto fermo da cui non si può prescindere." [Marriage is bourgeois, but great love lies outside marriage. And especially outside the quotidian. Giulio Scarli knows how to find poetic words to rhapsodize about the charm of the cruel reality of business, in order to exalt his own human and social effort, of his struggle in this world to progress and establish himself [...] The self-made man lives for the future,*

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not that the playwright has come to view the ambitions and the tenets of the *borghese* lawyer as wishful thinking, or his optimism unfounded. They strike him as ultimately irrelevant, since his labor and pursuit of success procured him status and social recognition, but they mean nothing for his psyche and his emotional fullfilment. His happiness was nourished by the social acknowledgement that his duties--to make a family, *roba* and *denaro*--have been met, and not by his own gratification in seeing his family happy, not because it feels well-off, but because it feels wanted--not possessed or maintained--and content with the fruits of this prosperity. Giulia, we are allowed to assume, has betrayed her husband, because he has betrayed her with his regarding their relationship as a commodity to which his greater prosperity would add "value" and refine his image as "successful," not only as a professional but also as a man.

What Emma was not able to endure has been Giulio's professionalization of their conjugal life, the association of its success with the economic standing of Giulio as well as her "duty" to wait for her husband to succeed. For Emma, adultery was an act of desperation in her pursuit of happiness

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invests for the children, works for the happiness of his own descendants without being able to guarantee his own... The victory of the future is pre-paid with the risk of defeat and frustration in the present. Giulio accepts his own defeat but in doing so he reformulates the roles, distributes the functions, affixes the parts to their proper historic destiny...without joy and without love. Without illusions and mystifications. It is a nasty verity to accept, but it is also a fact from which it is impossible to escape. Ibid., 166, 169.

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through intimacy and romance, distancing herself from Giulio's social logistics. Giacosa does not condone her impropriety in seeking fulfillment outside marriage, but he does not condemn it either. In fact, Giulio's resolve to take her back is not an act of mercy, but an act of expiation for his own guilt, for his own failure to provide Emma not with a house, but with a home. It is really tragic that even in a moment of catharsis, he has no other way to behave than declaim a "sentence" and retire to his natural habitat, his office, willing to keep up the theatre of happy family for the sake of Gemma. But as his relationship with Emma, his relationship with Gemma is a financial partnership. The appearances are maintained, in order for her to realize Giulio's bourgeois ideals. The irony is that the appearance will be maintained, not only out of deference for society, but also for her own sake, although "in spite of her." Giulio has planned a fictional home for Gemma's upbringing, a home where love will be faked just like in the past, but with the difference that this *realtà* will not transpire unbeknownst to him, but because of him.[137] Thus her future as a woman, for all the ambitions of Giulio, won't be more propitious than her mother's, because the *casa borghese* of Giulio Scarli will

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[137] *Apropos Gemma's future and perception of realtà, there is a striking similarity between Giacosa's play and Giacometti's Morte civile. In both plays, the "child" will be raised with the same perception of its realtà that society will have, that is society and Gemma will co-share the same fiction that Giulio has agreed upon with Emma.*

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continue to be a futile *realtà*, a *casa* still devoid of truth.

The crisis of the bourgeois psyche and the desperate attempt of the *borghese* to overcome this crisis and triumph over the *realtà* of a life that denies the freedom of spirit or even the freedom to "compromise" the spirit in order to comply with social duty and *realtà* takes Diritti dell'anima, Giacosa's next play, away from the *verismo* of "things" toward the *verismo* of the "unexpressed."[138] Written seven years after Tristi amori and just when Ibsen's *problematica* had began to challenge the veristic certainties of Italian playwrights, the play was seen as a rather hapless attempt not just to emulate, but to italianize this *problematica*.[139] Giacosa himself was not oblivious of this criticism, and although he openly admitted an influence of Ibsen on his "function" as a playwright, he was all the more adamant about the *italianità*, the originality of his dramaturgical concepts. Thus he explained in a letter to Roberto Bracco his artistic "encounter" with Ibsen:

Che Ibsen abbia lasciato in me una impressione profondissima ed

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[138] *The play was first produced at the Nuovo Teatro of Verona in 26 February 1894 by the company of Ermete Zacconi-Libero Pilotto-Sciarra.*

[139] *Cf. Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, ivid., 232; Maurice Muret, La littérature italienne d'aujourd'hui (Paris: Perrin, 1905), 52ff. For a refutation of this criticism see Lina Massignan, "Ibsen e il Giacosa de 'I diritti dell'anima'," Ateneo Veneto 119 (1935), 179-188, especially 185ff. The most frequent argument is the "similarity" between Anna, the play's heroine, and Ibsen's Nora as well as the "common" end of the plays (Like Nora, Anna leaves her marriage).*

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abbia in parte modificato il mio concetto dell'opera scenica. è vero; ma non è men vero che nè vorrei, nè saprei piegare il mio igegno latino alle forme nordiche nè ragionare in luogo di rappresentare.[140]

Rather than desiring to shock the *borghesia* out of its conformism, Giacosa was, in fact, inclined to explore the contradictions of *verità* not as they insinuate themselves in the realities that the *borghese* has forged around and for himself--in this case marriage-- but as they motivate the individuals to sacrifice their social pose in order to protect their freedom "to be free." This is the situation of Anna, the wife of Paolo, who walks out on him, when the latter, after discovering that Luciano, his cousin, had commited suicide, because Anna, out of deference to her marriage, had rejected his love, "demands" to "know" whether Anna had ever truly loved that man, whether, that is, Anna had commited "spiritual adultery."[141] This inquisition is staged as if it were the

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[140] *"It is true that Ibsen has left in me a most profound impression and has partly modified my concept of dramaturgy; but it is no less true that I would not want, or be able to adapt my latin genius to [his] nordic forms or to rationalize in lieu of representing." Letter cited by Roberto Bracco in the commemorative issue of La lettura 10 (Oct. 1906), 855-878, put together on the occasion of Giacosa's death. Among other contributors to this issue were Gabrielle D'Annunzio, Gerolamo Rovetta, E.A. Butti, Giovanni Verga and Luigi Illica. For the letter, see p. 867.*

[141] *It seems that with the development and the popularization of psychology and psychiatry in the late nineties, "spiritual adultery" had become an intriguing quandary frequently debated by modern Italian artists, especially feminists and the various arguments pro and against Platonic love and its being a "crime" continued unabated for several years. Amelia Roselli's Anima (discussed in chapter 4) is a good record of this bourgeois controversy. For Giacosa this problematica was not a discovery. Several of his earlier plays had dealt with "soul infidelity," such as Marito amante della moglie and Sirena. See Barsotti, ibid., 239.*

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last act of a drama that has begun in the past, in the souls and the lives of the alienated heroes. This "demand," which Anna feels as a violation of the soul, precipitates not only the anagnorisis that her marriage has been nothing more than a dispiriting illusion of "institutionalized" love, but also her resolve to "punish" her husband for not trusting her commitment to his own happiness, her sense of duty. With the only evidence of her "adultery" existing in an ambiguous letter found in Luciano's posession (mailed back to Paolo as his only "survivor") and declaring both Anna's "innocence" and "guilt," Paolo tries to interprete her "intentions," that it is to interprete her intimate *verità*, to bare her soul. The more he analyzes the letter, the more his own insecurity, cowardice and distrust come forward, and this shows to Anna that her husband had not been a stranger to her, but that she had been a stanger to him. Her "crime" has been not having realized this *verità*.

Diritti dell' anima is then a psychodrama, inquiring into the impasses of a marriage based on precarious assumptions about reciprocal love rights and the prerogatives of compassion. Paolo and Anna not only challenge each other's claims to fidelity and integrity, but they also gradually disclose the disingenuousness of their feelings and the hypocrisy defiling their inner selves. What Giacosa takes to task is not the institution of marriage nor its potential dissolution to a social transaction of convenience, where

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people negotiate the probity of their spirit in order to keep up the appearances. Instead, he resolves to anatomize spiritual adultery as the most dire side effect of psychic miscommunication. Whereas Anna has "impulsively" nurtured a secret passion for Luciano as an antidote to her emotional indifference for Paolo, the latter has indulged in a pathos for an ideal of Anna, idealized yet reshaped to fit his own precepts of what a life companion should be.[142] Both characters, Giacosa suggests, have failed to fulfill their need for unconditional love: They have lost the capacity to love.

What is diagnosed in the play as an unwholesome arrangement of private life is the characters' unconscious resolve to forge their marriage not by a constant reaffirming of love; but by an ersatz feeling of companionship, codified in legalistic notions--such as wifely duties or spousal rights (*"diritti"*)--[143] and maintained as a complacent life style, a legitimate co-ownership of each other's inner cosmos: *"Sono il possessore, [Anna] è mia, è cosa mia,"* declares Paolo; while Anna admits that *"[come] tua moglie per anni, in silenzio, ho difesa la tua pace, ho compiuto quello che la*

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[142] *Cf. Massignan, ibid., 179, 185.*

[143] *See Ferdinando Martini's review of the play, now in* Al teatro *(Firenze: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1895), 429ff.*

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gente chiama il mio dovere."[144] What in fact both of them allege to, but do not clearly articulate, is the rueful compromise they have been defining as an expression of reciprocal love.

For Paolo love has been a passion consecrated by the mystery of matrimony as the proper index of fidelity and happiness. For Anna love has been an act of self-negation which society has sanctioned as a wife's honorable duty, a "dovere" guaranteeing the appearance of a felicitous union. This is a familial circumstance in which Paolo has the right to have his wife's love constantly affirmed in its entirety. Equally, Anna maintains the *"diritto"* to conceal her personal agonies in favor of her husband's peace of mind, while honoring her *"dovere,"* simulating an abiding emotional bliss: This oxymoron dictates the course and the makeup of their lives at the expense of their sincerity, spiritual righteousness and self-awareness. Thus, Anna's dutiful "love" for Paolo has devolved to pity, and therefore the affectionate sacrifice of her true passion (Luciano) for an apathetic husband is deemed an unmercifully sentimental absurdity. Luciano's suicide, the catalyst and not the usher of her superficial marriage's demise, reveals this absurdity to its

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[144] *"I am the owner, Anna is mine, she is my thing." As your wife for years, silently, I have protected your peace, I have done what people call my duty." Sc. 7, and scena ultima, Giacosa, ibid., 487, 494.*

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true proportions: *"Ho ucciso un uomo e mi hai abracciata per questo,"* she retorts disgusted to a husband happy to reward the integrity of his meritorious "possession."[145] In the end, it is *"pietà,"* pity and mercy as well, that husband and wife seek from each other as the ultimate expression of erotic compassion.

Sincere love, Giacosa appears to conclude, is a tangible reality, perceptible in each and every articulation of its genuiness, be it in happiness or in adversity. It is a verità reaffirmed only if people feel the need to reaffirm it, in each other's "being there," in the struggle to reach each other's soul and not in the futile effort to possess it. Love becomes a useless abstraction, when "documented" declarations of faith are the only acceptable manifestation of reciprocal commitment to a (moribund) relationship. Indeed, the "unnecessary tragedy" Giacosa's characters repeatedly allude to, but fail to expound, is not the compromises they have to agree upon, in order to afford living together. It is rather their lack of courage to lead a life of sincerity, a lack which condemns them to live like panicky fugitives from their own true selves. That Anna goes, then, is not a proof of inner freedom. It is an act of exasperation. What Giacosa presents as all the more pathetic in her situation is the absence of an alternative option: It is not that she suddenly realized the

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[145] *"I have killed a man and you have embraced me for that." Sc, 4, Ibid., 480.*

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insipidity of her marriage that prompts her departure. It is rather the realization of her failure to save her soul from the humiliation of tolerating hypocrisy for the sake of propriety. Her life with Paolo has been a tragedy without a redeeming catharsis.

For the majority of Giacosa's scholars, Come le foglie is the epitome of his *verismo* dramaturgy and bourgeois sociology. It was virtually the first important Italian play of the twentieth century and as a cultural document of a period defined by all sorts of social and political adjustments it has been ever since perceived as the final chapter in the history of *verismo* or the theatrical obituary of bourgeois positivism.[146] In fact, the play was neither an end nor a sociopolitical manifesto, not only because its verismo esthetic was enriched and invigorated by the psychological subtleties of *crepuscolarismo* and *decadentismo*, but more importantly because the play had been conceived to affirm the

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[146]*The play opened at the Teatro Manzoni of Milan in 31 January 1900 by the company of Tina di Lorenzo, Flavio Andò and Virgilio Talli. To this day, it is still considered one of the greatest commercial successes of post-Risorgimento Italian theatre, enjoying a long run in Italy, productions in Berlin (1900) and Paris (by Antoine in 1909), translations in several foreign languages and a film adaptation in 1934 by Mario Camerini. Contemporary reviewers were as enthusiastic as the audiences, but for Giacosa, his friends and the actors this success was unexpected. Pozza, Boito and several other associates of Giacosa had predicted a disaster, having found the play rather gloomy and "difficult." Giacosa was still writing the forth act while the company was in rehearsal and from letters written at the time of the creative process it is revealed that he was rather ambivalent not so much about the commercial appeal of the commedia as for his aptitude to "complete" not just a social drama but a "modern" drama. For a chronicle of the play's prehistory, casting and reception see Marco Praga, Chronache teatrali (Milano: Treves, 1923), 24-28. For a collection of reviews see Nardi, ibid., 816ff; or, Giovanni Pozza, Cronache teatrali, op.cit., 315.*

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positivistic spirit still animating the most ambitious and "adaptable" *borghesie*.[147] The subject-matter of the *commedia*, a *borghese* family tested by social and financial crisis and saved through its reaffirmation in the "marriage" of one of its members within the same class, had been a challenging one for several late 19th century dramatists writing in the naturalistic vein. Henri Becque's Les corbeaux (The Vultures, 1882) and Bjornstjerne Björnson's En Handske (A Bankruptcy, 1883), to name just two of the most famous cases of this dramaturgy, had dealt with the social complications ensuing from the struggle for survival among the members of *borghesia*, but the manner as well as the mood in these plays suggested a pessimistic rather than an upbeat prospect of that class' capacity to endure.[148] Come le foglie, however, emphasized not the dissipation of bourgeois family --the

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[147] *For Giacosa and crepuscolarismo see Stefano Jacomuzzi, "Gli anni Ottanta: il decennio naturalista nel teatro italiano," Il teatro dell'Italian unita, op. cit., 174ff; and Giorgio Pullini, Teatro Italiano fra due secoli, ibid., 225.*

[148] ***Several critics have tried to establish a direct influence of these and other works on Giacosa's commedia. Becque was more popular with Italian than French audiences, and Bjornson's play, a popular success in the 1893-4 season in Italy was probably known to Giacosa through the Italian adaptation or the French translation. Cf. Pellini, 42ff and 51ff. For the "influence" of Bjornson on Giacosa see Ernest Tissot, "Le théâtre de Giacosa," La Revue latine 7 (1908), 502ff. For a general account on Becque's fortune in Italian theatre see Anne-Christine Faitrop-Porta, "Il teatro di Henri Becque nella Roma fine Ottocento," op. cit., 27-50. Silvana Monti is certain about Giacosa's borrowings from Georges Ohnet's Le maître de forges (The Ironmaster, 1883), another popular play in Italy; cf. her article "La scienza nel teatro naturalista italiano," op. cit., 756. Finally Pullini traces several of Come le foglie's motifs in Giacinto Gallina's dialect play Una famegia in rovina (1872). Pullini, ibid., 64-5. As in Ferrari's case, I don't find this sort of scholarship consequential.***

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autumnal title may easily mislead as an allusion to a class/family "dispersed" like the trees' dead leaves--but the confidence that a *borghesia* aware of its limits and its merits can, notwithstanding its occasional relapse into despair and nostalgia for its "golden past", find in itself the fortitude and the rationale for its social restoration.

Giacosa's penultimate *commedia* is essentially a plotless anatomy of a financially broken family, attempted through the study of the way with which its various members react or adjust to the new social *realtà* that transpires when their financial crisis necessitates their uprooting, emigration and resettlement in a foreign milieu constantly cancelling their hopes of assimilation and advancement. In this play there is not a protagonist prevailing over the other dramatis personae, while the episodic structure of the four acts has enabled the playwright to shift the focus of attention from one character to another, thus not only shedding light on the psychology of his mystified *borghesi*, but also explicating their success or failure to adapt to the new social demands.[149] Giovanni Rosani, another version of Fabio Regoli to whom life has not, however, been fair, is a "self-made" stockbroker gone bankrupt after his second wife Giulia has introduced to him a lawyer that misappropriated the money Rosani managed. His fall brings the end of his family's social prosperity and when Massimo

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[149] *Siro Ferrone calls the commedia "choral." Cf. Il teatro italiano, op. cit., 305.*

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Rosani, a hard-working nephew involved in the Swiss railroad business, offers him a respectable, but low-income job in Zurich, he resettles there with his second wife, Giulia, and his children from his first marriage, Tommy and Nennele. In order to augment his income Giovanni "works like a dog," but his sacrifices have little impact on the family's life. The members of this family "communicate" through Nennele, a down-to-earth young woman, who offers private lessons to children, while acting as a housekeeper, dealing daily with her spendthrift step-mother and listless yet extravagant brother. Giulia and Tommy, however, refuse to accept their new *realtà*, doing all they can to convey an image of debonair *borghesi*, the former idly spending her time by painting and flirting with her "art teachers," the latter gambling and socializing with the demi-monde. Deserting a job that Massimo has offered him, Tommy continues to amass debts and in order to repay them he becomes involved with a disreputable socialite who agrees to help him out if he marries her. Unable, or rather devoid of the volition to find a different way out, he accedes to this marriage of convenience, frustrating once again the dreams of his father and sister for the family's social recovery. Not suffering the idea that her brother is socially "*perduto*" (lost), Nennele contemplates suicide, but her father who accidentally becomes aware of her intentions, intervenes and prevents the fatality. In order to save the integrity of the family, Nennele resolves to marry hard-working Massimo. For

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old Rosani, this marriage may revive the hope for his family's more prosperous future.

Come le foglie chronicles a class identity crisis, adressing not only its symptoms but also its impact on the self-consciousness of the *borghese* who dares or dares not rise above the "necessity" of maintaining the *realtà* of "normality" and face the challenges of the *verità* that ensues, discouraging and inexorable. The members of Giovanni's family have two choices: either to pretend to ignore life's *verità*, fooling themselves into presuming that maintaining the appearance of an unproblematic *realtà* saves their integrity and self-esteem; or to defy the failings of this *verità*, trying to transform it rather than camouflaging it with self-delusions. Giulia and Tommy, who opt for the illusions of grandeur that the *realtà* of feigned opulence sustains doom themselves to a permanent social stagnation, either because the society they try to emulate does not adopt them (Giulia), or because the values and the lifestyle they espouse in order to keep up this *realtà* turn into a social *verità* bleaker and more compromising than the *verità* they tried to evade (Tommy). Nennele and Giovanni, who try to make the best out of the circumstances as realists, who refuse to simulate the easiness of the past in a present of hardships undergo a painful process of adjustment, too. But their positive spirit and their sense of their duty to the future and the family stimulates their faith in their capacity to endure sacrifice

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and overcome adversity. Certainly their sense of *verità* does not always spare them bouts of resentment and pessimism, and Nennele's resolve to end her life is the gravest manifestation of such despair, although what precipitated her loss of courage was not her loss of faith in her future and her mission, but her realization that, for all the sacrifices she is willing to endure, she cannot bring about happiness as a condition for her whole family. She soon realizes that the greatest triumph is simply to survive.

The *declassamento* of the *borghesia* reflected in the social discomfitures plaguing the expatriate Rosani family has been explained by several critics in terms of a "natural" decline which either the *borghesia* itself has accelerated, or the modern *moment* has impelled.[160] The simile of the leaves falling from the tree has been a topos of romantic realism since its earlier phases alluding to various situations of

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[160] *Pullini finds the end of the third act —in which Nennele decides to commit suicide—as the "actual" end of the commedia, arguing that the "positive" forth act is a contrived and facile dramaturgical solution that the previous acts have not prepared, and call it a comforting concession to an audience which expects to be made feel optimistic. Pullini, ibid., 227. Alonge, on the other hand, speaks of the play as an elegy lamenting the "end" of a class and describes the fourth act as consoling compensation: "Dopo l'elegia del cedimento e della caduta, delle foglie che il vento disperde, il soprassalto dell'autocritica, della confessione delle colpe, il consolante risarcimento della catarsi, del pianto liberatore... All' alba del nuovo secolo, l'Ottocento si congeda definitivamente con un grande pianto rituale sui destini di una borghesia sempre più in crisi, inquieta, sfiduciata. [After the elegy of the end and fall, of the leaves dispersed by the wind, there suddenly self-criticism emerges, a confession of mistakes, the consoling compensation of catharsis, the liberating tears.. In the outbreak of the new century, the 19th Century is bid farewell forever with a grand ritual lament over the fate of a bourgeoisie always more grievous, uneasy and disheartened.] Ibid., 180. See also Roberto Tessari in Ferrone, ed. Il teatro dell'Italia unita, op.cit., 190ff.*

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alienation, disillusionment and/or social disenfranchisement, yet for Giacosa this same simile does not function as a melodramatic reference to the familial and social situation he chronicles. The purpose is not to romanticize the sadness of the struggling heroes or the hopelessness of their efforts to evade *verità*. In fact it is evident the playwright's effort to write a terse, desentimentalized dialogue, in which banalities, non sequiturs, unfinished statements and silences accentuate not just the problem of miscommunication distressing the characters, but also their failure to articulate compassion for each other's predicament. Instead of conveying a state of decadence and dissipation, the imagery of the leaves refers not to a terminal social condition --the leaves are falling, they have not yet fallen--but to a *realtà* which, threatening though it may be, has not yet turned into an irreversible social *verità*. The *commedia* follows step by step the complications of a social crisis as it occurs (not after it has occured) and what animates the action is not the representation of effects, but the research for the causes and the efforts, successful or not, to arrest it. The struggle of the *borghesi* is not yet decided and the issue is whether life *(verità)* determines victory or defeat *(realtà)*, or if a transitory and mutable condition such as the *realtà* of *declassamento* should be allowed to determine the *verità* of life. For Giacosa, decline and failure is not the natural conclusion of a social cycle, subject to powers and factors

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above human power or the *moment*. Like Nennele, Giovanni and Massimo, Giacosa is not a fatalist. He tries to explain the ways of modernity in terms of human determination and social volition. Indeed, the predicament of the Rosani family derives not from a lack of perspective or from an effort to evade the truths, but from a lack of courage, a deficiency of *volontà*.

Giacosa's *borghesi* are not ignorant of this debilitating *realtà*. It is, in fact, Tommy, the character suffering most by this shortage of will, that articulates the origin of this problem:

> *TOMMY: Il pensiero è lí sempre, ma ne faccio passare degli altri davanti. Non ho immagini profonde. Mi vedo come in uno specchio. Come vedrei una persona indifferente. So quello che averrà. Non farò nulla perchè avvenga, non farò nulla perchè non avvenga. Mi abbandono alla corrente. [...] Tutto facile è stato nella mia vita. Tutto facile fino dal principio, e continuamente, e sempre! facile il vivere, facili i cognizioni, facili i piaceri, ..., facile la pietà, facili i vici...una cosa sola difficile... la volontà, ma non mi occorreva... la volontà per me si chiamava o consuetudine o capriccio [...] mancava la ruota, mancava il congegno. (Act III, sc.14).*[151]

Tommy's self-confessions associate the lack of *volontà* with a cultural development for which his generation bears no

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[151] *TOMMY: Such thoughts are always there, but I let other thoughts cover them up. I don't dwell on it. I see myself as in a mirror, as I might be looking at any stranger. I know what is coming. I will do nothing to hasten it, or to prevent it. I abandon myself to the current.... Everything in my life has been easy, easy from the start, continuously, always! Living has been easy, education has been easy, pleasures have been easy. Deference to my betters and kindness to my inferiors have been easy. Mercy and vice have been easy...one thing was difficult... will power, but I did not need it... My decisions were all made either by habit or caprice... I lacked direction and purpose... I read from Ferrone's edition in Teatro italiano, op. cit., 374-5.*

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responsibility and to which his father's generation has been the chief contributor: the social, political and spiritual trivialization of *borghesia* from a meritocracy to a plutocracy monomaniacally pursuing the proliferation of wealth, disassociated from nobler social aspirations. The initial drive of Giovanni's class to attain a status of happiness has atrophied to a culture of *denaro* and this atrophy has created a new generation of *borghesi*, who living without "ruota" and "congegno" have miscontrued life as a hedonistic hobby, a *capriccio*, which in its own turn has atrophied their will to have a mission. The ideological disorientation of the class's leaders lies at the core of the modern crisis-in-the-making and in a backlash it has hurt not only the humanity, but also the prosperity they have coveted. Essentially, then, there is a double drama enacted in Come le foglie: The drama of "irresponsible" fathers who, in order to secure their children a fortune and a future, have forgotten the value of living; and the drama of irresponsible children accustomed to good living with no experience of life.[152]

A well-intented father, Giovanni irresponsibly had worked all his life in order to let his children grow up enjoying life without the burden to have to face the "joyless" *realt*

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[152]*See Luisa Mirone, La familia a teatro. Conflitti e compromessi familiari sulle scene del secondo Ottocento op. cit., 91. I actually tend to believe that Come le foglie functions as a sequel to Tristi amori, since the final scene of that play anticipates the establishment of a bourgeois topos: the working father who, loveless, provides for the child, only in order to secure it the "realt" of wealth.*

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of struggling to live. With work and *denaro* prioritized as a mission, he has neglected his true *dovere*, to raise children with a sense of mission and a will to be themselves. This lack of communication has created a superficial emotional bond between father and child, a *realtà* of intimacy nourished not by his acting like a father but like a financier. Once this support is discontinued, the bond breaks and the emerging *verità* is that of a family without bonds of affection, a "partnership" disintegrated due to lack of funds. The children, well-intended, too, but without previous experience of adversity, cannot have a mission to save the family. They either try to save as much as possible of the appearance of the financial prosperity lost (Nennele) or to hold on to the appearance of the social privileges forfeited (Tommy).[153] The *volontà* to act and thus react to their predicament is missing, because what has been missing all along was communication, a mission of socialization, a love for mission. The final act of the play, a one-scene confession transpiring between father and daughter, is exactly what Giacosa has suggested as eluding modern *borghesia*, an attempt at communication and reconnection, an attempt at preventing the family's social extinction:[154]

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[153]*For example, Tommy has explained his gambling as a privilege of the "gente per bene, [chi] esprime quel distacco dal denaro che è il segno degli uomini superiori" [the good society, which expresses that distancing from money, which is a sign of superior men.]*

[154]*Cf. Alonge, 179.*

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> *GIOVANNI Cos´è che ignoro ancora della mia casa?... [...]*
> *NENNELE E io ti lasciavo quando avevi più bisogno di aiuto e di conforto, quando eri più solo: e non pensavo a te, e tu pensavi sempre a noi, e vivevi per noi!... E pensavo male di te, e ti giudicavo male. ... Non mi pareva che tu facessi abbastanza per noi. Capisci? Capisci? Non senti nulla di quello che ti dico?!*
> *GIOVANNI... Avevi ragione. Non ho fatto abbastanza per voi... Mi pareva che arricchirvi dovesse bastare.*
> *NENNELE Se tu sapessi come ti vedo su in alto davanti a me! Che riposo, che sicurezza mi dà il sentire quella tua protezione vigilante. Perchè non si parla mai di queste cose? Perchè non ci diciamo mai tutto?... Fa così bene spalancare l´animo fino al fondo...*[155]

The will to survive and live requires the will to communicate and express love through compassion and sacrifice. Nennele herself is to provide an example for the mission which the *borghesia* is presumed to adopt, the reacquaintance with the ethics of *lavoro* as a *dovere* not for the accumulation of wealth, but for the well-being of society. Her marriage with Massimo, the new positivist *borghese*, the Fabio Regoli for the new century, is indeed a sacrifice for her. It is clear that Nennele feels no eros for him, but a kind of love that could best be explained as admiration and respect for his humanity and the social values he represents. It would be unfair to interpret her sacrifice to marry him as a social compromise in

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[155] *GIOVANNI What´s going on in my house that I know nothing about?... NENNELE And I was going to leave you when you needed help and comfort more than ever, when you were more alone than ever: And I was not thinking of you, and you always thought of us, and lived for us!... And I thought unjustly about you and misjudged you... I thought you were not doing enough for us. Do you understand? Do you understand? Do you see nothing of what I´m saying to you?/GIOVANNI... You were right. I have not done enough for you... Then it seemed to me that it was enough to make you rich./NENNELE If you only knew how I look up to you! What comfort and security gives me the feel that you are my watchful guardian. Why is it that we never speak of such things? Why haven´t we ever spoken of all that?... It feels so good when we speak out our very soul... Ferrone, ibid., 383-4.*

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order to save the appearances of the respectable bourgeois family. It is rather a voluntary act of rehabilitating herself in the new class of pragmatists who have a mission to serve, and a will to serve it. Giacosa himself is a pragmatist and the end of his play does not suggest that Nennele's marriage will be a panacea for the troubles befalling Tommy, Giovanni or even Giulia. Nothing, indeed, suggests that this union will save Giovanni's *casa* as nothing suggests that this union will be a happy one. Whatever the future might be, Giacosa can only have good hopes for the family as the only bourgeois *verità* worth the sacrifice. The survival of this *verità* is not just a *dovere*. It is a *diritto*.

Massimo is a minor participant in the play's plot but a major one in the *commedia*'s wider sociological scheme, inasmuch as a representative of the new positivist *borghesia* he embodies its most important ideal: the social (not economic) value of work. "*Io ho l'energia che intraprende*," he proudly asserts, the energy, that is, which allows the *borghese* not to overvalue the trappings of bourgeois affluence, but to believe in the capacity of work to help one accomplish success and live life as well. In 1900 Giacosa is reproposing Fabio Regoli as a role model for the *borghesia*, but he is not willing to predict the social success of this model. As we said, Giacosa was a pragmatist and the *verità* of a society always in unpredictable evolution did not elude him. It always intrigued him.

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The self-assertiveness of the *borghesia* as well as its preoccupation with its status in a mutating social and cultural milieu is also the *realtà* debated in Giacosa's last play, Il più forte. Whereas Come le foglie functioned as an elegiac chronicle of a class in crisis with many a mode and mood borrowed from *scapigliatura* pessimism and D'Annunzian *crepuscolarismo*, in this last *commedia* the playwright eschewed subtle dialogue and *drammi intimi* going back to the straightforward social dialectics of Torelli. Il più forte is an exemplary problem play, yet its *problematica* is less about the specific dilemma--the relationship/conflict between business and idealism--frustrating the peace in a *borghese* family, and more about the discrepancy between social *realtà*/individual *verità* and social *verità*/individual *realtà* that the family crisis exposes. The playwright is not concerned with the struggle of classes or the controversial morality of the amoral superman expounded by Nietsche and italianized by D'Annunzio and his disciples. Nor does he philosophize about the prevalence of ethics and "values" over the "unprincipled" principles of capitalism. In fact, the basic situation of the *commedia*, the clash of a pragmatist *affarista* with his romantic and therefore morally adamant scion, is a topos not only for the French tradition of the *piéce bien faite* or the Italian *commedia a tesi*, but also a *tematica* revisited by playwrights with a more modern and more unsettling social vision, such as Octave Mirbeau (Les affaires

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sont les affaires, [first performance, 1903]) and George Bernard Shaw (Mrs. Warren's Profession, 1902). Giacosa himself had earlier in his career dealt with this issue in the lost Affari di banca, but his 1904 play approximates (although without adopting) the subversive social rhetoric of the Irish playwright and not the parabolically tragic inferences of Mirbeau.[156] The purpose was not to defend the rights and the moral *doveri* of the *borghesia* against its excesses and therefore moralize, as Croce has rather unfairly concluded,[157] but rather to emphasise the most "paradoxical" *verità* of this class: the irrelevance of moralism as "morality" and the debt of idealism and "anti-bourgeois" intellectualism to the financial and social security vouchsafed by the "profits" and the "affari" of the "unprincipled" capitalist *borghese*. Just like Shaw, Giacosa seems to imply that the greatest hypocrite is the idealist without a cause and that the greatest hypocrisy is to defend the *verità* of humanity, while ignoring the parameters of one's

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[156] *Pierluigi Pullini insists on Giacosa's debt to Mirbeau's play and takes to task earlier critics—Donelli, Rumor, Nardi and Barsotti—for either downplaying the issue or overlooking it altogether. Ibid., 61n.98. For a similar reaction see also Maurice Muret, La littérature italienne d'aujourd'hui, ibid., 52ff. Apropos Shaw and Giacosa, see Personè, ibid., 102ff. Although there is some similarity between Giacosa's and Shaw's rhetoric, it is highly improbable that Giacosa was conversant with Mrs Warren. Personè, in fact, argues that the affinity is purely coincidental, due only to the commonality of the social "problems" confounding the various Belle Époque European borghesie.*

[157] *Croce, ibid., 234ff: "Il più forte esprime un altro sentimento della borghesia, o di una parte più cospicua della borghesia: l'orrore per l'affarismo." [The Stronger expresses another sentiment of the borghesia, or a sentiment of its more conspicuous segment: the horror of speculation.]*

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own social *realtà*, of disavowing the same social benefits and comforts that had facilitated the pursuit of "nobler" social aspirations. Certainly as an aging moderate thinker Giacosa did not go as far as Shaw to proclaim that morality "the way...to think right and proper is a pretence, to keep the cowardly slavish common run of people quiet." But his "understanding" for the *verità/realtà* of the bourgeois businessman--"business is business" and "business is not life, but a means of life"[158]--does not connote a reactionary justification of the way things are in a capitalist state, but his respect for those having come to terms with the incongruities (*realtà*) of life (*verità*), without a loss of social perspective or sagacity.[159] Il più forte, then, is not the portrayal of a class hiding itself behind its appearances, but a debate that betrays the *borghese* willing, if not ready, to test not only the validity of his assertion that his class is wanting in humanity, but also the validity of this allegation for his own *trovarsi* as an individual.

Presented for the first time in Turin by the troupe of

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[158] *"Gli affari sono gli affari;" "Gli affari non sono la vita: sono uno strumento della vita; Il più forte in Giacosa, Teatro, ibid., 671.*

[159] *It is interesting to observe that Giacosa dedicated his last play to Ernesto de Angeli and G.B. Pirelli "in segno di vivissimo affetto." Both men were pioneering Italian industrialists, very close friends of Giacosa and men who influenced his appreciation about the "pragmatic" consciousness of the Italian businessman and his no-nonsense positivism. The dedication disproves, I think, the assertion that Giacosa's play was an apology of idealism against the enterpreneurial tactics of the borghesia. Cf. Vito Pandolfi, "Il mondo di Giuseppe Giacosa," Dramma 239-40 (1956), 29ff.*

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Irma Gramatica, the play was unable to score as astounding a commercial success as Come le foglie did, despite the meritorious production and the fact that in essence the *commedia* both embodied a variation on the themes and the characters of the earlier play and solidified its evasive optimism about the reinvention of *borghesia*. Structured as a sequence of duologue scenes alternating with brief "choral" episodes, much like Torelli's Mariti, the play has a main plot and a parallel subplot, both evolving the rebellion of the romantic artist Silvio Nalli against the complacent life prepared for him by his financier father, Cesare Nalli (plot) and against the amoralism of his cousin Edoardo Falcieri who challenges his sense of manly honor and threatens his relationship with his wife Flora (subplot).[160] The debate about the meaning of life and the dependence of this meaning's

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[160] *Mario Apollonio has suggested that the names chosen by Giacosa for his characters are highly symbolic, suggesting not only the ideal which each individual represents, but also the "status" that each character desires out of life. Thus, Cesare Nalli represents the patriarchal authority and the "volontà di dominio," [the will for domination], Silvio stands for the Arcadian search of absolute ideality, "l'umbratile sensibilità dell'artista" [the taciturn sensibility of the artist], Flora argues for a refined life style, symbolizing the "desiderio di una vita eletta ad offrire modello di sè raffinatamente" [the desire of a life chosen to provide itself as a model of refinement]. Apollonio, ibid., 704. Even Falcieri has a name that sounds like the verb falciare which metaphorically means to stab. This technique is also reminiscent of Torelli's dramaturgy. The theme of the "stronger" plays both with the argument of whether Cesare or Silvio is the stronger theorist of life and the antagonism between the socially "weak" but "independent" Silvio and the cagey yet financially dependent Edoardo. In the manuscript version of the play Giacosa directly associates this theme with the antagonism between the cousins, but in the published version this association has been subdued. In a letter to the poet Pascoli, written after the opening of the play, Giacosa wondered whether the meaning of the play would be served better if the title was changed to Il più forte? with the questionmark implying the impossibility of answering the argument.*

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quality on the ruthless struggle for hegemony and financial autonomy challenges the happiness of Cesare's family when on the day of his birthday, an occasion for which he lavishes luxurious gifts on his family--emblems of his financial success--his son Silvio becomes aware that the comfortable life he and his wife have enjoyed so far has been possible thanks to his father's morally dubious, but business-wise judicious ventures, the latter precipitating the financial catastrophe of one of his competitors. When the son of that man dares to call Cesare a thief in front of Silvio in a private social gathering, challenging him thus to a duel, Cesare arranges for the resilient Edoardo to fight the duel, so that Silvio's life may be spared. Hurt and confused, Silvio demands from his father the truth about the reality of his *affari* and whether the accusations have been justified by his activities. Upset by Cesare's confessions to the crimes of business as well as by his revelations about the way he had "financed" the bookish idealism of his son, Silvio resolves to loose his financial ties to his family, not only because this bond has sustained his own romantic self-delusions, but also because it has cut him off from the *realtà* of the real world. He decides then to depart from Milan and settle in Rome, completely "free" to support himself by means of his paintings, no matter if this resettlement would entail the end of refinement and the belated beginning of his socialization. To his father's apology for the nature of business and the

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protests of Flora who abhors leaving elegance behind for the sake of her husband's "problem" with reality, Silvio finds the courage to answer that his resolve to stand on his own feet is not a renounciation of his father's good intentions and love, but an endeavor to emulate Cesare's own example:

> *SILVIO: Non ti rinnego. Tu sei vissuto del tuo lavoro, voglio seguire il tuo esempio.*
> *CESARE: Di te, sono vissuto...Hai risoluto, eh? Respingi il mio denaro che ti disonora... Voglio sentire che suono hanno sulla tua bocca quelle parole. Dimmelo, Silvio...che ti disonora. Un'anima pura come la tua sdegna le reticenze riguardose. Ma anche la tua purezza, sai, è frutto del mio denaro...Ogni cosa: l'orgoglio, l'austerità, l'ingratitudine...ogni cosa è uscita di lì. [...] Ragazzo, portavo la legna alle stufe della Banca dove mio padre era fattorino. Se tu non nascevi, credi che mi sarei accanito ad ammassare milioni? Che ne avrei fatto? Che me ne faccio? Che ne farò se li ricusi?*
> *SILVIO:... Hai voluto la mia felicità: ebbene, non contendermela ora: voglio riceverla da te, col tuo consenso. Ti somiglio. Sono tagliato nella tua scorza aspra e rude. Mi hai dato di te la parte migliore...lascia che io operi secondo la tua indole nativa [...] Non sdegno la ricchezza, ma voglio crearmela da me...Guardati intorno: i soli ricchi utilmente generosi, sono i creatori di ricchezza (Act III, sc. 8).*[161]

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[161] *SILVIO: I don't renounce you. You have lived by your own work, I want to follow your own example./CESARE: I have lived by you... You are decided, aren't you? You reject my money as if it dishonors you... I want to hear these words from your lips. Tell me, Silvio, that they dishonor you. A pure soul like yours should disdain quibbling reservations. But even your purity, you know, is the fruit of my wealth...Everything: pride, austerity, ingratitude, every thing is the fruit of my wealth. ... As a young kid, I carried wood for the stoves of the bank where my father worked as an errand boy. If you hadn't been born, do you think that I would have worked like a dog in order to pile up millions? What would have I done with them? What do I do with them? What will I do if you refuse my money?/SILVIO:... You wanted my happiness: well, don't deprive me of it now: I want you to grant it to me with your consent. I've taken after you. I was cut out of the same rough, harsh grain as you. I've taken after your best part... let me work as you would act following your own natural bent [...] I don't scorn wealth, but I want to make it for myself... Look around you: the only rich people, usefully generous, are the creators of riches...* Giacosa, Teatro, *672-3.*

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Before departing, Silvio has to "reclaim" his honor from the cousin who has deprived him of the duty/right to defend his name and family. When Edoardo returns to his "shelter," Silvio, with renewed spirit, proves to him not just his own superiority as a man of honor, but also the lack of integrity and freedom that has defined Edoardo's "heroic" existence:

> *SILVIO:..All'armi ci hai una destrezza professionale. Sfido. Paghi i debiti con quelle! Hai paura di mio padre. Il denaro di mio padre mi salva. Perchè sai, che, solo a torcermi un capello, mio padre ti chiude la borsa. E tu sei uomo sì, da gittare la vita in un momento, ma non da faticarla per anni. Questo è. E ora hai la partita bella, sai. Ti lascio liberi il campo...e la cassa. Fatti sotto e svuotala fino all'ultimo. è il solo bene che mi puoi fare.*
> *EDOARDO: Sai che questa casa mi è sacra. Non posso risponderti (esce fieramente)*
> *SILVIO (ridendo). Ah! Ah! Ah! Gli è sacra. Gli è sacra. (Lo insegue). Va a batterti: eroe!*[162]

The question of money as a *realtà* determining the *borghese's* sense of freedom as well as his self-awareness had been for positivist Torelli a minor issue subordinate to the wider question of social ascendance with *denaro* demonstrating

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[162] *SILVIO:...As for the arms you are certainly a dexterous professional. Certainly. It's logical. That's the way you pay your debts! You are afraid of my father. My father's money saves me. Because you know that if you touch even a hair of my head, my father will cut you off from his wallet. Yes, you are a man who can dissipate his life in a moment, but who cannot drag it out in poverty year after year. That's it. And now, you know, you have the best deal. The house and the treasury I leave them free for you. Get in and wallow as much as you want. It is the only favor you may do me./EDOARDO: You know this house is sacred to me. Therefore I cannot respond to you (exits vehemently)./SILVIO (laughing). Ha!Ha!Ha!. Sacred to him! Sacred to him. (He follows him). Go and fight you hero you! Giacosa, Teatro, ibid., 675.*

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the degree of his social prosperity. While for the declining aristocracy wealth had devolved to the only means legitimizing its claim to social hegemony and therefore the freedom to maintain the appearance of social leadership, the *borghesia*, revering the idea of the "self-made man" and the contribution of "work" to the attainment of its own ambitious social pursuits, valued wealth not as a factor but as a reward that allowed them the freedom to work harder and accomplish more. Half a century later and with the bourgeois ideal having superseded the aristocratic culture of power and leisure, Giacosa's *borghesi* find their refined life-styles not only contradicting their self-image of "independent" fighters, but also emulating the habits, the mores and the appearances/*realtà* of the class that had hopelessly antagonized them and for which they had entertained not the least respect. If in Come le foglie Giacosa had visualized the potential decadence of the *borghese* to a *piccolo-borghese* compromising his happiness for the sake of bourgeois decorum, in Il più forte, he has pictured the "decadence" of the accomplished *borghese* to a bogus aristocrat with *denaro* compromising his freedom to be idealistic and pragmatic. The metamorphosis of Fabio Regoli to either Giovanni Rosani or Cesare Nalli connotes for Giacosa the failure of *borghesia* to exist as an ongoing social experiment, changing the perception about the *verità* of *denaro* as a power independent of class *realtà*, yet dependent on the capacity of the *borghese* to

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protect the *verità* of his freedom from the compromises the *denaro* necessitates. The Nalli *borghesi* feel that *denaro* has imperceptibly become an overpowering *verità* in their lives and the more they argue about it being a *strumento* of life rather than life per se, the more they realize that they have been the instruments of money, working not for the sake of happiness, but for the sake of maintaining a life style that betrays their dependence --therefore their lack of freedom--on its permanence: Their *verità* has become the fruit of a *realtà* that controls them, but which they cannot control.

When Silvio becomes conscious of his entrappment to *denaro*, he also becomes aware of the loss of freedom both he and his family have suffered unbeknownst to them. His resolve to work in order to "live" rather than live in order to work is not a negation of bourgeois positivism, but its affirmation. Indeed, Silvio wants to reacquaint himself with the spirit of the enterprising *borghese* and find himself animated by the same drive for accomplishment that had animated his father. He wants money to become an instrument for his life, not his raison d'etre but the motive to be engaged in a cause whose fulfillment will give him back the freedom (his sense of *verità* and *realtà*) as well as the reason to be and accomplish. Like Verga, Giacosa did not expect the dissolution of the *borghesia*, nor the disintegration of its nucleus, the family. The Nalli stay together. There exists no prospect of rupture between its members, because Silvio's

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departure implies not the repudiation of Cesare's "cause"--that for Silvio would have meant self-repudiation--but a praxis of re-immersion in the spirit of *borghesia*. This time, however, Silvio will not work and create inconsiderate of *realtà*.

Becoming again a positivist, this mission entails for Silvio the greatest possible freedom, but also the greatest possible "independence" from the *verità* of *denaro* as something already achieved in spite of him. This self-imposed alienation from Cesare's leisurely cosmos is a requirement for his maturation as a pragmatic idealist or an idealistic pragmatist. Giacosa does not predetermine the feasibility of this pursuit, nor does he moralize about the nobility of this cause. The play's end, just like the end of Verga's Dal tuo al mio, allows only the certainty of *borghesia*'s survival, without predicting the success of Silvio's socialization in the real world. Perhaps for Giacosa the outcome of this venture was less important than the *borghese's* initiative to implement his freedom. For the playwright the courage to even attempt to raise above the *realtà* of life is symptomatic of a superior, "stronger" individual, and as such indicative of a pragmatist conscious of his *verità*.[163]

For several critics Cesare Nalli is a more complex and

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[163]*For a different interpretation cf. Pellini, ibid., 69ff. The critic argues that Giacosa actually "proposes" an anachronistic dream in which honesty can perfectly coincide with work and profit.*

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therefore more interesting character than Silvio, not only because he has managed to rationalize the paradoxes, the incongruities and the compromises his business has entailed into a realistic, that is, pragmatic and therefore "true" modus vivendi, but also because his realism has proved a truer, more reliable and more "honest" way of life than that sort of idealism which considers *realtà* useless and irrelevant. Cesare Nalli is not a negative example of *borghese*, nor does Giacosa treat him as a stereotype of bourgeois ethos. For him *denaro* is a *realtà*, neither positive nor negative, but necessary for one's social survival. To label money an evil would be more hypocritical than not admitting its relevance to one's social status. It would be eaqually hypocritical not to admit the failure of idealism to guarantee happiness and fullfilment without the "instrument" of money or the "necessity" to procure it through means and procedures that fall outside the parameters of morality. In fact, as a *borghese* with a clear vision of the world, Cesare has convinced himself (or rather life has convinced him) that idealism devolves to inconsequential moralism, if the individual does not have the courage to admit to himself that making it in the world compels his conciliation with the idea that the world is imperfect and that happier is the man who manages to accomplish things with the least possible compromise of his ideals. Nalli has not been a speculator without a cause and he personally takes pride in "sponsoring"

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Silvio's idealism, not because he wanted his son to attain the kind of sophistication he himself was deprived of, but because he considered idealism on a par with pragmatism, both essential for social success. Probably Cesare is a "stronger" individual than his son, because, whatever his means, he has done the best he could to sustain his family and this success of his will be the measure by which he will be judged. The problem debated in the course of the play is not just Cesare's failure to give Silvio a chance to "know" the world, but Silvio's failure to demand this chance, not from his father but from himself. *"A te, manca il senso della vita,"* (You lack a sense of life) observes Flora, and the lack of this *senso* became Silvio's *verità*, because never before had he inquired into the "method" of life and the ideological concessions its application necessitates. Silvio is then more indignant at himself and not at his father, because he had never suspected his own *verità* that his own father had been able to detect: his weak *senso* of life, his social meekness, his subliminal reluctance to *"trovarsi,"* to feel the need to be stronger, not just above life. Becoming aware of his father's way of business has proved him not the dishonesty of Cesare, but the impracticality of his own ideas. His departure is, as we said, not a revenge on Cesare and the life he stood for, but a necessity for his familiarization with modernity, people and himself. As a minor character argues in the play, *"o buone o cattive che siano, le verità che stanno dentro di noi bisogna*

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cercare di conoscerle. A volerle ignorare, le buone intristiscono e le cattive inveleniscono. Silvio ha saputo guardarla in faccia, la sua verità."[164] Accepting *realtà* for what it is is a prerequisite for the *borghese* who wants not only to come to terms with imperfection, his and the others', but who also wants to hope for a more accurate *senso* of his role as a social entity.

GEROLAMO ROVETTA

More than Verga and Giacosa, Gerolamo Rovetta (1851-1910) took modern life at face value. This approach, evident in his *commedie* as well as in his novels, did not mislead him to an oversimplifying dramaturgy of facts and cursory perceptions, to a melodramatization of the bourgeois experience.[165] His preoccupation, not to say obsession, with every single thing bourgeois that striked him as excessive, ignominious, compromising and lurid --the double-standards of bourgeois ethos, the commercialization of familial affairs, the prostitution of ideologies, the (socially unprotested)

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[164] *"Whether good or bad, the truths which exist inside us, we have to try to know them. If we choose to ignore them, the good truths waste away and the bad fester. Silvio has learnt to look his own truth in the face." Ibid., 659.*

[165] *For a different view, which is also the prevalent one among Italian scholars of verismo, see Silvio D'Amico, Storia del teatro Drammatico, vol. 3, op. cit., 341; Luigi Tonelli, L'evoluzione del teatro contemporaneo in Italia, op. cit., 255; and Lander MacClintock, The contemporary Drama of Italy, op. cit., 77.*

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"conveniences" of adultery and human exploitation, the eroticization of *denaro* and the idolization of *rispettabilità*--motivated him to conceive a portrait of a class for which appearance, illusion, self-delusion and presumption constituted the essences of its *verità*. Indeed, the dramas of Rovetta, especially those of the period 1889-1895, hardly involving the investigation of more universal, or more recondite psychological truths, epitomize a social theatre about the *verità* of (*borghese*) *realtà*. Of all the playwrights of *verismo*, he was the most inexorable critic of the *borghesia*, deliberately avoiding populistic sermons of *moralità*, not because his cynicism or the veristic esthetic of objectivity exacted his emotional and ideological detachment from the "facts" he dramatized, but because the harrowing exposure of a class *realtà* with all its symptoms of corruption offered itself as the most moral propaganda for the cultural emandation of the *borghesia*.

Rovetta was not a popular playwright, if popularity connotes a condition of complete correspondence between artistic intent and audience expectation, that Goldoni, Giacometti, Ferrari and later Dario Niccodemi best exemplify in the history of Italian realism. His *verismo* work did not prove always commercially viable for the *capocomici* of the time, partly because his subject-matter, for all its sensationalistic potential, was more disturbing and controversial than tantalizing and partly because his cynicism

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seemed to alienate many a spectator who misconstrued his unsympathetic chronicles as unredeeming, if not hyperbolically negative or subversive.[166] And his *verismo* was cynical and pessimistic, it did not reflect a particular political engagement. The playwright, averse to all forms of political and cultural manipulation of the masses, was not inclined to favor either an aristocratic vision of modernity or a *piccolo-borghese*/socialistic credo. Both classes, for all their lofty ideological pretentions, appalled him as hypocritical, amoral and petty. Indeed, one would fail to comprehend Rovetta's anti-bourgeois misanthropy, if one failed to detect it as the consequence of the playwright's disillusionment with the cultural *verità* of the modern *borghese*, a puppet, as he perceived him, with no sense of social duty and, essentially, with no self-respect. What Rovetta detects as the sorriest predicament of middle class, irrespective of its education and prosperity, is its cultural repression by the aristocrat and the *piccolo-borghese*. This repression coerces it to undermine its own ethics and contradict by means of its life-style the lofty social values it upholds. Rovetta's *borghesia* has become a class without a cause, on the one hand aping the social norms of aristocracy and on the other adopting the moral codes of *piccola-borghesia*, which also constitute a corruption of the aristocratic ideal. This corruption is most evident in the

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[166] *Cf. Sabatino Lopez, "Gerolamo Rovetta," Nuova antologia 120 (November 1905), 43.*

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borghese's fixation with decorum, a fixation which is caused by the necessity he feels for his lifestyle to be perceived as on a par with that of his superiors as well as superior to that of his socially inferiors. This necessity for being "respected" by the other classes also explains his other fixation on respectability, not on the truth, but on the verisimilitude of the perfection of his social image. The risk of losing this respectability, of proving himself unworthy of his aristocratic aspirations and below the "expectations" of the *piccolo-borghese*, involves him in an endless pursuit of maintaining the appearance, and the more he tries to be, to appear, independent and assertive, the more he finds himself a hostage to the aristocracy (indebted to it for its appreciation and acceptance of him) and the more he realizes the imminence of the prospect to see his greatest nightmare materialize: his devolution and stasis to a *piccolo-borghese* at the economic mercy of his "superiors." In order to survive, Rovetta's *borghese* has to manipulate perception and appearances. He has to cheat and lie, he has to be both immoral and moralistic, he has to exploit and dishonor, he has to be an ideologue and an hypocrite. If he decides to be honorable, true, moral, "perfect," this choice, this *volontà* precipitates his fall, his social marginalization, his financial decay. To maintain, then, his status, he has not only to want to compromise and do justice to the common perception of his *verità*, but he also has to pretend that

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moral values are indeed socially valid, rebuking and punishing the man or the woman (mostly the latter) who dares either to pretend honesty or even dishonesty. For the playwright every vice and every social compromise is the result of a sense of fear for being excluded, marginalized, unwanted. The dramaturgy of Rovetta is a dramaturgy of fear. It chronicles the fear of the *borghese* to be himself or herself, but also the fear to be somebody else. Contemporary reviewers had called him consistently *cronista*, a "chronicler," and his *commedie cronistorie*, chronicles-histories, now aprovingly and now condescendingly. Whatever the critical tone might have been, these designations of the man and his work enforced on the historian of Italian drama an image of Rovetta as a well-intented journalist and sociologist who happened to express himself in the theatre. As usual, the first to coin this image was Benedetto Croce, and his assessment--*Rovetta fu uno scrittore alla buona col quale è impossibile sdegnarsi: disarma con la sua candidezza non tanto d'arte quanto di macanza d'arte*[167]--has yet to be challenged.

At no time during his playwriting career was Rovetta a stylist. The form of the well-made play, which Verga had tried hard to adapt in order to meet the esthetic needs of the "new drama" was not essential to his dramaturgy. Innovation and

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[167] *Rovetta was a benevolent writer, with whom it is impossible to be acrimonious: He disarms you not so much with the candidness of his art as with the candidness of his artlessness. Croce, Letteratura della nuova Italia vol. 3, op. cit., 166.*

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reformation were never artistic priorities for him, or at least as important as the relevance, the contemporaneity of the content. The *dramma borghese* of Rovetta who, it must be emphasized, converted to *verismo* after the successful experiments of Giacosa as well as after his own fortunate *scapigliatura* kind of realistic novel, is persistently akin to the terse style of the author of Tristi amori.[168] His plays are relatively short in length and performance time, they are devoid of intrigue and overstatement, and he contains his occasional penchant for melodrama in the creation of dramatic situations which necessitate from the characters a strong emotional reaction to the "facts" or a less than subtle shift from one state of mind to another. Rovetta would perhaps argue that the *milieu* and the *moment* in actuality would precipitate similar reactions, because their impact on the psyche of the individual is so drastic that it would have been "unrealistic" to depict a character with a clear vision of things, acting moderately and methodically. This psychological irregularity of Rovetta's characters has attracted a variety of criticisms, with some critics speaking of characters-*macchette*, types of people sketched and not portrayed in their process of development, and others remarking on the predominance of the *milieu* over character or even on its predominance over the

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[168] *For Rovetta's artistic affinities with Giacosa see Personè, ibid., 170ff.*

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"logic" of the plot.[169] Indeed, Rovetta is perhaps more particular about the milieu than any other realist playwright of *verismo*, save perhaps Verga, but his insistence on an exact reproduction of the *borghese*'s domestic habitat, be it a department store, a parlour, a newspaper headquarter or a garden, emphasizes exactly what Italian scholars have not been able to accept, namely, his concept of the milieu not as a background surrounding, illustrating, or defining the characters' social situation, but as a situation, a *verità* molded and determined by the choices of the individual who is involved in it. The milieu is the reflection of *realtà* as it transpires during the play, as the *commedia* chronicles the "fact." When it is not modified by the circumstances the characters create for themselves (the decor, for example, "details" the play's story even before its enactment (it betrays the events before they occur, while in Verga, Giacosa, and the others, the decor, for all its sociological connotations, remains unchanged), it bespeaks the moral quality of the life-style that the characters have chosen. It is not that Rovetta's secondary texts dwell extensively on description, or that the discription of the milieu illustrates a thesis. Yet the little details that explain the milieu manifest an "epic" sense of space as an agent of drama that "demonstrates" (not depicts) "*la realtà in mezzo alla quale*

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[169] *Cf. Cesare Levi, "Gerolamo Rovetta," Rivista teatrale italiana 14 (July-August 1908), 195.*

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viviamo noi e il nostro publico."[170]

Rovetta's dialogue, often described as untheatrical and prosaic,[171] eschews the sentimental rhetoric of melodrama, but of the melodramatic idiom he retains the emphasis on the emotional reaction of the characters as well as the theatricality of silence, often used as a means of expressing or implying truths which deference for *realtà*--the decorum or respectability--or psychological trepidation supress. The language used by his *borghesi* is certainly simple and "realistic" but its simplicity sounds as if coerced to function as a statement for the intellectual poverty of the *borghese* who cares more about the transparency of the social appearances and less about the richness of his vocabulary, the *borghese* who is already as culturally trite as the lower strata he spurns. A rhetoric luxuriating in big words and

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[170] *"The reality in which we and the audience live." Gerolamo Rovetta, Cinque minuti di riposo (Milano, 1906), 81. Cf. also Rovetta's remarks to José Leon Pagano, "Gerolamo Rovetta," Rassegna nazionale [Florence], 1 January, 1903, 38. For example, in the play Trilogia di Dorina which evolves as a sequence of one-acts chronicling the "decline" of an idealistic, "defeated," woman to a pragmatic but amoral "winner" through her life story as a governess, a struggling student and an opera star, the milieu of each act (a haute-bourgeois salon, a borading school apartment and a dressing room) show more the morality of each milieu (ostentatious borghesia, hypocritical piccolo-borghesia, "triumphantly" corrupt demi-monde) rather than their respective social attributes (wealth, camouflaged poverty, show-business glitziness). Equally in I disonesti, the milieu which basically remains the same--the sitting room of a petty bourgeois family--bespeaks the fluctuating fortunes of that family, not only through the decoration per se, but mainly through the vulgar "opulence" and the "taste" that define this decor. This decor does not so much provide information about the status as about the "circumstances" which dictate its changes. For more see below.*

[171] *Personè, ibid., 184;*

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lofty ideas is the attribute of characters who simulate profundity and seriousness, but who in the end are proved insipid demagogues or dissembling hypocrites. It might be that language as a manifestation of a character's moral make-up has been another of melodrama's distinct traits, but again Rovetta manipulates language in order to highlight a state of society and not so much to expose human behavior. Nonetheless what has been accounted as one of the playwright's artistic virtues is his cynical humor, the irony infused in his dialogue.[172] Like early Giacosa during the seventies and the early eighties, Rovetta had written Goldonian farces and social comedies and in those works irony and humor had been part of their machinery. Neither Verga nor veristic Giacosa, however, had any use of humor, either because they thought that laughter had to do with the existence of an energetic social spirit, an èlan that their *realtà* was devoid of, or because this *amara realtà* could not inspire sarcasm, but only gloom and desperation. Rovetta, on the other hand, laughs not only at the "victors/victims" of society, but also at the system which, encouraging people's illusion of self-importance, or convincing of their "necessity" to deceive and dissemble, insinuates itself as a parody of a principled society. Later in the twentieth century, Niccodemi, the *grotteschi* and

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[172] *Cf. Cheryl Reimold, "A Passing Smile: On Some Plays of Rovetta," Italica 51 (1974): 215-235. The essayist pays more attention to Rovetta's early, pre-verismo comedies and less to the later work. See also, Renato Simoni, Gli assenti (Milano: Vitagliano, 1929), 14-5.*

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Pirandello would venture to rationalize and codify this *"umorismo"* as the esthetic manifestation of the "abnormality" that defines the relationship *realtà/verità*. In fact, Pirandello's own earlier work reflects his personal infatuation with modernity's grotesque tendency to give importance to every vanity, banality and appearance at the expense of *verità*.[173] In Rovetta's *verismo* drama, humor is not used to make logic out of life's discrepancies, it is still an "emotional" reaction, a camouflaged articulation of pessimism and sometimes revulsion for a *borghesia* constantly undermining itself. More than a skeptic, that is a theorist of life, Rovetta has been a recorder of failures and far from being an assessor of other people's *realtà*, he more often than not found the *problematica* of his dramaturgy in the "facts" that shaped his own life. What with his emotional detachment from contradictory *realtà*, it was as if the playwright tried to fight the demons of his own social conscience through the representation of modern humanity not as a lost but as a losing generation, albeit often saved by its capacity to withstand or to "discredit" failure and unhappiness.[174]

Rovetta lived a very melodramatic life, shaped by social circumstances and familial events which tought him early on

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[173]*Cf. Luigi Pirandello, "On Humor" [L'umorismo], in Bernard Dukore, Dramatic Theory and Criticism, op. cit., 747ff. Characteristic of this tendency are plays like La mosca (The Fly, 1910), Tutto per bene (All for the Best, 1919), and La ragione degli altri (Other People's Logic, 1915).*

[174]*Cf. Cesare Levi, ibid., 203.*

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the importance of appearances as well as the logic of bourgeois respectability.[175] According to his biographers and friends, he discovered his talent for literature and drama quite accidentally, when in 1875 he was challenged to write a comedy.[176] This comedy was Un volo dal nido (A Flight from the Nest), a conventional *commedia borghese* about the tensions and the antagonisms endagering the happiness of a young couple. The *succes d'estime* of that comedy which was opened in Genova by the company of the famous actress Fanny Sadowsky convinced Rovetta that the theatre promised him the

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[175] *Still the only existing book on Rovetta's life is Enrico Bevilacqua, Gerolamo Rovetta e la sua famiglia materna: Appunti e ricordi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1925). The bibliography on Rovetta is very dated and, with very few exceptions, of little critical merit. In English, there exists an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Jon Colombo Cherubini, "Gerolamo Rovetta: A Late-Nineteenth Century Career," diss., Columbia University, 1972. This is a three-volume extensive biography and critical survey of Rovetta's entire oeuvre as novelist, dramatist, journalist and critic. It has the most extensive bibliography available in any book about Rovetta and the only one devoting a special section on his personal life. Its section on Rovetta's theatre, although inclusive and well-documented, does not provide any new insights on the plays, heavily, and I would say rather uncritically, relying on the criticism of Crocean tradition. Thus again Rovetta is a "minor" artist. For a concise biographical account, see the entry "Gerolamo Rovetta," Enciclopedia dello spettacolo, vol. 4, op. cit., 1288-9. Rovetta was the son of one of Brescia's oldest aristocratic families, but the unexpected death of his father obliged his mother to transfer the household to Verona, after she married a wealthy count. In Verona Rovetta never had a regular education, growing up as a rather precocious and lively alto-borghese destined to embark on a comfortable business career. Having spent his father's inheritance in Milan, Rovetta tried to avail himself of his maternal grandfather's will. When that inherintance passed directly to his mother, Rovetta loosened all ties with her. This alienation soon became hatred and lasted until his death. While in Verona, Rovetta became involved with an older woman of one of the city's most prominent families, but this relationship ended tragically with the woman's suicide. The scandal became soon known, but Gerolamo, who had confessed everything to his mother, was "advised" by her to simulate innocence and on the night of her burial, he went to the theatre, in order "to save the appearances." Bevilacqua, ibid., 122; also see Personè, ibid., 175.*

[176] *Simoni, ibid., 17.*

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opportunity of a career. The plays he wrote until the late eighties, however, social comedies emulating Goldoni, Ferrari and Torelli, did not fulfill that promise. In the meantime Rovetta had also established a reputation as a novelist of considerable merit and until the end of his life his novelistic output would be as prolific as his dramaturgy. After his estrangement from his mother, Rovetta, broke but "famous," went to Milan and apart from his work as an artist, also practiced journalism and literary criticism. Yet, this "fall" from the comforts of aristocracy to the struggles of middle class did not so much embitter him as it enforced him in his conviction that the class he had abdicated was a valueless plutocracy and that the class he had entered, competitive but disoriented, was not less fatuous. Milan would be his home town for the rest of his life and the town-milieu which predominates in his theatre. His acquaintance with *scapigliatura*, Verga, Giacosa and the other members of Milan's literary circles brought him closer to the movement of *verismo*, so that the period 1889-1895 was not only his most successful, but also his most substantial, since it is on the works he produced during this period that his literary reputation rests: La trilogia di Dorina (1889), I disonesti (The Dishonest, 1892), La realtà (Reality, 1895).

The paradox of the "defeated winner" as a defining situation of modern society, a topic already explored by Verga and Giacosa, received another, even more unconventional

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treatement in Rovetta's La trilogia di Dorina (Dorina's Trilogy, 1889), the first of the playwright's successes as a *verista* and one of *verismo*'s most representative plays.[177] What is indeed most interesting about this *commedia*, except from the attempt to capture the tangible and intangible *realtà* of various social milieux, is its experimental structure, an experiment which fragments the conventional pattern of the well-made play into a series of act-"scenes." Each act-scene documents a phase of a social procedure, but the cause-and-effect nexus between the acts has been dispensed with. One may argue that the play is a series of "effects" with the "causes" insinuated in the "effects" dramatized. The social exploitation of a young woman is not chronicled or illustrated, but the playwright opts to demonstrate the "progress" of this procedure in its various points. The transformation of Dorina from exploited victim to victimized avenger emerges not as a case discrepant with *realtà*, but as

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[177] *The play opened at the Manzoni theatre of Milan on 20 February 1889, presented by the troupe of Virginia Marini with Italia Vitaliani in the role of Dorina. The opening night was a controversial success for Rovetta with audience response divided between applause and "disapprovazioni." This mixed reception occured due to the hostilities between advocates and foes of verismo. The same reaction was repeated in all the major cities where the play was presented, but in the end Dorina became a favorite vehicle for the ingenues of Italian theatre until well into the twentieth Century. The play was first serialized in the periodical Carro di Tespi (26 July, 28 September 1890) and then published with drawings by Treves. The latest edition is of 1925 by Baldini and Castoldi. The play was translated into German in 1892 and had two succesful runs in Frankfurt (1892) and Berlin (1897). Carlo Bertolazzi is recorded to have created a Milanese dialect adaptation. A libretto, probably composed by Luigi Illica, was never set to music, although a score by Nicola Spinelli remained incomplete. The last stage performance tooke place in 1942 in Milan, followed by a radio broadcast in 1966 by RAI.*

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a "natural" phenomenon caused by a *borghesia* whose authority is based on human exploitation and manipulation. For this class, *rispettabilità* is not only a veneer concealing the crisis of its mores, it has also become a pursuit. The means to attain this pursuit is exactly this exploitation of the "inferior" or the "different" individual. For Rovetta, the *borghesia* is not just a corrupt and corruptive class. It is a serious social problem, because the social, moral and cultural compromises it forces upon the individuals who defy it turn the latter not to "heroes" but to "survivors," who have to play by its rules in order to tolerate society at large. Their defiance is a courageous and noble act, but indeed unpragmatic. The survival through modernity does not encourage heroism and sacrifice, but "realism" and cynicism.

The trilogy epitomizing the social experience of Dorina begins in the salon of a marquise who employes the young orhan girl as a governess.[178] Her son Niccolino, a spineless socialite, professes being in love with her, but his mother, ambitious and eager to maintain the family as wealthy and "respectable" as possible, is determined to disrupt her son's dependence on Dorina and thus she fires her. During the second part of her social education Dorina receives singing lessons in a boarding house from a music teacher of mediocre talent and nefarious intentions, who exploits her talent and her

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[178] *Giorgio Pullini calls the play a schematizzazione allegorica (allegoric schematization).* Cinquanta anni di teatro in Italia, *op. cit., 15.*

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situation. In this house, Dorina has to suffer the humiliating intrusion of unpaid creditors as well as the compromising "contract" that her impressario draws up for her in exhange of her favors. Most frustrating, however, is the "proposal" of Niccolino, who offers to pay her debts and to "maintain" her as a lover. Dorina denounces him and resolves to take her life in her own hands. Rather than her being dependent on society, society will be made dependent on her. Using her talent, charm and femmininity, she manages to become an opera star and it is as Dori the celebrity that society has accepted her and embraced her. The last part of her "trilogy" is actually a victory act, with Dori-Dorina mortifying the men who visit to earn her respect, a cavalry officer, a music critic and even Niccolino who returns in order to undo the harm he has caused her. Romance and romanticism are ridiculous fantasies that a working woman like herself has no time for. To Niccolino's persistence for forgiveness and the promise of a new beginning, Dorina remains ambivalent, but at the same time she is certain of at least one thing. It is she who will now "maintain" Niccolino not just as a husband/lover, but as her social hostage, avenging, thus, all those who wished to take advantage of her. Earning love, wealth, power and "respect" at the expense of her idealism and innocence, Dorina finds *realtà* a joke. Her *verità* will hence be the exploitation of this *realtà*. This time it will be she who will control the rules of

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the game.[179]

The social *realtà* of the "actress"--the *ballerina*, the opera singer, the itinerant trouper--fluctuating between the *realtà* of *piccola-borghesia* and *demi-monde*, has fascinated Italian realists from the time of Giacometti and Ciconi and, as we have already seen, this *realtà* had often be used as a symbol of a life and a morality, truer than those upheld by the aristocracy and the *borghesia*. Ciconi's Le mosche bianche has anticipated several of Rovetta's social observations about class racism, but the happy ending of that play had projected a new social *realtà* with none of the failings Rovetta observed in his contemporary world. La trilogia di Dorina, however, is not a play advising reconciliation, but a mockery of such a prospective, and although the playwright had put together Dorina's life story from real events reported to him by friends and opera associates,[180] the intent was obviously neither to titillate audiences with a *commedia à clef*, nor to sensationalize the heroine in order to render her more sympathetic. Sympathy and sentimentality are in fact effects which the playwright deliberately subverts, now downplaying melodrama (the "travails of the persecuted orphan") through

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[179] *No critic has ever looked at the play as a precursor of the grottesco. Rosso di San Secondo, in a commemorative article on Rovetta, distinguished the commedia as the playwright's best, finding its mix of irony and despair innovative and modernistic. See "Gerolamo Rovetta nel centenario della nascita," Giornale d'Italia 3 March 1951, 3.*

[180] *See Cherubibi, ibid., 365n105.*

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irony and laughter, now caricaturing Dorina's wrongdoers and the morality of the milieu they represent, and now shifting the focus from Dorina to the insidious demimondaines surrounding her. The *commedia* is indeed a social satire rather than a portrait of a society and if Rovetta verges on tragicomedy as Dorina gradually learns to exploit her exploiters, it is the entire social and cultural system of the Milanese *borghesia* that he impugns by deriding it. The play is tragicomic, not because Dorina suffers and finally prevails, but because her society, all pomp and circumstance, is in and by itself a grotesque corruption of humanity unworthy of pity and respect. At the end Dorina takes Niccolino back, but Rovetta makes this union appear as a *realtà* without *verità*.[181] Respect is too noble an affection to waste on a class which does not even respect itself.[182]

An adaptation of his own novel Le lacrime del prossimo (The Tears of the Kin, 1888), I Barbarò (The Barbarò Family, 1890) was written as a star vehicle for the famous Italian actor Ermete Novelli, but the prestige of the actor could not

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[181] *Cf. Cesare Levi, ibid., 202-3: "I fatti dimostrano che un affetto superiore non vi può essere...In tutto il teatro di Rovetta non v'è una sola scena d'amore, semplice e sincera: vizio, vanità, calcolo." [The facts demonstrate that a superior feeling cannot exist. In Rovetta's entire theatre there in not a single scene of love, simple and sincere].*

[182] *Cf. NICCOLINO Io amo la quiete, il riposo, e non ho ambizioni! Mi piace vivere con tutti i miei comodi; i mie cavalli, un buon cuoco e infischiarmene del mondo intero! (Act I) [NICCOLINO: I love privacy, leisure and I have no ambitions! I love living with my comforts; my horses, a good cook. As for the entire world, I could not care less!]*

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save this rather old-fashioned melodrama from instant failure.[183] A follow-up to La trilogia di Dorina, the play was expected to repeat the success of the earlier novel, but this time the story of an Italian "patriot" who achieved fame, wealth and aristocratic title through treason, deceit, political manoeuvering and extortion did not strike a chord in the heart of spectators who had perhaps judged its message and its *realtà* "predictable," that is to say, devoid of new insights to the national experience of *transformismo*. Contrary to Verga's Tartuffi and Giacosa's Ercole Malladri, I Barbarò was not conceived as a satire taking umbrage to the social and political tactics of Italians exploiting *italianità* in order to attain and then maintain their hegemonic status in the nation, but as a *dramma* reporting on the obsessive and ultimately tragic pursuit of "aristocratic" status as the only condition for one's survival in a society with a respect for class power. It might be that the play stands out in Rovetta's dramaturgy as a case of exploitative, populistic *verismo*, but, in essence, it asks some very penetrating questions about the morality of *italianità* as a system.

In the *prologo* of the play, which takes place in the decisive years of Risorgimento, the clandestine resistance league of Giulio Alamanni is betrayed to the Austrian police by Pompeo Barbarò, a servant in Alamanni's house. For this

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[183] *For Rovetta's "minor" verismo, see Cherubini, ibid., 412ff. The play opened at the Teatro Manzoni in Milan on 25 February 1890*

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disservice to his country, Barbarò is allowed to appropriate Alamanni's wealth and in a very short time he manages to create (or rather) to buy a reputation as a veteran of the Risorgimento, a national philanthropist and a paragon of *italianità*. The following four acts evolve several years later and during the first period of post Risorgimento political life in Italy. Barbarò, "honored" and "respected," is entertaining serious political ambitions, and in order to realize them he exploits his social and economical power, although his schemes do not seem to be promoting his interests. Thus new and more dubious plans are put into effect, among which is the use of Maria, Giulio Alamanni's surviving daughter, with whom his own son Giulio, a fervent idealist, is in love. Encouraging the marriage between his son and the daughter of his victim, Pompeo seeks to silence all his antagonists who still inquire into the means of his social success, but his political fate is doomed, when it appears that Tullio Mazza, an associate of Alamanni, had survived the Austrians and has reappeared in order to restore the truth about Barbarò and avenge Alamanni's death. When Giulio, who has been raised to believe in his father as a hero honorable enough to have maintained Alamanni's reputation, learns about Pompeo's ignominious past and is convinced of the "truth" of the new revelations by the witnesses of the crime, he forces his father to admit the facts. Seeing that Pompeo has been a compulsive deceiver and criminal, he "blackmails" him to

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withdraw from politics with the promise that he will stand by his side, if they will abdicate their position in society and run away from Milan. Pompeo is too ambitious and has worked too hard for this dream in order to acquiesce to Giulio's proposals:

> *POMPEO Non sono stato un eroe, ecco il mio delitto. Ma non potevo darmi questo lusso perchè avevo due bocche da riempire: la tua e quella di tua madre; questa è la verità, tutto il resto è falso! [...] Oggi siamo noi i padroni! Non ti nascondo più niente! Siamo ricchi, come dicono; come credono;...*
> *GIULIO A qual prezzo, mio Dio; a qual prezzo!*
> *POMPEO Sì, al prezzo di fatiche, di sudori, di stenti che ti sono ignoti! Tu non conosci la vita, perchè non hai lavorato; non conosci la vita, perchè non conosci la fame. Resta due giorni come sono stato io, senza mangiare e poi a pancia vuota giudica il tuo padre...E tu non buttarmi in faccia il tuo onore, i tuoi sentimenti, i tuoi sfoghi poetici! Hai fatto presto tu a fare il [giudice], perchè io ti ho aperta la strada graffiandomi, insanguinandomi le mani e l'anima! ... Oggi che sono arrivato, che sono contento, che sono felice, te lo prometto, te lo giuro, sarò sempre buono, sarò sempre nobile anch'io. [...]*
> *GIULIO ... Ma che t'importa di essere qualche cosa in questo mondo che tu disprezzi? La gloria meschina di dominare questa folla di servi e di pezzenti, vale il tuo riposo,... la tua pace? [...] (prende un revolver che ha nella tasca dell'abito). No, non è l'amore, è per l'onore! (tira il colpo)... (Act IV, sc. 5)*[184].

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[184] *Gerolamo Rovetta, I Barbarò (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1920), 100ff-103: POMPEO I have not been a hero, that is my crime. But I could not afford this luxury because I had to feed two mouths: yours and your mother's; this is the truth, the rest is false! ... Today we are the masters! I hide nothing from you any more! We are rich, as they say; as they think;.../GIULIO At what price, my God, at what price!/POMPEO Yes, at the price of hard work, sweat, and deprivations you ignore! You don't know life, because you have not worked; you don't know life because you don't know hunger. Stay two days as I have without food and then with an empty stomach judge your father... And don't throw into my face youe honor, your feelings, your poetic tantrums! It was rather hasty for you to be my judge, because I have opened to you the way, breaking my neck and wounding my hands and soul!... Now that I have arrived and I have been content and happy, I promise you, I swear it to you, I will always be good, I, too, will always be noble.../ GIULIO Why do you care to be somebody in this world that you despise? The petty glory of ruling this mass of slaves and nobodies, is it worth your comfort... your peace?" It is interesting here to notice how Pompio's thoughts anticipate the arguments of Cesare Nalli in Giacosa's Il più forte.*

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While Pompeo adresses his supporters, Giulio takes a gun and commits suicide for the sake of "honor." With this "honorable act, Giulio averts another Barbarò "success:" his consecration as a national "father."

I Barbarò is certainly a melodrama, but the esthetics of melodrama, its surprise-laden intrigue, its pathos and its emotive rhetoric, is by no means a problem, especially since the play evolves around two characters, father and son, with a penchant for melodramatization: A father monopathically obsessed with success and recognition (that is, "acceptance") and a morally absolutist son, who gravitates towards a manichaean interpretation of *verità*, and therefore not a pragmatist.[185] It is pertinent to speculate that the historical and political overtones of the play's theme and plot might might have influenced critics into considering it a socio-political melodrama, in which the father-son relationship is not a central issue, but rather a subplot manipulating audience emotions. The title of the *dramma*, however, conspicuously refers to this relatioship, arguably an indication of Rovetta's intent to explore the *verità* of this

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[185]*Cf. Robert Heilman, Tragedy and Melodrama (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 85ff.*

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relationship as well as the *verità* of each individual, whose rapport and rupture are defined not so much by the historical and political *moment*, present and past, as by the ideals each character has invested in his conception of this relationship.

Clearly I Barbarò is not a family drama, but the conflict between the vision of the father and that of the son allows the "family" to operate as a microcosm-symbol of the system that Rovetta dismisses as false and illusive. Indeed, for the playwright, Pompeo is not a conventional villain, but a victim of his own "unrealistic," that is, forged *realtà*. This falsehood-*realtà* entails a concept of society as a business, where everything, ideology and patriotism included, can be bargained and in which offending all the basic precepts of social morality--honesty, fidelity, friendship, integrity--is the only path to power. Pompeo is a self-made man and the "hard work" he has done--treason, cheating, blackmailing etc--have proved to him that this society honors and respects self-made men. Society, implies Rovetta, has proved to Pompeo Barbarò, the validity and the truth of his amoral "fiction." This *realtà*, iniquitous though it may be according to conventional ethics, has "created" Giulio Barbarò. His obdurate morality is the fruit of his father's immorality. It is a demand of the plot that Giulio ignore his father's past practices and that he be only cognizant of the glorious appearance that Pompeo has industriously cultivated. However, this does not undermine the fact that Giulio (who is given

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Alamanni's name) is a product not only of Pompeo, but also of the society which allowed Pompeo to be what he has been. By finding out about the treason that precipitated Pompeo's fortune, Giulio gradually realizes (although he does not openly admit it) that the father is a victim of the system -- *patria, nazione, società*--as much as he is its abuser. Thus his resentment is not that his father used and is using the system, but that he never wanted to revolt against the system which, unbeknownst to him, abused him. In effect, he is accusing Pompeo of allowing the system, by means of education and ethics, to dupe his son into believing in the fiction of perfect society. At the end, he sees that society is not perfect at all and that his father wants to repay its services to him by becoming its voice in the national political forum. Only a drastic measure such as his death can break what appears to him a vicious circle of social lies and deceptions. His suicide at the time of his father's nomination is not an act of desperation, but an act of self-immolation for the sake of *verità*. "Mercy! I have been destroyed," cries Pompeo over the corpse of Giulio. But it is uncertain whether for him this catastrophe is the death of his son (the death of his verità) or the end of his career, the end of his *realtà*.

This is a *realtà* which has indeed evolved into a *verità* for Pompeo Barbarò, a tragic situation because it is a victory (the fullfilment of his dreams) and a defeat (the loss of his son). Equally for Giulio his awakening to his father's *verità*

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is both a defeat and a victory, because it makes him aware of his own idealistic illusions and because it gives him the courage to sacrifice his life not out of self-pity, but out of a new sense of mission. His death then is not only an act of expiation in the name of society, but also a political gesture of honor, spontaneously conceived as the only way to fight a system undermining people's veracity and humanity.

I disonesti (The Dishonest Men, 1992)[186], still considered by the majority of Italian critics as Rovetta's masterpiece, constitutes along with Giacosa's Tristi amori the paradigmatic diptych of *verismo settentrionale*, introducing and expounding the social *problematica* of *commedia borghese*.[187] Just like Tristi amori, I disonesti is a domestic drama not about adultery, but about a family crisis divulged with the exposure of adultery.[188] Carlo Moretti has been a hard-working and morally self-righteous *piccolo-borghese* who, for several years, has seen his home in good financial standing. A cashier superintendent at a bank, he

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[186] *The play was presented for the first time at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin by the company of Virginia Marini and Ermete Zacconi with Emilia Aliprandi-Pieri in the role of Elisa on 15 February 1892. The play was an immediate success, and the company toured with it for a year. It was awarded the first prize in the Concorso drammatico nazionale and was published by Galli in 1894. It was translated into German, Spanish, French, Hungarian and several Italian companies toured with it overseas. In 1960 it was produced for Italian television.*

[187] *Personè, ibid., 170-1*

[188] *I quote from the tenth and final edition of the play by Baldini and Castoldi (1925).*

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attributes this prosperity to his well-paid job as well as to the good housekeeping of his wife Eliza, an impressionable woman who also supports her father, Orlando Orlandi, a rather dissipated character feigning literary aspirations. Little does Carlo suspect that responsible for his good fortune has been the banker Peppino Sigismondi, his benefactor, employer and his child's godfather, not because he pays him well, but because he has been Eliza's lover. In return for Elisa's sexual favors, Sigismondi regales her with money, gifts, jewelery and extra financial assistance, yet always reminding her that a revelation of their affair would end her husband's career. Lately part of this career has been an "operation" entrusted to him by Sigismondi: the destruction of another employee who had misappropriated deposited funds in order to pay off a debt. Although the employee had hoped to put back the money in the account, during the inquiry and the trial Carlo has been merciless, despite the pleas of Elisa and the man's wife. Suddenly Sigismondi is murdered for reasons unknown and thereafter the fortunes of Carlo are reversed. Eliza cannot keep up the house, furniture are pawned, and the maid is left unpaid. The financial deterioration troubles Carlo, but the truth about his previous affluence is revealed only when a bill comes into his hands, payed by Sigismondi to Eliza. The similarity of that bill with receipts that he had found among Sigismondi's papers reveals to him the true source of his prosperity. After a violent scene with Eliza, during

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which she tells him the whole truth about the affair, Carlo "thinks better" and in order to save his honor and his respectability, he resolves to maintain his older, lavish life-style so that people "won't suspect anything:"

> *CARLO: Persino nel lavoro, in tutto ciò che l'uomo ha di più onesto, di più santo, persino nel lavoro sono stato ingannato, imbrattato. Mi pagava anche per te!...[...] E nessuno, anima viva, non deve mai nemmeno sospettare tanta nefandità, perchè è ancora più che perdere l'onore; tu l'hai perduto l'onore, ma io che ci sono vissuto dentro, io sono peggiore di te, più giù, nel fango, più giù!... la punizione tua e mia sarà quella di vivere sempre insieme, di guardarci in faccia e di nascondere il nostro schifo, perchè tu mi fai ribrezzo, mi fai schifo! [...] Ricordati bene: si deve fare la vita come prima —più di prima—spendere come prima—più di prima. Io lavorerò tanto d'ammazzarmi, e anche, tu, lavorerai, di notte! Qui lavorerò, su questo tavolo che è roba sua. Perchè qui, è tutta roba sua!... tutto!... tutto!... tutto!...*[189]

But in order to sustain this appearance of regularity, Carlo cannot only work. He has to embezzle bank money, thus putting himself in the same situation as the man he mercilessly had persecuted as "dishonest." When his embezzlement becomes noticed, Carlo has to flee in order to escape the police, but again his "dishonesty" is not his own "responsibility," but Eliza's "fault:" *"Non si nasce disonesti! Sei stata tu!"*[190]

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[189] *I disonesti, ibid., Act II, sc. 5, 102-3: "CARLO: Even in my job, the most sacred thing, even in my job I have been deceived, stained. He paid me for you as well!... And nobody, not a living soul, should even suspect this turpitude, because it would mean more than losing our honor; you have lost your own, and I who have lived through [this sin], I am worse than you, lower than you, in the mud, and even lower than that! our punishment will be to live forever together, to look each other in the face and hide our revulsion, because you're nauseating, you digust me! [...] Beware: we must lead a life as before—better than before—spend as before—more than before. I will work until I drop, and you, too, will work, at night!. I will work here, on this table, which is his property. Because, here, everything is his. Everything!... Everything!... Everything!..."*

[190] *"Nobody is born dishonest. It has been you!" Act III, last scene.*

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Only four years seperate Tristi amori from I disonesti and yet, for all their thematic affinities especially with regard to adultery and *denaro* as dominant *realtà* of the bourgeois experience, Rovetta's drama emerges not as a variation on the sociological conclusions of Giacosa--*borghesia* in crisis, marriage as a loveless social necessity ("partnership), love subverted by *rispettabilità*--but as a sequel of that play, an actualization of the pessimistic *realtà* it had anticipated. Although in Tristi amori adultery and the pursuit of *denaro* did not jointly compromise the social status of the *borghese*, rather molding his *realtà* as simultaneous, parallel, but, certainly, unconnected catalysts, in Gli disonesti they complement each other as an *amara realtà* effecting not only his *declassamento*, but also his moral decline. The social milieu here is a *borghesia*-would-be, a white-collar well-to-do *piccola-borghesia*, whose illusion of prosperity and social grandeur is literally sustained by a shameless *borghesia* vaunting its morality, its philanthropy and its human face, but in reality moraly depressing their inferiors, so that they may afford their morality and philanthropy. For the playwright, this *piccola-borghesia* is a travesty of bourgeois ethos, without a proper education and a specific mission, driven to felony and further social debasement not just for the pursuit of *denaro* per se, but by the desire to prove themselves equals to their model class. In this materialistic underclass, honesty like affluence is an

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illusion, there is not one member whom the greed of the "superior" *borghese* has not infected. The more this illusion is fed by the *borghese's* social and financial rewards, the more addicted to this illusion he grows and the more enervated his resistance to immorality becomes.[191] The *piccolo-borghese* of Rovetta has no volition (*volontà*) but whims, not aspirations but yearnings, striving not for respect but for respectability. Once he sobers up to reality and realizes his addiction to the illusion, he also realizes his weakness, his dishonor, and fatuousness, but the lack of *volontà* and self-respect leads him back to illusion, to a stronger attachment to *rispettabilità*. The illusion becomes his *verità* until his irreversible downfall.

It has been suggested even by critics who have treated the play positively that Rovetta's petty-bourgeois *disonesti* are half-realized types, *macchette* without internal life, vociferous but passionless.[192] This conclusion is partly

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[191] *Cf. Lopez, ibid., 44.*

[192] *Cf. Gustavo Macchi, "I disonesti," Lombardia (19 November 1893), cited in Cherubini, ibid., 394: "La psicologia di Carlo Moretti non constituisce forse il merito maggiore del lavoro; l'interno dell'animo suo, la motivazione dei mutamenti interiori, nel rapido svolgersi dei fatti, s'intravede più che altro. Ma in cambio quasi ogni scena vibra di commozione violenta, cui il pubblico non si può sottrare, per l'evidenza con cui l'autore ha saputo presentarla sulla scena, per l'apparenza di realtà che ogni situazione, anche presa a sè, sotto l'abilissima fattura acquista. [Carlo Moretti's psychology is perhaps not the greatest virtue of the play; his psyche, the motivation of his emotional changes, are more than transparent as the facts develop rapidly. But in exchange, almost every scene vibrates with violent commotion, which keeps the audience in excitement, thanks to the clarity with which the playwright has managed to present it on the stage, but also thanks to the realism which, due to the excellent structure, every situation achieves, even when taken out of context.]*

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true, or rather partly accurate. Rovetta's *disonesti* are not half-realized theatrical characters, but in fact half-realized social entities, certainly without internal life, because they have never been given a chance to develop one, not only due to the "facts," but also due to their illusions. They are also passionless not because they don't feel, but because they have been deprived of the courage, the *volontà* to feel and react. These are not self-made men, they are "maintained" men. They are undeveloped, not because Rovetta has failed as a dramatist, but because as a *verista* he has ventured to depict how their real life counterparts have failed themselves.

The conflict of the individual with those social forces that precipitate his awakening to "real" life and thus his fall were taken up again by Rovetta in La realtà (Reality, 1895), a most cynical play about the modern social temper which is also the last of his major *verismo* dramaturgy.[193] Critics have not hesitated to draw parallels between Rovetta's *dramma* and Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, but although the situation in La realtà does indeed involve social tensions and controversies similar to those dramatized by Ibsen, the

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As Cherubini emphasizes, these views more or less reflect the critical reception of the play.

[193]*The play was presented for the first time at the Manzoni Theatre of Milan by the company of Ermete Zacconi on 15 February 1895. I read from Gerolamo Rovetta, La realtà (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1920). The play earned Rovetta first prize as the best Italian play of the 1894-5 in the seventh Concorso Drammatico Nazionale. It was first printed in 1895 and the 1920 edition is the last one. The play was more successful with audiences rather than with critics.*

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affinity between the plays is rather coincidental. Rovetta, contrary to Ibsen, is more concerned with the individual not in relation to his immediate world, but in relation to a more generalized concept of *realtà* as a perception, a vision that exists in the mind of the idealist hero --"his *realtà*" ("misconception') of modernity --and not as a true experience lived through. In fact, La realtà is more of a *dramma intimo*, rather than a "problem" play, since the conflict between the individual and the opposed mass is not analyzed in sociological terms, but is philosophically argued with regard to *verismo's* basic polarity *realtà/verità*. The conflict of the visionary with himself and not his conflict with society is what prevails as the *problematica* of this play.

The victim of *realtà* is Francesco Quarnarolo, a socialist leader who has inspired, organized and politically energized a labor union. A social visionary with radical ideas about the role of society in the life of the individual and with a very liberal sense of morality, Francesco has not been afraid to apply his convictions in his own personal life. As a father of a young daughter, Sofia, he has always tried to encourage in her a spirit of independence and tolerance, and to expose her to a "free" way of social thinking about the function of the individual in modern society. Sofia is the offspring of a marriage that ended sadly for Francesco, when his wife ran away with her lover, only to end up as a prostitute. Now the young girl, unaware of her mother's situation, but also

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concerned by Francesco's socially solitary life, has not opposed to his romantic liaison with Anna, a Swiss divorcee, although the scandal this relationship has stirred among members of the political establishment begins to take its toll on Francesco's social experiment. The controversial realities of his personal life become indeed a weapon in the hands of his union antagonists, eager to usurp his authority and turn the organization to a "special interest" lobby, serving political ambitions and not labor "rights." The *realtà* of that distant past impinges upon Francesco's life, when upon the slightest of evidence his enemies prove that a large sum of money, invested by Francesco in the union, was given to him by his former wife, ostensibly earned through her "immoral" work. This detail suffices for the union representatives to marginalize and then overthrow Francesco with the pretext that a honorable insitution cannot tolerate an indecent leadership. As another blow, Anna, overhelmed by familial pressures, discontinues the romance and returns to Switzerland. His public and private downfall has a compromising effect on Sofia, as she finds herself, a proud individual, pitied and "supported" by eleemosynary friends. For both victims of *realtà*, suicide is the only dignified exit from a life they think it has denied them the right to be believers in humanity.

For several critics who insist on Rovetta's social pessimism, La realtà typically illustrates a case of defeat,

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the undoing of a charismatic ideologue by a society of mediocrities who cannot tolerate his uniqueness, his resistance to conventional wisdom, his courage not just to be, but to think differently as well. From this perspective, the parable of Francesco Quarnarolo reaffirms *realtà* as an intangible force "normally" disproving or undermining any individual initiative against a "pragmatic" society with a legitimate suspicion of progress and humanism. Such an initiative is threatening, not only because Ferrari's logic--"society is right"--still prevails in the social mentality of *borghesia*, but also because a superior social *realtà* is uncomfortable, since it requires a superior sense of humanity and therefore a superior social ethics, requirements, that is, which are impossible for the multitude to meet. The resistance to and consequently the disenfrachisement of the unique individual is not a reaction to the danger of his ideas, but a reaction to the danger of his existence, since his presence and his activism constantly affirm their own inferiority and his greatness, their meekness and his nobility. The destruction, thus, of the individual is a necessary end in the struggle for survival, not because the "others" are the fittest to survive, but because he does not fit with them, not because he threatens them, but because they are threatened by him. As a milieu, *l'umile realtà della vita* does not determine the "life" of the individual, although it does determine his "living." His fall saves his *verità*, his "life," but it does

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not purge the *realtà* of social mediocrity, it does not "save" society from itself.

This argument complements the prevalent critical judgement about Rovetta's pessimism and the play's function as a mockery of social positivism. It is, however, an insufficient, not to say fallacious, exegesis.[194] It renders the play hyperbolic and melodramatic,[195] with hopelessness and bitterness advanced as features of modernity, therefore, a play maladroitly blending *verismo* skepticism with *crepuscolarismo*'s "faith" in the interminable decline of modernity. Although it is by all means legitimate to argue for *crepuscolarismo* influences on Rovetta's late *verismo*,[196] it could be more accurate to trace this influence not in the

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[194]*The critical analysis of this sort is usually based on the "rhetoric" of one of the play's minor characters, Marino, who, in his brief appearances at the beginning and the end of the play, theorizes on the problem of the exceptional individual with mediocre social realtà as well as on the reactionary nature of life against modernity (Act I, sc. 11, and Act III, sc. 6). This character has been viewed as Rovetta's raisonneur and thus his theorizations have been taken as Rovetta's "messages." In the play, however, Marino is a romantic intellectual and not a pragmatist, therefore his thoughts reflect the mentality of a social type who is habitually melodramatic about life and who as such cannot be a raisonneur for a playwright who has been invariably called a "chronicler," but seldom if ever a "romantic." Thus a part of the dialogue has been taken as the key to the play's meaning. As for the title of the play, this should not be viewed as a literal reference to the play, because it is a habit of Rovetta to charge the titles of his plays with irony or ambiguity. In this case, the realtà is not the theme of the play, but the "problem" which is being debated in the play. For an example of the prevalent views see Personè, ibid., 179; and Cherubini, ibid., 403ff.*

[195]*Cf. Guido Ruberti, Storia del teatro contemporaneo vol. 2 (Bologna, 1928), 550.*

[196]*Cf. Ferdinando Martini, "La vittoria dell'idealismo," Fanfulla della domenica 10 May 1896.*

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struggle between milieu and individual, but in the struggle of the visionary individual with himself, in the conflict between the *verità* of his ideals and the *verità* of his "idea" about his life. La realtà remains a problem play, but the problem is, in fact, the individual proper, his *dramma intimo*. Certainly Rovetta is concerned with the visionary as a *realtà*, as a social unit, but the question is whether a visionary can be a person and not whether a person can be a visionary, whether his existence is valid.

For Rovetta, Francesco is not a victim of society and mediocrity. He is a victim of his vision. A vision, an ideal, is a noble illusion, a fiction, a conjectural *verità* projecting a system not for a future society, but for a different society. His major flaw has been his faith in his vision, his faith in the "realism" of this illusion. The facts of life, which have previously been taken to be his intangible enemy, have not brought him down. It is he who has ignored the facts of life, and this, not because he thought that his system, his *realtà*, could exist as a paragon for other lives, but because he thought that his system could exist seperate from the facts. He organizes the union for the benefit of the workers, more in order to prove the realism of his political vision and less in order to change the existing system. It is all the more frustrating then for him to see not that this system cannot exist without him at the head of the union, but that he cannot exist without this leadership, especially when

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this social position-*realtà* exemplifies the success of his vision. In his personal life, he carries on an open affair with Anna, a stranger (that is, outside the Italian social parameters), and this openness has not legitimized, but vies to legitimize, his social/familial vision as realistic and humanistic. For him, liberalism is a legitimate social attitude, not only because his previous, "normal," marriage had been a social disaster, but because his faith in his moral and spiritual superiority flatters him into believing that social norms are immaterial to him and that he can overlook them without offending conventional morality. What is ironic here is not only the fact that Anna puts an end to the relationship out of deference to the social norms of her country (and not Francesco's), but also the fact that Francesco's social undoing ensues from the allegations about the compromises he condoned in his previous, "normal" and "legitimate" life. Again his major flaw is not his offending conventional morality, but his disregarding this past as irrelevant to his life and irrelevant to his "vision." *Realtà*, thus, has proved him wrong and not wronged.

Finally, as a father and "educator," Francesco has shaped Sofia according to his vision, that is, according to his illusion, since he has kept her ignorant of the past, not so much in order to spare her the pain of knowing her mother's life choices, as in order to prove "with" her the benefits of his vision as a system of ethics. *Realtà*, once more, proves to

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her not only her own social ineptitude as a model of "superior" morality, but the futility of her father's vision. Their suicide, at the end of the play, does not indicate the triumph of decadent society, but a personal admission of their unfitness to exist in society, not because they are above it, but because they are strangers to it. For Rovetta, the realtà "chronicled" in the play is the evasion of *verità*, the evasion of self-awareness.

After La realtà, Rovetta, probably under the influence of European neo-romanticism, shifted gradually from *verismo* to the neo-romantic *dramma storico*. In fact, he would score his greatest (commercial) success with Romanticismo (Romanticism, 1901), a jingoistic hybrid between *dramma storico* and *commedia borghese*, which idealized Risorgimento Italy and touched on the *borghesia*'s nostalgia for its glorious days of the past. Until his death, he would write several works in this venues, such as Il re burlone (The Merry King, 1905) and Molière e la sua moglie (Molière and his Wife, 1909). Papà eccellenza! (His Excellence, the Father, 1906) a play in the manner of Giacosa's *Il più forte*, constitutes a revisit to *verismo*, but although it achieved a considerable success, critically and commercially, this late Rovettian experiment with the political and social realtà of the *borghesia* remained incomplete. By then, a different *verismo* had evolved, concerned less with the social *realtà* of the *borghesi* and more with their psychological and intellectual *verità*. This was the

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verismo of Marco Praga, E.A. Butti and Roberto Bracco. The *verità* of the psyche was now the "problem" of modern *realtà*. On 8 May 1910, Rovetta commited suicide, but a few months earlier, in an almost Pirandellian twist of fate, the newspapers had mistakingly pre-announced his death. Rovetta, who had lived a very solitary life, was reported to have been amused reading his obituaries. The pre-announcement of his death, he thought, had proved once more the ludicrous discrepancy between appearance and fact.

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ITALIAN REALIST DRAMA
(1860-1918)

by

PANAGIOTIS SFYRIS

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CHAPTER 6

"VERISMI:" THE DRAMA OF MARCO PRAGA, ROBERTO BRACCO AND E.A. BUTTI

The last decade of the nineteenth century was an era pregnant with controversial, agressively anti-naturalistic literary trends, whose champions rejected positivism and the culture it had generated. This reaction of discontent with realism and naturalism, paneuropean in its scope and range, was also felt in the theatre, but the nascent alternative dramaturgies, mainly symbolism and decadence, lacked a broader cultural appeal. Thus, their evolution from avant-gardes to "schools" or traditions remained indeterminate and consequently they challenged neither the bourgeois orientation of contemporary drama, nor the sway of the naturalistic tradition. Ibsen and, to a lesser extent, the other Nordic playwrights (Bjørnson and Strindberg), all with a considerable body of work already behind them, were more notorious than popular for their controversial depictions of modernity. Although by this time naturalism had already been a point of departure for their dramaturgy and their experiments with symbolism, "ideas" and metaphysics had profoundly altered their esthetics, it was their "naturalism" that still

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fascinated (or infuriated) contemporary critics and audiences.

In Italy, the belated discovery of Ibsen as a "naturalist" and "idealist" by playwrights either already aligned with *verismo*, or beginning to experiment with it, was a development chronologically coinciding with the anti-*verismo* backlash, but also with the re-orientation of *verismo* itself from a social toward a psychological and "idealistic" *problematica*, with its divergence to various hybrid *verismi*.[1] The prevailing assumption that *verismo* simulated maladroitly the dramaturgical pattern of "naturalist" Ibsen, or more correctly a "gallicized" Ibsen (Becque, etc), has established a tradition of interpretation, according to which the branching out of *verismo* to *verismi* was a consequence of Ibsen's italianization and not a phase in the natural evolution of the movement itself.[2] Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that the encounter of the *veristi* with Ibsen was inconsequential or superficial, it would be equally inaccurate to insist on their unconditional surrender to his esthetic. Indeed, as we have already seen in previous chapters, concepts of humanity, morality and reality, usually identified *a posteriori* with (a still undefined) *ibsenismo*,[3]

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[1]*Cf. Mario Verdone, "Lucini, Ibsen e il teatro," Rivista italiana di drammaturgia 9-10 (December 1978), 61ff;*

[2]*Cf. G. Stuparich, Scipio Slataper (Firenze: La voce, 1922), 195.*

[3]*To the best of my knowledge, there exists no thorough study of Ibsen's influence on modern Italian drama. Allusions to "ibsenismo" abound in numerous monographies and articles about individual playwrights, but most authors and*

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had already insinuated themselves in the earlier native realistic drama, not only because the naturalistic temper of the positivist age had coalesced with the idealistic precepts of *Risorgimento culture*, but also because these concepts, emphasizing a relativistic attitude towards perceptions and truths, had always existed in Italian drama: they were evident in renaissance tragicomedy, the *dramma borghese* of Goldoni, the pro-realism theorizations of Manzoni, the *commedie a tesi* of Giacometti and Ferrari, even in the early work of Giacosa. The familiarization with the work of Ibsen only encouraged the recurrence of these concepts in *verismo* drama, which not only appeared to resist the advent of the various avant-gardes, but also to efficiently exploit their most dynamic and original attributes.

The compartmentalization of *verismo* to *verismi* did not, of course, entail the decline of the *dramma/commedia borghese*.[4] It necessitated its conditioning in a way that a

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scholars seem to assume that the esthetics and the notions entailed in the term ibsenismo are familiar to the informed reader, as if a consensus is already established about the content of the term. It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to provide an analysis of the term or to discuss the various ibsenisti of Italian drama, although I find it appropriate to cite those names which are cite most frequently in discussions of ibsenismo: Alfredo Oriani, Tomaso Monicelli, Cosimo Giorgieri Contri, Lorenzo Ruggi, Guglielmo Zorzi, Oreste Poggio. For a (far from complete) discussion of the problem "ibsenismo" in Italy cf. Daniela Quarta, "Ibsenismo in Italia: Bracco, Giacosa, Praga. Drammaturgie a confronto," in La didascalia nella letteratura scandinavica: Testo drammatico e sintesi scenica, op. cit., n.14, p. 84. Cf. also Piero Gobetti, Scritti di critica teatrale, op. cit., 598-601, 680.

[4]Cf. Silvio D'Amico, Cronache del teatro E. Ferdinando Palmieri and Sandro D'Amico, eds., vol. 1 (Bari: Laterza, 1963), 266-7.

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tragicomic vision of modernity, the ironic criticism of contemporary social trends and the accentuation of the discrepancy between the person and the persona, the private and public individual, could all be accomodated and enmeshed into an esthetic appropriate for an Italian (and not Italianized) social *problematica*. If for Verga, Giacosa and Rovetta, *verismo* meant a theatre of social anagnorisis, the *verismi* of playwrights such as Marco Praga, Roberto Bracco and E.A. Butti embodied a theatre about perceptions, not necessarily and exclusively about social appearances, but about ideals and ideologies, faiths and convictions, ethics and practices, none of which constituted certainties or truths and all of which were cultural subterfuges only appearing as immutable social facts. Theirs was a tragically ironic drama about the impact of perceptions on the collective psyche of the *borghesia*. The tragicomic cheapening of morals and ideologies, the paradoxes of the individual life as a physical extension of the human spirit were concerns germane to these *verismi*. Praga, Bracco and Butti were very political about the function of "psychological" drama and viewed the theatrical experience as clarifying, not edifying. Their drama was opinionated, but not judgemental. It was unsettlingly truth-seeking.

MARCO PRAGA

The career of Marco Praga (Milano 1862-Varese 1929) as

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both an apologist of *verismo* and the nemesis of the *borghesia* and its polity, has proved a puzzle for the critics who have followed it. The work itself -- some twenty plays, one or two libretti,[5] a couple of fiction books and a ten-volume collection of theatre reviews-- has generated a wide range of responses, from the most perceptive to the most dismissive, but some consensus on the overall value of his legacy or his status in the history of modern Italian drama has yet to be reached. Even his contemporaries, critics and colleagues, appeared to understand neither the man, nor his dramaturgy, nor his often unconventional sociology.[6] Thus, he is either treated as a minor, erratic and ultimately self-defeating artist, the typical *borghese* playwright with an interesting, yet narrow perception of society's *verità*;[7] or as an atypical *verista*, the forerunner of Pirandello and *pirandellismo*, the legitimizer of irony as the most distinctive essence of modern

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[5] *Praga co-authored the libretto for Puccini's Manon Lescaut.*

[6] *Cf. Alfredo Sartolio, Teatro femminista (Torino: Lattes, 1919), 275-290. The commedia borghese, of which Praga was considered as the most characteristic writer, was the cause of a controversy which became public in December 1921 through the cultural pages of newspapers such as L'epoca and La tribuna (both of Rome) and with the participation of other critics and playwrights. The argument that instigated the controversy was once again the mediocrity of Italian theatre and especially of the dramma borghese. The controversy continued the following year between Silvio D'Amico and Marco Praga in the journal L'idea nazionale. This controversy is recounted in two articles, "La commedia borghese" and "Teatro vecchio e nuovo," now in Silvio D'Amico Cronache di teatro vol. 2 (Bari: Laterza, 1963), 265-281.*

[7] *Cf. Croce, Letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. 6, op. cit., 203-206; Guido Ruberti, Storia del teatro contemporaneo, op. cit., 541ff; Alonge, Teatro e spettacolo, op. cit., 169. Luigi Tonelli, L'evoluzione del teatro contemporaneo in Italia, op. cit., 330ff.*

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Italian drama.[8]

Apart from his reviews, some scattered reminiscences, and his letters (published well after his death), Praga left scant commentaries on his drama or his esthetics, quite often contradictory in content and spirit. Originally, he seemed to espouse the "art for art" dogma, but at the same time he explained his involvement in the theatre as devoid of some deeper vision about its social or esthetic function. He resented Ibsen and Ibsenists, he disliked Ferrari.[9] And yet, near the end of his career, he was prone to dismiss almost his entire work as abortive and inconsequential--with exception being made to the two plays he saw performed by Eleonora Duse, La moglie ideale (The Ideal Wife, 1891) and La porta chiusa (The Closed Door, 1913), the two *commedie* which officially opened and closed his career as a playwright--while simultaneously defending the *italianità* and the pragmatism, that is, the national functionality, of the *commedia borghese*. Indeed, whatever his inconsistencies and reservations about his own *oeuvre*, Praga, the drama critic, was a polemical champion of *verismo*, even when its esthetics and *problematica* had lost appeal among serious intellectuals. Chekhov, Pirandello, the *grotteschi* and the expressionists were

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[8] *Cf. Gobetti, Scritti di critica teatrale, op. cit., 257; Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano, 716; Silvio D'Amico, Storia del teatro drammatico, vol. 3, op. cit., 292-294.*

[9] *Cf. interview in Ugo Ojetti, Alla scoperta dei letterati, op. cit., 126, 128.*

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invariably dismissed as "irrelevant," and only a theatre true to the spirit of *verismo* was openly encouraged.[10] The concept of the "true truth," which Praga tackled in the course of his career, appears at first sight tautological and perhaps unintelligible, but his subject matter shows that he was not preoccupied exclusively with the nature of *verità*. He was also inquisitive about the truthfulness, the uniqueness of *verità*. As a *verista* he showed that there actually exists a plethora of truths and not a single concept of truth, demonstrating, moreover, that these multifarious and handy truths are in fact fictions addicting the modern *borghese* to an artificial existence of contentment. Without these "truths," his plays have implied, bourgeois life would reveal itself meaningless. The bourgeois experience challenges him as a farce and it is this farce that the plays chronicled as the most tragic aspect of modernity. His *verismo* was not so much the drama of pessimism, but a drama communicating a fear for the fiction of *verità*. This fear insinuated itself through sarcasm and irony, by means of which he sought to detect the psyche of the *borghesia*. Praga found this class as a *maschera* without a

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[10] *From 1919 to 1929 Praga was esteemed as an authoritative, although esthetically obdurate, theatre critic for the Illustrazione italiana. As a critic, he was very skeptical about modern theatre, national and international. As we said, earlier he remained a champion of verismo to the end of his life. For a study of his reviews see Pullini, op. cit., 233ff; idem, Marco Praga (Bologna: Cappelli, 1960), 123ff. His ten volume collection of reviews is out of print, but an anthology with the most representative of them was published in 1979. See Marco Praga, Cronache teatrali del primo novecento Ruggero Rimini, ed. (Firenze: Nuovedizioni Enrico Vallecchi, 1979).*

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face, and it was this face that he sought to envision and mold in his *commedie*. His theatre is not only about the phenomenology of the *borghesia*. It is in and by itself the double of this phenomenology.[11]

Although Praga thought of himself as a conservative who never intended to subvert the social culture of the *borghesia*, he was initially construed as an iconoclast.[12] In fact, the playwright, a solitary and rather difficult man, had always tried hard to convince critics, inside and outside the theatre, that his dramas were transliterations of plain actuality, a dramaturgy of the "nude" truth, and not premeditated scathing attacks on the prevailing social structures and models. The excesses and the contradictions of positivist society did not repulse him, but hardened him as a social critic. It was resentment and not empathy that conditioned his tragicomic perception of the *borghesia* as an imminent social fiasco. Praga was not a cynic. He was an ironist, a mystified intellectual, apprehensive of what he

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[11]*As Giorgio Pullini has written, "per Praga il verismo va inteso come termine estensivo di un atteggiamento di fronte alla realtà: cioè [...] come interiorizzazione dei fatti esterni nello studio dei fenomeni psicologici che li producono e ne conseguono." [Praga perceives verismo as an all encompassing expression of an attitude toward reality; that is, [...] as an interiorization of external facts in the study of psychological phenomena which produce these facts or are derived from them.]* Teatro italiano fra due secoli, *op. cit., 237.*

[12]*Cf. Cesare Levi, "Marco Praga,"* Nuova Antologia *259 (January-February 1915), 198.*

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presumed as his inability to perceive modern society in its totality, as a uniform system of norms. One after another, his plays revealed this to be rather a system of exceptions and dysfunctions, with "normality" detected as a utopia invented by positivist society, an ideal which the *borghesia* wanted to believe as a reality. Praga exposed several of these dysfunctions, and his exposés, not always commercially or artistically successful, demonstrated this impossibility to "understand" not only society or modernity, but also the "fact" of human psychology and individuality. The dramatization of this impossibility, nonetheless, establishes Praga as the first modern Italian playwright proving (unbeknownst to him, according to Gobetti) that the only *verità*, the "nude" truth, is that there exists not one truth, neither norms nor "faces." His tragicomedies have thus initiated the Italian drama in the *problematica* of Pirandello, which means not only that Pirandello codified the perceptions of Praga into a philosophy, but that modernity could be grasped only in terms of a philosophy as paradoxical as Pirandello's: the *problematica* of the naked mask.

Praga's life, ostensibly decorous and uneventful, abounded in melodramatic paradoxes, in absolute triumphs and absolute defeats. One could very well speculate that to a considerable extent his irony and the penchant for the paradox evidence, more than he cared to admit, a very personal, almost autobiographical, sort of dramaturgy. One could go as far as

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to speculate that *scapigliatura*'s pessimistic mockery of bourgeois assertiveness, conformism and narcissism has been germane to his esthetics. Whatever the case might be, this attitude was inherited and not simulated, because Marco Praga was born into the life of the *scapigliati*. The son of Emilio Praga who, as we have already said, was one of the pioneers of Milanese *scapigliatura* in the 1860s and early 1870s, he grew up in an environment which embodied this paradox of the positivist *borghesia*: the comfort of bourgeois industriousness and the discontent with the presumed vacuity of its life-style.[13] He was not even ten, when he experienced his family's *declassamento*, as his thirty-six year old alcoholic father died leaving the family without substantial financial resources and thus social security. This loss of social standing obliged the twelve-year old Praga to leave school and choose a practical metier in order to support himself and his mother.[14] He studied accounting and after graduation he found a job as a book-keeper. But it was also at that time that he took up literature, journalism and drama. In the beginning, however, the success in his new literary endeavors

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[13]*See chapter 4.*

[14]*Praga became so emotionally attached to her that, except from a very short-lived marriage with his secretary in 1896, he lived with her until she died in 1918. Pullini is certain that* La porta chiusa, *whose central character is a selfless mother figure, is a tribute to her.* Marco Praga, *ibid., 8.*

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was not unconditional.[15]

L'amico (The friend, 1886), Giuliana (1887) and Mater dolorosa (1889, based on a popular novel by Rovetta) were plays of mediocre critical and commercial appeal, but Praga found the theatre a profitable business, at least more lucrative and more gratifying than accounting. These early works, deemed derivative and pseudo-naturalistic, were hardly artful enough to justify his persistence to pursue playwriting as a career. But for Praga these plays were not typical imitations of French naturalism. They were experiments with the form of *verismo*. For all his affectations as a man who could not care less about the spirituality of contemporary drama, *verismo* had intrigued him with its modernity and *italianità*. His two next dramas, Le vergini (The Virgins, 1889) and La moglie ideale, arguably a milestone in the history of the movement, solidified his reputation as the most promising and most perceptive of the younger playwrights. As in the case of Torelli twenty years earlier, however, very few of his later plays seemed to justify the enthusiasm La moglie ideale generated, with the critics finding them lacking in structure, style, and, worse, redeeming values.[16]

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[15] *Praga collaborated with the controversial journal Penombre. In 1883 and 1884 he penned two plays L'incontro (The Encounter) and Le due case (The Two Houses), without success. As a journalist he also collaborated with Il carro di Tespi, and after 1899 with Corriere della sera and La lettura.*

[16] *A problem with Praga's dramaturgy as well as with the work of other playwrights such as Butti, Lopez and Niccodemi (see chapter 7) was the reluctance of critics and occasionally audiences to accept plays which did not fall into one*

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L'innamorata (A Woman in Love, 1891), written for and performed by Duse, was a sad failure, and the plays following it, Alleluja (1892), L'incanto (The Spell, 1892), L'erede (The heir, 1893), Il bell'Apollo (The beautiful Apollo, 1894) and others, proved disappointing.[17] Frustrated by the lack of success, but also overburdened with his work as director of Italy's Society of Authors (he retained this post from 1896 to 1911), Praga distanced himself from the stage.[18] For the next several years, he fought hard to improve the financial fortunes of his colleagues who, exploited by star managers and impressarios unwilling to pay them substantial royalties, did not enjoy a status happier than Giacometti's, thirty years

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of the two forms of playwrighting, drama or comedy. Whether they admitted it or not, most Italian critics in judging the naturalistic theatre of their country looked for models and patterns in the French naturalistic drama of the period, which seemed to conform to the assumption that naturalism necessarily connoted a grim, deterministic and humorless drama, devoid of irony or sarcasm. It is interesting here to note that the plays of Henry Becque to whom Praga was more often than not compared, were not very popular with Parisian critics exactly because their ironic and paradoxical naturalism did not seem to comply with the critical presumptions about the nature of naturalism. Although it may seem arbitrary to label Praga's plays tragicomedies, a designation which I have not found to appear among Praga's writings or reviews of playwrights like Checkov or Pirandello, nonetheless it appears as a more appropriate interpretation for the designation "commedia" with which he labeled his work. Indeed, only three of his plays, the ones with a most deterministic or melodramatic tone, are designated as "drammi" (L'amico, Il dubbio and L'innamorata).

[17] *In the meantime he wrote a novel, La biondina (The Blond Girl, 1892) and a collection of short stories about the life of the theatre, Storie di palcoscenico (Stories of the Stage, 1895). Later he also wrote a collection of epistolary short stories under the title Anime a nudo (Naked Souls, 1920).*

[18] *From 1912 to 1917 Praga directed as a capocomico the company of the Manzoni theatre of Milan, but theatre administration did not prove very rewarding. During the war he was also associated with the "Teatro del soldato," which he helped found with the purpose of presenting an Italian repertory to the warring troupes of the nation.*

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earlier.[19] A series of plays written between 1903 and 1915 regenerated interest in his theatre. La morale della favola (The Moral of the Fable, 1899), La crisi (The Ordeal, 1904) and La porta chiusa (1913) are indeed his most significant works after La moglie ideale, although none of them proved in the long run as enduring as the earlier masterpiece. Its frequent revival, combined with the neglect of the later work, seemed to validate his self-dismissiveness. When he commited suicide in a Varese sanatorium, allegedly out of fear for the complications of pneumonia, Praga had come to believe that the theatre he championed was misunderstood, that it had been a lost cause.

As a *verista* Praga was not particularly interested in class politics. Tensions between contrasting social spheres, conflicts of ideologies, disparities of caste mentalities and special interests are conspicuously absent from his plays. That, however, does not mean that he deliberately dispensed with the controversies of actuality or that he sought to refine a dramaturgy of evasion ostensibly inoffensive to the social sensibilities of the *borghesia*. The truth is that, shunning all concerns and problems extraneous to the *borghesia* as a problem, Praga evolved an idiosyncratic sort of *verismo borghese*, sharply political and subtly polemical. In this the

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[19] *For his services to Italian theatre, he was titled as "commendatore" of the Italian crown in 1911. Praga would be involved in the Society as "member of the board" in 1916 and again as president until 1919, the year he resigned after altercations with other members.*

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deceptively normal experience of the metropolitan (Milanese) *borghesia* and its various sub-strata provided a *problematica* which dissected that class not as just a milieu, but as a *divenire*, a process, and a *moment* as well. As his *commedie* deal with dysfunctional conjugal and familial relationships set in salons pertinent to the respective bourgeois sects, the *borghesia*-milieu, for all its variations in the specifics of décor, opulence, or "refinement" as well as for all the specific kinds of values implied in these variations, remains essentially unaltered: an immured world apart from society, with doors, windows and halls segregating it from (and not connecting it with) exterior social life, with the furniture and the other properties bespeaking social achievement, social aspiration but also social wariness and a frustrating preoccupation with decorum; a space organized according to the social habits it indulges, or according to the social functions and appearances it facilitates; ultimately a space that reveals and sustains an image, but which at the same time not only conceals but also protects the privacy of the scared and vigilant *borghese*. The emphasis here is on the meaning of protection which his plays insinuate as analogous to concealment. The bourgeois milieu of Praga protects the normal appearance of family life, because it conceals its truth, namely, its abnormality. The protection then suggests not just concealment, but also the perpetuation, the sustaining of abnormality. Any effort to target the problem would entail the

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destruction of the social image, it would virtually waive the protection that the milieu provided, since the revelation would in effect provoke the social depreciation of the *borghese*, even the end of his illusions. For Praga, then, the bourgeois salon is not just a space for action, for pretending, for playing roles, the emblematic domain of a demoralized and demoralizing class. It is also a sort of hall of mirrors, in which the distorted appearances hide the true secrets or the secret truths the social survival requires to be repressed and discarded.[20] Giacosa, in his earlier social comedies, had tried to dramatize the milieu as a deception, but the edifying demands of his romantic realism prevented the function of the milieu as a visual embodiment of the bourgeois experience. In any case, that *borghesia* was not patterned according to a specific actual model. It was an invention conforming with (and ascertaining) the prevalent generalized concept of the class. In his *verismo* work, also, Giacosa had not dealt with the *borghesia* as a milieu, but with the *borghesia* within a milieu that could be defined as *borghese*, but which was set outside its actual metropolitan paramaters, in a suffocating province (Tristi amori, Diritti dell'anima), or in a neutral foreign world (Come le foglie).[21] Rovetta,

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[20] *Cf. Giuseppe Bartolucci, La didascalia drammaturgica (Praga, Marinetti, Pirandello) (Napoli, Guida Editori, 1973), 9ff. and 21-36.*

[21] *Il più forte is obviously an exception, but that play still has a thesis to prove, with the milieu providing a point of departure for the thesis debated therein.*

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on the other hand, dramatized the milieu as the determining factor of the *borghese*'s life, experimenting with its impact on the *borghese* and his or her perception of social status. Yet it was Praga who elevated the *borghesia*-milieu to an "antagonist" of the *borghese*. The physicality of that space, the "atmosphere," and the psychology it imposed on the individual revealed exactly those truths they were supposed to supress: Not the evasion of true reality, but rather a pretended evasion of it.

The *borghesia*, nonetheless, has not lent itself only as the appropriate milieu-matrix of his *problematica*. It is a *moment* as well: It is a phase in the social process of modernity, a phase in the social implementation of positivism, but also an evolving class experience, a social experiment carried out in the course of the *borghesia-moment*. There is a constant interaction between the *borghesia*-moment and the *borghesia*-culture. The psychology of the *borghese* is shaped by the culture and the ethics of an erratically positivist modernity, while this modernity is reciprocally shaped by the culture and the ethics of the *borghese*. The dysfunction of the family or the marriage, for instance, is explained in terms of a "normal," that is, "natural" social effect, since it is the consequence of an incompetent socialization program mapped out and supported by the *borghesia* itself. A family or a marriage disintegrates, because the individual *borghesi*, the men and the women, the husbands, the wives, and the lovers, have been

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shaped as personalities and consciences by a system which encourages respect for a society unconcerned with substance, so long as decorum and the appearance of regularity are not violated. The *borghesia* does not brook the exposure of its imperfections. The transgressors are alienated by the system, not because they break the ethical law, but because they do so while overlooking their duty to respect the appearance, because they have chosen to be true rather than real.

From Le vergini to La porta chiusa, the experiment of the *borghesia* has been found to give contradicting as well as self-contradictory results, exactly because Praga's *borghesi*, those, that is, who are the agents as well as the catalysts of the experiment with love, morality and idealism, don't actually believe in the practical value of it, they don't actually respect themselves, but only respect and cultivate their public image, their "ideal" reputation, in effect, an invention of themselves. Early in the twentieth century, Sabatino Lopez and Dario Niccodemi would treat this attachment to fiction as a tragicomic *realtà*, but Praga remained more of an ironist and less of a tragicomedian. The struggle between the fiction and the truth eventuating within the psyche and the life style of the *borghese* evokes either his anger or his resignation and his irony is the mode with which these reactions are manifested. Piero Gobetti, who has studied Praga's dramaturgy as a document of the *borghesia* as both a milieu and a *moment*, has explained the corruption of the

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bourgeois experience as *borghesismo*.[22] The symptoms of this *borghesismo* are detected to be the social normalcy of adultery, the mentality of lie, the idolization of *vergogna* (shame, shamefulness, but also the awareness thereof), the morality of hypocrisy, the necessity of self-deception, the subsequent social necessity for the maintainance of this self-deception, the spiritlessness of the "successful" marriage, the disenfranchizement of the *borghese* from himself, his *spersonalizzazione*, his de-personalization. Between the *maschere* of Gozzi and the masks of Pirandello, the depersonalized *fantocci* (puppets) of Praga offer themselves as parodies of an *italianità* which declined before peaking. Luigi Personè has aptly characterized his *borghesismo* as a *fatalità* (a fate), which preordains, normalizes, the ethical indiscretions the fictionalizing *borghese* needs to consider abnormal.[23] At best, Praga's *verismo* chronicles exactly this *moment*, the process, of this depersonalization. His plays do not capture the social malaise of the *borghesia* as its consequence, as a finality, but in the moment of crisis, as this process is revealed to have begun in the past and continued into the present, but is also anticipated to exist into the future, unfailingly sustained by the invention of normality. The playwright does not moralize by projecting the

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[22] *Gobetti, op, cit., 261.*

[23] *Personè, op. cit., 140, 141.*

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possibility of recuperating the face, a face which, as we said, is deemed non-existent. *Borghesismo* is a vicious circle, with the *borghesi* agreeing to agree on some mutually respectable social arrangement, so that a "face" can be assumed and saved. Adultery, in particular, dominates his drama and his *problematica*, not because this is a delectable favorite for the theatre-going borghese, but because for the playwright adultery constitutes the all encompassing embodiment of *borghesismo*.

Adultery does not insinuate itself as the crisis of a marriage, or the dissolving of the family. Either it is what keeps the "normal" marriage possible, or it is the revenge the wife takes on the husband, not because he has been the first to violate the morality of marriage, but because he has violated her *diritto* to be a partner in the relationship and not a trophy. As the husband is the embodiment of the bourgeois ideology--hard work, status, family values--the only ideology that the *borghesia* acknowledges as a national *verità*, the adultery commited against his honor is actually a retribution against the society that has excluded the woman from the social contract, a revenge for being respectable, but not respected. That revenge is in itself a mockery of the system, since the *amante* is obviously another hegemonic member of the society who, irrespective of whether he is better or worse than the husband, is nonetheless a traitor of the system supporting him as its respected and respectable pillar.

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Adultery, that is, is the punishment and the compromise that society (the "lover") unconsciously inflicts on her role model (the husband), but in this the woman (the wife) is the means of this auto-revenge, not just the price that the role model is forced to pay. Certainly the adulteress is not always justified by the playwright. Yet, she is not blamed either, because the wife is a role in the family arrangment, rewritten and reshaped by the *borghesia* to conform with its own (refutable) system of values. If the wife has failed to honor society by honoring her marriage, it means that society itself has failed as an "educator" of women. Either way, the *borghesia* is its own victim and victimizer, a defeated winner.

Once the adultery is exposed, the husband (society) is revealed to have been aware of the deceit all along and that he has condoned it, professedly out of love, but in fact, not because he was afraid of ridicule, but because he was afraid to admit his failure to raise to the standards of the society that "trusted" him. It is ethical cowardliness, and the fear of the self that prescribes his silence, the establishment of hypocrisy, the theatre (marriage) within the theatre (family/society), the keeping up of the appearances, and not simply his anxiety about the compromise of his social standing. Adultery, in fact, is supressed by the re-enfrancisement of the adulteress in the family, an arrangement which not only typically saves the family's honor, but which also "paradoxically" reveals and camouflages the shortcomings

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of the *borghesia* as a moral pacesetter: In La moglie ideale, it is the wife who perfects the arrangement for keeping husband and lover equally content. It is also she who negotiates an exit from the "other" life, which will not disturb the happiness of the husband. In La morale della favola, it is a priest who authorizes the adulteress to hide her sin from the husband, because such a lie is a praxis of morality. In La crisi it is the wife who, colluding with her brother in law, saves the husband from the despair not of having been cheated, but of being unable to find life meaningful without his "traitor." Finally, in La porta chiusa, the wife has kept her lover and father of her son within the family as his friend and mentor, not because she is, so to speak, society-smart, but because her husband is a parody of bourgeois ideology. Always the wife will have to put up with the idea that the marriage has either been a failure and a sacrifice (La porta chiusa), or that it will be life as usual, that is, a continuing lie (La moglie ideale), or an unredeeming prospect (La crisi). Giuseppe Giacosa in Tristi amori and later in Diritti dell'anima had de-sentimentalized the *problematica* of adultery, and had dramatized it as a social manifestation of an anomalous society. It was Praga, nonetheless, who developed this *problematica* as an *epopea* (an epic) of *verismo*, an hybrid *verismo*, but also--and that is his major contribution to the movement--as a *realtà* which parodied the *borghesia* and its whole cultural construct. Again, it is

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not that the playwright parodied the life of the *borghesia*. On the contrary, he relates this adultery-parody as a fact, a social practice.[24]

Womanhood, a *problematica* as germane to Praga's *verismo* as adultery, has been bared of the sentimental and melodramatic vestiges of romantic realism à la Cicconi or Dumas *fils*. It insinuates itself as the perfect theme for a sociological critique of the *borghesia*. Earlier critics were certain about the impact of "feminist" Ibsen on the sociology of Praga, but again there has been no consensus on how this impact evidences in his work, or what form it has taken.[25] Indeed, his attitude toward the "woman problem," the social function (and dysfunction) of woman, her demoralization and exploitation by and of the *borghesia*, has appeared ambiguous if not elusive. He has been called a misogynist and a feminist, an expert on female psychology and a superficial simplifier of the female mentality, an apologist of woman's rights and a detractor of her social indiscretions, a defendant of society against the "excesses" of modern woman, or a defendant of women against the "excesses" of society. Although the acquaintance with Ibsen's sociology must have

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[24]*Gobetti who took Praga to be a "conventional" and sentimental playwright, despite the fact that he appreciated the latter's drama of irony, has described his conventionalism as an elusively ironic esthetic. Cf. Op. cit., 258.*

[25]*Earlier critics stressed the impact of Henri Becque on Praga. Becque was very popular in Italy and for a time he was revered as equal to Ibsen. More recent scholars have "absolved" Praga of imitating the French dramatist.*

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given a strong impetus to his interpretation of womanhood as a psychology and at the same time as an "ideal" ideal-- an acquaintance not documented by Praga himself-- there is a significant distinction between Praga and Ibsen as students of women in society. Although they both agree that the socialization of women is indeed problematic, Praga's women, in his best work, are not the "victims" who finally revolt against social opression and find their self either by dismissing society (i.e. Ibsen's Nora) or by dismissing their lives (Hedda Gabler)[26]. His heroines are de-victimised and their unconventional (that is "immoral") social choices are explained not just as a defense against the *borghesia* which antagonizes them, but also as "normal" and "acceptable" (not condoned, but fostered), so long as they don't violate the appearance of decorum. Even motherhood, for instance, which for Praga is a sacrosanct and inviolable social *verità*, is not distinguished from womanhood. An unconventional (as in La porta chiusa) social situation arranged by a woman who is an ideal mother, but not an "ideal" (that is, "respectable") *borghese*, is sanctioned by Praga only because the abnormality of normality can demonstrate the double-standard enormities of society. Praga is very meticulous in avoiding judging society, not because such an attitude would not have been political, but because the de-victimization of woman entails the

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[26]*These were the most famous and most revived plays of Ibsen in Italy during Praga's career as a dramatist.*

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indictment of society, since, as we said, the woman is a "creation" of the very society she is found to offend. Woman, the mother, the wife, the lover, is an extension, a reflection, of society and therefore an "immoral" woman automatically suggests an "immoral" society. Even the positivist and Torellian maxim, "the husband makes the wife," is ironically twisted in Praga's cosmos. If the wife is less than ideal, it is because the husband is less than ideal. Therefore, the "ideal," that is, the benevolently hypocritical woman, is the perfect match for the "ideal," that is "respectable" (but not respected) husband. Indeed, they both represent what a *borghesia* without a *verità* deserves: the *verità*, the essentiality, of deception. Obviously Praga's irony is not just a technique. It is an attitude, a *realtà* he detects all around him.

Le vergini[27], Praga's first unequivocal success, struck several contemporary critics as a powerful demonstration of *verismo* sociology, but the documentaristic rendition of

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[27] *The play was performed for the first time at the Teatro Manzoni of Milan (16 December 1889) by the company of Virginia Marini with Italia Vitaliani, Edwige Guglielminetti, Enrico Reinach and Claudio Leigheb. After Milan, the play was acclaimed in Rome, Turin and elsewhere. It was first published in 1891 by Galli in Milan, but I cite from a later edition (1918), published by Treves. Carlo Bertolazzi adapted the play in the Milanese dialect and in 1928 it was revived and directed by Luigi Pirandello. It has been suggested that Pirandello knew the play so well, that influences of it are traced in his Stasera si recita à soggetto. Cf. Claudio Vicentini, "Il repertorio di Pirandello capocomico e l'ultima stagione della sua drammaturgia," Pirandello e la drammaturgia tra le due guerre. Ed. Enzo Scrivano (Agrigento: Edizioni del centro nazionale di Studi Pirandelliani, 1985), 88-91.*

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Milan's bourgeois milieu and the asperity of his innuendoes about the social duplicity of the *borghesia*, although no less appreciated, conveyed a message that was the opposite of what he had probably anticipated. Chronicling the social, moral, psychological and even economical perversion of the *declassée borghesia*, the play appeared to address the bleakness of the modern social temper and to indict the disintegration of the family and its ethics. Certainly, Praga was concerned about the accuracy of his observations and the pursuit of *verità* in the depiction of a particular social reality, yet the reception of the *commedia* as pessimistic and recriminatory imparted the misconception that the playwright was a cynical moralist and ideologue. The fact that Le vergini was a *commedia* and not a *dramma* was simply overlooked. Thus, the distorting irony of the play, manifest not only in the content but also in the form, went completely unperceived: The play was a success for the wrong reasons and Praga, who had arduously labored for months trying to balance the sociological *verità* of the milieu with a plot and a characterization dispensing with convention, moralism and *tesi*, was rather nonplussed.[28] The final outcome, indeed, was far from the tragic indictment that the critics saw. Rather, it was a tragicomic parody of *borghesismo*, not a study of defeat, but a criticism of defeatism, a mocking dismissal

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[28] *See Praga's letter to the critic G. Piccini (Jarro), cited in Pullini, Marco Praga, op. cit., 135.*

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of the entire prevailing social ethos, a play with a "happy end." Le vergini was not about losers, but about winners. The only loser was actually the *borghesia* itself.

Written in four acts and loosely based on real events, the play details the social disenfranchisement of three "fatherless" young women, the title's virgins, who, in the pursuit of social status, respect and happiness within a decorous marriage, are soon exposed to the *realtà* of a double-faced, pleasure-seeking and amorally moralistic man's world. In this *commedia*, the disenfranchisement was not the natural consequence of social exploitation, but a conscious choice which, the social pressures leading to it notwithstanding, ultimately meant emancipation: the repudiation of the bourgeois system by the ("defeated") winners. The whole play, with the exception of act II, transpires in the modest drawing-room of Delfina Tossi, a widow with three marriageable daughters, Ninì, Selene and Paolina. Without assistance and substantial financial means, Delfina has raised her daughters lovingly but without a particular attention to "details," such as the deference to decorum, the simulation of modesty and "social inexperience." She has been insistent, however, on one technicality: Their daughters should maintain their virginity, because this is their only asset. Society is very selective when it comes to adjudicate the marriageability of young women and thus it is important that her three daughters be able to bargain their *rispettabilità* with their honor. She has not

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been exactly accurate in her perception of bourgeois ethics and thus her daughters' virginity has lost its social value. It is indeed a technicality, unworthy of respect, which means that the young women can hardly "use" it for the attainment of *rispettabilità*. Ninì and Selene, the youngest of them, are more socially sophisticated than their mother, and, although they have listened to her advice, they have also come to realize that they are not "marriageable" and that therefore their virginity is a good asset not for the pursuit of husbands or love, but for the pursuit of conformism, for their social survival. The house of Delfina Tassi has been open to young men who regale her daughers with gifts, money, "confidence" and "protection" in exchange of their pleasurable social company, in exhange, that is, for their reputation. The mother, of course, is always at home, but this is another devoid of value formality. It is in one of these gatherings that the play opens, but before introducing the "virgins," Praga presents the society men who frequent and exploit the convivial salon of Delfina: First appears Vercellini, an elderly friend of the family who insists on being accepted by the women as their guardian. Then come Vittorio Olgiati, an amoral bon-viveur who is also the atypical raisonneur of the play (atypical because he express the values that Praga eventually derides) and Dario, an impressionable and sentimental man introduced by Vittorio to the life of the city after years of absence. An old aristocrat, the marquis Zoppi,

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who wants to marry Selene is the last of the *borghesi* to avail themselves of Delfina's lax domestic codes. These are the "villains" of the *commedia*, which begins as soon as Vittorio explains to Dario, the man who falls in love with Paolina, that the problem with the Tassi women is the inconsequentiality of their virginity:

> *VITTORIO: Ma bada, solo perchè le convenienze, i riguardi sociali impongono di non sposarle. Chè, effetivamente, nessuno può dire, o dice, o direbbe alcunchè sul loro conto, per quanto riguarda la loro onestà... dirò meglio: la loro purezza (Act I, sc. III)* [29]

While Ninì and Selene appear to play their parts without misgivings, Paolina, reticent, aloof and sorrowful, avoids the entertainments and the compromising intimacies, and it is this difference that makes Dario fall in love with her. Paolina responds to his sincere interest, but, apprehensive of her sisters's reputation, hesitates to consent to his marriage proposal, a proposal against which he has been advised by Vittorio. She accepts, nonetheless, when Dario promises her that they will start their new life away from Milan. The other sisters have also planned to disentangle themselves from their mother's home, but while for Selene the method is to

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[29] *VITTORIO: But, don't get me wrong, [one cannot marry them] only because propriety, the social conventions dictate that one cannot marry them. Because, in effect, nobody can say, or says, or could say anything at their expense, with regard to their honesty...or rather their purity.*

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marry the marquis, for Nini the solution is to join an operetta company and "earn" her living and her life.[30] Like Rovetta's Dorina, she knows that if she does not want to be used she has to use people. And while everything seems ready for the marriage, Delfina's invitation to Vercellini as the witness to the civil ceremony and Paolina's almost hysterical reaction to this prospect, exposes her *dramma intimo*. Her virginity had been violated by Vercellini, the "guardian," whose lover, unbeknownst to her mother and sisters, she had been. When Dario asks for an explanation, she tells him the whole truth, believing that her sincerity would compensate for her "impurity." He, nonetheless, cancels the marriage, but still in love with Paolina, he returns in the last act to ask her to leave with him, not as a wife, but as a lover. Paolina vehemently rejects the proposal and turns Dario down as unworthy of sincere love, as an insincere individual. She will live alone, but with dignity, because solitude within the *borghesia* is the most courageous, most sincere form of existence. With her virginity uncontested and her reputation tainted, Dario had every reason to deny her. But her sincerity should be expiatory; now with her "virginity," her faith to society lost and her true self found out, he has no reason to demand love, because he is beneath it. The confession, she claims, has proved her superior to him. Now she owns nothing

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[30] *The equivalent today would have been to join an adult revue company.*

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to society. Her loss of virginity to the *borghesia* is actually the key to her emancipation. Her last word is a sardonic *addio*.

Perceptive critics such as Gobetti and Pullini have admired Le vergini for its boldness and the effort on the part of Praga to personify the *borghesia* as an omnipotent "character" monitoring the ideology and eventually the destiny of the individual, be s/he the victim or the victimiser, but its structure, atypical as it is of the well-made play, has been deemed maladroit. As the *dramma intimo* of Paolina dominates only the end of the third and the whole of the final act, the earlier part of the play, dominated by the various forms of interaction between the Tossi women and the society men, appears disconnected from the *dramma intimo*, inviting the impression that Praga, failing to come up with a form amenable to the sociology of the content, has written a *commedia* vacillating between naturalism (Act I and II) and melodrama (Acts III and IV). A closer reading of the play, however, suggests that structurally the play is not a "failure," but that its form is the product of a sophisticated experimentation with the tragicomic potential of the *commedia*. Indeed, Le vergini has not a linear but a cyclical development with "comedy" and "tragedy" alternatively pushing the plot and the story forward. The movement is from comedy to tragedy and from tragedy to comedy, with these terms suggesting not moods which alternate in the course of the play, but what we may

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term as "sociologies," that is dramaturgical patterns of social criticism. Although it is true that the character of Paolina matures and dominates the play in the second part of the play, this is not because Praga could not handle characterization technique properly, but because Paolina, the assertive independent person, is completely dissimilar to the aloof and sketchy "type" of the earlier acts. This sketchiness, however, is not a characterization defect, but a social defect, an attribute of Paolina as an individual abused and depersonalized by the *borghesia*. From a tragic heroine, Paolina involves into a positive individual, a "comic" personality who has regained her lost dignity and the courage to dismiss society. And while she acquires a "face," Dario, his social peers as well as her sisters, fully shaped in the early part, appear to diminish in stature, to become types. They lose identity, they become numb faceless *borghesi* without dignity and character. They seek their own depersonalization. While for Ninì and Selene the depersonalization process is a conscious choice dictated by their desire to be included in the *borghesia* in order to exploit it for their own interests, Dario and the rest, for all their presumed authority and pragmatism, get smaller, more insignicant, they are devoid of independent spirit. They are the victims of their own selves. On the contrary, the earlier part, dominated as we said, by the *borghesia* and especially by its more distinct representative, Vittorio Olgiati, functions as a "comedy," as

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an ironic exposè of bourgeois amorality and demoralization. This "comédie humaine," to borrow Balzac's concept, appears to precipitate Paolina's tragedy, the dissolution of her bonding (the marriage) with the *borghesia*, but what in fact it triggers is her emancipation, her freedom, the rediscovery of her *verità*. In the final act, as Paolina and Dario reveal their incompatible life outlooks, this freedom empowers the young woman to laugh at the comedy that the *borghesia* is, but also to reach not a happy end, but a happy new beginning, not outside or inside the *borghesia*, but independent of it. It becomes, thus, apparent that as a *commedia*, Le vergini substantiates verismo's *problematica* of freedom and *verità*, but, at the same time, it validates tragicomic irony as its most distinct, most modernistic articulation.

La moglie ideale[31], a play which like Cavalleria

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[31] *The play premiered at the Teatro Gerbino of Turin (11 November 1890) with the company of Eleonora Duse and Flavio Andò. The production was a triumph and, despite a far from enthusiastic reception in Florence, the play became a staple in the repertory of several leading companies. It was constantly revived until well into the mid-sixties. The text is one of the most anthologized of modern Italian plays, although an English translation, although extant, was impossible to locate (see Appendix II). A French translation was prepared by Charles Le Goffic and D. Mayer. Aurelien Lugnè-Poe had programmed the play along with Le vergini for the 1893 season, but neeither production came into fruition. It was also produced in England and Spain. Cf. Lelièvre, Le thèâtre dramatique italien en France (1855-1940), op. cit., 82-3. The text was originally published in 1891 by the Libreria Editrice Galli of Milan. In 1910, Praga revised it and the new version was published by Treves. I cite from the Ferrone's edition in Teatro italiano vol. 5 which reproduces the 1891 edition. Both editions, however, open with the Paul Bourget epigram "...les plus hardis problèmes de psychologie personelle et sociale peuvent être traités en pleine scène. Seulement, trop peu de personnes travaillent aujourd'hui dans cette direction." [The most difficult problems of human and social psychology can be treated on the stage. Only too few people work today along this line.]*

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Rusticana and Tristi amori has been indelibly associated with Eleonora Duse,[32] is a daring reflection on an Italian (but also paneuropean) society in conflict with itself: a tragicomic society. Structured as a dialectic treatise on the ethical relativism of modern *borghesia*, as a series of agons between the three figures of the typical love triangle, the "ideal" social configuration, the *commedia* involves one unsentimental reversal of situation: not the dissolution of a marriage, but the break up of an affair. Although the title

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[32] *Cf. Marco Praga, "Come scrissi 'La moglie ideale'," cited in Ferrone, ibid., 394-98. This short piece of memoirs was published in the commemorative volume Ricordo di Marco Praga (Milano: SIAE, 1959) under the title "Malinconie". It is also reprinted in the Appendix of a most recent book, Lopez, Guido, ed. Marco Praga e Silvio d'Amico: Lettere e documenti (1919-1929) (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990). As Praga himself admitted, the play was conceived and created within a short period of time, and although he was happy enough with the first two acts, the third had displeased him as uninspired and undaring. Yet the idea, or rather his dream, to have Duse create Giulia, his conscious wife-and-lover heroine, intrigued him a few months after its completion. Praga had met Duse a couple of years earlier through her co-star Flavio Andò, when the actress was just embarking on her solo career, but that encounter had not develop even to an acquaintance. He nonetheless had the courage to send her the manuscript at Turin, during one of her seasons there. To his surprise, she promptly responded expressing her interest in it. During a long session in her apartment, Duse had Praga read the play to her, but her impression of the third act was hardly as positive as of the other two. "Vedete, Praga, se io fossi costretta a recitare la commedia così com'è, al terz'atto manderei fuori un altra," [You see, Mr. Praga, if I had to perform the play as it is, in the third act I would have to create a different [heroine]], the playwright recalls her as saying. Although the actress did not provide the young writer with solutions, Praga took her objection to heart and within a few hours he rewrote the entire last act. In the older version the assertive "ideal wife," as Duse had observed, had ended a conventional jilted lover who "faints" to the prospect of the breakup. In the new version Giulia was not a victim, but a user of an entire social system, a winner against all odds. She was the nemesis of the borghesia, an Italian Hnda Gabler who does not commit suicide to regain her freedom, but who asserts her freedom, her verità, as the only sentient individual among a class of puppets, as she calls her peers. For more on the production and the reception of the play, cf. William Weaver, Duse, op. cit., 84-5.*

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suggests that it is in the person of the wife that ideality is acknowledged, the play shows this ideal to lie not in her orthodox morality--Giulia, the heroine, is not immoral or amoral, but a sui generis moralist--but in her unconventional, ideal, that is, more congenial to the modern temper, sense of propriety. Essentially, the ideal wife of Praga is the embodiment and, because of that, the challenger of *borghesismo*.[33] The ethics of the *maschera* and in particular the manipulation of moral and ethical appearances for the maintainance of the *borghesia*'s pristine self-image, constitutes the essence of the play's sociology, and even though some twenty years later Pirandello would criticize the all-for-the-best justification of that ethic, in 1890 Praga could only go as far as to demonstrate its necessity, its pragmatic value, its realism.

As a sociologist of *borghesismo* Praga only departs from the ideality of Giulia as the ideal, peculiar to modern *borghesia* model of womanhood, in order to explore this ideality in the character and the function of the other figures involved in the adulterous triangle. The husband and the lover are also ideal: they perfectly embody the nature of their class, and their normativeness is precisely what allows Giulia to be ideal. As a matter of fact, Giulia is the ideal

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[33]*For a pertinent analysis of La moglie ideale with regard to the character of Giulia, see Eugenio Levi, "Decadenza del carattere nel comico del teatro verista," Il comico di carattere da Teofrasto a Pirandello (Torino: Einaudi, 1959), 141-152. Cf. also Ferrone, op. cit., vol. 1, lxiii.*

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wife, because her husband is ideal as such, since his sense, or rather his presumption of his social authority and authoritativeness has implemented his conviction that not only is the *borghesia* the best possible of all worlds, but that his own perfection has rendered him impervious to social discomfiture. He resists the possibility of his wife as an adulteress, simply because such a fatality cannot happen to him, to a successful, respected and, more importantly, idealistic *borghese*. Ostensibly in Praga's *borghesia*, husband and wife deserve each other, not because they are alike, but because they believe in one another's duty of respecting one another's "role." Yet the lover, the third partner in the triangle, is also ideal, both because he respects the social rules and because he does not violate the necessity of the "wife" to act, "to be," ideal. The "drama" begins not because the adultery cannot be concealed any more, but when the lover, tired of his part, vies to disentagle himself from the affair, not out of apprehension, but because he wants to legitimise himself as a husband. When his exemplariness as a lover proves superficial, the "ideal wife" intervenes to save the image of her own marriage's *rispettabilità*. A short loss of her self-control notwithstanding, the ideal wife-ideal lover demands that the third person be careful in his social behavior. He should respect the husband's right to believe in the pristineness of his marriage. His exit from the triangle

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should be tactful and decorous. It should appear "normal."[34] The drama then involves the negotiation over the way this affair will have to end.

The first act opens in the elegant salon of Andrea and Giulia Campiani, as the couple relaxes after supper in the company of their young son, occupying themselves with the various routines of the domestic ritual. The young boy procrastinates over homework, Giulia reads fashion magazines, Andrea follows the stock exhange news in the paper. There is ennui and lovelessness lurking behind the domestic bliss, as Giulia tries to distract Andrea from his business with intimate advances and sweet talk. Her major antagonist, Praga implies, is the stock exchange, the "lover" she has not been (and will never be) able to outdo. Andrea is flattered with this hyperbolic attention. To him it is evidence of his indispensability in the life of Giulia, a token of his marriage's social success, but bourgeois etiquette requires him to simulate reservedness and emotional restrain. Giulia wants to convince him of her need to have him around and he feels obliged to articulate, but not demonstrate, his contentment. The conflict on how to spend leisure time is thus resolved by Giulia amid jocular sentimentality:

> *GIULIA No, senti, io sto in casa, ma ad un patto: che vai alla Borsa e torni: mezz'ora, non di più. Alle nove e un quarto devi essere*

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[34] *As Siro Ferrone wisely observed, it is the lover and not at all the wife who proves a posteriori imperfect; unworthy of an ideal woman's faith. Op. cit., 146.*

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qui. Ti preparo il thè, qui accanto al fuoco, e alle dieci a letto, come due bravi figliuoli. Eh?... Ma guai a te se tardi. Non venirmi poi a raccontar storie, d'amici che t'hanno tenuto attorno. Non ammetto scuse. Se qualcuno ti vuol tenere a zonzo, devi rispondere: amici miei, io ho una mogliettina a casa, tanto carina, che mi aspetta; e vi saluto. Siamo intesi? (Act I, sc.1)[35]

It is at this moment that the lover, Gustavo Melati, a lawyer and family friend of Andrea, appears in order to ask a favor from him, a favor which has to do with the financial speculations of his younger brother. This is, of course, a subterfuge, but a logical one. Giulia is not intimidated by the presence of the "friend" and continues to tease Andrea about his "indifference" to her amorous feelings. But business is business and nothing can be more important than the cause of Andrea's prosperity. Indeed, the prospect of leaving Gustavo, a bachelor, alone with Giulia is not incompatible with social etiquette, nor does it appear as a hindrance to his need to deal with business. Andrea, the conscious *borghese*, the husband, father and hard working citizen, cannot be suspicious of Giulia and their guest, it is beneath his bourgeois mentality to be suspicious. But Giulia is not concerned with forms and formalities. She has been the lover

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[35] *GIULIA No, listen, I will stay at home, but with a condition: that you will go to the stock exhange and you come back: half an hour, no more. At quarter past nine, you have to be back. I will make tea, here by the fireplace, and at ten we will both be at bed like two good children. Right? But the worse for you if you are late. Dont' you dare come then to me telling me stories about friends who would not let you go. I brook no excuses. If somebody wants to keep you around, you must respond: my friends, I have a little wife at home, who is so cute, who is waiting for me; therefore I bid you farewell. Understood? Ferrone, ibid., 153-4.*

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of Gustavo, who has reciprocated, respecting her decorous "surrender" to both him and her husband. Giulia has not given him the right to take her or her duty to Andrea for granted. She has been completely honest about her parallel lives, she is always conscious of the appearances which are at stake:

> *GIULIA ... Perchè io ho sempre avuta questa virtù o questa fortuna, di non odiar[e Andrea], come quasi tutte le donne che hanno un amante, odiano il marito, e lo trascurano e lo trattano male. Io no. E' buono, è onesto, mi ama -lui-è il padre del mio bambino!... Non l'ho amato mai: per questo forse mi fu facile di volergli bene, perchè noi donne non odiamo che l'uomo che abbiamo amato, e quando cessiamo di amarlo. Ma allorchè ho provato anch'io il bisogno irresistibile di amare, e per disgrazia, fatalmente, mi sono innamorata di tutt'altri che di lui, ho saputo però conservarmi ai suoi occhi una buona moglie, affezionata... Tu fosti geloso di queste cure, di questa affezione. [...] Vedi Gustavo, ... in questa idea di perderti per colpa mia, trovo la forza di simulare, di essere in faccia a lui una buona moglie."... (Act I, sc. 3)*[36]

But the confession is interrupted by Andrea who returns home sooner than expected, because some serious business has come up and a serious trip the next day is mandatory. Giulia, complying with the need to prepare Andrea for the trip,

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[36] *GIULIA ... Because I have always had this virtue or fortune: I never detested Andrea, like almost all the women who, having a lover, hate their husbands and they neglect him and they treat him badly. I am not like that. He is good, he is honest, he loves me, he is the father of my little boy! I have never loved him: Probably it was for this reason that it was easy for me to have a great affection for him, since we women hate only the man who have loved, when we cease loving him. But from the moment I also felt the irresistible need to love, and —it's a disgrace, but so it happens—I fell in love with anyone but him, I have learnt, nonetheless, to remain in his eyes a good wife, affectionate... You would be jealous of this attention, this affection. [...] You see, Gustavo, in this idea that I may lose you by my mistake, I find the power to pretend, to appear before him as a good wife..." Ibid., 161-2.*

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"prepares" Gustavo's departure, since as she hastily explains to her husband, Gustavo "has some business to take care of." When the latter is gone, the social theatre is resumed:

ANDREA Non hai aggiunta una parola per trattenerlo.
GIULIA Ma se glielo avevo già detto... Sarà forse una frottola, si sarà seccato: era qui da un'ora...[37]

After Andrea goes to his room, Giulia finds herself pensive and apprehensive. It is the time she has to think, the time she has to put off the mask and see the face and Praga ends the act with a mime scene, as Giulia "*chiude la porta. Ridiscende adagio la scena. Dinanzi al caminetto si guarda un momento nello specchio. Poi si trascina una delle poltrone vicinissima al fuoco: vi si adagia e allunga i piedi verso i carboni accesi.*"[38] Only the mirror can show to Giulia her *verità*, her face, and only in the mirror she can discern the future of her parallel lives.

The second act takes place the following day in Gustavo's apartment, the place where the truths and the fictions will be exposed. Costanzo, a friend, visits him and in him, the disinterested friend, Gustavo confides everything about the

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[37] "*ANDREA You did not say a word to keep him./ GIULIA But I just told him... Probably it is a fib, he must have been bored. He has been here for an hour...*" *Ibid., 163.*

[38] *She closes the door. The scene is acted very slowly. In front of the fireplace, she looks momentarily at herself in the mirror. Then she moves an armchair next to the fire: she immerses herself in it and streches her feet out toward the cinder. Ibid., 165.*

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paradoxes of his affair and his resolution to end it. When Costanzo senses Gustavo's serious trouble, he reveals to him that society had always known about his affair with Giulia, that her husband's ignorance was already detected and that his situation had caused neither pity nor ridicule among his peers, because appearances were not violated. Gustavo, the man who can't find a way to tell Giulia the truth about his desire to get a wife, the one who will "betray" her in the name of bourgeois duty, is the apologist of her rectitude and Andrea's "innocence:"

> *GUSTAVO Eppure, se c'è uomo tradito che non sia ridicolo, è lui... Egli non ha motivo di dubitare di sua moglie. Oserei dire che non ne ha il diritto.... Quella donna strana, incomprehensibile per chi la vede nella sua vita domestica e pur la sa moglie infedele, ha risolto questo problema: di essere contemporaneamente di due uomini. Del uno lo è col corpo e col cuore, dell' altro coll'animo e col cervello. Ed è così l'amante più appassionata e la moglie più affettuosa. Ragione per la quale suo marito la ricambia di grandissimo affetto ed è ben lontano dal dubitare di lei!...[...] Tu non hai un'idea di quello che è Giulia per suo marito... Nulla la fa indiettreggiare, nulla la impaurisce, e si compromette, senza riguardi, quando le occorra. Se io rimango otto giorni senza andarla a vedere, è capace di venire a cercarmi in istudio. Ce l'hai vista. Ma tornando a casa, ecco la donna, non lo nasconde; lo dice al marito, non era certo ... nè nervosa, ne seccata. Anzi chiacchierina, allegra, affettuosa....E lui, certo, senza essere uno scemo, anzi non essendolo punto, avrebbe potuto, dopo ciò, immaginare piuttosto la fine del mondo che non un'infedeltà di sua moglie. (Act II, scene. 1)*[39]

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[39] *GUSTAVO Well, if there ever was a cheated husband who was not ridiculous, it was he. He has no grounds to doubt his wife. I would dare say that he has no right to do so... This strange woman, incomprehensible to someone who has seen her in her domestic life and knows that she is an unfaithful wife, has solved this problem: to belong simultaneously to two men. To the one she belongs with body and heart, to the other with soul and mind. Thus she is the most passionate woman and the most affectionate wife. This is the reason for which her husband pays her back with utmost affection, far from suspecting her... [...] You cannot possibly believe what she may do for her husband. Nothing holds her back, nothing scares her, and she makes a virtue out of necessity, when there is such*

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And Costanzo, who has listened to the apology as a juror listening to the defense, turns into a raisonneur who does not defend society, or Giulia, but who simply argues about the impossibility of *verità*, sincerity and compunction in a society which does not believe in their utility:

> *COSTANZO [Tutto è relativo] a questo mondo, l´onestà compresa. Dimmi: qual´è l´ideale dello zoppo? quello di "essere" perfettamente diritto? Ma no, perchè egli sa bene che quell´ideale lì non lo raggiungerebbe mai. L´ideale dello zoppo è semplicemente quello di trovare un paio di scarpe colle quali possa camminare e "parere" diritto. Ora in questa società...la moglie perfettamente saggia e fedele è una eccezione, è un idolo a cui bisogna erigere un altare. Chi la possiede è un essere privilegiato fuori delle leggi del mondo. Per i più, per la folla, l´ideale della moglie dovrebbe ben essere questo: una donna che avendo un amante si conserva una buona moglie, affetuosa verso il marito; che evita gli scandali e l´infelicità dei figli, e mantiene la pace in casa, una pace vera e sincera, non fittizia e di convenzione come se ne vedono tante e sotto le quali covano odi e disprezzi."*[40]

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need. If I don´t go and see her for eight days, she is capable of coming to my apartment looking for me. You have seen her there. But when she returns home, you see, she does not hide it; she tells her husband, being composed, not nervous. On the contrary, she is loquacious, cheerful, affectionate. And after such a revelation, he, of course, without being an idiot, —he is far from that—would rather think of the end of the world than his wife´s infidelity. Ibid. 168.

[40] *"COSTANZO In this world everything is relative, fidelity included. Tell me: What would be the ideal for a lame man? Wouldn´t that be to "be" perfectly upright? Yet, no, because he knows well that he would never be able to attain this ideal. For the lame man the ideal would be to find a pair of shoes with which he could walk and "appear" upright. Now in this society...a wife, perfectly sagacious and faithful, is an exception, she is an idol for which one should erect an altar. The man who has such a wife is a privileged being beyond the laws of this world. For most people, for the masses, the ideal of a wife should rather be this: a woman who, while having a lover, could remain a good wife, affectionate to the husband; one who avoids scandals and the humiliation of the children, who maintains peace at home, a true and sincere peace, not fictional or conventional, the like of which we see around us, and under which hate and contempt seethe." Ibid., 170.*

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At that moment Giulia makes her appearance and when she remains alone with Gustavo she demands the truth, that is, the truth she wants to hear: that Gustavo is not willing to break up with her, that their love is strong, and that her sacrifices still mean something to him. To her pleading, Gustavo responds by procrastinating, by putting off the truth. That will be exposed by Andrea who has not gone away as Giulia believed, but who has come to Gustavo with a response to the favor he had asked him. Giulia expertly covers up her social misstep by convincing him that she had run to Gustavo for the very same reason that he had come. Despite a brief lesson of etiquette to his "little wife" --a woman should never take the risk to visit a bachelor's apartment-- Gustavo has every reason not to suspect anything serious going on between Giulia and their friend, since society has been swift in informing him about Gustavo's recent engagement. The husband congratulates the lover on the event and thus Giulia learns the end of her "other" life from her husband, that is, from society itself.

The short third act is not exactly a denouement, but rather a sort of normalizing of the situation. Gustavo comes the next day with Costanzo to Giulia's house, as Andrea exits to buy tickets for the theatre, a "society event." Taking

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advantage of his absence, she returns to Gustavo all the letters he has sent her, the evidence of his "immorality" and her "sacrifice," but there remain two other duties to be honored: her self-defense, and the planning of the break-up. Everything should be logically mapped out and expertly executed. She has to let him know, that *a posteriori* their affair was a grotesque joke, with her a melodramatic jilted heroine and him a ludicrous puppet, not without heart or mind, but without courage, and therefore unworthy of her affection:

> *GIULIA (a Gustavo) Volete che ve la dica io la verità? ... Non valete meglio di un altro! Uno che fosse un uomo veramente, non un fantoccio, avrebbe trovato il coraggio di dirmelo. E con una donna come me avreste potuto farlo, senza paure. Sapete bene che se anche vi amassi ancora— e non vi amo più, ve lo giuro—non farei nulla per rattenervi, per attaccarmi a voi, perchè c'è sempre qualcosa che mi preme più di voi. Così siete venuto a questo bel risultato: che sono io che vi congedo. Io ri, perchè se volessi, potrei vendicarmi, e tenervi per forza: e ci stareste, perchè avreste paura... un fantoccio come "te" non si ribella... Badate a quello che fate... E poi lo sapete, voglio bene a mio marito. A mio modo si capisce, ma gli voglio bene, e non debbo causargli neppure una preoccupazione.... Venite dunque quando vi aggrada feel like, cioè quando quel poco d'onestà o di buon senso che vi rimangono ve lo faranno credere proper opportuno...Sarà tanto seccante per me il ricevervi, quanto per voi il venirci: ma è necessario! (Act III, sc. 6)*[41]

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[41] *GIULIA (to Gustavo) Would you like me to tell you the truth?... You are no better than the others! A man who is a true man, not a puppet, would have found the courage to tell [me that he wants to break up]. And with a woman like me, you could have done it, without fear. You know well that even if I still loved you—and I don't love you any more, I swear it—I would do nothing to keep you, to attach myself to you, because that would be more taxing for me than you. Thus you have only come to this result: that it is me who dismisses you. Yes, it is me, because if I wanted, I could avenge myself and keep you with force: and you would stay, because you would be afraid... a puppet like you does not rebel... Beware of what you are doing... You know, don't you? that I feel affection for my husband. In my own way, certainly, but I have an affection for him, and I should not cause him even the least anxiety... Thus you may visit us whenever it is convenient for you, that is, when whatever honesty and good sense are left in you will make you think it is opportune...Receiving you would be for*

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After the declaration of the necessity to pretend, Giulia resumes the role of ideal wife. Andrea has returned with theatre tickets and the curtain falls as she gives her arm to Gustavo, as they all move to the dining room, as they continue to honor the appearances.

A defiant and dauntless character indeed this Giulia Campiani, but it would be rather far fetched to suggest that with her or with her unorthodox moral orthodoxy, Praga had sought to denigrate the ethical tradition of an entire national class, or to melodramatize, to sensationalize the dissolution of an adulterous affair as traumatic as the dissolution of a legitimate marriage. Over and over again Giulia is equally emphatic about the social felicities of marriage and her guiltlessness for the adultery she has deemed a "necessity" to pursue. To her mind, her marriage has been neither a success nor a failure, simply because for her the extra-marital affair was neither an act of retribution against the husband (the society), nor a test for her own capacity to exist (not as an independent but) as a non-dependent, a free individual. It is very important in the sociological scheme of the play that it is the lover who is more hypocritical and

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me as distressing as it would be for you calling on us: but it is necessary!" Ibid., 193-4.

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more conventional than either of the spouses.

Giulia does not see herself as an adulteress, because first she never accepted the ethics or the logic of marriage and second because her marriage has not failed to exist independent of her adultery. She has been living two separate lives, two separate *realtà*, and her *verità* is that these two *realtà* have co-existed compromising neither her self-respect nor her social standing. If as a wife she has feigned around her husband, it is a very ennobling sort of feigning, because it has aggrandized Andrea's self-image as a success. And in this case, the substitution of *volere bene* (be fond of) for *amare* justifies her logic. It is as a wife and not as an adulteress that, when Andrea is around her, she simulates a more frivolous and at the same time more duty-conscious type of wife: namely, a wife who pretends to be a different sort of wife, only because the husband and the society encourage and, to a certain measure, authorize this simulation, so long as it is necessary to demonstrate a wholesome image of conjugal existence. Showing that conformity and security are essential to the well-being of the *borghesia*, showing that its polity is indeed a success, this is more important than upholding the starker *verità*, that this polity is far from the coveted perfection. In this case the simile of the lame man and the shoe that Praga puts into the mouth of the raisonneur Costanzo (his name meaning loyalty but also regularity), is central to Praga's idea of bourgeois *verità*. Giulia is the shoe, the

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expertly crafted, polished and practical shoe which facilitates the *borghesia* to stand tall. The irony, of course, is not that Giulia defies social norms--how can she defy the norms, if the norm is not to be normal? Praga argues--but that by defying them, she conforms to the social norm people think she has defied. The lack of guilt in Giulia's conscience is justified by her awareness that she has not deviated from the truth, but that she has not conformed with the appearance. Appearing good and respectful is for her an offense not to the true nature of society (*verità*), but to its deceiving *realtà*, its appearing normal and judicious. As a person of truth and integrity, Giulia knows the importance that her image holds for society. Therefore her awareness of the ways she is perceived by her peers, of the appearances that her social "role" sustains for the common interest, is precisely the source of her literally unconventional, that is, genuine, ethos, the warranty of her ideality.

There have not been dilemmas in Giulia's parallel lives as a wife and a lover. She has not agonized over the political correctness or incorrectness of her choices. That does not mean, however, that Giulia is superficial as a character or as an individual. Giulia is essentially a tragic character in a situation that in the history of drama has proved more successful as a farce and less congenial to the nature of "serious" drama: not adultery per se, but the situation of the adulteress. It is interesting to observe that throughout the

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play, it is the men, that is, society, who deplore social wickedness and falseness, the *società corrotta*. Giulia never assesses the morality of society, not because she feels guilty, but because she is a realist, a pragmatist, a moral individual. In fact, Andrea (the paragon of the same society that the others believe as corrupt), the benevolent and trusting *borghese*--a Nestor as Gustavo calls him--is duped not by his wife (on the contrary he is protected by her), but by the other men who professedly cannot put up with immorality, the same men who perpetrate what they abhor as iniquity.) Giulia is a tragic person in a tragicomic situation. She does not have to chose between what is wrong and right, but between what is right and right. She is not a wronging person, she is a wronged one, because she is abandoned by the man she has truly loved, while she is supported by the man she just feels sympathy for.

Giulia is betrayed, not simply because her lover deserts her, but because he demeaned her by not treating her as an equal, as a partner not in a relationship, but in a comforting arrangment. She is outraged not because he was unfaithful, but because he did not have faith in her, in her unconventionality, her genuineness, her otherness. She is outraged, because he has treated her as a conventional "adulteress," as the rest of women, as a characterless little woman, that is, as the persona, the *maschera* she had assumed for the sake of her husband. She is outraged because he has

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not respected her, because he has not seen her face, because he has taken her for that mask. Ultimately, she is disillusioned with her own self, because her true love proved a failure, because her marriage has proved truer, more fulfilling than her other life, the life she had believed in. Certainly, for a moment, she loses perspective and, behaving as a frustrated accomplice to a social crime, she turns against Gustavo, blackmailing him with her interference in his pursuit of the "conventional" social arrangement, the marriage with "another," respectable woman, the woman, whom she will later pity as unworthy of him. Soon, however, her logic prevails, but along with it she feels that she has to sacrifice her non-dependence, her *verità*, unwillingly: not because that was the right thing to do, but because somebody else has made the choice for her, because she has been discarded by society. She has been defeated and it is now she who has to keep up the appearance of victory, not in order to satisfy her ego, but in order to discomfit, to aggrevate her enemy, society, so that it (rather than she) should perceive itself as the loser, the loser of truthfulness. She is tragic because she sees herself subjugated by losers, by puppets, by characterless *fantocci*, who have obliged her to deviate from her truth, to "appear" defeated and surrendering to the idealized normality that the *borghesia* venerates, to become like the rest of women, without individuality. She has to choose between being and appearing conventional --for society

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the distinction is irrelevant because appearing "is" being, but for Giulia the difference is enormous--between, that is, being right (true to herself) and being "right" (true to the borghesia's self-image). The tragic conflict between right and right is modified by Praga the *verista* to the tragicomic (more tragic than comic) conflict between right and "right," between *verità* and *realtà*, genuineness and lie.

Praga considered again the function of lying as a bourgeois prerogative, in La morale della favola. In this play--less interesting but no less ambitious than La moglie ideale--the irony lies in the way the *borghesi* manipulate morality for the sake of social stability, or rather for the appearance of social stability. Again adultery is the situation which proves Praga's point. Lucia Campere, a happy wife and mother, has become the unhappy lover of Augusto Campese, a frivolous socialite who has no respect for her, despite his passionate and hyperbolic declarations of eternal love. Such is his power over Lucia's life, that she has seriously began to believe that she is more than a flirt for him, somebody important in his life. But when, after a brief visit to his apartment, she finds herself unable to live among her family as a sincere woman, she returns back to him, declaring her resolve to leave husband and children and become his forever. Obviously Augusto, surprised by this turn of events, refuses to accept such an arrangement, not because he is concerned about Lucia's reputation, but because he has

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never actually loved her. As his cold reaction to her "sacrifice" almost grows to hysteria, Lucia realizes that all that existed between them was a fiction. She also realizes that her social life is destroyed, not only because she has not the courage to live honestly next to her husband (who has not been aware of her transgression), but also because she cannot live with herself.

The deus ex-machina in her impasse is her mother and her uncle, a priest with rather pragmatic ideas about the function of modern marriage. Once informed about Lucia's departure from the norm of family life, he does not rebuke her, he does not even moralize. He only tries to convince her that it is absolutely necessary to pretend to her husband, because lying is the moral thing to do:

> *DON RAIMONDO Se tu fossi una creatura malvagia, indegna di pietà e di perdono, non saresti qui, ora, nello stato in cui sei, enon lo saremmo noi...è il tuo rimorso improvviso, è l'orrore che del fallo hai provato, è lo stesso atto inconsulto e benefico insieme che dopo il fallo hai compiuto, che hanno redento ai miei occhi di cristiano l'anima tua. La tua vita avvenire sarà tutta di bontà, di onestà, di devozione, di sacrificio. Perciò ti ho detto che il tuo dovere è quello di tacere il tuo peccato, e di espiarlo in segreto. E a tutti i retori, a tutti i moralisti della terra, che si stupissero, e mi dicessero: "Ah! è dunque questa la morale della favola? Si deve fingere, si deve mentire, si deve nascondere il peccato?," io risponderei tranquillo nella mia coscienza: Si quando il mentire è una expiazione, la più santa delle expiazioni."... è questa l'expiazione che hai il dovere di compiere. (Act III, sc. ultima)*[42]

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[42]*DON RAIMONDO If you were a wicked creature, unworthy of mercy and forgiveness, neither you would be here now, in the state you are, nor would we... It is your unaffected remorse,, it is the horror of sinning you have experienced, it is the very thing, unwise but also unselfish, which you have done after the transgression, which have redeemed your soul to my Christian eyes. Your entire future life will be full of kindness, honesty, devotion, sacrifice. For this reason I have told you that it is your duty to hide your sin and expiate it in*

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As Lucia is still hesitant about the effectiveness of her simulation, she asks the agonizing question: *E la mia faccia? La mia faccia?* [And my face? My face?] The answer is not provided, but suggested: There is no time to think of the face when the *maschera* is more important. Spare society and the husband the frustration of truth, is the advice.

The depersonalization of woman and her treatment by the *borghesia* as a malleable human entity, that does not take an identity on its own, but to whom an identity, or rather identities, are given is the thematic nucleus of La crisi, yet another exploration of the *problematica* Praga introduced in La moglie ideale.[43] Its feminist rhetoric, or better its feminist sensibility, is not the only offensive against the mentality of the *borghesia* and the sociology of the family. Fourteen years have separated the two plays, and in 1904 Praga, already a middle-aged man with second thoughts about the purposefulness of social contempt as an esthetic, does not

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secrecy. And to all the orators, to all the moralists of the earth, whou would be surprised at me and who would tell me: "Ah! Is this then the moral lesson of the situation? That one should pretend, lie, conceal the sin?" I would answer with clear conscience: Yes, if lying is an expiation, the most sacred of expiations."... It is this expiation you have the duty to fulfil." I cite from the 1908 Treves edition.

[43]*The play was first performed in the Teatro Alfieri of Turin (14 October 1904) by the company of Virginia Reiter, the actress to whom its printed version was dedicated. The play was first published in 1926 by Treves. This is the edition I cite from.*

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hesitate to defame the bourgeois ethical orthodoxy, yet at the same time a strong sense of pity has supplemented his irony. La crisi is a tragicomedy about adultery, lovelessness, tacit despair and reconciliation, but it is also about the "pretending to ignore" *verità*, about the voluntary supression of reality and truth, about self-depersonalization.[44]

La crisi reviews the necessity to tell lies, to believe in them or to convince others about their truth. This is the story of Nicoletta and Piero Donati. Nicoletta, as a young woman had a socially problematic past and a shady reputation. It was as a social misfit that Piero Donati found her and legitimized her, giving her an identity and a respectable name. But to his love, Nicoletta has responded with gratitude and respect, with the sentiment Giulia of La moglie ideale had defined as "fondness" and "affection." Thus their marriage has been respectable, but loveless. Nicoletta takes a lover, Ugo

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[44] *Praga had touched upon the necessity to pretend ignorance in an earlier, melodramatically ironic, "dramma" (Praga's designation), Alleluja!. The central character Alessandro Fera, nicknamed Alleluja for his debonair attitude toward life, has been living a very troubled social life, because he has known that his wife, Elisa, has commited adultery. In the family, there exists a daughter, and for her own sake, he has kept silent and has not separated from his wife, so that the girl will not grow up without motherly guidance, or without respect for her mother. After years of pretense, Alessandro finds his properly raised daughter an adulteress, a "daughter of her mother," admitting thus a deterministic evolution of sin within his own family, that is, his own life. Consequently, he becomes convinced that he can only become resigned to his fate of deceit and fiction, because Eva, the daughter ignores the sin of her mother, and he has to pretend that his daughter's sin is the "first" to violate the morality of the family. Nonetheless, he feels obliged to inform his son-in-law about Eva's infidelity. Eva, however, does not feel any guilt and considers herself as pure as her mother "has always been." Typically the play ends with compromise within the marriage.*

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Pucci, who wants her as she is: the married woman who is also the commited lover. Piero who has known about the affair has tolerated it, because a loss of Nicoletta would mean the loss of his identity, his life. He suppresses the truth from society and simulates ignorance and contentment. This fiction however is exposed when Raimondo, Piero's brother, returns after a long absence only to realize immediately the "crisis" in Piero's life. Raimondo, who had been aware of Nicoletta's improper past and had advised him against the marriage, now finds Piero's *realtà* to prove him right. When Nicoletta admits to Raimondo how sincere she has been in her parallel lives within her marriage, she also alerts him to her own *verità* as a woman:

> *NICOLETTA: [...] L'onestà della donna, nei paesi civili consiste in questo: d'essere per tutta la vita di un unico uomo! Ed è un onestà sola, per tutte, senza distinzioni e senza eccezioni! E non si capisce che ci sono delle nature per le quali è troppo pretendere e che quell'onestà lì non è possibile... (Act III, sc.II).*[45]

Her arguments are sophisms to his ears, and he decides to inform Piero about her adultery and to punish Pucci as well. He is surprised and disconcerted to find that Piero has known everything all along and that Nicoletta is essential to him not only as a wife, but as the essence of his life. Rather

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[45]*NICOLETTA: [...] The honesty of woman, in the civilized nations, consists of this: of belonging for the entire life to a single man! It is the only honesty, for all women, without distinctions and exceptions! And nobody understands that there are human beings for whom this is too exacting and for whom this honesty is not possible..."*

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than losing her, he has chosen to share her. From her antagonist, then, Raimondo turns into her ally. He will become Niccoleta's accomplice in her effort not to feel love for Piero, but to support his fiction of normality. It remains unclear whether Nicoletta will discontinue the affair, but with the *verità* revealed, it is probable that she may give love a chance. The important thing is that the "crisis" could be interrupted, that is, covered up for the sake of reality. Raimondo realizes that Niccoleta is "necessary" to Piero, and that this necessity obliterates all other ethical considerations. So he informs Nicoletta about her indispensability and she, moved and discomfited by Piero's silence, resolves not to lie, that is, not to conceal her having simulated her love. After Nicoletta's comforting apology, the play ends not emphasizing reconciliation, but the prospect of an amicable settlement, a tender partnership. The final tablau is a projection of this future,as

> *Pierro,... rimane a fissar Nicoletta che è sempre immobile, stesa sul divano. Poi a passi lenti, discende verso di lei. Prende una sediolina bassa, la pone a lato del divano, dov'ella ha il capo. Vi si siede, curvo verso di lei, muto, in attesa, come una madre che vegli il suo bambino ammalato.(emphasis mine)* [46]

Love will survive as pity and compassion. Pity for the self

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[46] *Piero,... remains staring at Nicoletta who rests immobile on the sofa. Then with slow steps, he moves nears her. He takes a stool, puts it close to the sofa arm, where her head rests. He sits bending over her, speechless and anxious, like a mother watching over her sick child.*

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and compassion for a love that does not really stand a chance: a *realtà* without true *verità*.

In La moglie ideale Giulia as a person had several functions within her social milieu, she had several masks by which her morality and her conduct were judged, but it was she who was always in control of these functions, she was the one who created the masks. In La crisi, however, where the crisis of marriage also connotes a crisis of identity, Nicoletta is certainly aware of her social *verità*. She has been a sincere hypocrite, but it is the others, her husband, her lover and the other *borghesi* who "interpret" her, who consider her identity, who decide on behalf of her what her identity, her *verità*, should be. Nicoletta has thought of herself as a winner, just like Giulia, but for the more conventional minds of her society she is a loser, which not only means that they pity her life, but that they also pity what they assume as her loss of dignity. Nicoletta has seen actually her identity being contested in spite of herself, that she has been "fictionalized," "idealized" as those interested in her desire her. The husband (the society) has wanted to believe in her as a wife, Pucci as a lover and Raimondo wants to believe her only as a lover and not as "also" a wife. In each and every case, Nicoletta finds herself deprived of complexity: She has to be either this or that "person," this or that role. Equally, Piero has seen his own selfhood contested: For Nicoletta he is a typical, uninspiring *borghese* who could be,

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but is not, loved; For Pucci he is the "other" man, the compromising nuisance; and for Raimondo, he is the hopeless, pitiful shadow of a husband, a needy type of man. Both spouses then have been distorted by perceptions, but it is Nicoletta who, in defending the sincerity of her double function as a wife and lover, asserts the right to a complex sort of identity. Giorgio Pullini has seen La crisi as a preview of *pirandellismo*, and his observation is justified not only by Nicoletta's bourgeois "difference," by the paradox of her "uncompromising" compromise within her marriage, but also by the observation that Piero has encouraged this paradox with his impassiveness, his resignation to this paradox as a necessity not for Nicoletta's but for his own sake.[47] Disclosing his knowledge of her adultery, that would have meant admitting the necessity of seperation, the necessity of confronting a *verità* which means both solitude and fatuousness. Love and the other high-flown ideals have lost value as noble and ennobling normalities. For the *borghese*, these are formalities, necessities who help him sustain his or her *maschera* as a face.

La porta chiusa[48], Praga's last important play, was

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[47] *Pullini, ibid., 266. The critic finds La crisi close to the problematica of Pirandello's Vestire gli ignudi and Così è, se vi pare, especially in the way Praga depicts his characters as victims of social appearances.*

[48] *The play opened in the Teatro Manzoni of Milan (24 January 1913), with Irma Grammatica in the role of Bianca. The production, directed by Praga himself, was very successful and the play entered the repertory of Italy's best female stars. In 1921 Eleonora Duse included it in the repertory of her last*

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certainly not a departure from his customary *problematica*, even though the ineffable falsehoods and deceits of the *borghesia* are not so much treated with sarcasm as with compassion and *sentimentalità*. This is not to say that Praga turned to the forceful emotionality of melodrama in order to render all the more pathetic the coming apart of a family and, on a metaphorical level, the coming apart of the *borghesia*. On the contrary, by drawing upon the allegorical inventory of symbolism as well as upon the tragic fatalism of D'Annunzio's crepuscolar drama, Praga sought not to write, but to chronicle a psychological drama, the crisis (the final act) of a crisis (a failed family life), as it breaks out not accidentally, but "normally," since a faked normality, a faked *verità* cannot outlast the real truth.[49] Indeed, his sarcasm recedes to what one might call compassionate irony (or ironic compassion), which means that Praga's hyper-critical attitude toward the bourgeois experience has mellowed down to some sort of resignation over the capacity of the *borghesia* for self-renewal. Written in 1913, the play appears within the context

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international tours and it was among those she played in the United States. Although she was not particularly fond of it—she thought it old-fashioned—she nonetheless was attracted to the central motherly role of Bianca, which appealed to her as very similar to the elusive tragic heroines that D'Annunzio had written tailored to her sensibilities. It is due to her appearances in the part that the play was translated into English. See Appendix II. The play did not fall into obscurity as quickly as the majority of Praga's plays, and revivals of it, on the Italian stage, television and the radio were frequent until the early sixties. The play was published in 1914 by Milan's Treves, which is also the only existing version of the play, apart from Duse's copy.

[49] *Cf. Pullini, ibid., 260.*

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of late *verismo* as a commentary on Giacosa's Come le foglie, but while in the earlier play the renewal of the bourgeois family required the evasion of and the departure from the national society, in La porta chiusa this evasion and departure, the violation of the "closed door" which is bourgeois life, appears not only as the prerequisite for survival, but also as the initiative for one's *trovarsi*, one's self-realization. A few years later Pirandello's Enrico IV would choose the evasion in the past, a tragicomic choice, as the means by which the individual may forge a life and an identity, but Praga's Giulio Querceta, the protagonist of La porta chiusa, opts for the evasion of the future,[50] an evasion to Lucesia, an unexplored land somewhere in the African continent, clearly a fictional landscape, which is looked upon as a land of promise. A figurative name, Lucesia (which might mean Let there be light [luce sia]) appears as a destination of mission, with the difference that it is not a society that will be saved --this is doomed to a nostalgia of a past *realtà*--but an individual, a *borghese* without a class and therefore without a *realtà*: a missionary of *verità*.

The plot of the play is very simple. It evolves in the course of a night of revelations (Acts I and II) and ends on the "departure" day sometime later (Act III). In the rarefied but cold milieu of a haute-bourgeois salon, an after-dinner

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[50] *Cf. Gobetti, ibid., 268.*

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conversation between the members of the Querceta family evolves into a confrontation with family history and the past, when Giulio, trying to resist the oppressive patronizing of his mother Bianca, a sad and reflective woman, challenges her conviction that he is to remain forever attached to her. Suffocating under her scrutiny, frustrated by the indifference of the elder Querceta, the admonitions of a clerical uncle and the assumed neutrality of Decio Piccardi, his elderly "soul mate," he revolts against the negativity with which his family and especially Bianca react to his desire to join the expedition to Africa. Unable to put up with the "closed door," and the fictions of his family, he turns to Decio and challenges him to admit that he was his "true" father. In the debate between the two men, it becomes apparent that Giulio had realized, since early on in his adult life, that he is not the son of his "father" Ippolito, a *borghese* of the worst type, but Decio's. Decio is forced to admit the true realities of the past, despite his promise to Bianca that their affair would never be exposed. Married to Ippolito, their age and sensibility gap notwithstanding, Bianca had suffered his disrespect and indifference, until Decio entered into her life. Their love did not mature as a revenge on her husband, but as the only interest of her life. Thus Giulio was not for her the child of adultery, but the child of the kind of love her real husband had denied to her. Although Ippolito soon became aware of the child's real paternity, he simulated

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ignorance, simply because the existence of a boy in his family perfected his image as an exemplary *borghese*. After Giulio's birth, however, Bianca and Decio have ended their affair, agreeing to function as his life-long custodians. After the revelations have come to an end, Giulio demands that his "father" convince Bianca to let him be free. At this point, Giulio feels only pity for his mother, not because he had lived on a false identity, but because she has conceded to a life of simulation. Now he wants to leave her, to open the closed door, only because she is the gordian knot with the past that has deprived him of an identity. Eventually, Bianca becomes resigned to Giulio's departure, only because Decio will accompany him into the life of the future.

As the curtain falls, Bianca has nothing to rely on except her nostalgia for her past, her life with Giulio. She has sacrificed her reality (her "fictions"), so that her son will become new and free. But her sacrifice, expiatory though it may appear, is in fact her eternal bondage to the *verità* of that past. As for Giulio, he will only be allowed to deceive himself that he is free, that he broke open the closed door. Decio's involvement in his life of the future is actually an extension of the bond attaching him to the past. His new life is perhaps a better life, but not a very different one. The mission to Lucesia will make him think that he is free, but Decio will be there as a symbol of the real truth.

The closed door is indeed a figure, a perception of a

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situation and a mentality, namely, the *borghesia* and its mentality. The plot, which evolves as a debate in three acts between the ideologically bankrupt powers of the *borghese's* universe (mother, father, lover) and the finger-pointing, soul-searching "fatherless" individualist of the future (the son), entails the punishment of the *borghesia*, not through aggression and contempt, but through abnegation and pity. Contemporary critics, searching for traces of *ibsenismo* in the story of a mother who is losing her son to the "future," the life outside the "door," interpreted the *"commedia"* as a mother's *"dramma."* Thus the focus was shifted from the "lost" son who vies to find himself outside society to the "losing" and defeated mother, for whom love has been, as Praga has often insisted in the course of the debates, an expiation of the past. It is nonetheless compassion and pity that insinuate themselves as ironies no less unsettling than the characters' attempt to find truth and freedom. It might be that Bianca has become resigned to Giulio's desire for a new life, but her success in having Decio follow her son does not entirely cut her off from him. She will be around him, even if Giulio does not perceive this intangible presence. Equally, her self-pity, her apprehensions for her victimization and isolation, compels her to create a new fiction, a new *realtà*, according to which, Giulio by means of Decio will always be the focus of her sacrificed ("expiated") life, it will be an ongoing present, bringing together the comforting deceptions of the past and

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the deceptive projections for the future. Pity has become, that is, comfortable, but not emancipatory.

Equally ironic is the pity that Giulio's aspirations encourage in Decio and his mother, since it becomes apparent to both that he does not want to dispense with the past, the lies and the compromises, but with the present which discomfits him as a recurrence of the past. It is ironic then that his departure to the future becomes possible only because there is a synergy between the people who have forged his past and his present, that is, between the forces who have shaped his identity but also his volition to want to leave. Their *realtà* ironically has shaped his *verità*, since it is their "sacrifice" that allows his transformation from a "man with past" to a man detached from that past, rather than a man with a mission. Indeed, it would only be tragic if Giulio realized that his freedom is unattainable, that the pursuit of a "face" in Lucesia is a utopia, another *realtà*.

Praga's mature dramaturgy, ever ironic, showed him in an identity crisis. La crisi, La morale della favola and to a certain extent La porta chiusa revealed a playwright anxious not to condemn the *borghesia*, but to be apologetic about its social and cultural failures. As his acrimony turned into pity and disdain, his tragicomic perceptiveness was curbed. Rather than projecting the triumph of sincere individuals over the hypocrisies of the *borghesia* as the essence of his criticism, his theatre appeared to refocus on the compromises that the

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triumph forced on the humanity of his defiant *borghesi*. Probably Praga did not want to be an apologist for the *borghesia*, but apparently he could not help feeling apologetic about its lifelessness and its devolution to a *maschera*. It was thus inevitable that the "defeated" winner of Verga and the survivor of Giacosa entered his *verismo* replacing his rebels and iconoclasts. Even to critics sympathetic to his sardonicism, the playwright seemed split between derision and sanctimoniousness. Irony as a moralistic esthetic did not impress them as convincing or modern. Thus he came to be identified with the "old" rather than the "new" drama.[51] His *verismo*, as he feared, has survived in the history of contemporary Italian theatre as an ambitious dramaturgy which nonetheless remained unfulfilled.[52]

ROBERTO BRACCO

The dramaturgy of Roberto Bracco (Napoli 1860-Sorrento

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[51] *Cf. D'Amico, ibid., 267-8, 276-280.*

[52] *Except La moglie ideale, which Giorgio Strehler sumptuously revived in the mid-fifties, and La porta chiusa, no other of his plays survived in the Italian repertory. In the late fifties, on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, there was a short-lived interest in his theatre, but that proved more commemorative than scholarly. For more information on Praga and his life, cf. Mirella Forgione, La vita e l'arte di Marco Praga (Padova, n.p., 1944). The author had been able to read unedited letters and other writings of her subject as well as to conduct interviews with several of his associates. Also, cf. Ricordo di Mario Praga (Milano: SIAE, 1959) and Saggi su Marco Praga (Genova: Teatro Stabile, 1962). Both include several articles and reminiscences by various authors. Cf., finally, Guido Lopez, ed. Marco Praga e Silvio d'Amico: Lettere e documenti (1919-1929) (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990).*

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1943), voluminous (some thirty five plays), stylistically varied and thematically ambitious, may lend itself as an accurate index to the evolution of *verismo* from a theatre of realities to a theatre of truths. In its diversity it reflects the conflict and the interaction between *verismo* and the various other contemporary (esthetic and theoretical) trends. Chronologically, it demarcates the various phases of that evolution, inasmuch as it either implements the tradition already attained or it anticipates future experimentations with the form and the themes of modern drama. Abstractions such as *realismo, regionalismo [dialect theatre], verismo, symbolismo, impressionismo, ibsenismo, psicologismo, expressionismo, intimismo* and eventually *pirandellismo* define the critical and historical surveys of his work. Yet, the engagement of so many designations, so contradictory in substance, for the categorization of a playwright patronized as facile, imitative, populistic and pseudo-intellectual clearly challenges the legitimacy of these assumptions. Rather than demonstrating the lack of individuality, the esthetic heterogeneity or the haphazard *problematica* of his ouevre, the difficulty of categorizing Bracco, of affiliating him with a particular, native or foreign, trend, shows that critics have been inept in their assessment of him; that their basic assumption--the derivativeness of *verismo* and the artistic smallness of the *veristi*--has been as fallacious and unproductive as their criteria. Bracco has yet to regain his

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relevance, precisely because his prevalent image conforms with the accademic stereotypes of *verismo*: As a *verista*, he could only be mediocre and derivative, italianizing or regionalizing contemporary international concerns and sensibilities.

The most important issue about Roberto Bracco, however, is not whether he was a great playwright, but whether he was an important playwright, an artist who could experiment with old and new artistic concepts of drama, reorientating *verismo* toward a more controversial, because subtler and unexplored, perception of *verità*. It would be scholarly rather unsound to adopt, or to resuscitate the term *bracchismo* (which the dramatist himself had, rather self-mockingly, coined as a response to the allegations of his compulsive stylistic plagiarism, meant to define his style which others and especially Pirandello appropriated and adulterated)[63] in order to describe a drama defying classification and a playwright who, like Capuana, had been averse to the various *ismi*. It would be more accurate to review his plays as

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[63]*Benedetto Croce, in an assessment of Bracco's work, written near the end of the playwright's career, emphatically insisted on Pirandello's (and the others') debt to his problematica and techique. Croce, in fact, has gone so far as to imply that Pirandello had obfuscated Bracco's vision and humanism and that his plays distorted his problematica by making it abstruse. Given, however, the antagonistic relationship between Croce and Pirandello, his particular comment has been overlooked as a derogatory hyperbole. See Letteratura di Nuova Italia vol. 6, op. cit., 210. For "bracchismo" see Luigi Personè, op. cit., 126ff. Personè as a young theatre scholar had exchanged letters with Bracco, in which the aging dramatist had elaborated not only on his critics and their generalizations, but also on his art. Their content indeed reads like an apology of his theatre, but due to their private nature as letters, they remained unedited until 1973.*

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experimentations of an eclectic (as Pullini designates him, though rather condescendingly) playwright who wanted to communicate his agony for the fallacious cultural priorities of modernity, the disenfranchisement of the spirit, the neglect of the self.[54] His dramaturgy synthesizes the humanism, the *sentimentalità*, of the Neapolitan dialect theatre with the stark sociology of Praga's *verismo*. Rather than italianizing values and concepts of humanity extraneous to the native spirit, Bracco sought to universalize truths fostered by the Italian experience.[55] Indeed, his theatre, gradually distancing itself from the *problematica* of the *commedia borghese*, focuses on the individual not as a social unit with a self and a persona, but mainly as an existential unit, as an individual at odds with his or her intimate truths, at odds with his or her own humanity.[56]

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[54]*Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli (1850-1950), op. cit., 192.*

[55]*Luigi Tonelli in his L'evoluzione del teatro contemporaneo in Italia (Milano: Sandron, 1913) went so far as to claim that Bracco was the Italian poet of the future and that "ciò che Ibsen ha fatto per tutto il teatro contemporaneo... il Bracco ha fatto per il teatro italiano" [what Ibsen has done for the entire contemporary theatre, Bracco has done for the Italian theatre]. Op. cit., 398ff.*

[56]*During the first years of the twentieth century any speculation about the literary merits and the artistic importance of Roberto Bracco, the dismissive attitude of certain critics such as Piero Gobetti notwithstanding, would have seemed as superfluous and spiteful. Well before Pirandello became an international celebrity and when Dario Niccodemi was still building a career in France, Roberto Bracco was already the Italian dramatist with the greatest recognition outside Italy. His plays, translated into all major European languages, were staged in major theatres and by major companies. Even in Norway and while Ibsen was still alive, the Italian playwright was much admired and championed. On Broadway, a young Alla Nazimova scored some of her earlier*

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Friends, associates and biographers have invariably portrayed Bracco as a paragon of *neapolitanità*, a debonair, sentimental and deeply humane individual who enjoyed life, liked people and especially women, as somebody who observed modernity not by studying it, but by experiencing it, keen on any ideas which interpreted life in unconventional and insightful ways. Bracco was not averse to socialism, feminism, and the modern psychiatric advances; politically he was a liberal favoring neither the left nor the right. His involvement in the theatre was a matter of circumstances.[57]

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successes in two of Bracco's plays, while Maxim Gorky and Eugene O'Neill have admitted their debt to his work. In a literary referendum sponsored by a journal in 1914, Bracco was chosen as Italy's most prominent playwright and Marco Praga, as head of the Italian Authors' Society, had designated him a maestro. All the famous actors-managers commisioned or included his plays in their repertory, while several of his drammi were published in periodicals as prestigious as La nuova antologia. He was much in demand in the lecture circuit of Italy's literary societies and in several of his presentations dealt with cultural issues independent of theatre, but relevant to the concerns expounded in his dramaturgy, most conspicuous among them being feminism, the social status of women, and the modern function of culture in a society seeming unable to attain a national cultural identity.Mario Venditti, Roberto Bracco (Napoli: Alberto Marotta, 1962), 47ff. Bracco's "feminist" essays were first published in the small volume Nel mondo della donna-Conversazioni femministe (Roma: Volgera, 1906). Later they were reprinted in another collection of essays Tra gli uomini e le cose (Napoli: Giannini, 1921). Another book of miscellanea is his Tra i due sessi-Fioretti di esperienza (Palermo: Sandron, 1921). Nell'arte e nella vita (Lanciano: Carabba, 1941) and Tra le Arti e gli Artisti (Napoli: Giannini Editore, 1920) complete his output as an essayist. At the end of World War I Bracco was as famous as Giovanni Verga and in the interwar years, his prestige no less than Pirandello's. This was quite an achievement for someone lacking an orthodox academic training, a sophisticated social background or a predilection for literature or the performing arts.

[57] *The most important and most quoted of Bracco's biographies—and there are several—is Pasquale Parisi, Roberto Bracco: La sua vita, la sua arte, i suoi critici. (Napoli: Remo Sandron Editore, 1923). A more recent one is Mario Venditti, Roberto Bracco (Napoli: Alberto Marotta, 1962). See also Aniello Costagliola, "Roberto Bracco." Nuova Antologia 221 (Sep.-Oct. 1908), 571-597.*

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He came to it through journalism, but before 1886, he had convinced nobody that he had either the talent or the will to make a living outside commerce and business for which he was destined by his family[58]. In 1878 he was registered in the Istituto tecnico of Naples in the faculty of commerce and accounting, but his progress was disappointing, and after a bout with sickness, his studies were interrupted. Bracco was sent to convalesce in a resort town near Naples. A coincidental encounter with Martin Cafiero, one of the most prominent journalists of Naples, turned his life around. Cafiero hired Bracco as a reporter for Il corriere di mattino, which he directed. Very soon Bracco discovered that he had an aptitude for journalism and literature. Soon he was asigned to write short stories, poems, humoristic articles and essays.[59] A theatre and music critic since 1891 for Il corriere di Napoli, Bracco covered the theatre at the time of verismo's acme, yet with no allegiance to any particular trend and enemy to no playwright or *problematica*. As he purported, his function as a critic was to judge the play as its creator had wanted it and not as he or any other would desire it to

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[58] *La verità sul teatro italiano, op. cit., 198.*

[59] *Other magazines and journals for which he worked were Corriere del mattino, Capitan Fracassa, Napoli, Piccolo, and Corriere di Napoli.*

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be.[60] Although he must have been important in popularizing the various styles of modern theatre to a *benestante* local *borghesia* well known for its unpredictability as well as its eclecticism, Bracco was (and prided himself as) a cardinal champion of Ibsen, whose plays he reviewed and chronicled following the tours of Duse and Novelli. Bracco was later to admit that his commitment to Ibsen proved almost detrimental to his career as a playwright, because the label of *ibseniano* followed him throughout his entire career, a career which had begun (unofficially) in 1886 but which matured after 1892.[61]

In 1886 he was commissioned to write a curtain-riser for Ermete Novelli, who happened to be in Naples for a series of performances. The "proverb" Non fare ad altri (Do not Do Unto Others...) was performed a few days later, scoring a considerable success and encouraging him to write within the

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[60] *Costagliola, ibid., 579. To the best of my knowledge, Bracco's reviews have not been collected and edited. I cannot therefore provide a personal opinion on his taste as a critic.*

[61] *"A teatro, facendo il critico, seppi dell'esistenza di Ibsen (tre o quatro drammi). Allora Ibsen aveva fama di filosofo e sembrava astruso. Io cominciai a spiegarlo alle turbe, con una singolare simplicità. Entro la cinta daziaria di Napoli, ero un apostolo di Ibsen. Ma se Ibsen avesse potutoleggere quel che scrivevo, avrebbe forse respinto il mio apostolato, che riduceva a esigne dosi la filosofia riconosciutagli ampia da critici illustri. E l'apostolato mi procurò la nomea di ibseniano..."[Working as a critic in the theatre, I became aware of Ibsen's existence (three or four plays). At that time Ibsen had the fame of a philosopher and seemed abstruse. I started to explain him to the masses with singular simplicity. Within a city of commerce like Naples I was an apostle of Ibsen. But if Ibsen had been able to read what I used to write, probably he would have renounced my missionary work, which trivialized a philosophy acknowledged by more famous critics as substantial. And this missionary work procured me the label of ibsenist..."Letter to Personè, op. cit., 116.*

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next few years a series of similar works, *bizzarie in un atto*, commissioned or performed by well known stars of the time: Un'avventura di viaggio (A Trip Adventure, 1887), Viceversa (1888), Le disilluse (The Disillusioned Ladies, 1888) and Lui, Lei and Lui (He, She and He, 1889). Evidently, these short farces, written in the fashionable style of the French *pochades*, were not completely out of the Neapolitan cultural and theatrical context. Types and situations familiar from the Neapolitan *commedia dell'arte* and its hybrid dialect theatre found their way into these *bizzarie*, but what is most interesting about them is Bracco's sharp sense of the grotesque and the tragicomic attitude toward the "funny" aspects of life.

Una donna (A Woman, 1886/1892) was his first experiment with contemporary drama as a serious playwright.[62] As biographers have pointed out, it was more discussed than applauded. Its topic, the social persecution of a young woman and mother, whose morality is contested even by the man who claimed to have truly loved her (at the end she commits suicide), triggered the debate both for its sociological presumptuousness, and its "extreme *verismo*." Ibsen's Hedda Gabler was suspected by several critics as the model for Bracco's Clelia, the play's heroine, but today the play seems

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[62] *The play was produced in Naples, at the teatro dei Fiorentini by the company of Tina di Lorenzo and Francesco Pasta in the autumn of 1892. The play was written between 1886 and 1887 with occasional changes brought to it in the interim years.*

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closer to the theatre of Giacometti and Torelli (Bracco's fellow citizen), rather than looking forward to *verismo* or indeed Ibsen. Although Bracco later disowned Una donna, it did anticipate several of his distinct properties as a *verista:* the "feminist" attitude toward society, the emphasis on human psychology and the *dramma intimo*, the articulate "idealistic" rhetoric, and the symbolic use of the milieu not only as a forger of the character's spirituality, but as an extention of his or her interior world, an exteriorization of the world that the character sees in his or her mind in crucial and excruciating circumstances.

Several critics suggested that Bracco's *verismo* easily verged on melodrama. What they have meant was not that his *verismo* was adulterated by sociological oversimplifications or by a fatalism overwhelming the individuality, the "freedom," of the individual. Rather, they resented what they perceived as Bracco's treatment of *verismo* as a symbolist esthetic which distorted *realtà* to the extent that life inevitably discomfited the character as melodramatic: not a melodramatic *verismo*, but a *verismo* which legitimized and projected only a melodramatic outlook of the human situation.[63] In fact,

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[63]*The argument concerns only Bracco's serious, that is, non-comic work, which is closer to the esthetic of Giacosa's romantic comedy than to the tragicomic commedia of verismo. In this dissertation, Bracco's comic work, which Croce considered as Bracco's better dramaturgy (he disliked, as we have seen, much of verismo drama), will be only cursorily discussed, since they don't actually differ in style or veristic accuracy from the plays written in Neapolitan dialect. For more on the issue of Neapolitan verismo cf. chap. 4.*

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Bracco would perceive his work as neither veristic nor symbolic. He would not even admit a complicity of *verismo* and symbolism in his work(s). He would argue that his drama was not supposed to surrender to esthetics, but to unearth the truth, not to censor reality, but to challenge the relevance, the power of *verità*.[64] His mission was to explore and intimate the truest of the truths, to be compassionate about the struggle with the truth, the ideals which existed supressed under the personas of modern men and women: the truths they were afraid to admit.[65] His *verismi* tended to recuperate the truths which make up the soul and the spirit,

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[64] *In the preface to the 1897 edition of his one-act play Maschere Bracco had insisted on the "intimate coherence" of his multifaceted dramaturgy, explaining this stylistic eclecticism as the effect of his "intellectual zeal" which manifested itself "variably." Also cf. Vittorio Bracco, Teatro verista, op. cit., 285ff.*

[65] *"Se le mie sensazioni mi suggeriscono una bizzaria buffa o grottesca, io voglio scrivere la farsa, la buffonata; se mi inducono nella mente una gaia serenità osservatrice, voglio scrivere la comedia comica; se mi danno pietose o lugubri o nauseanti visioni della vita, voglio scrivere il dramma; se mi solcano l'anima e la costringono alla contemplazione dei più intimi misteri o conflitti dello spirito umano, voglio osarne l'indagine e torturarmi insieme co' miei personaggi. La gente potrà non ridere o non sorridere o non piangere o non pensare, quando io rido o sorrido o piango o penso; ma che io abbia il dovere di unificare le mie sensazioni, per sembrare meno inquieto e più coerente, è cosa di cui non sarò mai convinto." [If my instincts alert me to a funny or grotesque extravagance, I want to write farce, a buffoonery; if they induce into my mind a mirthful insightful serenity, I want to write a regular comedy; if they give me pitiful, lugubrious or nauseating visions of life, I want to write a drama; if they tear my soul apart and coerce it to contemplate the most intimate mysteries or conflicts of the human spirit, I want to dare the inquiry of these [mysteries and conflicts] and suffer along with my characters. People may choose not to laugh or not to smile or not to cry or not to think, when I laugh or smile or cry or think; but that I have the duty to streamline my instincts, in order to appear less uncomfortable and more coherent, this is something that I will never accept.] Roberto Bracco, "Preface," Il diritto dell'amore (Napoli: Pierro, 1898), 26.*

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the "life" of the individual, and not to construct, to conjecture, the single truth which social necessities, self-interests and class codes fragment to myriads of disorienting realities. Even if one has to insist, like Gobetti, on Bracco's *ibsenismo*, his "Ibsen" should be traced not in his ambitious *problematica* and the "ideas" which informed it, but rather in the use of *realtà* not as an escape from or a distortion of truth, but as the index to that truth.[66]

Unlike Giacosa, Rovetta and Praga, Bracco wrote plays which only incidentally touched upon the intricate sociology of the Italian *borghesia*. The excesses of positivist society, the pathology of adultery, the pursuit of *rispettabilità*, the menace of depersonalization, the bourgeois *realtà* in its totality, have receded to the periphery of his *problematica*.[67] He has been apathetic to the dull and

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[66] *The so called ibsenismo might be detected in Bracco's mature dramaturgy, in the drammi written between 1899 and 1909, and not in the earlier plays. My opinion, however, is that if Bracco adopted or adapted something from Ibsen, this is not a philosophy or a method of investigating the human condition or a problem or an ideal, but Ibsen's characterization. More accurately, it is certain, mostly female, chacters of Ibsen that have impressed Bracco as models of humanity or symbols of a truer existence, patterns as such for his own dramaturgy. In any case, Bracco revered Ibsen for his ability to revolutionize the way we comprehend the function of the theatre, for restoring the ideal of the theatre. See his statements cited in Luigi Tonelli, op. cit., 412. For adiscussion of Bracco in relation to Ibsen see Maddalena Kuitunen, "Ibsen and the theatre of Roberto Bracco," Petrarch to Pirandello: Studies in Italian Literature in Honour of Beatrice Corrigan Julius A Molinaro, ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1981), 187-202. This is also the only recent study of Bracco in English.*

[67] *Bracco wrote very few plays in this vein, more often than not verging towards the farcical and the grotesque. L'infedele (Unfaithful, 1895) chronicles the revenge of a woman on her husband for daring to suspect her of adultery. The revenge is to let her husband believe that she has indeed a lover, with the difference that, unbeknownst to her victim, husband and lover are one and the*

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asphyxiating microcosm of the *borghese* banker and lawyer. The dysfunction of marriage and the precariousness of social status have mattered to him only insofar as they alert his heroes to their loss of self-respect. More than an ironist or a skeptic, Bracco is a compassionate altruist and his plays, replete with empathy for all individuals sensitive to the anxieties of modernity, encompass a wider range of humanity, from the underprivileged strata of Naples to the refined elites of the upper classes, from the poets, spiritual leaders and scientists to the socially challenged misfits. From that aspect, Bracco is certainly closer to the sensibility of Verga than to Giacosa and the rest of the settentrional *veristi* and this affinity is not unrelated to their common meridional cultural background. His commitment to canvass the interior realities of the individual, to dramatize the pursuit of inner freedom, to convey the discrepancy between the mask and the face of the individual not in relation to society but in relation to his or her own self, the metaphysics, that is, of individuality is evident in his plots and his characterizations. The *dramma intimo*, a *problematica* of psychological struggle, emotional frustration and spiritual

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same. La fine dell'amore (The End of Love, 1896) tells the story of an emancipated marquise who tried to find true love, but who in the men who interest her finds only vice, narcissism and frivolity; In Uno degli onesti (One of the Honest, 1900), a man breaks up with his lover, when she decides to leave her husband and stay with him, since he cannot accept the idea that she is a woman "dishonest" to her husband; and Il frutto acerbo (The Bitter Fruit, 1904) is a study of women who go after younger men and men who go after younger women, satirizing the various social compromises.

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angst, an emphasis on *hipersensibilità*, the sensitivity to intanglible realities, the psychology of self-defeat, the discomfiting conflict between one's desires and one's integrity, all in all the discrepancies within one's own self, are integral to his *verismo*.[68] Decadence, symbolism and impressionism, conditioned as they were to communicate emotional and spiritual experiences beyond the presumed analytical and representational capacities of *verismo*, offered Bracco not only a limitless pool of previously uncharted themes and "ideas," but they also suggested to him a subtler concept of *verismo*, more amenable to "subconscious," "unexpressed," dimensions of truth.[69]

In Bracco's plays the hero or the heroine assume responsibility not only for their ideas and actions, the things they do or say, but also for their ambitions and yearnings, the realities they suppress or deny. They are articulate people, which means that even if they lack the capacity to convince with words, they speak their mind with

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[68] *Cf. his 1913 essay "I pericoli del teatro contemporaneo," Tra le art e gli artisti (Napoli: Giannini, 1919), 184ff.*

[69] *Verga had experimented with the theme of the subconscious in In portineria, but, as we have seen, that experiment remained incomplete, only to be attempted again in La lupa. The allegoric function of verismo in that play is as apparent as the effort to dramatize the impact of the subconscious on the tragic characters's motivation and action. One could therefore argue that Bracco did not revise verismo with esthetics borrowed from other literary forms and trends, but that he simply rediscovered within the esthetic of verismo symbolic sensibilities which, due to the fascination with the problems of concrete reality, had remained dormant until the advent of symbolism and idealism. Cf., nonetheless, Rudolph Altrocchi, "Bracco and the Drama of the Subconscious." The North American Review 224 (March-May 1927): 151-162.*

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actions, silences, their commitment to the idea or the person they hold dear, with the sacrifice of their inner peace. They are people suffering from the awareness of their imperfection, but more than that they suffer from their inability to share their anxiety, to communicate their frustrations, their guilt for the failure to raise up to their self-image, or to the challenges of life. Afraid to lose their humanity, unable to control their stiffled passions, hurt by their inability to understand reality or to acknowledge their lack of true faith in other people, but more importantly distressed by the *verità* of their fallibility, their mediocrity, they actually fall prey to their uncertainties, they catch themselves unworthy of life: They find themselves liars and hypocrites, sanctimonious and averse to the truth. These individuals are thus defeated either by their self-image, their ideals or their ambitions. Paradoxically, their sacrifice is both an assertion of their freedom, a recuperation of their humanity, but also a declaration of their defeat, an act by means of which they accept their weakness in competing with life, in defying fate. Their self-denial has no redeeming value for the rest of humanity either, since it has been some sort of self-defense against the presumed threats of the community. Their ideals, which are supposed to free them of pettiness, intolerance and self-ignorance, betray them. They appear irrelevant and ineffectual. These individuals are mystified by life. They are apprehensive of the future, they see its advent as all the

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more compromising, more cruel than the experiences of the past.

Bracco's major plays involve death either as a dramatic situation and an end, or as a form of existence deprived of purpose and value: physical death (suicide, murder), spiritual death (madness), ideological death (acknowledgement of failure), social death (surrender to social exploitation). Almost invariably, the motive or the cause for these deaths is love: The pursuit of love, the denial of love, the absence of love, the loss of love, the impossibility of love, or even the oppression of love. Bracco has admitted that this *problematica* of love has emanated from his *"più vero io,"* from his personal, most intimate struggle with the meaning of love, the physicality and the spirituality of it.[70] This quest to understand how love functions as a spiritual, natural and social force, how it affects all other aspects of human behavior, has not started from some abstract notion of love. It has been inspired by his fascination with the ideal of womanhood, which he has consistently studied in its various manifestations: the woman-mother, the woman-wife, the woman-friend, the woman-object of unconscious desire. Bracco has been taken to task for treating his heroines sentimentally, for endowing them with limitless emotional strength, but then depriving them of the will to overcome adversity, or the power

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[70] *Cf. Personè, op. cit., 116-7.*

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to have their own way. It is as if he has manipulated his heroines, so that they may comply with the romantic stereotypes of the suffering and redeeming woman, the woman who exonerates and purifies society with her self-denial. Bracco thought of himself as a feminist, and he seemed to take seriously such criticisms. Yet his feminism has nothing in common with the movement for the rights of women, or with the contemporary rhetoric for their social emancipation. Rather, his feminism is an idealization of woman, a call for the need to "free" (not to emancipate) woman, to acknowledge her individuality. Yet his plays show this freedom to be possible only by means of her existence next to a husband, a lover or guardian, only through her commitment to that other person, her faith in her love. When this love does not exist, either because she has been betrayed, or because her freedom has not been protected, Bracco's woman experiences "death:" the loss of sanity, the loss of self-respect, the loss of life. Perhaps nowadays this attitude appears rather melodramatic and totally unfeministic, but at the turn of the century, such perceptions of the female situation made Bracco famous as an apologist of the female sex.

The discrepancy between the true self and the self-image is another of Bracco's concerns. He has discussed it either in connection with modern ideologies about identity and the ego (mainly the Nietschean sociology of superman, which he rejects) or in connection with the exploitation of science,

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religion and art as *maschere* concealing the true frustrating human frailties.[71] His "impostors" have exploited society's need for role models, heroes and "saints" not because they have wished to enrich or aggrandize themselves at the expense of society, but out of a subconscious fear of their insignificance, insecurity, spiritual mediocrity. It is their integrity, their truth, and ultimately their life they abuse, since their self-deception hardly subdues their weaknesses, emotional or spiritual, even when it devastate those who love them. Bracco has not been consistently successful in the dramatization of this problem, often failing to avoid the emotionalism of romantic drama. Be this as it may, the effort to discuss the complexities of the human subconscious and its manifestations as symptoms of a problematic identity is a major antecedent for the Pirandellian dramaturgy of the ego and the various selves.

With *verismo* gaining momentum by dint of the respect that Verga, Giacosa and Praga commanded among actors and critics, it was inevitable that Bracco would seek to acclimate himself to the movement by experimenting with themes and esthetics already integrated in their *problematica*.[72] In Maschere

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[71] *Critics have suggested that Ibsen's impact on his discussion of this issue is undeniable. The truth is that Ibsen has very little to do with Bracco's impostors, not only because he tackled the issue in very few of his prose plays, but also because he was more concerned with spiritual angst, with the problem and the metaphysics of responsibility and less with the problem of the "maschera."*

[72] *Cf. Paolo Bosisio, "Idee di teatro in Roberto Bracco," Otto/Novecento 18, No. 2 (1994), 45-60.*

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(Masks, 1894) and Don Pietro Caruso (1893), the best and most insightful of the earlier dramas, Bracco studied crises of conscience, crises of integrity resulting from the conflict with "unconceivable" realities of life, a conflict both dispiriting and depersonalizing, leading eventually to "conscious deaths" or to "conscious suicides": a resignation to a fictional (that is dead and ego-defeating) existence or a literal withdrawal from the struggle of life. Both plays aspire to a registering of life as a "tragedy," not as a fatality impossible to escape, but as a tragicomic, even grotesque condition which, confounding and paralyzing, pushes the individual to extreme, life-negating reactions. The grotesque complexion of these *drammi*, then, hardly highlights the irony of life. Rather, they construe life as an irony which challenges the human will to endure existence.

Maschere[73] is Bracco's tribute to Praga's own evolving *problematica* of bourgeois depersonalization. The milieu is again the salon of the hard-working, self-negating, family-oriented *borghese*, and the problem which challenges once again the role-model of society is how to maintain the image of "perfection" and "normality" when a tanglible reality -- adultery--threatens to destroy it. The basic characters of the triangle, the husband, the wife and the lover are still

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[73]*The play was produced by the company Pilotto-Sciarra on 5 May 1894 in Naples. In the state playwrighting competition of that same year it shared the first prize with Giuseppe Giacosa's Diritti dell'anima.*

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present, but the situation departs from the familiar pattern: this is literally a post-mortem on adultery, a post-mortem about a life hard to endure after the exposure of the abnormality. The betrayed husband returns after a year's absence to his home, only to find a priest and a nurse waiting to inform him about the death (suicide) of his wife, whose body is still lying on the conjugal bed. The fatality, however, has not been the suicide per se, but the fact that the woman was pregnant. It is not very hard for the husband to realize that the child of that woman is not his, that what he is faced with is not just a death, but a declaration of guilt and a "sacrifice" for the sake of his honor. The husband, still in disbelief about the "truth" of the death, becomes a crime inspector and from the interviews with the people who could possibly shed light to the fact, he understands that the lover, the culpit, has been his best friend and business associate, the man he trusted more than anyone else. The hardest dilemma however is not how to punish the lover, but how to explain the death to his daughter, who, returning from her boarding-school to visit her mother, should be protected from the truth, if her respect for the memory of the dead woman is to be maintained. The only solution is to feign despair for the death of a guiltless woman, but also to feign certainty about the normality that existed before the death. Husband and lover will continue to work side by side, as if nothing has happened. Their life henceforward will be a

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ceaseless fiction, a collusion of *maschere*, for the sake of preserving another illusion, the daughter's belief in an immaculate maternal ideal.

Bracco's main concern in this play is not the sociology of adultery, nor a criticism of its symptoms and effects. As the title suggests, what defines the dynamics among his characters, the dead woman and her survivors, is not the arrangement of life as a continuous theatre--a *maschera*--distorting the truth for the social benefit of those still alive. Rather, it implies the assumption of more than one *maschere*, that is, it implies a necessity of as many diverse "identities" as the realities which make up one's life. But these masks do not shield the individuals from social estrangement. They are rather alternative consciences, substitutes for the spirit, the soul, the personality of the individuals which will help them to cope not with society and its norms, but with themselves and one another. Bracco's betrayed *borghese*, before trying to restore normality in his social status, has to denounce the virtues and ideals his milieu and *race* have encouraged and instilled in him--sincerity, honesty, sense of duty, trustfulness--and replace them with these *maschere*, these other essentials for the "different" life he has to lead after "death." Bracco's *maschere*, thus, are not the pretenses which will deceive society, but emulations of the correct social values his heroes need in order to deceive themselves, to make life

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tolerable to themselves, to re-create a life which will let them think that they live as "real" people, just like they were before the "death." Several critics have spoken of Bracco's *impressionismo*, alluding to the double meaning of the arguments constituting the whodunit structure of the plot, but also to the suggestiveness of his *verismo*. Yet, his preoccupation with the *maschera* as an existential and not social necessity went unnoticed.

Don Pietro Caruso[74], which several critics consider as one of *verismo*'s most representative texts and certainly one of Bracco's most important plays,[75] embodies a synthesis of dramaturgical elements derived from the tradition of the local dialect theatre and the *problematica* of the *dramma borghese* with a considerable influence of Verga evident in the structure (language, rhythm, tempo) and the symbolic function of lyricism and folklore.[76] The plot involves two *drammi intimi* and two distinct interconnected situations, a socio/political and a familial problem. Even though the milieu does not represent an open public space (the action takes place in a modest claustrophobic room), *voci interne* (voices

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[74]*The play was produced by Ermete Novelli at the Teatro Sannazaro of Naples (21 November 1896. The text appeared in the third volume of Bracco's collected plays edition and was later included in Vittorio Bracco's anthology Teatro verista, op. cit. It has been translated into English (See Appendix II).*

[75]*Cf. Pullini, op. cit., 177ff.*

[76]*The play was written "in lingua", but in 1916 it was translated in Neapolitan dialect by Ernesto Murolo.*

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from backstage) suggest the existence of a broader social cosmos, all-encompassing and surveillant, intruding and, imperceptibly though inexorably, determining the psychological and social crisis dramatized. The love triangle of the *commedia borghese* husband-wife-lover is here modified to a father-daughter-lover configuration, with the love story dominating the early part of the *dramma* and the father-daughter relationship forging the tragic climax of the crisis. Don Pietro Caruso is a dejected "defeated" loser, a disreputable heavy drinker, small-time criminal and electioneering aide to the *conte* Fabrizio Fabrizi, a self-conscious but also unscrupulous aristocrat, who has defiled and compromised Margherita, the daughter of Don Pietro. The gentle young woman, who has truly loved Fabrizio and has hoped that her "sacrifice" would some day lead to her legitimization as his wife, has lived a sequestered life, as her father has wanted to preserve in her innocence and purity the only hope for a future, more dignified, life. Little could he suspect that the man he has trusted as the "guardian" of his honor is the same man who has violated his trust and "dreams." After a short scene in which Margherita becomes suspicious of Fabrizio's real intentions about their relationship, Don Pietro returns home intoxicated and pensive, concerned with the financial and social status of his daughter which, despite his "sacrifices" to the powerful of the society, he has not been able to advance. Fabrizio returns to take care of his

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business with Margherita's father, and when the truth about his relationship with her comes out, Don Pietro finds himself betrayed by all, but mostly by his dreams. Fabrizio tells him that he cannot marry Margherita, not because he does not love her, but because being the daughter of a man devoid of social *rispettabilità* she cannot enter a higher social class, she cannot marry a *conte*. When he offers to become her financial "maintainer" for life, Don Pietro realizes that he himself has been the "problem" of Margherita. Knowing that she is not marriageable, he compells her to accept the proposal of Fabrizio and after asking her forgiveness for his failure as a father, he walks out of the room with a revolver hidden in his pocket, while singing an aria refrain from Verdi's Il trovatore, which speaks of love redeemed with blood. His suicide, which Bracco lyrically "intimates," is the only act which can save Margherita from the stigma of being the victim of her father.

The suicide of Don Pietro, however, either as a declaration of defeat or as a sacrifice, lacks cathartic value. Margherita's life, her *verità*, will not change for the better, his own reputation will not be restored. His death, actually and metaphorically, is only a formality, since both he and his daughter are already socially "dead" and spiritually spent. Even as an act of resignation, this death suggests not a resignation from the responsibilities of life, an abdication of life, but an identity crisis, a crisis of

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consciousness, the realization, in other words, that his *verità*, his dreams (his illusions) for the future, embodied in Margherita, have been futile. Not having faith in the future, or rather not being allowed to have faith in the future, in the possibility of *verità*, is tantamount to not being able to exist, to not having the right to exist. Bracco has not underplayed the social causes of his "death" or its social implications, yet the issues of *denaro*, social injustice and social determinism central to the *dramma intimo* of Margherita (implied and not criticized in the course of the dialogue), are correlated with the issue of personal *volontà* (will). They might be challenging and often compromising, but they are not insuperable, so long as the individual has the volition (not just the necessity) to create his *realtà*. Don Pietro has been as much able to chose a more affirmative way of life as to chose his death, when he realizes that the problem of his life has not been society, but his own self, his own weakness, a powerlessness which he has passed to his daughter. Defeat, Bracco seems to insinuate, has been an unconscious life choice, informed, however, by a conscious resolve to look for his *verità* in dreams and not in *realtà*. The playwright has carefully choreographed the acting out of the crisis without "operatic" excesses, although with an emphasis on the coordination of nature (a "rainy" day) and human nature (premonitions of catastrophe, "moodiness") as a sign of imminent doom. Every gesture, sigh and soliloquy is more

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lyrical than melodramatic, attempts to understate *realtà*, to suppress the intimate thought, to downplay the tragic impasse. The ominous refrain from Il trovatore which functions as a trope throughout the play, much like the references to the "she-wolf" in Verga's La lupa, only accentuates the fact that Don Pietro's death is more than a sacrifice.[77] It is an exigency, if he is to expiate himself for misconstruing both reality and truth.

Closer to the sociology, the atmosphere and the *sentimentalità* of Neapolitan regional theatre is Sperduti nel buio (Lost in the Darkness, 1901), a trittico (triptych) of scenes from the life of Naples' disowned and the dispossessed.[78] The play is essentially plotless. Nothing actually happens, there is a continuous dramatization of the meaningless inertia which defines the life of those who frequent or work at a red-light district bar, trying to keep up the appearance of gaiety and survive the night (all three acts take place at "night"). At the bar of Franz, where

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[77] *On the function of this aria, which was used also by Pirandello in Questa sera si recita a soggetto, cf. Leonard G. Sbrocchi, "Roberto Bracco-Luigi Pirandello: Variazioni su un tema," L'enigma Pirandello A. Alessio, C. Persi Haines and Leonard G. Sbrocchi, eds. Atti del Congresso Internazionale. Ottawa, 24-26 ottobre 1986 (Ottawa: Canadian Society for Italian Studies, 1988), 218, especially 224. Pirandello was a close friend of Bracco and conversant with his dramaturgy. Sbrocchi is actually almost certain that Pirandello "imitated" Bracco's use of the aria in his own work. Ibid., n. 11, 226.*

[78] *The play was produced for the first time at Triesti's Teatro Verdi (14 November 1901) by the company Talli-Gramatica-Calabresi. It was first published in La nuova antologia 181 (1/1/1902 and 2/1/1902) [the text I read] and then by Palermo's Sandron in 1927.*

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mafiosi, prostitutes, sailors and foreigners mingle, drinking, dancing and "dreaming," Nunzio, a blind young man who plays the piano, while "fantasizing" in his darkness, forges a strong relationship with Paolina. She is a street girl, orphaned by her prostitute mother and deserted by her aristocrat father, who does not know her and who cannot know her, since their worlds are so apart. The young couple decides to leave the life of the bar and its dangers and stay together in a basement, leading each other through the "darkness." In the meantime, Bracco has changed milieu. The second act takes place in the *"boudoir intimo"* of the duke of Vallenza, who is the father of Paolina. In that act-scene which vacillates between tragicomedy and grand-guignol, the aging and frail duke, full of remorse for the injustice he has committed against the daughter he has not known, decides to undo his crime, to disperse the "darkness" of his consciousness by trying to find and legitimize his daughter, by making her his heiress. An ambitious socialite who has her eyes on his fortune tries to make him marry her. But although the Duke does not give in, he cannot carry out his expiatory plan. He dies before reaching his desk, remaining thus in eternal "darkness." The final act simply chronicles the end of dreaming. Poor and persecuted, Nunzio and Paolina cannot survive only on hope. She leaves him to follow her mother's fate, pressured by madams and mafiosi. She will still live in "darkness" (without aim). Left behind, Nunzio will continue to

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be lost in his own darkness, and the play ends as he sings a song about a *passero sperduto* (a lost sparrow).

The Neapolitan low life which Feravilla, Scarpetta and mainly di Roberto had detailed with a strong emphasis on the *drammi intimi*, but also on the ingenuity and the tragicomic survival of the city's lowest strata, is depicted by Bracco as a hopeless no man's land, a "darkness" which deprives its denizens of any chance of dignified living. As is the case with all regional dramaturgies, the city of Naples is the true protagonist in the play, crushing as an inexorable fate the ambitions and the hopes of people who, socially ambitious and good at heart, want to believe in the prospect of a better future against all odds, but who in the end can only resign themselves to the necessitites of life. The play was among Bracco's most popular ones, but the critics, who could not accept the "disunity" of the structure and who could not tolerate what they perceived as profuse pitifulness and sentimentality, deemed it as a maladroit confection of symbolism, *verismo* and melodrama. The complementary themes of perdition and blindness, however, do not connote a fatalistic, deterministic reading of Neapolitan *realtà*. Rather, they refer to a psychological and spiritual condition relevant to the loss of identity amid the anonymity of the city, the loss of self-awareness, the loss of purpose: the deprivation of

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verità.[79]

With Tragedie dell'anima (Tragedies of the Soul, 1900), a play dealing with the intangible clash between spirit and love within a conjugal relationship much afflicted by the "death" of faith, Bracco initiated a very important phase in his career in which the sensibilities and the socio-spiritual rights of women furnish the pretext for a more penetrating canvass of humanity. This "feminist" dimension of his dramaturgy, to which also belong Maternità (Maternity, 1903), La piccola fonte (The Small Spring, 1905) and Fantasmi (Phantasms, 1906) misled several critics into believing that the playwright, inspired by the more audacious sociology of Ibsen, had sought to reciprocate his modernism with a *problematica* spiritualizing, idealizing, and ultimately mythologizing the woman as an entity of superior humanity and intuition. Some of them spoke of Bracco's attempt to harmonize Ibsen and D'Annunzio, that is, idealism and symbolism, in his typical, "Dumasian," *dramma borghese*, while others insisted on his feminist agenda, as if the plays propagandized a more humane social existence for women. Arguments such as the above, however, tended to detach "feminism" from themes broader and more essential to his dramaturgy--the spiritual vacuum of modernity, the metaphysical agony of individuals struggling with their "mediocrity," the contestation of love,

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[79] *Bracco would revisit the same subject in the one act Notte di neve (Snowy Night, 1907) and Nellina (1908).*

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the misappropriation of ethics--and to confute the humanistic rationale of his *verismo*. Bracco, nonetheless, did not perceive the *dramma borghese* and its basic situation, the marriage, as conventions compromising his *verismo* and his *sentimentalità*. It might be that marriage offered the social pretext for the *dramma intimo* he contemplated in each and every of these cases, but he was more concerned with the existential significance of the conjugal bond and the unconditional preoccupation of the woman with the spiritual validity, the *verità* of it, not for the benefit of society, but for the benefit of her own humanity. The marriage, invariably unhappy and unfair to her *verità*, tests the limits of her capacity to love and redeem those who violate the rights of her soul, or take for granted her integrity. In the four "feminist" plays, the marriage is dead, or moribund, and the woman as wife and mother suffers either because she does not tolerate her social exploitation, or because she cannot tolerate disrespect; because her conduct has to prove her humanity eternally, because her sin, an adultery committed in the past, obstructs her freedom to assert her rights. The husbands, egoists and affected, are punished even when redeemed, not because the woman has known how to forgive, but because her sacrifice and "death" has shown their failed *verità*. Essentially the "feminist" dramaturgy of Bracco constitutes a theatre of analysis: an analysis of the identity, the composition, of the human personality, as spirit

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and material contest for its domination.[80]

In Tragedie dell'anima[81] Caterina loses the trust and the love of her husband, after she reveals to him that he is not the father of her child. Ludovico, who cannot love that child as he did when he thought it as his own, deserts her and Caterina has to adjust to the new reality of a life with a truth other than that of maternity. The real tragedy, however, is that both Ludovico and she have wished the child dead, as if that death could restore the spiritual unity bonding them. The child, however, has inherited from his true father, the most intimate friend of Ludovico, a debilitating malady which eventually kills it. That "death" reunites Caterina and Ludovico, yet their reunion has lost its power, because both of them will confront their guilt of having subconsciously wished for the death of an innocent human being:

> *CATERINA: Lo vedi! Ogni tenerenza, ogni letizia, ogni amplesso, sarà—inesorabilmente—un beneficio che tutti e due sapremo d'aver ottenuto dalla sua sparizione. Tu capisci: (terribilmente) io non potrò più essere sicura di non avere aspettata quella morte, come l'ai aspettata, segretamente, tu!... e tutti e due ci sentiremo legati insieme...dall'opera compiuta, per conto nostro, dal*

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[80] *"Bracco presenta il rapporto fra i due richiami nel vivo di un dramma difficoltoso, senza volerne presentare aprioristiche soluzioni ma con l'intento di esprimere la sofferenza che ne accompagna le fasi verso il superamento dell'antitesi." [Bracco presents the relationship between the two [spirit and matter] at the center of an arduous dramaturgy, without wishing to present apriori conclusions, but with the intent to express the suffering felt during the course toward the transcendence of the antithesis.] Giorgio Pullini, op. cit., 167.*

[81] *The play was presented by the company Tina di Lorenzo-Flavio Andò at the Teatro Paganini of Genova in February 1899. It was first published in Nuova antologia 174 (11/16, 12/1 1900) and it is included in the third volume of his Teatro. I cite from the text of the Nuova Antologia.*

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destino! (Act III, sc. iv).[82]

Although Ludovico cannot condone the fact that his moral rigidity has in fact proved his commitment to morality bogous and self-serving, it is Caterina who is punished in her redemption from the sin of her adultery. The death of that child connotes the eradication of that other *verità* of her life. Deleting maternal love as unnatural, as extraneous to the true relationship of her life, to her shared *verità* with Ludovico, she has also instinctively chosen a life deprived of superior spirituality, because this death has re-enfranchized her in society, it has reinstated life to her, albeit a conjugal life of bondage to somebody and something dead. Her "tragedy of soul" is that she will have to live with the awareness of her compromise with herself.

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[82] *"CATERINA: You see, don't you? Every intimacy, every joy, every embrace will—inexorably— be a gift which both of us we will acknowledge to have received thanks to that loss. You understand: (with an expression of terror) I will never be able to be certain that I have not expected this death, as you have expected it, secretly, you.. and both of us will feel bonded by something which fate brought about on our behalf!" op. cit., 433. Pullini and others have insisted that the motif of the inherited decease, recurrent also in Maternità, is a borrowing from Ibsen's Ghosts (I would also say from his Little Eyolf, too), a play which had an extraordinary fortune on the Italian stage. I think, however, that Bracco, aware though he may be of Ibsen's theme, is more influenced by the still prevalent theory of darwinism. The affinity is indeed superficial, because in Bracco's play the issue of the death is not dramatized, but functions as a realtà which compels the two spouses to reexamine their souls and the true value of their relationship. Besides, when Ludovico leaves Caterina, he does not know about the child's health problems nor its father (Caterina knows who the father is but ignores at first the decease). For him the problem lies in its identity as the "child of adultery."*

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In Maternità[83] Claudia di Montefranco, a woman who has suffered many humiliations by her womanizer husband Alfredo, asks for separation and divorce when she learns that she is pregnant. For her husband this fact has only economical value, since the child which will be born will inherit the fortune of an uncle, which Alfredo needs to repay his debts. Defying decorum, Claudia denounces Alfredo's hypocrisy and immorality before the uncle, but her social triumph follows a tragic course of events. The pregnancy has been problematic, the child has genetic problems and its "death," the death of a loveless child, a child sired without love, is necessary for her own survival. Claudia refuses to accept such a life and does not abort the child. She dies with it and her "death" is the ultimate triumph over a life which negates the right to dignity. Claudia is the antipode of Caterina, but her tragedy has been a catharsis of her own sin in tolerating a life devoid of spirituality. Her death is a happy end, because her maternity is a revenge and a personal vindication: Her death prevents the "death" of the child, because that child will not be born to die. Their shared death will be the attainment of eternal, immaterial maternity, and not a concession to

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[83] *The play was presented by di Lorenzo and Andò at the Teatro Manzoni of Milan in February 1903. It was published in Nuova Antologia 106 (July-August 1903) and later in the fifth volume of Teatro. I cite from Nuova Antologia, although the text has been "tamed" (the director of the magazine thanks Bracco for having "attenuated the verismo of certain passages), evidence that Bracco's play was considered too controversial for a moderately conservative periodical. In the Sandron edition the original text is restored.*

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society's financial logistics. Her maternity will not make Alfredo a father; it won't concede him the right to paternity. A tragicomic representation of the *borghesia* is more conspicuous here than in any of Bracco's other plays, but this representation, rather than subduing the tragic triumph of Claudia, actually enhances it, since the emphasis on the grotesqueness of bourgeois polity justifies Claudia's resolve to defy it by chosing her death over her life within it.[84]

In I fantasmi[85], a conjugal drama about the fantasm of jealousy, but also the fantasm of the life which cannot be lived, the basic situation is the psychological, subconscious, subjugation of the woman-wife to the "dead" husband, her enslavement to his memory and his psyche. Raimondo Artunni, a distinguished professor of Physical Sciences, terminally sick, cannot reconcile himself with the fact that life escapes him.

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[84] *The character of the uncle count, which Bracco has developed as a raisonneur who changes from defender to prosecutor of bourgeois italianità, is actually the one to admit the moral failure of the borghesia, when the disclosure of Alfredo's schemes shows the verità vera (the true truth), the bankruptcy of bourgeois institutions: IL DUCA: Io superfluo il dirlo... non ho nessuna predilezione per l'adulterio. Mi è sempre parso una cosa abbastanza...abietta. Ma devo convenire che nei limiti inalterabili dell'errore voi lo avete alquanto nobilitato. Se tutti i mariti del bel numero fossero come vostro marito, e se tutte le mogli adultere fossero come voi, ho paura... ho paura... che l'adulterio... finirebbe col piacermi. (Act II,sc.IV) [The Duke: I... needless to say,... I have no predilection for adultery. It has always seemed to me something too contemptible. Yet I must admit that within the unalterable limits of the transgression, you have rather ennobled it. If all the cuckolded husbands were like yours, and all the adulterous wives were like you, I am afraid... I am afraid that I would reach the point of fancying adultery]. Op. cit., 74.*

[85] *The play was first presented by the Compagnia Stabile of Rome at the Sannazaro theatre of Naples in 1906. It was first published a year later in Nuova Antologia 132 (December 1907). It is included in the sixth volume of Teatro. I cite from the text of Nuova antologia.*

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Married to a younger woman, Giulia, he sees in her the fantasm of the future, the life after his "death," and with his reason unable to fight his "irrational" feelings of jealousy, he has turned the short period of life left in him into a virtual hell for both of them. Suspecting the platonic love of one of his disciples for Giulia, Luciano, he accuses her of spiritual adultery. When she protests, he forces her to promise him that nobody will replace him after he dies, that she will be eternally faithful to him. Fearing the fantasm of the future, he needs Giulia attached to him, to a fantasm, that is, of the past. Giulia, believing in her own power to resist the temptations of another love, but also too proud to take an oath on the "purity" of her future life, refuses to comply with his demand, and when she asks him to kill her rather than bend to his will, he urges her to at least lie to him, to give him the comfort of a bogus *verità:*

> *RAIMONDO (irrompendo disperatamente) Non so ucciderti! Se avessi saputo farlo, non avrei aspettata la tua esortazione!*
> *GIULIA E allora che altro puoi volere da me?!*
> *RAIMONDO Voglio la menzogna! Ecco quello che voglio, perchè solamente nella menzogna potrò trovare un'ultima illusione. Cancella subito la verità che hai detta. Sappila cancellare, te ne supplico. Mentiscimi bene! Mentiscimi bene!...*
> *GIULIA (prorompendo in un pianto di pietà infinita e andando a lui per afferrarselo fra le braccia) Povero Raimondo! Povero Raimondo mio!*
> *RAIMONDO (avvinghiandosi a lei pazzamente) Mentiscimi bene!... (Act II, sc. 5)*[86]

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[86] *RAIMONDO (erupting with despair) I cannot kill you! If I were able to do it, I would not wait for your entreaty [to kill you]!/GIULIA What else, then, could you want from me?!/RAIMONDO I want the lie! That's what I want, because only in a lie will I be able to find the ultimate illusion. Revoke at once the truth you've said! Do revoke it, I implore you. Lie to me well! Lie to me*

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Raimondo dies and Giulia, to honor his memory, founds a charity house for indigent widows, and although she tries hard to live up to his standards, she feels that she has lost all freedom of faith in her own self, in the integrity of her spirit, that she is also "dead." Luciano, who has indeed loved Giulia, but who also feels guilty of this love as an offense to his mentor, decides to go away on a mission, especially when Giulia refuses to meet him. When Luciano's mother comes to beg for her help in order to prevent Luciano's departure, after some hesitation, she agrees to go and meet him. But on her way, the fantasm of her oath to Raimondo, an oath which she did not give, but which has staightjacketed her emotional life, possesses her and prevents the "betrayal." Giulia slowly dies as she keeps repeating *Non posso... Non posso!* (I can't! I can't!). Raimondo has found a way to finally kill her, exactly because she betrayed his (and not hers as well) *verità*, that is, the lie which he had forced her to commit.[87]

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well!.../GIULIA (breaking to tears of infinite compassion she goes to him to hold him in her arms) Poor Raimondo! My poor Raimondo!/RAIMONDO (grabbing her as in frenzy) Lie to me well!... Op. cit., 377.

[87] *The play estranged critics and audiences with the complete absence of "plot" and the almost incessant psychologizing debates between the characters. Thus Bracco was not given credit for the effort to experiment with a dramaturgy more nordic than Italian in atmosphere. To certain critics he appeared to capitalize on the notoriety of Ibsen's Ghosts, but except for certain affinities between Mrs Alving and Giulia (a much younger woman), the play has nothing in common with the earlier masterpiece. I fantasmi was a recycling of themes which*

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La piccola fonte[88], which is among Bracco's best plays and which anticipates the *intimismo* of Bracco's masterpiece, Il piccolo santo, revisits themes which almost half a century earlier Paolo Ferrari had treated in his Prosa. The educational rationale of the earlier *commedia*, however, has not survived in Bracco's *dramma*, which delves into the question of mediocrity, inspiration, and eventually love as the power which subdues that mediocrity and is the essence of inspiration. Stefano, a poetaster of great ambitions, is married to Teresa, a young woman of limited intellectual culture, but capable of limitless love. This marriage has suffered from his condescending attitude towards his wife and his belief that he is superior to Teresa and therefore a victim, a "dying" victim, of this bond. Teresa, aware of Stefano's emotional estrangement, but also a self-effacing aggrandizer of his artistic megalomania, tolerates his superciliousness, failing to understand that it is her commitment to his mediocrity which makes Stefano aspire to superior social and artistic states in life. When he begins an affair with a superficial socialite, a "princess" who also nourishes his ego, promising international success, Eliza, who feels that she is losing him, loses her mind; she "dies"

Bracco had already used in previous works, themes which appear in Butti and the women veristi.

[88] *The play was presented for the first time at the Manzoni theatre of Milan by the company Talli-Gramatica-Ruggeri in February 1905. It was published in Nuova antologia 118 (August 1905) and then in the sixth volume of Teatro.*

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spiritually and emotionally. It soon becomes obvious that the true inspiration of Stefano had been Teresa's love, because with her insanity, her detachment from him, Stefano loses his poetic power, he and his supporters realize his mediocrity. Now he has to live with a "senseless" woman, since his "princess" actually used him and then discarded him. Stefano sells the house and everything he owns to pay debts, but Eliza, who has "sensed" in her insanity his need of true love, "reintroduces" herself, as it were, to his life and after "putting him to sleep" she throws herself to the sea, while singing a song about a friend who will always be an inspiration to a loved one. Her physical death is the ultimate proof of her *verità*, the ultimate "inspiring" concession to Stefano's mediocrity. The influences of symbolism were more evident here than in any of the earlier plays, but what was more refreshing about this play was the overt tragicomic subplot of the relationship between Stefano with his servant Valentino, a grotesquely deformed creature, who functions not only as the nemesis of Stefano, constantly challenging him for his egomania, but also as the "interpreter" of Teresa's "dead" logic.[89] This character will be revived by Bracco in Il

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[89] *In a 1918 letter to Personè Bracco explained the play as a response to the philosophical trend of nitzscheismo, as a "christian" reaction to a modernity which denied the power of metaphysical love: "[...] Nella follia di Teresa c'è una misteriosa sub-conscienza per la quale pare che [lei] agisca con filosofica veggenza. Con la sua sparizione, Teresa lega a sè, alla sua ombra, per sempre Stefano, e forse questo postumo legame, questo postumo suo fascino salverà l'uomo infiacchito e avvilito e ne farà finalmente un uomo forte e onesto in un atmosfera di verità umana.... Teresa e Valentino...rappresentano in gruppo,*

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piccolo santo and in that *dramma*, he will be the catalyst of the dark and "unexpressed" *verità* suppressed deep in the human psyche.

Il piccolo santo[90] is a point of reference for the "theatre of silence" which would develop in France in the inter-war years, but also for the theatre of Pirandello, Rosso

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l´umanità umile, l´umanità cristiana, nella quale è una forza più bella e più utile di quella che l´ umanità orgogliosa e vanitosa, rappresentata da Stefano... crede di possedere... Io volli, in certo modo, simboleggiare le due correnti del neo-idealismo e del superuomismo che serpeggiavano ai primi albori del secolo ventesimo. Queste intenzioni restano, lo so, nella penombra. In tutta l´arte mia si riscontrano dei casi simili. A me piace di non dir tutto [emphasis is Bracco´s], di lasciar intuire quel che non dico. Anche nei fatti della vita cotidiana, del resto, c´è più di quanto si vede e si ascolta. [In Teresa´s insanity there is a mysterious subconsciousness by which she acts with philosophical perspicacity. By her loss, Teresa binds Stefano forever to her, to her shadow, and perhaps this posthumous bond, this posthumous fascination of hers, will save the exhausted and humiliated man and will ultimately render him strong and honest in an atmosphere of human truth... Teresa and Valentino...represent together humble humanity, the christian humanity, in which there exists a force superior to and more useful than the one which proud and vain humanity, represented by Stefano, thinks it possesses... I wanted, in a certain way, to symbolize the two currents of neo-idealism and the theory of the superman smoldering in the beginning of the twentieth century. These intents, I know, are not clear. In all my art there are similar cases. I like not to say everything, to let what I don´t say insinuate itself. After all, even in the facts of daily life, there is more than what one sees or hears.] Personè, op. cit., 121. In his 1925 letter to Personè, Bracco speaks of the "logic of madness" as being one of the themes which interested him before Pirandello discovered it popularizing it as central to his dramas. Op. cit., 126.

[90] *The play was written in 1909, but it was first produced in 1912 at the Mercadante theatre of Naples with Ferruccio Garaviglia in title part. The popular actor, however, died one month after the opening, and the play was later revived with huge success by another famous actor-manager, Ruggero Ruggeri. It was published in Nuova Antologia and then in the ninth volume of his Teatro. It is still the only play by Bracco still mentioned in histories of Italian theatre and the last to be adapted in English (see Appendix II). The play was out of print until 1994 when it was republished by Naples´ Di Mauro Franco.*

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di San Secondo and Ugo Betti.[91] Focusing on what he perceived as being life's superior realm, *"la realtà sostanziale nascosta dietro la realtà della superficie,"* he sought to construe that reality's intangible sway over human thoughts, yearnings and actions, and thus register its effect, now direly mortifying and now inexorably tragic, on the spirit and the psyche of the individual.[92] In the provincial microcosm of the five-act *dramma*, the playwright does not simply differentiate between the palpable manifestations of exterior reality and the subliminal symptoms of his agonizing characters' inner world. Nor does he posit the outcome of their interaction as moot fatalism. Rather, he anatomizes their "versions" of reality. Indeed, Bracco diagnoses the fabrication of these realities not as a praxis of self-defense against life's adversities, but as a wishful subterfuge which only deceivingly renders life tolerable and "functional." It is exactly this subterfuge that he divulges as a calamitous aberration of the human psyche. And it is both its social and psychological repercussions, on a personal, interpersonal as

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[91] *Cf. Umberto Galeota, Roberto Bracco (Napoli: Ardenza, 1967), 18; Bosisio, ibid., 55; Antonio Stäuble, Il teatro intimista, op. cit., 17ff; Edy Lanza, "Autori minori del novecento," op. cit., 198.*

[92] *"the essential reality hidden behind the reality of appearances." Roberto Bracco, "Preface" to Il Piccolo Santo. ed. Rudolph Altrocchi. (New York: The Century Co., 1929), 6, 7. That preface, which is considered one of the major manifestos of modern Italian theatre, is discussed in Stäuble, ibid. See also chapter 4.*

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well as on a societal level, that inform and precipitate his characters' irrevocable course towards (self-)immolation and transgression.[93]

Don Fiorenzo, the "little saint" of the title, is a middle-aged country priest, revered by his parishioners for his kindness and exemplary life. Beforing entering the church, Fiorenzo had been in love with an unhappily married woman, but as this relationship could not flourish, disillusioned, he decides to defy material desires and dedicate his love not to people but to "humanity." In his service he has Barbarello, a grotesque, half-witted boy, whose life Fiorenzo saved in the past, and who now has become virtually his shadow, his alter ego. In his quiet and ascetic life suddenly enter two persons who bring with them memories from the past: His brother, Giulio, an urbane and sensual man, who returns from South America after twenty-four years; and Annita, the daughter of the woman he had loved, who has come to him entrusted by her mother. He welcomes both of them, but he also feels for Anita emotions which he tries to believe as paternal, but which evoke the same spiritual turmoil he felt for her mother. This becomes obvious when he realizes that a relationship flourishes between Giulio and Annita, an event which makes him antagonistic to his brother. Annita, on the other hand, imbued with Don Fiorenzo's religious mysticism, can feel only a

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[93]*Daniela Quarta, ibid., 98.*

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spiritual attraction to Giulio. Fiorenzo, almost reluctantly, persuades the young woman of the beauty of "natural" love and compells her to respond to Giulio's proposal. But the marriage seems to have an "unexplainable" effect on the lives of the three people. Fiorenzo sees his faith waver, and his religious commitments unfulfilled. He cannot even attend the wedding ceremony. The cohabitation proves a disaster. Giulio and Annita live in an apartment above that of Don Fiorenzo, but the latter constantly avoids them. This situation becomes onerous to the marriage, so much so that Giulio decides to take Annita and move back to South America. The day of the departure is very painful for Don Fiorenzo and his pain communicates itself to Brabarello, who in order to "help" his master, rushes to prevent the departure. In the darkness of early morning, he thrusts Giulio over a dangerous cliff, the place he himself had been saved years before by Don Fiorenzo. When he returns to an apoplectic Don Fiorenzo, Barbarello triumphantly and at the same time desperately shouts: It was for you, for you!

The most conspicuously veristic trait of the play, furnishing its most outward manifestation of worldly reality, is the vibrantly folkloric, kaleidoscopic depiction of provincial society. Communal life, monotonous, unsophisticated and yet dynamic, becomes a significant point of reference for the social identity of Don Fiorenzo. Bracco has involved a large cast of ebullient social types in the *dramma intimo* of

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the priest (Sebastiano, Dottor Finizio, Barbarello and so on), and the contrast between his tacit pathos and their sentimental solicitude for him renders all the more dolorous his struggle to cover up his agonies, his *verità*. Unable though they may be to articulate their sentiments, selflessness and courage, they are, nonetheless, capable of impassioned gratitude and limitless affection.[94] This veracious social milieu does not circumscribe Don Fiorenzo's private life as a static and inconsequential reality. Nor does it merely operate as the voice of common sense, challenging his sense of self-awareness. On the contrary, having forged and promulgated Don Fiorenzo's public image, it has forced upon him the galling persona of *"piccolo santo,"* a persona which, as the play clearly proves, is ironically incompatible with his real identity: a hapless man compromised by social imperfections, a man deprived of enthusiasm for life, a man of duty and not a visionary of mission.[95]

"I santi veri non campano mai,"(The true saints do not live forever) remarks one young woman (Act IV), when Don Fiorenzo, silently yet frantically split between the man and the "saint," appears deprived of his celebrated talent to rise to the circumstances, to be a "saint." This *realtà* of sainthood, benevolently prescribed by public consensus, has

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[94]*Personè, ibid., 111.*

[95]*Luigi Tonelli, L'evoluzione del teatro contemporaneo in Italia, op. cit., 380.*

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not only suffused his public perception. It has also distorted his perception of himself. Having gradually repressed his real sense of identity as a man short of genuine metaphysical yearnings--an actuality disclosed very early in the course of the play--Don Fiorenzo has assumed the priesthood as a means for inspiring others towards a kind of self-negating mysticism, which he himself appropriated only in order to conceal his own social maladjustment.[96] Such has been the success of his immersion in this complacent role of protector, that not only has his limited spiritual vision become blurred, it has also devolved into obdurate moralism. His sense of a once unconditioned, compassionate love has been superseded by a precarious notion of a "dutiful" love, devoid of spiritual depth. As Giulio, his frustrated brother, remarks, what Don Fiorenzo has ceased to aspire to as a human being is to "try to look inside" people, to try fathom the strengths of their psyche. So many years of inadvertent abuse against his inner self have obliterated his capacity to love. They have turned him into an "oppressor" of souls and to a "fabricator" of other people's *realtà* as well.

"*É una REALTA'* [the capitalization is Bracco's] *terribile che non avevo mai veduta,*" (a terrible reality which I have never realized) Don Fiorenzo admits to Annita, the prime unwitting challenger of his psyche. Yet, his self-

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[96]*Stäuble, ibid., 18.*

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identification as an oppressor does not reawaken his true humanity. It only accelerates his tragedy. When Giulio (willingly) and Annita (unwillingly) happen to deviate from the *realtà* Don Fiorenzo has established for them, their adjustment to the real world becomes all the more hopeless, if not catastrophic.[97] And so it happens, because Don Fiorenzo's acknowledgement of his oppressiveness does not evolve as a conscious realization, but is coerced as a compromise with exterior circumstances he can not control. That Barbarello, his debilitated "alter ego," rushes to prevent --through crime-- the distortion of his master's (and therefore his own) cosmos, is not an accidental development, haphazardly accentuating the pathos of his "sacrifice." It comes about as the realization of Don Fiorenzo's subconscious desire, a desire too iniquitous to concede, too nefarious to commit and too atrocious to tolerate: a desire too real and intense to be subdued in his conscience.

The tragedy, therefore, of Don Fiorenzo is not simply his inability to come to terms with the reality lying outside his own self-centered cosmos. It is also the incongruity between his self-image as the magnanimous superman and the real malevolent transgression of his self-abused spirit.[98] When

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[97] *Tonelli, ibid., 393 ff.*

[98] *Cf. Personè, ibid., 108; see also Baldo Curato, Sessant'anni di teatro in Italia da Giovani Verga a Ugo Betti, op. cit., 111.*

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this transgression prevails, peace of mind and inner liberty do not transpire. Bracco's priest can only experience catastrophe. As soon as he senses the new *realtà* precipitated by Barbarello's deadly initiative, Fiorenzo the cleric identifies in Fiorenzo the man the real perpetrator of the crime and a hypocrite as well. His last words, "Per me?", acquire a powerful ambiguity, since it is far from explicit whether it is the man or the "saint" who has found the courage to wonder.

During the course of the play, Bracco bares the anomalies of Don Fiorenzo's universe, juxtaposing his *realtà* with the experiences of Giulio and Annita, whose lives he never ceases to tyrannize, be it subconsciously and/or deliberately. Although both Giulio and Annita constantly speak of the profound spiritual changes they have undergone and the inner peace they have attained under what they assume as Don Fiorenzo's cathartic influence, it is they who offer him lessons of sincerity and integrity, no matter if their impact on his persona is inconsequential. Failing to frustrate Giulio's genuine love for Annita, Don Fiorenzo only perceives his brother's courageous pragmatism and emotional maturity, but he fails to discern the superficiality of his own judgements and the narrowness of his own life principles. As Bracco insinuates, in assessing Giulio's character, Don

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Fiorenzo expresses assumptions about youth, eros and sexuality, informed not by some concrete evidence of Giulio's intemperance, but mainly through the projection of his own repressed libidinous passions on Giulio's demeanor. Although Giulio never hesitates to report on his rather reckless past, his frankness is not *un raffinato artifizio*, a refined subterfuge, but the trait of a man who lives life as it comes with no fear of reality and its consequences.

Likewise, Annita, who, unlike Giulio, has a minimal, though painful, experience of the world and its ambiguities, is more sincere about her convictions than Fiorenzo and a stronger believer in the redeeming value of what she acknowledges as her only real world, the reality of mysticism and Christian devotion. Yet again, her own tragedy begins as soon as Don Fiorenzo, the architect of her (only) reality, declaims it as unnatural and false, exhorting her to accept his brother's "secular" world as the best possible "reality" for her, no matter if he himself has always refrained from identifying this world as the single reality of humankind.[99] It is ironic that Annita concedes, at the expense of her inner peace, and forsakes her asceticism as a favor to the man who assumed priesthood, not by some spiritual necessity, but as

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[99] *Il piccolo santo, ibid., 102-3; Cf. Pasquale Parisi Pasquale, Roberto Bracco: La sua vita, la sua arte, i suoi critici, op. cit., 236ff.*

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self-punishment for a youthful love unredeemed.

For Don Fiorenzo, Annita is not just the object of his duty, the vulnerable protegèe, nor just the forbidden desire, upsetting his spiritual composure and challenging his repressed sexuality. A reflection of his wretched youth, she represents his only pure *verità*, the pristine *realtà* of his past, the only time when love (for her mother) meant to him inspiration and not some vocational duty, a means of life and not a means of living, albeit a worshipful living. As a human being, dispirited by the tribulations of life; that is, a human being, sharing the same experience of surrendering, despondent and disillusioned, to the chaos of the world, Annita appears to him as an incarnation of that pristine loving past, if not as a sister soul, an alter ego. Her arrival grants a different meaning to his life. Not only his spiritual kin, Annita also becomes the object of his inadmissible platonic love.[100] In this new *realtà*, Don Fiorenzo has zealously assumed the triadic role of the spiritual teacher/lover/brother. When aware of his brother's infatuation with Anita, his rigorous reaction does not signify an effort to protect her integrity as a woman. It rather reveals his desperate double struggle to preserve this new metaphysical reality, and to prevent the "incest" between a

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[100] *Francesco Flora, "Roberto Bracco: Quindici anni dalla morte," Il Dramma 259 (Aprile 1958), 41; see also Flora, Saggi di poetica moderna. (Firenze: Casa Editrice G. D'Anna, 1949), 171.*

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blood brother and a spiritual sister.

When Fiorenzo is forced to suspend this reality, inducing Annita to marry Giulio (Act III, scene V), it is he who authorizes the "incest" and violates his metaphysical rapport with her. As an incestuous act, however, this marriage stands no chance of flourishing. It is predestined to dissipate as an offense to some intangible power dominating their fortunes. When Annita faints before Fiorenzo's residence immediately after the wedding ceremony, the machinery of this unidentifiable nemesis is at work. At the same time, Fiorenzo, the miraculous "saint," appears to the "society" not only deprived of his metaphysical powers to vitalize Annita, but detached from God as well. It is at this point that Fiorenzo openly confronts, for the first time, his own false "reality." He prays, yet his prayer is an act of mendacity. It is the ultimate evidence of his spiritual vacuum.

The marriage, the deviant new reality, asphyxiates Fiorenzo's volition to endure life and renders him not only devoid of any respect for his own life, but also subconsciously prone to charging Giulio for his spiritual paralysis. This subconscious iniquity, perceptible by his sentient "other," Barbarello, becomes the catalyst of the drama. As he executes his master's subliminal thoughts, Barbarello brings about a harrowing anagnorisis. It divulges that Don Fiorenzo's one and only reality all along his "saintly" life had been his self-inflicted incapacitation to

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honor love as faith: a faith, that is, in the necessity that humankind practice love as an essential service to its humanity and not as an act of camouflaging its spiritual failures.[101]

Bracco, though convinced that life's exteriorities belie the frailties and the failures of the human spirit, is more skeptical about whether humankind can endure living without keeping up the appearances, the *realtà* of spiritual rectitude and "supermanhood." As a pragmatist, he does not deny the possibility of a human existence informed by metaphysical anxieties. What he doubts is the validity of such an existence, so long as human beings ignore, or want to ignore, the beauty and the strength of their tangible cosmos as well. Don Fiorenzo, incontestably a most sympathetic character, is both the victim and the villain of the melodrama he made out of his life. Failing to face the reality of human cosmos, he managed his life and the lives of the people around him as a pharisaic recreant. His "hamartia" has been his superficial self-awareness.[102] *"Sono spesso appena percettibili gl'indizii che preannunziano i fatti piu importanti della*

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[101] *Cf. Rudolph Altrocchi, "Bracco and the Drama of the Subconscious," The North American Review 224 (March-May 1927), 161.*

[102] *DON FIORENZO: "Non è un dolore! Non è un dolore! ... Questa sofferenza mia è un mistero: - è un mistero che, negando mi ogni barlume di consapevolezza, mi avvolge, mi stringe, mi soffoca, mi fa desiderare la morte ... e ... non mi fa morire!" [DON FIORENZO This is not a pain. This is not a pain!... This suffering of mine is a mystery: It is a mystery which, escaping my entire consciousness, besets me, oppresses me, suffocates me, it makes me desire death... and... it does not make me die.] Il piccolo santo (Act V, sc. 6), 137.*

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nostra vita," Don Fiorenzo observes.[103] Regrettably, the honorable struggle to decode these indices of life was the task he resisted undertaking.

The plays which followed Il piccolo santo did not continue the experimentation with existential themes. I pazzi, a play which Bracco had conceived since 1908, but which he refused to produce until 1922 (it was published several years earlier), dealt with various aspects of social and spiritual "madness," but when the critics got a chance to review it, Pirandello and the *grotteschi* had already treated the idea as the essence of modernity. Bracco was inevitably seen as an imitator of something he could not actually understand and the play did not meet with success.[104] Nemmeno un baccio (Not Even a Kiss, 1910) was another "woman's" play, but sentimentality had replaced *sentimentalità*, and the play seemed rather maudlin and "commercial." During the war years, Bracco wrote four plays which were later published under the collective title Riverberi della guerra (Reverberations of War).[105] But after the twenties, his fame started to fade,

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[103] *"Often the signs which preannounce the most important facts of our life are barely perceivable."* Il piccolo santo, *ibid., 93.*

[104] *Cf. Adriano Tilgher, "'I pazzi' di Roberto Bracco,"* Il problema centrale (Cronache teatrali 1914-1926), *Alessandro D'Amico, ed. (Genova: Edizioni del Teatro Stabile, 1973), 179.*

[105] *These were* L'internazionale, *the story of an Italian cabaret singer with an "international repertory" of songs (and men). She visualizes her past lovers as victims of war, but her italianità has been offended by her country's neutrality to the bloody actuality;* L'amante lontano *(The Missed Lover), written in Neapolitan, told the story of a woman who, avenging the betrayal of the man*

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as his clash with Mussolini's regime alienated him from the theatre and obstructed his access to the *teatri stabili* sponsored and controlled by the *fascisti*. In 1926 the regime sabotaged his candidacy for the Nobel Award, which eventually was bestowed on another Italian author, Grazzia Deledda. During the last years of his life, he retired from public appearances, although a couple of his plays, especially Il piccolo santo, were revived several times. When he died in 1943, Bracco had seen his work censored and disparaged by the literatti of fascism, and although he lived in moderate poverty, he never gave in to Mussolini's cultural policies. Yet, the end of war and the restoration of normality did not improve his critical fortune. His legacy fell into oblivion and apart from some rare, mostly commemorative, tributes to his life, Roberto Bracco has been relegated with the rest of the *veristi* in the list with Italian theatre's *"minori."*

ENRICO ANNIBALE BUTTI

If Bracco was an eclectic and his dramas conformed with patterns of *verismo* detailing intangible emotional, spiritual and psychological intricacies, Enrico Annibale Butti (Milano

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she loved, has humiliated and "dishonored" all the men she has pursued. When the "culprit" returns from the war with his eyes lost, she feels reborn and merciful, committing her life to him. La culla (The cradle) takes place at the front. When a spy falls in love with an Italian commander whose mission she has sabotaged, she commits suicide, but before that she entrusts her new-born baby to the Italian soldiers, a symbol of future fraternity between the warring peoples. Finally L'innovatore (The innovator) satirizes the intentions of those who want to change to renew things; at the end these novelties destroy the world.

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1868-Milano 1912), the other dramatist of "ideas," evolved a dramaturgy in which ideas, the controversies of modernity, were not simply debated.[106] They insinuated themselves as the rationale, the *problematica* and in effect the esthetic foundation of his plays, which epitomize a theatre not about ideas and the ideality of *verità*, but about ideas as realities, as the pretext for challenging the meaning of life and the idealization of existence.[107] Butti fashioned an idiosyncratic, hardly popular (commercially and critically) theatre--geometric, mathematic, conceptual are few of the recurrent charges against his dramas--which confuted the "realism" of ideals and ideologies. He subverted positivism and determinism, theology and atheism, pragmatism and intellectualism, relativism and absolutism. Concerned with the empiricism of ideas, with the discomfiting *verità* of this empiricism, he argued that the modern theatre could reassert its artistic supremacy, if it dispensed with the social excesses of the *borghesia* and the tedious intellectualizations of "psychological" drama, only if the (tragic) experience of ideas, and the realities of this experience supplied its *problematica*. This concept of theatre, he believed, was

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[106] *Cf. Bruno Villanova d'Ardenghi, Il teatro neo-idealistico (Milano-Palermo-Napoli: Remo Sandron, n.d.), 11-58.*

[107] *For the traditional critical view of Butti as a "dramatist of ideas" cf. Benedetto Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia vol. 6, op. cit., 221-229; also cf. Ruberti, op. cit., 642ff.; and Italo Maione, "Enrico Annibale Butti," Studi e saggi di letteratura (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1923).*

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consonant with *italianità* and its cultural tradition, it was the only form of theatre which, being Italian, could also be both universal and universalizing. The "new *risorgimento*" of Italian theatre, if it was to happen, entailed idealism as an esthetic, as the essence of its modernity and its universality:

> *Io adopero la parola idealismo a significare due fatti: la coscienza e la curiosità che l'artista creatore ha dell'Inconoscibile, ciò di quanto s'agita oscuramente dietro le semplici apparenze; la necessità che a centro dell'opera creata sia posta una idea eccelsa. Le preoccupazioni dello scrittore idealista io le formulerei dunque in queste massime: non considerare mai i fenomeni della vita soltanto nelle loro esteriorità sensibili, ma altresì nella loro significazione ideale, nella loro essenza intima e profonda. [...]scegliere possibilmente dei soggetti che pure essendo strettamente veri, compedino in sè una moltitudine di fatti singoli atti ad essere ragruppati sotto una denominazione comune, così che dalla narrazione d'un solo fra essi emerga per necessità logica un'idea generale, eterna, immanente, quasi direi: un assioma di vita individuale o sociale.*[108]

The concept of the "facts" as ideas contextualized within the natural parameters of *realtà* (life) occured to Butti, as his immersion to the drama of Ibsen (Butti was the only of the *veristi* to come to terms with the profound impact Ibsen had on his dramaturgy) and the philosophy of Nietzsche revealed to

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[108] *"I take the word idealism to mean two things: the consciousness of and the curiosity for the Unknown, which the creative artist has, namely that which elusively transpires behind the simple appearances; the necessity to posit at the center of an art work a sublime idea. Thus, I would formulate the concerns of the idealist writer in these maxims: never consider the phenomena of life only in their tangible exteriorities, but on the contrary in their signification as ideas, in their intimate and profound essence... choose subject-matters which, though totally true, comprise a multitude of single facts which pertain to a common category, so that from the narration of one of these facts a general, eternal, immanent idea may by logic necessity emerge; I would almost dare say, an axiom of the individual and social life." Enrico Annibale Butti, interview to Ugo Ojetti, Alla scoperta dei letterati, op. cit., 157, 159.*

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him not only an esthetics for the interpretation of human experience, but also a vision of the truth this experience actually conveys to the individual: anxiety for the meaning of existence, confusion for the goals of existence, consternation for the individual's self-defeat.[109] Yet, if Nietzsche proper as the philospher of superman was the "idea" which he constantly revisited either to uphold it or to dismiss it, his *ibsenismo* was a point of departure, despite the fact that for scholars and critics his dramaturgy embodied an emasculation, a melodramatization, of Ibsen's dialectic theatre. In fact, not only did Butti seek to modify, to universalize by italianizing Ibsen's vision of reality, he also went so far as to hypostatize and emotionalize the ideas, that is, to dramatize them as realities his heroes feel or surmise rather than "understand" or come to grips with. Indeed, reality as the touch of Fate, the touch of the *"Inconoscibile,"* is the unifying theme of his fourteen major plays.[110] Their plots betray his frustrating preoccupation with the ideas as

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[109] *Early in his career, Butti published Nè odi nè amori (Neither Hatreds, nor Loves, 1893), a volume with reviews and essays on Italian (and European) theatre and culture. His opinions on Nietzsche are found in his article "Le idee sull'arte di Federigo Nietzsche," Nuova Antologia (16 March 1900). His views on psychological theatre are expounded in his "Il teatro dell'anima" Flegrea (September 1900). Finally his views about the nature of Italian drama and his own position in it can be read in his "Il teatro e il pubblico in Italia," Nuova antologia 102 (1 Nov. 1902), 16-28.*

[110] *The entire dramatic production of Butti consists of twenty-five plays, eight of which he wrote in collaboration with others. These were satirical or musical comedies, while one of them, Il castello del sogno (The Castle of Dreams, 1914), was a "poema drammatico." For a complete listing of Butti's dramatic works (he also wrote five novels), see Appendix I.*

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fatalità, a preoccupation which to a great measure reflects the constant frustration life had been to him as a man who found modernity immanently uncongenial and progress unavailing.[111]

An only son of two well-off, sophisticated and overindulgent Milanese *borghesi*, Butti experienced a much protected childhood and early adolescence.[112] Of a delicate constitution, but with a positive mind, he demonstrated early on an interest in physics and mathematics, which he studied at the University of Pavia. Soon tired of these, he changed both discipline and school. Now at the University of Modena, he studied medicine, then Law and then again classic literature, finally getting a degree in Law. But he never made use of that degree, as literature and philosophy became his exclusive interest. As a young man, however, Butti was far from bookish. A fashionable dandy and a genial personality, he liked to combine his literary pursuits with a trendy life-style. During his student years, he founded along with friends Il tampel, a

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[111] *Cesare Levi, "Enrico Annibale Butti," Rivista teatrale italiana 16 (1912), 329.*

[112] *See his autobiographical intimations to Onorato Roux, Infanzia e giovinezza di illustri italiani contemporanei part II (Firenze: Bemporad, 1909), 267-272. Excerpts from his unedited personal diary are cited in Piero Ferrari, Enrico Annibale Butti nel teatro del secondo ottocento (Padova: Rebellato Editore, 1971), 29ff. Ferrari's book is the most recent book on Butti written in Italian which has largely drawn upon the earlier scholarly and biographical material, small in quantity. For a rather condescending study of the playwright in English see Susan Briziarelli, Enrico Annibale Butti: The case of the Minor Writer (New York: Scripta Humanistica, 1995). This book, however, is concerned with the totality of Butti's production as well as with his literary models.*

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subversively humoristic illustrated journal which lasted for almost two years, and co-wrote his first play, a farce with the title Un signore in abito bianco (A Man in White). Produced by a local *capocomico*, it was a pathetic disaster. But with his transfer to Milan in 1892, where he was to begin his literary career as journalist, critic and novelist, Butti entered a very difficult and painful phase of his life, which lasted until his early death. His first novel, L'automa (The automaton, 1892), became a controversial *succés d'estime*, creating quite a stir around his name.[113] But a year later, after the author had entered a period of intellectual experimentalism with mysticism and spiritualism, he suffered his first serious health crisis, a bout with tuberculosis, the malady which henceforward would vex his private life and his career. His first serious work in the theatre was Il vortice (The Vortix, 1892), a veristic *dramma* in the manner of Rovetta. It chronicled the moral decline of a merchant who, after embezzling money entrusted to him, encourages an adulterous affair between his wife and the man he embezzled in order to avoid his social catastrophe. The success, although far from outstanding, established him among Milan's theatre circles, encouraging him to pursue playwrighting as a profession. Despite the esteem he enjoyed among the literati

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[113] *The other four novels which followed L'automa did not have success, but evidence Butti's immersion in the work of Nietzsche, Poe, Hoffman, but also Ibsen and Strindberg.*

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for the "nobility" of his literary pursuits, very few of his plays became popular with the public which remained, as he admitted, rather indifferent to his commitment to a theatre "with a cause." Unable to touch the sensibilities of the wider public and unable to cope with the persistent problems of his health, Butti became very choleric and started to dismiss the theatre and its audience, portraying himself as the "misunderstood" artist who, ahead of his time, had to suffer ignorance and neglect. For Il castello del sogno, a dramatic poem, which he considered as his greatest and most ambitious work, he could find neither publisher nor producer. In the last few years of his life, spent in sanatoriums and solitude, he dispensed with ideas and sought to write comedies, as if trying to recapture not the spirit but the spiritedness of life. When he died he was only forty-six years old. As he confided in a letter to one of his friends, the imminence of death distressed him only because his work would rest forever incomplete. In his last testament, he asked for "neglect" and "silence" after a "life which had been pain."[114]

The social universe of Butti's theatre is defined by the antithesis between the *borghesia* of Praga and the individualists of Giacosa and Rovetta. His heroes, who are always articulate, commited to their principles, courageous and assertive but who are also always defeated by their own

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[114]*Pierro Ferrari, op. cit., 40, 41.*

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ideas, their own courage and their own principles, have struck critics as mechanic, lifeless, abstract: grandiloquent puppets devoid of interior life though equipped with a mechanical, so to speak, mind, "acting out" ideas which fail, precisely because they contend and vie to offset, to violate, *realtà*.[115] His doctors, philosophers, clergymen and feminists, be they positivists or idealists, devout or agnostics, visionaries or reactionaries, socialists or conservatives, are all betrayed by reality, because they and their "theories" of *verità* have disregarded this reality, because their vision is actually a system as illiberal as fate; a system, that is, which imposes another reality, another "fate" on people even if it offers itself as a condition of liberation and truth, as a remediate reality. Critics, perplexed by Butti's antipathy for all these "truths," have decided that Butti was an artist who, unable to find a voice, blamed society and its culture for his own failure to establish allegiance with any one of the trends ushering it into the new era. Some have seen this reaction transpire as a shift from idealism to anti-idealism, others have seen a shift from positivism to idealism and others still a shift from liberal to conservative values. Depicting the failure of ideologies has thus been taken to mean his devolution from an affirmative ibsenist to a defender of

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[115] *Cf. Maione, ibid., 164ff.*

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society, a spokesman, like Paolo Ferrari, for society and its *"valvole."*[116] This pervasive and rather simplistic overview of Butti's dramaturgy needs some modification, certainly not in order to sustain his self-image of the "misunderstood artist," but in order to understand why his *verismo*, be it gauche or complex, orating or random, contains the seeds for the inquisitive drama of Ugo Betti and the Italian existentialists of the 1950s.[117] His uneven dramaturgical style notwithstanding,[118] Butti was not the bellicose ideologue who created abstractions out of characters, or who dismissed the logic of progress for the logic of fate/reality. Rather than creating characters who were lifeless, mechanic and superficially rational, he re-created typical cases of modern humanity, individuals conditioned by the prevailing culture to be "objective," to act as mechanical, materialistic and detached. The fascination with objectivity is treated as a tragicomic actuality, since it is an illusion, a camouflage for the ideologies of his "enightened" *borghesi*, who have convinced themselves that their conservatism, or their subversiveness is the ultimate truth, the only open and liberating force of life. This militant "objectivity," this embarassing activism, pro or against modernity, is deemed by

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[116] *For the compatibility between Ferrari and Butti cf. Silvio D'Amico, Il teatro italiano del '900 (Milano: Treves, 1937), 250ff.*

[117] *Cf. Piero Ferrari, ibid., 54.*

[118] *Cf. Levi., ibid., 322.*

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Butti as essentially tragic, because it is just an illusion, a construct of reality, a hubris: claiming to have known the truth, this is the greatest offense to one's own humanity, because instead of seeing life as a process, one sees it as a finality, denying, thus, its most life-affirming truth: the unknown, "the *inconoscibile,*" and the indeterminate. His *borghesi*, intellectuals who defy reality, are not emancipated with the application of their theories, their ideas. Detaching themselves from the "pragmatism" of the community, their metaphysical common sense, they see themselves become resigned to it, when their life is the ultimate casualty of their intellectual "superiority." In Butti's cosmos, the idea of "the enemy of the people" has lost the irony which Ibsen had attributed to it. Butti does not accuse his enemies of the people. He pities them as tragic victims of their own selves. His *verismo* surveys the struggle with one's humanity, the processing of "absorbed" ideas into personas replacing the face: the identity, the *realtà* of the individual as an infinitesimal entity in a cosmos which cannot come to terms with its irrelevance in the wider scheme of Life.

A *dramma satirico*, L'utopia (1894)[119] is the first of Butti's plays to convey his concern for the excessive faith in the logic of *"superuomo."* The victim of this excess is the utopianist doctor Andrea Serchi who upholds the social

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[119] *The play was produced by the company of Virginia Marini (12 January 1894) at Turin's Gerbino theatre. It was published that same year in Milan.*

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necessity of eugenics and liberal love as the precondition for the regeneration of a physically and socially healthy human species. Andrea, who is sent to practice medicine in a small provincial town, has scandalized the local society with his controversial lifestyle and rhetoric. Living out of wedlock with a young teacher (Anita) who has embraced his views, and his sister who, although not a "disciple," is convinced of his honorable intentions, Andrea provokes a general outcry when in a conference he expounds his plan for the attainment of social and natural perfection, only to be mocked, abused and discharged of his medical duties. Going away to preach his system to more enlightened societies, he meets everywhere with public hostility. When he returns to Anita, disillusioned and hurt, yet still haughty and unrepentant, he finds nature's revenge waiting for him: His child, the child of his "liberal," that is, "natural" love, is deformed and mentally ill, one of these useless creatures he had preached moderns should dispense with. His child is his nemesis and the reality which alerts him to his falsehoods. In the tragically grotesque finale, Andrea feeds his infant-"enemy" soup, gradually coming to terms with the prospect of domestic life in a society (which has not been vindicated, because Andrea wanted to improve it not subvert it) who will now alienate him as the perpetrator of a sin against humanity.

The bankruptcy of a similar utopia, feminism, is the *problematica* of La fine d'un ideale (The End of an Ideal,

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1898).[120] In this *dramma*, feminism is not discussed as a controversial social alternative, nor is it associated with the social rights of women. Rather it is seen as a social side-effect of socialism, a system which Butti has perceived as a still immature and therefore tyrannical form of socialization, with the authority of the mass replacing the authority of the individual.[121] It is not, however, that Butti deplored feminism. Simply, he saw reality abort it as an "enemy" of society, not one which threatens society, but one which society exploits for the sake of appearing "enlightened," and then "defeats." Such is the story of Valeria Rovelli, a woman truly believing in her need to be treated as free and independent. A socialist and an activist, she has been a trustful and loving companion to her husband, the mechanic Andriano Rovelli, whom she has helped organize a factory along socialist principles. But Valeria has another reality besides that of the wife. She is the mother of a son fathered by a man whom she loved but who abandoned her. Unwilling to entrust her child to another woman or to "society," she has raised him on her own with Andriano

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[120] *The play opened at the Alfieri theatre of Turin by the company of Flavio Andò and Tina di Lorenzo (6 October 1898). It was published by Milan's Treves in 1900.*

[121] *Socialism according to Butti is based on sane principles of egalitarianism and social justice, but the institution itself is neither egalitarian nor just, because it posits society as superior to the individual and not as equal to him. The playwright would return to this topic in a later play Una Tempesta (A Tempest, 1901). See below. For Butti and his views on Socialism, see Ojetti, op. cit., 169ff.*

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ignoring his existence. When that man from the past wants to claim back "their" son, threatening her with a scandal, Valeria reveals her "'truth" to Adriano, who reacts first by denouncing her and then by reenfrachising her in "their" home. When the man comes to challenge his peace, Adriano shows him that he knows everything and that he is not afraid of scandals. Critics found the play irresolute, because Butti's thesis that society lacks the maturity necessary for a state of liberalism was misconstrued as a defense of traditional society.[122] Be this as it may, La fine di un ideale suggests not the "end" of an ideal, but its "defeat," its subversion by society proper.

Butti's next three plays, La corsa al piacere (The Race for Pleasure, 1900), Lucifero (Lucifer, 1900) and Una tempesta were written to form the trilogy Gli atei (The Atheists).[123] As the more figurative than philosophical title suggests, the unifying theme here is the identity crisis observed in people who fail themselves by their self-consciousness and belief in their *superuomismo*, be it socially, intellectually or politically. His "atheists" are men who think of themselves as gods, who want to shape reality

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[122] *Ferrari, ibid., 70.*

[123] *La corsa al piacere was presented by the comapny Andò-Di Lorenzo at the Manzoni theatre of Milan (23 February 1900). Lucifero opened at the same theatre by the company Talli-Gramatica-Calabresi (11 December 1900). The latter company also created La Tempesta a year later at the Teatro Communale of Triesti. The first two texts were published by Treves in 1900 and 1901 respectively, and the third by Milan's Libreria editrice nazionale in 1903.*

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more in order to vindicate their superiority and much less in order to reform life. These plays are essentially about their hubris, and the final exposure of their presumptiousness or mediocrity reveals their misprision. In the first play, a hedonistic lawyer who has compromised the life and the dignity of those women who have loved him, thinks that he is not accountable to reality, that the emotions and the self-esteem of his peers should be of no interest to him. As a pragmatist he has found the importance of being a winner more essential than the importance of being socially solicitous. He has, however, a weak spot, and this is his mother, from whom he has tried to conceal his misconduct. When the dying woman is made aware of his irresponsibility and selfishness, she has no forgiveness to offer him, because this would actually be the most reformative legacy to her son: his abandonment to the pain of unredeemed existence.

In Lucifero, in which Butti examines the spiritual vacuum created when physics (reason) negates the reality of the beyond, a priest, a "Lucifer," has changed vision and vocation, becoming a professor of natural philosophy preaching the "only" truth of life: the logic of the positive sciences. Raising his children to become agnostics, he has seen their lives succeed without the need of metaphysical values. When his son, however, falls in love and marries a devout woman who suddenly falls mortally ill, the absence of hope, of faith in a redeeming reality which would "explain" the illogicality of

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human death, the positivist theorems of the professor and his son fail to provide them with answers. They are left in a state of bewilderment over their failure to conceive life as a condition which cannot be tolerated without faith in some sort of afterlife reality, an incorporeal existence.[124] Una tempesta, finally, which to a great measure prefigures Verga's Dal tuo al mio, is another depiction of "immature" political reality. In this five-act *dramma*, Butti demonstrates the faulty foundations of political activism and their effects on the wider scheme of social reality as well as on the consciousness of the individual. When Cesare Sieci, a rich landowner, invites over his nephew Adolfo from America with the intention to make him heir to his vast property, the latter brings with him an anarchist friend, who has turned Adolfo into a "disciple." Averse weather conditions have destroyed the crop of that season in Cesare's fields and the financial damage of the farmers has excited their discontent

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[124]*Butti did not want to present a case for catholic faith. "Religion" is here meant as a superior faith above ecclesiastical dogmas. In his 1900 Flegrea article, he speaks of religion as a dream, that is, as a spiritual aspiration: "L'arte ha bisogno di religione... [La società] ha dimenticato il sogno ... ha rinnegato l'anima che doveva essere il suo studio prediletto, accettando supinamente le anguste conclusioni d'una filosofia degenre accecata dal metodo assai più che la Chiesa dal dogma. [...] L'anima è una realtà non una vana ideazione, è una essenza, non un astrazione metafisica che sfugga ad ogni indagine e meriti il sorriso compassionevole dei filosofi e degli psichiatri dal cervello minuscolo." [Art needs religion... Society has forgotten to dream... has denied the soul which should be its prefered object of study, surrendering to the paltry conclusions of a degenerate philosophy corrupted by method more than the church by dogma.... The soul is a reality, not a futile ideation, it is an essence, not a metaphysical abstraction which defies any inquiry and deserves the pitying smile of philosphers and psychiatrists of paltry intellect." Cited in Ferrari, ibid., 75.*

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with their treatment by Cesare. Adolfo's friend has indoctrinated them in revolution and when Cesare has offended one of their older peers, the situation gets out of control. The next day Cesare is found killed, and the culprit is found to be the anarchist. Adolfo, however, feeling guilt of "philosophical" complicity in his uncle's murder, cannot accept the "inheritance," which now falls prey to avid land speculators and is taken away from the farmers who cultivated it. The "revolution" did not destroy hierarchy, Butti claims. It has established a new but more reactionary and inhumane *realtà*. The play appeared very controversial in its time (a time of intense social conflicts) and failed.

Fiamme nell'ombra (Flames in Darkness, 1904), an allegorical play projecting self-sacrifice and anchoretism as an integral procedure towards self-discovery and spiritual rejuvenation, still remains Butti's best drama and the most representative work of his later career.[125] For the first time he inquired into the idleness of social ethics and ideologies not as a despondent malcontent, but as an optimistic visionary. The representation of life as a dolorous circle of adversities and emotional failures notwithstanding, the play does not proclaim the effort to establish a genuine communication between human beings as a hopeless venture. On

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[125]*The play was produced at the Costanzi theatre of Rome by the company Virgilio Talli-Emma Gramatica-Flavio Andò (18 October 1904). The text was first published in Nuova Antologia 117 (May-June 1905) and two years later by Treves.*

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the contrary, Butti champions this endeavor as the only "reality" in this cosmos, a *de rigueur* means for the atonement of people as human beings and social entities as well.

Fashioning the play as a secular "*sacra rappresentazione,*" he retells the passing of humankind from the sinful past via the redemptive present to a promising future and enacts it as a painful yet redeeming "rite of passage." The *dramma* is essentially about miscommunication between brother and sister. Don Antonio, a priest with ambitions to rise in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and a man with his love for a woman forbidden by social circumstances of the past, takes back his sister, Elisabetta, after years of an errant and probably promiscuous life. The distressed woman had left the paternal home, believing in the love of a man who later abandoned her with a child. With that child dead and her life dissipated, she has hoped that life next to Antonio would restore her spirit. Unprepared though for a life of penance and abstinence, she falls in love with a young and idealistic doctor (whose mother had been the woman loved by Antonio) who seduces her. When the young man informs his parents about his resolve to legitimize his affair with Elisabetta, his father, a man who knew her earlier disresputable life, interferes and presents the "scandal" to Antonio as a sin of his sister. When she reveals to him her whole past, he realizes not only that his career is irrevocably brought to a halt, but also that his "spirituality" had not been redemptive enough to "allow" him

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pursue the guidance of a wider humanity. As atonement, they should depart from society and look for the meaning of life high in the mountains, the only true *realtà*.

Butti's resolve, however, to present this "Passion" as a ritual, evolving along with the passing of time -- the name of each act signifies this pattern of linear movement from pathos and repentance (chrysanthemums) to ephemeral passion and bliss (roses) to enduring innocence (lilies) -- does not necessarily denote Fiamme nell'ombra as a "thesis play" of some religious consequence, since Butti treats religion as a conventional social vocation and not as a comforting system of humanistic philosophy. Ridding the idea of sacrifice from all religious (Christian) connotations, the dramatist essays an anatomy of sacrifice first as a symptom of social pathology and then as a desperate act of submission to inexorable social conventions. It is only after the denunciation of these "unnatural" cases of self-immolation in the name of a society, inhumane and inequitable, that Butti champions the prospect of sacrifice as a panacea for all social traumas. No more considered a venture of spiritual or emotional suicide, sacrifice is now dignified as the realization of the word's literal meaning, as an act of rendering something sacred and inviolable. This something is the human spirit.[126]

Until the very end of the play, when sacrifice emerges as

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[126]*Giuliano Manacorda, Vent' anni di pazienza: Saggi sulla letteratura italiana contemporanea (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1972), 201.*

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the ideal remedy for the spirit and the psyche --both of them consequences of either social harassment (Elisabetta) or inadvertent social maladjustment (Don Antonio) -- Butti has broadly castigated (self)sacrifice as an act of loss, be it a loss of honor, a loss of identity or a loss of idealism: Sacrifice has been a sin and it is a sin the characters have committed to the detriment of their dignity and at the expense of their spirit. Elisabetta reports her previous decadent life as a selfless and self-punishing act of sacrifice in the name of love. Don Antonio's priesthood is gradually revealed as a professional function, dictated not by some metaphysical yearning, but by some "social necessity," and this spiritual anomaly has been offensive to his righteousness and pernicious to his sense of personal honor. His sacrifice, unknown to the rest of the world save the woman who once loved him, has thus been a sin of latent hypocrisy on his part against his humanity and against God. Even Teresa, a secondary character in the play and a primary one in Don Antonio's *dramma intimo*, has sacrificed her life in a marriage deprived of dignity and love, a circumstance Don Antonio inadvertently fomented with his self-effacing acquiescence to fatality. In none of these cases has sacrifice evolved as a triumph of the spirit over exterior adversity. On the contrary, it has been a crime against the self, an "unrighteous" subjugation of the spirit

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to social conventions causing the loss of spiritual dignity.[127] The transgression, Butti suggests, has been those individuals' compliance with what he identifies as the prevailing practices of modern society: *Fingere* and *padroneggiarsi*, "dissembling" and "self-containment."

What allows the ascension of sacrifice from a pitiable formula of moral assimilation in a society ruled by etiquette to a deed allowing spiritual emancipation and the rebirth of faith in the capacity to love is the gradual identification of society not as the paradigm of probity but as the perpetrator of injustice, a conclusion which Giacometti had reached in Inclinazioni e voti, and which the *veristi* had considered many times over. It is the rebirth of the "inner dignity" which enables Don Antonio and Elisabetta to accept their past as the crucible of their spirit. It is also this rebirth which renders the abdication of their social personas (the "fallen woman" and the "wronged yet merciful cleric") and the re-evaluation of moral values as the principal condition for their spiritual rehabilitation. Sacrifice can now be expounded as an act of forfeiture: Forfeiting a counterfeit social identity becomes a recompense for neglecting the soul, the self.[128]

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[127] *Ferrari, ibid., 38.*

[128] *Persone, op. cit., 160-1.*

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As a "Passion play," Fiamme nell' Ombra by no means laments the hypocrisy of human society, nor does it withhold a prospect of social *restoro* (reformation) or a message of promise for a life, more decent and more veracious. Although Don Antonio and Elisabetta are ready to forgo society and thus attain self-awareness, in fact this resolution betokens not misanthropy but a process of edification, of enlightenment, of learning. These two individuals feel the need to get to know each other without the impediments of social hypocrisy and without the imperfections of social ethics.[129] This is going to be a society of two and not a solitude shared. For Butti, this learning process is not a first step toward social rehabilitation. It is mainly a courageous praxis of socialization.

The plays which followed Fiamme nell'ombra could not repeat its literary and commercial success, although elements of self-directed irony and a more tragicomic outlook of life reinforced the modernistic orientations of his final *commedie*. Partly because his poor health inhibited his more audacious involvement in the progress of Italian drama and partly because his low morale made him sensitive to matters of spiritual content incompatible with the *grottesco* insinuating itself in the theatre of Sabatino Lopez, and soon after Dario Niccodemi and Pirandello, it was inevitable that Butti would

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[129] *Ferrari, ibid., 55.*

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seem irrelevant. Critics were more appreciative of his presumed intentions and thus they tended to emphasize the discrepancy between his noble "vision" and the inferior final results. Butti could not understand how his work could be properly comprehended, when critics based their views on what they assumed to be his "intent." Be this as it may, the oblivion of his work cannot obscure the significance of his contribution to a national drama which had rediscovered reality as a *verità* whose incompatibility with the individuals' aspirations compelled them to face their *maschera*. In Butti's theatre, the confrontation with reality was to demonstrate the flaws of modernity and their impact on the face, the soul. It is, however, another matter, if the Italian dramatists who came after him were intrigued by the truth of the *maschera* itself and not with the "idea" of *realtà*. Butti had hoped that future genrations of scholars would eventually appreciate his real "intent," but like Praga and Bracco, he has yet to attain recognition.

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CHAPTER 7

DISCOMFITING REALTA': THE TRAGICOMEDY OF SABATINO LOPEZ AND DARIO NICCODEMI

By the beginning of the twentieth century *verismo*, which critics and writers averse to realism had declared dead many times over, still did not actually appear to have run its course.[1] In the long run D'Annunzio's experiments with a neo-romantic sort of *dramma storico* combining the *problematica* of the decadent movement and the esthetics of symbolism and *crepuscolarismo* did not have a lasting effect either on the audience or Italian playwrighting.[2] For all their lavish

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[1] *One of the first Italian critics who spoke of the need to return to a "theatre of poetry" was Angelo Conti, La beata viva (Milano: Treves, 1900), 157. Most characteristic of all such statements is Piero Gobetti's "Il teatro italiano non esiste" (The Italian Theatre does not Exist), published under the pen name Silvio Alfiere in the journal Il Baretti 3 (January 1926). Although the article was written rather late, considering not only verismo, but poetic drama as well, it is, however, indicative of the opinion many critics entertained about realistic theatre in Italy. The article is also found in Piero Gobetti, Scritti di critica teatrale (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1974), 676-684. See also, Alberto D'Ambra, "Dieci mesi di teatro drammatico in Italia" Nuova Antologia 327 July-August 1926), 99-106.*

[2] *Cf. Riccardo Scrivano, "Decadentismo e teatro (note dannunziane)," Critica letteraria 4, n.10 (1976):46-70.*

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poetry and spectacular theatricality, they impressed critics as rather irrelevant to the times.[3] Imitations of his dramaturgy seemed for a moment to revive the fashion for a pseudo-historical, mythological or *"medievaleggiante"* (often in verse) melodrama--Sem Benelli, Domenico Tumiati, Federico Valerio Ratti, Enrico Coradini, Ercole Luigi Morselli are representatives of this trend--but the public did not always enthuse over it and critics soon came to view this *teatro di poesia* as a coarse poeticization of the *problematica* of the *dramma borghese*.[4] The Ferrarian type of historical comedy, which Rovetta and others sought to update, also failed to challenge the domination of *commedia borghese*. The avant-garde movement of *futurismo*, which gained momentum in Italy well before the outbreak of World War I (1909 and afterwards), aspired to contest what its leaders--Filippo Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Fortunato Depero, Emilio Settimelli, Bruno Cora, et al.--perceived as *verismo*'s perverse monopoly of the Italian theatre. Yet, what with their anti-realistic, anti-

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[3] *Cf. Mario Morasso, "La tragedia moderna," L'imperialismo artistico (Torino:Bocca, 1903).*

[4] *It is interesting to note that later critics have seen this "teatro di poesia" as the harbinger of "fascist" dramaturgy, since it emphasised italianità and the D'Annunzian ideal of superman. Cf. Domenico Oliva, Il teatro in Italia nel 1909 (Milano: Riccardo Quinteri, 1911), ix-x; and Gigi Livio, Il teatro in rivolta (Milano: Mursia, 1976), 9ff. For the most comprehensive survey of the "teatro di poesia" see Anna Barsotti, "Il 'Teatro di poesia'." Rivista italiana di drammaturgia 9-10 (December 1978): 25-59; For an account of Italian drama during the era of Fascism, see Enzo Maurri, Rose scarlatte e telefoni bianchi: appunti sulla commedia italiana dall'impero al 25 luglio 1943 (Roma: ABETE, 1981), especially 75ff.*

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bourgeois rhetoric and their modernist experimental impetus, *i futuristi* and their *teatro sintetico* rather alienated than enlightened the *borghesia* they sought to provoke.[5] *Futurismo* did not become mainstream, nor did it undermine the esthetic of *verismo* or the form of the *commedia borghese*.[6] Nonetheless, its two basic esthetic attributes, irony and parody, reinforced *verismo*'s move toward a less deterministic inquiry of *realtà/verità*, and closer to a paradoxical, humoristic, relativistic perception of facts and social appearances.

That *futurismo* did not subvert but renovated *verismo* is a development which cannot be overestimated, especially when it is still common among Italian theatre historians to view the former as the negation of the latter and not as an alternative esthetic which imperceptively yet drastically modified the program of *verismo*.[7] As we have seen, the

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[5] *Cf. Franca Angelini, Teatro e spettacolo nel primo novecento (Bari: Laterza, 1991), 27ff.*

[6] *Livio, ibid., 58.*

[7] *The case of Marinetti, for example, is a perfect example of the relationship between verismo (dramma borghese) and futurismo. Interestingly enough, his first plays, La donna è mobile (The woman is flighty, 1909) and Poupées électriques (Electronic Puppets, 1907 [1910]) were written as "commedie borghesi," and it was as such that they were perceived or "misunderstood" by contemporary reviewers. Also Marinetti's affiliation with the "teatro di poesia" at least during the early part of his career is an aspect of his career which is still debated. Cf. Ruggero Jacobbi, "L'irrazionale e la follia nel teatro italiano del novecento," Bimestre 5 (1973), 26ff. Moreover, Marinetti would reapproach the conventional esthetic of commedia borghese, well after the experiment of futurismo with plays such as Il tamburo di fuoco (The Fire Drummer, 1922), I prigionieri (The prisoners) and Simultanina, although they continued to defy realism with their theatricality and whimsical plot structure. See Silvio*

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departure of *commedia borghese* from an investigation of a problematic society *(realtà)* toward an investigation of society as a problem *(verità)* predates the advent of *futurismo* and to a certain extent it even predates that of *verismo*. Symptoms of this development were evident not only in the dramaturgy of Paolo Giacometti and Paolo Ferrari, but even further back, in the tragicomic *fiabe* of Carlo Gozzi.[8] This is not to suggest that *verismo* eventually proved unsatisfactory and inconsequential as a dramaturgy of *verità*. Simply, earlier patterns of "realism" suddenly seemed more congenial to the modern temper and it was only normal that younger writers would seek to reintroduce them in their work. An ironic and tragicomic theorization of human (and social) life had been a characteristic of *italianità* from the time of *commedia erudita* and pastoral tragicomedy, but the illuministic demands of the *teatro educatore*, the nationalistic exigencies of Risorgimento and the positivist cultural developments had suppressed the artistic expression of incredulity toward dogmas and certainties peculiar to Italians. *Scapigliatura* and early *verismo*, concerned as they were with social impasses and human failings, had substituted

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d'Amico, "The Italian Theatre After the War," Thomas H. Dickinson, Thomas, The Theatre in a Changing Europe (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937), 251-253. See also Livio, ibid., 196ff.

[8] *Ted Emery, "Carlo Gozzi in Context," Carlo Gozzi: Five Tales for the Theatre Albert Bermel and Ted Emery, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 9ff. The "fiaba" as a subgenre of the grottesco will be developed by Luigi Antonelli, Dario Niccodemi and several others. See below.*

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irony for skepticism and cynicism, especially as they sought to depict circumstances of modernity which the new bourgeois cosmos could not, or lacked the will to control.

Yet, in the *commedia* of Praga, Bracco and Butti, tragicomic irony had already begun to pervade plot and structure. It expressed their vision but it also showed a new and more complex *problematica* of *verismo*.[9] This tragicomic vision allowed more revealing and unsettling perspectives of modernity/*realtà*, especially when the feeling of disenchantment, discontent and cultural malaise came to be identified as a trait of fin-du-siecle *borghesia*, as defeat and suffering intrigued the artists not as just pitiful but as ludicrous and grotesque. As the famous Italian ibsenist Scipio Slataper observed, *"in una società che non rispetta l'individuo, che lo costringe, per essere, a vie oblique e nascoste, è necessario che il sentimento del ridicolo finisca per diventare preponderante."*[10]

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[9] *Cf. Mario Appolonio, Storia del teatro italiano, op. cit., 716.*

[10] *"In a society disrespectful of the individual as a human being, which constrains him to follow oblique and abstruse directions, it is necessary that the sense of ridicule become at last preponderant." Scipio Slataper, Ibsen (Torino-Milano-Roma: Bocca, 1916), 285. Also cf. Gyorgy Lukács, Il dramma moderno vol.II (Milano: Sugarco, 1977). In his essay "La genesi della tragedia borghese da Lessing a Ibsen," (The Genesis of Bourgeois Tragedy from Lessing to Ibsen), he writes that "[n]ella maggior parte le tragedie moderne (...) non si compiono in forme tragiche, ma sono sostanzialmente tragicommedie. (...) Infatti i conflitti che, presi in sè, sono tragici, cominciano a perdere la loro tragicità per la debolezza e inferiorità delle medesime forze messe in opposizione (...)." [The majority of modern tragedies (...) are not realized in tragic forms, but they are essentially tragicomedies. (...) In fact, the conflicts which, when considered individually, are tragic, begin to lose their tragic aspect due to the weakness and inferiority of those same conflicting forces.] Op. cit., 117.*

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Interestingly enough, however, the ironic discrepancies of *verità*, and the sense of ridiculousness that the various *realtà* of modernity administered to the Italian *borghese*, most conspicuously insinuated themselves in the sort of *commedia borghese* which Italian historians and critics have ignored, dismissed, or condescended to as "commercial theatre," escapist entertainment, "middle-brow" drama, "theatrical" theatre (*teatro teatrale*): namely, a drama alleged to be exploiting the veristic esthetic for the amusement of an undemanding theatre-goer, but which, in fact (and a posteriori), proved to be the precursor of what Pirandello would later call *farsa trascendentale* (transcendental farce), "*una farsa che includa nella medesima rappresentazione della tragedia la parodia e la caricatura di essa ... come projezione d'ombra del suo stesso corpo, goffe ombre d'ogni gesto tragico.*"[11] This underappreciated and critically much

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[11] "*A farce which includes within the representation proper of tragedy its (the tragedy's) parody and caricature...as if it projected the very shadow of [this tragedy], distorting reflections of every tragic gesture.*" Luigi Pirandello, "Ironia," Saggi, Poesie, Scritti varii. Manlio Lo Vecchio-Musti, ed. (Milano: Mondatori, 1965), 1029. Also cf. Umberto Eco, "Pirandello ridens," Rivista italiana di drammaturgia 9-10 (December 1978), 93ff.

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vilified hybrid of *verismo*, which, for the sake of convenience, we may call *verismo* tragicomedy, gradually emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, when various popular theatre forms collapsed with naturalistic drama. The lacerating irony of Praga's *verismo*, the sensationalism of the French *comédies rosses* ("crass" naturalistic plays based on the *fait divers*), the farcical absurdities of the ever popular *pochades*, the campy violence and the antinomian humor of the *grand guignol* theatre, all these coalesced evolving into a new *verismo* dramaturgy which emphasized the grotesque aspects of the human experience, especially the conflictual life-style and mentality of the *borghesia*.[12] It is from this tragicomic reorientation of *verismo* that the dramatic phenomenon of the *grottesco* and (after Pirandello) *pirandellismo* emerged around the time of World War I. The leading masters of this tragicomedy, Sabatino Lopez and Dario Niccodemi, immensely popular playwrights in the first half of the century, not only

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[12] *For the grottesco as tragicomedy cf. Karl Guthke, Modern Tragicomedy (New York: Random House, 1966), 113ff. For a history of the grand-guignol theatre cf. Mel Gordon, The Grand Guignol Theatre of Fear and Terror (New York: Amok Press, 1988), 4-51; No book has been written about the Grand-Guignol in Italy. The genre became very popular at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to the adaptations Italian actors-managers performed throughout Italy's major and minor theatre centers. In 1908 the actor-manager Alfredo Sanati created a grand-guignol company which established itself in the Teatro Metastasio of Rome. This company remained active and popular until 1923. Among the Italian playwrights who furnished grand-guignol plays to the company were N. Berrini, the verista Giannino Antona Traversi (1861-1939) and Luigi Chiarelli, the "father" of grottesco. Another company, the Grand Guignol Internazionale, lasted only for one season (1910-1911). For more see Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e vita nazionale (Milano: Mondatori, 1950), and Enciclopedia dello spettacolo vol. 5 op. cit., 1620-1.*

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developed a dramaturgy highlighting the tragicomic dimension of the bourgeois experience, but also perfected the social *problematica* which would prevail in Italian drama well after the *grotteschi* and Pirandello.[13] The tragicomedy of Lopez

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[13]*The grottesco as a distinctly Italian dramaturgical phenomenon of the early twentieth century (the grotesque as a dramatic esthetic had been "discovered" by several European dramatists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, such as Lenz, Büchner, Hugo, Gogol, Schnitzler, Sukhovo-Kobylin, and many others) and as an antecedent of Pirandello's dramaturgy developed not as a school, or an avant-garde, but it begun as a tendency encouraged and then sustained by the tragicomic reorientation of verismo. This phenomenon, which peaked around the early twenties later to be assimilated in pirandellismo and the tragicomic commedia borghese, has been studied by critics either as a reaction against a conventionalized dramma borghese and its thematic tradition (adultery, etc) or as an "autoironia," an ironic or parodic reaction of verismo against itself. Critics generally concede that a school of the grottesco with an esthetic manifesto and a group of writers concerned with the same esthetic and similar problems has never actually existed and Luigi Chiarelli, who is credited as being the first to pursue the grottesco as a subversion of the commedia borghese, was among the first to admit that in an article he wrote for the journal Comoedia in 1923. Modern scholars use, however, the term teatro or dramma grottesco as a term to describe a variety of playwrights with diverse styles and problematica—Luigi Chiarelli, Luigi Antonelli, Enrico Cavacchioli, F.M. Martini. Carlo Veneziani, Arnaldo Fraccaroli, Luigi Barzini, Rosso di San Secondo and early Luigi Pirandello—who however shared a common skepticism about the claim, attributed to verismo's playwrights, that their drama, the commedia borghese, could expose the truths, that is the fallacies of the bourgeois culture. Their plays usually parody not the esthetic or the themes of verismo, but the "familiarity," the "realism" of these themes. As we have already shown, the theme of the borghesia as a grotesque social condition has appeared in the plays of playwrights as diverse as Ferrari, Ciconi, Giacosa, Praga and Butti, but in the twentieth century apart from playwrights who belong to verismo's tradition, the grottesco also emerged out of futurismo. Alessandro Veraldo's Altalena (Seesaw, 1910), a play which parodies marriage and love as a "commedia borghese" with a happy"beginning," tragic "middle and a tragicomic end, had a servant-philosopher character who as a raisonneur-"director" defined the relationships among the members of a bourgeois family. Varaldo was a journalist who also wrote plays in the veristic vein, but Altalena seemed very strange to audiences and did not have a success. In 1914 Enrico Cavacchioli, a futurista who had left the movement, wrote a "grottesco sentimentale," Campana d'argento (Silver Bell). In it a doctor finds out that a tuberculosis patient of his was not only the lover of his wife, but also the father of his "son" who is also diagnosed with the same malady. Out of revenge he decides "not to save" his patient, but to "spare" the life of the child. This play was also unsuccessful, and for this reason the "beginning" of the teatro grottesco is fixed in 1916 when Luigi Chiarelli's La Maschera e il volto (The Mask and the Face, written in 1914), became a national and*

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and Niccodemi does not constitute the "commercial" poetics

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international success [In that play a husband who finds his wife has cuckolded him, vows to kill her, but spares her life when they agree she will go away. People who believe he killed her congratulate him and a court finds him innocent. The wife, however, returns and the husband, whose defense lawyer was the wife's lover, has now to face the prospect of prison for "cheating" the public. The couple resolves to forget the past and their social roles, and escape abroad]. At that same time, Luigi Pirandello had created a name for his "unconventional" comedies La ragione degli altri (Other People's Logic, 1915) Liolà (1916), Berretto a sonagli (The Fool's Cap, 1917), Cosi è (se vi pare) (Right you are (if you think you are), 1917) and Il giuoco delle parti (The Game with the Roles, 1918), which appeared to several critics as grotteschi. Since the discrepancies of the borghesia had already entered the traditional theatre, the "grotteschi" playwrights had only to exploit, amplify or distort the appearance of normality (the mask) that the borghese kept up and to mock the culture—the morality or the ethics—that encouraged the suppression of reality (the "face"). A prevalent idea among the themes of the grotteschi was that of the borghesia as "theatre," a dramma or a commedia played out daily and "habitually" with every individual devoid of realtà, a puppet ("fantoccio" or "burratino") moved and manipulated by the intangible but omnipresent society-puppeteer, or by his very own contradictions. Chiarelli had set the tone for the grottesco "fashion" and others soon followed, emphasizing the facelessness of modern society, the "expropriation" of personality/individuality, the creation of types and roles out of human "characters," the "dream" of attempting to regain this personality: Luigi Antonelli with L'uomo che incontrò se stesso (The Man who Met Himself, 1918), Pier Maria Rosso di San Secondo with Marionette, che passione! (Marionettes of Passion, 1919), Enrico Cavacchioli with L'uccello del paradiso (The Bird of Paradise, 1919), F.M. Martini with Il fiore sotto gli occhi (roughly translated as A Bird in the Hand, 1921), Carlo Veneziani with La finestra sul mondo (A Window on the World, 1918), Arnaldo Fraccaroli with Quello che non t'aspetti (The Man You Don't Expect, 1921) and several others. The tragicomic irony is overwhelming in this dramaturgy which sometimes appeared as a tragicomic commedia a tesi with the thesis being the exposure of the bourgeois falsehoods (characterized by the presence of a raisonneur-puppeteer) and other times as a dreamy-mythic theatricalization of paradoxes and absurdities demonstrating the despondence and the tragicomic loneliness of the modern borghese. For an investigation of the grottesco in English see Georgiana O'Keefe Bazzoni, "Avant-Garde Italian Drama: Futurists, I Grotteschi and Pirandello," Diss. Graduate School City University of New York, 1983; Claudia Terzi, "Le poetiche del grottesco," L'idea del teatro e la crisi del naturalismo Luciano Anceschi, ed. (Bologna: Calderini, 1971): 51-80; Mario Verdone, "Teatro grottesco," Teatro contemporaneo, op. cit., 201-209; Gigi Il teatro in rivolta: Futurismo, grottesco, Pirandello e pirandellismo (Milano: Mursia, 1976), 58-113, and his introduction to Teatro grottesco del novecento (Milano: Murcia, 1965); but also Silvio d'Amico's famous article(s), "Il teatro grottesco" in Il teatro dei fantocci (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1920), 77-133; and Luigi Chiarelli, "IL vero volto della maschera e il volto," Dramma 246 (March 1957), 49-51.

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against which the *grotteschi* and Pirandello are generally perceived to have reacted. It is another, deceptively innocuous, experiment with *realtà*: an experiment undertaken not to reaffirm the values of the *borghese* or to play out his social fantasies, but in order to affirm the tragedy of the *maschera*, the impossibility of establishing or defining reality, truth and a sense of the self.

SABATINO LOPEZ

For Sabatino Lopez (Livorno 1867-Milan 1951), it has been argued time and again, the theatre could only function as an extension of the contemporary bourgeois cosmos, a cultural mechanism processing and validating the aspirations, the wishful thinking and the convictions of a *benestante* (well-off) audience which sought pleasure and comfort in a theatre whose *realtà* approximated its off-stage domestic life. Not many critics have deemed Lopez and his theatre worthy of serious criticism. With his popularity taken as a proof of his artistic mediocrity, he has suffered from a reputation as a thoughtful but facile entertainer, a sentimental artist of modest dramaturgical ambitions and ultimately a second-rate *verista*.[14] In an assessment which, more or less, typifies

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[14] *Croce and Appolonio have ignored Lopez altogether. Silvio d'Amico, Piero Gobetti and Antonio Gramsci have dismissed him as a commercial "commediografo." The only exception is Guido Ruberti, who has perceived Lopez's ironic subversion of verismo's themes and situations. See his Storia del teatro contemporaneo Vol. 2 (Bologna: Capelli, 1928), 582ff. Apart from his memoirs, there is no other biographical work on Lopez. All his plays written before 1932 were published by*

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the prevailing opinion about Lopez's drama, Silvio d'Amico has acknowledged him as a paradigmatic *borghese* dramatist, a persevering practioner of a theatre long out of touch with modernity:

> *Egli seguita imperturbabile a dipingere interni familiari, e a popolarli di creature di statura mediocre; le quali si compongono in agevoli quadretti sulla scena, coincidendo quasi sempre felicemente con quei quattro o cinque ruoli principali che non mancano, o non dovrebbero mancar mai, in una compagnia drammatica che si rispetti. Queste creature dicono cose molto comuni, in un linguaggio che l'autore si studia di mantener semplice; in realtà, esso è un pochino troppo corretto, sa ancora alquanto di novella letteraria, e ciò costituisce il suo principal difetto. Ma il pubblico borghese, e non soltanto quello di Milano, si riconosce in quei personaggi, risente con piacere sulla scena le identiche cose, le innocue arguzie e le bonarie osservazioni che hanno corso quotidiano nei suoi ambienti famigliari; e accetta le locuzioni letterarie senza accorgersene, o forse anche come un impercettibile tentativo di idealizzare quelle figure, un poco oltre la banalità consueta. Perciò Lopez è, presso quel pubblico, giustamente fortunato.*[15]

Milan's Treves. His one-acts have been collected in four volumes: Il teatro (1905), Teatro color di rosa (1921), Le bianche e le nere and Sorisi e sospiri (both of 1931). His plays have been out of print for decades and his name is unknown to most modern directors and producers even in Italy. For the purpose of the dissertation, this chapter deals only with the plays written before the end of World War I. The same policy applies to Niccodemi.

[15] *"Imperturbable he continues to depict domestic interiors and populate them with middle-class people; these [characters] are featured on the stage in delightful cadres, almost always fortuitously coinciding with the four or five principal roles which are not missing, or which should never be missing, from a company which respects itself. These characters say very ordinary things in a language which the author has deliberately kept simple; in fact, this language is a little bit too correct, it still maintains a novelistic quality and this constitutes its principal defect. But the bourgeois public, and not just the Milanese, identifies with these characters, it is happy to hear familiar things on stage, the innocuous quips and the ingenuous observations which are daily heard in domestic milieux; and it unconsciously accepts these novelistic locutions, as if it imperceptively tries to idealize those characters, [to see them as being] outside the banality of daily life. This is why Lopez has been so fortunate with this audience." Silvio d'Amico, La vita del teatro: Cronache, polemiche, note varie Vol. 1 Alessandro D'Amico and Lina Vito, eds. (Roma: Bulzoni, 1994), 347; see also Cesare Levi, "Sabatino Lopez," Nuova Antologia 202 (October 1919), 267.*

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This perception of Lopez, however, as a populist assertor of middle-class ideology is justified neither by the pervasive and cruel irony of the individual works, nor by his consistent attitude discrediting the *borghesia* as a mockery of a social (or ethical) system. Unlike Ferrari, who used to differentiate between an essentially virtuous *borghesia* and a "phenomenon" of corrupt individuals testing its resistance to decadence, Lopez is not melioristic. Unlike Rovetta who deplored that same class for its lack of integrity, he defines the complacent world of the *borghese* as incoherent and more often than not self-contradictory, without a uniform morality or ideology, intellectually paralyzed by convention and deceit, without vision or imagination. If his characters appear frivolous and fatuous, this is not because his priority has been to entertain with the depiction of a titillating *realtà*, harmlessly subverting the logic of society and its traditional values, but because as a realist he had felt responsible for reflecting the *verità* of a society which was indeed frivolous and fatuous, not to say useless: a society in which self-awareness was impossible to exist, since *verità* is an abstraction and not, as it was generally assumed, a dogma. Lopez does not, in fact, care about subtlety and shading, when it comes to portraying this *borghesia*. Everything in this class is exaggerated and distorted as black or white, things

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to laugh at, to laugh with, but also to deplore:

> *Accade per le figure che son recate normalmente sulle scene ciò che accade per gli invitati ad una festa mondana: non c'è abito che si differenzi di gran lunga dagli altri. Nero e bianco, nero e bianco. E credete che a un mondo simile alle uniformità esteriore si contrappongano difformità interiori? La forma mentale—poco più poco meno—raramente si distacca dall'aderenza alle convenzioni, universalmente accettate convenzioni applicate, d'altronde, nella vita collettiva come in quella intima.*[16]

The *verità* of this class is a projection of its social *realtà*, impossible to assess as something other than an illogical sequence of controversies, paradoxes and illusions, "absurdities" which do not disturb social life as irregular, paradoxical, illusory. Since bourgeois culture and mentality are homogeneous, they seem perfectly logical, regular, expectable and real, no matter if they constantly and conspicuously undermine even the least effort on the part of the individual to want to rise above mediocrity, deception or corruption. Giacosa and Rovetta had also reached similar conclusions, but Lopez deemed that such an effort can only be

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[16] *"For the characters which normally appear on the stage it happens the same as with the guests in a social function: the clothes are not that different from one another. Black and white, black and white. And do you think that in such a world interior irregularities are juxtaposed to the exterior uniformities? Rarely—sometimes less, sometimes more—is mentality detached from adherence to the conventions, conventions universally accepted and applied, anyway, in one's social as much as in one's private life."* Sabatino Lopez, interview, Arturo Lanocita, Scrittori del tempo nostro: interviste (Milano: Ceschina, 1928), 152.

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worthy of satire, because, as his plays suggest, the individual has no concept of his world, no concept of the "*paradossalità*" of his *verità*. While in Rovetta's dramas the modern *(piccolo-)borghese* was compelled by the facts to be moral and immoral, honest and dishonest, loving and heartless, in Lopez's tragicomedy the *borghese* found himself moral in his immorality, honest in his dishonesty, loving in his callousness.[17] The playwright deems it unnecessary to moralize and attack this system, first because the "system" habitually undermines itself; second because there is actually not one system but there are as many systems as there are *borghesi* who are part of society, and not a single idea about it is commonly shared; and third, because, as Northrop Frye has pointed out, the selection and the representation of absurdities as *realtà*, was by and in itself a moral act.[18]

What is essentially original about Lopez is his preoccupation with *verità* as a "fiction," which *realtà* requires people to "believe" in and accept as unique and incontrovertible. Those who dare to challenge this fictional *verità* either fail ludicrously, marginalized by society as a menace to its equilibrium, or resolve to compromise, so that the people whom they love and care about may be spared the pain and the humiliation of a similar failure. In Lopez's

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[17] *Cf. Personè, op. cit., 202.*

[18] *Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), 224.*

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world, the truth is as irrelevant as it is unattainable. It is impossible to distinguish goodness from evil, beauty from ugliness, honesty from hypocrisy. What appears good is evil and what appears evil is good; what is beautiful and comforting appears ugly and threatening, while what appears hypocritical is sincere and propitious. Usually it is the appearance that prevails and whatever the case may be, the individual is a de facto loser, irrespective of whether or not he is aware of his defeat. All the noble human resolutions and ventures--succor, dedication, sacrifice--can only be compromises with *realtà*, compromises, that is, which allow the individual to endure, since they mislead him into believing that his deeds have substance and meaning for the world at large.[18] What is equally tragicomic about Lopez is not only that he pitied the audience which demanded to be amused by him (and which he did amuse), but that he pitied an audience which liked to believe that it deserved to be pitied. His theatre taunted the illusions of the *borghesia*, but at the same time it acknowledged these illusions to be inevitable and abiding.

It is very hard to trace and establish facts in Lopez's private life which could possibly provide clues to his tragicomic *verismo*. Nothing extraordinary, unconventional or irregular defined the early years of his intellectual and artistic formation, there were hardly any experiences which

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[18] *Cf. Eligio Possenti, "Sabatino Lopez," Rivista d'Italia 23 (1920), 101.*

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could explicate his aversion for the bourgeois mentality, his penchant for the paradox and the bizzare, his apathy for grandiose philosophical debates or social ideas. Apart from the years of exile to Switzerland during the last years of Mussolini's regime, his had been an exemplary, rather uneventful, bourgeois life, exactly the kind of life which his plays exposed as not quite that exemplary. Born in a Jewish bourgeois family of Livorno, Lopez grew up in an environment where *belles lettres* was not just a way but the means of life. With his father working as a private tutor, he soon found himself attracted to literature, which he decided to pursue as an academic discipline during his studies at the University of Pisa. The theatre attracted him from a very young age and it has been reported that one comedy he wrote as a twelve-year old amateur was actually performed by Ermete Novelli, a famous *capocomico* and champion of modern Italian drama. Nonetheless, playwrighting would become a vocation well after the end of his studies. In 1888 he was appointed professor to the technological high-schools of Bologna, thereafter peregrinating throughout Italy and filling various teaching posts. His career in education, however, lasted less than a decade, as his first theatrical successes, Oriana and Di notte (At Night), both written in 1889, played a decisive role in

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his orientation toward drama and, for some time, journalism.[20] As the plays that followed Di notte proved more or less consistently popular with audiences, actors and, to a considerable degree, reviewers, he soon achieved an artistic reputation solid enough to earn him the leadership in the Italian society of authors, a post he held from 1911 to 1919. During the years of World War I, he co-organized the *Teatro di Soldato* (The Soldier's Theatre), a troupe offering theatrical entertainments to the various army camps of Italy. During the inter-war years he directed Milan's *Teatro del Popolo*, a semi-professional, not-for-profit company, opting for a repertory which mixed works by Ferrari, Giacosa, Bracco and Rovetta with popular plays of the modern and contemporary French theatre. His activities as a manager and director were interrupted during the forties, due to his persecution by the fascists. Evading deportation and death, thanks to the succor of a former student, Lopez lived abroad until the end of war. With Italy's return to peace and democracy, however, Lopez's career was essentially over.

Traditionally, the scholars who, at one time or another,

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[20] *Lopez started his brief journalistic career as a theatre critic for the newspaper Secolo XIX and guest short story writer for La stampa. In 1929 he practiced drama criticism for the Illustrazione italiana, later published under the title Cronache teatrali (Milano, 1931). In 1950 he published his memoirs S'io rinascessi (If I Were Born Again). Two other books of his are of particular interest for the history of Italian theatre Punti di vista (Points of View, 1952) and his earlier novel Gli ultimi zingari (The Last Gipsies, 1919), about the Italian itinerant troupes. His correspondence with Dario Niccodemi from 1916 to 1925 was published by his son Guido Lopez in Dramma 226 (July 1955), 35-48.*

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have ventured to revisit Lopez's plays within the context of *verismo*, have distinguished them into comedies (the vast majority) and *drammi borghesi*, despite the fact that only a handful of them fit easily into these standard categories.[21] Although it is true that Giacosa's *verismo* and the social dramas of French naturalism furnished the models for his dramaturgy, it is nonetheless evident from the plays themeselves that these influences affected only the form of his work. His rather unorthodox, with regard to *verismo*, convictions about the relationship between theatre and life, reality and realism did not undergo any modifications. Lopez has not disagreed with the axiom that *realtà* is a problematic condition of conflicts (not crises) and contradictions. Yet, he has insisted that this *realtà* cannot be defined and therefore understood. The treatment of familiar *verismo* subjects such as, for example, the social configurations and impasses of adultery, suggests a departure from the movement's tragic dismissiveness of modernity. Even a cursory review of his plays' titles evidences his preoccupation with irony, contradiction and the grotesque: Il punto d'appoggio (The fulcrum, 1899), La morale che corre (The prevailing morality, 1904), La buona figliola (Good Little Daughter, 1909), Il brutto e le belle (The Ugly Man and the Beauties, 1910), La

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[21] *For all his serious literary studies, Lopez was not a man attracted to theories, manifestos, schools and esthetic abstractions and wrote virtually nothing about his dramaturgy. His memoirs, although replete with information about his career, is not very illuminating as an esthetic guide to his art.*

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nostra pella (Our Skin, 1912), La donna d'altri (Other Men's Woman) announce plots and situations driven by antithesis, contrast, humor, sarcasm. The jocular taking on the serious problems of reality has regularly been explained as an effort on the part of Lopez to promote a message, a thesis, with parody only implementing his presumed pedagogic objective. The problem with this view lies in the presupposition that Lopez is a moralist and therefore his esthetic choices can only serve a more sophisticated sort of *teatro educatore*, failing thus to take into account the ease and, one might say, irreverence with which he has experimented with *verismo problematica*.

The world, according to Lopez, is a traumatic yet not tragic experience for the individual. It is only an unsettling one, since, whatever the problem or the conflict, he somehow always finds within himself the courage to defy adversity. For his *piccolo-borghesi*, demi-mondaines, the *cocottes* and the various other underprivileged social specimens mingling with his "respectable" *borghesi*, society is unfair but not indomitable, complex but not powerful, unpredictable and alienating but not inexorable, always beyond logic and always, tragicomically so, beyond conventional wisdom. The classes do not antagonize but exploit one another, although the depiction of their clash has been deliberately depoliticized. For Lopez the struggle of classes has a humanistic connotation, because the "class" is considered not as a system of people with

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mutual interests, but as a configuration of personalities whose social status does not define character and comportment, but affects the way they think of themselves as well as the way they use their social power in order to render their lives more complacent and more detached from *verità*. The real drama lies more in the daily effort of people to prove themselves better than life or to project the appearance of the winner even in the case of the most compromising disaster. This does not suggest a sentimental and apolitical outlook of *realtà*, but a "realistic" interpretation of it as an experience which tests the individual's self-awareness. Time and again Lopez proves that life is a test where there is no right or wrong choice. What matters is self-awareness and pragmatism. In most cases he has found that lacking the former, people have also lacked the latter and it is this deficiency which inhibits people from asserting their humanity. Searching for the self and *verità* is a rewarding attempt, Lopez seems to suggest. But it is also a tragicomic experience with expectations, whims and yearnings cancelling one another so rapidly in a person's life, that he or she has no chance to forge, once and for all, an identity, an ego, even only one *realtà*.[22]

The most frequent target of Lopez's irony is

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[22] *Indeed, Luigi Personè calls Lopez a "rievocatore delle velleità" (an evokator of yearnings) with velleità meaning an "espressione di un motivo umano che nasce dal profondo, ..., che è indizio di una sincera inquietudine, ... di un'amara esperienza." [an expression of human motivation which emerges from deep inside, ... indication of a sincere concern, of a bitter experience.] Op. cit., 197-8.*

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rispettabilità. From Ferrari to Rovetta and from Torelli to Giacosa and Praga, this fixation with public image, the deference to conventional wisdom and decorum, the preoccupation with the *ragione* (logic) of society, the fear of falling short of "people"'s expectations, the pursuit of a verisimilitude of ethical perfection had been studied as a staple of the *borghesia*'s collective psyche. Some diagnosed it as a *valvola* (safety valve) of the system (Ferrari, Torelli), others as a tragic plight for the emotional and familial life of the *borghese* (Giacosa, Bracco) and others as a symptom of a declining class (Rovetta and Praga). For the earlier realists, moreover, what appeared to legitimize the respect for *rispettabilità* was the consternation for the prospect of *ridicolo*, the prospect of social discomfiture, humiliation and pitifulness.[23] On the contrary, *rispettabilità* startled the *veristi* as a scurge of bourgeois sociology, zealousy observed primarily out of fear for the shame of *declassamento* (class devaluation), but also out of fear for a life not regulated by

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[23]*Livio has viewed the problematica of adultery as the "myth" par excellence of the dramma borghese and the "ridicolo" as an extension of this myth. His argument is based on a (marxist) interpretation of bourgeois marriage in terms of commerce. He finds the myth of the "ridiculous hero (husband) emerges not from the ludicrousness of adultery as a social situation, but from the ridiculousness of the husband who, tolerating adultery, has not "protected" his "property" and therefore is rightly laughed at as a "loser." Op. cit., 6. This critic as well as others have failed to observe that verismo playwrights such as Giacosa and Praga have treated marriage not only as a "property problem," but also as a grotesque social circumstance (especially Giacosa in I diritti dell'anima and Praga in La moglie ideale). Interpretations such as Livio's, however important or illuminating they have appeared to be, indicate, nonetheless, how haphazardly verismo has been studied and how unfamiliar verismo as a problematica still remains for most verismo scholars.*

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conventional wisdom. In the first case, the *borghese*'s situation was tragicomic, because ridicule was abhorred even more than death proper: in order to bypass the ludicrousness of a life without honor, the upright *borghese* would not hesitate to destroy his family and probably lose his life for the sake of his pristine reputation, for proving able to hold on to what is his own. In essence, the choice over losing life or honor was a ridiculous one, because it implied that an individual was not really free and that an uncharted, unimplemented, and therefore, relativistic notion of justice was esteemed superior to human logic and organized polity. In the second case, best exemplified in the drama of Rovetta and Praga, *rispettabilità* has devolved to an instrument, a *maschera*, in the hands of the *borghesi* who tried to protect not so much their privacy, but mainly the freedom to trespass on conventional social morality, the freedom, in other words, to be immoral, yet be respected and counted as well. In plays such as La moglie ideale and La trilogia di Dorina, *rispettabilità* was ridiculed by the very fact that the people who swear by its necessity are the people least respectable but most respected in society, people who like Julia and Dorina are making a virtue out of this necessity by violating it, thus maintaining their integrity but also maintaining their social persona intact. What was grotesque about that situation was the exposure of *rispettabilità* as ineffectual, but also amenable to individuals who could not care less about

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society, or society's right to preordain their own morality or life. People, in order to satisfy their needs but also in order to pander and dupe society, have to dissemble, to uphold a personality and a persona, two or more different egos, and two or more different lives, canceling one another. In effect, the demand to look, to be what the others want you to be, leads to the fragmentation of the personality, the fragmentation of the ego, the substitution of the person by the *persona*. This is more tragic than comic, but since *verismo* was both interested in the milieu and the individual, the social comedy and the personal drama have complemented each other. Thus *verismo*, at least in its later phase, proves more tragicomic than tragic. This is the point of departure for Lopez's tragicomic demystification of *rispettabilità* as well as the context within which the *grottesco*, not just as an esthetic, but also as a *problematica* evolved.

More specifically, the foundation upon which the plot of most of Lopez's tragicomedies were based was the paradox of the defeated winner, which Rovetta introduced in the Trilogia, and which typically unfolds along the following pattern: A man or (more often) a woman, usually a member of the *piccola borghesia*, accept the compromise of their respectability as well as their integrity in exchange for a lifestyle which is more suitable to their sense of honor, more secure and more dignified than that of their "normal" peers. The compromised individual is aware of his or her compromise, but also aware

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of their victimizers' moral deficiencies and inferior motives. They, however, don't use this knowledge. They use other people's fear of their knowledge, not by blackmailing, but simply by not using it. Besides, in most cases a sort of divine retribution is at work. The compromised individual, who had savored no respect from others during his normal life, once his disrepute, his disrespectability is a fact, suddenly sees himself acclaimed and respected. It is a peculiar sort of respect. The individual might be respected, but he or she is not accepted, he or she is punished for forcing, as it were, the society to respect him or her. There are two reasons for this: The "defeated winners" are punished either because they have dared to take risks with their morality and life, risks which more conventional individuals, often under the pretense of propriety, have not dared to take, despite their desire to do so; or because with the "success" in their "failure," they constantly appear to demonstrate and mock the failure of the system to be true and honest. This "theatre" of life is comical, because society is discomfited. It is also tragic because the hero cannot take pride in his triumph over convention, because, eventually, the person cannot get rid of the *persona*.[24]

Poetic justice or a closure which suggests inevitability or finality are not observed in Lopez's tragicomedies, which

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[24] *For a somewhat different interpretation based on an analysis in terms of the financial factor, cf. Personè, ibid., 201ff.*

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come in two forms: They are either dark dramas with a "happy" ending that implies an uncertain and unsettling prospect of existence; or comedies which, ending in sadness or resignation to the (irrational) demands of *realtà*, imply a settlement, an adjustment to the circumstances, not a triumph, but the best possible, the least painful of compromises. Happiness is thus not a symptom of fullfilment or success, just as despair is not an evidence of failure or defeat. The grotesqueness of Lopez's *realtà* is amplified by his emphasis on the contradictions which life contains: A successful and acclaimed *borghese* may be a sad failure, while a "defeated" and disreputable, say, courtesan might be a content survivor. Although the sadly nonplussed *borghese* keeps up the appearances of nonchalance to maintain his *rispettabilità* among his peers, the unpretentious "disreputable" *cocotte* makes a virtue out of her disrepute, vying to prove herself superior to her superiors, despite the fact that her victory, as we have said, does not change even a bit her true social condition. Lopez's characters are and feel tragicomic, they sense the discrepancies that define their lives, but contrary to the philosophizing "puppets" (*fantocci*) of the *grotteschi*, they never express their acknowledgement of or their resentment for the grotesqueness of their situation: they never examine the logic or the irrationality of their beliefs. Lopez's *borghesi* do not rationalize about their irrational *realtà*. The tragicomedy exists only for the characters to

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"demonstrate."

In his serious and quite often violently emotional tragicomedies, early works, most of them, in his oeuvre, Lopez has almost exclusively exploited the *problematica* of adultery. What distinguishes these plays from the typical *drammi borghesi* is his reluctance to elaborate on the unwholesomeness of this social circumstance or to engage his characters in a rhetoric of guilt. The social dynamics of adultery--the compromise, the *disonore*, the violation of *rispettabilità*--are so distorted that eventually the transgressor proves to be not the adulterer or the adulteress, but either the victim of the adultery, the discomfited spouse, or actually the domestic situation (the deceptive appearance of familial perfection) which fostered the "escape" from the real dishonorable predicament, the loveless marriage itself. The consequences of the adultery, often melodramatized to the point of parody and excess, expose a society indisposed to assume responsibility for its petty ways, yet inclined to take extreme measures not in order to protect morals and order, but out of a futile conviction that a (social or domestic) problem, violently suspended, is a problem no more.[25] But even in cases of true love and mutual commitment to the well-being of marriage, the

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[25] *Cesare Levi attributes this esthetic of violence to an influence of the grand-guignol drama, whose popularity coincides with Lopez's early career. The grand guignol elements of his plays do not mock the seriousness of the dramatized situation, but accentuate the tragic aspect of its grotesqueness. Cf. "Sabatino Lopez," ibid., 253, 256. This esthetic as an implement of social critique is used to greater effect in the teatro grottesco.*

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grotesque ruthlessly insinuates itself as a happenstance which ensues, not only embarassing the *borghese* out of his domestic happiness, but also confirming the *verità* that one's happiness is based not so much on another's sacrifice, but on another's defeat.

Oriana, Lopez's first play, is an one-act revenge tragicomedy detailing the transformation of a submissive adulteress into an assertive avenger of decorum and morality, once she becomes conscious that she has lost her lover to another woman. Oriana had left her husband and her children for the sake of Alberto, and although a change in the latter's behavior has alerted her to the imminent end of the affair, she does not want to believe in the impossibility of this relationship. When Alberto announces to her that he has been engaged to another woman, Berta, Oriana reacts swiftly by summoning Berta and confessing to her the treachery of Alberto: not his betrayal to Oriana, but his betrayal to the "other woman," Berta, since it has been the latter who ignores the "legitimate" affair. Oriana uses all the rhetoric of the betrayed woman which the romantic drama countless times abused, as if she were a wronged victim of adultery and not an adulteress herself. Methodically, but with real empathy for her rival, she manages to convince Berta that Alberto is untrustworthy and, what's more, a hypocrite. When the latter breaks off the engagement, Oriana does not stay behind, but abandons him too, because justice has been done. It is evident

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that for Lopez the affair of Oriana and Alberto is doomed to failure, not because it is sinful, but because it is loveless, just as her marriage was. It is an affair without the aura of adventure (the escape from *realtà*), but a compromising situation without emotional value. It can only be ironic that Oriana reacts to Alberto's treason more with the attitude of the wronged wife and less as the wife and mother who endured wrong for her lover's love. Oriana is the betrayed traitor, the defeated winner: a winner in the social battle of sexes, but also a loser, because society does not have a place for a woman who has offended her conjugal rights, but who has also defended, and successfully so, her rights as an adulteress. It might be that Alberto and Oriana have shaped their *realtà*, but it is equally true that this *realtà* has shaped them into victims of their own selves.

In Di notte, his second play and his first major success, Lopez departs from the melodramatic clichè of Ferrarian sociology--the husband avenging his honor--but the target of his critique is the absurd mentality of the *borghese* as well as the ludicrous and ultimately mortifying attempt to trust *realtà* as the unmistakable evidence of *verità*. In this rather fast-pacing *dramma*, a husband, sure of his wife's infidelity, kills her on a night after he has seen a man escape from her window. This man could not be other than her lover. But was he? The doubts and the remorse for the hasty act of retribution makes the husband think of commiting suicide,

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rather than turning himself in to the authorities. The lover, who has witnessed the murder scene, has not the courage to assume his responsibilities and thus spare his rival the qualms of contemplating his suicide. If he reveals his identity, he will then compromise the honor of the dead woman in the eyes of her daughter; if he does not speak, he will be responsible of his rival's wrongful humilation and punishment. If he does speak he will probably save the husband, but he will also bring about his own death. Once the daughter finds the truth from her mother's lover, she makes the lover meet with her father and that's where the play ends: at the beginning of the crisis. Will there be a duel? Will there be an arrangment to keep people from talking? Will ridicule be avoided? Is this meeting compromising? Is the husband as much of a victim as his wife? Was the husband right in the first place? The answers are for the audience to provide. Probably, as Lopez seems to suggest, arguing about the legitimacy of murder as a means of preserving honor is as irrelevant as the *rispettabilità* of the *borghese* who cannot live either as an avenger or as a victim. Equally irrelevant is the way husband and lover will solve the conflict, since even if the scandal is avoided, they will have to live with one another's knowledge of the *verità*: a *verità* which no appearance, no *maschera*, can ever efface.

In Tutto l'amore (All the Love, 1903), it is the tragic aspect of human life which fascinates Lopez as a *verità*

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mocking people's ambition to give love without the necessity to keep up the appearance of social perfection. The play chronicles the drama of Grazia, who, after some serious health problems due to complications of an arrested pregnancy, is constrained to abstain from physical love, a situation which has put a heavy burden on her marriage. Her compassionate and understanding husband, Emilio, sustains her interest in life, but inevitably the prospect of a sexless relationship strains their conjugal life. Unable to tolerate the illusion of domestic happiness, to live with the fiction of a marriage beyond the yearnings and the desires of youth, Grazia makes the decision to spare herself and her husband the prospect of hypocrisy and promiscuity and gives herself to him, conscious of, but indifferent to the truth that this intimacy will bring about her death: Her sacrifice is not only the ultimate expression of all her love for Emilio, but also the ultimate sacrifice of herself to herself for the sake of her honor and dignity, for the purpose of keeping her marriage, the only *verità* of her life, unspoiled and uncompromised. This play was well liked by critics, although their interpretation focuses on the psychology of Grazia and the heroically redeeming value of her decision. No one has seen her sacrifice not as a triumph of the spirit, but as a compromise to *realtà*, a desperate declaration of defeat to the necessity of keeping this relationship, at least spiritually, "perfect." Lopez's ironic attitude toward the paradox of Grazia's sacrifice might

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get lost under the sentimental, and one may say melodramatic preparation of the "sacrifice" finale. It is, however, more than inviting to suggest that her surrender to love is actually a manifestation of her will to surrender to the illusion that her sacrifice is an act of redemption, an a priori expiation of the tragedy her marriage might have been.

In Bufere (Storms, 1907), which critics consider Lopez's masterpiece, a domestic drama brought to a tragic, but far from cathartic, end shows that there is no emotion, ideal, morality or sacrifice which is not in fact a compromising *verità*, something which, however noble or appealing it might be held to be, can deteriorate to a most extreme perversion: love can turn to lechery, passion to abandon, idealism to phobia, morality to criminality. Lopez probes the veracity of the *borghesia* through the story of a university professor, Antonicu Sanna-Branca, and his wife Sabina, whose exemplary conjugal and social life founders when Antonicu becomes infatuated with an amoral circus equestrian, Cora Parnel. At first, Sabina, who is aware of her husband's attachment to the other woman, keeps silent for all her frustration, hoping that this adventure is a *bufera* (a storm), destined to pass once the passion dies away. Antonicu, suffering from the awareness that Cora is for him a necessity and not a "stormy" adventure, alienates himself even more from his wife and his peers, tolerating his lover's own attachment to her own other lover (and perhaps pander) as well as her sadistic provocations to

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his dignity and self-esteem. Sabina, who in the meantime has left their home in order to let Antonicu cope with his infatuation unimpeded by her presence, returns as soon as Antonicu's passion for Cora has proven detrimental to his spirit. In a final confrontation between Cora and Antonicu, Sabina, who has tried in vain to restore her husband's faith in the possibility of their love, takes a revolver and kills Cora in order to "liberate" him. Melodramatically violent, that final scene may deceive as superficially theatrical and probably at odds with the tastefully understated writing of the previous acts. But it is the rhetoric and not the event which distinguishes this scene as poignantly grotesque. Husband and lover try to outdo one another in melodramatic emphasis, the former pitying himself, the latter asserting her overpowering impact on his life and future. Inevitably Sabrina interferes in the skirmish, but it is self-defence and her hurt ego which impel her to save Antonicu:

ANTONICU Hai un amante: ti scaccio.
CORA [...] Da sei mesi lo sai...Lo sapevi e mi tenevi. Per scacciarmi ora è tardi.
ANTONICU Così, così mi rinfacci la mia vergogna e la tua? Sì, è vero: lo sapevo, e tacevo. A questo mi avevi ridotto tu: a un fantoccio senza volontà e senza dignità. Ero... quello che ero e son ridotto a questa miseria. Ho avuto fin la tentazione di ucciderti e mi è caduta l'arma di mano. Ma ora basta, ora è finita. Va' via.
CORA Che eri? Che ho fatto di te? Mi piacevi, e ti ho preso. Niente più. Mi hai aperta la casa e sono entrata. Niente più. Ho vissuto. Niente più. Perchè voglio, ti lascio: ma se voglio sei ancora per me. La fedele, la santa tua moglie—perchè so che tua moglie è qui a Palermo, lo so—tua moglie, se ti riprende, in ogni tuo bacio sentirà ancora sulle tue labbra il sapore delle mie labbra. Ma non mi si dimentica. Io sono l'amante, e sono più forte di lei. Solo che io ti dica una parola e ti riprendo.
ANTONICU ...Tu ti illudi!
[...] Sabina quasi rientra non vista: le mani brancicano la tenda.
CORA Io ci vado

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ANTONICU (la sbara il passo) *Non voglio*
CORA (trionfante) *Lo vedi che mi ami! Io resto!*
SABINA (si slancia alla scrivania, afferra il bisturi, si getta gridando su Cora e la colpisce) *Ah! donnaccia!* (Cora vacilla e cade).
ANTONICU (urlando) *Sabina! Sabina!*
SABINA (smarrita, convulsa) *Per te... Per liberarti... per te* (dà in uno scoppio di pianto).[26]

Potentially sensational situations such as adultery and erotic crime are here treated with a mixture of irony and compassion, as Lopez is more concerned with exposing the futility of human condition and less with the impass of a particular bourgeois marriage. In fact what surprises as a daring for its time statement is that every courageous, even self-sacrificing exploit one undertakes, professedly for the benefit of one's closest kin, is actually a self-serving venture undertaken out of deference to one's own sense of dignity and even interest. Although Sabina claims to have killed Cora so that Antonicu

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[26] *I cite from the text published in Nuova antologia 137 (October 1908), 430: ANTONICU You have a lover; I am breaking up with you./CORA It has been six months that you've known that. You knew it and you kept me. It is too late now to throw me out./ANTONICU That's how you mortify me, by reminding me of my shamelessness and yours? Well, it's true. I knew it and I kept silent. That's how low you have reduced me: to a marionette without will and without dignity. I was...what I was and I have been reduced to this misery. I even wanted to kill you but the weapon fell from my hand. But enough is enough. Now, it's over. Go away./CORA You were what? What have I done with you? I liked you, and I took you. That's all. You opened your house to me and I entered. That's all. I lived well. That's all. I leave you because I want to; but if I want, you will still remain with me. Your faithful, saintly wife—because I know that your wife is here in Palermo, I know it—your wife, if she takes you back, she will feel the savor of my lips in every kiss of yours. But I should not keep forgetting. I am the lover, and I am stronger than she. It is enough to say one word to you and you are mine again./ANTONICU Wishful thinking! [...] (Sabina enters unseen...); CORA I am going./ANTONICU (he blocks her way) I don't wish it! CORA (triumphant) You see how you love me! I'm staying! SABINA (goes quickly to the table, grabs a pen-knife, and screaming falls on Cora and hits her) You dirty woman! (Cora teeters and falls)/ANTONICU screaming Sabina Sabina/SABINA For you...For your freedom...for you (she bursts into tears).*

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can be free again, it is her own sense of loss --her loss of Antonicu's love--her unwillingness to accept Antonicu's ownership by another woman that motivates her to crime. The murder she commits is a sacrifice like that of Grazia in Tutto l'amore. She kills just as Grazia kills herself literally with love, so that she can maintain the illusion of a relationship which has the capacity to resist emotional and spiritual sclerosis. It is a hope, not a certainty that animates Sabina, a hope which she cannot realize, because Antonicu, as Lopez seems to suggest, will never find the *volontà* to forget Cora or the dignity to acknowledge Savina's crime as the means of his own liberation.[27] Admitting himself to be a *fantoccio*, a marionette, Antonicu (that is, Lopez) verifies what several of the belle-epoque's *borghesi* have felt as a sign of their time: the impossibility of being free. Modernity is not an era inspiring self-negating initiatives in people. It can only disprove their illusions of greatness and selflessness. It can only prove their social and moral affectation, a *crisi* which they are not willing to amend.

That keeping up an illusion is a *verità*, a necessity for the spiritual survival of the modern individual, is also the topic in Il viluppo (The Tangle, 1913). The play evolves around two couples, Gianfranco and Sandra, Maddalena (Gianfranco's little sister) and Leo. When Sandra and Leo

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[27] *Cf. Cesare Levi, ibid., 257.*

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become lovers, neither her husband nor his wife fail to suspect it, although out of deference for each other's emotions, they pretend ignorance to one another. Being deceived by their spouses, they also deceive one another, believing that pretending to ignore the crisis of their lives is more comfortable than *realtà*. Sandra becomes pregnant, but during childbirth, she dies. Her son, however, survives. It is only hers, because the child has no "father:" Gianfranco does not want to keep the child as his own, because, as he sincerely admits, he cannot love a child which might not be truly his own. Maddalena, however, offers to adopt the child, not because she only feels affection for an unfortunate "fatherless" infant, but because the child might be Leo's, her husband's, whom she does not want to estrange with her own incapacity to have children. Thus for her rival's baby she will be the surrogate mother and for her husband the surrogate lover. This baby is their tangle, although it belongs neither to her nor to him.

The *paradossalità*, the discomfitting eccentricity of *realtà*, always confuting the social taboos of the *borghesia* and always discrediting its morality, crests as a manifestation of the *grottesco* in Lopez's pleasingly unpleasant comedies. These *commedie* share a rather unappealing picture of modern society not only as a system divided into distinct classes with distinct conventions, but also as a system in which each and every class stereotypes the other as

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a caricature of its own proper image: While, for example, the *piccolo-borghese mantenuta* (kept woman) contrives a life-style emulating, legitimizing and at the same time ridiculing that of her role model, the society-smart, slick but respectable socialite, the latter is no more moral or classier than the former. Twisting the egalitarian social vision of Giacometti and satirically expanding on the indignant *problematica* of Rovetta, Lopez presents a modern society feeling unperturbed and comfortable with this harmonious coexistence of class hypocrisies, orthodox morality and *rispettabilità*. As has been mentioned earlier, the desideratum in this senseless bourgeois *realtà* is not respect but respectability, not love but acceptance.

Ninetta (1895), Lopez's first comedy, establishes not only this parodic *problematica* of the society-paradox, but also the pattern for his more mature creations, such as La morale che corre (The prevailing mores, 1904) and his masterpiece La buona figliola.[28] The stereotype of the fallen woman with the golden heart is here fleshed out as a pragmatist raisonneur who does not inveigh against the ways of the world, but reflects, rather dispassionately, on a *realtà* which authorizes people to create a fiction out of their life, to believe in this fiction and try to make others believe it is a *realtà* as well. Ninetta is the selfless *mantenuta* of

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[28] *Cf. Levi, ibid., 259*

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Conte Marcello D'Arcole with whom she has a daughter, hoping that one day the existence of this bond will precipitate their marriage and therefore her social enfranchisement. The Conte, however, who entertains serious political ambitions, is not willing to sacrifice a seat in the Parliament for the sake of Ninetta's love and, in order to boost his social prestige, he negotiates a profitable marriage with a rich socialite, terminating, thus, his liaison with Ninetta. The arrangement is to provide Ninetta with financial security and their daughter with a stable, "moral" home. Ninetta refuses to have her life financed by his money, but she agrees to leave her daughter behind and let her grow up in a "respectable" environment. Her sacrifice, that is, her compromise, does not so much upset her as it attests to her conviction that her moral immorality is preferable to the immoral morality of the *borghese*. Her argument is indeed an apology for her moral *realtà*:

> *NINETTA Che cosa? I tuoi quattromila franchi ogni anno? La pensione che si dà ai servitori dopo tanti anni di onorato servizio...No... perchè ti volevo lasciare un'inquietudine, un rimorso ... più in basso ero io, e più grande sarebbe apparso il tuo torto. Soffrire, ma farti soffrire.- E non li ho voluti nemmeno quei soldi, perchè mi pareva una cosa immorale prenderli... Già, immorale: perchè noi donne, che non possiamo avere la morale delle altre, ce ne fabbrichiamo una per noi, col nostro cervello, con i nostri sensi... E' la nostra onestà nell'infamia.*[29]

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[29] *NINETTA What? Four hundred francs of yours per year? The pension given to servants after years of loyal service... No... because I want to leave you with some uneasiness, some remorse... the lower I would get, the greater your error will appear. Yes I will suffer, but I must make you suffer, too.- And I would never want this money, because taking it would seem immoral to me... Immoral, all right: because women like us, who cannot have the morals of those*

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D'Arcole's marriage and ambitions are seriously compromised when his wife is found to be cheating him. Returning to Ninetta, who in the meantime has been involved with another man, a friend of D'Arcole also betrayed by his wife, he finds her getting prepared to depart to India, hopeful of starting a new life there. The play ends with a promise of reconciliation between D'Arcole and Ninetta, but this prospect is envisioned not within Italian society, but outside the national boundaries of *italianità*.

It is obvious from the plot summary that sentimentality plays an important role in Lopez's demonstration of the characters' (and especially Ninetta's) psychology. Yet, this sentimentality, far from tempering the irony of his social criticism, intensifies the impact of the satire, precisely because it exaggerates the emotional conflicts caused by the application of social standards. Sentimentality, to be exact, is employed as a form of social criticism, a sort of criticism which targets the mentality and not the emotions of the *borghese*. It aims both at the character as a representation of the real *borghese* and the *borghese* spectator as a social character. In the theatre of Dario Niccodemi sentimentality would actually be viewed and dramatized as a way of life, a manner of thinking and behaving, while in the theatre of the

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other women, invent them by our own intuition, by our own senses... It is our honesty in our infamy. Ninetta, act I, cited in Personè, 202.

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grotteschi it would be parodied as such. In Lopez's tragicomedy, however, sentimentality is a fixture of the comedy, and as such it has survived in Italian drama, especially in the social (and militant) comedy of Dario Fo.

How this sentimentality operates as an aspect of *realtà*, but also as a means of criticism pertinent to tragicomedy is characteristically evident in another comedy, La morale che corre, another variation on Rovetta's themes, the defeated winner and the victimized victimizer. The social outcast here is Giuditta, a servant in the house of a signor Giugiù Vargas, a rather libertine *borghese* who does not suffer from a crisis of conscience knowing that he is maintained by the woman he thinks he maintains. Giuditta, who has lost her honor by another servant, is thrown out of the house, pregnant and penniless, when her master's *mantenuta* requires her dismissal. After a suicide attempt, Giuditta aborts the child and becomes a *"mantenuta"* herself. Although for the *borghesia* her new social situation is a proof of her moral decadence, for Giuditta it is a conscious choice, an act of self-assertion. Like Rovetta's Dorina, she feels that as a fallen woman she is more valued and respected by the *borghesia*; she understands that men are attracted to unchastity more than they care to admit, but this she takes to be evidence of a social mentality and not a symptom of character depravity. She realizes this *realtà*, when Vargas, her former master, falls in love with her finding that as a cocotte she is more respectable, because she

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has no respect for the social demand for respect. As her new lover, totally dependent on her affections, Vargas has to suffer humiliation and disrespect from the woman he did not respect and humiliated. Sentimentality is used as a rhetoric of social critique:

> *GIUDITTA Ma ero una camariera, dunque per lei ero meno di una donna, eppure ero una donna, per me e per gli altri! Per il cameriere del signor Vargas, lei mi mando via di casa. Per cinquanta li re al mese che mi dava voleva comandarmi l'onestà: ora ne pagherebbe mille... o due milla per il contrario. Ma già allora ero come di un'altra razza per lei: perchè siamo degne di star con voi, con i signori come voi, nel vostro letto, noi poverette bisogna che siamo passate per altre mani. Quando ci siamo ben bene insudiciate tra lenzuola povere e sporche, allora si acquista valore e ci si può avvoltolare nelle vostre belle pulite.*[30]

This kind of rhetoric may echo the vituperations of Giacometti and Ciconi against the structure and culture of their time's aristocracy, but for Lopez it does not precipitate a change of attitudes or a change of heart on the part of those criticised or deplored. Giuditta does not become the lover of Giugiù, but she will use herself as the nemesis of the class he represents. The happy ending, her triumph, is not happy in the conventional meaning of the word. It is, to use Mario Verdone's term, a *tragigrottesco*.

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[30] *GIUDITTA: But I was a servant, therefore for her [Verga's lover] I was less than a woman, and yet I was a woman for me and for the others! Because of signor Varga's steward, she threw me out in the streets. For fifty lire per month, he wanted to control my honesty: now for my dishonor he would pay a thousand lire or even two thousand. But then for her I was of a lesser race: In order to be worthy of staying with you, with the men of your status, in your bed, we poor things have to go through many hands. When we defile ourselves under poor and dirty sheets, then we gain in value and we can get into your nice and clean beds. Act III, cited in Personè, ibid., 198-9.*

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The *grottesco* insinuates itself as a formula of social critique in La buona figliola, a social comedy balancing analytical sociology and parody.[31] It is a play of unmasking, a play which exposes the "face" of the *borghesia*, but the critique here is not concerned so much with its bogus morality as with its debilitating attachment to *denaro* (money). Lopez's characters, argues Pullini,

> *svelano spesso la coscienza di quello che sono e la necessità della loro corruzione; non si vantano per il male che fanno, ma per l'arte faticosa con cui hanno imparato a farlo, obbedendo alla violenza di un destino infelice...La religione del denaro svela il suo arcano, e pare per un momento sciogliere i personaggi dall'immobilità dell'accettazione, per renderli per lo meno avvertiti di quanto sono e fanno.*[32]

The awareness of the contradictions which define the culture and the life of the *borghesia* does not actually mean that the *borghesi* admit these contradictions as true or that they try to curb them. In fact, the *grottesco* in La buona figliola is manifested exactly through the depiction of this class as incapable of improvement or moral conduct, as incapable of rising above the contemporary social circumstances: a class which reinvents hypocrisy.

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[31] *Giorgio Pullini, Teatro italiano fra due secoli, op. cit., 228. I cite from the second edition of the play (Milano: Treves, 1909).*

[32] *"The characters often acknowledge their awareness of what they are and the necessity of their corruption; they don't take pride in the harm they do, but in the wearisome way with which they have learnt to do it, giving in to the violence of an unhappy fate...The cult of money reveals its own mysteries and for a moment it appears to release the characters from the immobility of acceptance in order to make them dimly realize what they are and what they are doing." Ibid.*

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Cesarina is the kept woman of Pippo Spontini, an elderly deputy, whom she does not love. Her father, Raffaelle, a provincial *piccolo-borghese*, condones his daughter's social conduct, because the family, he and his youngest daughter Giulia, needs Cesarina's financial support. The latter has inherited from a dead lover a considerable amount of money and she hopes to use this for her own social advancement. These plans are, however, frustrated by Giulia. When tired of provincial life, she comes to Rome and moves in with Cesarina. In Rome Giulia falls in love with Enzo, an assistant of Spontini, but in order to prevent her sister's loss of reputation, Cesarina finances Giulia's marriage with her own savings, curbing thus with her money the objections of Enzo's parents who have taken exception to Cesarina's ill repute. Expecting their disaproval, Cesarina has thought out a hilarious stratagem. When she meets the father of Enzo, apparently in order to agree on the marriage of their son with Giulia, she shocks him by her assertion that she would never throw away the money of Giulia's dowry on the *primo che capita* (on a "nobody"). It is only a matter of minutes before the parents change their mind about Cesarina and acquiesce to Enzo's marriage. For Cesarina this has been the greatest of sacrifices, because not only will she have to give away her money, but she will also have to procure more for Giulia by selling herself to a repulsive banker who persistently wooes her. The play ends with Cesarina sadly confessing that her

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sacrifice is actually an act of divesting herself, of letting herself be appropriated by the social power of money.[33]

Once again Lopez does not care to amend the ways of the *borghesia*, or to rehabilitate Cesarina in this tragicomic society. This *realtà* is deemed falser than the demi-monde of Cesarina, which at least has the decency, or better the cynicism not to fight the system, but uses the system as cruelly as it is using her. Cesarina stays outside this grotesque system, but instead of sentimentalizing her difference to or her exclusion from it, she considers this difference a social necessity and as such a natural aspect of this society: In order for her sister to be moral, she has to be immoral; in order for her father to live honestly, she has to be "maintained;" in order for Enzo's family to seem (not to be) respectable, she has to connive and buy her sister's entrance to *benestante* (well-off, well-regarded) society. Certainly, Cesarina is not happy about the compromises she has to tolerate, but the end--the happiness of others--justifies the means, her own unhappiness. As a pragmatist she has no time to think about emotions, opinions, morality or immorality. She has only to think of her survival, because it

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[33]*Cesarina is in fact using the verb "spogliare" which means not only to undress but also to deprive oneself from everything one owns or cherishes as well as to lose identity. The idea of "spogliare" as a subtler metaphor for exposure to the cruelty of life is recurrent in the theatre of the grotteschi, but especially in Pirandello who is fascinated by the multiple connotations of "nudity" as a symbol of the loss of identity, the loss of the self (see, for example, his play Vestire gl'ignudi [Naked], 1922).*

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is on this survival, which, as we said, is her own sacrifice, that the survival of others depends. Lopez is satirically provocative with his mercantilistic theorization on the bourgeois experience. Indeed, the most eccentric, most unsettling of his views are demonstrated by the character of Ferante, the banker who assiduously courts Cesarina, not because he loves her, but because he knows that she knows it is perfectly alright and legitimate to run after something you can't have, but which you can possess.

It is in fact with this character, a caricature of Torelli's Fabio Regoli or Giacosa's Cesare Nalli, that Lopez touches on the *grottesco* as a sociological *problematica*. Ferante is a very ugly man who has made his ugliness the least problematic of his attributes, since his wealth can attract the attention of people more than his physical appearance. He is conscious of his physical deformity, as he is conscious of his incapacity to inspire love. He can purchase love, however, which means not that he buys sexual favors, but that he follows the way of the world, since love is more of a comodity and less of a natural need, as Lopez has amply shown through the case of Giulia's marriage. Ferante is no less agreeable than the rest of the more graceful *borghesi*, his *verità* is not that different from the *verità* of his more pretentious peers. Besides, as Lopez seems to suggest, his ugliness, his grotesqueness is not all that different from the moral ugliness of the *borghese* who sells his principles for a dowry

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amassed with methods he has abhorred:[34]

> *FERANTE [to Cesarina]: Se vi dicessi:-Il giorno che vi innamorate di me, Via del Tritone 145—avreste il diritto di offendervi. Ma io non vi parlo d'amore...Eh! Porto gli occhiali per veder bene voi; ho a casa, in tutte le stanze, almeno uno specchio per veder bene me...Invece io un capriccio per voi [...] E allora perchè non m'illudo, sono uomo da cifre. Volete fissare una cifra? L'accetto senz'altro [...] Io alla bruttezza devo la fortuna. Se fossi stato un bel ragazzo, quand'ero ragazzo, ...avrei perso tempo insomma. Invece mi sono chiuso prima nel mio studio, poi nella mia banca. Io avevo da nascondere la mia bruttezza... e l'ho nascosta nel lavoro. Verso i quarant'anni ho preso coraggio e l'ho messa alla luce del sole: avevo molti, molti denari per farla passare. Ora... passa.*[35]

Ferante's justifications of his more preferable, pragmatic morality depend on certain key words--*specchio* (mirror, double), *occhiali* (glasses, lenses), *nascondere* (hide), *illusione*--words soon to enter the vocabulary of the *grottesco*. The usage of these key words as an imagery allusive

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[34] *Lopez returned to the issue of ugliness in another tragicomedy, Il brutto e le belle (1913), in which Ferante is actually the protagonist. That tragicomedy, however, does not consider the economic controversies of realtà, but speaks about desire and the tragicomic illusions the desire to love and be loved inspires in the individual. Cf. Levi, ibid., 262ff.*

[35] *FERANTE: If I said to you: The day you will love me, Via del Tritone 145-you would have the right to feel offended, But I don't speak of love...Eh! I have glasses only to see you well; at home, every room has a mirrror so that I can see myself well...On the contrary you are a caprice for me [...] Besides, I don't have any illusions, I am a man who likes to make deals. Would you like to agree on a sum? I will accept it without reservations [...] I owe my fortune to my ugliness. If I had been a handsome young man, when I was young, I would have lost time. Instead, I secluded myself first in my study and then in my bank. I had to hide my ugliness...and I have hidden it in my work. When I became forty I found the courage and showed it to the world. I had so much money that I could make it tolerable. Now, it is tolerated." Act II, sc. 3, op. cit., 70, 71, 72.*

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to the grotesque makeup of modernity manifests not only an attempt to improve on *verismo*'s capacity to detect the face (*verità*) under the presumptions of *realtà*, but also an attempt on the part of the playwright to move his drama toward a more allegorical, more poignant representation of this *verità*.

La nostra pelle (1912), a play inspired by an actual event, stands out as a most unsettling venture toward this kind of dramaturgy. Elsa Peroni is an elementary school teacher with a tremendous sense of duty and an admirable commitment to the humanistic function of education. Her humanity is tested and proved, when she donates part of her skin for the surgery of one of her pupils who has suffered serious burns. This act of selflessness, however, becomes a burden on her life, as society begins to take her for granted and exploit her kindness even at the expense of her own happiness and honor. Her husband, Edoardo, who is also the major of the village, has married her first in order to take advantage of her celebrity and second in order to have a nurse for his ailing and cross mother. There is no love in the marriage of Elsa, constantly humiliated by the wantoness, extravagance and indifference of her husband. When outstanding debts have to be paid, Edoardo makes Elsa ask for money from her mother-in-law as if the debts were her own. Nor is that woman better than her son. Insults and reproaches make up her customary behavior towards the ever obliging Elsa. The community which applauded her does not miss a chance to

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badmouth her. Even the father of the child she saved, an unscrupulous drunkard, compromises her social integrity by extorting money from her, deftly abusing her good will and morality. Lopez contrasts her miserable life with that of Umberto Fioravanti, a cousin of her husband. A rather benevolent man, Umberto, who has been acquited for a murder he commited while he was defending himself, is the new celebrity of the town, idolized and respected by the whole of the community. And this is the grotesque paradox of human life: Elsa has saved a life and in exchange she is constantly abused, while Umberto (who has fallen in love with her) is honored only because he has taken a life. Overwhelmed by social injustice, Elsa rebels against her life, only to find herself unable to assert her freedom, her lost sense of honor. When Umberto asks her to abandon the family and the community that did not respect her, running away with him, Elsa cannot find inside her the courage to evade her consciousness, her sense of duty and her social *realtà*, and thus she does not follow him. As her husband mockingly observes, her virtue is her bondage:

> *EDOARDO Come si è legati al peccato, si è legati alla virtù: anche la virtù, la tua virtù è una palla di piombo. Tu resterai virtuosa perchè devi rimanere virtuosa, perchè il tuo è un debito assunto verso la gente, che non ha nè bontà nè generosità - d'accordo- ma appunto per questo da te lo pretende, perchène hai dato l'esempio. Come hai principiato, tu devi finire: donna semplice nella tua casa. [...] Se qualche altra...abandonasse il marito chi se ne stupirebbe? Qualche risata, qualche commento e tutto sarebbefinito lì....Ma tu no...Tu hai come contratto un impegno...la tua parte nel mondo te la sei scelta e non la puoi mutare: dimenticare, concedere, essere generosa e paziente. Fino in fondo. Non puoi fare altro." (Act*

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III).[36]

Social criticism and the satirical accentuation of *amara realtà* --a reality disproving idealism and goodness, that is a reality abusing those who insist on an unrealistic, unpragmatic unconformist perception of modern life--are rather subordinate pursuits, since the basic allegorical concept of the play, the utility of humanity and selflessness, the value of "our skin," insinuates itself as an extension of a wider tragicomic issue: The discomfiture of the idealist in the effort to dignify the meaning of life. In this play life is not so much explored as a living experience (*realtà*), but as a superior humanistic phenomenon (*verità*) which the living experience distorts, trivializes and ultimately counterfeits as the "way of the world." In previous chapters we have seen that Rovetta and especially E.A. Butti had tackled the frustration of idealism and *verità* by modernity, yet their

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[36] *EDOARDO: One is chained to virtue just as one is chained to sin. Because virtue too, your virtue is your iron shackle. You will remain virtuous, because you must remain virtuous, because it is your responsibility to the people. It's true, they may have no kindness or generosity, but exactly for this reason, they demand them from you, because you have set the example. You must finish as you begun: a simple woman in your house. [...] If another woman had left her husband, who would have been surprised? A snicker here, a some small talk there and that would have been all... But you can't. Your duty is a like a contract... you yourself have chosen your role in the world, and you cannot change it: be forgiving, conceding, generous and patient. Until the end. You cannot do otherwise."*

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conclusions suggested a vision of a self-defeating society. On the contrary, Lopez deflates idealism as a grotesque social mentality. He mocks modernity, not because it defeats the worthiest of people, the Elsas of every society, but because it entangles them in situations where they are forced to violate their principles, to be dishonest with themselves, to suffer: and all that as a concession to a society which will perceive these self-abuses as manifestations of virtue.[37] Elsa is made dishonest, because she cannot leave the husband she does not respect, she cannot depart from the ungracious community that marginalizes her, and she cannot protect her humanity from those who have benefited from her virtue. Staying behind, however, is not at all a virtuous resolution. It only appears as such, for there will be no truth in her future life, because her "virtue" is a punishment imposed on her by others, but also a self-punishment, since it has deprived her of the freedom to be herself, to be true. Elsa has become a grotesque variation of the good individual. She will have to be a hypocrite, a dissembler and false for the very same reasons she will be always abused as sincere, dutiful and true. In a manner similar to that of the *grotteschi*, Lopez has seen Elsa not as a person, but as a

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[37] *Personè argues that the treatment of virtue as a paradox, a "trovata di vita e di forma" (a claptrap of life and form), anticipates Pirandello. I would say that Pirandello rationalized and systematized ideas already existing within Italian culture, ideas which Lopez, as a "popular" playwright, had managed to distill in his dramaturgy. Cf. op. cit., 203.*

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persona, a puppet attached to the strings of society, without personality and freedom, a fiction the people need to believe in and exploit.

In the inter-war years and until the end of his playwriting career, Sabatino Lopez did not depart from the tragicomic esthetic. For several critics, Lopez did not remain uninfluenced by the experiments of Pirandello and thus a kind of adulterated *pirandellismo* was detected in all his later works. His peculiar *verismo*, however, was never acknowledged as an original contribution to Italian drama, partly because tragicomedy was never fully legitimized by Italian scholars as a trenchant genre for *verismo* and partly because, as we have already noted, his commercial appeal was not perceived as a proof of quality drama. The *borghesia* as an audience seemed to interest the critics only as a public without esthetic values and not as one which could appreciate a subtler drama analyzing its collective psyche. Lopez and his *verismo* have not stood the test of time, exactly because he was never given a chance by modern theatre professionals who were willing enough to evolve *ab ovo* a dramaturgy faithful to the (internationally acclaimed) tradition of Pirandello, but not to the tradition that Pirandello himself had appropriated for his experiment with *verità*. Five years after his death, the Italian state honored Lopez by giving his name (Lopez) to a newly founded village. It is a gesture of gratitude which today strikes one as rather ironic, since Sabatino Lopez has

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yet to find a place in the canon of modern Italian drama.[38]

DARIO NICCODEMI

In the evolution of *verismo* to a tragicomic dramaturgy/*problematica*, the drama of Dario Niccodemi (Livorno 1874-Rome 1934), is a drama of transition. Immensely popular and multifarious, Niccodemi virtually dominated the theatre of the evanescent *Belle-èpoque* and fascinated audiences exactly at the time when it was fashionable (not to say compulsory) for the most assertive and polemical of critics to decry the *dramma borghese* as the cultural anachronism it was incumbent on them to eradicate.[39] To make a convincing case about the relevance of Niccodemi in the history of modern Italian drama is hardly an easy endeavor, especially when, notwithstanding his phenomenal popularity and his international appeal during the inter-war years, Italians have neglected him as a quaint footnote in the history of their theatre. As for his plays, they have rested unstudied, unstaged and out of print for decades, dismissed as clichéd curiosities of a dying world with no actual relevance to the dramaturgical experiments of the time, artifacts simulating French originals or

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[38] *For a complete list of Lopez's plays see Appendix I.*

[39] *Characteristic are the reviews of Antonio Gramsci and Silvio D'Amico. Their dismissive attitude reflects more or less the negativity which surrounded Niccodemi as a playwright and to a large extent as a theatre manager and director.*

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popularizing modern sensibilities.[40] But his obscurity, too, as a theatre manager and director, is a serious scholarly liability. Although today Niccodemi is only mentioned as the man responsible for the staging of Pirandello's Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore[41] and Ciascuno a suo modo, the fact is that he exerted a decisive influence on the theatrical environment of his time.[42] He was a pivotal force in the reorientation of Italian theatre toward an esthetic and a *problematica* disassociated from the concern with *italianità* as well as in the reinvention of *verismo* as a cosmopolitan,

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[40] *Silvio D'Amico concludes: "Dario Niccodemi, who might be defined as the Italian Bernstein, [...] is one of the few authors of our modern age who remained consistently under a marked French influence. [...] Complex and involved in his construction, but skillful in his grand coups de théâtre, and clever in the brilliant artificiality of his dialogue, Niccodemi also, like Bernstein before him, appears as a comedy writer of a plutocratic society, of savage and cruel people, who pursue one another from salons to alcoves, gasping with jealous desire, and following a perpetual round of pleasure, of sex, of gold, of unsatisfied vanity. For this reason his own triumph with the crowd coincided with the period of the nouveaux riches and of inflation." "The Italian Theatre After the War," The Theatre in a Changing Europe, op. cit., 255. Lander MacClintock, summarizing Italian scholars, also concludes: "Niccodemi was an old-fashioned dramatic writer in the French tradition of Scribe, Sardou, and Bernstein; he wrote his plays and conceived his plots in terms of "dramatic situations," [...] no profound thinker, no great psychologist, he makes the most of the material and writes good theatre." The Age of Pirandello, op. cit., 63. Cf. Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e vita nazionale (Milano: Mondatori, 1955).*

[41] *That production, a veritable succés de scandale, has become one of the cornerstones of modern Italian theatre. Niccodemi described his collaboration with Niccodemi in his memoirs Tempo passato (Milan: Treves, 1929). Excerpts from that book have been translated and published in Susan Bassnett and Jennifer Lorch, eds. Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre: A Documentary Record (Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 59-61.*

[42] *Italian critics used the sobriquet "mago" (magician) when refering to Niccodemi and his productions, used both approvingly and (mainly) pejoratively. Cf. for example, Guido davico Bonino, Gramsci e il teatro (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), 45ff.*

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eclectic dramaturgy amenable both to the grotesque tendencies of the modern artistic temper and the psychological preoccupations of *crepuscolarismo* and *intimismo*.[43]

Indeed, the most important contribution of Niccodemi was his commitment to change Italian theatre and drama from within, that is through the refinement or the amalgamation of ideas, techniques and esthetics which the earlier Italian realists and *veristi* had sought to master, but with no effort on their part to integrate and implement: the esthetic of *sensibilità* and *simplicità*, the tragicomic formula of the Gozzian *fiaba*, the tragic *umorismo* of Goldonian comedy, the *intimismo* of Giacosa and Bracco. Foreign sensibilities germane to symbolism and expressionism as well as to the French naturalistic drama of the boulevards were not bowdlerized or superficially italianized, as most Italian critics believe. Niccodemi exploited these esthetics as complements of *verismo*, as other "*verismi*," which could sustain the modernity of the *commedia borghese* as an independent and idiosyncratic, "Niccodemian," esthetic: not a dramaturgy of *poesia*, but a dramaturgy harmonizing theatricality with social consciousness, irony with melodrama, show-business attitude

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[43]*As a manager and dramaturg of his company Niccodemi tried to balance verismo and the new generation of the grotteschi. Among others, he produced plays by Rosso di San Secondo, Chiarelli, Fausto Maria Martini, and Gino Rocca. Foreign authors who attracted his attentions were Shaw, Maugham and Achard.*

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with objectivity.[44] The playwright who took himself seriously as an artist and a craftsman--he did not think of himself as a poet[45]--was never apologetic about the *problematica* or the virtues of the *dramma borghese*. In fact the validity of this theatre, or the cultural virtues of its audience was never an issue for him, he never condescended to it, nor did he aim at pandering to its ostensible low taste. On the contrary, Niccodemi thought that his popularity was a superb instrument for the esthetic instruction of modern audiences, because he actually believed that a drama of modern *verità* was in need of thinking patrons. Niccodemi distrusted manifestos and avant-garde revolutions. He preferred to mold the perfect audience not by aggravating it, but by introducing it to a theatre which revealed modernity to be unsettling, ambiguous and unpredictable, yet not estheticized as a *problematica* intelligible only to the initiated.[46] Niccodemi

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[44] *Renato Simoni, for example, who was rather positive about Niccodemi, did not think of him as a verista playwright, because of his idiosyncratic esthetic, his tragicomic, theatrical verismo struck him as a departure from the verismo of Giacosa and Praga. Cf. Renato Simoni, "Dario Niccodemi," Dramma 281 (February 1960), [2].*

[45] *For a self-criticism of Niccodemi see his letter to Roberto Bracco cited in Giovanelli, Paola Daniela and Guido Lopez, eds., Uno scandalo teatrale sullo sfondo di Caporetto [Prete Pero di Dario Niccodemi] (Milano: Libri Scheiwiller, 1995), 34-5. In this letter Niccodemi calls himself a "scrittore," a craftsman of writing as opposed to artist.*

[46] *In an interview to Giuliano Donati-Petténi, Niccodemi had remarked: "Si grida molto contro i nuovi ricchi, ma se la maggioranza delle persone che vengono al teatro è composta di questi, bisogna dire che ciò ha per noi un grande vantaggio dal momento che ci troviamo davanti a un pubblico meno scaltrito, meno imbevutto di priconcetti, di teorie, di pregiudici, più ingenuo insomma." [The*

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was not another version of Giacometti. His precursors are Gozzi and Ciconi, because his theatre was about masks and realities, about the *verità* of (and not behind) perceptions and appearances. His is the dramaturgy of the social appearance, the perfect popular theatre for the age which had begun to be uncertain about the existence of one *verità*.

Cosmopolitanism, which for several critics proved the detachment of Niccodemi's theatre from art and real life, was not an artistic affectation. Rather, it was the defining condition and trait of his entire life and career. Born in Livorno, Niccodemi grew up in Buenos Aires, where his parents moved when he was still very young. His father, Antonio Niccodemi, was a goldsmith, but the economic depression of Italy forced him to emigrate to Argentina. The family would not fare better in the new country and Antonio, bitter about his failures, would commit suicide. Dario, who was his second son, was only ten years old when the family left Italy, but in Buenos Ayres his formal education was scant. After two years of school, he was forced to seek employement in a goldsmith firm, but, notwithstanding the lack of regular studies, he proved himself an active mind and a very practical young man with a penchant for theatricality and adventure and a love for

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newly-rich are much decried, but if the majority of the people who come to the theatre is made up by them, it is necessary to admit that this for us is a great advantage since we appear before an audience less experienced, less imbued with preconceptions, theories and bias, and therefore more pristine]. Colloqui e profili *(Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1925), 195.*

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the performing arts. He had his first encounter with the business of theatre through a relationship with Alessandro Incrocci, a compatriot and ex-Garibaldian, who ran the prestigious theatre Politeama and whose daughter Niccodemi eventually married. Another decisive influence was his association with Don Carlos Pellegrini, a politician and businessman with literary interests, for whose newspaper El país Niccodemi wrote dramatic criticism. Two plays, one in Spanish (La duda (The Doubt, 1900) and one in Italian (Per la vita [For Life]), which he saw produced with encouraging success, convinced him that the theatre was his true vocation.[47] In 1901 he founded and directed the weekly El teatro and before long Niccodemi was a celebrity among the capital's litterati. The catalyst, however, in his life and career was his relationship and collaboration with the great French actress Gabrielle Réjane, whom he met in 1902 during one of her tours in Latin America. At the time the actress was at the peak of her fame and Niccodemi was impressed by her personality and life style. Soon he was to be her secretary and lover and for her sake he returned to Europe.

In Paris Niccodemi begun the second phase of his career. Mastering the French language in a very short time and

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[47] *These two plays have remained unedited and Niccodemi never bothered to publish them during his lifetime. Lucio Ridenti in his Teatro italiano fra due guerre 1915-1940 (Genoa:Dellacasa, 1968), 97ff., suggests that the first play was written first in Italian for a touring Italian actress and then translated into Spanish.*

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introducing himself to Réjane's famous celebrity friends, he forged friendships with Henri Bernstein, Victorien Sardou, Maurice Maeterlinck and Anatole France, all of whom had an impact on his work and mentality. As the playwright of choice for the company of Réjane, Niccodemi toured throughout Europe and his plays L'Hirondelle (The Swallow, 1908), Suzeraine (1908), Le refuge (The Refuge, 1909), L'aigrette (The Egret, 1912) and Les requins (The sharks, 1912), all major successes for the actress, solidified his reputation not only in France but also in Italy, where his plays, translated and produced by prestigious actor-managers, had created him a considerable following well before his settlement there. With Réjane's retirement in 1915 and Italy's entry in the war, Niccodemi repatriated and settled in Milan. It is from that city that he launched his Italian career as a playwright, theatre manager, director and dramaturg.

From 1915 and until the late twenties Niccodemi was Italy's main and most popular theatrical force.[48] His plays L'ombra (The Shadow, 1915), Scampolo (The Remnant 1915), La nemica (The Enemy, 1916), Il titano (The Titan, 1916), La maestrina (The teacher, 1918), and La volata (The Flight, 1919) became national but also international successes, with Niccodemi usually involved in the foreign productions. The

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[48] *Niccodemi was responsible for the Italian translations of his (French) plays. Ridenti claims that Scampolo was actually the first play to have been written directly in Italian. Ibid., 95.*

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more critics dismissed his work as facile and exploitative, the more audiences seemed to be fascinated with it, and although for a time he seemed able to combine show business and playwriting quite effectively, after 1920 his literary career passed to a second place, when his function as president of the Italian Authors Society and artistic director of the Compagnia Niccodemi monopolized his activity. Niccodemi experienced few failures during his career. He shaped the careers of several young playwrights, he helped Pirandello stage his experimental works, he toured with the modern Italian repertory to Spain, Portugal and Latin America, and he organized frequent conferences on the theatre and the drama.[49] His family life however suffered the severe blow of two of his children dying very young, and emotional exhaustion seemed to take its toll on his health. His career ended abruptly, when a debilitating sleeping sickness, encephalitis lethargica, paralyzed him and precipitated his untimely death in 1934. By 1930 his career was essentially over. He passed the last few years of his life among family in Milan and Livorno. After his death a series of one act plays, written

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[49] *As a theatre director, Niccodemi was esteemed for the elegance and the meticulousness of his productions. As a dramaturg of his own company, however, he was regularly criticized for his repertory choices. Although his contribution to the native drama was not openly contested, he was taken into task for producing trivial imports of the commercial French stage, which audiences liked, but which added nothing to the Italian theatre. Cf. Sergio Tofano, "Regìa italiana di ieri," La regìa teatrale, Silvio D'Amico, ed. (Roma: Angelo Belardetti editore, 1947), 195ff; and Paola Daniela Giovanelli, "Dario Niccodemi," in Renato Barilli and Franco Solmi, eds., Metafisica: Gli anni venti vol.2 (Bologna: n.p., 1980).*

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only for reading, were produced, but several actors continued to include his earlier plays in their repertory. His popularity did not diminish immediately after his death, and especially Scampolo was revived until well into the sixties. His critical reputation however, hit its lowest point by the early fifties and it has remained there ever since. His name is now brought up only as a case in point for what had been wrong with the theatre at the time of Pirandello.[60]

What has been most interesting about the critical fortune of Niccodemi is not certainly the fact that critics and historians have found his plays devoid of artistic merit or his popularity scandalous. Rather, it is their disagreement about what is wrong with his dramaturgy. Although the

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[60] *There are no major critical studies on Niccodemi. He is mentioned in passing in various historiographies, but no analysis of his work exists other than Ruberti's rather disapproving notes in his own history and Gobetti's sparse remarks. There are only two old monographies on the theatre and the early career of Niccodemi: Renzo Bianchi, Dario Niccodemi (Milano: Modernissima, 1924) and Pietro Baratti, Dario Niccodemi. (Livorno: G. Ghappini, 1936). But these books read rather as authorized biographies with little critical value. In 1929 Niccodemi published a book of reminiscences from the world of the theatre under the title Tempo passato (Milan: Treves, 1929). In English there exists a thesis by John Prichard Finelli, "Bernstein and Niccodemi," (Thesis (MS) University of Virginia, 1933), which I have not been able to read. For more information about Niccodemi as a theatre manager, see his correspondence with Sabatino Lopez in Guido Lopez, "Sabatino Lopez-Dario Niccodemi: Epistolario 1916-1925," Dramma 226 (July 1955): 35-48. See also the introduction to Prete Pero, op. cit. Reviews of his plays have survived in various collections compiled by drama critics or their editors. Most of them give extensive plot synopses and brief opinions on the performances. His plays, as we said, have not been edited or collected. They still exist in the old editions by the Fratelli Treves, except Prete Pero which was reissued in 1995, op. cit. An American edition of Scampolo provides some general background on the career of the playwright and bibliographical references, but this edition is hopelessly outdated and often inaccurate. MacClintock's book on the age of Pirandello simply regurgitates the dismissive opinion of Italian critics and his plot descriptions are not reliable.*

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theatricality of his comedies or his ability to create suspensful situations and charismatic characters are undisputed, there has been no consensus about the specifics of his "superficiality," the demerits of his esthetics or the alleged simplifications of his social *problematica*. Guido Ruberti, for example, one of the very few historians to deal, even cursorily, with Niccodemi, has found his plays contrived and exploitative, devoid of true feeling and passion, intriguing and yet emotionally uninvolving. On the contrary, Antonio Gramsci, more ideological and polemical, is offended by their excessively melodramatic technique, the overwhelming coexistence of emotions and sensations, their pseudo-romantic pulp-fiction literariness.[51] Cesare Giulio Viola, himself a *pirandellista*, *intimista* and *verista* of the interwar years with considerable talent, viewed Niccodemi as a unique showman who could sense the interests and the social fantasies of a widening middle-brow audience, a man with a talent for pandering, albeit in a sophisticated manner, to these interests and fantasies with populist but artistically trivial plays. Silvio D'Amico, on the other hand, distinguished Niccodemi as a wasted talent, the reflection of a decadent society and a decadent culture, a playwright for whom eclecticism was an artistic subterfuge for grandiosity: In fact, Niccodemi was a latter day Sardou, an enterprising hack

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[51] *Ruberti, op. cit., 677; Gramsci, op. cit., 255.*

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writer who could expertly blend French boulevard theatre naturalism and ibsenesque *psicologismo*, passing off the "product" as modern drama.[52] Adriano Tilgher and Luigi Personè dignify him only as an emoting actor's author, a keen entertainer with an eye for the sensational theatrical situation, but for Piero Gobbetti, probably Niccodemi's most perceptive and dispassionate critic, the latter is indeed a conscious eclectic, not only the father of the theatre of the *grottesco*, but also the true undertaker (*dissolutore*) of "old drama:" a subversive critic of modernity, who treated his contemporaries and their pretensions with irony and parody he expertly camouflaged as "rancid sentimentality."[53] Evidently, the problem with Niccodemi has not been his artistry, but his art: an art perceived as a distortion (sentimentalization) of *realtà* (social, ideological, emotional) and therefore deplete of *verità*.[54]

Opinions and assumptions such as the above underestimate and obscure the determination of Niccodemi, expressed in various occasions during his life, to create a drama which would free the Italian theatre from foreign influences and

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[52] *Cesare Giulio Viola, "In morte di Dario Niccodemi," Scenario 3 (October 1934), 538-9; Silvio D'Amico, "Dario Niccodemi e la critica," La vita del teatro, op. cit., 384;*

[53] *Adriano Tilgher, Il problema centrale. Cronache teatrali 1914-1926 (Genova: Edizioni del teatro stabile di Genova, 1972), 100ff; Piero Gobetti, Scritti di critica teatrale, op. cit., 681-2.*

[54] *Personè, ibid., 308.*

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trends, but which would also provide models for its evolution as a denationalized, therefore, universalized cultural medium.[55] Niccodemi sought to practice an idiosyncratic sort of *verismo*. Like Verga, he thought of his dramaturgy as an evolving cycle of independent but also interconnected illustrations of modern humanity.[56] His naturalism focused exclusively on the *problematica* of the *borghesia*, not as a class existing within a system but as an autonomous a-political *realtà*. The theatre of Niccodemi was not a bourgeois theatre, but a theatre about the "theatre" of the *borghesia*, a human (not social) experience perceived and reproduced as existentially tragicomic: a class-spectacle, a culture of appearances, illusions and desires, incomprehensible even to its most acute members. His dramaturgical intent was not of course to disengage his plays from the realities that intrigued the modern Italians and which more critically acclaimed *veristi* had ventured to detail. Rather, he sought to distance his *problematica* from a realistic drama for the sake of a drama on (and of) reality: a universal reality which simply happened to be Italian as well.[57]

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[55] *Cf. Camillo Antona Traversi, La verità sul teatro italiano dell'ottocento, op. cit., 182-3.*

[56] *Cf. his interview in Arturo Lanocita, Scrittori del tempo nostro: interviste, op. cit., 197.*

[57] *It is true that some of the plays Niccodemi wrote around and after the end of World War I, such as Il titano, La maestrina and Prete Pero, have a distinct national and for some critics nationalistic tone. In these cases, however, italianità is part of the milieu, a sort of "stage direction" and not*

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Niccodemi does not distort *realtà*. His drama is not even about a distorted *realtà*, that is a reality which people, the *borghesi*, have manipulated in order to satisfy their desires and which has turned against them. It is about a distorting *realtà*, a reality which beguiles, surprises and confounds, but which also reduces the *borghesi* not only to social types, but to social *maschere* whose only *verità* is their incapacitation to have a *verità*, a social identity and a personality. This *realtà* is ever-changing, indetermined, elusive exactly when his characters believe that it is tangible and preordained. The *borghesi* of Niccodemi cannot sustain the pain of *verità* and usually their compromise with the truth necessitates their return to the elusive *realtà*. Earlier *veristi* had touched upon this paradox of the modern individual, but Niccodemi sentimentalizes this escape to illusion, and by doing so he parodies not the individual or his audience who is identified with him or her as Gobbetti has it, but the human weakness before the challenges of life, a weakness which is beyond class considerations. Sentimentality and sentimentalization is the essence and the driving force of Niccodemi's tragicomedy, since it does not encourage the audience, but estranges it, alienates it, and hardens it at the same time it stimulates its emotional involvement. That is what Niccodemi's theatre is all about: the tragicomedy (drama) of a tragicomedy (life).

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a theme.

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The *borghesia* of Niccodemi is a Gozzian *realtà*, a peculiar, "theatricalized" sort of social reality. This does not mean that Niccodemi exaggerates and distorts its image.[58] The three plays of his middle-period, Ombra (The Shadow, 1915), La nemica (The Enemy, 1916) and Scampolo (The Remnant, 1916), which constitute the defining works of his tragicomic dramaturgy, feature a *borghesia* with a "theatrical" sense and experience of reality, all movement, incident and role-playing. The commedia dell'arte types which Gozzi had sought to re-dehumanize in his mask tragicomedies, re-attributing to them symbolic and "mythologized" accouterments of social status and *italianità*, appear in Niccodemi as living masks-puppets, whose mythological universe is not a remote and "invented" land at the edges of *realtà*, as happened in Gozzi's cosmos. Social *maschere*, Niccodemi's *borghesi* are descendants of Pantalone and Truffaldino, yet they appear as recognizable

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[58] *I am not at all suggesting that Niccodemi deliberately revisited Gozzi's dramaturgy in order to pattern his own tragicomedies after his. All I am suggesting is that Niccodemi, just like Giacometti and Cicconi before him, instinctively recycled the traditions of Italian theatre as they survived in the culture in the same way that Goldoni provided the model for the dramatists of the late Risorgimento period. One could argue that Niccodemi, due to his peculiar educational and theatrical background, could not have internalized this tradition. It should be remembered, however, that Niccodemi is not a "foreign" and "imported" playwright who italinized his previously gallicized style of theatre. He is an expatriate playwright who was not culturally disenfranchised from his italian culture. Nonetheless, commedia dell'arte was not an obscure art form and I think it is shaky scholarship to speculate that Niccodemi was unfamiliar with the theatrical tradition of his native country. Besides, his work as manager and dramaturg of his own company suggests that he was conversant not only with verismo and its roots, but also with the whole history of Italian culture. Niccodemi was famous in the theatre community for his library and its thirty thousand volumes. Cf. Orio Vergani, "Ricordo di Dario Niccodemi," Dramma 216 (1 November 1954), 40-43.*

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fixtures of modern social reality, as counts, *alto-borghesi* socialites, big time professionals and new capitalists. The *piccola-borghesia* is not part of this world and only in Scampolo does this class appear (and again rather deceptively) to challenge and refute the humanity of the *borghesia*. The legendary lands of Gozzi with the sorcerers, the courtiers and the kings have been replaced here by a gallicized bourgeois milieu, the mansions of the French gentry (Nemica), the comfortable quarters of the Parisian *borghesia* (Ombra) or those of the Roman capitalist èlite (Scampolo). These "mythic" milieux, countless times dismissed by critics as operatic romantic(ized) settings, borrowed from the popular escapist novel, do not define Niccodemi's characters, they do not convey socio-political messages. They imprison or suffocate the *borghesi* as the latter deal with *drammi intimi*, the ghosts of their past or the apprehensions for the *verità* of the future. The more these milieux impress the public as quaint, the more deceptive they are, because their presence, normally a symbol of status, order and serenity, contradicts reality, a condition of constant pressure, agitation and passion.

The borghesi-masks are not concerned with their social status, their problems have no serious socio-political reprecussions, society does not threaten their survival. The *borghesi* rather deal with themselves, they are obsessed with themselves, they are afraid of themselves, of their *verità*. They desperately seek to unearth "secrets" (past realities),

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which may reveal to them the truth about their identity and their purpose, they are constantly preparing themselves for a discomfiting, but ultimately cathartic revelation, only to become disillusioned, fatalistic and resigned, once this *verità* insinuates itself. Niccodemi's *maschere* do not behave. They demonstrate emotions when these have reached their maximum and cannot be repressed. What Niccodemi's critics have detected as a melodramatic and contrived *realtà*, a "situation" exploiting the eagerness of middle-brow audiences to be thrilled, is in fact a "startling" *realtà*, not a veritable "surprise" but a reality already looming in the life of the *borghesi* which manifests itself in the most frustrating of situations, when the *borghese-maschera* is certain that his or her happiness is at last at hand. The incidents which compose this startling reality do not reveal, but eclipse *verità*. Not only do they obscure it, they also compel the *borghese* to desire this obfuscation of *verità*. This desire for blindness before truth is Niccodemi's most tragicomic theme. The decision to be unhappy and thus also happy, this uncanniness of the *borghese's* world experience, renders Niccodemi's *borghesia* a *grottesco* in and by itself: a mask which takes itself for a face as long as the real face remains safely hidden, as long as life does not appear nonsensical or out of joint.[59] Once the face is revealed, the mask wants to remain

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[59] *Cf. Guthke, op. cit., 73-4.*

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a mask. The endings of Niccodemi's tragicomedies are happily unhappy, they are untragically tragic. They are unsettling because the *verità* they establish reveals the enormity but also the comfort of the illusion his heroes entertained as a *verità*. Ciconi and occasionally even Ferrari (especially in Cause ed effetti and Il suicidio) had touched upon this paradox, but the pedagogic esthetic of *teatro educatore* had attenuated the treatment of this paradox as a fixture of the human experience. Niccodemi appears convinced that this paradox is indeed the essence of the human experience, comic because it is revealing and discomfiting, and tragic because it is unalterable. The game between *realtà* and *verità* is endless and in it the human *maschera* is a powerless, sometimes pitiful and sometimes sympathetic player-loser. It is this thesis that explains Niccodemi's abstinence from both moralism and idealism. Certainly, his plays abound in aphorisms, sentimental sophisms and truisms but they never represent a thesis, they never constitute the rationale of a raisonneur, they do not represent his opinions. They are as tragicomically irrelevant to the modern experience as the professed self-confidence of the *borghesi*.

Niccodemi realigned himself with Italian theatre as an "Italian" playwright through the creation of Ombra, a tragicomic experiment with the mythology of *commedia borghese* and a case in point for the tragicomic *verismo*. An instant success for Irma Grammatica, an actress second only to Duse,

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and the Compagnia Stabile of Milan, the play was nonetheless (mis)directed by Marco Praga with an emphasis on melodrama and emotional excess, which the play appeared to encourage but did not actually necessitate.[60] As a result the critics condescended to it as another typical melodrama. Certainly, the play was not intended to depart from the Giacosian view of marriage as an epitome of the bourgeois experience, yet the melodramatic representation of this experience had the function of stressing the incontrovertible ironies of life and not of chronicling the compromising dissolution of a human relatiosnhip. From the beginning to the end, Niccodemi twists the melodramatic conventions with which the *dramma borghese* had been viewed to assert conjugal life. Instead of pity and fear, he has opted for the instigation of discomfiture: the deliberate distortion of *realtà* to a situation of convenience.

The disintegration of a conjugal relationship determined not by immorality or lovelessness but by the "facts" of life, a theme which Lopez had already dramatized in Tutto l'amore, lent itself once again as the basic situation of Ombra. Niccodemi, however, did not detect its grotesqueness in the ultimate sacrifice of life for love, but rather in the resolve of the individual to overlook reality and thus survive only for the sake of a fictitious *verità*. The central character of

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[60] *The play was produced on Broadway in a version prepared especially for Ethel Barrymore who scored one of her first successes in it. The play was also translated into French, Spanish and German. I cite from the 1917 edition*

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Ombra is Berta, a woman of remarkable spiritual tenacity, whom a rare and chronic neuro-psychological ailment has incapacitated sexually and socially. Her marriage to Gerardo, an artist and museum administrator, has survived thanks to their mutual love and respect, but the incompleteness of their relationship has strained their capacity to believe in its value and relevance: Abhorring to admit that Gerardo's love might actually be pity, Berta has consciously forced herself to entertain the illusion that their marriage is above physicality and that it can last thanks to its spiritual strength. The truth, however, is different, because Gerardo has maintained a long affair with Elena, Berta's best friend. Divorced from her husband for the love of Gerardo, Elena has given birth to their child, and it is this new circumstance which forces Berta to deal with the realities of Gerardo's future life. Berta, kept in the dark about the double life of Gerardo, "suddenly" recuperates and regains her ability to walk, but, exhausted from happiness, she resolves to keep her recovery secret and thus surprise her husband who, as she thinks, has patiently hoped for her improvement. When she visits Gerardo in his atelier, which is also the home of Elena and his child, Berta has masked herself as a stranger, but she is the first to be frustrated by the turn of events when the first person she meets there is Gerardo's baby. When her husband, confounded and desperate, reveals to her the real truth, Berta is overwhelmed only by the desire to suspend

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reality, to regain her ailment, to regain her previous state of illusion and hope:

> *BERTA: Dio di misericordia e di pietà Rendi mi la mia malattia. E la mia ignoranza. E il mio dolore. E la mia immobilità E dammi anche la forza di ritornare alla mia croce! Ci stavo tanto bene. Dio mio! Dio mio! Ci stavo tanto bene... tanto bene... tanto bene. (act II)*[61]

Before long, however, Berta realizes her dependence on Gerardo's existence in her life. To accomodate herself in the new circumstances she dismisses the need for realism and invents a new reality: When Elena visits her to ask her to set Gerardo free, Berta leads her into believing that it is she, Elena, who must set Gerardo free, since Gerardo cannot feel happy outside his marriage. His other family, his other life, was a reality rendered irrelevant by her recovery. Gerardo, however, is not willing to accept Berta's argument as socially logical, and thus she agrees with him on the following "fiction:" She will pretend to be sick and "stuck" in the same place as before; He will live his "other" life and he will come to visit her as if nothing had happened, as if he were coming back "home" from work. For the rest of their life, she will be his shadow (ombra) in the hardships of the future.

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[61] *BERTA: Clement and merciful God! Give me back my malady. And my ignorance. And my pain. And my immobility! And give me also the strength to endure my cross! It was so good then! Oh, my God, my God! It was so good then, so good, so good.*

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"Tutto è deciso" (All's decided), Berta resolves at the end.

The treatment of Berta's tragic conflict with *realtà* as esentially tragicomic was a subtlety that most critics missed, resolved as they were that Niccodemi had a talent only in trivializing, melodramatizing profound human truths. In reality, both the content and the form of Ombra betray not only the tragicomic temper of early twentieth century *verismo* but also Niccodemi's consistently original tragicomic vision. The melodramatic excesses which critics have deplored as symptoms of artistic demagogy are the tools of this vision. Niccodemi the *verista* dealt not with the appearances of reality, but with reality as an appearance, a contrivance, a melodramatic farce played by the forces of life at the expense of the modern individual. The coincidences, the surprises, the secrets, the pretensions, the revelations, the interminable role-playing of Berta and Gerardo as victims and victimizers of one another, constitute not only manifestations of his tragicomic form, but also a reality, a "course of events" contrived in such a way that Berta's surrender to the comforting deceptions of the past takes a whole new meaning as a broader statement on the discomfiting irony of this reality. In this "world of deception," as Guthke terms it, Berta is a defeated winner. She has reached the truth, but she has renounced it as unrealistic, that is, impractical for her own life. She is at the same time a victim of this ironic course of events, since they subvert every initiative of hers aiming

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at happiness and fullfilment.[62] What is tragic about the defeat of Berta and her return, as she expresses it, to the cross of her deceptions is not just the incongruity between herself as an individual and exterior reality (the course of events), but the incongruity between her true reality (*verità*), the one she suspects but also rejects, and her idea (idealization) of reality, that reality which eventually rejects her as a living person but attracts her as an actor, a mask, a pretense. In other words Berta is the victim of self-deception and exterior deceptiveness as well. At the same time what renders this tragic predicament comic is the fact that as soon as she realizes her deception, she also realizes that she felt the truth all along; but instead of compromising with this revelation, she has chosen to relapse to that false, but "realistic," state of existence which had allowed her to believe that she wanted to know the *verità* of her life.[63] Pirandello himself would deal with oblivion as a tragicomic human condition in Enrico IV, but it is Niccodemi who first detects this state as a social phenomenon of modernity. Oblivion for Niccodemi is the evasion of reality, a choice

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[62] *Cf. Guthke, ibid., 82.*

[63] *Niccodemi theatricalizes this incongruence and its tragic irony when he has Berta disguise herself as a "stranger" before revealing to Gerardo her new reality, hoping that his surprise will immediately turn into joy for the prospect of their reaccquaintance as spouses and spiritual partners. When the facts disprove her intentions, Berta, as we have seen in the excerpt cited earlier, wishes to restore herself to the state of bliss she enjoyed as a person who could not move, who could not be alive, but who could, nonetheless, live.*

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which ironically appeals to people as the best for the compromise and reconciliation with this reality.[64]

What is different about Nemica, a play written in the same tragicomic vein, is the depiction of *verità*.[65] Niccodemi has withdrawn from the concept reality-is-appearance and an alternative theorization of the relationship *verità/realtà* has been at work: This is not a *commedia* about true reality, but about real truth, where the "real" connotes a realistic, "pragmatic," therefore, manipulated truth, not necessarily an overt contradiction of the facts of reality, but nonetheless a discrepancy. The theme here is the *verità* of maternity and its darker aspects, but Niccodemi treats *verità*

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[64] *The tragicomic connotations of "darkness" and "shadow" were also dramatized in a later play, La casa segreta (The Secret House, 1924). In this play, which belongs to the later phase of his playwrighting career and to a time of "pirandellistic" tendencies in the Italian theatre, the "face" is not so much theatricalized as it is objectified as a verismo allegory. Niccodemi dramatizes the story of Anna who is in love with a poet Claudio Varchi and the first act demonstrates this ideal love. Act II begins with a Wedding breakfast, but Anna is found married to another man (a brutal diplomat, as it proves), after Claudio had suddenly disappeared from her life. The third act, which takes place in the "casa segreta," the retreat to which Claudio had withdrawn after his disappearance, brings the former lovers together, after Claudio has asked in a letter to meet with her. Anna arrives with her face covered by a veil. She tries to hide her "disfigured" face, after an injury she suffered from her husband in a fit of jealousy has deformed her beauty. Claudio asks her to abandon everything and move in with him, but Anna, raising her veil, reveals her deformity, the "face" which cannot be loved. But Claudio cannot see. He has gone completely "blind," and the reason he had left her was the awareness of his coming blindness. Anna, astounded by the revelation, resolves to sacrifice her social position and devote herself to him. The realtà of her "deformity," the truth about her "face" will not be revealed, so that at least Claudio may retain the illusion of her as the "ideal" lover of the past.*

[65] *The play was succesfully produced by the troupe of Tina di Lorenzo and Armando Falconi, a vastly popular husband and wife team during the first half of the twentieth century at the Carignano theatre of Milan (8 November 1916).*

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as a fiction and a pretense shielding people from the reality they are afraid (not just unwilling) to accept. Nemica concerns the familial relationship between two brothers, Gastone and Roberto di Nièvres, and their mother, Anna, all members of a mythologized, as Gramsci asserts, French aristocracy, reaching a crisis around the time of World War I.[66] The relationships in this family have been forged in the past by the death of the father and a secret which has determined the hatred of Anna for Roberto, the elder of the two sons, a hatred which endures unabated into the present. Although the two brothers are respectful and supportive of one another, Roberto, unable to understand his mother's aversion to him, has ended as a distraught personality, a malcontent maladjusted to the social *realtà* of the family.

A version of the truth about the past is disclosed to him by Marta, the daughter of the family notary, whose love Roberto has spurned, as a "punishment" for his indifference. This half-truth is that Roberto does not belong to the family, because he is the illegitimate son of Anna from a sinful affair she has wanted to forget. Not only that, he is also a threat to the legitimate rights of Gastone, who is the "real"

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[66] *The action is set in a remote mansion in the periphery of Paris. The topography in Nemica is an essential part of Niccodemi's tragicomic scheme, because the remoteness of the location and the emotional aloofness of the family are strikingly juxtaposed to a Parisian society whose intrusion in the present and the past of the di Nièvres threatens the equilibrium between the reality of every family member and the reality of the family as it is perceived by this society.*

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di Nièvres: Anna, therefore, hates him, because Roberto is irrelevant to the reality she wants to believe in.

Another version of Roberto's *realtà* comes to light, this time from Anna herself, when he challenges her to admit the truth for once: Roberto is not her own but her dead husband's illegitimate son, the stranger she had promised the dead man to raise as her own and equal to Gastone. Her hatred then is not the hatred of a mother, but the hatred of an "enemy" against a challenger of authority and identity. When the third act opens, the two brothers have already been drafted and sent to the frontiers of war. In a battle Gastone, the real son, dies and it is the "enemy" who returns to bring the news back home. As Roberto tells Anna, Gastone's last words were "Mamma," and suddently this reference to motherhood awakens in Anna a new, motherly, feeling for Roberto, who finally believes that he has found a mother. The truth however, as Niccodemi appears to imply, is more paradoxical: It's not Roberto who has found a mother, but Anna who has invented a son: Loving Roberto, she will simply continue to love Gastone, although this is a *verità*, a real *verità* she won't admit even to herself.

From the proto-*verismo* era of Giacometti's La morte civile and Ciconi's La statua di carne to Torelli's Figlia suavissima and Butti's Fiamme nell'ombra, the invention of a *verità* as the preferable reality for the dejected *borghesi* had distinguished itself in the *problematica* of *verismo* as the

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prerequisite for survival, socially and spiritually. For Pirandello, the invention of a *verità* was a tragicomic manifestation of humanity and the *grotteschi* would theatricalize this invention as Ciconi had, probably unconsciously, done. But Niccodemi appeared to see an invented *verità* or an invented reality as an existential end in the life of modern *borghesia* and not as a solution: The invented *realtà* and the invented *verità* together constituted the one and only *verità* of modernity. Especially in Nemica the melodramatic situation of inexplicable hatred against an "innocent" enemy and the conflicting interpretations of this hatred along social parameters (status, property, identity) prove exactly the idea that various truths and various realities embody one *verità:* the normal existence of these discrepant and discomfiting realities and truths. Niccodemi's certainty is also evident from the fact that, notwithstanding the various moralistic maxims tossed here and there, he does not sermonize about the "multifictitiousness" of this *verità*, there is actually no raisonneur to defend a social thesis. Once again the tragicomic dimension of this modern condition is that the one *verità*, or the various minor "truths," are always amenable to manipulation, even when we pretend that we don't care about reality/truth or that we are afraid of reality/truth, or that we are unwilling to accept them. In fact, we manipulate them, unconsciously yet compulsively, in such a way, that we may be able to pretend our superiority or

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our indifference to *realtà*, which we like to label reconciliation. Always, however, we act as masks, perhaps respectable and acceptable, but nonetheless masks, just like Roberto who is now respected and accepted by Anna but still remains the mask, the substitute for a *verità* she has forever lost (Gastone).

A comic, although by no means parodic, take on the melodramatic realities and social perceptions of the *borghesia*, Scampolo was also a peculiar sort of sentimental *commedia borghese*. Indeed, its sentimentality, according to the critics the major contributor to the play's astounding commercial national and international success, insinuates itself as a tragicomic (more comic than tragic) esthetic of sociological dramaturgy, a means of social criticism-satire which targets the self-consciousness of the bourgeois cosmos. This sentimentality, expressed through and typified by the resilient protagonist of the play, a Roman version of Eliza Doolittle, is a complement of Niccodemi's *grottesco*, not a parody, as we said, of the *borghesia* as a *problematica*, but a parody of it as a *realtà* defined by the pursuit of materialism and hegemony as well as by the subordinate role of love in human affairs. The capitalistic transformation of Italy, the expansionist and colonial aspirations of the industrialist and materialist *borghese*, the conventionalized social relationships among the elites, and the paternalistic attitude of the *borghesia* toward the unfortunate and the downtrodden

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are the social phenomena suggested in the background of Scampolo, whose plot is essentially the *imborghesimento* of the eponymous heroine, the vagabond yet "untarnished," adventuress of Niccodemi's Rome. This *imborghesimento*, the assimilation of an inferior human being into the superior class, is a process whose end and success has been left open to speculation, although it is legitimate to believe that the purpose of Niccedemi was not the italianization, therefore, the trivialization of Shaw's Pygmalion, as one critic has suspected, but the depiction of this process as dispiriting and dehumanizing: not the triumph of the modern social spirit, the defeat of the *borghesia* by its social beneficiaries as it were, but the loss of spirit, the loss of inner freedom, the loss of the self that the *imborghesimento* entails. Gerolamo Rovetta had pointed to the (tragic) social repercussions of this loss (the prostitution of morality, the loss of ethics, exploitation, and so on), but Niccodemi is here not preoccupied with social edification but rather with the identity crisis the prospect of social integration, the prospect of *rispettabilità*, causes. Consequently, sentimentality also emerges as a *problematica* proper, since the problem discussed in Scampolo is not just the fact of integration and the logic of the process, but more importantly the discomfiting sentiments which nourish in the psyche of the individual the compliance with the requirements of social *realtà*: nostalgia for a love that has never been fulfilled,

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longing for inner freedom, nostalgia, that is, for the self, the "face."

Scampolo, a creature of Rome's streets with a shrewd sense of life, proud enough of her feat of surviving without losing self-respect or dignity, and Tito, an ambitious and cynical *borghese* with serious aspirations to become part of the system, cross paths when she is still a neglected social nonentity and he at a less than promising stage of his life. They meet at a second-rate hotel and they soon realize that despite their vastly different backgrounds and social expectations, they share a pragmatist, unsentimental, view of the world and its ways. They forge a friendship which, however, very quickly turns to a patronizing (on the part of Tito) relationship who aspires to introduce Scampolo in society and improve her condition. The *imborghesimento*, however, is a frustrating and at the same time edifying experience for her, since the *borghesi* who claim to be sophisticated and humane, represented here by Giulio and his wife Emilia, both affected socialites, are appalling parodies of sophistication and humaneness. Giulio tries to seduce and exploit Scampolo, while Emilia demonstrates to her the double-standard morality of the well-off "lady." Tito, who has an affection for the happy-go-lacky persona of Scampolo, is rather indifferent to her as a face, a woman who has emotions and ideas and desires. Thus he is oblivious to her growing love for him. When a lucrative job in Libya is offered, Tito

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has no scruples about leaving Scampolo, his "creation," behind and alone in a society which the young woman feels uneasy about. He does not reveal to her the truth about his intentions, and Scampolo will stay "maintained" at his house, waiting for his return. The play ends with Scampolo, learning her grammar and looking at a map of Africa, crying over the uncertainty of the future and her loss of courage: The creation has probably realized that the life without the creator is a *realtà* that necessitates her reconciliation with the idea that she has to survive by a nostalgia of the love she will never have.

Scampolo has come to realize that her *imborghesimento* is in fact a paradox, a tangible, lived-through illusion, a reality which is not realistic, which has no value for her spirit and her life. The more she familiarizes herself with the masks of the *borghesia*, the more obvious becomes to her the impossibility of belonging to this class and the more tragic appears to her mind the impossibility of abdicating her new social position. She is stuck with the *borghesia*, and she is going to cope with the realities alone, without the "guidance" of her Pygmalion, which brings her closer to the other, more substantive *verità*: that she has become attached not to Tito, but to "Tito," an idea of an absent man whose presence will be felt as overwhelming and eventually compromising, because this presence will abrogate her capacity to be pragmatic and, more importantly, free. The loss of

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freedom as a loss of identity, a recurrent, as we have seen, preoccupation of *verismo* (as, for example, in Verga's La lupa and Praga's La porta chiusa), is treated by Niccodemi as a tragic rather than comic *verità*. Indeed, its dramatization in the last scene of the last act--the departure of Tito and the "promise" of love--relies on melodramatic gestures and acts (the held-back tears, the prolonged silences, the qui pro quo, the "intimations"), but rather than insinuating themselves as mawkish, their *sentimentalità*, their moving humanity, evokes the tragic irony of *intimismo*: Scampolo tries to act *"borghese,"* to appear restrained and positive, but her effort to play the part efficiently proves to her that henceforth she will live for "Tito," she will live for a *realtà* and a fiction. Scampolo tries, that is, to assume the *maschera* of the *borghesia*, but the "face," her unsentimental humanity "of the streets," her sense of the freedom she abdicates somehow alert her to her defeat. The play gains in sentimentality as she tries to remains unsentimental, but contemplating her *verità*--the map of Africa--she cannot help feeling frustrated by her defeat. In an adaptation of the play to a novel, Il romanzo di scampolo (1917) which Niccodemi himself prepared, the story of Scampolo ends on a tragic note with Scampolo "defeated" by Tito's forgetfulness and indifference. As has been noted, the sad resolution of Scampolo's conflicts with life that the novel depicted, subdued the ironies of the original play. It appears that the open end of the *commedia*,

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its tragicomic potential, sentimental or unsentimental, was more congenial to the ironic sensibility of the War years.[67]

The plays which immediately followed Scampolo, Il titano and Prete Pero (Father Pero) with obvious patriotic messages did not actually depart from the tragicomic *problematica* of the earlier works. In these Niccodemi sought to capture and demystify the shocking experiences of the Great War society, but what with the patriotic rhetoric and the emotional dramatization of war realities, his *sentimentalità* bothered several critics as unctuous and exploitative. His tragicomic vision of the war as a test for the humanity of the individual did not come through, as the lack of emotional detachment from actuality induced him to a melodramatic rather than ironic dramaturgy. Apparently, the war did not lend itself as a "myth" and his resolve to be "real" rather than myth-making, that is, his resolve to accurately describe the *moment* rather

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[67] *Niccodemi revisited the same situation and conflict in the the 1929 play Il principe (1929), which he labeled "illusione" (an illusion). This time, however, the "fiaba" pattern of his dramaturgy was more apparent, since the play was essentially a tragicomic take on the tale of the sleeping beauty. While in Scampolo it was the love of a classless woman for the up and coming borghese that provided the pretext for the exposure of realtà/illusion, here it is the love of a guileless borghese girl for a prince that conveys the irony for the "illusions" of life. Vera is an eccentric, aloof and musing girl whose life acquires a "mythic" dimension when a prince of a distant country visits her provincial town. Of all the women who have gathered to pay their respects and admire him, that prince has eyes only for Vera. It seems that this love at first sight has "awaken" Vera who "finds herself" through this love. The prince promises that he will ask his father to allow him marry her, but Vera knows deep down in her soul that this is an illusion that passes for real life. When Vera finally prefers to go along with the illusion, and ask the Prince to "take her away" it is the Prince, the "illusion," that alerts her to verità. Although he promises to "come back," Vera is certain that this promise is the end of the illusion. After seeing him off, she "sleeps" again: she become once more apathetic, aloof and "real."*

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than interpret it worked against his intentions. Once the war was over, this faithfulness to the facts, the "relevance" of these plays were of no importance, they were irrelevant.[68]

Three other plays, La maestrina (The Schoolmistress, 1917), Acidalia (1918) and La volata (The Flight, 1919), are more "Niccodemian" than the "war" plays. Acidalia has evident affinities with the then-emerging *grottesco*, but the other two convey a rather old-fashioned sociology with the tragicomic perception of life obscured by the melodramatically optimistic denouements. Patterned after Scampolo but with some superficial yet peculiar plot affinities to Giacometti's Morte civile, La maestrina follows the life of Maria, a young "defeated" woman who after years of hapless life in America

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[68] *Il titano, whose success was also due to the lively performance of Ruggero Ruggeri, a beloved veteran of the Italian stage, tells the story of Marco Asciani, a capitalist "titan" in pre-war Italy who, after losing his two sons and almost his own life at the front, tries to catch up with life, only to realize that his survival and his humanity is at stake. The bank that he had succesfully established had been exploited by his brother-in-law, Guido who, during his absence, had been engaged in war profiteering, damaging the name of the family and the financial health of the insitution. The dreams he had made about using his resources for the benefit of humanity have proved illusions. Reality, his relationship to Guido, has created the public illusion that he is a criminal as well despite his service to the country and the sacrifice of his sons. He can only find a job as a humble worker, but this experience has probably saved him from the falsehoods of dreams and ambitions. He has found that surviving requires indeed the strength of a titan. Il prete Pero, a play which created a controversy among conservative Catholics for the unfavorable, as they thought, depiction of Italian priesthood as a compromised and defeatist metier, told the story of a patriot priest who used unconventional methods to help his congregation survive the cruelties and the famine of war. The controversy which continued unabated throughout the run of the play irritated Niccodemi who responded to the accusations with the preface to the published text of the play in 1918. For more on the creation of the play and its reception see Giovanelli and Lopez, op. cit., 30ff.*

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has come to a small town as a teacher trying to reconcile herself with the loss of her child, whom her lover had abducted and whose fate she had been unable to trace. The mayor of the town, who has fallen in love with her, tries succesfully to find Maria's seducer, Giacomo, who has escaped the law, only because his wife is the lover of the local pastor. The seducer reveals that the child is not dead, but not registered and therefore "socially dead." In fact the child is one of Maria's pupils, but since the child is now grown up, Maria cannot recognize her among them. This recognition will happen only at the end, when Giacomo out of fear of arrest by the authorities, points out the "lost" child. Maria will stay with her and Filippo will be their protector. The melodramatic coincidences of life which Niccodemi so effectively had dramatized in Ombra, Nemica and Scampolo as situations conducive to one's awareness of *verità*, and which Pirandello would exploit in his "theatre" plays as instances of the *farce transcidentale* that is life, have only a subdued ironic effect in La maestrina. The happy ending is here literally happy. Niccodemi vindicates his heroine and there is nothing left unresolved which may suggest the prospect of an unsettling *realtà*. The tragedy lies in the past of Maria, and only happiness and peace are projected for her life with her daughter. More conventional still is La volata in which Niccodemi revisits the *problematica* of Torelli and early Giacosa only to suggest that a love is above class

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considerations and that the commitment to such love dignifies the disrespect for *rispettabilità*.

In Acidalia Niccodemi sought to blend tragicomedy with parody, but the story of a philosopher who experiments with infidelity in his own life in order to prove its validity for the life of the modern individual, founded as it was on a sophism and not on a paradox of *realtà*, did not offer itself as a solid ground for a *grottesco* comedy. Niccodemi had to invent a peculiar social situation rather than mythologize a condition of *realtà*, to create, that is, a *fiaba* out of the modern experience. Thus the tragicomic connotations of the venture--the defeat of man by his own "experiments" and ideas--get eclipsed by the almost farcical way with which he discomfits himself. Filippo, who has never felt the impact of infidelity in his own relationships with women, wants to feel how it feels to be cheated. For this reason he courts a rather frivolous and flirtatious woman, Bice, certain that she will cheat him at the first chance. Bice, however, not only disproves him, rejecting the courtship of suitors that Filippo sends to her, but he finds out that all the women in his life, including his wife, had been unfaithful. Angry with himself, he renounces his infidelity theory. The parody of the *grottesco* was an esthetic which did not really suit Niccodemi well and his attempt to emphasize the tragicomic discomfiture of the central character did not succeed, precisely because he was reluctant to emphasize the artificiality of the situation

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the play presented as a modern *realtà*. Consequently, he deprived the play of the potential to function as a critique not with its plot, but with its artificiality.[69]

Probably unsatisfied with the result, Niccodemi did not repeat the experiment with the *grottesco*. Indeed, the four plays which he was to write and stage before his death--L'alba il giorno e la notte[70] (Dawn, Morning and Night, 1921), La casa segreta(1924), La Madonna (1927) and Il principe (The Prince, 1929)--are all highly effective variations on the tragicomic *fiaba* of the mid-teens. Once again the *borghesia*, its paradoxes and its attempts at circumventing *realtà* insinuate themselves as the dominant *problematica*, yet the tragicomic ironies, supported by a feeling of silent sadness, bring the plays closer to the esthetic and the *problematica* of *crepuscolarismo/intimismo*, still prevalent in the Italian drama of the twenties and thirties.[71]

By and large the drama of Niccodemi, or to be more exact,

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[69] *Cf. Renato Simoni, "Acidalia," Trent'anni di cronaca drammatica vol. 1 (Torino: SET, 1951), 341ff.*

[70] *This play, which for several critics is probably Niccodemi's best, is a fiaba for two characters in three acts, with each act transpiring in each of the title's times of a day. The simple story is about the union, seperation and reunion of two young lovers, Anna and Mario, with "dawn" and "night" embodying the illusions which the "mystery" of love nourishes, and the "day" revealing the "disappointing," "real" reality. The twist of the story, however, is the fact that the harsh realities of the "day"—the sunlight has "de-romanticized" love—do not disolve the illusion of the "dawn," but enforce it while the "night," the time of romance, conceals the reality and happiness seems a verità. The play was a big success and it has been translated into English. See Appendix II.*

[71] *Cf. Giorgio Pullini, "Teatro intimista," Teatro contemporaneo, vol. 1 Mario Verdone, ed. (Roma: Lucarini editore, 1981), 401ff.*

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his tragicomic drama anticipated to a large extent, perhaps more than Pirandello and the short-lived trend of the *grottesco*, the sort of drama or the sort of "realism" that would dominate the Italian theatre during and after the era of Mussolini. In fact, the relationship between *verismo*, tragicomedy, *pirandellismo* and the *grottesco* was symbiotic and interactive rather than conflictual. Despite the polemics of critics and theorists who, annoyed by *verismo*'s perseverence, kept on declaring the need for its supression, this interaction proved not only enduring but also beneficial. Realities and truths, or the perception of the absurdities that the new order embodied, and whose cultural leaders had every reason to keep unnoticed, were not "evaded" by the tragicomic *commedia borghese* of the inter-war years, nor was *verismo* a lost artistic cause. Even if the tragicomic meridional *verismo* of Eduardo de Filippo, a cultural phenomenon by itself, is considered extraneous to the tragicomic *verismo* of Niccodemi (and Lopez), still the fact remains that the discomfiting problem of reality, central to the *problematica* of *verismo* since the time of Verga or even Giacometti, did not become irrelevant in a time of pressing political and social conflicts. *Verismo*, we repeat, was not a political dramaturgy, but it had always been and continued to

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be an engaged one.[72]

The tragicomedies of Aldo de Benedetti, Cesare Giulio Viola, Gherardo Gherardi and young Ugo Betti, the dramaturgy of the *"telefoni bianchi"* (white telephones), as they are customarily and rather uncritically labeled by post-war critics, were not plays projecting or propagandizing a model of social reality that Fascism encouraged, nor were they plays of "evasion," plays unrelated to the "facts."[73] Certainly they were not written as social criticism, but irony and understatement, the absence of the raisonneur and the *predicatore*, were their defining attributes. The *problematica* was not the evasion of reality, but the effort of the *borghese* to endure the vulgarity of this reality, the effort to pretend that he or she has the strength to evade reality, if he or she

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[72] *Political theatre in the thirties and the forties, that is a theatre propagating an ideology, was the dramma storico which Mussolini and his regime encouraged and sponsored. The dramma borghese never assumed this function during the inter-war years, and this does not mean apathy or a dramaturgy of evasion as several critics have insinuated. Suffice it to say, that it was the drama of Pirandello, a fascist sympathizer and the enemy of "old" verismo, that prospered during Fascism, along with the various nationalistic drammi storici. Cf. A.C. Alberti, Il teatro nel fascismo: Pirandello e Bragaglia: Documenti (Roma: Bulzoni, 1974).*

[73] *For the dramaturgy of the thirties, cf. Gigi Livio, "Anni Trenta: drammaturgia e spettacolo," Teatro contemporaneo, op. cit., 373ff. "Telefoni bianchi" was a term invented to describe the "irrelevant" dramma borghese of the Fascist era and refers to the semiology of the dramma borghese as escapist entertainment. For a reassessment of this dramaturgy, which has not been studied thoroughly, cf. Enzo Maurri, Telefoni bianchi e rose scarlatte, op. cit. The "telefoni bianchi" as a problematica and genre has had an important but equally misunderstood tradition in Italian cinema.*

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chooses to. This tragicomedy thrived on the paradox and the juxtaposition of perception and reality, and the influence, from that aspect, of the *grottesco*, *intimismo* and the theatricalized sociology of Pirandello cannot be overestimated.

The history of evolution of Italian *verismo* from Giacometti to Niccodemi, a history of constant reinvention and cultural adjustment to ever changing modernity, proves that eventually *verismo*, more than a movement, was indeed an ideal, and as such able to endure and survive avant-gardes, manifestos, experimentalisms and even politics. The twentieth century rediscovered the nobility of this ideal in the neo-realistic cinema of Italy, but it has been the theatre, the *commedia* and the *dramma borghese* which continuously upheld this ideal for the largest part of Italy's history as a unified nation. It was *verismo* as "neo-realism" which embodied the reinvention of the art of investigating the *vero*. But the "newness" proved to justify not only the modernity of the movement, but also explain its engagement with the new, the modern, the different, the other, the unfamiliar, even when that seemed old, obsolete, conventional, familiar, "real." *Verismo* was about the challenge to perceive the *verità* of modernity in process, namely, in the incessant permutation of its deceptive realities. If nothing else, its multifarious representations of this process should be at least acknowledged for providing Pirandello with the picture of a

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humanity without a "face" *(verità)*, but with a multitude of masks: the "theatre" of the twentieth century.

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APPENDIX I

ITALIAN REALIST PLAYWRIGHTS AND THEIR PLAYS

The asterisk (*) indicates the plays treated in the dissertation. The dates are those of the first performance (where possible);

PAOLO GIACOMETTI (1816-1882)

Danvelt (1833); Riccardo di Monforte (1835); Rosilde (1836), Luisa Strozzi (1836); Luigi Camoens, Una famiglia di artisti, Paolo de Fornari, Stefano II (1837); Godoberdo Re dei Longobardi, Corinna (1838); Pellegro Piola, Illusioni e realtà (1839); Virtù e bellezza, Giulia, La famiglia Lercari (1840); Il Domenichino, *Il poeta e la ballerina (1841); Cristoforo Colombo parts I and II, I Carrara, Quattro donne in una casa (1842); Un poema e una cambiale, Isabella del Fiesco, Dopo morte, Miss Baba (1843); Per mia madre cieca!, I Fieschi e i Fregosi, Serafina, Un testamento (1844); Cecilia, la moglie dell'omicida, *Le tre classi della società (1845); Camilla Faa da Casale, La benefattrice e l' ingrato, Le tue ballerine (1846); Carlo II, I misteri dei morti, Paolo da Novi, Roma risorta (1847); Amore e gloria, Cola di Rienzo, Siam tutti fratelli, Stefania, L' amico di tutti (1848); Il fisionomista, Il patrimonio dell' orfana, I martiri toscani, Le metamorfosi politiche (1849); *La donna, Gli educattori del popolo (1850); La donna in seconde nozze, *Inclinazioni e voti, La moglie dell' esule, Il milionario e l'artista (1851); Corilla olimpica (1852); Elisabetta regina d' Inghilterra, La trovatella di S. Maria (1853); La colpa vendica la colpa, Lucrezia maria Davidson (1854); Torquatto Tasso (1855); Giuditta (1856); Maria Bianca Visconti (1859); *La morte civile (1861); L' indomani dell'ebbro (1862); Luisa san Felice, Eponina (1863); L' ultimo dei Duchi di Mantova, Madre e figlia or Le storie intime (1864); Sofocle (1865); Il matrimonio di un trovatello, Maria Antonietta (1867) Arrigo IV il Salico, Unità morale in famiglia (1869); Michelangelo Buonarroti, Renata di Francia (1873); Lotta crudele (1874); Camiola Turingia (1875); Povertà in guanti (1877); Il gladiatore di Ravenna, La lettera anonima (1878); Piaga del giorno (1879); Luigia di Guzman e i Braganza (1880)
Lost plays: La sorella e l'amica; Dam Remond; Ingegno e ciarlatenismo, Pasto de Foscari.

TEOBALDO CICONI (1824-1863)

Le pecorelle smarrite (1857); Troppo tardi! [Antichi e moderni] (1858); I Garibaldini, Peccati vecchi e Penitenza nuova, *Mosche bianche (1860); *La rivincita (1861); *La statua di carne (1862); *La figlia unica, La gelosia, La festa

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nazionale (1863).

PAOLO FERRARI (1822-1889)

El Sor Baltromeo Calzolaro (1847); Un' anima debole; Un' anima forte; Scetticismo, or Il quinto lustro della vita (1848); Il collegiale emigrato (1849); Una perdita a Faraone (1850); Il Tartufo moderno (1852) rewritten as *Prosa (1858); Opinione e cuore (1863); Un ballo in provincia (1861); *Goldoni e le sue 16 commedie nuove (1851); La butéga del Caplér; La sgnora Zvana e al sgnor Zemian (1852); Dante a Verona (1853); Dolcezza e rigore (1854); Una poltrona storica (1853); La scuola degli innamorati (1854); La satira e Parini (1856); Persuadere, convincere e commuovere (1857); La medicina di una ragazza ammalata (1862); La donna e lo scettico (1864); Il codicillo dello Zio Venanzio; Marianna; Il poltrone (1865); Vecchie storie (1867); Nessuno va al campo; *Il duello; Amore senza stima; Gli uomini serii (1868); Roberto Vighlius; L' attrice cameriera; *Cause ed effetti (1871); *Il ridicolo (1872); Un lion in ritiro; Il Cantoniere (1873); Amici e rivali (1874); *Il suicidio (1875); Le due dame; Il perdono or Il delirio (1877); L' Antonietta in collegio (1878); Per Vendetta (1879); Maria e Mario; Un giovane ufficiale; Alberto Pregalli (1880); Giorgetta Cieca (1881); False famiglie (1885); Il signor Lorenzo; La separazione (1886); Fulvio Testi (1888).

ACHILLE TORELLI (1841-1922)

Troppa grazia (1862_; *Il punto d'appogio [La missione della donna] (1866); La più semplice donna vale due volte un uomo (1865); *La verità (1865); *Gli onesti (1866); *I mariti (1867); Chi solo può giungere a tanto(1867); Fragilità (1868); *La moglie (1869); Nonna scellerata, 1870; Amore uguaglia, Triste realtà, 1871; I derisi, Triste passato, *Colore del tempo, 1875; *Scrollina, 1880; Rapisco mia moglie, 1882; *L'israelita, 1883; *Figlia suavissima, 1898.
+Torelli wrote over a hundred plays, several of which were adaptations of earlier works. There is no complete catalogue of his oeuvre.

GIUSEPPE GIACOSA (1847-1906)
*Al pianoforte, 1870; Chi lascia la via vecchia per la nuova, sa quel che lascia ma non sa quel che trova, 1870; Storia vecchia, 1871; Una partita a scacchi, 1871; A can che lecca cenere non gli fidar farina, 1872; Non dir quattro se non l' hai nel sacco, 1872; La gente di spirito, 1872; Affari di banca, 1872 (lost); I figli del marchese Arturo, 1873; Intrighi eleganti, 1874; Gli annoiati, 1874; Teresa (Luisa),

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1875; Sorprese notturne, 1875; Il trionfo d´ amore, 1875; Acquazzoni in montagna, 1876; Il Marito amante della moglie, 1876; Il fratello d´ armi, 1877; Il Conte rosso, 1880; Il punto di vista, 1879; La zampa del gatto, Sirena, 1883; Il filo, 1883; *L´onorevole Ercole Mallardi, 1884; *Resa a discrezione, 1886; La tardi ravedutta, 1886; *Tristi amori, 1887; La signora di Challant, 1891; *Diritti dell´ anima, 1894; *Come le foglie, 1900; *Il più forte, 1904.

GIOVANNI VERGA (1840-1922)
L´onore, 1865; *I nuovi tartuffi, 1865; *Rose caduche, 1869; Cavalleria Rusticana, 1884; In portineria, 1885; La lupa, 1896; La caccia al lupo, La caccia alla volpe, 1902; Dal tuo al mio, 1905.

GEROLAMO ROVETTA (1853-1910)
Un volo dal nido, 1875; La moglie di Don Giovanni, 1877; In sogno, Collera cieca, Scellerata, 1878; Gli uomini pratici, 1879; La contessa Maria, 1884; * Alla città di Roma, 1888; *La trilogia di Dorina, 1889; *I Barbarò, 1890; Marco Spada, Madame Fanny, *I disonesti, 1892; La Baraonda, 1894; *La realtà, 1895; Principio di secolo, 1896; Il ramo d´ulivo, Il poeta, 1897; La moglie giovine, 1898; Le due coscienze, 1900; Romanticismo, 1901; Il re burlone, 1904; Il giorno della cresima, 1905; *Papa Eccellenza, 1906; Molière e sua moglie, 1909.

MARCO PRAGA (1862-1929)
L´ incontro, 1883; Le due case (1884); L´ amico, 1886; Giuliana, 1887; Mater dolorosa (after Rovetta´s novel), 1889; *Le vergini, 1889; *La moglie ideale, 1890; L´innamorata 1891; Alleluja, L´ incanto, 1892; L´erede, 1893; Il bell´ Apollo 1894, La mamma 1895, Il dubbio 1899;* La morale della favola, 1899; L´ ondina, *La crisi, 1904; *La porta chiusa, 1913; Il divorzio, 1915.

ENRICO ANNIBALE BUTTI (1868-1912).
Il vortice, 1892; *L´ utopia, 1894; *La fine d´un ideale, 1898; La corsa al piacere, *Lucifero, 1900; Una tempesta, 1901; Il cuculo, 1903; Il Gigante e i Pigmei, *Fiamme nell´ombra, 1904; Intermezzo poetico, Tutto per nulla, 1905; Nel paese della Fortuna, 1909; Il castello del sogno, 1910; Le rivali, 1910; Sempre così, Il sole invisibile, 1911; Le vie della salute, 1912.
Collaborations Il signore dall´abito bianco (with Giuseppe Messori), 1891/2; Il frutto amaro and Paolo Ermoli (with Cesare Hanau), 1892; Le seduzioni (with Guglielmo Anastasi), 1893; La furia domata (with Gustavo Macchi), 1895; Il crepuscolo degli Amanti and Le acque (with Tommaso Antongini), 1910; Il pozzo della Verità (with Giannino Antona-Traversi), 1911?]

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ROBERTO BRACCO (1860-1943)
Non fare ad altri, 1886; Lui, lei, lui, Un avventura di viaggio, 1887; Le disilluse, Dopo il veglione e vice versa, L'articolo ottavo, Una donna, 1892; *Maschere, 1893; Infedele, 1894; Il trionfo, *Don Pietro Caruso, 1896; La fine dell'amore, 1896; Fiori d' arancia, 1898; *Tragedie dell'anima, 1899; Il diritto di vivere, Uno degli onesti, 1900; *Sperduti nel buio, 1901; *Maternità, 1903; Il frutto acerbo, 1904; *La piccola fonte, Notte di neve, 1905; *I fantasmi, 1906; Nellina, 1908; Ad armi corte, *Il piccolo Santo, Il perfetto amore, 1910; Nemmeno uno bacio, 1912; L'internazionale, 1915; L'amante lontano, Ll' uocchie cunzacrate (in Neapolitan), 1916; La culla, 1918; I pazzi, 1921.

SABATINO LOPEZ 1867-1951
*Oriana, *Di notte, 1889; Il bajardo, 1890; Il successo, 1891; Berta, 1892; Il segreto, 1894; L'ospite, 1893; L' intrusa Il ritorno, 1894; *Ninetta, 1895; Il destino, 1896; I fratelli, La guerra, 1897; Il punto d'appogio, Una posta suprema, 1899; *Tutto l'amore, 1903; La morale che corre, 1904; La donna d'altri, 1906; L'elogio funebre, *Bufere, 1907; *La buona figliola, 1909; Fra i due, 1910; Il principe azzuro, 1910, Il brutto e le belle, 1910;
*La nostra pelle, Giulietta e Romeo, 1912; Il terzo marito, *Il viluppo, 1913; Gelsomina, 1914; Mario e Maria, 1915; Il passerotto, 1918; Sole d'Ottobre, 1920; Per il suo bene, Si chiude, Schiccheri è grande, 1920; La Jeanne e la soa veggia (in Milanese), La distanza, 1921; L'ultimo romanzo, 1922; Parodi e Co., 1925; Giovannino, 1927; La signora Rosa, 1928; Laboremus, 1929; L'alibi, Gli occhi degli altri, 1931; Pigrizia, 1932, Il giocatore di prestigio, 1932; Questa o quella, 1935; Notizie di Parigi, Luce, 1937; Fatica, L'ultimo romanzo, L'omino della stazione, Fra un atto e l'altro, 1955.
Collaborations: Disciplina (with E. Calandra), 1892; L'onomastico di Nicoletta (with Gerolamo Rovetta), 1908; Act III of Alessandrone (Act I by Roberto Bracco and Act II by Giannino Antona-Traversi), 1915; Tre tempi, tre manere (with Eligio Possenti), 1933.

DARIO NICCODEMI (1878-1934)
La duda (In Spanish), Per la vita (In Italian), n.d.; L'Hirondelle, Suzeraine (In French), 1908; Le refuge (Il rifugio), 1909; Raffles, L'aigrette, Les Requíns (I pescecani), 1912; *L'ombra, La piccina (with Y. Mirande), 1915; *Scampolo, *La nemica, Il Titano, La maestrina, 1916; L'incognita, 1917; Prete Pero, 1918; La volata, Acidalia, 1919; L'Alba, il giorno e la notte, 1921; Teatrino (One acts): Lettera smarrita, Il poeta, Festa de beneficenza (Vol. 1); Fricchi, Le tre grazie, L'incognita (Vol. 2); Scena vuota, La pellicia, Natale (vol. 3), 1922; La casa segreta, 1924; Il tempo passato, La Madonna, 1927; Il Principe, 1929.

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AMELIA ROSSELLI (1870-1954)
*Anima, 1898; Illusione, 1901; L'idea fissa, 1906; El rèfolo, 1909; El socio del papà, 1911.

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APPENDIX II

Italian realistic plays translated and/or performed in English.

ROBERTO BRACCO

L' Infedele (The Countess Coquette); Trans. Dirce St. Cyr; New York, 1907.

Don Pietro Caruso; trans. and edited by Carl A. Swanson, Modern Italian One-Act Plays. Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1966.

La fine dell'amore (adapted as I Love You); London, 1913; also trans. as The White Fly by Countess Maria Tomacelli, 1923.

Fiori d' arancio (Orange Blossoms); New York, 1914.

Uno degli onesti (The Honorable Lover); New York, 1915.

La piccola fonte (The Hidden Spring); Trans. Dirce St. Cyr; Published in Poet Lore 18 (1907).

Notte di neve (Snowy Night); Trans. Arthur Livingston New York, 1915. Published in Frank Shay, ed., Twenty Five Short Plays (International). New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1926.

I fantasmi (Phantasms); Trans. Dirce St. Cyr. First published in Poet Lore 19 (1908). Reprinted in Samuel Marion Tucker, ed., Modern Continental Plays. New York: Brendano, 1920.

Lui Lei Lui (Three); Trans. Dirce St Cyr; adapted by Gilbert Cannan, 1914.

Il piccolo santo (The Little Saint); Trans. Victor Rietti. Published in Gambit International 6 (1966).

E.A BUTTI

Tutto per nulla (All for Nothing); Trans. Dirce St. Cyr; New York, 1907; Unpublished on file at the NYPL, The Theatre Collection (call. no. NCOF+)

Intermezzo poetico (Her Highness) Trans. A. Hines Ludovici, 1922.

Le vie della salute (The Wrecked Lover); Trans. A. Hines Ludovici, 1922.

PAOLO GIACOMETTI

Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra (Elizabeth, Queen of England); Trans. T. Wilkins, 1866.

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La morte civile (Civil Death); Translator unknown; New York:G.F. Nesbitt, 1873; and New York: J.J. Little, 1882.
Giuditta (Judith); Trans. J. A. Gray, New York, 1866.
Maria Antonietta, Regina di Francia (Marie Antoinette, Queen of France); Trans. J. C. Pray, New York, 1867; and H. Forest, London.

GIUSEPPE GIACOSA *Una partita a scacchi* (The Wager); Trans. Barrett H. Clark; New York, 1913.
Tristi amori (Unhappy Love); Translated by E. A. Trombly; Published in Poet Lore, 1917.
Diritti dell'anima (Sacred Ground); Trans. Edith and Allen Updegraff. Published in the collection Three plays by Giuseppe Giacosa. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1918.
Come le foglie (Like Falling Leaves); Ibid.
Il più forte (The Stronger); ibid.

SABATINO LOPEZ *Il terzo marito* (Three for Diana); Trans. C.B. Fernald, N.Y., 1919.
La vita che torna (The sparrow); trans. by Isaac Goldberg; in Plays of the Italian Theatre. Boston: John Luce and Company, 1921.
Il brutto e le belle (Face value); adapted and produced by Leo Ditrichstein, 1922; translation unpublished.

DARIO NICCODEMI *Il rifugio* (The Prodigal Husband); Trans. Dario Niccodemi and Michael Morton; New York: 1914.
L'ombra (The Shadow); Trans. Michael Morton, 1915.
Scampolo (Remnant); Trans. Dario Niccodemi and Michael Morton, n.p. London, 1917.
La nemica (Stronger than Love); 1925
Il poeta The poet; Trans. Robert Rietty; in Limes from Sicily and Other Plays. Leeds: E.J. Arnold, 1967.
La maestrina (The Schoolmistress); adapted by Gladys Unger, N.Y., 1925.
L'alba, il giorno e la notte (Dawn, Day, Night); Trans. Robert Rietty; Published in Gambit International 6 (1966); alternative title: If it's a Rose.

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MARCO PRAGA

La porta chiusa (The Closed Door); Trans. A.S. Macdonald; Published in Oliver M. Sayer, ed. The Eleonora Duse Series of Plays; New York: Brentano's, 1923.

La crisi (The Ordeal); Trans. Dirce St Cyr; (Unpublished on file at the NYPL, The Theatre Collection (call. no. NCOF+); New York, 1908.

La moglie ideale (The ideal wife); Trans. Mrs. T.C. Crawford, London, 1913.

AMELIA ROSSELLI

Anima (Her Soul); Trans. Natalia Costa-Zalessow; Published in Katherine Kelly, ed. Modern Drama by Women 1880-1930; New York: Routledge, 1996.

GEROLAMO ROVETTA

Sceleratta!; Trans. anonymous. Published in London's Monthly Magazine (1888).

La trilogia di Dorina (The Rib of Decision); Trans. Dirce St. Cyr and Witter Bynner; New York, 1908; Unpublished on file at the NYPL, The Theatre Collection (call. no. NCOF+). The translators, for unknown reasons, have changed the names of the principal characters.

Collera cieca (Blind Anger); trans. E.F. Davis, 1912.

GIOVANNI VERGA

Caccia a lupo (The Wolf Hunt); Trans. Isaac Goldberg; in Plays of the Italian Theatre. Boston: John Luce and Company, 1921.

Cavalleria rusticana (Cavalleria Rusticana. Scenes from the Life of the People); Trans. Eric Bentley; Published in Eric Bentley, ed., The Modern Theatre, vol. 1. Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955.

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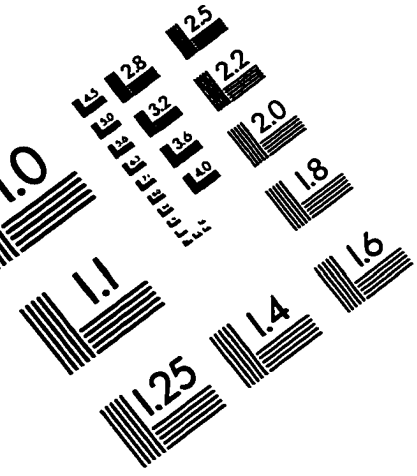

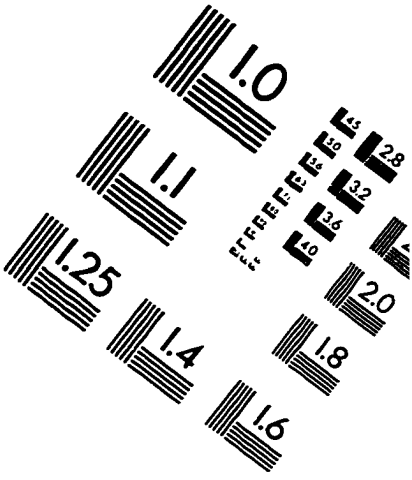

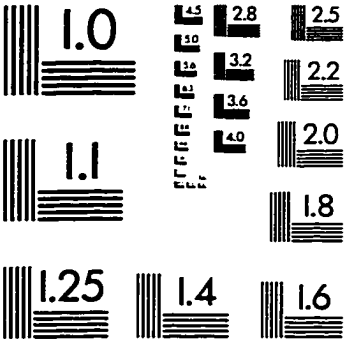

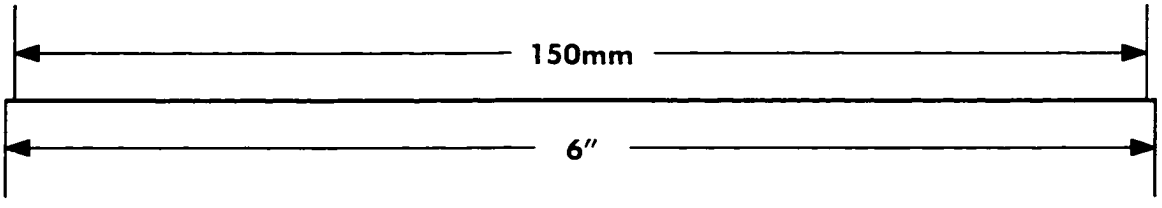

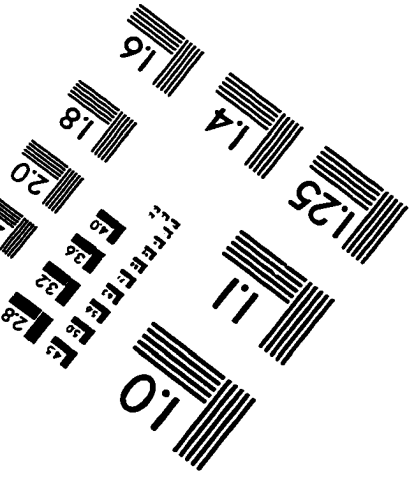

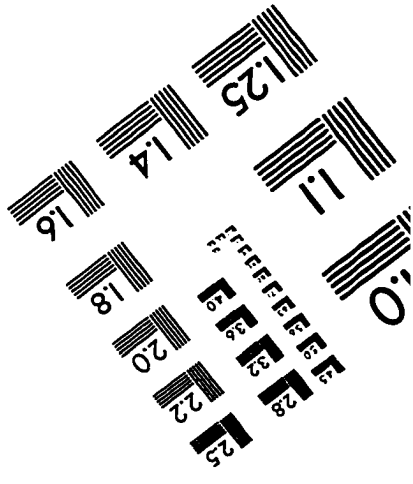

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