

REHEARSING "THE SOUTH"

SICILIAN CONSTRUCTS OF REPRESENTATION ON THE STAGE 1860-1917

by

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Abstract

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My dissertation examines how theatre in Sicily after the *Risorgimento* may have contributed to the construction of a Sicilian identity that is considered different and *other* to that of northern Italy. I analyze the role that Sicilian theatre and the *verismo* movement played, between 1863 and 1917, in the building of a regional versus national identity through artistic cultural representations. By considering key works from this period, I posit that old and new stereotypes were reaffirmed and developed, and that native artists participated in the *othering* of their *paesani*. I also contend that the touring Sicilian acting companies in the early twentieth century, based in improvisation and folk theatre, furthered the perception of the island as exotic and different.

In chapter one, I suggest that the popular play, *I mafiusi*, was the beginning of the mafioso anti-hero, and of the fetishization of the mafia. I focus on the context of the play and the events around its production and success, and its influence on Sicilian *verismo*. In chapter two, I look at how *verismo*, as epitomized by Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria*

Rusticana, created an industry for the representation of the Sicilian peasant. Using Orientalism as a lens, I argue that the parallel development of the North/South divide and *meridionalismo* in the new Italian state, at the same time that we see successful representations of the Sicilian in literature and theatre, helped to solidify certain negative and positive stereotypes. I also analyze Capuana's articulation of *versimo* as it appears in some of his theoretical works and in his play *Malià*.

In chapter three, I turn to Sicilian dialect theatre and the famous regional actors who inspired Nino Martoglio and Luigi Pirandello to write some of their most famous characters. I argue that Martoglio's *L'aria del continente* and Pirandello's *Liolà*, while using some of the same stereotypes and tropes found in *verismo* just a few years earlier, now offered a lighter, gentler, comic Sicilian figure. In addition, I address the performance of these works by the actors Giovanni Grasso and Angelo Musco, and suggest that audiences perceived them as the embodiment of Sicilianness.

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Introduction: Representation of the Other Italy

“Nun sugnu stranu ma sicilianu.”
(I’m not strange, I’m Sicilian.)¹

In the lyric above, the singer/songwriter denies an implicit accusation that he is strange. Taken from a song by a contemporary Italian music-band Tinturia, the single lyric suggests that the stereotype of the Sicilian as exotic and other persists to this day, that the stereotype has been incorporated into the identity of the island’s people. Using Sicilian in all of their songs for their first recording, the group invokes a form of resistance to the dominant language, Italian, by using their local dialect while displaying the very difference they are disavowing. Using the local language or dialect in a popular cultural product is common and often used by communities that live on the periphery of a dominant culture not of their making. In his essay “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” Stuart Hall takes this one step further by arguing that the popular is a “contradictory space,” a site of continuous negotiation.² The song provides a contemporary example of the persistence of these counter-hegemonic moments in Sicily, even after a century and a half as a unified nation.

In my dissertation, I will examine the role that Sicilian theatre played between 1863 and 1917 in the construction of both a regional and national identity through its representations of “real” Sicilians on stage that reaffirmed old stereotypes and constructed new ones. Hall describes representation as a process where language is used to produce meaning: “Representation is the

¹ Tinturia, “A. A. A. Cercasi Patri P’i Me Figli,” *Abusivi (di necessità)* (Wanted a Father for my Children, Abusive Needs). Tinturia, formed in 1996 in Agrigento, Sicily, fuses the musical styles of pop, rock, ska, folk, rap, and reggae. The first recording includes songs entirely in Sicilian. Their later recordings have been in Italian.

² Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey (New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1998), 448.

process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploys signs and signifying system) to produce meaning.”³ I propose then that the choice of language itself has great relevance in the meaning that is being made. Therefore, I will also be looking at how the choice of Sicilian over Tuscan Italian on the stage affected that representation, and how that choice participated in the construction of an identity that sometimes reinforced the national project but more often problematized it. As Antonio Gramsci observed:

But between dialect and the national-literary language something changes: specifically, the cultural, political-moral-sentimental environment. The history of languages is the history of linguistic innovation, but these innovations are of an entire social community that has renewed its culture and “progressed” historically.⁴

The language reflects that world’s folklore and worldview. However, the local language or dialect continues to evolve as it also reflects the push from the dominant culture and the national-literary language. The unification of Italy reduced regional cultures and languages to new subordinate subaltern status. Nevertheless, as Gramsci points out, that language and culture does not disappear but also appropriates innovations from both the high and popular forms and remains vital.

In addition, I will consider how native Sicilian artists contributed to the othering of their *paesani* while they attempted to bring the island’s people and their culture to the attention of all Italians. I will argue that this othering is the corollary of a negotiation among sociocultural forces at a time when the newly formed nation was concerned with constructing a national identity. I

³ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 17, 61.

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Antonio Gramsci Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3:52.

will be analyzing the plays of a representative sample of Sicilian playwrights from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Giuseppe Rizzotto, Gaetano Mosca, Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, Nino Martoglio, and Luigi Pirandello. In addition, I will examine the portrayals of these artists' works on stage by two noted regional actors, Giovanni Grasso and Angelo Musco, who made their careers playing "the Sicilian." By presenting contemporary political, ideological, and economic conditions, I hope to present a snapshot of the cultural landscape, the structure of feeling, and how these artists contributed to the construction of a regional identity that had not existed in Sicily before. These examples are not meant to be conclusive or definitive, only representative of a small piece of the ongoing construction and reconstruction of a cultural identity.

Italy and Sicily

For centuries Italy has been a collection of regions, each with its own history, culture, government, and even language. In 1865 with Italian unification mostly complete, this changed, but its population remained deeply divided in its loyalties. Because of political and economic conditions, this became particularly problematic between the North and the South. An anecdotal example of this is a personal experience I had in the spring of 2008 during a visit in Eastern Sicily. In a heated discussion about politics with my cousin Salvatore (Toti) Siracusa, a retired civil engineer from Caltagirone, the question of national and regional allegiance soon arose. Speaking in a mix of Italian and Sicilian, I asked Toti whether he identified primarily as an Italian or as a Sicilian. He responded emphatically that he was a Sicilian *first*, then Italian. He repeated this statement twice more for emphasis. His response included a note of hurt pride and of anger toward the central government in Rome, which was what we had been discussing

earlier. I wondered how many other people in Sicily felt as strongly as he did about their regional allegiances, and whether they shared his sense of grievance towards the northern Italian government.

The rift in Italy between North and South was born out of the very struggles for independence in the 1860s, and may well have been inevitable given the different cultures, economies, and histories of these regions. For the North and the Piedmont Government, the South seemed an enigma, and a nuisance—but now it was part of the new nation. Benedict Anderson writes that the definition of a nation is that it is “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁵ However, for the Italian government located in the North, this meant bringing into the nation a radically different space “to be explored, penetrated, contained, colonized.”⁶ The slower rate of economic growth by the more agrarian South became an enduring symbol of Southern difference.⁷ It was this economic backwardness that was then generalized to include the South’s people and culture, both of which were described as barbaric and uncivilized.⁸

The period after Unification was marked by the quick construction of stereotypes of southern Italians, both negative and positive, but mostly negative. These stereotypes were not all new, but they did become more virulent due to the problems in the region that threatened the unity of the new Italian kingdom. The insurgency of Sicily (which continued into the 1890s), local banditry, organized crime, and government corruption all played a role in the island’s negative reputation, but not the only one. Because, I would argue, it was also the representation

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

⁶ Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power 1859-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*

of those rebellious elements in cultural and official products that secured the island with its identity as other. In that early period of nationhood, the first *meridionalisti* Pasquale Villari, Sidney Sonnino, and Leopoldo Franchetti were dispatched to Sicily to explore and analyze the region's unique social and economic problems. The result of those explorations provided a series of official reports and letters that led to what is still known today as Italy's Southern Question, a designation that originated with these *meridionalisti* writers. Jonathan Morris describes the birth of *Meridionalism* as an "intellectual concept that explains the idiosyncrasies of Southern Italy in relation to the rest of the country."⁹ The othering of the South and the islands had begun; from this time forward it would be referred to as *La questione meridionale* or the Southern Question.¹⁰ These *meridionalisti* produced an intellectual body of work whereby the discourse on the nation's identity resulted in a false binary. These assumptions have persisted into the present.

The Southern Question endures as an issue and continues to play a role in the lives of Italians from all regions. In 1991, a group of like-minded factions coming from the Lombard and the Veneto regions formed the political party *Lega Nord* or Northern League. One of their main party platforms included secession of the North from the South, and the creation of a new state called Padania.¹¹ The Northern League maintains a view of the South as parasitic, crime-ridden, and a region that has squandered the hard-earned money invested in it by the North. One of its

⁹ Jonathan Morris, "Challenging Meridionalismo," in *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, ed. Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris (Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1997), xvi.

¹⁰ Most scholars see the Question as "a global representation of the Mezzogiorno's people and heritage" born in the wake after 1860. Marta Petruszewicz, "Before the Southern Question: 'Native' Ideas on Backwardness and Remedies in the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, 1815-1849," in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, Jane Schneider, ed., (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 27.

¹¹ See "Lega Nord per l'indipendenza della Padania," accessed December 2, 2012, www.leganord.org.

goals is to liberate the North of what they saw as dead weight.¹² In the 1994 and 1996 elections, the Northern League, under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, managed to challenge national unity with their high electoral numbers.¹³ They did not succeed. Nevertheless, Italy has since then been steadily moving in the direction of a federalist state. In 1999 and 2001, two constitutional amendments that substantially increased the power of the individual regions in Italy were approved. These amendments were the beginning of a process of federalization that is occurring, not only in Italy, but also in many of the nations in the European Union.¹⁴

Sicily's Theatre

Sicily's theatre from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries reflected the struggle for hegemony between Sicilians and Northerners, and their shifting ideologies. The neo-gramscian view of hegemony describes this clash for dominance as ever shifting and as irreducible to economic interests or class struggle. Richard Dyer describes this struggle as the attempt by a particular group to win the consent of other groups through social means and stereotypes, and it is an "attempt to fashion the whole of society according to their own world view, value system, sensibility and ideology."¹⁵ The ruling group makes this world-view "appear (as it does to them) as 'natural' and 'inevitable'" in order to establish their hegemony.¹⁶ These dynamics lead to the cooptation of symbolic power by dominant groups in the society and the

¹² The party's strong anti-southern stance can only be matched by their strong anti-immigrant stance.

¹³ Jane Schneider, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-orientalism in Italy (1848-1995)," in *Italy's 'Southern Question's Orientalism*," 1-3.

¹⁴ Sergio Fabbrini and Marco Brunazzo, "Federalizing Italy: The Convergent Effects of Europeanization and Domestic Mobilization," *Regional and Federal Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 100-20.

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, *Gays and Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1977), 30.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

stereotyping of Sicilians, even by other Sicilians. These other Sicilians feel solidarity with the economically and culturally dominant classes of the North, rather than the subaltern of the South.¹⁷ Therefore, they exempt themselves from the stereotype. Nevertheless, because it is a constant negotiation, these representations on stage also sometimes work against these stereotypes. Using the local language directly challenges the Northern dominant group, yet it does not necessarily give the subaltern a voice.¹⁸ In Sicily, in many cases, the artists who are constructing the representation of the subaltern do not emerge out of the illiterate peasant class but from the educated, elite groups of the island.

Theatre as a cultural product was a natural tool for establishing and propagating civil and moral values.¹⁹ Indeed, society expected plays to mirror Italy's life. One of the biggest influences on theatre at this time was a form of naturalism, which affirmed the possibility of representing reality on stage. But the reality reflected in that mirror had more to do with the interests and ideologies of competing arguments than with "real life." One of those arguments centered on language and the use of dialect versus the use of Tuscan Italian. Some Sicilian writers like Giovanni Verga were on the side of the national language; others, like Nino Martoglio and later in his career Luigi Capuana, saw an advantage in maintaining their local language. Nevertheless, regardless of the playwrights' ideologies, many of these plays by these Sicilians featured the working class or peasant class of the island. The representation of these lower-class stereotypes, new to the stage, encouraged the perception of the South as an exotic world. Dyer writes that

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 44.

¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 284-85.

¹⁹ Judith Davies, *The Realism of Luigi Capuana: Theory and Practice in the Development of Late Nineteenth-Century Italian Narrative* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979), 10.

stereotypes are taken to be an expression of a general agreement about a social group that arises independently of the stereotype; however, it is from the stereotypes that we form ideas about social groups.²⁰ A stereotype is less real and more apparent, expressing a “particular definition of reality, with concomitant evaluation, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society.”²¹ Many Sicilian artists participated in what became a national project of providing representations of Sicily and its people. These cultural representations contributed to a certain negative perception of the South. Sicilian artists, such as Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana, who were part of the bourgeois and intellectual classes, presented these images that seemed to display a loyalty to their class over their region.

Verga and Capuana were among the first proponents of the *verismo* movement in Italy. The Italian *veristi* based their movement primarily on Emile Zola’s Naturalism. This group followed many of his precepts: the writer should observe and depict what is in the human being and in nature, and the writer must not revert to abstract characters but tell the “true story” of the individual via the chronicle of daily life.²² Zola writes that you take the faithful depiction of a person or group’s life study and provide an exact observation of that study without embellishments; “it is only the scrap of an existence.”²³ The Sicilian *veristi* adopted what they believed to be a scientific approach to their work equal to that of the social scientists of the period, such as Franchetti and Sonnino, who aimed at achieving analysis, clarity, and objectivity in their studies.

²⁰ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Emile Zola, “Naturalism on the Stage,” in *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, translated by Belle M. Sherman, 109-57 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 124.

²³ *Ibid.*

I will limit my focus to major Sicilian artists and writers from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century who command the Sicilian theatrical canon: Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, Nino Martoglio,²⁴ and Luigi Pirandello. However, I will begin by looking at Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspara Mosca's *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* because of its unique position as the first popular play to reach audiences outside Sicily and become a staple in the repertoire of Sicilian theatres.²⁵ Rizzotto and Mosca are not part of the canon and their play, as it is, is rarely produced because of its apparent mafia friendly theme. Nevertheless, the play is important because of its influence on verismo and its unique historical relevance as the first successful mafia cultural product. It is considered a prototype of verismo with its naturalistic tendencies and its representation of the common Sicilian. However, unlike the other plays I will be discussing, *I mafiusi's* roots are in the folk culture of Sicily and not a product of the intellectual bourgeois class. The other pivotal plays that I will be looking at are *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Malià*, *L'aria del continente*, and *Liolà*. These plays are examples of the most popular and the most socially conscious works of their day, and they comprise what is the theatrical canon for Sicily. Furthermore, these plays continue to be performed today in professional and amateur theatres throughout the island.

The Literature

With the exception of Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and the works of Pirandello, there have only been a handful of books in English that have included any discussion of Sicilian theatre at the turn of the twentieth century. There are two important books that include discussion of this period: Marvin Carlson's *The Italian Stage from Goldoni to D'Annunzio* from 1981, and

²⁴ Nicknamed the "Goldoni siciliano" by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, a Sicilian contemporary of Martoglio who served as prime minister of the kingdom of Italy from 1917-1919.

²⁵ Hermann W. Haller, *The Other Italy: The Literary Canon in Dialect* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 308.

the recent anthology by Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa, *A History of Italian Theatre* from 2006. Certainly, in Italian there have been more books that have included scholarship on this period, but again, with the exception of Verga and Pirandello, only a few scholarly works on the other Sicilian playwrights from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Capuana and Martoglio have received scant attention by Italian scholars for their theatrical work, even while their plays are still performed in Sicily today. In Italy the theatre, especially what is considered popular theatre, has not yet received the kind of academic scrutiny reserved for poetry, prose, or Italian language theatre.

One Italian scholar who attempts to address that gap is Guido Nicastro in his 1978 text, *Teatro e società in Sicilia: 1860-1918*. This monograph has provided me with the germ for my own work. Nicastro's goal is to look at those Sicilian artists who represented the Sicilian figure on stage for the first time. He limits his study to Rizzoto and Mosca, Verga, Giuseppe Giusti-Sinopoli, Federico De Roberto, Capuana, Martoglio, Alessio Di Giovanni, and Pirandello. He concludes with an analysis of Leonardo Sciascia's *I mafiosi*, an adaptation of the Rizzoto/Mosca play *I mafiosi di la Vicaria* staged in 1966 at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan.

In the preface to his monograph, Nicastro laments what he perceives as the neglect by scholars of writers, theatres, audiences, and actors of the island. In his work, he attempts an analysis of scenes, structures, and language within the socioeconomic context of the island's realities.²⁶ His study, nevertheless, remains a literary interpretation of certain plays with some background on when the work was written. However, he does point to some intriguing directions for further study.

²⁶ Guido Nicastro, *Teatro e società in Sicilia (1860-1918)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1978), 7. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Nicastro states that the underdevelopment and poverty of Sicily represented in these authors' works still plague the island at the time he was writing, and while he seems to be celebrating these artists, his conclusion is that Sicily's theatre, in the end, failed to represent the "real Sicilian."²⁷ After writing that only Pirandello had managed to capture the reality of the island, he concludes:

Se questa linea interpretativa è giusta, non è sbagliato affermare che il teatro siciliano fu, nel suo insieme e con le eccezioni di cui si diceva, un grande avvenimento mancato. E ciò nella misura in cui non riuscì a tradurre in figure e momenti scenici la realtà regionale nella sua sofferta contraddittorietà. Le ragioni del fallimento vanno ricercate non solo nell'inadeguatezza dei mezzi espressivi del teatro del epoca, ma anche nei limiti culturali e politici della classe egemone del tempo, siciliano e nazionale, incapace di intervenire su quell'ampia zona di realtà doppiamente subalterna per collocazione sociale e geografica.

[If this interpretive line is correct, it would not be wrong to affirm that the Sicilian theatre as a whole, with the exception of the one I mentioned, was a huge missed event. And this was because it did not succeed in translating into figures and scenic moments, the regional reality (of the island) in its contradictory nature. The reasons for this failure can be found not only in the inadequacies of the expressive means of the theatre of the day, but also in the cultural and political limits of the hegemonic classes of the day, both the Sicilian and the national, (who were)

²⁷ Ibid.

incapable of operating on that wide playing field of reality (which was) doubly subaltern because of its social and geographic position.]²⁸

My study will focus on how the works of Sicilian artists were part of the conversation of nation building, while they may have still included some instances of resistance. Indeed, in some ways Sicily's theatre contributed to the development of a unique regional identity that was not apparent before the *Risorgimento*, even while, as Nicastro points out, these works were mostly a missed opportunity. Therefore, Nicastro's study has provided me with an important jumping-off point in my question of how these Sicilian artists both failed and succeeded in contributing to the construction of a separate regional identity. Failed because that identity was incomplete and in many ways based on negative stereotypes, yet succeeded in having a great influence on Sicily's culture.

Another important area of scholarship on the relationship between the North and South after Italian unification has come from the social sciences beginning in the 1990s. Scholars have been revisiting many assumptions held by Italians about the South, deploying Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a theoretical model. This is a new perspective on what has been a continuous issue in Italy since the nation's inception. Of course, other scholars and leaders have considered the ramifications of the Southern Question before the 1990s, including Antonio Gramsci in *The Prison Notebooks* and in articles for his weekly journal *L'Ordine Nuovo*.²⁹ Both these contemporary scholars and Gramsci have analyzed reasons for the construction of this binary

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Its full name, *L'Ordine Nuovo: Rassegna Settimanale di Cultura Socialista* (The New Order: A Weekly Review of Socialist Culture), a fortnightly series on socialist politics and culture, was founded in 1919 by Antonio Gramsci, Pietro Tasca, Umberto Terracini, and Palmiro Togliatti. Its first page contained the following slogan, "Educate yourselves because we'll need your intelligence. Rouse yourselves because we'll need your enthusiasm. Organize yourselves because we'll need your strength." The journal circulated mostly in Turin and Piedmont. Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 1:71.

after unification that will inform my study. Gramsci locates the roots of the Southern problem within the political context of unification, when the alliance between the industrialists of the North and the landowning classes of the South established a “hegemonic programme of the Cavourian moderates.”³⁰ Because the other classes of the island were excluded from the “revolution,” Gramsci calls it a “passive revolution” and sees some of the problems in the South stemming from that of omitting the lower classes of the island.³¹ It was a top down revolution not one rising up from the bottom. Gramsci’s writings also provide a starting point for many contemporary scholars because of his observations on the particularities of the Southern social structure. Many scholars interested in Italy see a parallel between the Southern Question and Said’s notion of Orientalism, a framework for understanding the Italian South as another object of Orientalism.

John Dickie points out that “the South, like the Orient, is a construct; in Said’s words, it is ‘a constituted entity.’”³² Using this as a model, he posits that the constituted entity (Sicily) can be constructed by those who observe aspects of the Sicilian experience either from outside the culture or from within. Said argues that it is common for cultures to transform the strange into something that is “for the benefit of the receiver.”³³ The hegemonic culture establishes itself as the norm and sets diverging cultures within the framework of the other. In the North, the re-imagining of the South as other fulfilled the political goal of placing the blame for the *meridionale* regions’ economic failure on their “strangeness” and alien nature. The hegemonic culture generated a label for the South as politically and economically “underdeveloped” in relation to

³⁰ John Davis, *Gramsci and Italy’s Passive Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 67-68.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 322.

³³ Ibid.

the North³⁴ and defined a discourse that would continue to refer to the South's "backwardness" and failure (or refusal) to resolve backwardness throughout the twentieth century right up to today. This failure or refusal was and is seen as a proof of the "barbarism," rebelliousness, laziness and violent nature, of the Southern character.³⁵

But the stereotypes are not all negative. There has also been an idealized image of the South and Sicily with its peasants perceived as primitive (close to nature), picturesque, and exotic. This positive stereotype is also Orientalist. The popular late-nineteenth-century journal *Illustrazione Italiana* offers pictures and articles that characterize the South as a bucolic land of rustic charm peopled by exotic yet quaint peasants.³⁶ In his essay on the stereotypes of the South, John Dickie writes how this illustrated magazine used a marketing strategy that traded on kitsch for a public that saw itself as discerning and knowledgeable.³⁷ The audience for these products was the Northern bourgeois classes. The North, already acquainted with these stereotypes, then saw them in plays and more often in operas such as Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Those scholars who have used Said's Orientalism as a model will inform my scholarship, but I will not be looking at how the North necessarily constructed this binary. Rather, I will be looking at how Sicilian artists problematized that binary in the late nineteenth /early-twentieth centuries, while seeming to embrace it. Consequently, they came to construct a new regional identity. This identity was informed by the island's political history and roots as well as by the past and current stereotypes being peddled by the Northern elites and Sicily's hegemonic classes.

³⁴ Jonathan Morris, "Challenging *Meridionalismo*," 2.

³⁵ John Dickie, "Stereotypes of the Italian South 1860-1900," in Lumley and Morris, *The New History of the Italian South*, 114-15. The author explores Alfredo Niceforo's book *L'Italia Barbara contemporanea* (Contemporary Barbarian Italy) of 1898 and how it can be seen as the "locus classicus of prejudice towards Southern Italians."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 131,133.

This identity was then solidified by a group of native artists who established themselves as the cultural authority of Sicily.

In his article “Beyond Occidentalism,” Fernando Coronil describes representations of “Otherness” as constructions of “Selfhood.”³⁸ Coronil shifts our attention from “the deficiencies of the West’s representations of the Orient, to that of ‘Occidentalism,’ which refers to the conceptions of the West animating these representations.”³⁹ A thorough reading of Coronil’s theories helps explain the motivations and maneuvers of the Sicilian playwrights I shall focus on. To become cultural authorities of Sicily, particular artists needed to build a canon that was theirs, and not the North’s. Therefore, they claimed authenticity. In order to do that they had to establish different categories (us-them) whereby the subject retained power over the object (i.e., The US held power over the THEM). They did this by creating the concept of “Sicily” as a comprehensible, bounded category, whose past appears to be self—contained—detached from a world history. To ensure their privileged status, they had to construe these categories as various power structures within a (cultural) hierarchy, and, in so doing they naturalized differences (and thus, the concept of the other) as inherent and legitimate. Their production supported the reproduction of power asymmetry in place.⁴⁰ The Sicilian artists were complicit in the othering of their *paesani* while they participated in the construction of a new separate identity that could only remain inferior to that of the North but at the same time subversively challenged *that* hierarchy, to establish a new one on their terms. This new way of examining otherness focuses on the generator of these representations and not necessarily on the representations themselves. It also raises the question: what is at stake for them when they produce these constructs?

³⁸ Fernando Coronil, “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Gerohistorical Categories” in *Cultural Anthropology*, 11 no. 1 (Feb. 1996): 51-87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

Therefore, I will not only be looking at these representations, but also to the personal writings of these artists on these works.

The Chapters

In the first chapter, “*I mafiusi di la Vicaria: The Beginning of the Fetishization of the Mafioso*,” I trace the beginning of the mafioso Sicilian stereotype to the 1863 popular Palermo piece by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspara Mosca. In 1863, Rizzotto, a palermitano, along with Mosca, a grade school teacher, wrote a play that represented life in the great prison of Palermo with scenes that revealed the habits, culture, and jargon of the *camorristi* of Palermo. The first appearance of the word mafia was in the play’s title, *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, though the word mafia or mafioso never appears in the play. The mafia, mafioso, man of honor, has been a part of popular culture for over a hundred years beginning almost at the moment of the new Italian state and with Rizzotto and Mosca’s play. It was not only the interest of the audience in the criminal underworld (*ambiente della malavita*) but the alternate code of conduct of the criminal denizens that became a symbol for a real fear by the North of a wild and uncivilized Sicily and, at the same time, a fascinating look at an alien world, a taste of the forbidden and exotic. In this world, the mafioso prison inmates dominated, overturning society’s rules and conventions. In addition, the portrayal of these Sicilian characters on stage, especially in the early twentieth century by the Sicilian acting companies, further popularized these mafiosi and stereotyped the Sicilian. The first great actor playing Gioachino Funciazza was Rizzotto, the author himself, who played the *capomafioso* throughout Italy and the Americas until his death. These productions with Rizzotto were translated from Sicilian to Neapolitan to Italian depending on the audience. With the

revival of the Sicilian play in the early twentieth century, the work was performed in Sicilian by Sicilians, creating a greater sense of “realism” and difference for the audience.

This chapter focuses on the context for the play *I mafiusi*, and the events around its production and success that includes the rise of organized crime in Palermo. Corruption at the local level in the South seemed an accepted part of doing business; at least that was the perception in the North. The actual issues in Sicily were far more complex, and I will only touch on these briefly. Nevertheless, the structure of feeling in Italy and Sicily at that crucial moment in time, the creation of a unified state, and the success of *I mafiusi*, I argue, was the beginning of the mafioso anti-hero, and of the fetishization of that criminal society. The verismo movement in Sicily freely borrowed conventions pertaining to rustic chivalry, the vendetta, and honor, importing the worldview of the mafioso into their work.

In addition, I link the play’s influence with other cultural and scientific events that supported a perception of the Sicilian as essentially uncivilized. The late nineteenth century saw the founding of the Italian Positivist Criminology by Cesare Lombroso. He developed a theory of anthropological criminality, which attributed criminality to inheritance. His theory provided a scientific reason for the differences between the Northern Italian and Southern Italian. He claimed, “Southern Italians were more crime-prone and lazy because they were unlucky enough to have less Aryan blood than their northern countrymen.”⁴¹ This theory also seemed to justify a series of hard-line policies towards the South. Therefore, I argue that Lombroso’s theory, the reports about high-profile murders in and around Palermo, and the visual stage representations all tended to reinforce the Sicilian as criminal or mafioso stereotype.

In chapter two, “The Sicilian *Verismo* of Verga, Capuana, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*,”

⁴¹ Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Praeger Press, 2002), 108.

I focus on Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* as well as the theoretical basis for verismo as written and developed by Luigi Capuana. In addition, I examine how Verga's work created an industry for the representation of the Sicilian peasant on stage in his rural Sicily using Capuana's play *Malià* as an example. Probably more than any other Sicilian writer's, Verga's work has come to "define" the island and the thinking of its people. During a period in Italy of constructing national identity, Verga contributed to this project by introducing the North to some of the cultural differences it had with the South. Verga's investment in verismo and in representing a true image of the Sicilian only reinforced the more negative stereotypes about the South that were already present in the works of the *meridionalisti*. Turridu and Alfio in Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* defined the stereotypical Southern male common to those studies conducted after the Risorgimento: independent, overly passionate, violent, and bound by ancient rules of honor. Meanwhile, the same work portrayed Southern women as overly passionate, loose, and crazy. Verga's portrayal of the Sicilian figure gave Northern audiences stereotypes that they were already familiar with from stories and journals yet had never seen portrayed on the stage.

As an opera, *Cavalleria Rusticana* had its greatest success reaching not just all of Italy but also most of the western world. The opera incorporates more bucolic and picturesque scenes while including much of the violence and passion of the original story. More than any other art form in Italy during the nineteenth century, musical drama was a national expression of unity, which was forged by Giuseppe Verdi and then used by the political leaders of the Risorgimento.⁴²

⁴² "The Presence of opera, whatever term is used (*opera lirica, melodrama*), in the fabric of the awareness and sensibilities of the vast 'masses' in Italy in the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth is a revealing example of how influential processes of innovation can be

Verga was dedicated to writing for a bigger audience than just Sicily. Unlike Rizzoto and Mosca, who were writing for their fellow citizens in Palermo, Verga was always writing for a literate bourgeois audience, primarily in the North. He did not write in dialect, even though his language follows the rhythms and phrasings of dialect. The question of language was a debate in which he and many other writers were actively involved. I will look at who was on both sides of the debate and why. Luigi Capuana, an ally of Verga, originally stood with his friend on the question of language, but later changed his mind and wrote many plays in dialect. One of his most famous was *Malià*, which I will analyze and compare to Verga's work.

In chapter three, "Performing Sicilianness: *L'Aria del Continente* and *Liolà: commedia campestre*," I turn to Sicilian dialect theatre and the regional actors who inspired Martoglio, Capuana, and Pirandello to write some of their most famous characters. I look at how *L'aria del continente* (1915) by Nino Martoglio (1870-1921) and *Liolà: commedia campestre* (1916) by Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) continue to represent and perpetuate the development of particular stereotypes and tropes, which were found in verismo just a few years earlier. In addition, I will address the performance of these works by Sicilian actors in Sicilian at the beginning of the twentieth century and how these performances contributed to the othering of the Sicilian.

Using semiotics as a tool and *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* by Erika Fischer-Lichte as a model, I argue that audiences in the North interpreted signs of difference in the Sicilian actor as an embodiment of Sicilianness—seen as something very strange and exotic as compared to being Italian. In her book, Fischer-Lichte writes that

in the capitalist age and of how permeable the social, cultural, and economic areas can be in relation to a phenomenon that seems resoundingly to involve different, and often opposing, strata of society." Roberto Leydi, "The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera," in *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Georgio Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 289.

“theatre expresses the society in which it occurs through a wide range of cultural systems,” including the body movements, gestures, and language of the actor.⁴³ These systems contribute to the culture as a whole and make up part of the norms and rules that a given society immediately recognizes.⁴⁴ Fischer-Lichte extends the field of semiotics to look at “how and why types of acting are related to, or derived from, a historically determined cultural context.”⁴⁵ Similarly, by using contemporary critics’ and reviewers’ descriptions of the Sicilian performers, as well as the context of the performers’ lives, I argue that audiences perceived the performances by these actors as a glimpse into another world of uncivilized primitives. In fact, I argue that the Sicilianness of these plays with these actors was a major factor in their success. Luckily, I am able to include an analysis of the famous Sicilian Angelo Musco (1872-1937) in an adaptation of *L’aria del continente* to film in 1937. Uploaded on YouTube in early 2012, the film, directed by Gennaro Righelli, provides a rare opportunity to see the actor perform one of his greatest roles. Even though the work has been completely translated into Sicilian, the obvious cultural clichés stand out. It is a testament to these regional actors that they created some of the most influential theatre in Sicily. The same year that this film was in the theatres, Musco died, as did the Sicilian acting companies. Without their stars, such as Musco and Giovanni Grasso, senior (1873-1930), and with a push towards a national Italian language from the Fascist regime, Sicilian language theatre disappeared—at least for a while.⁴⁶

⁴³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁶ Not to be confused with his cousin, Giovanni Grasso, junior (1888-1963), a famous cinema actor.

Chapter One

I mafiusi di la Vicaria: The Beginning of the Fetishization of the Mafioso

“I believe you use Mafia and equate it with organized crime. It’s an ugly stereotype that gets used over and over again against Italians.”¹ Mario Cuomo.

In June 2012, a fundraiser for a public broadcasting station was televised, in which a trio of talented teenage tenors sang opera and traditional Italian songs.² Called Il Volo and performing on the stage of the Detroit Opera House, the group sang such Italian songs as the Neapolitan classic “O Sole Mio” and the popular standard “Smile.”³ Zachary Woolfe of the *New York Times* called the group’s repertoire a mix of “Italian pop and soaring power ballad, the same sweet spot that has carried performers like Mr. Bocelli and Il Divo to superstardom. The difference, of course, is age: theirs and that of potential audience.”⁴ While I would describe their voices as impressive for their relatively young age and lack of training, their inter-song banter,

¹ Mario Cuomo denies there is a *mafia*. Larry Mcshane, “Italian Group Assail Generic Use of ‘Mafia’” with AM-Castellano Successor,” *Associated Press*, December 18, 1985, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1985/Italian-Group-Assail-Generic-Use-of-Mafia-With-AM-Castellano-Successor-Bjt/id-3e5572f5d1c2d20de83ae394a8f8a962?S>. Cuomo served as New York State Governor from 1983-94.

² Piero Barone (1993-), Ignazio Boschetto (1994-), and Gianluca Ginoble (1995-) referred to as the three tenors, Il Volo, The Flight. The teens, untrained, were competing on an Italian talent show, “Ti Lascio una Canzone” (2009-10), when the producers had the idea of putting the three of them together for a song, “O Sole Mio.” Italian-American Anthony Rugiero, a board member of the Detroit Opera House, saw them and wanted to bring them over for a benefit. Already signed in Italy, the result was a contract with a major popular/rock music label Geffen Records in the United States and a world tour.

³ Charlie Chaplin composed the music for “Smile” for his 1936 film *Modern Times*. John Turner and Jeffrey Parsons added the title and lyrics for the music in 1954. Lawrence E. McDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film Music: A Comprehensive History* (Lanham, Maryland: Ardsley House, 1998), 40.

⁴ Zachary Woolfe, “They’re Like Awesome Opera Singers,” *New York Times*, October 2, 2011, New York edition, Arts and Leisure section, 1.

probably written for them, contained a few sour notes. The singers resorted to a series of Italian stereotypes in a staged attempt to be funny and endearing.

Standing downstage next to a full orchestra, Ignazio, born in Bologna but now living in Sicily, introduces his fellow performer, who is upstage at the top of a flight of stairs. In his Italian accented English, he says, “My friend Piero was born in Naro, Agrigento... Naro *provincia* Agrigento, Sicilia. For those of you who don’t know, that’s where the Godfather came from.” Piero, going with the joke, shakes his finger and responds, “Be careful.” Ignazio continues, “No, no, you don’t have to worry about Piero; he’s a very peaceful sort.”⁵ A portion of the audience claps and cheers when he mentions Sicily, signaling that they are either Sicilian or of Sicilian descent; the spectators laugh when Ignazio mentions the Godfather, signaling that they are in on the joke. Later in the program, the singer introduces Gianluca, the third of their trio, and with sincerity he says, “And our friend Gianluca was born in Roseto degli Abruzzi in the Abruzzo region, a very beautiful part of central Italy.”⁶ Part of the audience applauds again, indicating its connection with that geographical area. No joke this time. Later, there is another use of stereotypes in an introduction to the traditional Italian song “*Mamma Son Tanto Felice*.”⁷

⁵ The PBS Special “Il Volo Takes Flight—Live from the Detroit Opera House” aired March and June 2012. It is an interesting reference because of its inaccuracy. It seems to be a reference to *The Godfather*, Mario Puzo’s 1969 novel adapted to film in 1972, 1974, and in 1990. The fictional Sicilian crime family emigrated from Corleone, Sicily—a town also known for a number of real life mafia bosses. Ignazio was using a shorthand reference to imply that the town was mafioso and by extension so was Piero.

⁶ “Il Volo Takes Flight.”

⁷ “Il Volo Takes Flight.” “Mamma Son Tanto Felice” (1941) was written by Cesare Andrea Bixio, with lyrics by Bruno Cherubini, and has been sung by great tenors such as Beniamino Gigli (1890-1957), Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007), and Andrea Bocelli (1958-).

Here, the three singers enumerate the three things that Italian men and boys love, that is, eating, *calcio* (soccer), and their mothers.⁸

The jokes as well as the inter-song chats assume knowledge of cultural stereotypes of the Italian and Sicilian. The American record company executives and the persons hired to groom these singers presume that by trotting out these familiar and easily recognizable stereotypes, *Il Volo* will lull prospective spectators into feelings of nostalgia for a place that exists in the audience's imagination. They offer a shorthand method to produce these feelings while providing the trio of inexperienced singers a way to fill in the empty moments. Part of the selling point of these young men is their Italianness, and, hence the effort to highlight the stereotypical images of what that means. Indeed, select images of Italy, as well as images reinforcing themes in the songs, are projected on a large screen behind the performers. For example, *Mamma Son Tanto Felice* is accompanied by different video loops of scenes with mothers with babies, eating and drinking with the family at the dinner table, and serving food. All three performers sing this song as they move into the audience and hand out roses, stopping to sing to their own mothers in the audience. The mothers cry with emotion and the audience members, many standing, applaud. The stereotype is announced, projected on a screen, and then performed in the song amid the audience.

Many of the stereotypes appear to be positive (even while they are essentializing)—the beauty of central Italy, the love of food, soccer, and mother—yet the Sicilian retains the negative stereotype as mafioso. In this instance, the word mafia is not mentioned. Rather, the term Godfather is substituted, giving the statement a lighter nuance by evoking memories of the 1972

⁸ “Il Volo Takes Flight.” The specialness of the mother/son relationship in Italian culture has a long tradition. Even *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* includes a scene depicting the special love a son has for his mother.

iconic American film *The Godfather* with actors Marlon Brando and Al Pacino, and *not* the countless murders and real-life assassinations of such persons as the anti-mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.⁹ The audience, which includes a large number of Italian Americans, tolerates these negative images of Sicilians and in fact appears to encourage them—hence the continued pervasive use of these images, despite their negative connotation. It is a conflicting response that is not only tolerated but appears to be celebrated by a segment of Italian Americans.¹⁰

The Sicilian mafioso stereotype does not seem to be fading away anytime soon, considering the constant emergence of new cultural products dependent on it.¹¹ The term has become ubiquitous around the world and is used today to describe any criminal underworld organizations. But for the Sicilian, the term has a particular usage that suggests a crucial difference and includes a history that goes beyond the naming of a criminal organization. Ignazio’s joke at his friend Piero’s expense highlights that difference.

⁹ In 1992, after the Italian Supreme Court set a seal on the initial guilty verdicts of 342 Mafiosi sentenced to a total of 2,665 years in prison, the Corleonesi assassinated the investigating magistrate Giovanni Falcone and two months later Paolo Borsellino in a massive car bomb killing five members of his escort. John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 18-19.

¹⁰ Certainly this is not true of all Italian Americans. There are groups such as UNICO (The National American Italian Service Organization) and NIAF (National Italian American Foundation), which have attempted to highlight and denounce these instances of negative stereotyping of Italians.

¹¹ Besides novels, movies, and television, the mafia has also penetrated the game world from the personal computer to playstations. Many of the games use conventions made popular by *The Godfather* films. One example is a game called *Omerta*, a multiplayer online text-based role-playing (RPG) mafia game, available at <http://www.barafranca.com>. Described in the directions as “set in the 1930’s (sic) gangster and mafia world, the game is all about status, money and respect.” It is based on the legendary stories of don Barafranca, a fictional gangster created for the game. The goal is to accrue rank points via crimes such as stealing cars, breaking friends out of jail, robbing banks, gambling, drugs, protections, etc. “New game players choose to start in a city of either USA or Italy, where the mafia has got a large influence even now.”

In her article, “Destabilising Paradise: Men, Women and Mafiosi: Sicilian Stereotypes,” Elizabeth Hart focuses on the negative stereotypes connected with the Sicilian figure in film and media and the juxtaposition of the geographical place as a “terrestrial paradise” with the “destabilizing characteristics, such as criminality.”¹² Sicily, geographically, has historically been depicted as a bucolic paradise; the land sung about by the poet Theocritus (ca. 300 BCE), while, on the other hand, Sicilians, the people, have suffered a perception of criminality. Hart argues that the enduring stereotyping of Sicilians as criminals, for both an Italian and a global audience in film representations, “illustrate the ascendancy of audience need and expectations over any hegemonic intent in media representations and that their survival is embedded in aesthetic pleasure, which is partly fuelled by a sense of exotic difference.”¹³ Because of this appeal, the mafioso, out of all the Sicilian stereotypes, “has the greatest currency globally.”¹⁴ Due to some deeper aesthetic appeal, representations of the mafioso figure in film and the media have become fetishized by audiences worldwide, who have little to no knowledge of the figure’s origins.

Nevertheless, audience hunger for the mafioso figure in entertainment has sustained its existence as a cultural anti-hero since its first presentation in a popular work, *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, on a small stage in Palermo in 1863. Since then, the mafioso’s reach has exceeded his humble beginnings to become a staple character on the world stage. As such, the Sicilian has also become infamous, as he has been continually connected to organized crime. In his article, “Stereotypes and Cultural Memory: Adaptations of Oskar Luts’s *Spring* in Theatre and Film,” Anneli Saro points out, “Stereotypes must be explicitly or implicitly shared by an entire

¹² Elizabeth Hart, “Destabilising Paradise: Men, Women and Mafiosi: Sicilian Stereotypes,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (May 2007): 213.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 219.

community. And the bigger is [*sic*] the community, the bigger the legitimacy of the figure.”¹⁵

The mafia stereotype is worldwide, and hence has attained a sense of permanence and truth in the global cultural landscape. To understand the extent of its celebrity, we can compare it to the Neapolitan *Camorra*, which is not nearly as well known nor as culturally visible; however, as a criminal organization, it is just as politically connected and still a corrupting presence in Naples.¹⁶

In his book, *See Naples and Die: The Camorra and Organized Crime*, Tom Behan provides a thorough and useful history of the *camorra* and its origins. Indeed, his explanation of how organized crime developed in Naples has relevance to the discussion of the origins of the mafia in and around Palermo. We must keep in mind that both organizations evolved secretly, and that its members were mostly poor and illiterate.¹⁷ Therefore there are no early written documents about these organizations from its members.¹⁸

Behan traces certain theories about how the *camorra* started in Naples: the first theory is that the organization is a direct descendant of a Spanish secret society, the *Garduna* founded in 1417; the second theory is that the *camorra* was a new type of *lazzaroni* (very poor criminal).¹⁹ Behan then includes what he considers a more likely explanation that the *camorra* grew out of

¹⁵ Anneli Saro, “Stereotypes and Cultural Memory: Adaptations of Oskar Luts’s *Spring* in Theatre and Film,” *Trames* 12, no. 3 (September 2008): 309.

¹⁶ An older criminal organization, the *Camorra*, has been described and written about in detail by Roberto Saviano in his popular 2006 book, *Gomorra: A Personal Journey into the Violent International Empire of Naples’ Organized Crime System*. Saviano’s book was first adapted into a play in 2007 and produced at the Teatro Stabile di Napoli and then adapted into the 2008 film *Gomorra*, directed by Matteo Garrone.

¹⁷ Tom Behan, *See Naples and Die: The Camorra and Organized Crime* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2002), 17.

¹⁸ Behan, *See Naples and Die*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

Neapolitan society at the end of the eighteenth century among the city's poor.²⁰ It is not surprising, as I shall discuss later concerning the word mafia, that the etymology of the word camorra remains as mysterious as the organization's origins. I will not discuss all the possibilities here, but I will make note of the fact that the first stronghold of the camorra was in the prison system, where the inmate was not allowed to eat, drink, smoke, or gamble without the *camorrista's* permission.²¹ The inmate was also required to hand over a tenth of all the money he was sent in order to pay for the right to buy and sell any essential or non-essential needs in the prison.²² The relevance of this last section will become clearer when I discuss the plot of *I mafiusi di la vicaria*, in which the camorra is described in exactly the same way.

Certainly, the Neapolitan, who hails from a land where the camorra has existed since the eighteenth century (longer than the mafia) and where it still retains control, does not endure the same stigma as the Sicilian, who continues to be closely identified with the mafioso.²³ This is not to say that Neapolitans as Southern Italians were not subject to similar prejudice as Sicilian -- just that they were not as closely identified with criminality universally as Sicilians were and still are.²⁴ Neapolitans are not called camorristi, that is to say, members of the camorra, for instance. I would argue that one contributing reason for this difference in identification is due to the success of the 1863 play *I mafiusi di la vicaria*, by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspara Mosca. The play is about a *man of honor*, Gioachino Funciazza, a shoemaker and Italian patriot, who becomes an inmate the Palermo prison La Vicaria as a result of killing the supposed seducer of

²⁰ Ibid., 18.

²¹ Ibid., 23.

²² Ibid.

²³ Outside of Italy the stereotype is often generalized to all Italians.

²⁴ See chapter two where I discuss the "Southern Question."

his wife.²⁵ At La Vicaria, we are introduced to his fellow gang members and the rules, customs, and jargon of the camorra. The terms mafia or mafioso are never mentioned in the play.²⁶

In this chapter, I argue that the importance of *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* works on two levels: first, as a historical document of the inner workings, customs, and jargon of the secret criminal societies in Sicily operating in and around Palermo at the time of the *Risorgimento*; and second, the play is important because it is the *first* successful cultural product about the “society of honorable men.” Therefore, I argue that Rizzotto and Mosca’s play was the primary successful cultural product that introduced, defined, and glamourized the mafioso figure: first by giving that figure and his organization a name, and then through its success and influence. The play was the beginning of the fetishization of the mafia. The representation of the mafioso presented a figure that was attractive because of his ability to make his own laws, but dangerous because of his willingness to use violence to achieve his goals. The Sicilian who was perceived as different by the North and was part of the new “conquered” land, was easily fitted as a mafioso. Negative and positive traits of the anti-hero figure were freely attached to the Sicilian man, who became objectified and stereotyped as someone with dangerous criminal tendencies.

Indeed, the conventions demonstrated in *I mafiusi* are freely translated into the works of the Sicilian *veristi* beginning with Giovanni Verga. Therefore, I argue that the connection and the construction of the stereotype of the Sicilian as mafioso originated with Rizzotto and Mosca’s play. Historically the play was born almost at the same moment as the unified Italian state.

However its national success came a little later and coincided with a period when *brigandagio*,

²⁵ The names used to describe these secret organizations and their members are numerous. Gioachino is called a man of honor, of the society, a camorrista, and a capo (head of his gang). Other names for these organizations include *cosa nostra*, society of honorable men, the society, as well as mafia and camorra. *I mafiusi* uses the terms camorra and the society.

²⁶ Gioachino is also sometimes seen as Gioacchino and in the Sicilian Jachinu.

bandits, outlaws, rebels against society in the South were causing serious problems for the newly unified nation. These challenges to the Piedmont government encouraged a view of the Sicilian as other and led to questions of difference based on science.

The late nineteenth century also saw a growing Positivist movement, and the beginnings of modern theories of deviance and crime.²⁷ In 1871, after studying the skull of the Calabrian brigand Giuseppe Villella, Cesare Lombroso made his first discovery of the famous occipital fossa, the presence of a cavity in the brain that resembled that of a fetus in its third or fourth month of development, and led him to compare the “criminal” to an earlier evolutionary form of primitive man.²⁸ This discovery would lead to his theory of the born criminal and the founding of Italian Positivist Criminology.²⁹ Lombroso’s theory of anthropological criminality attributed criminality to inheritance and provided a pseudo-scientific reason for the differences between the Northern and Southern Italian: the incidents of *brigandagio* and civil unrest.

Lombroso’s theory provided one way to answer the question, why are these people so different? As Mary Gibson points out, Lombroso argued using the veneer of science that it was the lack of Aryan blood that made Southern Italians more crime-prone and lazy compared to their northern countrymen.³⁰ Although Lombroso did have many critics in his day, his populist style in his successful book *L'uomo delinquente* provided his theories a huge platform.³¹ His

²⁷ See chapter two on a discussion about Positivism.

²⁸ Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 230-1.

²⁹ Cesare Lombroso, (1835-1909) physician and psychiatrist, wrote the highly influential works, *L'uomo delinquente* (Criminal Man, 1876) and *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* (Criminal Woman, The Prostitute and The Normal Woman, 1893). Lombroso proposed a theory of the born criminal marked by physical and psychological anomalies.

³⁰ Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 2002), 108. See Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca Editore, 1889).

³¹ Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, 232-33.

theories also coincided with some of the early field reports that came from such *meriodinalisti* as Pasquale Villari, Sidney Sonnino, and Leopoldo Franchetti.³² This theory of the Southern Italian as criminal or even as an evolutionary primitive caused some real fears for the North and may have provided some justification for the harsher policies directed towards the South.

Nevertheless, I argue that it was the success of the Sicilian-themed works that were written during this period and reflected the concerns of the new nation that helped to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Hence the mafioso figure became the new cultural antihero, leading to an unshakable stereotype for all Sicilians. I argue that *I mafiusi* was instrumental in the cultural fetishization of the mafioso, particularly by the upper echelons of society: politicians and artists with substantial cultural capital. My claim is that works by veristi playwrights such as Verga and Capuana evince tropes and features of *I mafiusi* in their depictions of purported Sicilian folklore.

In this chapter, I will begin by presenting the plot of *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, followed by the origins of the play and the controversy surrounding its authorship. I will then discuss the political and social situation in Palermo during the revolution and the rise of organized crime in the city. I will then discuss popular theatre in Palermo, and the connection between verismo and Rizzotto and Mosca's play.

Plot

The setting of *I mafiusi* is Palermo in 1854, when Sicily was under the rule of the House of Bourbons.³³ The first act of the four-act version is set in a small piazza in the Albergheria

³² See chapter two.

³³ The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was comprised of the union between the Kingdom of Sicily and the Kingdom of Naples that was occupied by the French House of Bourbon, 1816-60.

district of Palermo, the oldest neighborhood in the city.³⁴ Pasquale Ardichella sets the tone of the work with his first line, “Sì, sì che fate bene. Dategli una coltellata che la merita.” (Yes, yes, you are doing the right thing. Give him a good knifing because he deserves it.)³⁵ Pasquale, a comic figure reminiscent of a *miles gloriosus*, believes that Gioachino Funciazza’s wife, Carmela, is having an affair with the butcher. Pasquale, who is also Gioachino’s apprentice shoemaker, informs his boss, who immediately runs off to challenge the butcher to a duel. Pasquale, the local gossip, also informs the audience that Gioachino is a camorrista and had been in prison in 1848 for his part in the Sicilian revolution against the Bourbons.³⁶ Meanwhile, Pasquale discovers from Carmela that it is his sister that the butcher was seeing, but it is too late, Gioachino has killed the man and is carted off to prison.

Acts two and three take place in the Palermo prison, Ucciardone, where Gioachino is the acknowledged *capo camorrista*. The scene opens with Totò, an upper level member of the “society” teaching two younger lower level members, Turi and Errico, the fine art of rustic fencing with knives made of wood. Then two characters enter who are not members of the “society,” don Nunzio, a faithful Bourbon servant, who works as a spy for the chief of police, and don Leonardo, the timid, naïve, gentleman, who is ignorant of the rules of life inside the

³⁴ I am using both Barbina and Loschiavo’s versions of the play in Italian and Sicilian. The first act of *I mafiusi* in Italian is included only in Barbina’s version, as well as the three-act Sicilian version. Alfredo Barbina, *Teatro verista siciliano* (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1970); Giuseppe Guido Loschiavo, *100 [i.e. Cento] anni di mafia* (Rome: Vito Bianco Editore, 1962).

³⁵ Gaspare Rizzotto and Giuseppe Mosca, *I mafiusi: commedia in quattro atti*, in Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 55.

³⁶ Two major revolutions took place on the island of Sicily in 1820-1 and in 1848-9. “In 1848-9, many radical democrats and peasant *squadristi* formed an irregular military force against the Bourbons, often forcibly ousting local power-holders from their positions.” After the Bourbons regained control of the island, many of the revolutionaries were imprisoned, while others went into exile including future prime minister, Francesco Crispi. Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power 1859-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 58-63.

prison.³⁷ *Zio* (Uncle, his title to his associates) Gioachino demonstrates many of the nuances of being a *capo* in the card-playing scene, where we learn that he decides who plays and when, that he takes a cut of any player's winnings, and remarkably always wins when he plays. But it is his subtle threats to don Nunzio during the game that establishes his ultimate authority. Nunzio attempts to challenge the *capo's* authority, but quickly backs down. Nevertheless, when Gioachino leaves the room, Nunzio incites the young camorristi, Enrico, Turi, and Totò, by telling them that he had heard Gioachino disparaging them and calling them dishonorable. This is all untrue.

Meanwhile, a guard slips a letter to don Nunzio, asking for information about a new political prisoner, who remains anonymous throughout the play. This political prisoner is meant to be the real-life lawyer/patriot/future prime-minister Francesco Crispi, the precursor and political arm to Giuseppe Garibaldi. Nunzio marks him as a rich man, so that the "society" will charge him a large tribute for his entrance into the prison. The incognito prisoner pretends not to understand the request by Turi and, hence, Gioachino is called in to collect the money. At this point, when the capo asks for the tribute, the new prisoner takes him aside and whispers in his ear. The audience is never told what he says, but everyone would have recognized who he was.³⁸ Gioachino reacts to this by paying him respect and asking him if he needs anything at all. Of course he does not have to pay the tribute.³⁹

³⁷ Salvatore Maniscalco was the Bourbon chief of police from 1849-1860. He came to symbolize the cruelty, corruption, and misgovernment rampant in the Bourbon regime. He also gained notoriety for his reliance on professional criminals as spies against revolutionaries. Riall, *Sicily and the Unification*, 62-63.

³⁸ The actor playing the incognito would be recognizable to the audience as Crispi. Giuseppe Loschiavo, *Cent'anni*, 83.

³⁹ Loschiavo writes that the real-life Gioachino D'Angelo did take part in the anti-bourbon movement along with other Mafiosi working with the patriots. *Ibid.*, 84n1.

Gioachino also demonstrates another side of his personality by taking Leonardo under his protection, while he teaches him the ways of the prison and the jargon of the society. When Leonardo finds that someone has robbed him, he goes to Gioachino for advice. He then runs into Nunzio and tells him of the robbery. Nunzio, having already sent a secret letter to the police that he needs to be moved, informs Leonardo that he saw Turi coming out of his room with a bundle under his arm, and he tells Gioachino. The capo calls Turi to explain himself, he denies that charge, and when they look for Nunzio to clarify what he said, they discover that he has been transferred out of the prison. Turi asks Gioachino to explain his actions towards the incognito, and Gioachino does not reveal his identity but reemphasizes the respect he is owed because he is working towards our good. Turi asks for forgiveness and re-pledges his loyalty.

Gioachino permits the prison inmates to play cards. While they are dealing the cards, another prisoner, Menico, approaches them dressed in the garb of the “society” and begins to disrupt the card game. Tempers escalate, and Menico and Totò take out their knives. Menico is really challenging Gioachino’s authority, and when the capo comes to break up this quarrel is faced with a delicate situation. Menico reminds Gioachino that it was he who recommended him to become *picciotto di sgarro* in 1848, when they were in prison together.⁴⁰ The two make peace and recall their friendship, but for Menico’s disrespect toward the society, a ritual of duel of first blood with knives must take place to prove his courage. Menico passes the trial by cutting Turi first on the left hand. Menico then invites them all for a celebratory drink. As they are talking

⁴⁰ *Picciotto di sgarro* (young one) is the lowest level member in the society, who is initiated after giving proof of his courage and honor; before that they are called *mezza pàmpina*, (literally half a page) a friend of the friends, an apprentice. The initiation is a rite de passage with the initiated going through a death and resurrection as a new man. *Picciotto di giornata* distributes the duties to the *picciotti*. The next level up is the *picciotto d’onore*. All members, except for those affiliated through political or social rank, must prove their honor through murder or some violent action. Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47-48, 67, 74.

they hear a bell tolling for a death. A guard informs them that don Nunzio is dead—that he was killed by accident—and he confessed to being a spy for the police and a thief.⁴¹ Enrico curses don Nunzio, but Gioachino silences him: “Sta zitto, Finiscila! In quest’istante starà consegnando l’anisma a Dio. Iddio perdona! Perdoniamoci noi pure! God, forgive us.” (Shut up, stop it! In this moment his soul is being delivered to God. May God forgive him! And forgive us too!)⁴²

The fourth and final act returns us to the same setting as the first act, with Gioachino home with his wife, having served his prison term and having left the life of the society. Now he is called “maestro” because of his profession as a cobbler, instead of “zio.” But his old Mafiosi friends are also out of prison and come looking for him. One day as Gioachino and his worker, Pasquale, are fixing Leonardo’s boots (he is also out of prison), they are approached by Menico and Turi. His camorristi friends propose that Gioachino participate in an enterprise involving fleecing a rich businessman of his money in a game of cards. Gioachino refuses the offer and goes on to explain that he is now living an honest life. They now propose, in a more demanding tone, that they steal Leonardo’s silver snuffbox. Gioachino again refuses, and Turi and Menico assault him. At this point the incognito from the prison shows up with a gun in his hand, followed by Leonardo. As Loschiavo writes, the incognito (Crispi), appears at that moment like a *deus ex macchina*, and saves Gioacchino from his former comrades. The incognito then rewards Gioacchino with a membership in the *società operaria di mutuo soccorso* (the workers’ mutual aid society), the workers’ union.⁴³

⁴¹ Loschiavo notes that the evasive phrase, that he was *killed by accident*, demonstrates one of the rules of omertà—nobody is responsible. Loschiavo, *Cento anni*, 91n1.

⁴² The original line in the Sicilian version is: “Diu pirdunati i nostri piccati comu nui pirdunamu I nostril nimici.” (God forgive our sins as we forgive those of our enemies.) Rizzotto and Mosca, *I mafiusi*, in Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 118, 619.

⁴³ Loschiavo, *Cent’anni*, 98.

Origin of the play

The real writer of *I mafiusi* as a theatre piece is as shrouded in mysteries as the origins of the mafia itself. Relatively little is known about the authors Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspara Mosca, and the true authorship of the play remains unknown to this day. There are few details about their early life, but of the two, we know least about Gaspara Mosca, who shortly after the success of *I mafiusi* disappears from the stage and returns to obscurity. Barbina writes that Mosca was born in Palermo in 1825 and worked as an actor when he was very young with a travelling acting company.⁴⁴ In 1860, he was on the stages in the North, in the Emilia Romagna region, when he received news of the revolution in Sicily and immediately returned to Palermo to participate in the battle against the Bourbons.⁴⁵ In 1862 he returned to the theatre to become *primattor giovine* for Rizzotto's company and a writer or collaborator on *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, which became so successful that they made that the first part of the *Trilogia della malavita* (Trilogy of a criminal life). The second part was called *La Taverna di lu zù Minicu Chiantedda* (Uncle Minicu Chiantedda's Tavern) and the third part was called *La promutrici e lu scarparu* (The promoter and the shoemaker). Mosca only stayed until 1864, when he left the theatre to assume a position as an elementary school teacher.⁴⁶ When he left, Mosca apparently handed over all the rights to his plays to Rizzotto, though Rizzotto, and after his death, his son, later claimed that he was the sole writer.⁴⁷

Rizzotto was born in Palermo in 1828. He left his law studies, against the wishes of his parents, to become an actor. He served in the war against the Bourbons and then returned to the

⁴⁴ Alfredo Barbina, introduction to *I mafiusi: commedia in quattro atti*, by Gaspare Mosca and Giuseppe Rizzotto, in Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 332.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 44-45n.

theatre. In 1863 Rizzotto had his biggest success when he presented *I mafiusi* with himself playing the lead role of Gioachino. Barbina meticulously goes through four possible scenarios for how the play was created, including one testimonial acquired by Giuseppe Guido Loschiavo and contained in his book, *Cento anni di mafia*. I will not go through all the stories but I will look at the controversy and at Loschiavo's oral history.

In the late nineteenth century shortly after the death Rizzotto in 1895, the question of the true authorship of the play came under scrutiny. During the period that Rizzotto had been performing the play outside Sicily, he had attached his name alone to the play, completely omitting any mention of Mosca. Originally from Messina, but working in Rome, the writer, playwright, and literary critic Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo was the first to cast doubt on Rizzotto's claim that he had written *I mafiusi*. On December 19, 1899, in an article, "Il vero autore dei *Mafiusi*" (The real author of *I mafiusi*) for *Il Giorno*, a Roman newspaper, he writes that it was Gaspara Mosca, a poor elementary school teacher who wrote the famous play, and not Rizzotto, and it is past time that we do him justice.⁴⁸ He cites three different Palermo newspapers that laud Mosca's works, including his trilogy of *I mafiusi*.⁴⁹ He concludes by saying that Mosca is obviously the author because he continued writing after *I mafiusi*, while Rizzotto never wrote anything else.⁵⁰ The Neapolitan critic and writer Edoardo Boutet picked up on this controversy, reprinting the article by Cesareo but including a letter written in response by Rizzotto's son, Salvatore Rizzotto. His son cites the monetary award from the city of Palermo that Rizzotto won for writing *I mafiusi* and asks why was Mosca not included if he wrote it.⁵¹ Salvatore Rizzotto

⁴⁸ Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo, "I mafiusi," reprinted in Edoardo Boutet, ed., *Le cronache drammatiche*, vol. 1-4 (Rome, December 24, 1899), 206-8.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 207.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 221.

also includes as evidence, a famous letter from the mayor of Palermo, marchese di Rudini, who celebrates Rizzotto's play and encourages him to continue with his work—again not a word from or about Mosca.⁵² Salvatore Rizzotto concludes by contradicting Cesareo and naming several other plays written by his father including *I vastasi di Palermo*.⁵³

In another version of the story of who wrote *I mafiusi*, we have Loschiavo's oral testimony of an actor, Natale Cirino, who had performed in *I mafiusi* and knew Rizzotto personally. Loschiavo treats Cirino's story as both believable and reliable. Starting with the beginning of Rizzotto's life as an actor, Cirino explains how Pepé (Rizzotto) was a *capocomico* of a group of *guitti*⁵⁴ actors, who travelled around Sicily in a couple of caravans pulled by horses or mules performing at fairs or religious festivals.⁵⁵ Their performances were mostly improvised from *scalette* (outlines) or pre-established plots (*commedie a braccio*).⁵⁶ In 1862, the troupe arrived in Palermo for the Feast of Saint Rosalia, the patron saint of the city. The city was still recovering from the turmoil of the war for Unification from 1860. The little acting troupe was also suffering from poverty and hunger, but luckily they happened on a tavern owned by Jachino D'Angelo (also known as Funciazza because of the scar on his face), "*capo malandrino*," "*capo società*," "*mafiusu di cuteddu*," (head bandit, head of the society, mafioso of the knife). Despite these flaws, he was also very generous and provided the acting company with some food and a place to stay.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ A *guitto* actor was an actor who worked under the most impoverished circumstances. He was generally untrained, illiterate, and relied on improvisation, rather than a script. He was generally considered a "bad actor." "Attore comico di infimo ordine, misero e randagio" (A poor traveling comic actor of the lowest order). Giacomo Devoto and Gian Carlo Oli, *Dizionario della lingua Italiana* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1971), s.v. "guitto."

⁵⁵ Loschiavo, *Cent'anni*, 46.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

This same Jachino suggested to the prompter, Mosca, to write about the life and culture of the Vicaria and include the jargon, the bullying, and the way they extract the various tributes (*il pizzo; la lampa*) from inmates with no recourse.⁵⁷ Within the prison Jachino also inserts the incognito who has the same features as Crispi and is in for political reasons, and towards whom the mafioso had a certain respect and esteem.⁵⁸ Jachino made himself the protagonist and included his friends from prison as the other Mafiosi characters. At this point Loschiavo adds that Rizzotto had also been detained (in the same prison with Jachino?) for slanderous rumors, and that traditionally the actor/playwright himself has been identified as the naïve character Don Leonardo.⁵⁹ This would mean that Rizzotto may have actually known Jachino in prison, but in the end it is not clear whether the work was dictated to Mosca by Jachino or on behalf of Rizzotto.⁶⁰ As Alfredo Barbina notes, the reason for the continued uncertainty lies in the lack of reliable sources in the writings about this topic.⁶¹ The true story will probably never be known.

Regardless of who wrote the play, we do know that the actors came to work in the *teatrini* of Sant'Anna and S. Ferdinando in Palermo in 1863. As *capocomico*, Giuseppe Rizzotto and his group of regional actors first performed what would become the play *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, as a series of scenes (acts II and III) at the Teatro Sant'Anna. A travelers' handbook from 1864 describes the space as a small theatre in the Piazza di Sant'Anna, where comic pieces were performed.⁶² Barsotta notes that the Teatro Sant'Anna along with the S. Ferdinando hosted

⁵⁷ Ibid, 47-48.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 48.

⁵⁹ Loschiavo inserts a question mark because again these stories are unsubstantiated. Loschiavo, *Cent'anni*, 49.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 33.

⁶² George Dennis and John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in Sicily* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1864), 95.

a popular repertory in that era.⁶³ This certainly would be in keeping with what is known about Rizzotto and his actors.

We know that in this period it was impossible to enlist Sicilian actresses and so these companies usually imported them from Naples, even though they performed in Neapolitan alongside Sicilian. In a letter (December 10, 1902) to the theatre critic Stanis Manca, Nino Martoglio, the impresario of the Sicilian acting company, wrote about the lack of Sicilian actresses in Rizzotto's acting company in the nineteenth century. He noted that the Sicilian theatre suffered from a population that was:

Così pieno di pregiudizii nel carattere delle nostre donne, quasi Maomettane, ritrose fino all'esasperazione, piene di sciocchi scrupoli e scarse di educazione e di spirito. Tuttora qui, una signorina di famiglia borghese che si prestasse a recitare in dialetto, anche in una filodrammatica, provocherebbe uno scandalo, come se si prostituisse con dei mascalzoni, con della gente volgare.

(So full of prejudice, when it comes to the character of our women, almost Mohammedan, backwards to exasperation, full of foolish scruples and with little education and spirit. Even today, if a young lady from a bourgeois family were to presume to act in dialect, even in amateur dramatics, she would cause a scandal, as if she had prostituted herself with a rascal, with vulgar people.)⁶⁴

The success of the play was due entirely to the prison scenes, which depicted how the men of the camorra or the "society" ruled the lives of the inmates regardless of whether they were members or not. The characters were based on real life members of the camorra and

⁶³ Anna Barsotti, *Verga drammaturgo: tra commedia Borghese e teatro verista siciliano* (Florence: Nuova Italia, 1974), 40.

⁶⁴ Sarah Muscarà Zappulla and Enzo Zappulla, *Giovanni Grasso: Il più grande attore tragico del mondo* (Acireale, Italy: La Cantinella Coop., 1995), 40.

provided the first depiction of how their organization works. Except for a scene with the voice of the character's mother, there are no female characters in these prison scenes. As the performance of the scenes at the small theatre attracted larger audiences, its representation of prison life also provoked strong controversy because of its realistic depiction of the lives of the *malandrini* (criminals), prompting one critic to call it a font of moral corruption.⁶⁵ Rizzotto, who was threatened with the closing of his play, turned to the mayor of Palermo, Marchese di Rudini, and proposed modifying the work so that it included a moral ending and, thus, satisfy the critics.⁶⁶ He added a prologue and an epilogue, in which the audience is shown how Gioachino came to be in prison, and how he was reformed after leaving prison.⁶⁷ These two acts probably written by Rizzotto (or Mosca) included the wife and mother of Gioachino and some very broad farce provided by the character of Pasquale.

Palermo, Risorgimento, and the Mafia

The two original acts of *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* centered on the culture, habits, customs, and jargon of the camorristi in the Ucciardone prison of Palermo in 1854 under the regime of the

⁶⁵ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 35.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Antonio Starrabba, Marchese di Rudini (1839-1908), was a political leader who fought in the Sicilian revolution. He was mayor of Palermo in 1864 and twice prime minister (1891-2, 1896-8). He was forced to resign in 1898 due to his severe suppression of a series bread riots that resulted in the Bava-Beccaris massacre in Milan. *Enciclopedia Treccani Online*, s.v. "Antonio Starrabba Marchese Di Rudini," accessed November 7, 2012, <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-starrabba-marchese-di-rudini>.

⁶⁷ Loschiavo includes a version of *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* in his book *Cent'anni di mafia*, which omits act one and begins with act two in the prison. Barbina's anthology, *Teatro verista siciliano*, begins with the full four-act version of the play in Italian, but includes the shorter three-act version in Sicilian in the appendix, *I mafiusi di la Vicaria di Palermu*. The play has many different versions and adaptations as well as different dialect versions. In addition, as a popular piece written by actors who had no formal training and sometimes little education, the play would have been subject to changes and improvised sections.

Bourbons.⁶⁸ However, this play was produced during the Risorgimento, a period of war in Palermo, when whole neighborhoods had been reduced to rubble by Bourbon cannon guns. The birth and early evolution of the figure of the mafioso is informed by the events in that city and by the rise of a new criminal element.

Lying along the northwestern coast by the Gulf of Palermo in the Tyrrhenian Sea, Palermo is the largest city and the capital of Sicily, serving as its administrative center since the island joined the kingdom of Italy in 1861. More than 2,700 years old and founded by the Phoenicians in the eighth century BCE, Palermo, like Sicily, has been subject to a series of conquests from the Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, Saracen Arabs, the Normans, the Swabians, the French and the Spanish Bourbons. This was about to change, when in 1860 Palermo and the rest of Sicily were on the cusp of a successful revolution and the creation of a new Italian State.

Even before the landing of Giuseppe Garibaldi, Francesco Crispi, and his *Spedizioni dei Mille* (Expedition of the Thousand) at Marsala on May 11, 1860, waves of rebellion were spreading in towns all around Palermo.⁶⁹ In the city itself, the government had lost control, as

⁶⁸ *I mafiusi* refers only to the camorra and camorristi and never mentions the word mafia in the play. Loschiavo writes that a camorra organization ran through all the prisons in Palermo, even reaching into Naples, where it was started. Loschiavo, *Cent'anni*, 13. The Ucciardone Prison of Palermo, “the hotel of the mafia,” a fortress-like structure that was built in the early nineteenth century, during the time of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. It still serves as a prison and has been the primary holding place for today’s Mafiosi. Jane C. Schneider and Peter T. Schneider, *Reversible Destiny: Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 255.

⁶⁹ Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*, 68. Francesco Crispi (1819-1901) dominated Italian politics from 1887 to 1896. A Sicilian by birth, he served twice as Prime Minister of Italy. He is also credited as one of the “main architects of Italy’s material unity.” Crispi played a leading role in the 1848 uprising against Ferdinand II, but after the Bourbons regained control, he was forced to flee. In 1859, Crispi returned to Sicily to prepare for the insurrection of 1860 with Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882). Christopher Duggan, “Politics in the Era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-96,” in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John A. Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

armed bandits cut communication lines and disrupted provincial and communal administration, cutting the city off from other Sicilian provinces, prompting officials to complain that they could not enforce their authority against the “criminals.”⁷⁰ As Garibaldi’s troops moved towards Palermo, they grew in number as peasants joined the troops with promises of land for every Sicilian who joined.⁷¹ By the beginning of June, Garibaldi’s army entered Palermo, fighting the well-equipped larger army of the Bourbon Neapolitan army with their much smaller army, relying mostly on guerrilla war tactics that included help from the inhabitants of the city. After days of fierce street-to-street fighting, the commander of the Bourbon forces requested an armistice.⁷² Garibaldi then sent Crispi to negotiate terms and a final capitulation was signed on June 6, with the Bourbon troops embarking soon after for the mainland.⁷³ In October, a plebiscite was held in Sicily and Naples that supported those regions becoming an integral part of Italy under Victor Emanuel as their constitutional king.⁷⁴

Crispi was anxious to avoid any suggestion of annexation of the southern provinces or any possibility of federalism, hence his insistence on the following wording for the plebiscite: “we want Italy one and indivisible under the constitutional scepter of the House of Savoy.”⁷⁵ Despite Crispi’s good intentions, Sicily was really an “annexation,” and it was treated like a

2000), 168-69; see also Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 186-87. See chapter two, n171.

⁷⁰ Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*, 69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷² Duggan, *Crispi*, 196.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ The people of Sicily voted 432,053 for and 667 votes against to join the kingdom of Italy with less than one-fifth of the population participating. Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi 1860: A Study in Political Conflict* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1954), 389.

⁷⁵ In later years, there were claims that the plebiscites of 1860 were not valid because of fraud and irregularity. Duggan, *Crispi*, 216.

conquest.⁷⁶ The question that concerned the government in Piedmont was less the hegemony of Sicily and more the manner that Piedmont would use to control the island, which included “the ostentatious insistence that the South was a backward and primitive region which would have to be ‘piedmontized’ for its own good.”⁷⁷ The southern provinces would be ruled using Piedmontese institutions, laws, and legal codes, without discussion or consideration for the regional governing administration they would be sweeping away.⁷⁸ Northerners who arrived in the South to take over the administration came with the assumption that southerners were corrupt and would benefit from the Piedmont way of doing things.⁷⁹ Luigi Carlo Farini, Minister of the Interior, in a letter to Cavour wrote: “What barbarity! Italy indeed! This is Africa: compared to these boors the beduin are the very flower of civilization.”⁸⁰ Cavour held a similar view, and, hence, his government only dealt with the South to suppress dissent. Little wonder that the local inhabitants quickly became disenchanted with their new leaders and were soon shouting in the streets, “Down with Victor Emanuel, we want Garibaldi!”⁸¹

The hegemonic political and cultural classes of Northern Italy found it expedient to “other” people in the South, because of differences in cultures, traditions, and a perception that they were inferior. These feelings and perceptions were compounded by the continued political and social unrest on the island that were also fed by the treatment the local inhabitants received from the Piedmont government. In 1861, special envoy Diomedede Pantaleoni reported that the

⁷⁶ Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi*, 412.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Duggan, *Crispi*, 220-1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 220.

⁸⁰ From Luigi Carlo Farini to Cavour, October 27, 1860, in Camillo Cavour, *Carteggi di Camillo Cavour: La liberazione del Mezzogiorno e la formazione de Regno d'Italia* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1952), 3:208, quoted in Duggan, *Crispi*, 220. Camillo Paolo Filippo Giulio Benso, count of Cavour (1810-1861), was one of the leaders of the Risorgimento and the first prime minister of Italy.

⁸¹ Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi*, 424.

island was fraught with “discontent, lawlessness, hostility to the government and support for opposition groups.”⁸² Lacking any real knowledge of Sicilian culture and political traditions, government policy-makers, whose concerns were focused on the North, did little to nothing to address these problems.⁸³ That did not mean the problems went away for the people of Sicily. By 1893, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi was confronted with a series of strikes by workers united under the *Fasci Siciliani dei Lavoratori* (Sicilian Workers Leagues, 1889-1894) as many of these issues reached a crisis point.⁸⁴ The government, Prime Minister Crispi, over-reacted. The strikes by the *Fasci* were met with a swift crackdown: the island was declared in a state of siege, and 40,000 troops were called in to use extreme force and summary executions, the new Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was dissolved, and the rolls were purged of many of its poorest voters.⁸⁵ After a series of arrests, public trials of the leaders, and harsh prison sentences, the movement died. Nevertheless, the poor and harsh treatment by the government only drove the local people into subversive channels.⁸⁶

A form of mafia was already operating in and around Palermo before Giuseppe Garibaldi made his famous landing in Marsala, 1860. As John Dickie notes, the mafia was until recently located primarily in western Sicily in and near Palermo, the center for wholesale consumer markets and a major port.⁸⁷ The organization grew out of the money made from the orange and

⁸² Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*, 126.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Affiliated with the Socialist movement in Sicily, the *Fasci Siciliani dei Lavoratori* was made up of farm workers, tenant farmers, artisans, sulphur miners, and industrial workers, who were looking for social justice. In 1893-4, they staged a series of strikes across Sicily. Their demands were for fair land rents, higher wages, lower local taxes, and distribution of misappropriated common land. Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism To Fascism: 1870-1925* (New York: Taylor and Frances, 1967), 161-3. See chapter two.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi*, 414.

⁸⁷ John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 39-40.

lemon groves located there. These were extremely profitable crops that were first exported in the late 1700s to places such as New York and London.⁸⁸ As Dickie states, the mafia was born of “power and wealth,” and the goal in such cases is not just to keep it but also to accumulate more power and wealth. Hence, the mafia’s violent tactics seemed to escalate after unification, and by 1863 the streets of Palermo had already been stained with the blood of officials murdered before the eyes of terrified witnesses, who would remain silent under the questioning of the police.⁸⁹ The first study of what would soon be called the mafia was conducted by a Sicilian nobleman, Baron Nicolò Turrisi Colonna, “Pubblica sicurezza in Sicilia nel 1864” (Public Security in Sicily in 1864). Colonna himself had been marked for assassination, but escaped. His report identified some of the common elements and modus operandi of the typical mafioso without calling them Mafiosi: protection racket, murder, territorial claims, collaboration and competition among different gangs, and an adherence to *omertà* and a “code of honor.”⁹⁰ Turrisi Colonna also mentions that if sect members break the rules set for them and are judged guilty, a death sentence is carried out.⁹¹ Fear and intimidation were, and still are, a major component of the mafia.

As Saverio DiBella explains, a new efficient and vicious criminal model was being developed based on just a few basic rules for success: a professional killer, a spectacular execution, intimidation of witnesses, neutralization of the magistrate, a politically significant murder, a message easily understood by all, and *omertà*.⁹² The school suitable for teaching and propagating these rules was the prisons.⁹³ The Bourbon prisons were the meeting place for both

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Saverio DiBella, *Risorgimento e Mafia in Sicilia: I mafiosi della Vicaria di Palermo* (Cosenza, Italy: Pellegrini Editore, 1991), 18.

⁹⁰ Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 48-51.

⁹¹ Ibid., 50.

⁹² DiBella, *Risorgimento e Mafia*, 18.

⁹³ Ibid., 21.

the violent criminal and the revolutionary. *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* provides a theatrical representation of the circumscribed relationship between the mafioso and society.⁹⁴ It realistically portrays the initiations that preceded the long apprenticeships of acolytes learning the jargon, which still resembled the camorra terminology, the rules of the criminal society, along with the technical knowledge of how to use a knife or razor, an instrument used to cut the face of a mafioso as a punishment, for killing the *infami* (disloyal, anyone who gets in their way), for duelling to demonstrate your expertise and courage, or to maintain your role as *capomafioso*.⁹⁵

In addition, *I mafiusi* refers specifically to the unification of the Italian states and the birth of the new nation and portrays the mafioso as a patriot. The play suggests that the new Italian nation should make room in society for the mafioso, who has already fought for the revolution. In the last act of the four-act version of the play, Gioachino ends with a final piece of advice to the audience:

Via, signore, perdonateli! Il perdone è la più nobile vendetta! Speriamo, che il mio esempio sia loro di emendo, cangiando sistema di vita e darsi ad uno stabile lavoro. Perché, il lavoro è l'unico mezzo che può render felice e contento l'individuo, la famiglia e formare la grandezza d'una intiere nazione!

(Let's go gentlemen, forgive them! Forgiveness is the most noble revenge. Let us hope that my example will be both a lesson in amending, changing your system of life and in devoting yourself to a stabile job. Because, work is the only means we

⁹⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

have to make the individual and family happy and content, and of making the entire nation great!)"⁹⁶

As Nicastro notes, in this last act Gioachino wishes to leave the life of a rebel and instead integrate himself into the structure of the new nation.⁹⁷ He is not alone in his wish to do this, “la sua figura sembra precorrere quella di tanti altri Mafiosi veri e reali, che assumeranno una posizione privilegiata di mediazione tra il potere politico e la società subalterna” (his figure seems to anticipate that (the situation) of many other real life Mafiosi, who assume a privileged position of mediation between political power and the subaltern society.)⁹⁸ The mafioso represented by Gioachino fought for Italian independence, is a patriot, and after unification becomes an exemplary citizen.⁹⁹ He comes from the working class in Sicily, but his influence reaches the power elite of Italy. He is part of the myth of the good mafioso who has made amends and now is part of the working class. These traits—that of the mafioso as yet another example of the Sicilian commoner—are some of the tropes veristi writers would later incorporate in their works.

Mafia, the Mafioso, and Verismo

I mafiusi could be described as popular performance. According to Tim Prentki and Jan Selman, popular theatre as “the practice of theatre as an expression of specific communities’ stories, issues, knowledge and needs.”¹⁰⁰ However, I would argue that the play might more accurately be seen as coming out of a folk culture, even though it originated in the streets of a

⁹⁶ Rizzotto and Mosca, *I mafiusi*, in Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 139.

⁹⁷ Guido Nicastro, *Teatro e società in Sicilia (1860-1918)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1978), 15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Tim Prentki and Jan Selman, *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in Focus* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2003), 8.

city. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel characterize folk culture by its communal nature – its “direct relationship” between community and performer, which includes rural songs and dances, ballads and, and urban broadsides.¹⁰¹ This folk culture can be found in country dwellers, but also in urban slums of commercial and industrial cities.¹⁰²

I mafiusi grew out of a tradition of folk theatre in the important Sicilian city of Palermo. This tradition extends back to earlier theatrical forms of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including *commedia dell'arte* and the *vastasate*. *I mafiusi* is pure theatre in its development by actors working in popular theatre. Barbina writes that the play has no antecedents in Sicilian theatre, and that it is different in content, tone, structure, and language from the old repertory.¹⁰³ This is a slight exaggeration about its originality. Indeed, in the next paragraph Barbina connects elements of the play, the passions and jealousy, to the *pasquinate* and the realistic elements, the mafioso jargon, to the *vastasate*.¹⁰⁴ Enrico DiMarzo writes that Palermo had a tradition of dialect theatre going back to the seventeenth century and the first play in Sicilian, *Notti di Palermu* by Tommaso Aversa, published in 1638 by Decio Cirillo.¹⁰⁵ The farcical play describes life in the Palermo of his day, and was a type of popular farce that was in vogue in Palermo in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts: A Critical Guide to the Mass Media* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 52.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 5n2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), poet, writer, and playwright, was famous for his *pasquinate*.

¹⁰⁵ Tommaso Aversa (1623-1663) was a poet and Italian playwright. He translated Virgil's *Aenid* into Italian. Enrico DiMarzo, *La nuova scuola poetica dialettale siciliana* (Palermo: R. Sandron, 1924), 51-52.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 124.

In Palermo the *pasquinate*, *commedia dell'arte*, and the *vastasate* were very popular; however, these forms fell out of fashion by the 1860s.¹⁰⁷ The *pasquinate* originated in the sixteenth century and were satiric poems that lampooned government and religious officials, as well as other people in the community. Signs and satiric manifestoes were hung on statues in the piazza during the night so that the people could read them in the morning before the police arrived to remove them. They were written anonymously and were often the expression of popular discontent. The *vastasate* developed out of the *commedia dell'arte* in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. Like the *commedia dell'arte*, it was a farce with a written plot and improvised dialogue. However, the plots followed real-life people and events of Palermo, and always included characters of the lower classes or *vastasi* (porters or vulgar persons).¹⁰⁸ These works also included popular songs and dances, as well as local news spoken in the local dialect, and performed in piazzas or *teatrini*, small remodeled theatres.¹⁰⁹

Rizzotto and Mosca were writing for their fellow *palermitanos* about their own city using the local language and dialect. The original two acts of *I mafiusi*, though innovative because of its subject, resembled the *vastasate* of its day: it includes characters based on real people, a local song about Palermo sung *all'uso siciliano* (in the Sicilian style), and a tarantella; at the end of act two, when the prison guards arrive during a prison fight with Gioachino and his men, the

¹⁰⁷ *Vastaso* is the Greek for one who carries. With the passage of time the term came to carry a negative connotation of one who is dirty, vulgar, or illiterate. Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Gaetana Marrone, Paolo Puppa, and Luca Somigli, *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1339. The most popular character of the *vastasata* was Nofriu, a comic porter, similar to the *commedia dell'arte zanni stock* characters. *Zanni* (the term is both singular and plural coming from the Venitian diminutive of Giovanni) was a mask or a term to describe any of the servant masks, often displaced immigrant workers. Nofriu is also in the only surviving complete *Vastasata*, *Lu curtigghiu di li Ragunisi (Il cortile degli Aragonesi)*. Framed within poetry and songs and written in the eighteenth century about life in Palermo, the work's author is unknown. These works were also included in the repertory of the puppet theatres. Francesco De Felice, *Storia del teatro siciliano* (Catania: Editrice Elefante, 1979), 27.

¹⁰⁹ See chapter three.

camorristi stop quickly stop their brawling and “la scena si cambia in ballo improvvisato,” (the scene changes into an improvised dance). *I mafiusi*'s departure from the *vastasata* lies in its use of a scripted dialogue and a shift to a more dramatic tone, while still maintaining some elements of the farce, such as the scene that turns a prison mob fight into a tarantella. *I mafiusi* was still a *vastasata*, but it was also becoming something else that would inspire the next generation of Sicilian writers, the veristi.

Beginning with the first performance in Palermo of what was originally a series of scenes set in the Palermo prison La Vicaria, audiences have been fascinated by this often-violent outlaw society with its own chivalric code and rules of *omertà*. In 1863, two palermitani, Rizzotto and Mosca, and a cast of all men performed a comedy about life in the great prison built by the Bourbons, portraying habits, culture, and jargon of the camorristi.¹¹⁰ In the first twenty-three years the play topped two thousand performances in regional theatres of the South, and thirty-four performances in Rome (1884).¹¹¹ Rizzotto went on to tour throughout Italy and then to North and South America. His company included women who spoke in Neapolitan while the men spoke in Sicilian.¹¹² Soon after the play's success, the terms mafioso and mafia entered into the official language of Italy as a definition of the criminal members and their organization in Sicily.¹¹³ Despite this added meaning to the word, it has always also meant much more. This seems to explain why the word exploded into popular use as well. As John Dickie notes, the play changed the connotation of the words, mafioso and mafia, to now define criminals operating like

¹¹⁰ Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costume, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano: Raccolti e Descritti, volume secondo* (Palermo: Libreria L. Pedone Lauriel di Carlo Clausen, 1889), 290.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹¹² Zappulla Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla, *Grasso*, 40.

¹¹³ Pitrè, *Usi*, 290, 292; Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 86. See chapter two.

characters in the play.¹¹⁴ Therefore, it was not just a question of criminality but also the specific traits of those characters/criminals.

The actual use of the term *mafiusu* in the title came about by accident. Originally entitled *La Vicaria di Palermo*, allegedly, Mosca changed the title after hearing an angry exchange in the streets of Palermo, with one man yelling at the other, “Chi vurissi fari u mafiusu cu mia?” (Are you trying to the play the boss with me?).¹¹⁵ It should be noted that the play provided a name, mafioso and mafia, for what otherwise might have been grouped with the *Camorra*, with its members also called “*omini d’onuri*,” “men of honour,” but based in and around Naples.¹¹⁶ The work’s title is the first general usage of the term mafioso, though the word never actually appears in the play.

The true origin of the word mafia is unknown, but there is evidence that the word existed for at least two centuries in Sicily before its use by Rizzotto and Mosca.¹¹⁷ The etymological origins of the word mafia have been traced to Arabic *Mu*, strength and *Afah*, to protect, or from *Ma afir* the name of the Saracen tribe that ruled Palermo, or that it derived from *mahias*, meaning bold man or braggart. Others believe it comes from *mafia* or *maha*, meaning rock or cave, places that served as hide outs for persecuted Saracens and later fugitives.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Henner Hess, *Mafia & Mafiosi: Origin, Power and Myth* (Adelaide, Australia: J.C.B., 1998), 2. Other versions of the story have Rizzotto hearing this phrase. Diego Gambetta, *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 210. See also Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹¹⁶ The camorra operates in a similar fashion but is older than the mafia by about a century and is seen as even more vicious in its violence. Like the mafia, it also has political connections and continues to operate today. However, it has proved to be even more difficult to stamp out, because of its looser organization. See Behan, *See Naples and Die*.

¹¹⁷ Hess, *Mafia & Mafiosi*, 1-2. See chapter two, n222.

¹¹⁸ Hess, *Mafia & Mafiosi*, 1-2.

Giuseppe Pitrè and Luigi Capuana defined the Palermo street meaning of mafioso as something of beauty, charm, perfection, or excellence in its field.¹¹⁹ One of the sources for Pitrè was Antonino Traina's 1868 Italian/Sicilian dictionary, whose definition comes five years after *I mafiusi* and primarily looks at the term as a code of conduct or state of mind.¹²⁰ The etymological discussion of the word mafia by these three Sicilian writers is more academic and may be a distraction from the real discussion about the possible existence of organized crime in Sicily and possible solutions to the problem. Indeed, Pitrè and Capuana seem to downplay the very real problems connected with this organization, fearing perhaps the stigma that it might put on Sicilians. Coming from the eastern section of the island, Capuana would not have seen much evidence of a mafia. In his book on the origins of *brigantaggio* in Sicily, Capuana mixes up the different types of bandits, brigands, and Mafiosi.¹²¹ However, in a section defining the mafia, Capuana copies exactly the same words used by his "good friend" Pitrè:

La mafia non è setta né associazione non ha regolamenti né statuti. Il mafioso non è ladro, non è un malandrino ... La mafia è la coscienza del proprio essere, l'esagarato concetto della forza individuale, 'unica e sola arbitra di ogni contrasto, di ogni urto di interesse e di idee' Il mafioso vuol essere rispettato e rispetta quasi sempre. Se è offeso, no ricorre alla Giustizia non si rimette alla Legge; se lo

¹¹⁹ Joseph Farrell, ed. *Understanding the Mafia* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997), 21. Giuseppe Pitrè (1841-1916) was a medical doctor, a senator, and a collector of Italian folklore. Born in Palermo, he wrote a dictionary and grammar of Sicilian about the oral traditions, rituals, and customs found on the island. He worked with many volunteers in compiling his twenty-five volumes of popular traditions. He compiled his *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari Siciliane* (Library of Sicilian popular traditions) between 1871 and 1913.

¹²⁰ See Antonino Traina, *Nuovo vocabolario Siciliano-Italiano* (Palermo: Giuseppe Pedone Lauriel Editore, 1868).

¹²¹ See Luigi Capuana, *L'isola del sole* (Catania: Giannotta editore, 1882).

facesse, darebbe prova debolezza, e offenderebbe l'omertà, che ritiene *schifiusu o'nfami* chi per aver ragione si richiama al magistrato.

(The mafia is neither a sect nor an association, it has no regulations or statutes.

The mafioso is not a thief or a criminal ... Mafia is the awareness of one's own being, an exaggerated notion of one's own individual strength, the sole arbiter of every conflict, of every quarrel, of interests and of ideas ... The mafioso is someone who always wants to give and receive respect. If someone offends him, he does not appeal to the courts, he does not turn to the law; if he did, it would be proof of weakness, it would be an offence to omertà, that holds those who run to the magistrate to be despicable and a disgrace.)¹²²

He explains how the terms mafia and mafioso, separate from their later association with the camorra in Sicily, had these more positive meanings. Capuana then repeats Pitrè's complaint that the negative meaning of the term is due directly to the great success of *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* by Rizzotto and Mosca, even while their definition relies on the play's character Gioachino as a model for these attributes.¹²³

John Dickie, in his insightful and detailed study of the Sicilian mafia, points out that Pitrè's definition of the mafia (above) became a "talisman for Sicilian gangsters," who quoted it in court as late as the 1970s.¹²⁴ Dickie also points to Pitrè as an important source to the myth of rustic chivalry through his numerous collections and publications of the fast disappearing peasant

¹²² Luigi Capuana, *La Sicilia e il brigantaggio* (Roma: L. Perelli, 1892), 91-92; Pitrè, *Usi*, 292; Translation of passage by John Dickie, except for the last three lines in *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 86.

¹²³ Capuana, *La Sicilia*, 89-90. See chapter two, n220. Pitrè, *Usi*, 290-1.

¹²⁴ Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 86.

sayings, songs, fables, customs, rituals, and superstitions.¹²⁵ Indeed, his works were a major influence on the Sicilian writers of verismo. However, I would argue that it was the commercial and cultural success of *I mafiusi* as a theatre piece in which audiences were able to see and experience this alternate world that contributed to the use of its conventions in verismo and established the mafioso Sicilian stereotype.

Dickie goes on to suggest that though “it is unlikely that Pitrè was actually a member of the mafia,” he did spend some time working in local Palermo government with a “notorious mafioso” whom the ethnographer called “a real gentleman . . . an extremely upright and honest administrator.”¹²⁶ Regardless, of whether Sicilians believed there was an actual mafia or not, the tropes and conventions in *I mafiusi* seeped into the works of important Sicilian *verismo* writers such as Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana.¹²⁷ For Verga and Capuana whether an organized criminal society called the mafia existed seemed unlikely, and living on the eastern side of the island, they had no personal experience of it.

However, they were interested in the code of the mafia, which mimicked the rustic chivalry of the Sicilian peasant in folklore. *I mafiusi di la vicaria*, as well as the conventions of the “mafia” that are found in it (e.g. duels of honor and *omertà*), were picked up and eased into the works of these authors, who were not writing about the mafia, but about the Sicilian peasant of folklore. Dickie notes that the mafia appropriated many of the feudal conventions coming out of baronial privileges such as the kissing of the feudal lord’s hand by the vassals only formally outlawed in 1860 by Garibaldi, and using the title of ‘don’ for any man of status (originally used

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See chapter two for a detailed description of *verismo* and biographies of Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana.

by the Spanish noblemen who ruled Sicily).¹²⁸ These practices provided local color and, hence, were inserted in the stories of the veristi, who were by virtue of their education, class, and worldliness very different from the people they wrote about.¹²⁹ As Hart argues, as well as a cultural and political hegemonic intent, there appears to be an aesthetic appeal of the mafia at the heart of its endurance with audiences, but also for the Sicilian writer looking to please that audience.

I mafiusi has been identified by Italian scholars as the first veristi work and an example of the verismo impulse in Sicily before Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.¹³⁰ In *Verga drammaturgo: tra commedia borghese e teatro verista siciliano*, Anna Barsotti argues, in her chapter "*Cavalleria Rusticana e I mafiusi*," that Verga, unconsciously or not, borrowed many of his tropes from *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, including the famous ear-biting scene between Alfio and Turridu.¹³¹ In her comparison of the two works, she locates echoes of *I mafiusi* in many of the attitudes and customs represented in the characters of *Cavalleria*. "Dategli una coltellata che la merita. L'uomo si deve fare rispettare e chi fa un'offesa deve pagarla col sangue!" (Give him a good knifing because he deserves it. A man must be respected and whoever offends him must pay with blood!)¹³² These lines are spoken by a character who is probably the least honorable in Rizzotto and Mosca's play, Pasquale, but the sentiment behind it reveals one of the supreme principles of the man of honour. Anna Barsotti compares these emblematic lines to similar lines spoken by Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a progeny of *I mafiusi*. He says:

¹²⁸ Dickie, *Cosa Nostra*, 57. Feudalism was abolished in 1806 in the South and in 1812 in Sicily.

¹²⁹ Pietro Mazzamuto, *La mafia nella letteratura* (Palermo: Edizione Andò, 1970), 23-26.

¹³⁰ Alfredo Barbina includes *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* in his collection *Teatro verista siciliano*, along with the works of Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, Giuseppe Giusti Sinopoli, Federico De Roberto, Alessio Di Giovanni, Nino Martoglio, and Tito Marrone.

¹³¹ Barsotti, *Verga drammaturgo*, 40- 41.

¹³² Mosca and Rizzotto, *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, in Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 55.

mia moglie sa che la berretta la porto a modo mio; [battendo sulla tasca del petto] e qui ci port oil giudizio per mia moglie e per gli altri anche. [Due carabinieri in tenuta 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 sanno, grazie a Dio!

(My wife knows that I wear my berretta my way; [tapping the pocket on his chest] and this is where I keep justice for my wife and also for others. [Two policemen in uniform exit the barracks and walk away towards the church]. I look after my own interests, myself, with no need from those dressed up in their fancy uniforms. And everyone in the village knows this, thank God!)¹³³

Pietro Mazzamuto also sees a connection between *I mafiusi* and the works of the Sicilian veristi, “ma la mafia entra anche nella grande letteratura del verismo siculo-orientale e precisamente nelle opera del Capuana, del De Roberto, del Verga, e del Martoglio” (but the mafia even enters the great literature of the verismo from eastern Sicily and precisely from the works of Capuana, De Roberto, Verga, and Martoglio).¹³⁴

The lives and circumstances of Rizzotto and Musca, as actors in popular theatre, were as distant from the Sicilian veristi writers as one could get. Verga and Capuana were writing for the educated audience of the North, where their books were published and their plays were first performed. The theatre of Rizzotto and Mosca was a theatre for and of its community, speaking of concerns and issues that their audience would recognize. It was only because of the extraordinary success of *I mafiusi* that their work reached beyond their community. *I mafiusi di*

¹³³ Barsotti, *Verga drammaturgo*, 41; Giovanni Verga, *Cavalleria Rusticana: scene popolare* (Turin: F. Casanova Editore, 1893), 16-17. Unless otherwise specified all translations are mine.

¹³⁴ Pietro Mazzamuto, *La Mafia nella letteratura* (Palermo: Edizioni Andò, 1970), 24.

la Vicaria is called a *dramma folcloristico* in Loschiavo's 1964 work *Cent'anni di mafia*, and a *commedia in quattro atti* in Alfredo Barbina's 1970 collection, *Teatro verista siciliano*.

These categories deserve some attention and explanation. Loschiavo publishes a Sicilian language version of the three-act play, which omits the added first act, and begins with the original prison scenes and includes the last act, the redemption of Gioachino. Loschiavo writes that after many years of research he discovered a script with an old Sicilian acting company who assured him that Rizzotto never had the honor of being published.¹³⁵ This version is in Sicilian. As there were many versions of the working script, Barbina also dug in many archives looking for a complete version. He finds an 1885 edition of the play in Italian entitled *I mafiusi: commedia in quattro atti* by G. Rizzotto, with no mention of Mosca, published by E. Perino in Rome.¹³⁶ *I mafiusi* went through many changes as it attracted a larger audience, but its beginnings were as a popular folk piece, hence its early designation. Its development came about through theatrical traditions and not literary movements like verismo. Nevertheless, as Barbina writes, no one can deny the kinship and close relationship between *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Rizzotto's *I mafiusi*—that is—Verga's debt to *I mafiusi*.¹³⁷

Outcomes

The play toured throughout Italy and the Americas continually with Rizzotto playing Gioachino Funciazza until his death in 1895. In the early days of the twentieth century the new Sicilian Acting company in Catania at the Teatro Machiavelli performed the play, and *I mafiusi* found new life with Giovanni Grasso as Gioachino Funciazza. On November 30, 1902, the new

¹³⁵ Loschiavo, *100 [i.e. Cento]anni di mafia* (Rome: Vito Bianco Editore, 1962), 50.

¹³⁶ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 47.

¹³⁷ Barbina, *Teatro verista*, 47.

Sicilian language company debuted at the Teatro Argentina in Rome in a double-bill of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*. The reviews were excellent; Stanis Manca for *La Tribuna* was at that performance and described Grasso as an actor who commits himself solely to nature.¹³⁸ In describing the company he continued, “Chi sono? Da dove sono venuti? Come si sono rivelati artisti tanto vigorosi ed originali?” (Who are they? Where did they come from? How have they come to reveal themselves these vigorous and original artists?)¹³⁹ Their strangeness and otherness seems implied by these questions. They are different from the professional Italian actor. The portrayal of these Sicilian characters on stage, especially in the early twentieth century with the Sicilian Acting Companies, further popularized these Mafiosi and stereotyped the Sicilian.¹⁴⁰ With the revival of the Sicilian themed plays in the early twentieth century and the performances of them by Sicilian actors such as Giovanni Grasso and Angelo Musco, these older plays saw a revival of interest in the early twentieth century.¹⁴¹ I would argue that Giovanni Grasso as the *capomafioso* Gioachino in his *cavallo di battaglia* role, helped to further disseminate and affirm the Sicilian stereotype of the mafioso. Indeed, as Hart argues, as well as a cultural and political hegemonic intent, there appears to be an aesthetic appeal of the mafia at the heart of its endurance with audiences.¹⁴² I would go further and call it the fetishization of the representation of a figure that uses violence to satisfy his appetites and sense of entitlement.

These representations of glamour hide the ugliness, violence, and corruption of an organization that only devours all it comes in contact with—without honour and without a sense

¹³⁸ Stanis Manca, “All’Argentina,” *La Tribuna, Rome*, December 3, 1902, quoted in Zappulla Muscarà and Zappulla, *Grasso*, 37.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See chapter three.

¹⁴¹ See chapter three.

¹⁴² Hart, “Destabilising Paradise,” 213.

of humanity. *The Godfather* and all the other Mafiosi cultural products are descendants of the “original” in Rizzotto and Mosca’s *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, for the latter was the first work to establish an audience for this kind of entertainment and, more importantly, the first work to brand the Sicilian as a mafioso. It facilitated the construction of a pervasive stereotype. Thus, while the memory of this early play has diminished and faded, in every representation of a mafioso—the snappy dresser, the nickname, the respected leader, and the efficient enforcer—we can see a little bit of Gioachino Funciazza.

Giuseppe Rizzotto (1828-]895) autore/attore del dramma folcloristico *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, composto nel 1861-62. La foto che lo ritrae fu inviata dallo stesso Rizzotto al «decano filodrammatico» Gaspare Caminneci (Palermo, 17 maggio 1882).



Figure 1:

Giuseppe Rizzotto (1828-95) author/actor of the folk drama *I mafiusi di la Vicaria*, written 1861-62. Rizzotto sent the photo, which shows him as Gioachino Funciazza, to the “dean of the drama society” Gaspare Caminneci (Palermo, May 17, 1882). Professor Caminneci was a folklorist who wrote about the Sicilian masks from the early nineteenth century. Courtesy of Salvatore Costanza, *La patria armata: un episodio della rivolta antileva in Sicilia*. Trapani, Corrao, 1989.

Chapter Two

The Sicilian *Verismo* of Verga, Capuana, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*

In the final moments of Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a townswoman runs downstage and announces the offstage murder of *compare* Turridu Macca to the gathered townsfolk, "Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu! Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!" (They have murdered neighbor Turridu!). On January 15, 1884, *verismo alla siciliana* had come to the theatre.¹ Giovanni Verga's one-act play opened at the Carignano Theatre in Turin, with the great Italian actor Eleonora Duse starring as the wronged woman Santuzza. The story is set in a Sicilian village on Easter morning. Turridu has recently returned from his stint as a soldier and finds that Lola, the girl who promised to marry him, has married the "rich" merchant, Alfio. In order to make his former lover jealous, Turridu begins courting another young woman, Santuzza. Lola becomes jealous and starts seeing Turridu behind her husband's back. Alfio spends most of his time away from home traveling with his cart and selling his wares. On Easter, he returns home and on his way to church, he runs into Santuzza, who, angry with Turridu for his betrayal of her, informs Alfio of Lola's infidelity. Alfio finds his rival at the tavern. Turridu offers Alfio wine, but he refuses it and instead challenges him to a duel. Turridu bites Alfio's ear, a traditional Sicilian sign of acceptance of a challenge. After bidding his mother a final good-bye, Turridu meets Alfio outside town for a knife duel. Alfio stabs him three times, once in the arm, once in the stomach, and once in the throat. Thus, Turridu dies.

The production received an enthusiastic reception and plaudits from the critics. Indeed, Verga's play provoked a sensation that night and many others that followed. The production would go on to receive standing ovations in Florence, Milan, and Rome and then on to Paris

¹ No name is mentioned in the death of Turridu. The townfolk follow the rules of *omertà*, the code of silence.

twice, in 1897 and 98, with Duse as Santuzza, a character that would remain a staple in her repertory of definitive roles. Giuseppe Giacosa, the dramatist and librettist who encouraged Verga in his writing and brought his work to the attention of the Rossi Acting Company and La Duse, wrote in the *Gazzetta Piemontese* the day before the show opened, “Ridano che il Teatro va riformato e ricondotto a forme più semplici, più sincere, in una parola più vicine alla realtà.” (They shout that the theatre needs to be reformed and brought back to a simpler more sincere form, in a word, closer to reality.)² Verga’s play was proclaimed the beginning of that reformation and would mark a turning point for the Italian stage.³ Realism and the representation of the lower classes from the South on the stage became a new trend and an enticing selling point to the audience with its exotic and primitive setting and its strange passionate and violent characters. This short play, with its distinctive locale and colorful characters provided bourgeois audiences in the North with a new perspective on the periphery of the newly unified Italy at a moment when the country was attempting to construct a national identity and a national culture. But that very attempt would actually highlight and reinforce the differences.

Indeed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Cavalleria Rusticana* launched the popularization of a recognizable Southern type and setting that, though not completely new, would become the model for the image of Sicily and all things Sicilian. For the stage, this meant an increase in the number of productions that featured the Sicilian and his land as its subject and setting. Soon after the success of *Cavalleria*, many Sicilian writers, including Luigi Capuana, began adapting their literary works for the stage to supply Sicilian acting troupes with new works. In the early twentieth century, these troupes and actors began to tour the north

² Francesco De Felice, *Storia del teatro siciliano* (Catania, Italy: Editrice Elefante, 1979), 245. All translations are mine, unless otherwise specified.

³ *Ibid.*, 245.

of Italy, Europe, and the Americas. To provide a truer experience of this exotic world, these troupes performed in Sicilian many plays originally written in Italian, thus offering audiences what was perceived to be a more authentic experience of the South. Even though Verga had written *Cavalleria* in Italian, he did give permission for it to be translated and performed in Sicilian by these groups. Consequently, in the theatre, Sicilian-language acting troupes gained national and international success as they performed *Cavalleria* and other *veristi* plays.

In this chapter, I will be looking at how Verga's portrayal of the Sicilian figure in *Cavalleria Rusticana* reinforced and propagated a stereotype of the Southern peasant already emerging in the newly unified Italian state as the nation's "other." Many of these stereotypes were mostly disseminated in literature, but the stage representation of the South, especially when presented in the Sicilian language, helped to disseminate these constructions further and in a way that penetrated the new nation's zeitgeist. In my analysis, I will also deploy Gramscian and neo-Gramscian tools to argue that *Cavalleria Rusticana*, in its many incarnations and as an important addition to the Italian canon, contributed in the construction of the image of the "real" Sicilians on stage that, on the one hand, reaffirmed old stereotypes, and on the other, constructed new ones. Using Antonio Gramsci's idea of the hegemonic and the dominant, I will look at how Verga's story was used to construct an identity of the Sicilian peasant, which was then extended to the Sicilian, and how the tenets of *verismo* helped to reinforce that construct. Hence, part of my discussion will relate to the general cultural, social, and political climate of Italy, and how it fed into the ideas of *verismo*, which acted as the theoretical underpinning for Verga's most famous work. This will include Luigi Capuana's theoretical construction of *verismo*, as well as his play *Malià*, an offspring of *Cavalleria*. Beginning with an explanation of the term stereotype, I will then move to an examination of the origins and implications of the "*Questione*

meridionale” (Southern Question) using current scholarship practices prevalent in the social sciences. I will limit myself to the most pertinent scholars who have written specifically about how the cultural phenomenon of certain artistic works has contributed to the myths of the *meridionalismo* of the *Mezzogiorno*.⁴

I am not claiming that the construction of a Sicilian identity using stereotypes in culture is unique to Italy, nor that a regional identity was necessarily established by these works. Instead, I argue that these cultural products contributed to the delineation of Sicilianness. As local elites part of the ruling class, Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana contributed to defining Sicilian identity by setting themselves apart from the majority peasant class that occupied the island. Ernest Gellner refers to such elites as the agro-literate polity. He writes that this smaller group would attempt to separate itself from the greater majority of agricultural producers, or peasants.⁵ Gellner explains how, for this smaller group, “its ideology exaggerates rather than underplays the inequality of classes and the degree of separation of the ruling stratum.... There is a great stress on cultural differentiation rather than on homogeneity.”⁶ The incomplete and sometimes distorted portrayal of the peasant class in Sicily by Verga and Capuana emphasized the differences between them and the Italian bourgeoisie. Many of these stereotypical depictions simply served to push this group further to the margins of society during a politically unstable time for the union.⁷

⁴ *Meridionalismo* is the term that refers to the field of intellectual investigation of Italy’s South; *Mezzogiorno* is another term for describing all places south of Rome.

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁷ In the 1890s, Sicilian peasant farmers, along with other oppressed workers such as sulfur miners organized into *fasci* (a union), and organized large protests and strikes. Prime Minister Francesco Crispi sent in thirty thousand soldiers to violently squash the protests, imprison its participants, and dismantle the union.

In 1981, Richard Ashmore and Frances Del Boca, two social psychologists, wrote, “A stereotype is a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group.”⁸ This definition is open and allows for an interpretation that the stereotype “may or may not be accurate and rational, widely shared, conscious, rigid, exaggerations of group differences, positive or negative, or based on essentialist or biological rationales.”⁹ In addition, “stereotypes may or may not be the cause or the effect of prejudice, or the cause of biases and self-fulfilling prophecies.”¹⁰ In the case of partial or distorted representation of a little-known group of people by an outside group of people in a cultural product, the result may lead to a caricature of that group that engenders one form or another of prejudice. In their critical compendium, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation on National Characters: A Critical Survey*, Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen provide an ambitious survey of national and ethnic stereotypes present in European literature. In his introduction, Beller explains how literary partial representations lead to prejudice.

Once textually codified, the partial representation will represent the whole. This is an issue of information, or information processing, which together with our tendency towards value judgments will generate prejudices. Prejudices involve,

⁸ Richard D. Ashmore and Frances K. Del Boca, “Conceptual Approaches to Stereotypes and Stereotyping, in *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior*, ed. David L. Hamilton (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1981), 21.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Lee Jussim, Thomas R. Cain, et al., “The Unbearable Accuracy of Stereotypes,” in *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*, ed. Todd D. Nelson (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 201. For a further discussion, see Mark P. Zanna and James M. Olson, eds., *The Psychology of Prejudice* (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1994); John F. Dovidio, Miles Hewstone, et al., *The Sage Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (London: Sage Publication Ltd., 2010).

then, an a priori information deficit. This often engenders negative valorizations, or else starry-eyed idealizations, both of which stand in need of correction.¹¹

These partial representations are stereotypes that are often used to define whole populations.¹²

Further, what is objectionable about stereotyping is the implication that important traits are inborn for large groups and that these essential traits are fixed by Nature.¹³ Richard Dyer writes that stereotypes are taken to be an expression of a general agreement about a social group that arises independently of the stereotype; however, it is from the stereotypes that we form ideas about social groups.¹⁴ A stereotype is less real and more apparent, expressing a “particular definition of reality, with concomitant evaluation, which in turn relates to the disposition of power within society.”¹⁵ I maintain that the distorted representation of the Sicilian peasants in these particular veristi works contributed to thinking about this population in essentialist terms that “othered” them and provided cover to the Italian government to institute repressive policies.

Indeed, inevitability permeates the works of the Sicilian veristi, especially Verga, whose work is defined by its sense of pessimism. As Gellner explains, it is in the interests of the agroliterate society to accentuate the difference between them and the agricultural producers or peasants because “by externalizing, making absolute and underwriting inequalities, it fortifies them and makes them palatable, by endowing them with the aura of inevitability, permanence

¹¹ Manfred Beller, introduction to *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other,’” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 257.

¹⁴ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

and naturalness.”¹⁶ I maintain that both Verga and Capuana were (consciously at times and, perhaps, unconsciously at other times) determined to advance a political agenda with their works. This, I believe, is apparent, given their active participation in the national debate about the “language question,” the culture, and politics.¹⁷ In choosing to write about the peasants, both landowning and not, in Sicily, and by using the language of realism and science to bring these figures into the national consciousness, Verga and Capuana supplied the nation with a simple way of looking at their new citizens. Consequently, the process of representing those figures on stage made those figures popular and ubiquitous in a way that prose could not have done in Italy in the late nineteenth century, because of widespread illiteracy.

The New History of Italy and the Southern Question

Since Italy’s Unification in 1865, the Southern Question has played an important role in national politics and in the perceived identity of the South. Besides writing *The Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the Italian Communist Party who was imprisoned in 1926 by Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime, left behind an unfinished manuscript that focused on the Southern Question.¹⁸ His writings on this issue helped to articulate not only the North/South binarism, and to relate the circumstances of the relationship between an industrial and non-

¹⁶ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11.

¹⁷ Both Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana were active in local politics. Capuana was elected as mayor to his hometown of Mineo.

¹⁸ Born in Sardinia, Antonio Gramsci attended the University of Turin on a scholarship. He broke off his studies to pursue his political commitments and write full time for the socialist press. His writing touched on a full range of topics from drama to international events. Richard Bellamy, introduction to *Gramsci: Pre-Prison Writings*, ed. Richard Bellamy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), x-xv.

industrial society, but also to reveal the inequities that exist in these populations.¹⁹ Gramsci relates the history of Italian unification and points to the consequences of the Northern collaboration with Southern landowners during the 1860 liberation of Sicily and the South from Bourbon rule.

Beginning in the 1990s, many scholars in the social sciences have been revisiting assumptions about the North/South binary in Italy, established soon after the *Risorgimento*, using Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a theoretical lens. John Dickie identifies the most crucial aspect of Said's theory by drawing parallels between Orientalism and Italy's Southern Question. He writes, "The South, like the Orient, is a construct; in Said's words, it is 'a constituted entity.'"²⁰ As Said states, this "constituted entity" can be constructed by those who observe aspects of the Orient either from outside the culture or from within, but the bits of knowledge about the "other" culture reflect the interests of the dominant culture that is conducting the study. This point is the basis for the new understanding of the othering of the South after Italian unification. Said writes:

All cultures impose corrections upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge. The problem is not that conversion takes place. It is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness; therefore cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.²¹

¹⁹ Pasquale Verdicchio, introduction to *The Southern Question*, by Antonio Gramsci (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), 26.

²⁰ John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 116.

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 67.

The social sciences today have adapted this model to explain the appearance and endurance of this idea of the “Southern Question.”

In the introduction to her anthology *Italy's Southern Question*, Jane Schneider lists the stereotypes that have clung to the image of the South since Italy's Unification. The Southerner by contrast to his Northern neighbor tends to be “passionate, undisciplined, rebellious, intensely competitive, and incapable of generating group solidarity or engaging in collective action ... unable to build the rational, orderly, civic cultures that, in the North, underwrote the emergence of industrial capitalist society.”²² By using Said's lens, Schneider, Dickie, Nelson Moe, Lucy Riall, and other scholars have been able to reframe assumptions about Italian history immediately before and after unification. The most persistent assumption has been the idea of the South as a drain upon the nation. This notion gained acceptance in Italian politics and society after the publication in 1875 of Pasquale Villari's *Lettere meridionali* (Southern Letters), which argue that the South is the main problem of the new nation, “*una problema meridionali*” (a southern problem).²³ By enumerating and highlighting some of the real economic obstacles facing the South and especially the landless laborers who were being exploited by the lords of the large estates (*latifondi*), Villari was primarily issuing a call to action to the Italian government to fix these problems. But the call was ignored, and instead of dealing with some of the serious economic and social issues facing the South, the government used Villari's work as a justification for the vilification of the South.

²² Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country* (New York: Berg, 1998), 1.

²³ Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell'Italia meridionale: dall'Ottocento a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 1993), 36.

Italy's Southern Question or more to the point Southern Problem originated with the observations of these first *meridionalisti*, writers such as Pasquale Villari, Sidney Sonnino, and Leopoldo Franchetti, who after Italian unification in 1860, sought to understand the new territories of their kingdom through a method of analysis that combined such disciplines as "agronomy, economics, geography, and sociology in order to explain the peculiarities of the South in relation to the rest of the country."²⁴ Two conservative politicians from the North, Sonnino and Franchetti, wrote one of the most influential works on Sicily.²⁵ The two set off for a private investigation of the island in order to provide an extensive report for the Piedmont government.²⁶ Their study of the socioeconomic, political, and administrative problems of the South would result in the publication in 1877 of a two-volume text, *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (Inquiry in Sicily). The first volume by Sonnino, subtitled *I contadini* (The Peasants), analyzes the plight of the landless peasant, and specifically looks at the contractual relationship between the peasant and the landowner. Franchetti's second volume, *Le condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia* (Political and Administrative Conditions in Sicily), explores the links between poverty, crime, and political corruption, and specifically names and describes the differences between the common *brigandaggio* (brigandage) found on the island and the origins and organization of the

²⁴ Jonathan Morris, "Challenging *Meridionalismo*," in *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, ed. Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris (Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 2.

²⁵ Sidney Sonnino was Italy's prime minister briefly in 1906 and then again in 1909-10, while Leopoldo Franchetti was a deputy of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and then a Senator in 1909.

²⁶ Though the fieldwork research conducted for the report would prove to be a breakthrough. Its findings represented convictions already formed and written about by Sonnino: that the poverty and extreme inequality in the South, including the Southern Question, represented a "dire threat" to Liberal Italy. Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a Dream: Sidney Sonnino and The Rise and Fall of Liberal Italy 1847-1922* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki editore, 1999), 78.

Sicilian mafia.²⁷ But along with a call to the Piedmont government²⁸ to reform the island, in the best tradition of the Right's *buongoverno* (good government), Franchetti also recommended restructuring the entire system of government administration, giving the center more control. In addition, he suggested purging the bureaucracy and the Sicilian police, replacing them with an educated elite from outside the island, and bringing criminals to justice through organized massive police operations.²⁹

In his essay "The Emergence of the Southern Question in Villari, Franchetti, and Sonnino," Nelson Moe looks at the works of these meridionalisti as a way of explaining the construction of a South that, almost immediately after Unification and with the publication of Villari's letters, began to be seen as a "deviation from the norm of social justice and good government."³⁰ Moe points out that because these meridionalisti, beginning with Villari, resorted to reporting many of their findings in a "sensational fashion" and continued "to emphasize the peculiarity of the South," the North appeared to be "in an antithetical position with respect to the South."³¹ One example of this strategy is Villari's tendency to assault his readers with scenes of human degradation, such as his description of the horrendous working conditions and the use of child workers in the Sicilian sulfur mines. Villari again underscores the particularity of these

²⁷ Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal Policy and Local Power, 1859-1866* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 225.

²⁸ The Piedmont government under the rule of the House of Savoy, the only indigenous monarchy in Italy, was the seat of government for Italy, and had been the leader in the *Risorgimento* with Count Camillo Benso di Cavour as its talented leader and statesman. Anthony Cardoza, "Cavour and Piedmont," in *Short Oxford History of Italy: Italy in the Nineteenth Century 1796-1900*, ed. John A. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.

²⁹ Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*, 225.

³⁰ Nelson Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question in Villari, Franchetti, Sonnino," in *Italy's "Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (New York: Berg, 1998), 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Sicilian mines especially in comparison to other countries that have set up protections for their mineworkers and especially for their child workers.³²

Moe's analysis of Sonnino and Franchetti's work supports his position. Written as observations of their travels throughout Sicily, Sonnino and Franchetti's language is similar to that found in Villari's letters. An example of this sensationalism can be found in Franchetti's description of the Sicilian countryside. Franchetti writes that, as a traveler, the Sicilian countryside provokes feelings that "overcome by a sense of profound isolation;" he further notes that "it seems to him that the nightmare of some mysterious power weighs on the bare and monotonous countryside, a power against which there is no help or defense."³³ The observations are of an outside observer of the mainland.³⁴ Franchetti continues by describing the ruling class of the island as "most passionately ambitious for domination, the quickest to take offense, the most ruthless in its struggles for power, influence and profit, the most implacable in its hates, most ferocious in vendettas."³⁵ This particular observation is one that will continue to show up in the cultural portrayals of Sicilians. In a similar tone, Franchetti depicts the oppressed peasants as living under conditions that are reminiscent of "the times in which the Sicilian countryside was tilled by hordes of slaves"; he observes that the island is littered by bands of brigands, bandits, and Mafiosi who are "virtually unchecked by the forces of law and order."³⁶ Moe concludes that Franchetti's "rigorous and rhetorically charged elaboration of two distinct Italies,"

³² Ibid., 56.

³³ Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino, *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974), 1:21-22, quoted in Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question," 65. Translated by Moe.

³⁴ Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question," 65.

³⁵ Franchetti and Sonnino, *Inchiesta* 8, 21, 13, quoted in Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question," 65.

³⁶ Ibid., 23, quoted in Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question," 66.

established “the conceptual framework with which the country’s elites viewed Sicily and the South more generally from that point forward.”³⁷

Some of the writings of the meridionalisti did point to real problems in the South such as local government corruption, high incidence of violence, ineffective police, excessive taxation of the poor, and certainly the concentration of property in the hands of absentee landowners.³⁸ Nevertheless, the consequences of these meridionalisti writings has been the formation of a binary by which northern Italy is used as a basis for comparison in studies of the South, thus engendering a label for the South as politically and economically underdeveloped in relation to the North, and defining a discourse that would continue to refer to the South’s “backwardness” and failure (or refusal) to resolve backwardness throughout the twentieth century right up to today. Antonio Gramsci called these meridionalisti “sociologists of positivism” who reduced Southerners to lists of “scientific” facts of positivist sociology and who supplied intellectual support to the idea of two different cultures in Italy.³⁹ The failure (or refusal) of the South to resolve its backwardness was and is seen as proof of the “barbarism,” rebelliousness, violent nature, and laziness of the Southern character.⁴⁰ After Unification, rather than engaging in a

³⁷ Moe, “The Emergence of the Southern Question,” 71. In 2002, Nelson Moe extended his essay into a book, in which he looks at how the Southern Question shaped the political, social, and cultural life of Italy in the twentieth century. See Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

³⁸ Christopher Duggan, “Politics in the Era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-1896,” in Davis, *Short Oxford*, 159.

³⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdicchio (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), 32-33.

⁴⁰ John Dickie explores Alfredo Niceforo’s book *L’Italia Barbarica contemporanea* (Contemporary Barbarian Italy) of 1898 and how it can be seen as the “*locus classicus* of prejudice towards Southern Italians.” John Dickie, “Stereotypes of the Italian South 1860-1900,” in *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, ed. Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 114-15.

process by which to deal with some of the real issues facing the South, these problems were ignored and in many cases made worse. Indeed, the very problems the South was facing were used to define the island and its people.

Many assumptions about the South were already present in diverse cultural products in one form or another going back to the seventeenth century, but it was only after Unification that the South and its people were truly defined and categorized. In his monograph *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*, John Dickie begins by listing many of the negative and positive stock images and stereotypes of the South “as a place of illiteracy, superstition, magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously, and alluringly African or Oriental.”⁴¹ Dickie’s objective is to look at the way politicians, writers, and the Italian public objectified Southerners in the post-Unification period. His focus is rather broad, as he writes about the works of Sidney Sonnino and Leopoldo Franchetti and the political origins of the Southern Question, the popularity of the picturesque in contemporary magazines, and the first Sicilian prime minister Francesco Crispi’s policies concerning Sicily. Dickie divides his work into four essays: the first addresses brigandage; the second looks at the birth of the Southern Question; the third deals with representations of the South as picturesque in a popular periodical of the day; and the fourth discusses Francesco Crispi’s *Sicilianita*. Dickie’s main thesis is that this form of stereotyping and “othering” of the South was a consequence of nation building, because in order to define themselves as Italian, the bourgeoisie needed an “other.”

⁴¹ Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 1.

Verismo

Verga and Capuana reflected and were influenced by not only Italian and French literary movements but also the political and social situations in Italy. Despite claims that they were dedicated to expressing the reality of life in Sicily in their work, Verga and Capuana were following literary conventions that had been present in Alessandro Manzoni, while incorporating a “reality” that had been set up by the *meridionalisti*. Their theory of verismo, based on the notion of a scientifically observed life, was borrowed from the French Naturalist Movement. Their work attained a veneer of reality, while actually reinforcing many of the contemporary views and assumptions of the ruling class about the peasants in the South. I am not arguing that Naturalism creates stereotypes but that verismo, as it came to be used by Verga and Capuana (who were speaking for their class), used the notion of realism in a way that reinforced many of the negative stereotypes about Sicilian peasants. Therefore, to understand the verismo of Verga and Capuana, I will discuss its origins and some of the influences that helped to define it by analyzing its relationship with the French Naturalists, Alessandro Manzoni, and the *Scapigliatura* movement. This will lead into a discussion of Verga’s and Capuana’s early literary work and theories.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century in Italy, the elements of verismo could be found in literature, drama, and opera.⁴² The roots of verismo are both foreign and Italian. Initially a literary movement, it was introduced to the stage by Verga’s one-act adaptation of his story

⁴² Besides Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana, many would also include Federico DeRoberto as the important Sicilian veristi. He is most famous for his novel *I Viceri (The Viceroy)*, a depiction of the rivalries of dynastic families in the Sicilian nobility at the time of the *Risorgimento*. Verismo has also had a lasting influence in opera with such composers as Pietro Mascagni, Ruggiero Leoncavallo, and Giacomo Puccini. G. M. Carsaniga, R. H. Freeborn, and F. W. J. Hemmings, eds., *The Age of Realism* (Sussex, UK: The Harvester Press, 1978), 330.

Cavalleria Rusticana. Italian scholars link the literary movement of verismo to two influences: first is the French naturalist movement, especially as it was defined by Emile Zola (1840-1902),⁴³ and the second is Count Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), the Italian titan of letters. Manzoni's first major work was the verse tragedy *Il Conte di Carmagnola* but he is best known for his historical novel *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*, first published in 1827; definitive version published in 1842).⁴⁴ Although Manzoni historically preceded Zola, I will begin by looking at French Naturalism and Zola, and then look at Manzoni.

The French Naturalist movement was an important influence on the verismo movement though, as I stated, not the only one. Naturalism can be considered part of the new “structure of feeling” that was sweeping through the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ It was an era that was developing new sciences, new experimentation, and optimism over what human beings could accomplish. In the natural sciences, French paleontologist and anatomist Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) discovered fossils of extinct mammals and reptiles. His findings paved the way for Charles Darwin's momentous theory of evolution and led to seismic shifts in the way that people looked

⁴³ In 1894, during a meeting with Verga, Zola is reported to have said, “*Le verisme italien, oui, oui, je comprends: c'est mon naturalisme*” (Italian verismo, yes, yes, I understand: it is my naturalism). *Ibid.*, 323.

⁴⁴ Count Alessandro Manzoni was born in Milan into a rich family of provincial landowners with estates near Lecco. He was born a Catholic but was an agnostic liberal until his conversion in 1810 to a form of evangelical Catholicism. He is most famous for his novel *I promessi sposi*, but he also wrote poetry and two historical tragedies influenced by William Shakespeare: *Il conte di Carmagnola* (1820) and *Adelchi* (1822).

⁴⁵ Raymond Williams coined the phrase “structure of feeling” as a way to describe “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs,” “a social experience which is still in process.” Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132. It is a concept that attempts to describe the relational experience of culture through time.

at the world.⁴⁶ The scientific method seeped into the way they thought about the arts and thus gave birth to the positivist movement, which divorced the sciences from metaphysics and morals.⁴⁷

The concepts of empiricism that reject theology and metaphysics as a way to gain knowledge and rely solely on the senses, experience, and scientific investigation, define the positivistic spirit that had come to envelop thinking in France and the rest of Europe in the nineteenth century; it was part of the new structure of feeling. In the 1830s, the philosopher Auguste Comte developed a system devoted to the investigation of positive facts and observable phenomena, which he called Positivism.⁴⁸ This system can predominately be observed in fields such as anthropology and sociology, including the meridionalisti. Its tenets soon made their way into the field of literature via the critic and historian Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893).⁴⁹ Influenced by the English thinkers John Stuart Mills and Herbert Spenser, Taine developed a positivist theory of literature in 1864. Giacomo Debenedetti traces the first application of the term naturalism in literature to an essay by Taine on Henri Balzac published in 1858 in *Journal*

⁴⁶ The Italian translation of *The Origin of Species* was published in 1864 as *Sull'origine delle specie per elezione naturale*, and translated by Giovanni Canestrini and Leonardo Salimbeni. See also Tim Murray, *Milestones in Archaeology: A Chronological Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007); Walter C. Hartwig, ed., *The Primate Fossil Record* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Important fossil discoveries, of course, continued into the twentieth century.

⁴⁷ Anthony Walsh and Lee Ellis, *Crimonology an Interdisciplinary Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 58.

⁴⁸ Gertrud Lenzer, ed., introduction to *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings* by Auguste Comte (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998), xiv.

⁴⁹ Comtean influenced anthropology and sociology can be detected in such important social scientists as Emile Durkheim, who “claimed to base his sociology on objective ‘social facts.’” Jens Høyrup, *Human Sciences: Reappraising the Humanities through History and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 157.

des Débats.⁵⁰ In his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (published in 1862-4), Taine argues that every artist conveys the psychology of the culture in which the cultural artifact is produced. Moreover, that psychology is comprised of “*la race,*” “*le milieu,*” and “*le moment.*”⁵¹ Indeed, he proposes that the study of the artistic creation be done scientifically as an expression of a particular biological heredity, determined by socio-political circumstances and by a specific historical situation.⁵² Taine’s critical theory denied the operation of free will in the creation of a work of art. Instead of a Romantic aesthetic, the work of art could be seen through a determinist prism.

A close friend of the French critic, Emile Zola was greatly influenced by Taine’s theory of positivism and literature. Zola incorporates much of this new thinking into his own work. In his essay “Naturalism on the Stage,” he applies this experimental method to the drama. One of the critical tenets to this method is the invisibility of the author in the presentation of his work. Zola writes that the author “himself disappears, he keeps his emotions well in hand, he simply shows what he has seen. Here is the truth; shiver or laugh before it, draw from it whatever lesson you please, the only task of the author has been to put before you true data.”⁵³ The writer should observe and depict what is in the human being and in nature, and the writer must not revert to

⁵⁰ Referring to the French novelist Henri Balzac, Taine writes, “È un artista, ponderoso, che ha, come servitori e padroni, gusti e facoltà di naturalista.” (He is an artist, ponderous, who has, as servants and masters, tastes and abilities of a naturalist.) Debenedetti also points out that it was Balzac himself, in his preface to *Comédie humaine* in 1847, who announces that he will write a “natural story” of man, but it was Taine who defined and described how Balzac was a naturalist. Giacomo Debenedetti, *Verga e il naturalismo* (Milan: Garzanti Editore, 1978), 294.

⁵¹ Debenedetti, *Verga*, 294. According to Høyrup in *Human Sciences* (157), “*la race, le milieu, and le moment*” roughly translate as “the culture, the geographical environment, and historical time.”

⁵² Pierluigi Pellini, *Naturalismo e verismo* (Scandicci, Italy: Nuova Italia Ed., 1998), 22-23.

⁵³ Emile Zola, “Naturalism on the Stage,” in *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*, trans. Belle M. Sherman (New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1893), 125.

abstract characters but tell the “true history” of the individual via the chronicle of daily life.⁵⁴ Zola proposes taking the faithful depiction of a person or group’s life study and providing an exact observation of that study without embellishments; even if it is not a whole life, like the special study of a mineral by a chemist, the novelist can focus on a few days in the life of an individual, on a “scrap of an existence.”⁵⁵ In sum, a person is the product of her family, her environment, and the very period she is living in. The narrative must mimic the elements of a scientific experiment. The setting must in a knowable contemporary time with characters from the lower echelons of society who use the language of that society and behave according to the dictates of that environment. Most importantly, the narrator must maintain an objective distance from the action and simply allows events to unfold without taking a moral or ethical position. Many of these tenets were adopted into verismo, but the movement also contained many homegrown influences.

Francesco De Sanctis (1817-1883), educator and founder of modern Italian criticism,⁵⁶ was the first scholar to authoritatively claim in his lectures given in 1871-2 that Count Alessandro Manzoni could be classified as one of the first veristi.⁵⁷ De Sanctis correctly pointed

⁵⁴ Ibid., 114-15.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁶ Francesco De Sanctis was born in the south of Italy in the Campania region. He was active in politics all of his life, and he was Minister of Education for the Italian government in three periods in the 1860s and then in the 1870s. In 1861, he became professor of comparative literature at the University of Naples. He is most famous for his work on Italian Idealism in his multi-volume work *Storia della letteratura italiana*. See Luigi Russo, *Francesco De Sanctis e la cultura napoletana* (Florence: Sansoni, 1959).

⁵⁷ “The belief that an unbroken thread connected Manzoni’s romantic realism to late-nineteenth-century *verismo* was to become, with minor qualifications and shifts of emphasis, one of the tenets of twentieth-century literary criticism, in the works of Russo, Marazzan, Sapegno and others.” Carsaniga, Freeborn, and Hemmings, *The Age of Realism*, 323. See Luigi Russo, *Giovanni Verga* (Bari, Italy: Laterza, 1995), 57-60; Mario Pomilio, *Dal naturalismo al verismo*

to some obvious connections between Manzoni and the veristi, such as their attention to geographic details and a profound aspiration to reveal a historical truth.⁵⁸ De Sanctis elaborated further on this connection in four articles in the periodical *Nuova Antologia di scienza, lettere ed arti* (New Anthology of Sciences, Letters, and Arts), in which he wrote, “Manzoni non prende per base della sua tragedia una idea, ma il fatto storico, come e realmente avvenuto, e non si attende a mutarlo o alterarlo nelle sue circostanze essenziale, anzi si studia di riprodurre la sua fisionomia fin ne’ menomi particolari.” (Manzoni’s tragedy is not premised on an idea, but on a historical fact or event, the way it really happened, and he does not attempt to change or alter that fact or event in its essential circumstances; on the contrary, he tries to reproduce its appearance to its smallest details).⁵⁹ Verga used this literary conceit for his *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which he claimed was based on an actual event, a duel of honor that had occurred in Vizzini (a Sicilian town) a century earlier. Both romantic realism and verismo share the central tenet that “art should be true to life.”⁶⁰ More importantly this reveals a conscious and deliberate attempt to use art as a way of revealing the world to its audience. Manzoni’s influence on Verga seems more direct and ideologically closer than that of the French Naturalists.

Further, Giovanni Carsaniga suggests that it is demonstrated in the writings of both Manzoni and the veristi that the impulse to move towards a more realistic art form may have been dictated by a basic belief in democratic ideals.⁶¹ This impulse and the underlying ideology

(Naples: Liguori, 1966), 87-94; Debenedetti, *Verga*, 101-5; Cinzia Gallo, *Il verismo minore in Sicilia: teorie e “teorici” nel ventennio 1875-95* (Catania, Italy: Bonanno, 1999).

⁵⁸ Carsaniga, Freeborn, and Hemmings, *The Age of Realism*, 323.

⁵⁹ Francesco De Sanctis, “La Poetica di Manzoni,” *Nuova antologia di scienza, lettere, ed arti* (Florence: Direzione della Nuova Antologia, 1872), 235.

⁶⁰ Carsaniga, Freeborn, and Hemmings, *The Age of Realism*, 324.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

connect Manzoni to the verismo movement and specifically to Verga. In addition, Manzoni and Verga shared a paternalistic inclination towards the lower classes, and, as Carsaniga points out, seemed to operate under the assumption “that social divisions are inherent to a stable social order and that the lower classes should be content with their lot and leave politics to their betters.”⁶²

Though Manzoni may not have been stating this position directly, his portrayal of the rigidity of classes within his novel *I promessi sposi* and his underlying Catholic ethics suggest that the poor would be best served “to cultivate the Christian virtues of resignation and political non-involvement.”⁶³ Manzoni’s fervent Catholicism permeates the pages of his novel. In Manzoni’s work, according to Gramsci, “the Church lies between the people and God,” further demonstrating more of “an apparent than real” concern with peasant life.⁶⁴

I promessi sposi is considered one of the most important books in the Italian literary canon. In Italy, the author remains one of the most influential writers of the nineteenth century, as his novel is acknowledged as having an enormous impact on the development of a national language.⁶⁵ Written in the style of Sir Walter Scott’s popular *Waverly Novels*, *I promessi sposi* takes place in Spanish-occupied Lombardy between 1628 and 1631. The plot follows the trials and tribulations of two peasants, Renzo and Lucia, who are kept from marrying by a local

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. Antonio Gramsci also made reference to this connection in his writings, as I point out later in this chapter.

⁶⁴ Marcia Landy’s article looks at Gramsci’s connections between culture and politics in his writings. Marcia Landy, “Culture and Politics in the Work of Antonio Gramsci,” *Boundary 2* 14, no. 3 (1986): 61.

⁶⁵ “The year *I promessi sposi* was published it began to undergo linguistic revisions. On one level, these were only an extension of his constant drive to perfect the novel. But they also became part of a much vaster political project, conceived as early as 1806, to produce a single national Italian language.” Sandra Bermann, introduction to *On The Historical Novel*, by Alessandro Manzoni (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1996), 28.

nobleman, the novel's main villain. After being forced to separate, they each flee their hometown and encounter adventures set amid a period of huge upheaval in Lombardy, including the uprising of Milan, famine, and plague. The couple eventually reunites and marries. Manzoni's novel was revolutionary in its adoption of two protagonists from the lower classes and in the way that he packed the text with historical details. In a chapter devoted to Manzoni's technique in *I promessi sposi* and a study of the relationship between the novel and the archive, Marco Codebò analyzes the author's method of incorporating extradiegetic documents into the narrative.⁶⁶

Manzoni was attempting to present the documented truth, not just an author's inspiration, and he therefore would interrupt his narrative in order to include documented records. Codebò asserts, "In order to set the tone of the novel, it needed not only archival proofs, but it also had to display them."⁶⁷ An example of this interruption takes place early in the novel after a parish priest is ambushed by two bravoos, namely, outlaws working for noble lords. Manzoni interrupts the action in order to include a three-page catalogue of *gride*,⁶⁸ edicts against bravoos.⁶⁹ Another example of this kind of documentation is the detailed descriptions of Milan in 1630 during its devastating outbreak of bubonic plague. Manzoni again includes archival records and then inserts a supplementary text, *Storia della colonna infame* (*Story of the Column of Infamy*), which expands on the event.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Marco Codebò, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), 60-79.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-66.

⁶⁸ Literally *grida* means shout; edicts were shouted in the streets. See Gregory L. Lucente, "The Uses and the Ends of Discourse in *I Promessi Sposi*: Manzoni's Narrator, His Characters, and Their Author," *MLN* 101, n. 1 (1986): 51-77.

⁶⁹ Codebò, *Narrating*, 66.

⁷⁰ *Storia della colonna infame* was meant to follow the definitive edition of *I promessi sposi* published in 1840-42. The historiographic text provides further details on an event mentioned in

In the section “Letteratura popolare” in the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci questions Manzoni’s objectivity in the portrayal of the figures in *I promessi sposi*. In his view, Manzoni reveals a bias or even prejudice towards the lower-class characters while demonstrating a loyalty to his own class in his depiction of the aristocrats. Gramsci explains, “Questo atteggiamento è nettamente di casta pur nella sua forma religiosa Cattolica; i popolani, per il Manzoni, non hanno ‘vita interiore’, non hanno personalità morale profonda; essi sono ‘animali’ e il Manzoni è ‘benevolo’ verso di loro proprio della benevolenza di una cattolica società di protezione degli animali.” (It is clearly a caste attitude, even in its religious Catholic form. For Manzoni the people do not have any “inner life,” any deep moral personality. They are “animals” and Manzoni is “benevolent” towards them, with exactly that benevolence of a Catholic society for the protection of animals.)⁷¹ The lower classes have been dehumanized, but in a way that requires the help and support of the upper classes. Manzoni takes a patriarchal attitude full of Catholic charity towards the poor and less privileged.

Gramsci dedicates a whole section of his cultural writings in his prison notebooks to Manzoni, whom he uses to expose the historical and cultural conditions of Italy.⁷² According to Gramsci, Manzoni is part of the Italian intellectual/ruling class, traditionally cosmopolitan, elitist, and at odds with the development of a culture that includes the masses.⁷³ Through his work, Manzoni re-inscribes the cultural hierarchy of the lower and upper classes (aristocracy),

chapters 31 and 32 about the trials held in Milan in 1630 against those accused of spreading the plague. The word “end” appears only at the end of this work. Ibid.

⁷¹ David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds., *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 292.

⁷² David Forgacs, introduction to “VII Manzoni,” in Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, *Cultural Writings*, 288.

⁷³ William Q. Boelhower, “Antonio Gramsci’s Sociology of Literature,” *Contemporary Literature* 22, n. 4 (1981): 584-85.

preserving the rights and privileges of his social class. Much of Gramsci's writing centers on the mapping of those people whom he calls subordinates, subaltern, or instrumental, and on looking at the power relations that maintain their subordination.⁷⁴ His goal in this was to look for ways that they might shake off their subalternity.⁷⁵ Gramsci believed that the subaltern could through political action develop class-consciousness and hence play an important part in the revolution.⁷⁶

Antonio Gramsci's writings on culture extended the meaning of the term "hegemony from a strategy for revolution" into a concept that can be used as a tool for understanding society, the practices of ruling classes, and their institutions to gain and maintain power.⁷⁷ He did this by re-theorizing the idea of culture. "Culture is something quite different," according to Gramsci. "It is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is attainment of higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations."⁷⁸ His pre-prison and prison writings often deal with the economic interpretation of the term class stemming from his readings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.⁷⁹ He rejected the economism of some Marxists; instead, he posited that if the subaltern acquired

⁷⁴ Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 98. Gramsci uses the terms "subordinate," "subaltern," or "instrumental" interchangeably to refer to the rural unorganized peasants in the South, or really any people, who had no social or political consciousness as a group. In other words, they are the groups that are denied access to hegemonic powers, such as the peasants, industrial workers, artisans, laborers, shepherds, and so on. David Arnold, "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and The Postcolonial Vinayak Chaturvedi* (London: Verso, 2000), 32-33.

⁷⁵ Crehan, *Gramsci*, 98.

⁷⁶ Arnold, "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity," 31.

⁷⁷ Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London: Routledge, 2006), 41-45.

⁷⁸ David Forgacs, ed., *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 57.

⁷⁹ Arnold, "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity," 32.

consciousness of the hegemonic apparatus on the level of ideologies, they could then reform their methods of knowledge.⁸⁰

Hegemony is not merely physical dominance but also ideological, institutional, and cultural. A bourgeois hegemony is a complex relationship between the ruling and the subaltern groups that results in a “negotiated version” of the ruling class values. It is sustained by the establishment of what Gramsci called a historic-bloc, in which a number of social forces come together (these are mostly elite) to maintain and further common interests.⁸¹ The organic intellectuals disseminate ideology and propaganda, and these ideas of the dominant group or classes are popularized and institutionalized. A hegemonic class acquires consent from other classes and other social forces, thereby creating and maintaining a system of alliances. These social engagements exist in a state of constant tension and flux because of the continual push and pull of subordination and resistance of subaltern groups. There remains a negotiation among different groups who sometimes work together while, at other times and in different situations, also offer resistance.

Gramsci provides a coherent description of the class relational forces that underlie the production of culture in Italy during this period. He distinguishes between the organic and the traditional intellectuals: the former actively participates in life, while the latter is the man of letters, philosopher, or artist.⁸² When organic and traditional intellectuals become involved in politics, the ways they engage with society are often indistinguishable. Oftentimes, they

⁸⁰ Jones, *Gramsci*, 43-47.

⁸¹ The concept of historic-bloc came from Benedetto Croce’s philosophy of the praxis. Gramsci has been described as “Crocian.” Jones, 1 *Gramsci*, 8-19. See also Walter L. Adamson, “Benedetto Croce and the Death of Ideology,” *Journal of Modern History* 55, no. 2 (1983): 208-36.

⁸² Jones, *Gramsci*, 85, 87.

overlap.⁸³ In Gramscian terms, Manzoni and Verga can be considered both organic and traditional intellectuals. As traditional intellectuals, they claim that they remain outside of politics and class, despite evidence to the contrary. Manzoni and Verga make only a symbolic concession to the subaltern classes in their cultural productions, as they continue to represent the interests of their social class. Each author naturalized assumptions about the “essence” of the subaltern by a different method: Manzoni through the use of religion and Verga through the use of science.

Whereas Manzoni takes an almost pitying and Christian view of his common folk characters, Verga takes a cold analytic view of his characters—a scientific perspective that reduces his characters to objects to be studied.⁸⁴ For instance, Verga’s verismo takes the form of the scientific method by means of the neutral impersonal narrator—one of the features of naturalism Zola posits. By invoking a scientific approach to culture, Verga made the claim that his depictions were authentic. However, in so doing, he contributed further to the naturalization and reification of the lower classes. Thus, his work reflects his class loyalty, even if it is demonstrated in a way that is antithetical to Manzoni’s novel.⁸⁵ Both authors claim a commitment to presenting “truth” to their audience. The resulting goal may be educating a disparate populace to be a unified nation, by presenting the dominant groups morals and ethics as beyond man, that is, of God’s or Nature’s making.

Manzoni’s contribution to education came in the form of his work on the language question. In rewriting *I promessi sposi*, he made a commitment to establishing a national vernacular based on a Tuscan idiom current in educated circles in early nineteenth-century

⁸³ Ibid., 93.

⁸⁴ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, 2:897.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 896.

Florence; in his rewrites, he revised and edited out any stray words or phrases from his own Milanese dialect.⁸⁶ Indeed, during this period and certainly after Unification, literary Italian enjoyed a prestige out of proportion of its relevance in a country that had over forty dialects and—in the nineteenth century—a population that was overwhelmingly illiterate, especially in the South.⁸⁷ Manzoni and his supporters hoped to use the Tuscan language and a literary tradition that began with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as the one unifying symbol in an otherwise fragmented country. This leads to another important connection between Manzoni and the veristi, and particularly Verga, who also saw his writing as educationally valuable to the construction of the new nation. Like Manzoni, who edited out much of the Milanese dialect that had appeared in his original text in favor of a purer Italian (that of Tuscany), Verga also wrote in Tuscan, and used the construction of Sicilian and occasional local phrases to suggest the Sicilian language.

Like its French counterpart, verismo also aimed at representing the real and adopted many of Zola's precepts. These include maintaining an impersonal narrator who simply reports the action and dialogue without cueing the audience in on the characters' thoughts or feelings, as well as mining the lives of the lower classes, which for Sicilian writers meant the landless, agricultural classes of the South. In comparing French naturalism to its Italian counterpart, Gramsci writes:

⁸⁶ Federica Brunori Deigan, introduction to *Alessandro Manzoni's "The Count of Carmagnola" and "Adelchis,"* trans. Federica Brunori Deigan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2004), 12. After unification in 1868, Manzoni became president of a commission looking into the language question. He also published two books that dealt directly with that issue, *Dell' unita della lingua e dei mezzi di diffonderla* and *Intorno al vocabulario* (1868).

⁸⁷ Italy had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in Europe in 1871 with forty-two percent illiteracy in Piedmont and eighty-five percent illiteracy in Sicily. Thomas Sowell, *Migrations and Cultures: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 143.

Sarebbe da studiare questo punto: se il naturalismo francese non contenesse già in germe la posizione ideologica che poi ha grande sviluppo nel naturalismo o realismo provinciale italiano e specialmente nel Verga: il popolo della campagna è visto con “distacco,” come “natura” estrinseca allo scrittore, come spettacolo naturale, ecc. È la posizione di *Io e le belve* di Hagenbeck.⁸⁸ In Italia il motivo ‘naturalistico’ si innestò in una posizione ideologica preesistente, come si vede nei *Promessi sposi* del Manzoni, in cui esiste lo stesso “distacco” dagli elementi popolari, distacco appena velato da un benevolo sorriso ironico e caricaturale. (The following question should be examined: whether French naturalism already contained the germs of the ideological position that would later have a substantial development in Italian naturalism or local realism, and especially in Verga, wherein rural people are observed with “detachment,” as “nature” extrinsic to the writer, as a natural spectacle, etc. It is the point of view in Hagenbeck’s *Io e le belve*. In Italy, the “naturalist” element was grafted onto a preexisting ideological position, as one can see in Manzoni’s *The Betrothed*, where there is the same “detachment” from the people—a detachment barely concealed by a benevolent smile that is ironic and has the quality of caricature.)⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Carl Hagenbeck wrote a memoir, *Von Tieren und Menschen: Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen*, in 1908, translated as *Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck’s Experiences for Half a Century among Wild Animals*. Hagenbeck collected wild animals from around the world and supplied them to European and North American animal exhibitors, including P. T. Barnum. He founded the Hamburg Zoo in 1848. He is considered the father of the modern zoo, which attempted to show animals in their natural environment. See Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck’s Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

⁸⁹ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, 2:688; Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3:6.

Gramsci identifies a specific ideological positioning embedded in the use of the scientific method on peasants, particularly as naturalism was developed in Italy. As he explains it, this position was already there in French naturalism: the veristi refined it.⁹⁰ Secondly, picking up on the writings of De Sanctis and Luigi Russo, Gramsci equates the methods of the veristi with those used by Manzoni in *I promessi sposi* but goes further with the idea. Gramsci sees these methods as a form of dehumanization. By also making reference to Hagenbeck and his autobiography as a collector of wild animals, Gramsci makes the parallel between the wild animals and the poor country folk being represented. He equates this method of detachment, maintained in any naturalistic study, with a form of dehumanization, namely, an objectification of the poor that, in many ways, really strips the individual of his or her humanity.

But when did Verga and Capuana take up the mantle of verismo? Giovanni Verga was not always described as a verista; indeed, Verga criticism, beginning with Capuana, has posited his œuvre as a dichotomy between *Verga minore* and *Verga maggiore*.⁹¹ The “minor” works are described as his early romantic or decadent writings, which are based in the middle class aristocracy of the cities and center on the themes of passion.⁹² He was fifteen when he wrote his first novel, *Amore e Patria* (Love and Country, 1857), a romantic tale of the American

⁹⁰ It is relevant to point out the very instability of the term naturalism, which is sometimes used interchangeably with realism and, in Italy at least, was often coupled with the terms regional or provincial.

⁹¹ But this has not always been the case. Critics such as Benedetto Croce and Luigi Russo have argued that “the themes of the ‘realistic’ works are already present in the ‘romantic’ one.” Michal Peled Ginsburg, “I Malavoglia and Verga’s ‘Progress’” *MLN* 95, no. 1 (1980): 82-83. See Carmelo Musumarra, *Verga Minore* (Pisa, Italy: Nistri-Lischi, 1965); Giovanni Cecchetti, *Il Verga maggiore* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968).

⁹² Giulio Cattaneo, *Giovanni Verga* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1963), 26-27.

Revolution full of love of woman and love of country.⁹³ He had a special interest in writing stories that reflected his patriotic fervor in those years leading to Italian Unification, as exemplified by his first published novel, *I Carbonari della montagna* (The Charcoal-Burners of the Mountain, 1861). This historical novel chronicles the Carbonari movement against the French during the reign of Joachim Murat (1808-15) in Naples. The Carbonari was the name of a revolutionary secret society that played an active role in Italian Independence. The novel reflects an anti-French sentiment in its relating the partisan uprising of the Carbonari against the Bourbons for independence in the 1810-12 war in Sicily.⁹⁴ These early novels reflect Risorgimento ideals.⁹⁵ Verga was a lifelong supporter of a united Italy and a united culture, and played an important part in the politics of his country.

Between the years 1864 and 1884, Verga spent much of his time living on the peninsula, looking for opportunities to become a published writer and for a way to play a role in the formation of the culture of the new nation. Opportunities to become a nationally recognized writer were virtually nonexistent in Sicily: first, because the big publishing houses were all in the North and Rome, and second, because the audience was also predominately in the North. This period saw a huge growth for the print industry, which included books, journals, and newspapers, for the purposes of entertainment and education.⁹⁶ Production and consumption were located north of Rome; Sicily and the South were truly the periphery of the nation, and it followed that if Verga was to make a difference in the national conversation, he had to move north.

⁹³ Cattaneo, *Verga*, 26-7.

⁹⁴ Sarah Zappulla Muscarà, *Invito alle lettura di Verga* (Milan: Mursia, 1984), 65.

⁹⁵ Gino Tellini, *The Invention of Modern Italian Literature: Strategies of Creative Imagination*, trans. Dawn Winterhalter and Gemma Dawkes (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007), 87.

⁹⁶ Ann Caesar and Michael Caesar, *Modern Italian Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007), 116.

Verga first moved to Florence where he worked as a theatre critic for the newspaper *La Nazione*, then he moved to Milan where he was a journalist for *Corriere della Sera*, and finally he went on to Rome where he directed *Il Fanfulla della domenica*, a literary supplement to the newspaper *Il Fanfulla*.⁹⁷ The young Verga was in a position to impact the art and culture of the new nation. In Florence he had the opportunity to be part of a thriving theatrical community with a multitude of theatres and journals dedicated to the theatre. Politics and art were inseparable in discussions over the new Italian culture and the education of the people.

In 1872, while in Milan, Verga briefly joined a group of artists who identified themselves as *Scapigliatura*, named after the 1862 novel *La Scapigliatura e il sei febbraio* (*La Scapigliatura and the sixth of February*), by Cletto Arrighi (the anagrammed pseudonym of Carlo Righetti).⁹⁸ The novel's prologue is a call to action against repression and inequality.⁹⁹ The *Scapigliatura* movement (whose name means "disheveled" or "unkempt") was the equivalent of the French *bohème* in its rejection of bourgeois conventions: "To be *scapigliato*, then, in Arrighian terms, meant to issue invitations of defiance to conformists, and to systematically set doubt against

⁹⁷ "The programme of the first Editor, Ferdinando Martini, was to promote cultural unification, and to extend learning beyond traditional elites. Contributors included Carducci, Verga, Capuana, De Marchi, Serao, and Bersezio." David Forgacs, "*Fanfulla della domenica*, II (1879 – 1919)," accessed October 25, 2010, <http://www.jrank.org/literature/pages/16164/Fanfulla-della-domenica-II.html>.

⁹⁸ Caesar and Caesar, 116. The novel, *La Scapigliatura e il sei febbraio* by Cletto Arrighi, is set in the four days in February 1853 before the "aborted revolt staged by Giuseppe Mazzini against Austrian hegemony in Milan and Lombardy." The story follows the ill-fated lovers Neomi and Emilio, who like their author, are opponents of Mazzini's violent nationalism. The story reflects the author's belief that "chaos and futility are inherent in all military action." David Del Principe, *Rebellion, Death, and Aesthetics in Italy: The Demons of Scapigliatura* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1996), 24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

faith.”¹⁰⁰ The members of this movement, 1860s to the 1870s, were concentrated in the northern cities of Milan and Turin and were primarily responding to what they saw as the failures of the *Risorgimento*, as well as providing forms of protest in their work against capitalism, Catholicism, and militarism.¹⁰¹ The *scapigliati* also repudiated any literary pretension and, in particular, were critical of the historicism and religious vision of Manzoni.¹⁰² The dispute with Manzonianism is crystallized by Arrighi’s rough draft for an unpublished novel parody, *Gli sposi non promessi* (*The Unbetrothed*).¹⁰³

Igino Ugo Tarchetti, another leader of the *Scapigliatura*, displayed a different side to the movement with his collection of Gothic stories in *Racconti fantastici* (*Fantastic Tales*) and his last novel *Fosca*.¹⁰⁴ Tarchetti died of consumption and typhus at the young age of twenty-nine in 1869.¹⁰⁵ His work reveals a close relationship with the works of Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, E. T. Hoffman, Mary Shelley, and Ann Radcliffe, with its “narrative of monstrous beings who are orphans of the human race and victims of misunderstanding.”¹⁰⁶ David Del Principe points out that these stories also serve as allegories for much of the injustice facing foreign-ruled

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Both works were published posthumously in 1869. In 1981 *Fosca* was the basis for the film *Passione d’amore* directed by Ettore Scola; in 1993 the musical *Passion* with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim and book by James Lapine was based on the film and the novel.

¹⁰⁵ Other members of this movement included Carlo Dossi, Emilio Praga, Camillo and Arrigo Boito, Giovanni Faldella, Achille Giovanni Cagna, and others. Del Principe, *Rebellion, Death, and Aesthetics*, 16, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Luigi Capuana was a direct successor of Tarchetti in his exploration of spiritualism, ghosts, mesmerism, hypnotism, the occult, vampires, and monstrosity, all discernable conventions in his short story “Un vampire” (1904) and in his collection of short stories from *L’aldilà*. Both Tarchetti and Capuana aimed at portraying these preternatural subjects in realistic terms. Ibid., 17-18, 97.

Italy, and then the failure of the Risorgimento in achieving its goals.¹⁰⁷ Tarchetti, like Arrighi, was also critical of Manzoni and his belief that “literature’s duty is to instruct to ‘the true moral’”; yet, paradoxically, Tarchetti exalted the works of Walter Scott, who greatly influenced Manzoni.¹⁰⁸ Tarchetti, while agreeing that Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* may be the best Italian novel to date, finds it mediocre compared with the great models of English, French, and Spanish novels.¹⁰⁹ He also believed, in contrast to Manzoni, “that the common goal of literature is ‘to instruct and educate while alluring.’”¹¹⁰

Giulio Cattaneo describes the *Scapigliato* literary movement as going in two principal directions: the first is dominated by a renewal of Romanticism at its most extreme and fantastical, and the second is the depiction of a rough and squalid reality that anticipates veristic tendencies.¹¹¹ In 1873, at one of the salons that he frequented in Milan, Verga often met with the poet, librettist, composer, journalist, and novelist Arrigo Boito, one of the leaders of the *Scapigliato*.¹¹² The influence of this movement on Verga is discernable in his stories *Una peccatrice* (A Sinner, 1866), *Storia di una capinera* (The Story of a Blackcap, 1871), and *Eva* (1873).¹¹³ The latter was his first story to enter the national literature, and its language is tinged with French, a language he had known well since his youth.¹¹⁴ Two Verga scholars, Carmelo

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Cattaneo, *Verga*, 149-50.

¹¹² Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) is best known for his librettos for *Otello* and *Falstaff* for Giuseppe Verdi; he also wrote his own opera, *Mefistofele*. Cattaneo, *Verga*, 150.

¹¹³ Cattaneo, *Verga*, 102-106.

¹¹⁴ Luigi Russo, introduction to *Giovanni Verga Opere* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1968), 63:xvii.

Musumarra and Vitilio Masiello, describe the preface to *Eva* as an introduction to the themes that will become part of verismo, with its representation of a realistic but squalid existence determined by economic and social conditions that still contained *Scapigliatura* themes.¹¹⁵ Verga announces his objective in the first lines of his introduction to *Eva*: “Eccovi una narrazione—sogno o storia—poco importa, ma vera, com’è stata, e come potrebbe essere, senza rettoriche e senza ipocrisie.” (Here it is a narrative—whether a dream or a story—matters little, what matters is that it is true, the way it was, and the way it could be, without rhetoric and without hypocrisy.)

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The literature of the mature Verga depicts the economic struggle for survival in the social classes, ranging from the destitute to the rising middle class of the South.¹¹⁷ This latter period is seen as anti-literary and impersonal, as opposed to his early “too literary” and “too personal period.”¹¹⁸ Inevitably with this distinction between periods, verismo has become equated exclusively with Verga’s Sicilian work. Many scholars and critics, including Capuana, point to an actual “conversion” by Verga, which becomes apparent after the publication of *Nedda* in 1874.¹¹⁹ Subtitled “*Bozzetto siciliano*” (Sicilian sketch, 1884) and written in a simple direct language style, the story follows the ill-fated love of a poor, young girl who works as an olive-picker in Sicily and engages in a doomed love affair with a poor young man.¹²⁰ The story is considered new because of its unique focus on the poor in Sicily. However, it should be noted

¹¹⁵ Vitilio Masiello, *Verga tra ideologia e realtà* (Bari, Italy: De Donato editore, 1972), 52; Carmelo Musumarra, *Verga Minore* (Pisa, Italy: Nistri-Lischi, 1965), 85-86.

¹¹⁶ Giovanni Verga, *Eva* (Milan: Fratelli Treves Editore, 1883), 5.

¹¹⁷ Ginsburg, 82.

¹¹⁸ Ginsburg, 82.

¹¹⁹ Carsaniga, 348.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

that other critics find the idea of conversion too restrictive and simplistic; at variance with both these ideas, the scholar Carsaniga points out that what is more probable in the case of Verga is that he did not necessarily have a conversion. Rather, he was never seriously constrained by any ideological indoctrination and, consequently, he allowed himself to follow his own artistic practice rather than any veristic theory.¹²¹

Regardless of Verga's purity of ideological consistency, we see in his mature writings, beginning with *Nedda*, a writing style and new focus on Sicily and its folk that would define his work. Giovanni Cecchetti comments that "I critici, com'è noto, son quasi tutti concordi nell'affermare che la narrative più originale e matura del Verga comincia con la novella, o 'bozzetto siciliano,' *Nedda*." (The critics, as has been noted, are almost all in agreement in affirming that the most original and mature narrative of Verga begins with the novella, or "Sicilian Sketch," *Nedda*.)¹²² Luigi Capuana was the first to note this shift in his 1882 work *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea, seconda serie*, where he notes that "quando il Verga scrisse la *Nedda* forse non credeva d'aver trovato un nuovo filone nella miniera quasi intatta del romanzo Italiano" (when Verga wrote *Nedda*, perhaps he did not think that he had discovered, intact, a new vein in the mine of the the Italian novel).¹²³ But it is in his short stories *Vita dei campi*, in which *Cavalleria Rusticana* first appeared in 1881, that Verga perfected the verisimilitude that would define verismo. At the time of its publication, Capuana described the *bozzetti* "sketches" contained in *Vita dei campi* as "studi dal vero" (studies of reality).¹²⁴ There are eight stories in the

¹²¹ Ibid., 349.

¹²² Cecchetti, 1. See also Musumarra, *Verga Minore*, 145-157.

¹²³ Luigi Capuana, *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea, seconda serie* (Catania, Italy: Giannotta, 1882), 117.

¹²⁴ Alberto Asor Rosa, "Il primo e l'ultimo uomo del mondo," in *Il caso Verga* (Palermo, Italy: Palumbo Editore, 1974), 23.

compilation: *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *La Lupa*, *Fantasticheria*, *Jeli il pastore*, *Rosso Malpelo*, *Guerra di santi*, *Pentolaccia*, *L'amante di Gramigna*, and in the second edition of 1881, he added *Il come, il quando, il perché*.

Alberto Asor Rosa writes that what is characteristic of these sketches is their predominant focus in representing local color even more than developing a narrative.¹²⁵ As a Marxist critic interested in the ideological implications of Verga's work, Asor Rosa further points out that the reality Verga focuses on actually reflects the things in his environment in which he is most interested.¹²⁶ Asor Rosa singles out both *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *La Lupa* (*The She-Wolf*) as stories that reflect Verga's particular emphasis on representing conventional Sicilian customs and traditions that correspond to sociological clichés.¹²⁷ He writes:

Nel breve spazio di pochissime pagine—anche strutturalmente le due novelle hanno assai poco la forma del racconto—sono presenti tutti gli ingredienti che una convenzione successivamente consolidatasi contribuirà bene a farci conoscere. Né vale argomentare che Verga viene prima della convenzionalità del genere: a lui spetta, caso mai, la maggiore responsabilità di averla inaugurata: ci sono personaggi e temi, infatti, che nascono convenzionali, nella misura in cui corrispondono a *clichés* sociologici, magari reali, ma senza possibilità di assumere significazioni più generali, al di là di quelle inerente ai semplici dati di costume che li fondano.

(In the brief space of a very few pages—even structurally the two short stories have very little narrative shape—all the ingredients are anticipated which a later

¹²⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 24

consolidated convention would do much to make familiar. Nor is it worth arguing that Verga comes before the conventionalization of the genre: it falls to him, if to anyone, the main responsibility of having inaugurated it. There are characters and themes, in fact, that are born conventional, to the extent they correspond to sociological *clichés*; though perhaps real, they lack the possibility of assuming more general meanings, outside of those relative to the simple patterns of behavior that underpin them.)¹²⁸

As Asor Rosa suggests, much of Verga's writings about Sicily and its people in these two short stories are a reiteration of what was being advanced by such sociologists as Franchetti and Sonnino to the new Italian government. But it is Verga who conventionalizes in art what had already become clichés in the cultural thinking about the South. As Asor Rosa points out, even the structure of the story does not follow the conventional structure of storytelling of the day but rather attempts to mimic the structure of a scientific piece of writing. Verga's use of these new conventions in these stories becomes another means for disseminating a limited and sometimes distorted view of the South to the rest of Italy. These views would continue as stereotypes about the South that are still present today.

Interestingly, despite Verga's prominent position as a *verista*, he did not publish any works on the theory of *verismo*, though much has been gleaned from the few places where his principles are stated (three prefaces, an interview, and a few letters).¹²⁹ For the theory behind *verismo*, we must turn to Capuana, Verga's close friend and colleague. Indeed, Giacomo

¹²⁸ Ibid., 24 (translation mine, with help from Stefano Boselli).

¹²⁹ Giovanni Carsaniga, "Literary Realism in Italy: Verga, Capuana, and *verismo*," in *Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed. Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

Debenedetti, a noted Italian scholar on Verga, writes that “se il Verga e l’artista, il Capuana e soprattutto la coscienza, l’intelligenza riflessa di quell’arte.” (If Verga is the artist then Capuana is above all the conscience, and the intelligence reflecting that art.)¹³⁰ In point of fact, Capuana did function as verismo’s theoretical interpreter, advancing its principles through his critical works *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: prima serie* and *seconda serie*, published in 1880 and 1882 respectively, and through his many published articles and essays.¹³¹ Many of these articles were written during Capuana’s tenure as a journalist and drama critic in Florence, first for *Rivista italica* in 1865 and subsequently for *La Nazione* from 1866 to 1868. Nevertheless, despite Capuana’s early and fervent relationship with verismo, by the 1890s he would decidedly move away from this movement, as indicated in his book *Gli “ismi” contemporanei*, in which he treats all theories, philosophies, and preordained concepts including naturalism, as equally irrelevant in the creation of a work of art.¹³²

Like Verga, early influences on Capuana included plays and novels coming out of France, which dealt with contemporary subjects, and works by authors such as Zola, Manzoni, and De Sanctis. While living in Milan and Florence in the 1860s, Capuana read De Sanctis’s writings on Darwin and the relationship between science and art.¹³³ De Sanctis, a Hegelian and follower of the ideas of Giambattista Vico, argued for the autonomy of art in his aesthetic theory

¹³⁰ Debenedetti, *Verga*, 17.

¹³¹ Judith Davies notes that by the second series of *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea*, many critics see an “increasing detachment” of Capuana from the theories of positivism and Zola. Judith Davies, *The Realism of Luigi Capuana: Theory and Practice in the Development of Late Nineteenth-Century Italian Narrative* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979), 76. See also Carlo Madrignani, *Capuana e il naturalismo* (Bari, Italy: Editore Laterza, 1970), 229; Walter Mauro, ed., *Antologia dagli scritti critici* (Bologna, Italy: Calderini, 1971), 89.

¹³² Davies, *Realism of Capuana*, 116-17.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

of form and content.¹³⁴ De Sanctis, like Hegel, links the artist's formal expression to his conceptual content and describes form as having an organic quality in which the idea is conceived unconsciously.¹³⁵ Benedetto Croce explains De Sanctis's idea of form and content as a dialectical relationship between the artist's vision (form), and the material world (the content).

¹³⁶ In *The History of Italian Literature*, De Sanctis writes, "La forma non è *a priori*, non è qualcosa che stia da sè e diversa dal contenuto, quasi ornamento o veste, o apparenza o aggiunto di esso; anzi è essa generata dal contenuto, attivo nella mente dell'artista: tal contenuta, tal forma." (Form is not *a priori*, it is not something existing of itself and distinct of the content as though it were a kind of ornament or vesture or appearance or adjunct of the content: it is generated by the content acting in the mind of the artist: such as the content is, such is the form.)¹³⁷ This description of art as form differs from Hegel's idea of art as a manifestation of

¹³⁴ "The roots of Italian Idealism are to be found in the work of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), professor of Latin Eloquence at the University of Naples. Years before Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Vico's *New Science* (1725) conceived of knowledge as acquired through a self-generative process." Stephen Moller, "Italian Idealism," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Historical, Philosophical, and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9:335.

¹³⁵ Gerhart Hoffmeister, "Hegel and Hegelianism in European Romanticism," in *Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders*, ed. Steven P. Sondrup (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 65.

¹³⁶ This position is almost identical to Benedetto Croce's. Croce (1866-1952) philosopher, historian, critic, politician, was also a student of De Sanctis and a follower of Vico. He was an Idealist and Neo-Hegelian and wrote extensively about Aesthetics and historiography. Croce and his anti-positivist stance would also become the guiding principle in Capuana's later life. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainsley (London: Macmillan, 1922), 366.

¹³⁷ Francesco De Sanctis, *Nuovi saggi critici* (Naples: Presso Antonio Morano, 1872), 241-42, quoted and translated in Croce, *Aesthetic*, 366.

ideas.¹³⁸ However, what is critical about De Sanctis's ideas to Capuana is that he locates both the content and form in this world, in the consciousness of the artist.

Further, De Sanctis writes that art is constantly being regenerated, a departure from Hegel's view that art would eventually end and be transformed into philosophy.¹³⁹ The scholar Gerhard Hoffmeister points out that De Sanctis counted works by artists such as Manzoni and Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) as proof that art would continue to regenerate.¹⁴⁰ Capuana shared this view. Indeed, *Storia della letteratura Italiana* is a testimony to what De Sanctis calls the "Italian Spirit." In that history, he traces that spirit, beginning with the poetry of the thirteenth-century Sicilian Ciullo d'Alcamo (?-1230), on to the works of such artists as Dante, Petrarch, Macchiavelli, Leopardi, and Manzoni, and culminating in the ultimate expression of the "Italian spirit" in the Risorgimento.¹⁴¹ Rather than focusing on each individual literary work, De Sanctis emphasizes the dialectic process between the real and the ideal, the form and content.¹⁴² The poet dies but the work of art continues. For Capuana, this justifies the invisible hand of the

¹³⁸ Hoffmeister, *Hegel and Hegelianism*, 65- 66.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Giacomo Leopardi, a Romantic poet whose work included reflections on science, human culture and society. His poems look at the relationship between Nature and society in such works as *Zibaldone* and *Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degli italiani* ("Discourse on the Present State of the Italian Society," 1824). Giovanni Carsaniga, "The Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)," in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 421.

¹⁴¹ Ciullo d'Alcamo came out of the court of Frederick II and is part of the *Scuola Siciliana*. The poem he quotes is part of *Contrasto Amoroso* and written as a dialogue between a lover and his lady. The work differs from other poems from that period as De Sanctis explains: it is written as a dialogue in Sicilian with no rhetorical flourishes, "senza ombra di artificio e di rettorica" (without a shadow of artifice and rhetoric). Its roots seem to come from an earlier, more popular source. Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura Italiana* (Naples: Cav. A. Morano, 1897), 1:3.

¹⁴² Hoffmeister, *Hegel and Hegelianism*, 65- 66.

artist. He insisted, “Che la mano nell'artista rimane assolutamente invisibile e l'opera d'arte prende l'aria d'un avvenimento reale....”(That the artist’s hand must remain invisibile and the work of art take on an air of a real event....)¹⁴³

The preface to *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea* reveals Capuana’s artistic beliefs, with the above quotation from De Sanctis and a quotation from his friend Angelo Camillo DeMeis (1817-91), the philosopher/educator famous for his epistolary novel *Dopo la laurea* (*After Graduation*) (1868):¹⁴⁴ “Il mio *credo* critico è tutto in queste parole di così grandi maestri” (My critical beliefs are all contained here in these words by these great masters).¹⁴⁵ DeMeis used an evolutionary model for his discussion of the development of literary forms.¹⁴⁶ DeMeis’s notion about forms, derived from Hegel, posited that art forms are evolving, like organisms; rather than transforming into philosophy, they would eventually be absorbed into science.¹⁴⁷ As Carsaniga explains De Sanctis, synthesis of form and content in art allowed for the invisibility of the author’s personality, while DeMeis’s theory pointed to the scientific novel [verismo] as the last stage of the evolution of narrative forms.¹⁴⁸ Capuana writes, “E quando dico forma, non intendo soltanto le frasi, lo stile, ma qualche cosa di più elevato: la concezione, tutto

¹⁴³ Capuana, *Studi sulla letteratura*, 142.

¹⁴⁴ Davies, 17-32. The novel is comprised of thirty-one letters that are roughly divided between two friends, Giorgio and Filalete, who discuss a variety of topics including literature, evolution, art, philosophy and religion; however, the letters actually “constitute compact philosophical treatises portraying very closely the author’s own beliefs as a scientist and a thinker.” At the core of the correspondence is the debate between scientific and literary intellectuals. Vincenzo Traversa, *Three Italian Epistolary Novels: Foscolo, DeMeis, Piovene—Translations, Introductions and Backgrounds* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 116-117, 126.

¹⁴⁵ Capuana, *Studi sulla letteratura*, preface.

¹⁴⁶ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism,” 71; Benedetto Croce, *La Critica* (Naples: G. Laterza e figli, 1905), 3:342-43.

¹⁴⁷ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism,” 71.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

l'organismo dell'opera d'arte, che funziona colla pienezza della vita, libero e indipendente dalla personalita cho lo creo.” (And when I say form, I do not mean just the phrase or style, but something more elevated: the idea, all of the organism of the work of art that functions with the fullness of life, free and independent from the personality that creates it.)¹⁴⁹

As Benedetto Croce explains, this idea of art would lead Capuana to consider verismo as an ideal that was responding to the “spirit of his times.”¹⁵⁰ Capuana writes, “L'arte subisce oggi le influenze del carattere positivo del secolo....” (Art today absorbs the influences and the positive [Positivist] characteristics of this century....)¹⁵¹ Art has a relationship with the life surrounding that artist.¹⁵² As Judith Davies observes, “Capuana’s was a positivism with metaphysical appendages, a *juste milieu* stance with room for manoeuvre.”¹⁵³

In Verga’s work, many of these ideas come to fruition. He believed that an objective representation of real life required a total disappearance of the artist from the work. In a letter to Capuana, Verga describes his artistic goal:

E se vogliamo andare un po’ più in là, questa suprema noncuranza per l’artista qualsiasi parmi che dev’ essere una maniera universale con cui sarà vista l’arte in avvenire. Mi spiego. Che cos’è non il tuo nome, nè il mio, ma quel del Manzoni, o di Zola, in faccia ai *Promessi Sposi* e all’*Assommoir*? L’opera d’arte non val più dell’autore? Se è riescita ben inteso. Parmi che si deve arrivare a sopprimere il nome dell’artista dal piedistallo della sua opera, quando questa vive de sè; sai la

¹⁴⁹ Capuana, *Studi sulla letteratura*, 132.

¹⁵⁰ Croce, *La Critica*, 344.

¹⁵¹ Capuana, *Studi sulla letteratura*, 263.

¹⁵² Croce, *Aesthetic*, 367.

¹⁵³ Davies, *Realism of Capuana*, 29.

mia vecchia fissazione di una ideale opera d'arte tanto perfetta da avere in se stessa tutto il suo organismo.

(And if we want to go further with this, it seems to me that in the future there will be complete indifference in art to the artist. Let me explain. Not your name or mine, but what is Manzoni's or Zola's name in the face of *Promessi Sposi* and *Assommoir*? Isn't the work of art worth more than the artist? If he has succeeded in his task, of course it seems to me that we must arrive at the point when we can suppress the name of the artist from the pedestal of his work, when it exists in itself; you know of my old obsession with the ideal work of art; a work[of art which is] so perfect that it contains its entire organism.)¹⁵⁴

This letter from 1881 reveals a distillation of the ideas of De Sanctis and evolution in art, and perhaps the belief that verismo, as a last stage in the evolution of art, would live on without the need to consider the author. Later in their careers, Verga and most pointedly Capuana will abandon many of these ideas of verismo.

The Political Landscape: Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana

Since the point of this chapter is that the beliefs of the artists are indeed important to the ideas of their work, in this section I will discuss both the personal circumstances of Verga and Capuana, and the political conditions of Italy's relationship with Sicily during their lifetimes. I will move on to a discussion of the ideological beliefs of the two authors as demonstrated in their attitudes towards the language question.

¹⁵⁴ Verga to Capuana, letter, 19 February 1881, in *Opere*, ed. Luigi Russo (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1968), 19. Translation mine, with help from Stefano Boselli.

After the Risorgimento, Italy was still struggling to come together as one nation with its diverse regions and interests. There was no common history, language, or culture that united the regions. Nevertheless, there were those people coming mainly from the upper classes who believed in a united Italy and who attempted through violent coercion or through co-optation to bring the nation together.¹⁵⁵ Gramsci describes the Risorgimento as a “passive revolution.” There were two main “parties” involved in unification. One was the Moderates organized around Cavour (Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, 1810-1861), and the second was the Action Party organized around Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882). The Action Party failed to consider the demands of the peasants and hence failed in their goal of achieving a democratic republic.¹⁵⁶ The Moderates included a more organic base located in the northern bourgeoisie. This party “exercised a restrictive form of hegemony which rested on a class alliance with the big landowners and an ‘absorption’ of the democratic opposition in parliament through a practice known as ‘transformism.’”¹⁵⁷ With this concept in place, there is no possibility of undermining power because opposition groups are simply absorbed by the hegemonic groups.

Both Verga and Capuana were staunch patriots and believers in a united nation and a strong central government, for the most part. However, Sicily and the South suffered most from

¹⁵⁵ “Between 1861 and 1865 almost two-thirds of the entire Italian army was deployed in trying to maintain order in southern Italy.” Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 140, plate 19.

¹⁵⁶ David Forgacs, introduction to “Passive Revolution, Caesarism, Fascism,” in Forgacs, *Gramsci Reader*, 247.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. The political tradition of *transformismo*, in which an elite collaboration contains class polarization, began with the Italian prime minister, Agostino Depretis, who served in 1883, and continued to be used by prime ministers into the twentieth century. In other words, people from different, even opposing parties, would become allies in order to push through legislation, according to the wishes of the prime minister.

this union and the legislation that was passed during this period. The interior regions of Sicily were mostly dominated by the *latifondi*, which were large estates growing mostly cereals and pasture. Absentee-landlords, many of which came from the North, often owned these estates. These estates were managed by middlemen and worked by peasant tenants in small units. These *latifondi* were self-contained, with much of the tools, clothing, and building materials coming from the estates themselves, and with much of the produce remaining there as well—a form of feudalism.¹⁵⁸ Agricultural workers were often at the mercy of the *signor* and were offered little in the way of rights and a genuine living wage. There was a sharp division between the landowner and agent, lawyer, merchant, bureaucrat and petty intellectual on one side, and the worker on the other side.¹⁵⁹ Politically, the worker had no voice. During the 1860s, a disproportionate rate of taxation was placed on grain-growers and on urban houses, which placed unsustainable burdens on local governments.¹⁶⁰ Most of the tax revenue was funneled towards the center, which left many under-resourced administrations in the South to go bankrupt.¹⁶¹ This was part of the reality of the South in the mid-nineteenth century.

Originally from the Aragona region of Spain, the Verga family descended from the barons of Fontanabianca, who came to Sicily with the Aragon occupiers centuries earlier.¹⁶² A wealthy and important family, it owned land and a country estate in Tiepidi outside Vizzini, as well as a home in Catania.¹⁶³ Most sources list Giovanni Verga as having been born September

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism* (London: Methuen, 1967), 23.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Duggan, “Politics in the era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-96,” in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John A. Davis (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159-60.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁶² Cattaneo, *Verga*, 10.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1-13.

2, 1840 in Catania, though even Verga was unsure of the exact date of his birth; he had during his lifetime checked the municipal records to discover that he was actually born on August 31.¹⁶⁴ Nearby in the ancient city of Mineo, close to the city of Catania, lived the Capuana household. Luigi Capuana was born a year earlier than Verga in May 28, 1839 in the small ancient town of Mineo, a town located about eighteen hundred feet above sea level and only thirty-four miles west of Catania, within sight of Mount Etna.¹⁶⁵ The Capuanas were a family of landowners, though they had suffered financially after the early death of the patriarch.¹⁶⁶

Capuana and Verga were part of a tiny elite class of Sicilians who were highly educated, traveled outside of the island, and generally socialized and moved within their own circle. Their circumstances stood in stark contrast to a majority of Sicilians on the island (in 1860 the rate of illiteracy was 89 percent, and by 1901, it was still a shocking 71 percent of the population).¹⁶⁷ Their alliances were with those of their intellectual circle. This circle included the intellectuals in Sicily, and the Northern artists and publishers that they had connected with during extended stays in Milan, Florence, and Rome. Capuana and Verga led lives that stood in stark contrast to their fellow Sicilians. Indeed, they spoke in the literary Italian of Tuscany, and according to Verga's letters, could not actually speak Sicilian. In 1911, he writes to Capuana:

Precisamente voi, io, e tutti quanti scriviamo non facciamo che tradurre
mentalmente il pensiero in siciliano, se vogliamo scrivere in dialetto; perché il

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 9. According to the official guide for the town of Vizzini, the August 31st date places Verga and his family in Tiepidi, Vizzini, and substantiates their claim that he was born not in Catania but in Vizzini. Giovanni Cosentino, *Guida Turistica di Vizzini* (Vizzini, Italy: Tipografia Giovanni Casentino, ca. 1990).

¹⁶⁵ S. E. Scalia, *Luigi Capuana and His Times* (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1952), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Pietro Vetro, *Luigi Capuana: La vita e le opere* (Catania, Italy: Studio Editoriale Moderno, 1922), 1-21.

¹⁶⁷ Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*, 133.

pensiero nasce in Italiano nella nostra mente *malata di letteratura*, secondo quello che dice *vossia*, e nessuno di noi, né io, né il Patriarca San Giuseppe riesce a tradurre in schietto dialetto la frase nata schietta in altra forma — meno qualche poeta nostro popolare — e anche quelli, a cominciare dal Meli, che sa non solo di letterario ma di umanista. E poi, con qual costrutto? Per impicciolirci e dividerci da noi stessi? Per diminuirci inconclusione? Vedi se il Porta, ch'è il Porta, vale il Parini fuori di Milano. Il colore e il sapore locale sì, in certi casi, come hai fatto tu da *maestru*, ed anch'io da *sculareddu*...

(Exactly you, I, and all of us who write do nothing but mentally translate the idea in Sicilian when we want to write in dialect; because the idea is born in our minds in Italian, we who are overfilled with literature, according to those who say “sir”, and none of us, neither I nor Patriarch Saint Joseph is capable of translating into an authentic dialect an authentic phrase born in another form—apart from some of our popular poets—and even those—[this sentence is elliptical: it means “even those are not so good with dialect”], starting with Meli, who not only smells of literature but even of humanism. And then for what purpose? To make ourselves smaller [because dialect is smaller than the larger Italian language] and separate ourselves from ourselves? [Italians from Italians]? In the end, to make ourselves less than we are? See if Porta, who is after all Porta, is worth Parini outside of Milan. For color and local flavor, yes, in certain cases, the way you have done as

teacher [but also *maestro*/master writer], and even as I have as the little student.)¹⁶⁸

Verga states his position on language very clearly in this letter that dates from a time late in his career, after most of his biggest successes. He argues that he and Capuana cannot truly speak in Sicilian because of their education in Italian, and indeed their education and training in literature has made it impossible for them to translate what is truly in the minds of those who speak in Sicilian. Verga argues that it is literally impossible to authentically reproduce Sicilian even for great artists like Meli. They, and Verga means artists, are too educated to think like those people who only speak in “dialect.” Verga is very deliberately separating himself and his fellow artists from the lower classes. The last section of the letter reveals the ideological motive for rejecting the use of Sicilian in a work of art, that is, its actual regional character. Verga was invested in the idea of a national literature and a national language. This seems closer to the reason why Verga refused to write in Sicilian.

Nevertheless, Verga could easily write in Sicilian, as he proves in the same exchange of letters with Capuana as above: “*Te’!Te’! Figghiu miu! Ssa Bona genti mi cumpensa di tuttu lu chiantu ca haiu fattu ppi stu sicilianu fausu, stortu, tiratu ccu li denti. ...Mmalidittu ddu puparu sceccu ca ti lu fa fari!*” (Here! Here! My son! These good people will compensate me for all the tears that I have shed for this false and twisted Sicilian dialect pulled out [of me] with my teeth.

¹⁶⁸ Verga to Capuana, letter, Catania, December 1911, in *Carteggio Verga—Capuana*, ed. Gino Raya (Rome: Edizioni Dell’Ateneo, 1984), 407. Translation mine, with help from Stefano Boselli. Giovanni Meli (1740-1815) was a Sicilian poet who wrote in Sicilian. His works include *Don Chisciotti e Sanciu Panza (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza)*. Carlo Porta (1775-1821) was a Milanese poet who wrote in Milanese. His works included a partial translation of Dante’s *Inferno* in dialect and his most famous poem, *Desgrazzi di Giovannin Bongee (Troubles of Johnny Bolgeri)*. Giuseppe Parini (1729-1799) was also a Milanese poet, but he wrote in a style reminiscent of classical Latin. His work included a series of Horatian odes and a mock didactic poem, *Il giorno (The Day)*.

Damn that donkey [ass] of a puppeteer that makes you do it.)¹⁶⁹ In this playful indictment, Verga chides Capuana for writing his plays in Sicilian. The “donkey” is a reference to the great tragic Sicilian actor Giovanni Grasso, who had started his career as a puppeteer and worked closely with Capuana; Grasso was also famous for his portrayal of Verga’s *comparsa* Alfio in the Sicilian language version of *Cavalleria Rusticana*.¹⁷⁰ The level of intimacy and friendship between the two writers is obvious in this one example of an epistolary correspondence that spanned over fifty-one years.¹⁷¹ Their exchanges ranged in subject from the personal to the literary and most often included discussions of their artistic work. The letters also reveal a shared commitment to a united Italy and desire to make important contributions to the country’s literary canon, but the two friends were at odds later in life about what form that contribution should take. Capuana agreed with Verga early on in his career and believed that only Italian should be used for their work. However, by the early 1890s, his position shifted and *Malià* was translated from Italian to Sicilian for the stage. For Capuana, writing plays in Sicilian became an important step toward an Italian identity that included Sicily, while Verga’s position remained set against such a utilization of the language. This consistent position also reflected Verga’s politically right-leaning (royalist-nationalist) allegiance.

Concerning a note Verga penned to an editor, who asked for his participation in his new journal, Gramsci remarked:

¹⁶⁹ Verga to Capuana, letter, Catania, November 1911, in *Carteggio*, 407.

¹⁷⁰ Giovanni Grasso (1873-1930) was considered the greatest Sicilian tragic actor and was noted for his performances as *comparsa* Alfio, and don Jachinu Funciazza (*I mafiusi* by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca). A former puppeteer, Grasso worked on stage and in silent cinema, *Sperduti nel buio* (*Lost in Darkness*, Morgana Film, 1914). See chapter three.

¹⁷¹ Gino Raya, *Carteggio*. Raya edited two hundred and sixty letters between Verga and Capuana; and nineteen between Verga and Adelaide Bernardini (Capuana’s wife) between 1870 and 1921.

Nonostante qualche apparenza superficiale, il Verga non fu mai ne socialist, ne democratico, ma ‘crispino’¹⁷² in senso largo Nel 1920 un certo Enrico Messineo fondo (o voleva fondare?) un giornale “La sicilia nuova,” che intendeva propugnare l'autonomia siciliana; invito il Verga a collaborare e il Verga gli scrisse: “sono italiano innanzi tutto e perciò non autonomista.”

(Notwithstanding some superficial appearance, Verga was never a socialist nor a democrat, but a ‘crispino’ in the general sense.... In 1920 a certain Enrico Messineo founded (or wanted to found?) a journal “The New Sicily,” that intended to propose ‘Sicilian autonomy’; he invited Verga to collaborate and Verga wrote him: “I am an Italian above all, and therefore not a Separatist.”)¹⁷³

Gramsci places Verga’s response within the context of his political views, which tilted toward a center right nationalism. He goes on to point out that the intellectuals who were associated with verismo were really not concerned with establishing an alliance with the masses in order to unify the nation, as was the case in France, but rather with presenting evidence that the nation really was not unified. Gramsci felt this was not true about Verga, who was a strong believer in a unified nation, but the sicilian writer’s work did more to support the divisions in the nation, than to heal them.

¹⁷² Francesco Crispi (1819-1901) dominated Italian politics from 1887 to 1896. A Sicilian by birth, he served twice as prime minister of Italy. He is also credited as one of the “main architects of Italy’s material unity.” He famously declared, “The monarchy unites us, a republic would divide us.” Though he started out as a revolutionary and a supporter of democratic ideals, in his second term as prime minister he dispensed with many democratic laws and ruled authoritatively. Duggan, “Politics,” 168-69. See also Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818–1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁷³ Gramsci, *Quaderni*, 1:680.

Like Verga, Capuana was politically conservative in his ideology and part of the bourgeoisie. He ignored the political realities of Sicily in his literary work (though he was very involved in the local politics of his town Mineo) and instead was interested in portraying the psychology of the crimes of passion, “rinnovando quella arcadia siciliana di sangue, inaugurate da *Cavalleria rusticana*, che diviene con tutta probabilità un comodo alibi per motivare e giustificare la deprecaate passionalità cruenta dei siciliani.” ([And in so doing], renewing that Sicilian arcadia of blood, launched by *Cavalleria rusticana*, which becomes in all probability an easy excuse for the cause and justification for that doomed violent passion of Sicilians.)¹⁷⁴ In the introduction to *Teatro dialettale siciliano*, Niccolo Giannotta finds common ground with some of the criticisms launched at Capuana many years earlier by the Neopolitan critic Eduardo Boutet.¹⁷⁵ Gianotta argues that Capuana preferred to ignore aspects of the island that he saw as politically radical, such as the fight for the rights of the disenfranchised peasant class. He compares Capuana’s Sicilian theatre with the revolutionary theatre of the political activist Garibaldi Bosco and his documentary play *Il giorno di San Sebastiano*. A socialist party organizer, Bosco was one of the founders of the Palermo *fasci* movement, *I fasci dei lavoratori di Palermo*.¹⁷⁶ His play *Il giorno di San Sebastiano* has been described as a realistic depiction of a tragic incident. During a large celebration for San Sebastian in 1893 in the town of Caltavuturo,

¹⁷⁴ Pietro Mazzamuto, introduction to *Teatro dialettale siciliano*, by Luigi Capuana (Catania, Italy: Niccolo Giannotta Editore, 1974), 30.

¹⁷⁵ Luigi Capuana reprints the polemic against verismo between Verga and himself in the appendix of his book *Gli ‘ismi’ contemporanei* (Breinigsville, PA: BiblioLife, 2010). Eduardo Boutet’s essay originally appeared in the Roman journal *Don Chisciotte* in January 7, 1894.

¹⁷⁶ Garibaldi Bosco, along with Deputy Giuseppe De Felice (known as the Father of Sicilian socialism) and Dr. Nicolo Barbato, organized the general union strikes of Sicily in 1893-94 that were eventually crushed by the army. In 1894, all three were sentenced to twelve years in prison by a military tribunal. In 1896, however, they were granted amnesty by the king and released. *New York Times*, March 14, 18, 1896.

Sicily, a group of peasants who were demanding their rights to state-owned land were targeted and shot. Fifteen farm laborers were killed, with many others dying later of their wounds. This incident sparked protests and acts of solidarity with other workers throughout Sicily.¹⁷⁷ Bosco's play represents a counter-hegemonic cultural product that was linked to the Socialist Movement, as well as to the union and strikes of all the workers in Sicily in the 1890s. The union and strikes were crushed by the state using violence, and most of the cultural products attached to that movement have been lost.

***Cavalleria Rusticana* and Its Progeny**

While in Rome in 1883, Verga began work on adapting his stories to the stage with the help of Giuseppe Giacosa; in a letter to Capuana, Verga wrote, "Il teatro è la sola cosa che possa fruttare materialmente alla letteratura."¹⁷⁸ (Theatre is the only thing that can materially produce something from literature.) The first story he adapted into a dramatic play was *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1884. Verga's *Cavalleria* was a success as a play. As an opera, it became the model for the verismo movement on the stage. The play is written in Italian, but the sentence structure is inverted to follow the rhythms of the Sicilian dialect; Verga also includes common Sicilian proverbs and sayings to add local color. Verga never wrote any of his work in Sicilian, though he allowed others to translate it into that language.¹⁷⁹ *Cavalleria Rusticana* was a great success and

¹⁷⁷ Mazzamuto, *Teatro dialettale*, 30.

¹⁷⁸ Verga to Capuana, letter, Rome, 29 October 1883, in *Carteggio*, 208.

¹⁷⁹ "In the Italian context 'dialect' does not refer to varieties of Italian. Like Italian (or rather Tuscan, on which Italian is based), Italian dialects are different Romance languages deriving from Latin... From this angle one could say that Tuscan itself is one of the Italian dialects, or else, which amounts to the same thing, that the Italian dialects are not dialects but languages." Giulio Lepschy, *Mother Tongue and Other Reflections on the Italian Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002), 37.

primed bourgeois audiences' appetites for these strange characters that lived in this "exotic" world.

In 1890, an opera based on Verga's story, with music by Pietro Mascagni, and libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci, opened in Rome at the Teatro Costanzi, and provoked an even greater sensation than the play had some years earlier. Mascagni, a young unknown composer at the time, won a competition with his new one-act opera, *Cavalleria Rusticana*. On opening night, Saturday May 17 1890, with the house half-full at best, the reaction seemed unanimous. Gemma Bellincioni, who sang the role of Santuzza, described the reaction that night:

You cannot even have the barest idea of what happened in the hall of the Costanzi.... After the *Siciliana* the public applauded, after the prayer, they cried out enthusiastically; after the duet between Santuzza and Turridu they exploded in delirious joy. At the end of the opera the spectators seemed literally to go crazy. They screamed, they waved their handkerchiefs; in the corridors strangers embraced. "We have a maestro! Hurrah for the new Italian maestro!"¹⁸⁰

The opera played to packed houses for the next fourteen performances; the Costanzi extended its season to accommodate demand. Reviewers and audiences cheered the opera's novelty and artistic intelligence. For Mascagni, this opera would prove to be his greatest success.

The opera was produced in forty-one cities alone in Italy, and, by the end of 1893, it had been staged throughout Europe and in South American cities such as Buenos Aires.¹⁸¹ Verga

¹⁸⁰ Allan Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 59.

¹⁸¹ Allan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Operas: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 34.

played no part in the composing of this opera. Targioni-Tozzetti and Menasci based the opera on Verga's successful play but then made some considerable changes. Mascagni had signed a contract with Verga that gave him the right to adapt the play; however, that contract lacked "clear financial provisions" in the eventuality of the enormous success of *Cavalleria Rusticana*.¹⁸² Hence, Verga brought a lawsuit against both Mascagni and Sonzogno, who had purchased the opera from Mascagni, and by 1893, all claims were settled.¹⁸³

Capuana's *Malià* was produced as a play in the 1890s, nearly a decade after *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and it was rewritten in dialect after a failed production of the work in Tuscan Italian. Capuana had begun to move away from some of the precepts of verismo that he and Verga had proposed earlier in their careers, though he was still following the *Cavalleria* model that was set by Verga. However, unlike Verga, Capuana had changed his position on the language question: the controversy over whether to use dialect or the standard Tuscan Italian in their writing for the theatre. Capuana had believed like Verga that they should write only in Italian but began to shift his opinion in time, and later, contributed some of the most important plays to Sicilian dialect drama. Guido Nicastro writes that Capuana closely followed the model of the theatrical *Cavalleria* in the creation of his play *Malià*.¹⁸⁴ Verga himself, in a letter to Capuana praising his new work, remarks that *Malià* contains one or two scenes from his play *La Lupa* (The She-Wolf).¹⁸⁵ Capuana responds to the letter by stating that the actors rehearsing in *Malià* had all read *Cavalleria* and believed that his play greatly resembled it.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Mallach, *Italian Operas*, 34.

¹⁸³ Verga was paid 143,000 lire by Sonzogno, a substantial sum for its day. Mallach, *Mascagni*, 56-7.

¹⁸⁴ Guido Nicastro, *Teatro e società in Sicilia: 1860-1918* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978), 122.

¹⁸⁵ Verga to Capuana, letter, Milan, 9 January 1892, in *Carteggio*, 407.

¹⁸⁶ Capuana to Verga, letter, Rome, 13 January 1892, in *Carteggio*, 407.

Ten years after the success of his play *Cavalleria* and the subsequent failure of *In portineria*, Verga adapted *La Lupa* for the stage. The story was taken from the same group of short stories as *Cavalleria*, *Vita dei campi*. The tale follows the same successful formula of *Cavalleria* with its passionate Sicilian peasants. *In portineria*, which debuted on March 16, 1885 at the Manzoni of Milan, fell flat and left Verga feeling disillusioned by the theatre.¹⁸⁷ His real problem may have been that *In portineria*, a story about the working class in Milan, was a quiet intimate play, a contrast to *Cavalleria*. As Verga himself describes it, “Ho voluto appunto il poco rilievo delle passioni, e la semplicità del disegno non tanto per far contrasto al quadro così diverso della *Cavalleria Rusticana* quando per rendere schiettamente e sinceramente il diverso ambiente che mi ero proposto di colorire.” (I did not want to highlight the passions and I wanted a simple plot, not only to make it contrast with *Cavalleria Rusticana*, but also in order to reproduce truthfully and sincerely the different environment that I had set out to portray.)¹⁸⁸ The setting for *La Lupa* is rural Sicily among the poor agricultural peasants, very similar to the setting in *Cavalleria*. A single older woman, Pina, who has a young daughter, Maricchia, who is ostracized in her town because of her sexual attractiveness, becomes obsessed with a young man just returned from the army, Nanni. Gnà Pina¹⁸⁹ confronts Nanni in a barn near the fields where they labor together. Nanni rejects her advances, and instead asks for the hand of Maricchia in marriage. Pina is enraged but finally agrees. Once Nanni and Maricchia are married and settled, the she-wolf, Pina, again approaches him, “bewitching” him, and he succumbs to her advances.

¹⁸⁷ Francesco De Felice, “Giovanni Verga *Drammaturgo*” in *Teatro Siciliano*, 243.

¹⁸⁸ Verga a Capuana, letter, Milan, 5 June, 1885, in *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, ed. Gino Raya (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1975), 207-8.

¹⁸⁹ Gnà is a Sicilian form of address used for rural women. Some scholars believe it derives from *signor*, and others from *donna*. Stanley Appelbaum, trans. and ed., introduction to *Sicilian Stories—Novelle Siciliane: A Dual-Language book* by Giovanni Verga (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2002), x.

Pina and Nanni continue having a sexual affair for some time. Maricchia, now Nanni's wife and the mother of his children, denounces them both to the town authorities. Nanni repents to the sergeant and begs to be thrown in prison. The sergeant refuses, but some days later, Nanni is kicked in the chest by a mule and nearly dies. After he recovers, during Easter, Pina again approaches him "with those eyes." Nanni threatens to kill her if she comes near him again. She does, so he grabs a nearby axe and kills her. As a play, *La lupa* was another big success for Verga. Described as a modern day Greek tragedy, it opened on January 26, 1896, at the Theatre Gerbino in Turin.¹⁹⁰ In the 1890s, Verga agreed to adapt his story *La lupa* for an opera by Puccini, but in the end the project was put on hold indefinitely.¹⁹¹

Capuana's play *Malià* is very similar to both *La lupa* and *Cavalleria*. Like *La lupa*, it includes the prevalent superstition of the peasants and Sicilians in general, such as *malocchio*, the evil eye.¹⁹² *Malià* means spell and, like *La lupa*, focuses on the idea of the female predator. Capuana also adapted his play *Malià* into an opera, writing the libretto himself, with music by fellow Sicilian Francesco Paolo Frontini. *Malià* is set in a small town in Sicily in the late-nineteenth century. A three-act play, *Malià* borrows many of its tropes from Verga's work. Some standard tropes are the use of religious imagery and the honor killing or vendetta. The play revolves around the superstition and belief in witchcraft (*Malià*) although the real cause of all the trouble is sexual passion. Jana is believed to have been hexed by the local witch at the wedding

¹⁹⁰ De Felice, "Drammaturgo," 246.

¹⁹¹ Mallach, *Italian Opera*, 229. In the 1990s, Marco Tutino, an Italian composer, presented a new opera of *La lupa* at Livorno, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. "Marco Tutino," Wikipedia, last modified October 25, 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco_Tutino.

¹⁹² Capuana wrote extensively about spiritualism, mesmerism, and other supernatural phenomena, which he affirmed as true. Luigi Capuana and Andrea Cedola, *Novelle del mondo occulto* (Bologna, Italy: Pendragon, 2007), 52.

of her younger sister Nedda to Cola. But Jana's torment began before her sister's wedding. Jana, the daughter of Massaru Paulu, is engaged to Ninu but has fallen passionately in love with her brother-in-law Cola. She attempts to keep this passion to herself, but only succeeds in making herself sick with desire as her fiancée, father, aunt, and those who come in contact with her attempt to explain her changed demeanor. At this point she also refuses to marry Ninu. The aunt suggests that Jana has been hexed by "dda vecchia magara," the old witch Caristia, and she calls in Don Sciaveriu Teri, who knows how to deal with these hexes and owns a special medallion to rid the person of these things. Jana refuses to take the medallion, but Caristia and Don Sciaveriu Teri decide to put it under her pillow.

One day, Cola finds himself alone with Jana, and she confesses her love for him. He also professes his love for her, and they begin an affair. Jana appears to get better. Meanwhile, Ninu, who has stayed away for some months, finally comes to see his fiancée. Jana is upset and tells him that she could not possibly marry him. She tells him about the affair with Cola. He retorts that he will still marry her, and they promise to keep the whole thing secret. But this plan is upset when Nedda overhears that her husband has cheated on her with her sister. Cola then shows up and attempts to keep his wife quiet. Ninu whispers to Cola that he knows what he did, and they begin to fight. At this point, the rest of the family and neighbors have gathered and attempt to stop the two men. Ninu sees the barber's razor peeking out of his pocket and grabs it. He cuts Cola's throat. The play ends with the "honor" killing.

All of these men looking to restore their honor through the killing of their opponent stood in as grotesque facsimile to the legal duels that the Italian nobility engaged in. Between 1860 and 1930, Italian men fought thousands of duels, which by definition had to continue until one or

both of the participants were injured.¹⁹³ These duels of honor were even encouraged as long as the combatants were considered “gentlemen,” members of the upper classes and sometimes middle classes, and they followed the rules of behavior before, during, and after the duel.¹⁹⁴ The practice of dueling was a way for the elite to distinguish themselves from the masses.¹⁹⁵ For the poor peasant who engaged in the practice of what they would call vendetta, there was only prison. Verga was commenting on the bourgeoisie who aped many of the practices of the aristocracy.¹⁹⁶ Hence the honest portrayal of a pastoral world populated by fiery peasants was actually a façade masking a bourgeois worldview with its strict rules of behavior. As Guido Nicastro points out in his monograph *Teatro e società in Sicilia (1860-1918)*, the peasant characters that people Verga’s *Cavalleria* are closer in their behavior to the heroes of a bourgeois world, which is built on hypocrisy and deceit, and where a sense of sin exists alongside a heightened sense of honor; this portrayal is in complete contrast to the world of struggle and poverty that these peasants actually come from.¹⁹⁷

In a chapter from the book “*Il teatro di Verga e la Sicilia*,” Nicastro argues that the representations of Sicily that Verga presents on stage are far from accurate and, indeed, closer to a portrayal of the concerns and morals of his own social world. He cites the nineteenth-century Neapolitan critic Eduardo Boutet, who also argued a similar point some years earlier. On January 7, 1894, Boutet wrote in the Roman journal *Don Chisciotte*, “*Sicilia verista e Sicilia vera*”

¹⁹³ Steven Hughes, “Men of Steel: Dueling, Honor, and Politics in Liberal Italy,” in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Cornelis Spierenburg (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 64.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Nicastro, *Teatro*, 340.

(*Verista Sicily and Real Sicily*), in which he challenged the realism of Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and of most of the Sicilian veristi works.¹⁹⁸ Boutet not only refutes the image of the real Sicily painted by the stories of both Verga and Capuana, but he accuses them of making the error of being "insensitive to their times" and ignoring the true suffering of the Sicilian peasants.¹⁹⁹ When these writers shout that they represent reality, they are not being truthful: because their reality does not get any deeper than the characters' clothing.²⁰⁰ Boutet contends that the Sicily of *Cavalleria Rusticana* is more a literary exercise than any reality.²⁰¹ Indeed, Boutet further points out that this form of writing that is declared impersonal and realistic, demonstrates a conservative bias in its content.²⁰²

Capuana's response was a defense of himself and of Verga, and an attack on Boutet as ignorant of the real Sicily. He accuses Boutet of not understanding Sicily because he had never visited the island: "Che ne sapete voi, caro Boutet, che non siete mai stato in Sicilia?"²⁰³ (What do you know, my dear Boutet, you, who have never been to Sicily?) He later included both Boutet's critique and his own response in his book *Gli ismi contemporanei*. Capuana claimed that he and his friend Verga were indeed representing the true Sicilian in their portrayals. Nicastro claims that this debate between Capuana and Boutet about the two ways of looking at

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁹⁹ Capuana, *Gli "ismi,"* 327. Eduardo Boutet's essay originally appeared in the Roman journal *Don Chisciotte* in January 7, 1894.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 326.

²⁰² Nicastro, *Teatro*, 38.

²⁰³ Capuana, *Gli "ismi,"* 330.

art and reality has continued to this day in Verga scholarship in respect to the social value of his work.²⁰⁴

The implication of what Capuana is saying is that for those who have never been to Sicily, the characters from *Cavalleria* can serve as a model of the true Sicilian peasant. These characters have become iconic. For instance, the proud and reckless Turridu, who as the returning soldier, still wearing the uniform of the *bersagliere* with his characteristic red cap, would become the model for the maffioso Sicilian²⁰⁵ with his irresistible appeal to women, his independent spirit, his passion and disregard for any moral laws, and his quixotic belief in violence. And, as seems fitting, in the knife duel with his rival *compar* Alfio, the cuckolded husband quickly dispatches this proud but impulsive character to what seems an inevitable end in this world of rustic honor. After the success of this play, the ritualistic honor killing at the end of most Sicilian verismo plays would become *de rigueur*. Equally passionate and vengeful are the female characters, as Santuzza demonstrates when she informs Alfio of his wife's betrayal with Turridu, hence setting up both Lola and Turridu for retribution. In addition to these character types, Verga includes a Greek Chorus: the townsfolk play a critical role in representing the community's beliefs and practices that include gossip, and the pervasive presence of religion and superstition. Subsequently, Turridu and Alfio, dangerous men quick to anger and violence, would become familiar emblems for the Southern male, while the wronged and overly passionate

²⁰⁴ Nicastro, *Teatro*, 39.

²⁰⁵ In addition to referring to members of the Sicilian mafia, maffioso/a is still used today in Sicily to describe a person who appears as flashy, deviant, or beautiful with a flair. Familiarly, the word *maffioso* is defined as “di persona che ostenta un'eleganza vistosa e spavalda” (a person who displays a garish and arrogant elegance). Giacomo Devoto and Gian Carlo Oli, *Dizionario della lingua Italiana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1981). See chapter one.

woman as characterized by Santuzza and Lola would become familiar emblems for the Southern female.

Verga had to adapt *Cavalleria Rusticana*, a very short story, into a one-act play by making some specific changes to the story. The story presented two difficulties in translating it to the stage. The first is the indeterminate time frame for the piece, and the second has to do with the shifting of the setting from inside the town to outside. For a verista, these aspects needed to be specific and reflect the conditions of the events. Verga attempts to apply Zola's recommendation for stage naturalism to determine his characters according to their surroundings, and to have his characters act according to the logic of facts and to the logic of their temperament.²⁰⁶ To achieve this effect Verga simplifies and cuts the time down—making the play run in real time—while he cuts the settings down to one—in the piazza in front of Gnà Nunzia's wine tavern.

In the novella, Turridu is the main focus, but in the play, the focus now shifts to Santuzza, who also becomes more sympathetic. She is pregnant by Turridu, and a greater amount of intimacy between the two is established than is alluded to in the novella. The role of his mother, Gnà Nunzia, is also expanded, and we have what was a very masculine story transformed into a far more feminine one. Verga wanted a commercial success and he wanted Eleanora Duse to play Santuzza, so the role may well have been expanded for her. The other two big changes he made in the stage version were, first, the individualizing of the town folk, four neighbors now acting as chorus; and second, moving the fight scene between Alfio and Turridu offstage, echoing the convention of a Greek tragedy.

²⁰⁶ Zola, "Naturalism," 125.

Verga manages in his setting to encapsulate much of the local color of the Sicilian town. The play takes place in a public square with a road leading to the church, with the policemen's barracks across from the tavern and the neighbor's stable next door. The church bells are ringing at the start of the play, and it is Easter Sunday in the small town. The town folk are ever present on stage and often interrupt the action to buy something or just to gossip. Their presence is vital to the overwhelming feeling in the play that nothing is secret in the town. Everyone knows everyone's business, even while everyone denies that they are sticking their noses in someone else's "fatti" (business).

The other change in the play has to do with the language. The novella is written in standard Italian. Therefore, to maintain "local color," Verga uses the rhythm of Sicilian by following that language's constructions in phrasings. He also includes many proverbs and exclamations common in Sicily. For the play, Verga omits any direct dialect, but again uses his unique phrasing to add Southern flavor to the language. The most common exclamations are religious and superstitious in nature. Verga manages to portray the oppressive presence of the Catholic Church, through sound, by ringing the church bells at important moments in the play (which is evocative of the bells used during mass to call attention to the most sacred moments), as well as through a language, that is full of religious imagery and religious figures. Most notably, Verga's characters invoke the names of Mary Magdalene and Christ, such as when Santuzza begs Gnà Nunzia to follow the example of Christ at the moment when he took pity on Mary Magdalene: "Fate come Gesù a Maria Maddalena."²⁰⁷ (Do as Jesus did toward Mary Magdalene). Or similarly, we hear the reference to Judas when Santuzza bewails the injustice of Turridu's "buona" (good) appearance, which belies his actions: "Colla faccia tanto buona!

²⁰⁷ Verga, *Opere*, 818.

Signore! Com'è possibile avere in core il tradimento di Giuda con quella faccia!"²⁰⁸ (With such an angelic face! Christ! How is it possible to possess the traitorous heart of Judas with that face!)

The most frequently invoked exclamation by almost all the characters used both as a description and as a denunciation or curse, is the word "*scomunicata*" (excommunicated). Santuzza describes herself as *scomunicata*, because of her relationship with Turridu; she cannot set foot in Gnà Nunzia's tavern or home; she has been thrown out of the church for her sin. Her alienation in the small town, surrounded by neighbors, is emblematic of the state of the Sicilian who is oppressed by superstitions and primitive beliefs. The church provides no support for its congregation; indeed, it acts as a means of suppressing the people through fear. The word *scomunicata* is also used by others to describe Santuzza, but it used more loosely, for example, when Zia Filomena curses her husband, Zio Brasi, " Zitto, scomunicato!"²⁰⁹ (Quiet, you excommunicated!)

The overwhelming weight of religion in the play is not by accident and is established with the first lines of the play, "Oggi è Pasqua, colla grazia di Dio!"²¹⁰ (Today is Easter with God's grace!) But this Easter will not see the resurrection of Christ but rather the violent death of a man for honor. These lines are followed by *Comare* Camilla calling Santuzza to confession. Confession is one of the seven sacraments of Catholicism and takes place in the confessional between the priest and the penitent, but for Santuzza it is staged in the public square for all to hear. Turridu and Santuzza have their big confrontation in the square, even as Turridu tries to quiet her by reminding her that everyone can hear. But the whole town already knows that he is

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 822.

²⁰⁹ The term can be seen to mean both something very serious or in this case something less serious, such as "Quiet, you old goat!"

²¹⁰ Verga, *Opere*, 817.

having sexual relations with Lola. According to Michel Foucault, confession is a tool used to control people and their impulses²¹¹; it is associated with civilized man. Siro Ferrone explains that religion is the key to the religiosity of the play because it demonstrates the primitiveness of the peasant.²¹² “True religion” is not apparent in this society, just as true justice under the law is lacking. Verga purposely puts the police and their barracks on stage. The police are often seen to walk back and forth during the action, seemingly oblivious and certainly ineffectual in their presence. They only enter the action after the death of Turridu to arrest Alfio. This recalls those studies by Franchetti and Sonnino about the lawlessness of the Sicilian, while again demonstrating an aping of the type of duel engaged in by “gentlemen.”

A decade after the first stage production of *Cavalleria*, Luigi Capuana’s five-act play *Malià* followed the model set by Verga. Capuana’s characters in *Malià* are familiar echoes of Verga’s characters. Indeed, his characters embody many of the same traits. There is the woman so crazed with love that she is consumed by it: Santuzza in *Cavalleria* and Jana in *Malià*; then there is the male protagonist, the *maffioso*, at the center of the triangle and caught between two women: Turridu in *Cavalleria* and Cola in *Malià*. Each character has been influenced by and modeled on those figures in Verga’s work. Nevertheless, there are variations and important differences in how these characters have evolved and part of the reason is because of the ubiquity of them throughout the culture.

Malià was originally produced in December 1891 in Italian at the National theatre of Rome, and it met with little success.²¹³ Capuana then adapted the story into an opera with music

²¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 1:60-61.

²¹² Siro Ferrone, *Il Teatro di Verga* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1972), 144.

²¹³ De Felice, “*La Malià*,” 267.

by fellow Sicilian Francesco Paolo Frontini. The opera opened in Bologna at the Teatro Brunetti in 1898.²¹⁴ It met with some success. But then, in 1902, against the advice of his friend Verga, Capuana translated the play into Sicilian. The new production opened March 16, 1903, at the Teatro Olimpico to overwhelming success, with great Sicilian actors Giovanni Grasso and Mimi Aguglia.²¹⁵ This version was then published in Capuana's *Teatro dialettale siciliano*, in Palermo in 1911. Capuana introduces the play by arguing for its existence as a work in dialect and for its performance on the Italian stage:

Come se si trattasse di dialetti ostrogoti! Come se i personaggi veneziani, fiorentini, Napolitani, siciliani non fossero forse più *italiani* di quelli del teatro non dialettale, perché più sincere, al pari degli attori che li rappresentano!... Io credo che bisogna passare pei teatri dialettali, se si vuole davvero arrivare al teatro nazionale italiano.

(As if we were talking about gobbledygook dialects. As if Venetian, Florentine, Napolitan, and Sicilian characters were not perhaps more *Italian* than those non-dialect theatre characters, because they are more genuine, equal to the actors that represent them!... I believe that we must first go through a period of dialect theatre, if we are truly to achieve a national Italian theatre).²¹⁶

Gramsci comments on Capuana's dialect plays, including *Malià*, which were originally written in Italian but only had success when they were translated into Sicilian. He reasons that

²¹⁴ Corrado Amiveri, *Operisti minori: dell'ottocento italiano* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1998), 72.

²¹⁵ De Felice, "La Malià," 270. From this point on Capuana wrote in dialect translating a number of his Italian stories into Sicilian for the Sicilian Acting Company.

²¹⁶ Luigi Capuana, *Teatro dialettale siciliano* (Catania, Italy: Niccolo Giannotta Editore, 1974), 72.

theatrical dialogue is better served by a living language actually spoken by the people rather than the literary, national language, which was “still largely a cosmopolitan language, a type of ‘Esperanto,’ limited to the expression of partial notions and feelings.”²¹⁷

Malià takes much of its action from Verga’s Sicilian plays, both *Cavalleria* and *La Lupa*, with its focus on sexual obsession and superstition, women who seduce and are seduced, and personal honor and vengeance through blood. Cola resembles the mafioso Alfio from *Cavalleria*, who is a version of Gioachino Funciazza from *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria*.²¹⁸ Again like Verga, Capuana includes the town’s folk as important characters and religion closely resembles superstition. There is the witch who puts the curse on Nedda and the charlatan Don Sciaveriu Teri who reveals the medallion that will lift the curse. Many of the characters have by now become quite familiar to audiences all over Italy and even beyond its borders.

Malià is just one example of a play that is modeled on Verga’s *Cavalleria*. With the success of *Cavalleria* on the continent in Italian, there was new interest in seeing more Sicilian characters on stage. Giovanni Grasso’s Sicilian Acting Company, beginning with just a few plays in Sicilian, quickly added these two works to the repertory. Both *Malià* and *Cavalleria* were translated into Sicilian and met with great success.²¹⁹ The actors, such as Giovanni Grasso, Angelo Musco, and Rosina Anselmi, became renowned for their portrayals of these Sicilian figures, and they performed these plays throughout the peninsula and beyond to the rest of Europe, South America, and the United States.

The Iterations of *Cavalleria* and *Cumpari Turridu*

²¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections*, 268-69.

²¹⁸ See chapter one.

²¹⁹ Other works that were performed included *I mafiusi* by Gaspare Mosca and Giuseppe Rizzotto, and *Zolfara* by Giuseppe Giusti Sinopoli. De Felice, *Teatro Siciliano*, 72-74.

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Cumpari* Turridu have captured the imagination and become truly iconic. The traits attributed to Turridu can be interpreted as positive or negative, but generally point to an overly passionate nature coupled with an adherence to some honor code that leads to violence. The world that he inhabits is both mythic and real. Beyond the obvious copies of this story in other veristi plays of the early twentieth century, it has become a reference point and a symbol for a series of meanings that point back to a particular stereotype of the Sicilian and Sicily. Indeed, contemporary artists continue to use *Cavalleria Rusticana* and its characters as shorthand to represent the Southern Italian, and because of the three art forms that it originates from—written text, stage, music—it has had immense cultural influence. Its simple direct structure and brevity have also contributed to its impact.

The stereotypes that have resulted from it are often used to label Sicilians as *Mafiosi*, not just in Italy but wherever Southern Italians have settled.²²⁰ Despite what might be seen as a negative connection, Sicilians have embraced Verga's story of Turridu, especially in its operatic form. Many Sicilian immigrants associate this story with home. When my aunt, Maria Concetta Capuana, died on April 30, 2011, the symphonic Intermezzo from *Cavalleria Rusticana* played at her funeral as she had requested because it was her favorite opera. She was born in 1916 in Vizzini and had immigrated to Australia in 1953. Her love of the opera went beyond the music; it

²²⁰ It should be noted that after the 1870s and the Risorgimento, the great majority of immigrants who left from Italy were from the South, usually poor illiterate and unskilled farm workers. This was a big shift from before 1870 when the majority of the immigration came from the North. These Northern immigrants were usually educated or skilled. 1901 to 1909 saw the largest number of Southern Italians leaving the country. It is also with the new immigration of Southern Italians that the United States starts to see a growing hostility towards immigrants in general, and Southern Italians and Sicilians in particular. Leonard Covello, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child: A Study of the Southern Italian Family Mores and their Effect on the School Situation in Italy and America* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1967), 28-31.

was the association that it held to the place of her birth, regardless of the fact that the music was written by a Tuscan who had never ventured south of Rome before he wrote *Cavalleria*. It was a symbol of home.

Today Mascagni's *Cavalleria* is part of the repertory in opera houses around the world, including the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. *Cavalleria* is traditionally paired with its "Siamese Twin," Pietro Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*, also considered a verista opera. Its appearance has not been restricted to the stage, however, because the opera has been filmed many times and has been made into a popular movie, most notably by Franco Zeffirelli in 1982 with tenor Placido Domingo as Turridu. Nevertheless, it is when the opera is used as a kind of shorthand that its meaning as a representation of the Sicilian is made explicit. Fragments of the opera have been used in many films in which Sicilians and/or Mafiosi are represented, most famously in *The Godfather III*, directed by Francis Ford Coppola and released in 1990.²²¹ The concluding half-hour of the film shows the Corleone family attending a performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in Palermo with Michael Corleone's son Anthony singing the lead role of Turridu. In this section, Coppola suggests, *Cavalleria Rusticana* serves as a ritual against which a series of murders unfold.²²² It is the ritual of the opera itself that Coppola intends, but it is also the choice of that particular opera that is significant.

²²¹ The 1980 movie *Raging Bull*, directed by Martin Scorsese, also uses the music to *Cavalleria Rusticana* for its opening shots of the film, with Jake La Motta shadowboxing in slow motion to the intermezzo. "This picture is about an Italian—a first generation one in this case—about the particular abrasions the Italians experienced as they confronted American society upon immigration.... He is the product of a certain ethnic group that feels it needs to make its way aggressively in America." Bert Cardullo, "An Interview with Stanley Kauffmann," in *Plays, Movies, and Critics*, ed. Jody McAuliffe (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 251.

²²² Lars Franke, "The Godfather Part III: Film, Opera, and the Generation of Meaning," in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 31.

In *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia*, John Dickie speculates about the associations that Roman audiences made during the premiere of the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1890. He argues that there is a direct line from the opera's premiere to today in the perception of the Sicilian as mafioso.²²³ He points out that, even though the word mafioso has a different meaning today, "'Mafia' was widely taken to refer not to an organization, but to a mixture of violent passion and 'Arabic' pride that supposedly dictated Sicilian behaviour. 'Mafia,' as viewed by many, was a primitive notion of honour, a rudimentary code of chivalry obeyed by the backward people of the Sicilian countryside."²²⁴ Mascagni's audience in Rome at the Teatro Costanzi would have seen the characters of Turridu and Alfio as typical Mafiosi.²²⁵ Dickie argues that the mafia co-opted the idea of the chivalric man of honor that is portrayed in Verga's story to blur the distinction between the mafia's criminal organization and the Sicilian.²²⁶ As he notes in his book, the mafioso has appropriated the term honor and applied it to the "made man" in the organization, who commits murder, is loyal to his "family," and knows how to say nothing—*omertà*.²²⁷ These are considered men of honor, and it is a something that the mafioso takes very seriously.

All the characters of *Cavalleria* continue to live on from the stages of opera houses to the streets of small towns. The opera has certainly had the most far-reaching influence yet the play is still performed in Italy. In Sicily, Verga's drama is a staple in many professional and amateur venues. In Vizzini, the little mountain town where Verga had one of his homes, the characters

²²³ John Dickie, prologue to *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 15.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* See chapter one.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

come to life every few months on the streets where they were born, as the actors don their costumes—Turridu’s *bersaglio* (military cap) and Santuzza’s *scialletto* (shawl). The plays are performed in the streets in front of buildings where the events supposedly took place.²²⁸ A walk around this ancient town, sixty kilometers from Catania in the Hyblaeen Mountains, leads you up and down winding stone streets that open up onto piazzas and scenic vistas of green peaks. On stonewalls outside homes and churches, plaques mark sites where the figures of Verga’s stories and novels lived, loved, and died. The Vizzinese are very proud of their connection to Verga and have built a tourist industry around him by placing plaques that describe pivotal incidents from his stories and novels: “Casa di Lola,” “Lola che ascoltova ogni sera, nascosta dietro la vase di basilico, e si faceva palida e rosa, un giorno chiamo’ Turridu.” (Lola listened every night, hidden behind the vase of basil, and she would turn pale and blush, then one day she called Turridu.)²²⁹ A statue of Giovanni Verga standing with his arms and hands open occupies a place of honor in the town, and is visited by tourists and students. These sites have become sanctified by the

²²⁸ Verga’s novel *Maestro Don Gesualdo* is also a favorite and is often performed in spaces in front of locals described in the text.

²²⁹ The following is from an Italian travel website: “Si consiglia di leggere almeno la novella *La Cavalleria Rusticana* prima di effettuare la visita... Vizzini è la cittadina in cui lo scrittore Giovanni Verga ambientò alcune novelle... Il modo forse più suggestivo per visitare il paese è proprio quello di ritrovare l’osteria ove Turiddo e Alfio si sfidano a duello con la chiesa di S. Teresa ove le comari vanno a pregare (nell’ opera), le case della Gna Lola e Santuzza e la *Cunziria*, antico quartiere dei conciatori, fuori dall’abitato, ove i due compari combattono.” (We advise you to at least read *Cavalleria Rusticana* before coming for a visit. Vizzini is the town where the writer Giovanni Verga set many of his novellas... The best way to visit the town would be to rediscover the tavern where Turriddo and Alfio challenge each other to the duel outside the church of S. Teresa where the folks go to pray [in the opera], the homes of Gna Lola, and Santuzza and the *Cunziria*, the old quarter of the leather tanners, outside the town, where the two villagers fight.) (Info@sicilyweb.com) <http://www.sicilyweb.com/vizzini/index.htm>.

community and provide the town with an identity molded around the stories by the Sicilian author.

Turridu continues to be present in the cultural landscape and has also showed up on YouTube in a 2007 popular Italian folk song by a group based in Sicily. The Filippo Leonardi Band released a compact disc in Maccarisi, a Sicilian dialect. One of the songs, “Anu mazzato a cumpari Turridu” (They have killed Turridu), is described as “uno scanzonato inno contro la mafia” (an easygoing hymn against the mafia). In the opening of the video for the song, uploaded to YouTube on January 6, 2007, there is a Turridu wearing his *bersaglio* and sitting in a barber’s chair while a barber shaves his face with a straight razor. He says to the accompaniment of a *marranzano* [in English it is known as a Jew’s harp], “Anu mazzato a cumpari Turridu, l’anu mazzato menza a via, fu accando casa mia, l’anu mazzato, Tirollalla.” (They have killed our neighbor Turridu, they have killed him in the middle of the street, it was near my home, they have killed him, tralala.) The first line of the song is the famous phrase announced at the end of Verga’s story; however, the three lines that follow point to another mafia murder in the streets. The video includes images of a religious procession, old men dancing the tarantella, and men murdered by the *cosa nostra*. The song, written as a tarantella, is a litany of familiar laments for Sicilians: emigration to the continent, poor treatment by the North and by the government, murder in the streets, their craving change, although they hide in their homes in silence.²³⁰ The video and song is available on YouTube with Italian subtitles.²³¹

²³⁰ The tarantella is both a type of traditional folk music and folk dance that is believed to have originated in Southern Italy. Using an indigenous type of music known as *pizzica*, three in a measure or six in a measure, the dance is associated with a ritual known as *tarantismo* (tarantism), which includes hopping, skipping, and circling movements done to expel the poison from the bite of a tarantula spider. It was believed that, once the individual was bitten by the spider, she could only recover by dancing until exhaustion for up to three days. Jeri Daboo, *Ritual, Rapture, and Remorse: A Study of Tarantism and Pizzica in Salento* (New York: Peter

It seems appropriate that Turridu is now part of the YouTube generation, and that the layers of cultural significance that has accumulated with time continues to play a role in the way that Sicilians see themselves and the way that others see them. The Sicilian stereotype has been embraced and reviled, and continues to be relevant in high and low culture both in Italy and abroad. Indeed, subaltern groups often internalize negative stereotypes as part of their identity. Sicilians love their native son Verga and they celebrate him as one of their own. His cultural contribution and that of his cultural offspring have helped to reinforce and essentialize traits to the rest of Italy, Europe, and any place that Sicilians or Southern Italians have come to call home.

Lang, 2010), 2-4. Some great composers have composed tarantellas, including Franz Liszt (1811-1886), Frederic Chopin (1810-1845), and Mascagni, who includes one in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The tarantella is in fast six to eight time alternating between major and minor keys.

²³¹ Filippo Leonardi Band, "Anu mazzato a cumpari Turridu," YouTube video, 4:17, posted by blochinuius, June 1, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czMh_ITJbUg.



Figure 2. Statue of Giovanni Verga in Vizzini, Sicily. Photo taken by author.



Figure 3. Statue of Luigi Capuana in Mineo, Sicily. Photo taken by author.



Figure 4. Vizzini –The plaque explains that this is the home of *compare* Alfio and his wife Lola, who hidden behind the vase of basil, listened to Turridu’s songs. Photo taken by author.

Chapter Three

Performing Sicilianness: *L'aria del continente* and *Liolà: commedia campestre*

In his 1896 essay *La Sicilia e il brigantaggio*, Luigi Capuana complained about a public that believed the cry from Giuseppe Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* represented all it needed to know about Sicilian customs and culture: "Hanno ammazzato compare Turridu!" (They have killed compare Turridu!)¹ Capuana's essay is an attempt to defend himself and fellow Sicilian writers from a charge of helping to establish negative stereotypes of the Sicilian. Despite an acknowledgment that their portrayals of the rural and peasant classes did much to perpetuate the Franchetti and Sonnino stereotypes from *La Sicilia*,² Capuana professes his sincere intentions as an artist. He writes, "Noi credevamo di produrre unicamente uno schietto lavoro d'arte...; non abbiamo mai sospettato che la nostra sincera opera d'arte, fraintesa o mal interpretata, potesse venire adoprata a ribadire pregiudizi, a fortificare opinioni storte o malevoli... (We believed that we were producing a pure work of art...; we never suspected that our sincere work of art, misunderstood or badly interpreted, could come to be used to confirm prejudices, to strengthen twisted or malevolent opinions.)³ The intention of the writer is irrelevant, because these images and representations of the Sicilian had already been subsumed into the regional and national *zeitgeist*. The artistically constructed identity became the accepted identity for the people of the island.

¹ Luigi Capuana, "La Sicilia e il brigantaggio," in *L'isola del sole* (Catania, Italy: N. Giannotta Editore, 1898), 10.

² Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino wrote *La Sicilia nel 1876*, a report on Sicily and its people. See chapter two.

³ Capuana, "Sicilia," 7-8. For a discussion on stereotypes and *i veristi*, see chapter two. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

In chapter two, I argued that Sicilian verismo not only helped to construct stereotypes for Sicilians that persist today, but also that Sicilians themselves adopted these tropes as essential characteristics of their nature. Further, it was the performance of Sicilianness in the early Sicilian plays that helped to establish that identity, the continued performance of which can be seen on stage and in films today.⁴ In this chapter, I will be looking at the reconstruction and continued development of particular stereotypes and tropes of *verismo* in the plays *L'aria del continente* (1915) by Nino Martoglio (1870-1921) and *Liola: commedia campestre* (1916) by Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936). I will also discuss how the Sicilian actor Angelo Musco (1872-1937), the model for the leading roles in these two plays, performed an evolved version of the Sicilian.⁵ My main argument is that the representation of Sicilianness, already established by the first wave of Sicilian writers, now evolves via the performances of native Sicilian actors. I will use the plays *L'aria del continente* and *Liola* to explore this representation of Sicilianness, which was, I argue, a major factor in the success of these plays. There are three reasons for choosing these texts: first, both plays were written specifically for the leading Sicilian comic actor of his day, Musco; second, they were written in Sicilian; and third, their settings and themes revolve around the idea of Sicilianness.

I will also touch on another noteworthy actor and colleague of Musco, Giovanni Grasso (1873-1930), whom Lee Strasberg called the greatest tragic actor in the world.⁶ Grasso's tragic portrayals of the violent Sicilian defined the mannerisms and conventions of the verismo theatre,

⁴ See chapter two and my discussion of *The Godfather* trilogy.

⁵ Angelo Musco writes in his autobiography that the idea for *l'aria del continente* came from a proposed collaboration between Martoglio and Pirandello. Pirandello dropped out of the project and handed it completely over to his partner. Angelo Musco, *Cerca che trovi...* (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1929), 170.

⁶ Giovanni Grasso's other admirers included Gabriele D'Annunzio and Vsevolod Meyerhold, while Angelo Musco's admirers included Antonio Gramsci and Edward Gordon Craig.

and were the source of his success. Both born in Catania one year apart, Grasso and Musco worked initially as puppeteers and then as actors. In many ways, they were two sides of the same coin, with Grasso hailed as the tragic actor, and Musco as the comic actor, yet both seen primarily as Sicilian.⁷ Indeed, both possessed the same native training that gave them their unique performance style. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study I will focus mainly on Musco, whose tragic-comic portrayals transcend the conventional image of the violent Sicilian and demonstrate a new humoristic style of *mise en scène*, hence developing new tropes and myths.

Using semiotics as a tool, I will unpack the social context of signs interpreted by the audience as an embodiment of Sicilianness. In her book, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, Erika Fischer-Lichte writes that “theatre expresses the society in which it occurs through a wide range of cultural systems,” including the body movements, gestures, and language of the actor.⁸ These systems contribute to the culture as a whole and make up part of the norms and rules that a given society immediately recognizes.⁹ Fischer-Lichte extends the field of semiotics, which has primarily investigated the meanings and codes at play in theatre and performance, by looking at “how and why types of acting are related to, or derived from, a historically determined cultural context.”¹⁰ Similarly, I will attempt to place the acting style and the body within a historical and cultural context, by using critics’ and reviewers’ descriptions of the performers, as well as through the viewing of the film *L’aria del continente*, in which Musco reprises his famous role.

⁷ Italian scholars often cannot speak about one without also referring to the other, because both play such an integral role in the story of Sicilian vernacular theatre.

⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Musco and the Sicilian actor, in general, represented the Sicilian construct for the Northern bourgeois audiences that saw them. The actors could not escape the cultural construct of the Sicilian that preceded them. They were haunted by it. In his book *Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson argues that the cultural activity of theatre is “deeply involved with memory and haunted with repetition.”¹¹ Carlson describes these theatre iterations as “ghosting,” whereby the audience is presented with an identical previously encountered artistic product in a new context.¹² He demonstrates how this phenomenon operates on at least four levels of the theatrical performance: performance space, dramaturgy, the body, and the production elements—such as costumes, lighting, and sound. Northern audiences in Italy were sophisticated theatergoers; therefore, they were familiar with the conventions and styles of acting that were current for the professional actor. Seeing a Sicilian actor using different acting conventions, and even different physicalizations for common social interactions, spoken in a different language, caused a sensation, and also reinforced audiences’ ideas about difference.

Already stereotyped, the Sicilians performing dialect plays only helped to reinforce earlier images of difference with characters that were also based on earlier stereotypes. As Carlson points out, the theatre and its actors carry the ghosts and memories of previous performances for the audience. Indeed, Sicilian actors carried the ghosts and memories of previous images and stories about the South, illustrating the way a performance contains both cultural and acting codes of behavior. The lived experience of performance, what Richard Schechner calls “restored behavior” or “twice-behaved” behavior, contains both a recollection and reproduction of the past and a construction of the present. A performance can be both a ritual

¹¹ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

of remembering and a reinforcing of contemporary ideology. Within that ideology are contained the assumptions of a particular society, keeping in mind that every performance is slightly different and changes with the times. The body of the *exotic* Sicilian actor performs both the part of the character as compared to other remembered performances. It also performs Sicilianness in juxtaposition with the memory of images of the Sicilian as realized by such *meridionalisti* as Franchetti and Sonnino, as well as the novels and short stories of Sicilian writers such as Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana. The ghosts of these cultural texts and images would haunt the stages of any production set in Sicily and inhabited by Sicilians. The memory of those performances allows the audience to perceive the differences: the breaking of accepted social and theatrical practices. The body of the foreign actor introduces a form of alienation that takes the audience away from the story to contemplate the nature of difference, indeed, to question whether it is a performance at all.

Both *L'aria dell continente* and *Liola* reveal a deliberate attempt to leave behind the darker image of the South portrayed in the verismo stories and plays of Verga and Capuana, and rather push a gentler, more bucolic image. These younger Sicilian writers, who were writing in the wake of verismo, animated many of the same themes of verismo: *la roba* (goods, property), love, revenge, gossip, and class struggle, in addition to a fair amount of local color and customs. However, their work reflected a new sensibility about the negative perception of the Sicilian and a deliberate attempt to change it. These new works were also prompted by the success of the new *Compagnia Drammatica Dialettale Siciliana*, founded in 1903 by Giovanni Grasso and fostered and made possible by Nino Martoglio, the journalist, poet, and later artistic director of his own Sicilian Dialect Company. By 1907, Martoglio had decided that Sicilian theatre needed to

change and leave behind the tropes of violence, revenge, and betrayal.¹³ In the new dramaturgy of Pirandello and Martoglio, the tropes of verismo were being altered, and the dark vengeful Sicilian of Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaspara Mosca's *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria* and Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* were now the comic lighter figures of *L'aria dell continente* and *Liolà*.¹⁴

The shift was from a threatening mafioso Sicilianness to a nonthreatening amusing Sicilianness in both the new dramaturgy and in performance. Artists from the South were consciously attempting to show a different side to the Sicilian in the early twentieth century. This thematic shift was also taking place in the ways the Sicilian was physically performed. By 1914, the actor Musco, who had started with and been a member of Grasso's company, branched out with his own Sicilian acting company. In his autobiography, Musco explains the difference between Grasso's company—which specialized in the passion, the jealousy, honor, the vendetta, and the cult of the family, prevalent in verismo—and his own company—which would show a different side of Sicily: a land of serenity, joy, songs, laughter, and cleverness.¹⁵

The comic Sicilian figure in Martoglio's *L'aria del continente* and Pirandello's *Liolà*, and the Sicilian actor, Angelo Musco, who originated the main roles in these plays, came to represent Sicilianness. So was the case with Giovanni Grasso, who had originated many of the verismo roles of the dangerous, virile honor-driven man. Musco's character in Martoglio's story is an older gentleman, more of a buffoon and harmless. In Pirandello's story, he is a bit of a prankster, a free-spirited peasant, clever, but far from the vengeful Alfio from Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The same cannot be said about the female characters in these two plays, which remain

¹³ Antonio Scuderi, "Sicilian Dialect Theatre," in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 261.

¹⁴ According to Alfredo Barbina, Mosca sold the rights of the play to Rizzotto. *I mafiusi di la vicaria*, in *Teatro verista siciliano*, Alfredo Barbina (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1970), 34-36.

¹⁵ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 103.

essentially the same stereotypes they were in the earlier verismo stories. The new plays do discuss the liberation of women and women's rights to a degree but still retain the conventional stereotypes of a patriarchal society. Objectified and cast mostly as supporting figures, the women in these stories are sexually dangerous, and remain the source of betrayal and pain. While the male characters have lost some of their mafioso demeanor, the female characters are still either sexual predators or saintly motherly figures.

In the first section of this chapter, I will look at the birthplace of the Sicilian theatre in Catania, where Sicilian plays with native, dialect-speaking actors were first professionalized, and exported to the continent and beyond. The following two sections will look at the dramaturgy of *L'aria dell continente* and *Liola*, and the way verismo is used and reinvented in them. The final section will discuss the Sicilian actor, specifically Angelo Musco and his shift away from Giovanni Grasso's type of Sicilianness. I will conclude by looking at Musco's performance in the film version of *l'aria dell continente* (1937), which was uploaded to YouTube in January 2012, to explicate what it reveals about his acting.

The Catanese Popular Theatre

Located on the east coast of the island, facing the Ionian Sea, and in the shadow of a large active volcano, Catania is the second largest city in Sicily after Palermo, and the birthplace of the first internationally acclaimed Sicilian acting troupe. The origins for this troupe arose out of popular culture, which included puppet and variety theatre performed in the local dialect. By the mid-nineteenth century, Sicilian puppet theatre was very popular among the general population. It was called "*opera dei pupi*," a humorous allusion to the idea of a "big" theatre

performed by puppets.¹⁶ It arose out of a local folk culture and was developed largely by an illiterate population for performance in their communities.¹⁷ The stories performed usually centered on the chivalric tradition and interest in medieval lore, elements of which came from an oral tradition of the popular *cantastorie* and were not only picked up by the puppet theatre but also by middle-class theatre.¹⁸

According to Alessandro Napoli, there were two traditions or styles of *opra* (Sicilian term for opera) in Sicily. One was the style in Palermo, the western half of the island. The other was seen in Catania, the eastern side of the island, and Calabria.¹⁹ Music was an important part of the puppet shows, especially during the battle scene. Therefore, both styles included a small orchestra: a violin, a guitar, and a double bass in the eastern side. In addition, in western Sicily there was usually a small cylinder piano or “*pianino*.”²⁰ Both also included some kind of percussion during battle scenes, a drum, and a clog (*zoccolo*) that was worn by the puppeteer to produce a loud noise when stomped on the floor.²¹ The differences between the two styles were based on the dimensions and weight of the puppets and on alternate mechanical systems, as well as on contrary ideas about theatre and spectacle.²² In Palermo, the puppets were much smaller in size, only 80 cm (2 ft. 7½ in.), with jointed knees. The puppeteers would manipulate the objects from the side of the stage with their feet resting on the same level that the puppets performed

¹⁶ John McCormick, Alfonso Cipolla, and Alessandro Napoli, *The Italian Puppet Theatre: A History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010), 167.

¹⁷ Henryk Jurkowski, *A History of European Puppetry: From Its Origins to the End of the 19th Century* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 338.

¹⁸ These are also called *cantastoria*, literally, sung story. They were narrated by itinerant storytellers who would sing heroic tales of *Carlo Magno*, *Rinaldo*, *Orlando* in the piazzas of the towns they visited. Ettore Li Gotti, *Il Teatro dei pupi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1957), 18-20.

¹⁹ Alessandro Napoli, “L’Opera dei Pupi di stile catanese” (paper), 1, accessed October 31, 2012, <http://www.fratellinapoli.it/storia-opera-pupi/storia-opera-pupi.pdf>.

²⁰ McCormick, *The Italian Puppet Theatre*, 167.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

²² Napoli, 2.

on.²³ In Catania the puppets were much larger, 120 cm (3 ft. 11¼ in.), and had *parlatori* or *parlatrici* who provided the voices of the puppets.²⁴ These speakers emulated many of the *grande attori* of the day, such as Ernesto Rossi.²⁵ Puppeteers in Catania were always open to innovation, whether it was creating puppets with eyes and mouths that moved and better armor or adding live bodies to the performance and eventually dropping the puppets altogether.²⁶ The fierce rivalry between the two leading puppet theatres run by Don Gaetano Crimi (1809-1874) and Don Giovanni Grasso (1792-1863, grandfather of the actor Giovanni Grasso) influenced their race for perfection.

According to the ethnographer Giuseppe Pitré, it was 1859 when Don Angelo Grasso (1834-1888, father of Giovanni Grasso) substituted live actors for the puppets on stage performing the stories of Charlemagne.²⁷ The actors, along with the some of the puppeteers, included young barbers, sailors, and laborers of every kind, and caused a sensation, especially because of the use of dialect.²⁸ They were often costumed in their character's garb, as Giovanni Grasso relates to Martoglio in a letter; he writes that his father, Angelo Grasso, in 1880, was so enthusiastic about the story of Meschino that he dressed himself from head to toe in armor and sword, spending more than £3000.²⁹ Using live actors on stage had become common by the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sarah Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla, *Angelo Musco: Il gesto, la mimica, l'arte* (Palermo: Novecento Editrice, 1987), 41.

²⁷ Ibid., 45. Giuseppe Pitré (1841-1916) was a medical doctor and a collector of Italian folklore. Born in Palermo, he attempted to write a dictionary and grammar of Sicilian, and to write down the many oral traditions found on the island. He worked with many volunteers in compiling his twenty-five volumes of popular traditions. Don was used as a term of respect for these artists.

²⁸ Ibid., 45.

²⁹ Nino Martoglio, "La fine di un teatro popolare," *Secolo XX*, Milan July 1907, quoted in Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 45. See note 40 for the story of *Guerrin Meschino*. Giovanni

1880s, and was practiced alongside puppet shows, which by this time included contemporary dramas such as *Cavalleria Rusticana* in their repertory.

The spaces used for performances were usually abandoned warehouses or stores with room for about two to three dozen spectators.³⁰ Following the 1887 cholera epidemic, which had caused all the theatres in Catania to shut their doors, the variety style was inaugurated.³¹ Small remodeled theatres, called *teatrini*, provided a varied menu of entertainment, a short drama, a farce, a *macchietta* (a character sketch), and some songs, lasting about forty-five minutes, with continuous performances starting in the early afternoon until the late evening.³² The artists performed twelve to thirteen times a day.³³ The theatre in Sicily during this period was composed of puppet and variety shows and small itinerant acting companies from Naples who performed full-length dramas such as the romance *Le due orfanelle*.³⁴ The difficulty in finding young Sicilian actors forced many theatres to take on these companies in order to fill their season. Young working men made more money in their professions than could be offered in the theatre.

Verga's novella *Don Candeloro e Ci* (1894) was inspired by Don Angelo Grasso and his puppet theatre.

³⁰ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 53.

³¹ Muscarà Zappulla and Zappulla, *Giovanni Grasso: Il più grande attore tragico del mondo* (Acireale: La Cantinella Coop., 1995), 29.

³² Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 53. The *macchietta* (literally small spot) is half monologue and half song performed with music that underlines the words. It is written in verse, with spoken passages in prose. The comic mimics a particular *type* or person that is recognized by the audience. It can be satirical, tragicomical, or sentimentally ridiculous, but it always includes obscene allusions and double entendres. The form originated in Naples with the poet Fernando Russo (1866-1927) and was made famous by the performer Nicola Maldacea (1870-1945). Carlo Missaglia, introduction to *Come si ride a Napoli!*, by Renzo Arbore and Vittorio Marsiglia (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai Editore, 2010), 7-8. Angelo Musco, using Maldacea's repertory, specialized in the *macchietta*.

³³ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

There was also the problem of illiteracy. Potential performers could not read, and therefore, they were asked to improvise around a particular scene.³⁵

In 1888, Don Angelo Grasso died, and his widow, Donna Ciccia Tudisco, was left to run the Machiavelli Theatre with her young children, including Giovanni Grasso, who was fifteen years old at the time. These theatres were family-run just as acting was a family business, and it was during this time of variety that the Aguglias, the Anselmis, the Bragaglias, and Musco came to perform at the Machiavelli. The theatre began to gain notice, and audiences for these performers grew.

One night in 1891, the prominent Italian Shakespearean actor Ernesto Rossi (1827-1896) found himself in the city of Catania, at the foot of Mount Etna, during a theatrical tour.³⁶ He was attracted by the renown of the *pupi* catanesi, and so he decided to pay a visit to the small subterranean theatre called Machiavelli.³⁷ That night the marionettes performed Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* in Sicilian. Rossi was so impressed by the performances of the voices behind the puppets that, after complementing them, he encouraged them to become actors themselves.³⁸ According to the Roman journalist Stanis Manca, that was the beginning of the revolution in their theatre and the transformation from puppet theatre to an actor's theatre.³⁹ More than that, the legend of the Catanese actor was formed.

Francesco De Felice's version of the same story places the event in 1898. Ernesto Rossi was performing at the *Teatro Castagnola* in Catania, and on his day off, he attended a puppet

³⁵ Ibid., 49.

³⁶ Stanis Manca, "La scoperta d'una Compagnia dialettale," *La Rassegna: Internazionale*, January 15, 1903, 38. Manca was the first national critic to call attention to the company. Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 68.

³⁷ Ibid., 38.

³⁸ Ibid., 40.

³⁹ Ibid.

show at the Machiavelli Theatre in order to see Giovanni Grasso.⁴⁰ Rossi was so impressed he invited Grasso to study in Florence under his direction.⁴¹ The maestro later confessed that he had rarely laughed so hard as he did at the Machiavelli at the farces performed with such quick witticisms and spontaneous “lazzi” by Grasso.⁴² Nevertheless, Grasso never followed Rossi’s advice, but his encouragement did lead him to continue his journey to be an actor.⁴³ In a slightly different version of the event, Martoglio claims that he personally brought Rossi to the *teatrino* to see the young Grasso in April 1894.⁴⁴ Grasso performed *The perilous deeds of Guerin Meschino* and in honor of the great actor, *Cavalleria Rusticana*.⁴⁵ The slightly different versions and dates of this story speak to its many iterations in the oral culture and its ultimate transference into the printed media. The story is part of the actor’s constructed Sicilian persona used to publicize his humble beginnings and enormous natural talent.

As the single most important contributor to the creation of a Sicilian stage, Nino Martoglio recognized early on the potential of the Catanese actors from the small Machiavelli Theatre, whom he encouraged. By 1902, the first formation of a Sicilian acting company left the island and toured the North and then beyond. The novelty of the company, which performed mostly in Sicilian, added a new dimension to their repertory of regional plays, and audiences now flocked to see a Sicilian actor perform Sicilianness. As Antonio Scuderi notes, these actors had no professional training or experience with literary theatre; indeed, most of these actors

⁴⁰ Francesco De Felice, *Storia del teatro Siciliano* (Catania: Editrice Elefante, 1979), 69-70.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Nino Martoglio, “Un marionettista... grande attore,” *Natura ed Arte*, Milano, May 15, 1903, quoted in Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 50-51.

⁴⁵ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 51. *Guerrin Meschino* (1473) is an epic tale by Andrea da Barberino that follows the ups and downs of a slave-born hero, who overcomes each challenge to discover his royal parents, marry a Persian princess, and live happily until his death. *Merriam-Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literatures*. “Andrea da Barberino.”

emerged from various forms of popular theatre and lacked even a formal education.⁴⁶ Their acting was endowed with a simplicity and sincerity, especially in their portrayals of Sicilians; its lack of pretense “enhanced the sense of verismo for viewers and critics.”⁴⁷

Content at first, to stay on the sidelines, Martoglio took control of the acting company after their premiere in Rome. Grasso was still inexperienced in managing the business of theatre, and Martoglio helped them to become a world-class company.⁴⁸ As Stanis Manca noted, there were two reasons that Sicily never had a Sicilian acting company before Giovanni Grasso’s at the Machiavelli theatre in Catania: one reason was the lack of plays in Sicilian, and the other was the lack of female Sicilian actors.⁴⁹ The latter problem was no small concern for the creation of a Sicilian company. Most of the female actors were imported from Naples, so you would hear a Neapolitan speaking alongside a Sicilian.⁵⁰ In Sicily, women were generally kept indoors, and a Sicilian woman performing on stage with a man was considered tantamount to prostitution.⁵¹ By the beginning of the twentieth century, this was no longer a problem as more Sicilian women became actors, but the lack of new Sicilian plays was still a concern and hence, the call for new works. There was a recognition that their repertory was limited, and that they were always looking for new works that were set in Sicily and could be performed in Sicilian. By 1907, more interested in expanding the repertory, Martoglio began writing full-time both Sicilian and Italian plays. He also solicited other Sicilian writers such as Pirandello and Luigi Capuana, both of

⁴⁶ Antonio Scuderi, “Sicilian Dialect Theatre” 258.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Stanis Manca, “La scoperta d’una Compagnia dialettale,” *La Rassegna: Internazionale*, January 15 1903, 43.

⁵⁰ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 68.

⁵¹ Ibid.

whom were personal friends, to contribute works too.⁵² Martoglio's goal was to raise the Sicilian language theatre to a national level and to represent the Sicilian figure to the rest of the peninsula in a positive light. In the end, he would expand the world's perspective on Sicilians with a repertory of work that portrayed a more diverse and civilized subject, but the portrayals would retain their Sicilianness that, for better or worse, established difference.

L'aria del continente

The Italian stage of the late nineteenth century reflected the concerns and needs of a newly unified state concerned with offering both a didactic, socially instructive theatre, and a literary, ethereal theatre. The theatres also reflected the cultural conventions of the Italian bourgeoisie who frequented them. Many of the most popular plays by Italians like Achille Torelli's *I mariti* (1867, "The Husbands") or Marco Praga's *La moglie ideale* (1890, "The Ideal Wife"), whether they ended happily or not, provided a model of bourgeois values and morals.⁵³ These works are marked by their adoption of structures and techniques borrowed from the "well-made" plays of Eugene Scribe, Alexander Dumas *filis*, and Emile Augier.⁵⁴ These plays reflected the influence of the French theatre with its focus on the family. However, the intimacy of family is absent in the Italian plays, which were written in a literary Italian. Indeed, there was a scarcity of great Italian playwrights in the late nineteenth century due largely to the lack of a common conversational language. For Italy during this period, language was local and regional. Even so, as Paolo Puppa points out, Italian theatre during this period failed to include dialect because of

⁵² Martoglio also enlisted Giovanni Verga, Federico De Roberto, and P. Maria Rosso di San Secondo. Gabriele D'Annunzio also had his play *La figlia di Iorio* translated into Sicilian for the company. *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵³ Paolo Puppa, "The Theatre of United Italy," in *A History of Italian Theatre*, 226-27.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

self-censorship and a prevailing group of influential conservative reviewers.⁵⁵ Actors on stage spoke intimate scenes between lovers, spouses, or friends in a mode of expression that would sound very different from that of ordinary speech; and with the arrival of a more bourgeois dramaturgy, a natural sounding language seemed essential.

Hence, the arrival of a new Sicilian dramaturgy featuring the urban proletariat and *petite* bourgeoisies seemed to provide an alternative type of theatre. In 1884, audiences responded enthusiastically to the verismo dramaturgy that brought to life a new world that they had only read about or perhaps seen in pictures. It featured short scenes, the suggestion of dialect, and memorable theatrical tropes, such as *compare* Turridu biting Alfio's right ear.⁵⁶ This constituted the first wave of the Sicilian and his world. The second wave of dramaturgy came with the Sicilian actor and offered a more approachable Sicilian.

Nino Martoglio was born in 1870 in the small town of Belpaso, a few miles north from Catania. His fame rests on his promotion of Sicilian language poetry and theatre, as well as his work as a poet, playwright, and theatre entrepreneur. Like his father who founded the daily newspaper of Catania, Martoglio founded a political and literary weekly journal named *D'Artagnan*, after the character in *The Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas.⁵⁷ The journal was published from 1889 to 1904, and it contained writings in Sicilian. Many of the articles were written under pseudonyms and were satirical attacks of the foibles of fellow citizens of Catania.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 228.

⁵⁶ Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was written in Italian with the grammar inverted to mimic Sicilian. See chapter two.

⁵⁷ Gaetano Cipolla, *Siciliana: Studies on the Sicilian Ethos* (New York: Legas, 2005), 211-12.

⁵⁸ Consequently, Martoglio was compelled to fight twenty-one duels.
Ibid., 212.

It was during this period that Martoglio became a supporter of the actors of Teatro Machiavelli. He publicized them and later wrote many plays for them, including several for Musco.⁵⁹

Martoglio's *L'aria dell continente* was originally written and performed in Sicilian, and then translated into Italian. This play was one of many that the writer would fashion for the talented Musco. Early in the second act, Musco's character sums up the *difference* between those from the Continent and Sicilians, and indeed, the satiric crux of the text:

Viva la faccia del Continente, unni ci su' genti evoluti, genti di spiritu, e non certi cretini 'neutrnuti nell'ignoranza e nei pregiudizii, comu cca!... unni si pò fari il comodaccio suo..., cioè, mio...anzi proprio, senza dari cuntu a nuddu, senza cumplotti ridicule, senza pettegolezzi e senza sorrisi ironici, comu chiddi ca stati facennu tutti, compri su 'stu bestia di me' cugnatu!...

(Long live the face of the Continent, where there are people who are evolved, people with wit, not like certain stupid people here wrapped up in ignorance and prejudice!... [the Continent is] where one can run his own life...that is, run my own life...indeed more than that, a place where a person doesn't have to answer to anyone, without ridiculous plots, without gossip, and without ironic smiles, like the ones you all have on your faces, including my beast of a brother-in-law.)⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Martoglio wrote more than twenty-three full length and one-act plays in Italian and Sicilian. Most have been published in Italian and Sicilian including his two collaborations with Pirandello, *A vilanza* (1917) and *Cappiddazzu paga tuttu* (1917).

⁶⁰ Nino Martoglio, *L'aria del continente*, in *Teatro*, vol. 1 (Messina-Florence: Casa Editrice G. D'Anna, 1965), 64.

The 1915 play *L'aria del continente* opens with the return of Don Cola Dusciu, a wealthy, middle-aged bachelor, to the home of his sister la Signora Marastella, brother-in-law Don Lucinu Faru, nephew Michilinu, and niece Clementina in a small unnamed town in the interior of Sicily. Don Cola had travelled to Rome in order to have his appendix removed, and in the six months he has spent there, he has been transformed. Don Cola has changed his style of dress; he wears the latest fashion and no longer wears the *scuzzetta*, a typical Sicilian cap. He has opened his eyes to the true backward thinking of Sicily and consequently has adopted a more Continental, open-minded attitude. Having met a much younger cabaret performer, Milla Milford, while in Rome, he has brought her home to live with him despite knowing it would cause a scandal. Milla, who claims to be the daughter of an army colonel and a Venetian countess, is a vivacious temptress with a dubious set of morals who has already caught the attention of the police delegate, because of an altercation with the Mayor's son. The officer asks Cola to vouch for her character. He does so and subsequently announces that she will be living under his protection in his home. This last piece of news scandalizes Marastella, who announces that she will no longer set foot in his home. Marastella is the emblem of the traditional Sicilian mother, who maintains the traditions of home and family. Her husband Lucinu has no such qualms. He cannot wait to meet the new woman and insists that he will have to look in on Cola to see how he is faring.

The arrival of Milla in town stirs up the gossips and the ardent interest of a number of men, including Cola's nephew and brother-in-law. Meanwhile, Cola has assumed a very un-Sicilian-like attitude of enlightenment on the subject of women's rights and codes of behavior. He does not condone the provincial possessiveness and jealousy of his town. Milla can talk to whatever man she pleases and even allow him to kiss her hand. In the second act, Cola proclaims

his progressive views to a group of card players at the town casino: “Lasciatele libere, le donne, per Dio, fatale respirare, emancipatele dalla schiavitù!” (Free your women, for God’s sake, let them breathe, emancipate them from their slavery!)⁶¹ Milla takes full advantage of his liberality, meeting both his nephew and brother-in-law clandestinely. Meanwhile, the police delegate and Marastella discover that the woman is actually a scheming imposter out to get his money and every other man’s, apparently. Her real name is Concetta Càfiso and she was born in Valguarnera Carapepe, Sicily.⁶² For Cola, this is the ultimate betrayal, because not only did she lie about her intentions and sneak around with other men including Lucinu and Michilinu—but *also* she is Sicilian—the very thing he wanted to avoid. In the moment of the discovery, Cola explains to the Officer and Marastella that the source of his ultimate humiliation is her not being a Continental but a Sicilian:

Comu chi ’mporta?... ’U sapi sèntiri, lei, chi veni a diri?... Si era cuntininali, marciava all’usu so’: cuntinintali di nascita idda, Cuntinintali d’adozione ju... e mi nni puteva ridiri?... Ma essennu Siciliana e sapennu comu si marcia cca, veni a diri ca mi l’ha fattu in piena facoltà mentale, ccu tutti li sentimenti!... E cc’ haju a fari, ora?... Ju puteva fari ’u cuntinintali ccu una di ddà supra!... Ma ccu ’na siciliana è logicu c’haju a fari ’u sicilianu!... Mi divu cumprumettiri ppi forza!...

(What do you mean it doesn’t matter? Do you want to hear why it matters? If she was a continental, it meant she marched to her own customs: she would be continental by birth, and I would be an adopted continental and she could laugh at me? But being a Sicilian and knowing our customs here, means that she did it with full knowledge, with all the sentiments! And what can I do now? I could play

⁶¹ Ibid., 66.

⁶² Carrapipi in Sicilian. It is a small town in the center of the island.

the continental with someone from up there! But with a Sicilian, it's logical that I have to play the Sicilian! My reputation must be irrevocably damaged!)⁶³

After bravely facing the gossip against himself and his continental paramour, he cannot bear the fear that they will discover that she was actually a Sicilian. All vow to keep this fact secret, while Cola sends Milla packing. The young woman leaves, cursing him in Sicilian. The story ends with Cola putting on his *scuzzetta*, smoking his pipe, and resuming his Sicilian customs.

Gossip is a common trope used in literature and drama to represent small town attitudes. It is almost always included in Sicilian set stories as it is in Martoglio's work. Gossip, the widespread dissemination of discourse that lies between truth and falsehood, has also played a rich role in stories and plays that were written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by the veristi Sicilian writers such as Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), Luigi Capuana (1839-1915), Giuseppe Giusti-Sinopoli (1866-1923), and Alessio DiGiovanni (1872-1946). An ever-present dark force, gossip was often coupled with a sense of surveillance, the sense that all the townsfolk were aware of everyone else's affairs. A man loses his honor because it appears that his wife is having an affair with another man. That appearance may be based on the slightest of evidence, but the man may now be a victim of whispers, knowing looks, and public snubs. Verga turned these busybodies into a kind of Greek chorus in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, where neighbors and friends to the main characters can be heard commenting, revealing information, and taking sides. Gossip acts as a social weapon to beat people into compliance with the accepted norm. At the heart of this surveillance is the over-consuming interest in appearances. In Verga's world, the gossips win and the protagonists must succumb to the rules of their society or die. In the lighter,

⁶³ Martoglio, *L'aria del continente*, 132.

pastoral Sicily of Martoglio, the consequences of gossip are much less dire and provide the audience with more laughter than tears.

The gossips in *L'aria* know more than Cola, who only makes himself ridiculous with his behavior. Martoglio has set up a dialogue between the continental view of life and the Sicilian view of life. Cola speaks for the Northern social norms, and his sister's and the town's gossips speak for the Sicilian social norms. Cola's mistaken infatuation with the North is what leads to his humiliation and to a recognition of the value of being Sicilian. Indeed, his Sicilianness would have protected him from this kind of betrayal. Cola reverts to his native customs, rejecting utterly those customs from the North. Martoglio's play exposes and exaggerates the Sicilian trying to be something that he is not indeed, trying to shake off his Sicilianness. The dramatist also plays with the jealousy/honor tropes of verismo through Cola's ability to accept an open relationship with Milla on her terms. Further, when he discovers her betrayal, that is, that she is not from the North but a Sicilian like him, he simply sends her on her way. There are no reprisals, no violence. Cola is foolish and he is gullible. Guido Nicastro noted that Don Cola is a comic person because he believes that he can place himself outside the rules of being a Sicilian and that such people are destined to be the object of ridicule to everyone.⁶⁴ Again with intention toward changing the perceptions about Sicilians, Martoglio's play is a portrayal of a rather wealthy landowner part of the bourgeoisie. Hence, the work reflects a new sensibility towards Sicily and the Sicilian identity.

In addition, Martoglio's play demonstrates his attempt to change the understanding of Sicily through a new appreciation of the language.⁶⁵ Part of his lifelong work was to establish a

⁶⁴ Guido Nicastro, *Teatro e società in Sicilia (1860-1918)* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1978), 189.

⁶⁵ This appreciation was for all the dialects in Italy and indeed, in 1901 and 1909, dialect poets from across Italy came together for two conventions held in Rome. *Ibid.*, 139.

literary Sicilian. Characters from Sicilian verismo works were often working class or the rural poor. Martoglio's characters come from the bourgeois classes. Cola is a wealthy landowner who is educated and speaks Tuscan Italian but at home speaks Sicilian. Marvin Carlson observes that Martoglio uses both Italian and Sicilian in a way that reflects changes in mood and formality rather than social status.⁶⁶ This use of Sicilian may enhance the play's exotic appeal to an audience that is not familiar with the language, but it also enhances its sense of reality. The awkwardness of the intimate scene in literary Italian is gone. An audience member from any region could identify with the continual switch between a local dialect and Italian. Martoglio's use of Sicilian then works as an indication of mood rather than status. In addition, his use of language in this way is also an attempt to erase the social stigma surrounding the use of dialect, and the perception of dialect as only spoken by the lower classes.

A Free Spirit: *Liola*

In 1917, Antonio Gramsci, acting as the theatre critic for *Avanti* (1916 to 1920), wrote an enthusiastic review of Luigi Pirandello's one act play *Liola: commedia campestre*, calling it "perhaps the best that the Sicilian dialect theatre has created."⁶⁷ He further wrote, "To me it

⁶⁶ Marvin Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues: Language at Play in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 98.

⁶⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 141. *Avanti! Giornale del Partito socialista*, founded December 25, 1896, was a daily newspaper that reflected the predominant view of the Italian Socialist party and was published simultaneously in Rome, Milan, and Turin. In 1926 the newspaper was suppressed by the Fascist regime and was forced to move its operations to Paris and Switzerland. In 1943, the newspaper returned to Italy as a weekly and continued until 1994, when the newspaper was liquidated because of lack of funds due to corruption. In 2011, the publication returned. Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Geografia e istituzioni del Socialismo Italiano* (Naples: Guida Editore, 1983), 51-53. See also Ugo Intini, "Un pilastro della nostra storia," in *Avanti della domenica*, no. 40, November 15, 2011, http://www.avantidelladomenica.it/site/artId__1399/434/DesktopDefault.aspx;

seems that Pirandello is an artist precisely when he is a dialect writer and I feel that *Liola* is his masterpiece”⁶⁸ However, Gramsci’s praise was not echoed by the audience of his day, who gave it a far less enthusiastic reception. The theatre critic speculated that the poor reception was due to the absence of expected dramaturgical conventions in a play representing Sicily and its inhabitants; Gramsci wrote, “*Liola* does not end in the traditional way with a knifing or a marriage.”⁶⁹ Instead, Pirandello uses many of the expected veristi conventions and tropes in a way that satirizes them, similar to their use in *L’aria del continente*. These two plays occupy different spheres of influence in their intention as consumer products and as works of art. Pirandello and Martoglio worked together on three plays and had an ongoing working relationship, but their relationship to the theatre at this moment in time was quite diverse.

According to Pirandello, the Sicilian troupe of actors headed by Nino Martoglio presented an antiquated, regionally and linguistically limited image of Sicily. Indeed, many of the cultural theatrical products coming out of Sicily at this time contributed to ideas of the South’s backwardness in the ongoing national discussion of the “Southern Question.” Nevertheless, by the beginning of World War I Pirandello changed his mind about Sicilian dialect theatre. It was Martoglio who convinced Pirandello to write in dialect for the Sicilian actors from the Teatro Machiavelli. Musco, who was now the head of his own acting company, needed new material in Sicilian. Pirandello agreed and reworked a scene from his novel *Il Fu Matteo Pascal* to compose *Liola*. Still produced today, more often in Italian rather than in Sicilian, *Liola* has remained a staple in repertory theatres throughout Italy. Before his international theatre success with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello wrote eleven

Gaetano Arfè, *Storia dell’Avanti!* (Naples: Giannini, 2002).

⁶⁸ Gramsci, *Selections*, 142.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Sicilian language plays for the Compagnia drammatica siciliana and co-wrote two plays with Martoglio, *'A vilanza* and *Cappiddazzu paga tuttu*. Pirandello now wrote roles with certain actors in mind; he wrote *zu Simuni* for the Sicilian actor Turi Pandolfini (1883-1962), whom he had seen in the part of *zio Nino* in Capuana's *Il paraninfo*.⁷⁰ And he wrote the character of Liolà with the actor Musco in mind, whom he had seen and met with before agreeing to write for the company.⁷¹

Pirandello was aware of Musco's talents and of his appeal to an audience. Besides having an ability to sing, improvise, and move an audience, Musco also came with a set persona cultivated by his years on the stage playing particular characters. By 1916, the actor had already been performing for over twenty years. His reputation had been established by such roles as Turridu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and as the leading protagonist in both *Malia* by Capuana and *L'aria del continente*. The characters from these plays all contain many of the same stereotypes that came to define Sicilianness; from the mafioso intriguer to the independent male bound by ancient rules of honor, all living in a rural culture. Musco portrayed both comic and tragic characters; this range notwithstanding, for the audience he always was the Sicilian. The actor as a recycling cultural product enacts over and over again the same deeply embedded types that become part of the cultural conscience.

Liolà lives with his mother, *za Ninfa*, and his three sons, each left to him by a different lover. He soon discovers that another girl, *Tuzza*, is also pregnant by him. In order to "do the right thing," he asks *za Cruci*, the girl's mother, for her daughter's hand in marriage. However, this would lead to clipping his wings and locking himself in a cage: "Cu tuttu chistu, *za Cruci*,

⁷⁰ De Felice, *Storia*, 168. Salvatore Pandolfini, born in Catania, was Angelo Musco's nephew. He went on to work in over thirty films including what is considered one of the first films in Italian neorealism, Roberto Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* (*Rome, Open City*) in 1945.

⁷¹ Nicastro, *Teatro*, 182.

sugnu cca: mi tagliu l'ali e mi vegnu a chiuji di mia stisso dintra a gaggia—cci dumannu a manu di so figlia Tuzza.” (Despite all this, za Cruci, I am here: I will clip my wings and shut myself in a cage—I ask you for your daughter Tuzza’s hand in marriage.)⁷² Tuzza, however, won’t hear of it. Instead, she plots, with the help of her mother, to throw herself at the feet of her uncle Don Simune, a rich landowner. Tuzza knows that Don Simune will agree to adopt her baby because his much younger second wife Mita has failed to produce an heir to whom he can leave his land and *roba* (material wealth); this is a major point of honor. The gossips, on the other hand, inform the audience that the failure is actually his. Don Simune claims the unborn child as his own and, consequently, displaces his wife from her primary position in his home. Mita rejects the new arrangement and leaves his household.

Meanwhile, in order to help Mita regain her position and also possibly to revenge himself on Tuzza, Liolà suggests a new deception. Mita should allow him to have sex with her, and because of his obvious fertility, she would become pregnant. Then she could claim that the child belongs to her husband, thus providing a remedy to Don Simune’s problem and re-establishing her own position in his household. She agrees. And in the third act of the play, Don Simune takes back his wife and announces the baby as his own, in the meantime renouncing Tuzza’s baby. The gossips highly doubt Simune’s paternity and instead suspect Liolà to be the father of both children. Don Simune tells Liolà that he should now marry Tuzza, but he refuses. He recognizes that he has made a narrow escape from a life that would have been like that of a bird in a cage. Tuzza, enraged by his refusal, attempts to stab Liolà with a knife, but he parries, is nicked, and disarms her. Always maintaining his good humor, he offers to adopt her child and teach him to sing like the others. And the world is made

⁷² Luigi Pirandello, *Liolà: commedia campestre in tre atti*, in *Tutto il teatro in dialetto*, ed. Sarah Zappulla Muscarà (Milan: Tascabili Bompiani, 2005), 175.

right again, not with the truth but with a bigger deception, because “in un mondo dove tutti fingono, regna chi finge meglio e la finzione diventa un mezzo di sopravvivenza.”⁷³ (In a world where everyone pretends, he who pretends best rules, and pretending becomes a way of surviving.)

In *Liola* the title character explains the simple life lesson that “Lu finciri è virtù; e cu’ ‘un sapi finciri ‘un sapi rignari!”⁷⁴ (Pretending is a virtue; and he who doesn’t know how to pretend, doesn’t know how to reign!) According to a letter Pirandello wrote to his son, Stefano, *Liola* was written in two weeks during a summer holiday in 1916: “L’ho scritta in 15 giorni, quest’estate; ed e stata la mia villeggiatura. Defatti, si svolge in campagna... e tutta la commedia e piena di canti e di sole. E cosi gioconda, che non pare opera mia.”⁷⁵ (I wrote [the play] it in fifteen days, this summer; and it was my holiday. In fact the play takes place in the country... and is full of song and sun; and it is so joyful that it doesn’t even seem like mine.) This is an assessment that some might agree with, because certainly, contrary to any other play in Pirandello’s oeuvre, the main character Liola retains his freedom at the end of the play and appears to be happy. Liola is a free spirit: “Oceddu di volu sugnu: oj ccà, dumani ddà.”⁷⁶ (I am a bird in flight: today I am here, tomorrow there.) As his name implies, he is here or there (*li o là*), free like the wind; he sings and brings laughter wherever he goes. But he is also a bit of a trickster and a libertine: he has three sons by three different women. Indeed, Liola lives outside of all social and moral conventions. Within the context of his world, his behavior is not immoral but rather amoral. Despite distinct pastoral elements, Pirandello also incorporates and then upends many of the

⁷³ Nicastro, *Teatro*, 200.

⁷⁴ Pirandello, *Liola*, 167.

⁷⁵ Leonardo Bragaglia, *Interpreti Pirandelliani (1910-1969): Vita scenica delle commedie di Luigi Pirandello, dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Rome: Trevi Editore, 1969), 39.

⁷⁶ Pirandello, *Liola*, 175.

tropes of verismo, such as sexual rivalry, adultery, revenge, and murder. These were expected elements in any play about the South.

Cavalleria Rusticana is the classic model for verismo theatre, and the similarities between Pirandello's *Liola* and *Cavalleria* are numerous, as Domenico Vittorini points out: "Same country setting, same primitive people and passions."⁷⁷ Leonardo Bragaglia agrees, writing that *Liola* stands as a perfect example of a *verista* representation *alla Verga*.⁷⁸ Many scholars have reflected on the influence of verismo on Pirandello's early work. Indeed, *Liola* as a play presents its figures and setting as a given that audiences would already recognize from the Sicilian themed plays that came before.

Liola offers a pleasing representation of a primitive yet picturesque Sicily with exotic yet appealing characters. The setting, Pirandello's hometown of Agrigento, harkens to a pastoral Sicily inhabited by merry workers who sing and make love, while it glosses over the darker side of the island and its people. Written in Girgenti dialect, the play opens in the country estate of Don Simuni with a group of female workers singing about the Passion of Christ while they shell almonds on a Sunday morning.⁷⁹ The women then lapse into gossip about the town, apprising the audience of the main characters and the action of the play. The gossips function as the town conscience similar to a Greek chorus. This is a familiar convention made popular in Verga's work. Another familiar convention borrowed from *Cavalleria* is the love triangle. Turridu, the main character in Verga's play, wants Lola, who is married to Alfio, while Santuzza wants Turridu, and in his rejection of her, facilitates his death. *Liola*, also at the center of a love

⁷⁷ Domenico Vittorini, *The Drama of Luigi Pirandello* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 71.

⁷⁸ Bragaglia, *Interpreti Pirandelliani (1910-1969)*, 45.

⁷⁹ Born near Agrigento, Sicily in 1867, Pirandello used Girgenti dialect, a variant of Sicilian, in his early regional plays. His doctoral thesis from the University of Bonn, published in 1891, looked at the phonology of the Girgenti dialect and was entitled *Sounds and Development of Sounds in the Dialect of Girgenti (Laute und Lautentwicklung der Mundart von Girgenti)*.

triangle, woos Mita who is married to Don Simuni while Tuzza, like Santuzza, plays the role of the rejected, vengeful woman. In addition, both Turridu and Liolà live with their beloved mothers, adding another stereotype about the close relationship between Italian men and their mothers. Because Pirandello's play borrows heavily from the conventions of verismo, it gives the impression of representing the social reality of the South.

However, Pirandello's Liolà is not conventional. He has little in common with the *braccianti* (agricultural day laborers) exploited in Sicily; rather, he is an intelligent, calculating force of nature (a bit mafioso in the original sense of the word). He enjoys playing the fool and pretending. Pretense is the way to succeed in society; it is gauging the situation and assuming the appropriate mask. This is a familiar theme in Pirandello's work. However, the play's lighthearted mood seems closer to Niccolo Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* than to Pirandello's own *Enrico IV*, especially in its focus on sexual intrigue. The plot of *Liola* centers on a deception, as Eric Bentley explains, "[The] deception (inganno) leads to outrage (infamia), whereupon a remedy (rimedio) is found, not by exposure of the deception but by another and larger deception."⁸⁰

In Luigi Pirandello's world, the protagonists break every rule and make war with the gossips. In his 1916 Sicilian play *Pensaci Giacomino* (also written for the actor Angelo Musco), seventy-year old retired schoolteacher Toti, from a town in Sicily, marries a pregnant young girl disowned by her family. Toti helps her to raise her baby, while maintaining a connection with the natural father. This obvious flouting of local norms outrages the town.

The use of gossip is just one of the conventions that consistently appear in cultural works about the island. The most famous and ubiquitous convention includes the virile, honor driven male and the deceitful, lustful woman, both of whom are capable of wielding a knife against a

⁸⁰ Eric Bentley, introduction to *Naked Masks: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Plume, 1957), xvi-xvii.

rival or lover. In the heyday of verismo in the late nineteenth century, the stories played out on stage combined a tragic realism verging on melodrama. Deeply passionate men and women with a high sense of honor backed with the sharp edge of a knife represented the dangerous side of Sicily, but there was another side: the peaceful pastoral Sicily harkening to the Idylls of the Greek Theocritus of Syracuse. The idealized version of the South and its peasants as primitive (close to nature), picturesque, and exotic has a long history in literature but is also present in small doses in the verismo plays and operas.⁸¹ Bucolic images of peasants working in fields were often offered simultaneously with the violence in an effort to both delight and shock the audience. Interestingly, *Liola* also tries to marry these two visions of Sicily into one world, as if a place could simply be boiled down to black and white. Indeed, the form Sicily takes in Pirandello's dialect plays, but especially in *Liola*, is both lyrically nostalgic and darkly sardonic. *Liola* is that primitive amoral figure that audiences can be shocked by and secretly enjoy. In the end, the play is a celebration of everyday rural life in Sicily, idealized and mythologized.

The Sicilian Actor

On April 16, 1903, Giovanni Grasso's *Compagnia Dialettale Siciliana* debuted at the Teatro Manzoni in Milan, where it was seen by Enrico Polese Santarnecchi, who wrote for a weekly theatre journal:

è inutile negarlo, assistendo, noi del settentrione, a quelle scene che sonorizzate dalla vita vissuta di quel popolo meridionale, pareva ci trovassimo di fronte alla rappresentazione di costumi di un altro popolo. Quale enorme differenza tra essi e noi! Come essi sono più semplici e forse più generosi di noi! Là palpita ancora la

⁸¹ See my discussion on the opera of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in chapter two.

passione, là i sentimenti si esplicano ancora in modo quasi selvaggio, certo in modo libero! Quel popolo sarà meno raffinato del nostro, ma indubbiamente quegli uomini sono di noi più sinceri.

(It's pointless to deny it, it seemed to us from the North, in attendance, that those scenes are drawn from the actual life of the people from the South, it seemed like we were watching the representation of a culture of people from another nation. What an enormous difference between them and us! How much more simple and more generous than us! There, passion still beats, there, emotions are still performed in a semi-savage way, certainly in a free way! Those people may be less refined than us, but surely those men are more sincere than us.)⁸²

The review reaffirms the interpretation of difference between the two cultures, but at the same time ironically celebrates that difference. The debut performance of Grasso's Sicilian Company featured the verismo play *La zolfara* (The Sulphur Mine, 1895) by Giuseppe Giusti Sinopoli (1866-1923). The play follows the verismo tradition of realism that focuses on conflict between the classes, the exploited and the exploiter, but deemphasizes the conventional passion and honor themes.⁸³ Both the dramaturgy and the actor helped to reinforce a theatrical experience that went outside the parameters of what was considered "art."

Indeed, it was the performance of a different social and acting code that does not follow the rules of decorum that leads the reviewer to his conclusion. The Sicilian is not civilized;

⁸² Pes (Enrico Polese Santarneckchi), "La compagnia siciliana," *L'arte drammatica*, April 18, 1903, quoted in Zappulla Muscarà and Zappulla, *Grasso*, 55. Santarneckchi was the first to translate Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* into Italian, *L'anitra selvatica* (1892).

⁸³ Though veristic, its style of theatre is closer to the pedagogical theatre of Garibaldi Bosco. Vincenzo Consolo, "People and Land of Sulphur," in *Reading and Writing the Mediterranean: Essays by Vincenzo Consolo*, ed. Norma Bouchard and Massimo Lolini, trans. Ben Lawton (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006), 145. See chapter two.

rather, he is “semi-savage” and, perhaps, incapable of controlling his emotional outpouring. The reviewer casts this difference in a positive light, yet the superior tone undercuts his praise and smacks of orientalism.⁸⁴ The image conjured by the review is reminiscent of the *bon sauvage* myth, which is a version of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s noble savage and what Renata Mautner Wasserman calls “shorthand for the ideal of the virtuous primitive.”⁸⁵ The Southern Italian figure could be both evil and naïve, and in this case, the image of the naïve figure is summoned. This figure retains vaguely primitive characteristics that include acting on instinct, impulsiveness, an awareness of personal strength, lack of reason, and an indulgence of his/her appetites.

Later in the same article, the reviewer continues, now turning his attention to Grasso’s performance,

è un’arte ingenua la sua che nulla à di studiato, è un attore di grande intuito e nato per recitare: à il dono di una fisionomia caratteristica e molto mobile con la quale esprime a suo piacere amore ed odio. È insomma un notevole attore e certo chi non l’à inteso non se ne può fare un esatto concetto perché quella sua recitazione, dirò quasi selvaggia esercita una specie di fascino. Questa compagnia siciliana a Milano è molto interessante perché per noi vuol dire la conoscenza dei costumi di quelle regioni del sud dove ancora non è penetrata—come nelle nostre—il soffio potente della civiltà moderna...ed è forse per questo che quelle regioni sono, forse, migliori delle nostre!

(His is a naïve art that cannot be studied, he is a great intuitive actor born to perform: he has the gift of a common and very malleable physiognomy, with

⁸⁴ See chapter two.

⁸⁵ Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, *Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and Brazil: 1830-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1994), 98.

which he can easily express love and hatred. He is, in short, a noteworthy actor and certainly whoever has not understood that cannot conceive exactly why his performance, I will call semi-savage, excites a certain kind of fascination. This Sicilian company in Milan is very interesting because for us it means learning about the cultures of regions of the South, which have still not been penetrated—like our own—by the powerful breath of modern civilization... and this may be why those regions, perhaps, are better than ours!)⁸⁶

Again the emphasis is on difference, and the use of the term semi-savage to describe Grasso's performance paints the company as inartistic and simply behaving in a natural way—not a civilized way.

Indeed, it is the constructed Sicilianness of the performance by Grasso that leads the reviewer to echo the words of Franchetti and Sonnino from *La Sicilia*, invoking the term savage and comparing the North and the South in terms of modernity and primitiveness. The actor's body is transformed into the representation of a geography writ large. On the stage, the Sicilian character is given a body with costumes suited to a poor sulfur miner, a voice speaking in a foreign tongue set in a foreign place. As a literary figure, the Sicilian was conventionally associated with both negative and positive stereotypes. On the stage, Giovanni Grasso embodies the Sicilian figure by virtue of his birth and his ability to perform many of the preconceived notions Northern audiences held about them. Because the actor comes from a minority culture within a larger national culture, that body represents the whole minority group.

The body of the actor on stage performed what was seen as a truer, more real Sicilian because of the actor's ethnicity and background. It seemed more real and provided an almost

⁸⁶ Pes, "Compagnia Siciliana," 55.

anthropological experience for the audience. In a London review of the Sicilian Players performance in 1908, the critic wrote, “In the general realism of the whole troupe, the gestures, the habits, the nature of Sicilian peasants undoubtedly appear before us alive upon the Shaftesbury stage... The question I would suggest is, whether these are the expressions of consummate realistic art or excessively clever mimicry... Is what we see, Sicilianism in dramatic art or Nature preserved for export—Lulu stuffed, holding in his claw the nut gilded *par amour du grandiose*?”⁸⁷ The Sicilian actor is misread and misconstrued; the art is suspect as the critic confuses a different set of theatrical conventions and norms with what he sees as Nature. Interestingly, the perception is the same in London and in Milan. The two European cities are more alike than the two Italian cities of Milan and Catania.

The Sicilian actor was labeled “primitive” precisely because he did not follow the rules of acting that bourgeois audiences were used to. Indeed, the very “untrained” and “unrefined” quality of acting that they encountered on the stage offered up a sensuality that had been repressed on stage and in “modern society.” Audiences were treated to an acting style that did not follow the “natural sign system organized for expression of individual emotions.”⁸⁸ Fischer-Lichte argues that the body has both a natural order and a symbolic order of culture, and therefore, like any other cultural phenomenon, it is determined historically.⁸⁹ As the European bourgeois society became more “civilized,” that is, the rules and norms of social practices and the body became more complex and convention-bound, the acting body on stage would also

⁸⁷ “The Sicilian Players,” *The Academy: A Weekly Review of Literature, Science, and Art*, 74 (January-June 1908): 519. The reference is to Gustave Flaubert’s 1877 short story “Un Coeur Simple” (A Simple Heart) and specifically to the stuffed beloved parrot of the simple maid Felicité.

⁸⁸ Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre*, 39.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

reflect these cultural shifts in accordance with the civilizing process.⁹⁰ Sicily, during this period, was predominately rural, with a peasant class, a very small middle class, and the landed wealthy class. In 1900, four-fifths of the population of Sicily was still illiterate, which was a far greater fraction than that of the North.⁹¹ The result was a very different culture and society.

Northern professional actors, who may not always have come from privileged backgrounds but were trained to observe the cultural conventions of the elite, performed verismo plays during its first wave.⁹² The first performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in 1884 was given in Turin by Cesare Rossi's acting company with Eleanora Duse (1858-1924) as Santuzza.⁹³ These actors specialized in a literary theatre *in lingua* (meaning in Italian). Italian, performing the works of William Shakespeare, Gabrielle D'Annunzio, and Henrik Ibsen, and portrayed characters that engaged in long speeches and lengthy debates about high ideals. Though portraying Sicilians, the performers' interpretation of that world would still result in a performance following their cultural and theatrical conventions. It was not until November 30, 1902, when the first Sicilian acting company debuted in Rome at the Teatro Argentina with *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Mafiusi di la Vicaria di Palermo*, that the audience could compare these already familiar plays with the new Sicilian style of performance. With Giovanni Grasso at

⁹⁰ Ibid., 3-4

⁹¹ Denis Mack Smith, *Italy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 234.

⁹² In the South regional actors sometimes performed verismo plays; but before the 1890s, most elite southern audiences saw these plays with traveling acting companies with famous *grande attore*.

⁹³ Eleonora Giulia Amalia Duse, born in Ligevano, Lombardy, started acting at the age of four in her family's acting troupe. Though starting life as a poor actor, she went on to great success with her signature performances in the works of Henrik Ibsen, William Shakespeare, and Gabriele D'Annunzio. Duse performed with Cesare Rossi (1829-1898) and his company between 1881 and 1884 as leading lady. Guido Noccioli, *Duse on Tour: Guido Noccioli's Diaries, 1906-1907*, trans. and ed. Giovanni Pontiero (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1982), 168.

the helm, this company included Marinella Bragaglia (*la piccola Duse*, 1882-1918), who was one of the first Sicilian born actresses to join the company, and Angelo Musco.⁹⁴

Gabriele D'Annunzio called him "il maestro del riso,"⁹⁵ but early in his career, Musco describes himself as an illiterate actor who had to struggle to learn his lines by memory, but who later secretly learned how to read and write.⁹⁶ Unlike the Sicilian writers who penned the verismo plays, these actors emerged from the lowest echelons of Sicilian society. Musco was born in 1871 in Catania, the last or almost last child of a family of between ten to twenty-four children.⁹⁷ Not much is known about his childhood; even his autobiography omits that part of his life. He did not go to school, but like most of the poor children of that time and place, he attempted to make a few lire any way he could. Musco's book focuses on his artistic beginnings, his love for *opra 'i pupi*, his early work as a child in the puppet theatres around Catania, and the beginning of his professional career.

In 1884, working at the *Teatro Sicilia* for the puppeteer Gregorio Grasso, Giovanni's oldest brother, Musco worked as a manipulator of puppets, singer, stagehand, storyteller, comic, a lover (as a character), and dancer.⁹⁸ In a typical farce, he would dress up as a prima ballerina with a long veil and a garland of flowers on his head, riding a donkey, which he would dismount

⁹⁴ Marinella Bragaglia, discovered by Grasso, was the prima donna of the company. She played Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. In 1903, she left the company and ran off with actor Ermete Novelli's nephew, Vittorio Marazzi. She also began acting *in lingua*. Later she joined Musco to create a new Sicilian company, *La Compagnia Bragaglia-Musco*. A company, Musco remarked, was not based on the celebrity of a *mattatore* but on the true art of the *mattatrici*. Bragaglia died tragically in a fire on a paddle steamer in 1918. Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 72, 90, 119.

⁹⁵ Enrico Serretta, introduction to *Cerca che trovi...* by Angelo Musco (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1929), 6.

⁹⁶ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 60.

⁹⁷ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 35.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

and then dance, though without pointe shoes.⁹⁹ He quickly grew tired of this life and went in search of better prospects, which took him outside of Catania and even to Naples. Out of work, he returned to Catania, where he suffered through a period of poverty and hunger.¹⁰⁰ So he would go from little theatre to little theatre offering his services as a singer, storyteller, and *trasformista*.¹⁰¹ He also began singing duets with the Anselmi sisters.¹⁰² Rosina Anselmi would continue to work with him throughout his career. His fame grew as a *macciattista* and singer, and by the 1890s, he was performing at Grasso's Teatro Machiavelli, sending the public into a frenzy with his signature song "A musca" (The Fly) and in his Giovanni Lizzio farce.¹⁰³

In the last years of the nineteenth century, when the puppet shows were suspended for the summer, Grasso was experimenting with a group of dialect actors, performing both with improvisation of a scene and with a written text.¹⁰⁴ Of course there were more of these improvised sketches, which featured popular characters and the brigands that infested the countryside, than actual written plays.¹⁰⁵ Some of the earliest of these scripts were 'U *Baitu* by Rizzotto, who also wrote *I mafiusi*, and some written by Carmelo Gangi, one of the actors. His

⁹⁹ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 58-59.

¹⁰¹ Common in the variety theatre of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a *trasformista* was a comic actor who could rapidly interpret character types, a *macchiattista*.

¹⁰² Musco, *Cerca che trovi*, 62.

¹⁰³ De Felice, *Teatro Siciliano*, 67. These little songs were sung in dialect. "A musca" (La mosca) was a popular comedic *filastrocca* (nursery rhyme) from the late nineteenth century that helped to make Angelo Musco famous; he became known as *Angilu a musca* (Angelo the fly). Giovanni Lizzio (1840-1920) was a Sicilian *cantastorie analfabeta* (illiterate singer/storyteller) who was known for his poems, duets, and motets, which were printed on broadsides and handed out in the piazzas where he performed. He was born in Giarre, Sicily, near Catania. Maria Bella Raudino, *Éthnos2006: Quaderno di etnologia* (Siracusa, Sicily: Centro Studi di Tradizioni Popolari "Turiddu Bella," 2006), 11.

¹⁰⁴ De Felice, *Teatro Siciliano*, 67.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

short works contained local color and a lifelike representation of Sicilian life.¹⁰⁶ These experiments were very successful and hence added to the repertory. But it was the first production of Gaspare Mosca and Rizzoto's *I Mafiusi* that became the new company's *cavallo di battaglia*, a tour de force. By 1900, they were an acting company performing in Sicilian and touring the island and the South.¹⁰⁷

By their second tour, a polemic arose concerning the limited nature of the repertory of the Sicilian company and, particularly, the liberties Grasso was taking with certain plays.¹⁰⁸ These were two separate issues, but both centered on Grasso's decisions as the *capocomico* of the company. In 1904, after the second tour of the new company, Sicilian critic and writer Luigi Natoli wrote a review of Grasso's company condemning his lack of new Sicilian dramas since the first tour and criticizing the inclusion of dramas such as Paolo Giacometti's Italian play *La morte civile*, translated into Sicilian by Luigi Capuana.¹⁰⁹ Natoli writes, "Egli [Grasso] ha pensato che se lo Scarpetta ha fatto fortuna riducendo in dialetto Napolitano *le pochades* francesi, egli poteva ben ridurre in siciliano drammi italiani, spagnuoli, e russi."¹¹⁰ (He thought that if Scarpetta could make a fortune adapting French *pochades* into Neapolitan dialect, he could well adapt Italian, Spanish, and Russian dramas into Sicilian.) Natoli repeats some of the earlier criticisms that had been made against Sicilian verismo, "e sembra che quattro milioni di persone non sappiano fare nè facciano altro che ruggire e impugnare il coltello; e si è venuto

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 65-66.

¹⁰⁸ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco*, 111-12.

¹⁰⁹ Luigi Natoli, *Una promessa mancata* in *Rivista teatrale italiana*, vol. 7 (1904) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007), 170.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 170. Eduardo Scarpetta (1853-1925) started as the mask Pulcinella of the *commedia dell'arte*, which he then transformed into an individual character. He helped to reform the stage of his time and is considered the inventor of Neapolitan style comedy. He was also known for his skillful reworkings of French *pochades* and vaudeville. Gaetana Marrone, "Neapolitan Theatre," in *A History of Italian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 245-47.

creando un tipo convenzionale che di siciliano ha soltanto qualche bestemmia tradizionale il coltello e il gergo mafioso” (and it seems that four million people do not know how to do nor do anything other than roar and hold a knife; and so it has come to create a conventional type that as a Sicilian he only has some traditional swearwords, the knife, and mafioso jargon).¹¹¹

However, Natoli points specifically to Grasso’s failure to enlarge the repertory with other Sicilian dramas, and representing other aspects of life on the island.¹¹² Another contemporary critic pointed out that Grasso’s limited repertory was tailored to show off his strengths as an actor, which included shouting and chewing up the scenery: hence the negative stereotypes of Sicilians.¹¹³ The second issue, connected to the first, was Grasso’s unauthorized additions and elaborations to the works of certain playwrights, including De Roberto, D’Annunzio, and Pirandello.¹¹⁴ Grasso added final scenes for his characters at the end of both *La Lupa* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*; he went so far as to write a continuation for *Cavalleria Rusticana* called *Sette anni dopo* (Seven years later).¹¹⁵ Verga blamed Grasso for *La Lupa*’s failure on the stage and was so incensed by Grasso’s changes that he withdrew permission for performance.¹¹⁶ Martoglio also came to have artistic differences with Grasso. He soon parted with the *capocomico* and began his own company.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 172

¹¹² Ibid. Luigi Capuana and the Neapolitan critic Eduardo Boutet debated the shortcomings of verismo’s representations of Sicily. See chapter two.

¹¹³ Muscarà Zappulla and Zappulla, *Grasso*, 72.

¹¹⁴ Gaetano Caponetto, “L’eredità di Giovanni Grasso e Angelo Musco per un teatro antropologico siciliano,” in *Giovanni Grasso e Angelo Musco il tragico e il comico nel teatro siciliano* (Catania: Teatro Stabile di Catania; Università di Catania, 1987), 24.

¹¹⁵ Muscarà Zappulla and Zappulla, *Grasso*, 130-33.

¹¹⁶ In a letter to his French translator Edouard Rod (January 29, 1908), Verga complains about Grasso, “mi torna in scena fra i carabinieri, dopo di aver ucciso Turridu, all’ultima scena!” (he returns on stage between two policemen, after having killed Turridu in the last scene). Grasso played *Compar Alfio*. Ibid., 112.

After breaking off with Grasso himself, Musco joined Martoglio's company. He later went on to form his own company. Musco wanted to portray a different kind of Sicilian, the opposite of Grasso. He wrote: "Ora se Giovanni Grasso, con la sua prodigiosa efficacia drammatica, aveva mostrato in tutto il mondo una sola faccia della nostra terra, un campo vastissimo io vedevo riservato alle mie possibilità per mostrare l'altra faccia, una specie di giocondo rovescio della medaglia."¹¹⁷ (Now if Giovanni Grasso, with prodigious effectiveness has shown the whole world only one side of our land, I have a vast field of possibilities for showing the other side, a kind of reversed jolly side of the coin.) The accuracy of this pronouncement can be seen in two photographs taken in 1903: the first, representing a scene from act two of *La zolfara*, shows Grasso, in a menacing pose, standing over a cowering Marinella Bragaglia, with one hand on her shoulder and the other pointing a long straight metal mining tool at her heart; and the second, representing a parody of the same scene in *La zolfara*, shows Musco in a similar pose holding a crooked metal tool over a crouched, fearful Carolina Bragaglia (sister of Marinella).¹¹⁸ Grasso's face is a mask of determined violence, while Musco's face is a comical grimace. Musco performed the farce immediately after the drama.

In the film version of *L'aria del continente*, with Angelo Musco reprising his role, the Sicilian actor responds to the common Italian proverb "tutto il mondo è paese" (all the world is a village), that is to say, people are the same all over, with "sì, ma qui è *troppo* paese," (yes, but here it is too much a village), meaning too small-minded.¹¹⁹ The proverb is meant to express the

¹¹⁷ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 103-4.

¹¹⁸ See figures 1 & 2.

¹¹⁹ *L'aria del continente*, directed by Gennaro Righelli (1936), YouTube video 1:6:53, posted by santibailorchannel2, February 8, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=begvcQDYOu0&list=UU4m9FqR08hAgnr9g9Lazcow&index=4&feature=plcp>. An indictment of Sicily's small town mentality said by Don Cola, Angelo

common nature of all humans and that those in big cities are no different from those in small towns. Musco takes the literal meaning and uses it to point out the smallness or pettiness of the thinking in Sicily, alluding to the pervasive malicious gossiping common on the island. In his autobiography, Musco complains about the “*male lingue*” (vicious gossipers) who had spit their venom towards him: he separated from his female singing partner as a young artist in Catania because of the vicious gossip directed towards him. It was okay to work on stage with a woman but scandalous to be seen walking the streets with her.¹²⁰

In his performance as Don Cola, Musco adds quite a bit of his persona to the character. The lines added above are throwaway lines that feel like Musco’s contribution. He was notorious for going off-script, and these moments were often inspired. Of course, it also led to some friction with his writers. Nevertheless, his portrayal of Cola alternates between comedy and pathos, reminiscent of his contemporaries the Marx Brothers and Charlie Chaplin. The film of this production, though far from a stage, and re-worked, is a gift.

Cinema

In the first two months of 2012, the films *L’aria del continente* (1936) by Nino Martoglio and *Pensaci, Giacomino* (1937) by Luigi Pirandello were uploaded to YouTube. Both films, adapted from Sicilian language plays, were translated into Italian and featured the original stage interpreter Angelo Musco in the roles of Don Cola Dusciu and Agustinu Toti. *L’aria del continente* also features his frequent acting partner, Rosina Anselmi. The accessibility on the

Musco, in the film version of *L’aria del continente*. In the published play version, the scene ends on the Delegato’s line. Angelo Musco adds the last line in the film version.

¹²⁰ Musco, *Cerca che trovi...*, 57.

Internet of these films provides a rare opportunity to glimpse the consummate artist that writers Martoglio and Pirandello fashioned many roles for.

Gian Piero Brunetta writes that Nino Martoglio, who directed and produced several naturalist films with his production company Morgan Film, including *Captain Blanco*, *Teresa Raquin*—based on Emile Zola’s book—, *Sperduti nel buio* (*Lost in the Dark*, 1914)—based on the Neopolitan play by Roberto Bracco (1861-1943)—, and the only film saved in its entirety, *Assunta Spina* (1915), played a central role in the development of neorealism in the Italian cinema.¹²¹ These films were shot on location and portrayed the lives of the proletariat speaking in their local dialects and performing local customs. Giovanni Grasso reprises his stage role in *Sperduti*, completing the connection with verismo. Produced during a period when the Italian film industry was under the control of the Fascist government, Martoglio’s original story has undergone some inevitable changes in its adaptation to the screen. The first third of the film takes place in Rome and shows off an international, glitzy, art deco mecca, with its hotels and nightclubs, in contrast to the play, which is set entirely in an unnamed town in the interior of Sicily. The language of the film is Italian, not Sicilian, and the film has also added singing and dancing, indeed, the Roman sequence in the nightclub includes several acts that would for that time have seemed risqué, including the sexually suggestive dance of Mille Milford.

Playing alongside Rosina Anselmi, as his sister, Musco dominates the film, just as he had dominated the stage version. Musco plays the buffoonish Sicilian who becomes enthralled with everything Roman (*continentale*) after a bout of appendicitis brings him North for an operation. The film, maybe more than the play, attempts to draw a sharp contrast between the image of the

¹²¹ Gian Piero Bruetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Films from its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2003), 53. See also Peter E. Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), 15.

international modern cities of the North, somewhat jaded, perhaps even bacchanal, to that of the more wholesome, picturesque image of the South, with the peasants dancing and singing as they celebrate the harvest, which is a scene at the end of the film.

In just these two films, what seems evident is that Musco's power as an actor emanates from an ability not only to present a performance rich in vitality, focus, and humanity, but also from a supple physicality that allows him to shift easily from character to character. In the case of *L'aria dell continente* and *Pensaci Giacomino*, the transformation includes one from a relatively young man to a feeble old man with a cane. His virtuosity with physical comedy is evidenced in a scene close to the beginning of *L'aria del continente*, when Don Cola demonstrates in mime the removal of his appendix during a recent operation—exemplifying a classic *lazzo*. Antonio Scuderi writes that a number of theatre critics from the early twentieth century, including Antonio Gramsci, saw a continuation of the improvisational skills of *commedia dell'arte* in Giovanni Grasso's dialect acting company, of which Musco was a member.¹²² Musco was a master at the *lazzo* going back to his days as a *macchiettista*.

Much later in the same film, Musco does a dance parodying one done by Milla Milford, the young gold digger who had used and deceived him. He dances on his toes and pirouettes with a grace that belies his age and his big round belly. These moments provide small glimpses of an actor whom contemporary critics praised as an extraordinary vocal and imaginative mimic whose powers were evident in works from tragedy to comedy, and who was named the able “giocoliere” (juggler) of gestures and words.¹²³ In a review published in *Avanti!* (March 29, 1918), Antonio Gramsci wrote that the success of the dialect plays by Pirandello and Martoglio

¹²² “Contemporary scholarship on the techniques of *commedia* improvisation, which were apparently akin to those used in oral traditions, substantiates this notion.” Antonio Scuderi, “Sicilian Dialect Theatre,” 260.

¹²³ Muscarà and Zappulla, *Musco* 225.

were due in large part to Angelo Musco.¹²⁴ Gramsci claims that with Musco, theatre had returned to its origins, and that the actor truly becomes the re-creator of the work of art.¹²⁵

Musco adds a layer of interpretation and meaning to the work that is vital to its success on the stage. Gramsci continues, “Questa si confonde col suo spirito, si scompone nei suoi elementi primordiali e si ricomponne in una sintesi di movimenti, di danza, elementare, di atteggiamento plastico.”¹²⁶ (The work is fused with his spirit, it is broken down into its primordial element parts and recomposed in a synthesis of dance of an elementary, well-formed beauty).¹²⁷ Gramsci continues that the actor Musco gives a physical life to what was literary prose, a life of integral expression where the whole body becomes language; indeed, the whole body speaks.¹²⁸ Musco’s performance in these films is a testament to Gramsci’s review. It is the physical agility and mastery of movement that stands out. In the discovery scene about Milla, late in *L’aria del continente*, Don Cola, in his despair, attempts to kill himself for being such a fool; his sister is holding back the whole time. He punches his head, one side then the other, bouncing from side to side, like a puppet. His attempts are feeble and half-hearted, and in a moment, the foolish Cola puts on his Sicilian cap, lights up his pipe, and becomes the Sicilian gentleman again.

The result of this portrayal was a gullible character who does not seek revenge for his ill-treatment from Milla, a fallible and very human persona, quite far from Alfio or any of the mafiosi characters from verismo—keeping in mind that a mafioso is described as a man of

¹²⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Marxismo e letteratura*, ed. Giuliano Manacorda (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1975), 434.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Robert S. Dombroski, “On Gramsci’s Criticism,” in *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, ed. James Martin (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.

¹²⁸ Gramsci, *Marxismo*, 435.

honour who is clever, passionate, and demands respect.¹²⁹ Musco's characters inspire compassion even as they appear as buffoons. This is true of Cola and especially true of the professor in Pirandello's *Pensaci, Giacomino*. In this role, also created for him by Pirandello, Musco plays a seventy-year old teacher who marries a young woman from his town, after her parents toss her out for getting pregnant. *Il professore* seems foolish to the townsfolk but his action is noble. He even obtains a job in town for the deadbeat father. Musco's performance demonstrates flexibility in its physicality and humanity, and the furthest you could go from the dangerous Sicilian of verismo. It is a gentler Sicilianness that poses no threat. Musco's characterizations still offered a stereotype, even if it was not a mafioso. Rather, it was the easily duped country bumpkin an audience could laugh at and feel comfortable with.

Grasso's portrayals of the Sicilian reinforced perceptions by the Northern audiences about the South's savage or semi-savage nature. With the new dramaturgy of Martoglio and Pirandello, Musco was able to expand that perception with his comedic performances. The physicality of these performances broke theatrical and social conventions of decorum and civility practiced by the bourgeoisie and the professional acting community that they were accustomed to. Nevertheless, the new dramaturgy and image did not do away with the old; rather it merely added a new dimension to the stereotypes. Interestingly, stereotypes of the Sicilian woman did not change. Both *L'aria dell' continente* and *Liola* portray the main female characters as sexual predators. In my research, I have found that there is very little written about these women. Muscarà and Zappula write that as little as there is about the Sicilian actor from this period, there is even less about the actress. The performances by Sicilian women in these roles would be an interesting line of research.

¹²⁹ See chapters one and two.

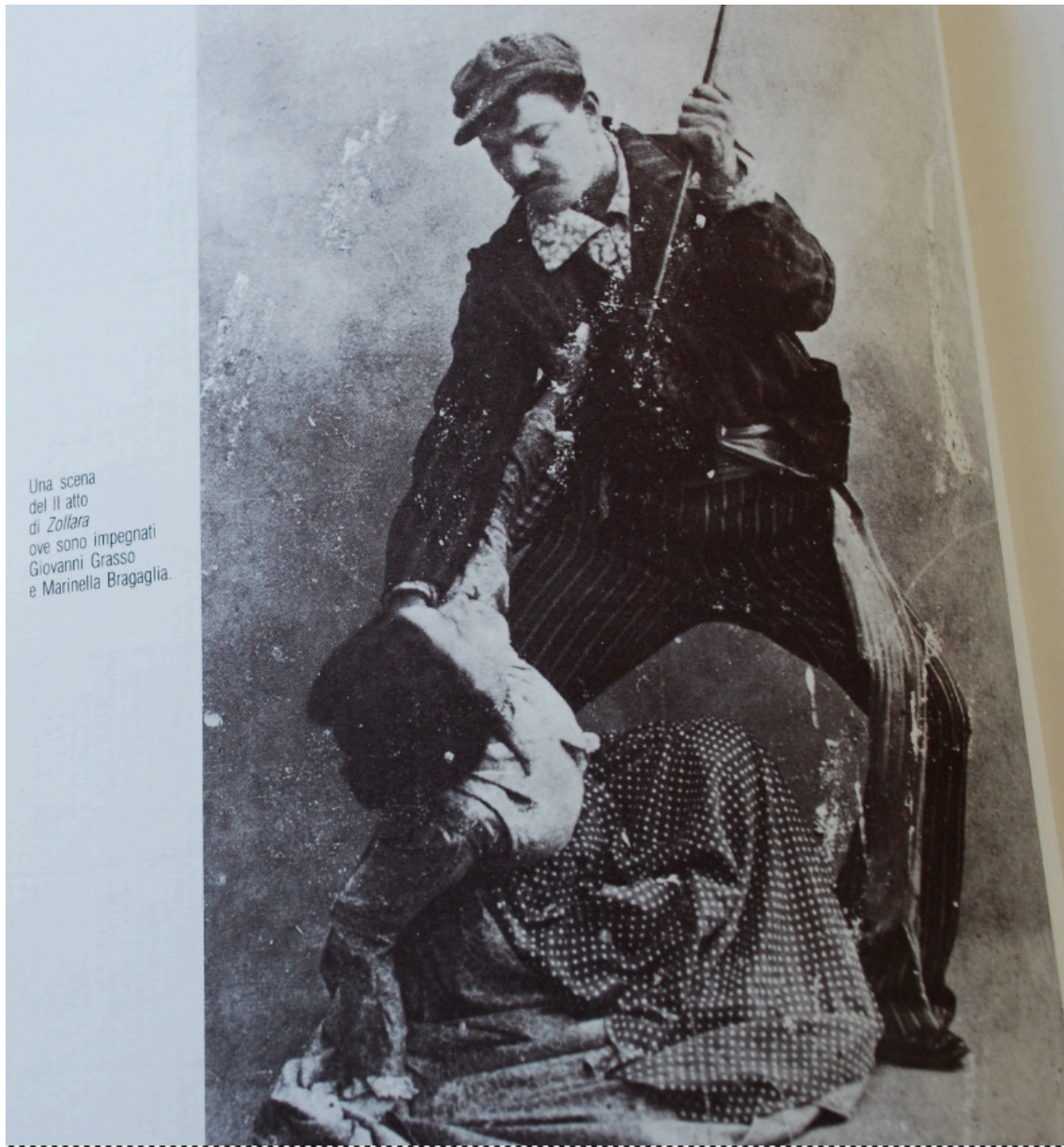


Figure 5 Giovanni Grasso and Marinella Bragaglia in Act II of *La zolfara*. Reprinted with permission by Sarah Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla, *Angelo Musco. The gesture, facial expression, art*, Palermo, Novecento, 1987.



Figure 6 Angelo Musco and Carolina Bragaglia in a parody of Giovanni Grasso's performance in *La zolfara*. Reprinted with permission by Sarah Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla, *Angelo Musco. The gesture, facial expression, art*, Palermo, Novecento, 1987.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have attempted to make two contributions to existing scholarly discussions—one about Sicilian theatre in the post-*Risorgimento* period and the other theoretical. In the first instance, I have included discussions on Sicilian theatre and pivotal playwrights of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that have received little attention in English language scholarship, with the exception of Giovanni Verga and Luigi Pirandello. I have attempted to fill in a gap of knowledge on this period in Sicily, which, I would argue, in terms of theatre, was the island's richest and most influential. I have limited my study to what I believe are key theatre works and figures that are representative—but I have certainly not written a comprehensive history of theatre in the region. Indeed, I have focused almost exclusively on the popular theatre of Catania and Palermo, and I have omitted any discussion of opera, which was probably the most popular form of entertainment at that time.

In the second instance, theoretically, I have argued that the theatre in Sicily after the *Risorgimento* was pivotal to the construction of a Sicilian identity. Sicilian culture retained both elements of resistance to northern Italian dominance and the negative stereotypes constructed and promulgated in the North. In the introduction, I quote the Sicilian band Tintuira, “Nun sugnu stranu ma sicilianu” (I’m not strange, I’m Sicilian), a simple lyric that I believe exemplifies this rather complex and conflicted Sicilian identity. My three chapters follow in a chronological order from the inception of what would become a national Sicilian based theatre, beginning with *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* in 1863 to the height of its popularity with the works of Nino Martoglio and Pirandello performed by one of the Sicilian acting troupes of the early twentieth century.

In my first chapter “*I mafiusi di la Vicaria*: The Beginning of the Fetishization of the Mafioso,” I limited my discussion to the popular theatre in Palermo, its influence on *versimo*,

and how the play, along with other historical events in Sicily contributed to the construction of the Sicilian as mafioso stereotype. The origins of the mafia are not known, nor are the origins of the play, *I mafiusi* and, hence, I found myself swimming through a sea of speculation. For the most part I relied on Giuseppe Guido Loschiavo and Alfredo Barbina for theories on how the play was born—both scholars also included Italian and Sicilian versions of the play. *I mafiusi* (acts two and three) provides probably one of the most detailed descriptions of a complex criminal organization, and its belief system, at a time before government authorities even knew of its existence. The play also introduces a naturalistic style that resembles what would become verismo. I have tried to offer some perspective on this play as both a historical document on the mafia and as a cultural product coming out of popular theatre.

There certainly are areas of investigation that I did not attempt here, as I remained focused on making the connection between this early work and its influence on Sicilian artists, and on the perspective of the island that *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* brought to the rest of Italy. One area of study is in film, which I believe would offer a fruitful study in how Gioachino Funciazza and his offspring have penetrated Italian and American cinema. An example is the beginning of the realistic depiction of the mafioso in the early 1960s. During this period Italian cinema attempted to move away from a mythical representation of the mafia, sometimes resembling a Sicilian western, and instead attempted to represent a more “realistic” and “less romantic” *cosa nostra*.¹ Two very different films premiered in 1962 that, I believe, are good examples of this move: the first is Francesco Rosi’s *Salvatore Giuliano* dramatized documentary, (a more precise term might be docudrama), which attempts to offer insights into the death of the outlaw Salvatore Giuliano by police in a small village in 1950; the second is Alberto Lattuada’s

¹ Roberto Chiesi, “The Octopus’s Tentacles,” trans. Alison Dundy, in *Mafioso*, directed by Alberto Lattuada (1962; The Criterion Collection, 2008), DVD.

Mafioso, which was based on the true story of a hired assassin for the mafia; but the story was then reworked as a stylized dark comedy (the assassin's identity remains secret maintaining *omertà*). Both films provide a more "realistic" vision of the mafioso, the mafia, and its cultural impact on the South. Indeed, though there is a long history of the mafioso in the cinema, I only touch on it briefly.

I also limited my study to looking at the representation of the mafioso primarily in the nineteenth century according to the parameters I set above. In further research I might explore other popular cultural products about the mafioso including the very successful serialized novel, *I beati Paoli*. I had originally included a short discussion about this novel in my first chapter, but I decided that it deserved far more attention than I could give it. A short summary below about the novel hints at a possible connection with the mafioso as constructed in Sicily in the nineteenth century, but also suggests other influences and a different context. Its popular format as a serialized novel also suggests a larger audience in the North and possibly the South, keeping in mind the high rate of illiteracy in Sicily in the early twentieth century.

Between May 1909 and January 1910 in the Palermitan daily newspaper *Giornale di Sicilia*, a serialized novel *I beati Paoli* (*The Blessed Paolists*) by the Palermitan Luigi Natoli (1857-1941) under the pen name William Galt became the most popular series to hit the stands. Coming out at roughly the same time as the Sicilian acting companies were enjoying their successes, the serialized novel added its own mythology to the beginnings of the mafia. First published in 239 installments, it became a bestseller and was printed in 1921 and again in 1949, the gap due to censorship of revolutionary material by the Fascist government.²

² Jane C. Schneider and Peter T. Schneider, *Reversible Destiny: Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 41-42.

Written as a historical novel, it tells the story of the legendary “*società segreta d’onore*” (the secret society of honor) of Palermo from 1698 to 1719.³ *I beati Paoli* takes place during the feudal period in Sicily and is about a society of men coming from all classes, including the peasant class, who meted out justice to noblemen who had abused their power and committed injustices against their vassals. Dressed as monks during the day, these men travelled to different churches to obtain information and met in the subterranean tunnels underneath Palermo. Then by night, dressed in black hoods with masks, they would punish the wicked. These shadowy figures were, in a sense, fighting for justice in a time when the authority figures were unwilling or unable to. The stories of their exploits are also presumably based on some truth, but their super good deeds are overstated. They, like the mafioso, were out for themselves—that is aggregating money and power for themselves, while killing those who got in their way.

I beati Paoli, like *I mafiusi*, lent the real mafioso a kind of glamour and a kind of brand that allowed them to gain a reputation, not only in Italy, but eventually around the world. It is a representation of glamour that hides the ugliness, violence, and corruption of an organization that only devours all it comes in contact with—without honour and without a sense of humanity. Because I argue that *I mafiusi* was the first successful cultural product to offer audiences entertainment about organized crime, *I beati Paoli* seems to have some connection to that earlier work. More importantly, as I argue that *I Mafiusi* was the first work to brand the Sicilian as a mafioso, constructing a pervasive stereotype, *I beati Paoli* may have further perpetuated that stereotype to a larger audience. This could be a question for further research.

In my second chapter, “The Sicilian Verismo of Verga, Capuana, and *Cavalleria Rusticana*,” I focus on the influence of Giovanni Verga’s short story, *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

³ See Luigi Natoli, *I beati Paoli* (Palermo: Flaccovio editore, 2010).

Though I am primarily focused on Verga's success on the stage, I also discuss the literary contribution of verismo. I argue that by providing a vivid apparently realistic representation of the Sicilian as an exotic other, Verga reinforced a negative perception of the island already in the structure of feeling. In addition, I argue that his work also nurtured the creation of a whole new genre of entertainment that would include variations of his *Alfio and Turridu*. I review the theory of verismo and how Italian and French literary works were instrumental in the movement, and I compare Capuana's Sicilian play *Malià* to Verga's work, noting the similarities and differences. Further analysis on the representation of the Sicilian woman in verismo and in popular theatre on the island would be a possible point of exploration. The strict patriarchal system in Sicily allowed women very little freedom, and cultural products tended to represent women as versions of the whore or Madonna. In this study my focus was mainly on Sicilian men, and hence I did not evaluate this topic in any depth.

In chapter three, "Performing Sicilianness: *L'Aria del Continente* and *Liola: commedia campestre*," I analyzed the performance of an identity on the stage in two particular works by Sicilians. Using semiotics as a tool, I posited that signs of the performances by Sicilian actors could be interpreted as embodying Sicilianness. Using Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* as a guide, I analyzed the cultural system of the Sicilian actor of the late nineteenth century. I argue that the differences in Sicilian culture vis-à-vis the rest of Italy provided audiences with a sense of newness in what they were seeing. Indeed, the conventions of the regional, "untrained" Sicilian actor would not follow the rules of what the bourgeois audiences expected – that is what they saw on the professional Italian stage. These differences, I argue, were then connected to other images of the uncivilized Sicilian. I focused my discussion on the famous Sicilian actor, Angelo Musco, whose performances are

documented by contemporary sources. In addition, I had the opportunity to view two of the actor's works, which were adapted to film in the 1930s. These films, *L'aria del continente* and *Pensaci Giacomino!* provide a rare glimpse into the style and physical presence of a type of actor that is long gone.

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