

**DENOUNCEMENT, ENGAGEMENT AND DIALECT:
THE SICILIAN MYSTERY NOVELS OF LEONARDO SCIASCIA**

AND ANDREA CAMILLERI

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The genre of the mystery novel offers an ideal medium to analyze social injustice. The guise of criminal investigations allows for an examination of deviant behavior across diverse social strata and its causes and effects upon modern society. In theory, institutional justice in Italy extends equal rights and treatment to all citizens, irrespective of social standing or political affiliation. However, an analysis of criminal activity and the manner in which it is investigated and prosecuted reveals that this principle does not always hold true. These crimes-- each a labyrinth of social and political connections, the daunting task of exposing those responsible and bringing them to justice within the framework of the legal system-- constitute the plot of the Sicilian mystery novel.

Despite the valiant and occasionally successful efforts of an investigator to solve these crimes, it is impossible to prosecute the guilty parties within the framework of the legal system. This break of the Sicilian mystery novel with the tradition of the genre prompted Italo Calvino to comment on "...the impossibility of the mystery novel within a

Sicilian context” (Calvino, Foreword. *To Each his Own*).¹ These mystery novels raise the question: What are the social phenomena unique to a Sicilian context that prevent institutionalized justice from being administered and what are the historical reasons responsible for such phenomena?

When read as reflections of modern Sicilian society and the complex social problems that beleaguer it, the mystery novels of Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri act as powerful tools of social denouncement. Through these novels their authors denounce the obscure web of connections and corruption that plagues not only Sicily but the Italian mainland as well. These mysteries reflect a society that is increasingly socially engaged, and they hint at the evolution of a collective moral consciousness in Sicily since Sciascia first published *The Day of the Owl* in 1961.

This dissertation examines the innovative stylistic and thematic elements that make Sciascia and Camilleri’s literary contributions unique while reflecting the socially unjust cultural reality in which they were raised.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Calvino, Prefazione. *A Ciascuno il Suo*. By Leonardo Sciascia. Milano: Adelphi, 1988. (“...come viene dimostrata l’impossibilità del romanzo giallo nell’ambiente siciliano.”)

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Introduction

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...
Every step toward the goal of justice requires
sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless
exertions and passionate concern of dedicated
individuals.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

In an interview the renowned Italian prosecutor Gian Carlo Caselli once commented, that in order to understand Sicily he read Sicilian authors from Giovanni Verga and Luigi Pirandello to Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri. As proof, he then pulled a copy of *The Fly Game (Il gioco della mosca)* by Camilleri, out of his pocket (Sorgi 18). His coupling of Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri with two of Sicily's most renowned authors bears testament to the value and importance of their literary creation.

Both Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri have made a tremendous contribution to Italian literature by introducing contemporary Sicilian culture and its history to a wide audience. Although their writing styles differ dramatically, they both found the genre of the mystery novel to be the most effective mode of expression for their critique of Sicilian culture. Sciascia's first mystery novel, *The Day of the Owl (Il giorno della civetta)*, published in 1961, was a revolutionary text-- the first published novel that had the Mafia as its subject. With this publication Sciascia challenged the culture of conspiratorial silence (known as *omertà*) that enables the Mafia to exist, and implicitly forced the public to acknowledge this parasitic social phenomenon. Paradoxically, the presence of the Mafia and its culture of *omertà* dictated the ambiguities of Sciascia's text;

this break of the Sicilian mystery novel with the tradition of the genre prompted Italo Calvino in 1965 to comment on "...the impossibility of the mystery novel within a Sicilian context" (Calvino, Foreword. *To Each his Own [A ciascuno il suo]* by Leonardo Sciascia).²

In chapter one I examine Leonardo Sciascia's lifelong contributions to Italian cultural and the innovative elements of his mystery novels. His life was devoted to civic engagement, and his early years of working as a state employee and an elementary school teacher gave him tremendous insight into the deplorable conditions of Sicilian laborers. A prolific researcher and writer, he published numerous essays, historical novels and critiques, in addition to six mystery novels that he wrote over the span of three decades. This study focuses primarily on the importance of his mystery novels; they act as powerful tools of social denouncement that reflect the social reality in which they were written to demonstrate how the Mafia has changed since it first became the subject of widespread public debate in the 1960s.

While many critics refer to Sciascia as socially "engaged" in the Sartrean sense, Sciascia himself expressed his estrangement from that definition of "engaged literature" (*letteratura "impegnata"*), which he regarded as synonymous with political literature in support of a particular party. By contrast, Sciascia reveals his admiration for the socially engaged literature of the Enlightenment:

The fact of looking for and stating the truth derives from, more than a humanistic tradition, an enlightened tradition. Voltaire was truly the father of this approach, later continued by Zola... The danger has been to abusively redirect this approach to a partisan and political position. Voltaire and Zola, however, but not Sartre. Like Voltaire and Zola, therefore, it is my duty to speak of that of which I am convinced. Under no circumstances am I however

² "...come viene dimostrata l'impossibilità del romanzo giallo nell'ambiente siciliano."

an engaged writer, under no circumstances am I a teacher of thought. (Sciascia, Foreword. *One Way or Another*)³

The legacy of Sciascia's novel approach to denouncing social injustices through literature and specifically the genre of the mystery novel is continued by his fellow Sicilian and contemporary author Andrea Camilleri. Chapter two explores the extraordinary life of this dynamic man and his extensive theatrical and literary production. On the heels of a prolific career as a director for theater, television and radio, in addition to teaching for decades at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome, the native of Southwestern Sicily published his first novel at the age of 64 to become Italy's most widely published contemporary author. Like Sciascia, Camilleri regards Sicily as a microcosm to explore universal social injustice. His mystery novels are of vital importance to contemporary Italian literature, for they examine explosive social issues that presently confront Sicily and Italy, as well as Europe and beyond.

The Sicilian author Vincenzo Consolo (a close friend of Sciascia's) accused Camilleri of having betrayed the tradition of engaged literature embraced by Sciascia and much of Sicilian literature. On one occasion he said that he understood Camilleri had little to do with Sciascia and civic engagement and that, in his opinion, one of the reasons for his literary success was that he doesn't make readers think (Sorgi 145).⁴ I would argue the opposite is true and that Camilleri's novels are perhaps more socially engaged than Sciascia's, in certain respects. While Sciascia's literary contribution was

³ "Il fatto di cercare e dire la verità rinvia, più che a una tradizione umanista, a una tradizione del secolo dei lumi. Voltaire è stato davvero il padre di questo atteggiamento, ripreso più tardi da Zola... Il pericolo è stato di ricondurre abusivamente quest'atteggiamento a una posizione partigiana e politica. Voltaire e Zola, dunque, ma non Sartre. Come Voltaire e Zola, dunque, è un mio dovere parlare, di ciò di cui sono convinto. In nessun caso sono però uno scrittore impegnato, partigiano, in nessun caso sono un maestro di pensiero."

⁴ "Di Camilleri ho capito che c'entra poco con Sciascia e con l'impegno civile." "...Uno dei motivi di successo di Camilleri, a mio avviso, anche se forse sbaglio, è che non fa pensare."

instrumental in bringing the oppressive and omnipresent problem of the Mafia in Sicily to the forefront of national political attention, it offered readers little insight into Sicilian culture.

On the contrary, Camilleri provides an invaluable window to the social norms and language of Sicily, the facets of contemporary culture that are crucial to understanding the island's social problems. Chapter two also considers the social impact of Camilleri's literary contribution that has been largely obscured by the Italian literary establishment.⁵ It is noteworthy that Camilleri writes in an era in which it is not necessary to bring attention to the socially destructive nature of the Mafia; the phenomenon has garnered public condemnation and has been officially combated by the State (albeit, unsuccessfully). Unlike Sciascia, Camilleri writes for a public that lives with the Mafia on its conscience and is cognizant of the consequences of silent *in-action*; contemporary citizens are more active in their denouncement of social ills than previous generations.⁶ This widespread consciousness allows for Camilleri's nuanced critique of the Mafia's socially destructive nature. The subtle implication, that the Mafia is responsible for much of the crime in Camilleri's novels, mirrors the increasingly sophisticated and technological network that shrouds Mafia members in anonymity. The less esoteric nature and wider diffusion of Camilleri's novels, when contrasted with those of Sciascia, in addition to his use of a hybrid Sicilian dialect, give Camilleri's literary contribution an undeniable social force.

⁵ It is interesting to recall the initial reaction of critics in response to Luigi Pirandello's art. In July of 1916 Adriano Tilgher made a comment in reference to Pirandello's comedy, *Think about It, Giacomino!* (*Pensaci, Giacomino!*) stating that Pirandello's art was devoid of profound content, it was an art of idleness and entertainment and that it lacked moral seriousness. (Sciascia, *Alfabeto Pirandelliano*. 69).

⁶ For example, Sicilians mobilized to publicly denounce the Mafia in solidarity following the assassination of Sicilian magistrates in the early 1990s (behavior in part attributable to Sciascia's courageous example).

When I met with Camilleri in 2003, I asked him if he felt his literary contribution was socially engaged. He said that in his view the act of writing is in itself an important act of engagement and that he wrote specifically to communicate and interact with an audience. Furthermore, he maintains that his refusal to refer to the Mafia by name prompts his audience to consider the veil of conspiratorial silence that facilitates the elaborate, socially destructive crimes that his novels depict.⁷

Ironically, Sciascia's use of the standard Italian language, a register intended to increase the diffusion of his message and ensure comprehension, may have restricted his readership. While the esoteric nature of his works was well-received by the literary establishment, educated professionals and politicians, it excluded less sophisticated readers from his audience, precisely those whose consensus and participation is crucial to affecting meaningful social change. By appealing to the conscience of socially powerful individuals to change a system of favors and corruption (some politicians owe their political position to local mafia members) from which they benefit, Sciascia's approach could not instigate truly effective change.

By contrast, Camilleri's novels incorporate a language reminiscent of Sicilian dialect as opposed to the Standard Italian language which his characters regard as the bureaucratic language of the State. Unexpectedly, his novels have engaged millions of enthusiastic readers that span the socio-economic spectrum in Sicily, Italy and abroad (Sorgi 79).⁸ Passionate readers of all ages enter into the mechanism of his mysteries and

⁷ Camilleri, Andrea. Personal interview. 4 Nov 2003.

⁸ Carlo Bo suggested that "Camilleri fills a void that is the writing of high entertainment, something present in England but absent in Italian culture." ("Camilleri occupa uno spazio vuoto, che in Italia finora non c'era, che è la scrittura d'intrattenimento alto; cosa che in Inghilterra c'è e che invece da noi manca completamente.") Sorgi comments that others have referred to Camilleri as a "craftsman of writing" ("artigiano della scrittura").

engage the author directly to express their opinions on the verisimilitude of aspects of his plots. Avid readers of his mysteries relate with the characters and develop a special relationship with Camilleri as they invest time and energy to learn the basics of his dialect creation.

The awareness that Sciascia drew to the Mafia represented a milestone in a generational battle against organized crime in Sicily; indeed, his contribution was a fundamental catalyst for the creation of an Antimafia crusade. His publications drew national and international attention to organized criminal activity in Sicily and forced the government to abandon its complacency in the face of Mafia activity. However, to change a culture and eradicate problems that have existed for centuries it takes a revolution and ultimately, as the Italian revolutionary theorist Antonio Gramsci asserted, revolution must come from within the existing system.

Little can be gleaned about Sicilian culture from Sciascia's mysteries and hence, the highly innovative nature of Camilleri's novels-- they humanize the victims of organized crime as they depict average Sicilians whose lives are adversely impacted by Mafia activity. Camilleri's novels are vitally important to continuing the social crusade initiated by Sciascia; they draw attention to the weak and exploited in hopes of eliminating social injustices. When read in a chronological order, both Sciascia and Camilleri's mystery novels provide a window to modern/contemporary Sicilian culture that reveals the evolution of a collective moral consciousness. Sadly, this evolution of consciousness is juxtaposed with that of the Mafia, a labyrinth of global activity whose increasingly elusive nature has no regard for human life.

Chapter three considers a number of the historical novels and essays written by Sciascia and Camilleri; both authors are adamant that the elements responsible for Sicily's modern social injustice are found in the island's history. While they agree on the crucial importance of studying historical events that have been obscured by the official version of history, they differ in their approach. Sciascia examines profound, historical events that have shaped Sicilians' attitudes towards government, law and religion: his novels explore the barbaric activities of the Holy Inquisition, land laws and taxation that favored the nobility and the Church's persecution of bishops in Sicily. By contrast, Camilleri focuses on local historical events that have affected the merchant and lower-classes, events that are often neglected by historians as they reveal the systemic repression and abuse of the lower classes by local government and church officials.

The concluding and fourth chapter regards the "disappearance" novels of Sciascia, Camilleri and their literary predecessor Luigi Pirandello, who hailed from the same southwestern province of the island. These three authors are inextricably linked through their cultural affinities and their shared preoccupation with the themes of identity and moral responsibility in the context of a greater social good. A reading of their disappearance novels provides a synthesis of their unique literary visions.

1

Leonardo Sciascia: Forging the Path of Social Engagement through the Sicilian Mystery Novel

I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

-Elie Wiesel

1.1 Introduction

In modern Sicilian society, organized crime is not an aberration but rather a recognized system that operates parallel to and arguably, in harmony with that of the State. It benefits a few to the detriment of the majority, which is why Sciascia called the Mafia a “parasitic bourgeoisie” in *To Future Memory (A futura memoria)*. Sciascia attributed the perpetual cycle of miserable economic and social conditions in Sicily to the Mafia-like attitude that is commonplace in Sicilian daily life. This multi-faceted and elusive organization secured a place within Sicilian society as the result of complex historical events that occurred during recent centuries in Sicily, Italy’s largest region.

Throughout history, Sicily has been conquered and inhabited by numerous cultures as a result of its geographic location in the heart of the Mediterranean. Centuries of foreign domination are partly responsible for an entrenched distrust of institutionalized government and law enforcement within Sicilian culture and for the creation of the Mafia. Rather than appeal to the official system of justice for representation, people

would turn to members of the Mafia to settle agrarian disputes and seek retribution for injustices suffered. Initially, the organization offered protection to powerless individuals and played a constructive role in Sicilian society for which it earned the trust and respect of locals. Its infrastructure was reinforced by the creation of an Italian nation state in 1861 that would radically alter Sicilian society through agrarian land reforms, the imposition of taxes and a military draft, all of which caused the general public to resent the national government and its representatives.

Under the Fascist regime, the Mafia was regarded as a threat to the State's power and those connected to organized crime, an activity that undermined Fascist totalitarian rule, were aggressively persecuted. Although effectively suppressed by the Fascists, organized criminal activity was not eradicated. Following the Second World War the Sicilian Mafia, known as "Cosa Nostra" (a name that refers specifically to the Mafia in Sicily) vigorously resumed its activities, revitalized by the freedom of democracy. In a sense, Italy's post-war government, The First Republic, served as a conduit for the Mafia's resurgence as many members of the Christian Democratic Party (the party that would monopolize political power for more than fifty years following the Second World War) either directly or indirectly profited from their illegal activities.

Despite the Mafia's transformation into a socially destructive and parasitic organization, Sicilians remain reluctant to cooperate with official investigations into its activity, an attitude that empowers organized crime and undermines the legitimacy of the official system of justice. It was against this culture of conspiratorial silence (*omertà*) that Leonardo Sciascia courageously rebelled, making it his mission to denounce Mafia activity and the social injustices responsible for its creation.

1.2 Life

Leonardo Sciascia was born in Racalmuto, Sicily in 1921, a small town in the southwestern province of Agrigento, one of the poorest and least developed areas of Italy. Sciascia's family was of modest means as his father worked as a manager for a sulfur mining company. Growing up, he witnessed the intense poverty in which others lived and the unjust conditions to which laborers were subjected. This experience molded his consciousness of the human condition and strengthened his conviction that it is the civil obligation of the privileged and educated to fight for social justice to protect the less fortunate.

As an elementary school teacher in Racalmuto during the post-war decades, he had daily contact with the economic hardships that shaped the lives of his pupils. From this first-hand experience Sciascia developed an acute awareness of the effects of corruption and the abuse of power upon the general population. His belief that such social conditions were responsible for the underdevelopment and lack of opportunity in Sicily became the focus of his writing.

To best understand the social and economic conditions in which Sciascia lived and taught, one must read *Salt in the Wound (Le parrocchie di Regalpetra)*, which he wrote in 1954. Compelled to write a true chronicle of the scholastic year's events, these chronicles embody the themes that would reoccur throughout Sciascia's literary production. The chapters are entitled: "The History of Regalpetra," "A Brief Chronicle of the Regime," "Circle of the Concord," "Mayors and Police Commissioners," "Parish Priests and Archpriests," "Scholastic Chronicles," "The Salt Miners," "Electoral Diary,"

“The Snow and Christmas.” Each chapter examines a facet of Sicilian society and the intense social injustice that inspired Sciascia’s social engagement through his literary activity and political participation.

Although the chronicle is set in the imaginary town of Regalpetra, Sicily, Sciascia stated that Regalpetra was analogous with hundreds of towns across the island. To his amazement, upon the publication of these scholastic chronicles in the bimonthly journal, “New Arguments” (“Nuovi argomenti” volume n.12 January-February, 1955), Sciascia received acknowledgement from teachers across Sicily that shared his experience and commended him for his courage in transcribing such crude realities. Sciascia added the following note to a later edition of *Salt in the Wound*:

I believed that I had transcribed the facts of a particular experience in these chronicles; I did not think similar conditions were found in other parts of Sicily and in cities such as Palermo and Catania. The consensus that my Sicilian colleagues demonstrated, that all I had written was true, and that I had possessed the courage to write about it, surprised me in a certain sense. Some told me that in certain areas, conditions are even worse. (Sciascia 143)⁹

These scholastic chronicles reveal the driving forces behind Sciascia’s passion for social justice. He describes the impoverished economic conditions of his pupils, the sons of farmers, salt and sulfur miners who attend school to the chagrin of parents who desperately need their help in the fields and elsewhere to support their families. They come dressed in rags with desperate hunger in their eyes to learn to read and write, useless skills for the destiny to which they, as their fathers beforehand, are condemned. Sciascia was incredibly frustrated by this cycle of poverty, and with the state-imposed

⁹ “Credevo di aver trascritto in esse i dati di una particolare esperienza, non pensavo condizioni simili si riscontrassero in altre parti della Sicilia, anche in città come Palermo e Catania. Il consenso che colleghi siciliani mi manifestarono, che tutto quel che avevo scritto era vero, e che avevo avuto il coraggio di scriverlo, in un certo senso mi sorprese. Qualcuno mi disse che, in certi posti, c’è addirittura di peggio.”

curriculum he was required to teach-- material that had absolutely no relevance to the lives of his pupils and to which they could not relate. He writes:

I read them a poem, I search for the clearest words, but it suffices to really look at them as they are, far away as if at the end of a reversed binocular, in their reality of misery and rancor, far away with their confused thoughts, their tiny desires of unattainable things, and the luminous echo of poetry shatters within me. (Sciascia 143)¹⁰

Sciascia suggested that Alessandro Manzoni's *The Betrothed* (*I promessi sposi*) be an integral part of the school curriculum, not for the portrait that it offers of 17th Century Italy but rather, for the reflection it offers of modern day Italy (*To Future Memory* 91).

He describes the discomfort he felt standing in decent clothing in front of such underprivileged children whose parents regarded him as a representative of the State, the State which imposed taxes, mandatory military service and education for their sons, depriving them of farm hands. He writes, "Here, in a remote village in Sicily, I enter the classroom with the heavy heart of a sulfur miner who descends into the dark mining tunnels" (*Salt in the Wound* 111).¹¹

Sciascia was committed to contributing to the betterment of society in any way possible, through teaching, politics and perhaps most effectively, through his literary contributions. Unlike many Sicilian authors who have left the island to join the literary circles in Rome and elsewhere on the mainland, Sciascia lived in Sicily his entire life. Elected councilor as an independent candidate to the Italian Communist Party in 1975 and to both the European Parliament and Chamber in 1980, Sciascia accepted the latter

¹⁰ "Leggo loro una poesia, cerco in me le parole più chiare, ma basta che veramente li guardi, che veramente li veda come sono, nitidamente lontani come in fondo a un binocolo rovesciato, in fondo alla loro realtà di miseria e rancore, lontani con i loro arruffati pensieri, i piccoli desideri di irraggiungibili cose, e mi si rompe dentro l'eco luminosa della poesia."

¹¹ "Qui, in un remoto paese della Sicilia, entro nell'aula scolastica con lo stesso animo dello zolfatore che scende nelle oscure gallerie."

post to participate in the parliamentary commission that investigated the slaughter on Via Fani,¹² the kidnapping and assassination of the President of the Christian Democratic Party, Aldo Moro.

Sciascia's literary activity constituted a powerful form of social activism aimed at promoting change by offering readers a grim picture of Sicilian reality and by inviting them to question the status quo as well as the official version of history and the importance of justice. Sciascia revisits history in an effort to comprehend modern society and the centuries' old cycle of injustice that continues to affect it. In *Salt in the Wound*, the ethics that would mold Sciascia's artistic expression and transcend his vast literary production are eloquently expressed in his comment, "I believe in human reason and in the liberty and justice that rise from it" (15).¹³ In his presentation to the collection of articles entitled, *Leonard Sciascia: Memory, the Future (Leonardo Sciascia: La memoria, il futuro)*, Matteo Collura refers to Sciascia as the only dissident voice in Italy during certain moments and commends the far-sightedness of his works that he argues merit inclusion in literary canons (7).

Sciascia's numerous publications consist of historical and detective novels, chronicles, articles and critiques; an important literary critic, he drew attention to authors whose works had been marginalized or altogether ignored by the Italian literary scene. Of his writings, the detective novels were instrumental in eroding the centuries' old code

¹² The Slaughter on Via Fani refers to the events that occurred in Rome on March 16, 1978 in which Aldo Moro, the President of the Italian Christian Democratic party, was kidnapped and his body guards killed by the Red Brigades. Aldo Moro was held captive for 55 days during which the Red Brigades demanded the political recognition of their movement and the release of various members of their organization on trial in Turin. When the political parties in power refused to negotiate the President of the Christian Democratic Party was killed. His body was discovered in the trunk of a Red Renault R4 on Via Caetani, a symbolic location chosen for its equal distance between the offices of the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party.

¹³ "Credo nella ragione umana, e nella libertà e nella giustizia che dalla ragione scaturiscono..."

of silence that surrounded Mafia activity. His publications raised national awareness of this elusive organization as it stimulated debates and pressured government officials (many of whom benefited directly or indirectly from Mafia activities) to acknowledge the existence of organized crime and its destructive social consequences. It is not a coincidence that a few years after the 1961 publication of Sciascia's *The Day of the Owl*, the national government organized a "cultural campaign" and assembled an Antimafia squad to combat organized criminal activity (which some naïve national politicians mistakenly believed was confined to the region of Sicily) and the socio-political conditions that allow it to exist.

Sciascia's legacy exists in the ongoing struggle for social justice in Sicily and in his unwavering faith in humanity's moral and ethical obligation to protect and defend the less fortunate; an attitude embraced by the contemporary Sicilian author Andrea Camilleri. In *Salt in the Wound* Sciascia states: "If I become used to this daily anatomy of misery, of instincts, to this crude human rapport, if I start to view it in its necessity and as fate, like a body that is made that way and cannot be different, I will have lost that sentiment, hope and other things that I believe to be my best attribute" (131).¹⁴

1.3 Mystery novels

Of Sciascia's vast literary production, this study focuses on his six mystery novels whose publication spans a period of nearly thirty years: *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl*) 1961, *A ciascuno il suo* (*To Each His Own*) 1966, *Il contesto* (*Equal Danger*)

¹⁴ "Se io mi abituerò a questa quotidiana anatomia di miseria, di istinti, a questo crudo rapporto umano; se comincerò a vederlo nella sua necessità e fatalità, come di un corpo che è così fatto e diverso non può essere, avrò perduto quel sentimento, speranza e altro, che credo sia in me la parte migliore."

1971, *Todo modo (One Way or Another)* 1974, *Il cavaliere e la morte (The Knight and Death)* 1988, and *Una storia semplice (A Straightforward Tale)*, published posthumously in 1989.

The Day of the Owl offers an introduction to the phenomenon of the Mafia. *To Each His Own* highlights the ineptitude of the local police and the use of anonymous letters and crimes of passion as means of diverting attention from organized crime. *Equal Danger* underscores the political manipulation of law enforcement and official justice and the unwillingness of officials to take responsibility for judicial errors. *One Way or Another* condemns the complicity of the Catholic Church in politics and political corruption and the consequences of its grave *in-action* as it fails to condemn such illegal activity. *The Knight and Death* demonstrates that organized crime is not confined to the island of Sicily but is rampant throughout the country and that officials continue to obstruct justice as they manipulate investigations and knowingly assign the blame to innocent individuals. Lastly, *A Straightforward Tale* contains the damning revelation of the direct involvement of church representatives and law enforcement officials in organized criminal activity.

1.3.1 *The Day of the Owl*

Published in 1961, *The Day of the Owl* is Sciascia's first and most important mystery novel-- it offers a groundbreaking introduction to the phenomenon of the Mafia and outlines the steps that the government must take to eradicate this socially and economically crippling organization. The story opens with the murder of Salvatore

Colasberna (a bricklayer turned businessman), who is shot in the back as he runs to board the first bus out of town early one morning. Colasberna, together with other bricklayers had founded the Santa Fara cooperative that was reputed to do excellent quality work at reasonable prices. Their honest work ethics helped them to win several building contracts making their cooperative unpopular with competitors “protected” by the local Mafia.

The story is told from the perspective of the protagonist Captain Bellodi, a Northern from the town of Parma who is stationed in a small Sicilian town. The fact that he is not Sicilian is fundamental to the narration for it conveys the challenges that prevent Sicilians from denouncing their system: they lack a point of comparison to view and judge their system and they are conscious of the serious personal consequences they could suffer for drawing attention to the presence of organized crime. Instead, it is natural for Captain Bellodi to compare the social system and culture in Sicily with that of his native town and to comment on particular elements of Sicilian society. While his status as an outsider makes his astute observations and social critique possible; it limits his effectiveness as an investigator: witnesses are loathe to cooperate with officials of the State and especially with outsiders.

Just as Sciascia was criticized for his writing, Captain Bellodi is viewed with diffidence by his Sicilian colleagues and the population. They are annoyed by the naive desire of an outsider to instigate change in Sicily where corruption and organized crime are historically entrenched. Sciascia describes the annoyance of some cooperative members when questioned by Captain Bellodi: “From the first words he uttered the

members of the Santa Fara (cooperative) thought, “mainlander” with a mixture of relief and contempt; the mainlanders are nice but they don’t understand a thing” (17).¹⁵

In comparison with Sciascia's subsequent novels, the presence of Sicilian dialect is most prevalent in *The Day of the Owl*. For example, to express distrust of the police a proverb in Sicilian dialect is cited: “He who sides with the police loses wine and cigarettes” (Cu si mitti cu li sbirri, ci appizza lu vinu e li sicarri) (53). Captain Bellodi is reminded of the historical reasons for the Sicilians’ distrust of the law when warned by a farmer not to pet his dog, named “Barruggieddu.” Curious to learn the word's etymology the Captain asks the significance of “Barruggieddu” and is told it means evil or malicious, one who first appears docile but betrays trust and bites those within reach. The captain is told the name was changed from “Barricieddu” and before that from “o Bargieddu” at which point the original meaning of the word is revealed: “Bargello, il capo degli sbirri” (Chief of Police). At that point Bellodi decides not to question the farmer for it would be useless to expect his cooperation. Furthermore, he acknowledges that the Bargello had done exactly that for centuries, treated people well at first only to later ferociously attack and betray their trust. Through Captain Bellodi’s recognition of the historical reasons responsible for such deeply entrenched distrust, Sciascia reiterates that to understand modern social injustices you must examine history.

As Captain Bellodi’s introspective nature prompts his ironic reflections on Sicilian society, Sciascia brings the following cultural elements to the attention of his readers—anonymous letters, crimes of passion and the family. In reference to anonymous letters the captain muses: “It’s interesting . . . how in these parts one drowns

¹⁵ “...dalle prime parole che disse i soci della Santa Fara pensarono, ‘continentale’ con sollievo e disprezzo insieme; i continentali sono gentili ma non capsicono niente.”

in anonymous letters: no one speaks but fortunately for us, for us police [military police], everyone writes. They forget to sign, but they write” (17).¹⁶ His irony alludes to the fact that yes, anonymous letters do contain clues about the motive for a murder; however, the author of the letter is typically the perpetrator of the crime framing another individual to take the blame. No anonymous letter can be taken at face value as things are often not what they seem.

Similarly Sciascia comments upon the phenomenon of “crimes of passion”, that is to say when one murders another to defend his honor and that of his family; a defense commonly used to justify homicide. Captain Bellodi states that often these crimes have nothing to do with defending one’s honor but are an excuse to mask a less respectable reason to kill: “In Sicily, Crimes of passion...do not arise from true passion, from the passion of the heart but rather from an intellectual passion” (101).¹⁷ Like anonymous letters this convenient motive for murder is eagerly accepted by the police and cleverly employed by the Mafia. In reference to the frequency with which homicides committed by the Mafia are being ruled a “crime of passion” Bellodi remarks:

Since they first screamed “they killed cumpari Turiddu” from the sudden silence of the orchestra pit, chilling the spine of opera fans, Sicilian criminal statistics and the lottery combinations, show a more frequent connection between cuckolds and murderers. Passion inspired homicide (crimes of passion) is discovered right away and therefore enters in the active police register: homicide that is considered a crime of passion carries a light sentence and therefore enters into the active register of the Mafia. Nature imitates art-murdered upon the lyrical set of Mascagni’s music and by Compare Alfio’s knife Turiddu Macca began to populate autopsy tables across Sicily’s tourist maps. (38)¹⁸

¹⁶ “È curioso ...come da queste parti ci si sfoghi in lettere anonime: nessuno parla ma, per nostra fortuna, dico di noi carabinieri, tutti scrivono. Dimenticano di firmare, ma scrivono.”

¹⁷ “Il delitto passionale, il capitano Bellodi pensava, in Sicilia non scatta dalla vera e propria passione, dalla passione del cuore; ma da una specie di passione intellettuale.”

¹⁸ “Da quando, nell’improvviso silenzio del golfo dell’orchestra, il grido ‘hanno ammazzato cumpari Turiddu’ aveva per la prima volta abbrivido il filo della schiena agli appassionati del teatro d’opera, nella statistiche criminali relative alla Sicilia e nelle combinazioni del giuoco del lotto, tra corna e morti

The lack of regard for the law, and the institution of the State, that inspires such creativity in the form of anonymous letters and crimes of passion is best understood in the context of the family structure in Sicily. A family's honor must be defended at any cost and therefore Sicilians are willing to accept this motivation for crimes. Sciascia's protagonist reflects upon the importance of the family within Sicilian society:

The Captain thought that the family is the only institution truly alive in a Sicilian's conscience, but it exists more as a dramatic contractual and juridical knot than as a natural and sentimental union. For a Sicilian the family is the State. The State, which for us is the State, is outside, an enforced entity that imposes taxes, military service, war and the police. (101)¹⁹

While Sicilians are united in their cohesion to a family unit, they are often at odds with their fellow citizens, and this distrust of their neighbors and other outsiders to their family structure, makes them vulnerable to being framed for crimes they did not commit. Following Colasberna's murder, neither the bus driver, the food vendor standing next to the bus, nor a single passenger aboard the bus claim to have witnessed his death. This novel exemplifies the mentality of "hear no evil, see no evil" (which Camilleri later refers to as "nenti vitti, nenti saccio") and depicts a complacent majority privy of a collective moral consciousness. Sciascia alludes to the centuries' old climate of fear responsible for the witnesses' refusal to cooperate with the official investigation as he describes their diffidence: "Now they remained silent, as if their faces were buried under a centuries'

ammazzati si è istituito un più frequente rapporto. L'omicidio passionale si scopre subito: ed entra dunque nell'indice attivo della polizia: l'omicidio passionale si paga poco: ed entra perciò nell'indice attivo della mafia. La natura imita l'arte: ammazzato sulle scene liriche dalla musica di Mascagni e dal coltello di compare Alfio, Turiddu Macca cominciò a popolare le mappe turistiche della Sicilia e i tavoli d'autopsia."¹⁹ "...Pensava il capitano, che la famiglia è l'unico istituto veramente vivo nella coscienza del siciliano: ma vivo più come drammatico nodo contrattuale, giuridico, che come aggregato naturale e sentimentale. La famiglia è lo Stato del siciliano. Lo Stato, quello che per noi è lo Stato è fuori: entità di fatto realizzata dalla forza; e impone le tasse, il servizio militare, la guerra, il carabiniere."

long silence” (10).²⁰ The lack of solidarity amongst Sicilians, expressed in their refusal to defend one another, allows organized crime to operate without obstruction. They are united only in their diffidence and distrust of the law and justice system. This sentiment is captured in the words of a police informant:

That the law was written equally for all, the informant had never believed, nor could he: between rich and poor, educated and ignorant, there stood the law and its representatives; and these men could, extend their arm as referee only in one direction, on the other part they were supposed to protect and defend. (30)²¹

This informant (who ordinarily reveals the name of an individual innocent of the fact at hand, someone “without protection”) is killed when he reveals information leading Captain Bellodi to the trail of the parties responsible for the murder of Colasberna. From the moment the names leave his mouth, the informant is destined to live his final hours in terror, aware that he sealed his fate with his revelation. Sciascia writes, “Normally his revelations affected people outside of this connection of friendship and interests: young thugs not held in regard that committed a robbery at the cinema and the next day held up bus; small-time delinquents that were isolated or without protection” (57).²²

In his relentless search for the truth Captain Bellodi uncovers evidence that implicates members of the Mafia in Colasberna's murder. Although the Mafia boss Don Arena is convicted in court, his conviction is overturned in appeals court: clearly powerful political officials are behind the scenes protecting others connected to the

²⁰ “..ora stavano in silenzio, le facce come dissepolte da un silenzio di secoli.”

²¹ “Che la legge fosse immutabilmente scritta ed uguale per tutti, il confidente non aveva mai creduto, ne poteva: tra i ricchi e i poveri, tra i sapienti e gli ignoranti, c’erano gli uomini della legge; e potevano, questi uomini, allungare da una parte sola il braccio dell’arbitrio, l’altra parte dovevano proteggere e difendere.”

²² “Di solito le sue confidenze colpivano persone estranee a questa trama di amicizie e di interessi: giovinastri sconsiderati che la sera vedevano una rapina al cinematografo e l’indomani andavano a fermare un autobus; delinquenti di piccolo affare, insomma, isolati, senza protezioni.”

murder. As the novel ends Captain Bellodi vows to continue to impose justice in Sicily despite his defeat in bringing Don Arena to justice.

Just as Captain Bellodi questions Don Arena about the source of his hundreds of millions of lire on deposit in various bank accounts (with no legal source of employment and land that generates a nominal revenue it is obviously obtained through illegal activities), Sciascia encourages the government to increase transparency of the banking sector and conduct fiscal reviews of the funds suspected of having a connection to organized crime. Sciascia maintained this is a critical step in combating mafia activity-- an approach that proved effective when employed twenty years later by the Antimafia Magistrate Giovanni Falcone.²³

With the Publication of *The Day of the Owl* people could no longer deny the existence of organized crime for this novel provides a clear example of how it operates.

In the Appendix added to a later edition Sciascia writes:

The Mafia was and is another thing, a “system” that in Sicily contains and moves the economic interests of a class that we can closely describe as the bourgeoisie and that rises from and it develops in the emptiness /vacuum of the State (that is to say when the State with its laws and orders is weak or does not exist) but inside the State. In other words the Mafia is nothing other than a parasitic bourgeoisie, a bourgeoisie that does not labor or produce but that merely exploits. *The Day of the Owl* in effect is nothing more than an example of this definition. (137)²⁴

²³ Giovanni Falcone introduced an innovative investigative technique, following "the money trail", to build his case. Subsequently, he became part of Palermo's Antimafia Pool, created by Judge Rocco Chinnici. The Antimafia pool was a group of investigating magistrates who closely worked together sharing information to diffuse responsibility and to prevent one person from becoming the sole institutional memory and solitary target. Next to Falcone the group consisted of Paolo Borsellino, Giuseppe Di Lello and Leonardo Guarnotta. 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Falcone/>.

²⁴ “Ma la mafia era, ed è, altra cosa: un <<sistema>> che in Sicilia contiene e muove gli interessi economici e di potere di una classe che approssimativamente possiamo dire borghese; e non sorge e si sviluppa nel <<vuoto>> dello Stato (cioè quando lo Stato, con le sue leggi e le sue funzioni, è debole o manca) ma <<dentro>> lo Stato. La mafia insomma altro non è che una borghesia parassitaria, una borghesia che non *imprende* ma soltanto *sfrutta*. *Il giorno della civetta*, in effetti, non è che un <<per esempio>> di questa definizione.”

While this first mystery *The Day of the Owl*, is clearly set in Sicily (the towns are referred to as C. or S. etc. to demonstrate the Mafia's ubiquitous nature on the island), the setting of subsequent novels is increasingly ambiguous to convey the presence of the Mafia and corruption at a national level. At the end of the novel Captain Bellodi comments:

Italy is also incredible: and one must go to Sicily to understand how incredible Italy is. Perhaps all of Italy is becoming like Sicily.... As I was reading about the scandals of the regional government in the newspaper an idea came to me, the situation is similar to that scientists refer to as 'the path of the Palm tree', that is to say the climate that is conducive to the growth of the palm tree, is moving north, something like 500 meters every year... (125)²⁵

Of Sciascia's detective novels, *The Day of the Owl* is the most organic. The protagonist Captain Bellodi is a character Sciascia based upon the figure of Major Renato Candida, a commander in Agrigento who had an exceptional sense of social awareness and an understanding of the phenomenon of the Mafia during the 1950's. Upon the publication of a book that he wrote on the Mafia, Major Candida was transferred to Turin, as was common practice anytime a member of the Carabinieri or Polizia demonstrated intelligence and a desire to combat the Mafia. Like Major Candida, Sciascia's protagonist Captain Bellodi is an exemplary individual whose intelligence, meticulous morality and heightened sense of civic duty will serve as a model for subsequent protagonists.

²⁵ "Incredibile è anche l'Italia: e bisogna andare in Sicilia per constatare quanto è incredibile l'Italia." "Forse tutta l'Italia va diventando Sicilia.... A me è venuta una fantasia, leggendo sui giornali gli scandali di quel governo regionale: gli scienziati dicono che *la linea della palma*, cioè il clima che è propizio alla vegetazione della palma, viene su, verso il nord, di cinquecento metri, mi pare, ogni anno..."

1.3.2 *To Each His Own*

To Each His Own, Sciascia's second detective novel published in 1966, features Professor Laurana, a high school Latin teacher, as its protagonist. The professor acts as an amateur detective as he investigates the murder of Doctor Roscio and the Pharmacist Manno, who were killed while hunting. Although there is no reference to a particular town, the mention of sulfur and salt production indicates that the novel is set in western Sicily.

The mystery begins with the delivery of an anonymous letter to the Pharmacist Manno, news that immediately spreads throughout the small town. As the pharmacist is an upstanding citizen with no enemies the letter is considered a joke, yet after his death it is regarded as the threat that foreshadowed his fate and that of Doctor Roscio.

A peculiar embossing on the stationary used for the anonymous letter reveals that the paper is of exceptional quality and is quite rare. Although the characters contained in the anonymous letter are cut out of a newspaper, the professor notes that the characters have a distinct font, unique to a religious publication written in Latin and to which only two clergy members in town subscribe. Incapable of perceiving such subtle clues, the local police are portrayed as ineffective investigators who lack the intelligence and cultural sensitivity to solve the mystery. Prompted by naïveté or convenience they believe that the anonymous letter contains the true motive for the crime.

Although he has no intention of making his discoveries public, when Professor Laurana comes too close to the truth he is killed. As the novel concludes two of Laurana's acquaintances (with whom he frequented the local circle) learn of his death and

one comments: "He was an idiot" (151). While certainly not an idiot in terms of his intellectual capabilities, the implication is Professor Laurana was an idiot for thinking he could uncover the truth and not be killed.

This novel highlights the ease with which people's opinions are easily manipulated, as they are suddenly willing to believe slanderous gossip about an individual. In the case of the pharmacist Manno, upon his death most people are willing to believe he had an affair with a young girl who came to the pharmacy to pick up medicine for her ill mother. This illicit affair, while unsubstantiated, provides a motive for his murder, a potential crime of passion committed to avenge the honor of the girl's family. The malicious rumor destroys the lives of Mrs. Manno (she is widowed and her family's reputation is tarnished), that of the young girl with whom the pharmacist is accused of having an affair, and her family. This rumor prompts the young girl's fiancé to abruptly break off their engagement. She is no longer an attractive candidate for marriage, she is responsible for her family's dishonor and she will strain her family's financial resources, her fate and that of her family is determined by an anonymous letter.

This novel details the far-reaching consequences of a single crime. The murder of Doctor Roscio and the Pharmacist Manno produces two physical victims but also victimizes their families and friends. The eagerness with which the police accept false motives is highlighted as is their failure to protect citizens.

1.3.3 *Equal Danger*

Published in 1971 the setting of Sciascia's third detective novel, *Equal Danger* is ambiguous, as the story could take place anywhere in Italy. In the final note Sciascia states that the setting is an imaginary town and that, "The substance (if there is any) is intended as that of an apologue on the world's power, the power that is evermore reduced in the impenetrable form of a chain of events that we can most accurately call mafiosa" (122).²⁶

The protagonist Inspector Rogas is called upon to investigate the highly publicized assassination of several judges as officials have little confidence in the investigative abilities of the provincial police squad. However, when Inspector Rogas highlights the irregularities encountered in his search for motives such as, for example, the inheritance amassed by a judge that is more than twenty times the amount he would have earned from twenty-two years of state service, his superiors strongly discourage him from bringing attention to such matters.

Sciascia highlights the ease with which the police assign blame for crimes to certain groups or individuals without any evidence. Inspector Rogas is ordered to ignore his suspicions about an individual he suspects is responsible for the murders and is told instead to focus on a fringe radical group that clearly had no part in the assassinations. Rogas contemplates the justice system and its shortcomings; he is convinced the judges' assassin is an individual that was falsely convicted of a crime for which he is now meting out retribution by liquidating members of the judicial system.

²⁶ "La sostanza (se c'è) vuole essere quella di un apologo sul potere nel mondo, sul potere che sempre più digrada nella impenetrabile forma di una concatenazione che approssimativamente possiamo dire mafiosa."

Inspector Rogas meets with the President of the Supreme Court, to warn him that he is very likely a victim on the killer's list. Afterwards they discuss the possibility of judicial error and when the President asks the Inspector whether he has ever considered the problem of judging he replies, "Always." The President then makes a comparison between the superior power of a judge and a priest in that the moment they are dressed in their vestments they are incapable of making an error for they are vested with the power and trust of the people who will accept their decision as if it were scripture.

The theme of justice and judging is paramount to Sciascia's scheme of social responsibility. He maintains that judges and priests have a tremendous amount of accountability for the perpetuation of organized crime because they are entrusted with a tremendous social responsibility- to oversee and protect the welfare of *all* citizens. More than any other members of society, judges and priests have a moral and ethical obligation to condemn unjust actions and demonstrate exemplary behavior by protecting the weak and powerless.

Early in the novel it is clear the Inspector's superiors are attempting to cover up the true nature of the assassinations and orchestrate a politically advantageous outcome. When Rogas discovers he is being followed by members of the Italian Secret Service he knows the evidence he is uncovering could potentially implicate very powerful individuals. As if a foregone conclusion, Inspector Rogas is killed in the novel's final scene as representatives of the system he challenged will not permit that his discoveries be made public.

1.3.4 *One Way or Another*

Unlike Sciascia's other mystery novels, *One Way or Another*, is unique as it is narrated in the first person. The story's protagonist, a successful artist, is driving aimlessly through the countryside one day when his curiosity is piqued by a sign for the Zafer Retreat. A former monastery converted into a hotel, the retreat is preparing to host spiritual exercises that important political figures, industry leaders and church officials will attend. Intrigued by the content of these spiritual exercises, the artist (who remains anonymous) checks in to the hotel for a few days to witness these spiritual exercises firsthand.

As the artist observes an exercise in which the participants chant and move in a choreographed fashion across a dimly lit room, an ex-senator is shot and killed. In its investigation of the murder, local police forbid guests from leaving the premises (with the exception of a few of the men's' lovers in the hopes of avoiding an even greater scandal). As the investigation proceeds, it is clear that the cult of power surrounding some guests will ultimately protect them-- they are considered beyond suspicion by virtue of their reputations which exclude them from the investigation.

One Way or Another contains Sciascia's scathing judgment on the Catholic Church's complicity in organized criminal activity and the obstruction of justice. Sciascia asserts that the Church's *in-action*, represented in Don Gaetano's refusal to cooperate with investigators, constitutes a passive acceptance of the murder. Don Gaetano wields his priestly vows like a shield to exonerate himself from his moral and civic obligations to cooperate with the investigation. His behavior not only casts doubt on his integrity and

Christian values, it makes a mockery of the exemplary Christian behavior church officials vow to uphold. Don Gaetano's insistence that the punishment awaiting the guilty parties will be decided by God (the only being capable of judgment), and served in the afterlife, is a convenient, self-serving mentality that would result in a total breakdown of law and order if applied on a larger scale.

This novel is fundamental to understanding Sciascia's views on the institution of the Church and the lack of moral leadership that is conveyed in the refusal of the Church's representatives to denounce social injustice. The *in-action* of the Church (its refusal to publicly condemn the Mafia) has far reaching consequences for the entire society and ultimately bears some of the responsibility for the social inequities that local parishioners benefited from for centuries. Sciascia contends that it is impossible for the Church to exist as a neutral party and that in attempting to do so they have facilitated mafia-like activities to the detriment of the less powerful masses, which the Church is morally obligated to protect.

Midway through the novel a second murder occurs at which point it is clear that Don Gaetano's refusal to cooperate has resulted in another death. Thus one crime leads to another like a chain of events that continues unimpeded. Ironically the story concludes with the murder of Don Gaetano, whom the artist believes had full knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the earlier murders. Don Gaetano's efforts to protect the identity of the guilty individuals ultimately results in his own demise. The artist reflects on the uncanny resemblance between a portrait of Lucifer and Don Gaetano to convey Sciascia's assertion that frequently those vested with authority, spiritual or otherwise, appear more evil than those whose actions they have vowed to protect against.

The artist is the most introspective and philosophical of Sciascia's protagonists, he bears a striking resemblance to the author himself as he contemplates aesthetics, religion, and social values. As he observes the official investigation that encounters resistance, he ironically reflects on the abuse of power and the hypocrisies of the Catholic Church.

1.3.5 *The Knight and Death*

Nearly 15 years later in 1988, Sciascia published his fifth detective novel entitled *The Knight and Death*. The title is appropriate as Sciascia was very ill when he wrote this novel and was constantly reminded of his own mortality. The novel investigates the murder of a lawyer named Sandoz. The tone is more cynical than that of previous novels for the Deputy, the novel's protagonist, has become jaded by the seemingly impossible tasks of bringing the truth to light and imposing justice within the framework of the law.

On the eve of his death, Mr. Sandoz and a friend, the President of an important industrial consortium, exchange notes that read, "I'll kill you." at a dinner party. As the only evidence for a possible motive, the Deputy questions the President about the note, who explains that it refers to a longstanding joke they have about courting the same woman. The President tells the Deputy that Sandoz confided in him that he had received threatening phone calls. Of course, they had not taken the threats seriously as they assumed they were a joke, prompting the Deputy to think: "Yet another joke, these people don't do anything but joke" (23).²⁷

²⁷ "Ancora uno scherzo, pensò il Vice, questa gente non fa che scherzare."

As in the novel *Equal Danger*, the Deputy is pressured by his superiors to ignore suspicions about a high-ranking industry leader that implicate him in the assassination of the lawyer Sandoz and to focus his investigation on a fringe political group of disenfranchised youths referred to as the “Sons of 1989.” The Deputy reflects upon the willingness of law enforcement officials to prosecute individuals for crimes they clearly did not commit and their lack of conscience in doing so. Like Inspector Rogas in *Equal Danger*, the Deputy is killed for suspecting the true nature of the crime and following a course of investigation his superiors warned him not to. In a familiar ending, the Deputy is shot dead one evening as he leaves his house. As he falls to the ground, he solves the mystery and bitterly envisions the morning paper’s headline that will mistakenly attribute his death to a fringe political group: “The Sons of ’89 strike again. The police official on their trail is killed.”

Although the Deputy is Sicilian, *The Knight and Death* is set in an unspecified Northern Italian city; through this detail Sciascia emphasizes that organized crime is not confined to Sicily and that corruption is prevalent nationwide. In an ironic twist of events, there is no longer a northern captain investigating crime in Sicily as in the case of *The Day of the Owl*, but rather a reversal of this scenario with a Sicilian deputy investigating crime in a Northern Italian city.

1.3.6 A Straightforward Tale

Published posthumously in 1989, Sciascia’s last crime novel, *A Straightforward Tale*, brings Sciascia’s detective fiction to a full circle. Like his first mystery novel, *A*

Straightforward Tale is set in Sicily. The novel is prefaced by a quote from Dürrenmatt's *The Execution of Justice*, "Once again I want to scrupulously sound out any possibilities that perhaps still exist for justice."²⁸ The choice of this quote captures Sciascia's relentless struggle to communicate with an audience and his undying hope in humanity's ability to rectify social injustices.

The story begins with a telephone call that no one takes seriously, especially as it is the evening of the festival of San Giuseppe the Carpenter. A man has discovered "something" at his country home that he would like the police to go and see but he does not elaborate. Told by his superior to 'go and check it out, if he wants to, but that it is most likely a joke' (especially as it is the evening of an important local celebration), the Brigadier and two officers head out the following morning to investigate (12). Upon their arrival the man who had called is sitting at the kitchen table slumped over dead with a bullet in his temple. With the exception of the Brigadier, officials are eager to report the death as a suicide. When the protagonist, the young Brigadier feels certain there is more to the story, he is warned not to investigate further and to leave the case as "a straightforward tale" i.e., a suicide.

In the course of his investigation the Brigadier learns that the abandoned country farmhouse had sheltered a narcotics operation and that his superior, the Police Commissioner is involved. When the Commissioner learns the Brigadier has knowledge of his involvement in the case, he makes a desperate attempt to murder him. As the Brigadier expects the Commissioner to try to prevent him from making his discovery public he is on guard and rapidly responds to the commissioner's attempt to kill him. The

²⁸ "Ancora una volta voglio scandagliare scrupolosamente le possibilità che forse ancora restano alla giustizia."

Brigadier shoots and kills the Commissioner in an act of self-defense and high-ranking law enforcement officials immediately arrive on the scene. To avoid making the commissioner's illegal activities known to the public and to protect the others involved, they organize the Brigadier's defense so that he is accused of accidentally killing his superior. Once again, the true proponent of truth and justice is victimized.

Unlike previous novels, in *A Straightforward Tale* the direct participation of the police commissioner and a local parish priest in the production and trafficking of drugs occurs. The previous passiveness of law enforcement officials and their willingness to overlook the true culprits of crime has escalated to their direct involvement in the aiding and abetting of organized criminal activity. Sciascia maintained that those guilty of passive *in-action* could not escape blame for their behavior allows the direct participation in criminal activity to occur.

This detective novel is extremely important to understanding Sciascia's view on the ineffectiveness of the Anti-Mafia force in Italy from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. In fact, Sciascia argued that the problem of organized crime had escalated during these two decades and become more difficult to combat. Despite the lack of apparent headway made in the fight against criminal activity and the corruption that perpetuated it, Sciascia did see one last reason for hope that is expressed in the choice of a native Sicilian for his final protagonist. In his final mystery novel the story is set in Sicily (there are many references to Sicily), the protagonist the Brigadier is Sicilian, he has knowledge of who is responsible for the crime at hand-- and he lives. He cannot, of course, make the truth known, but he is empowered by his will to survive and overcome the attempt on his life. In this protagonist, Sciascia acknowledges the importance that the struggle against

organized crime in Sicily, come from within the system. It takes a native to combat these deeply-rooted social ills, someone from the inside who truly understands the socially destructive nature of this phenomenon. Sciascia commends the courageousness of this individual to denounce his superior and to continue his search for the truth.

1.4 Analysis of Mystery Novels

While Sciascia communicated eloquently in a variety of genres, his most effective social denouncement is expressed in the detective novel, the genre he felt to be the most honest form of literature as noted by author Andrea Camilleri: “He is a writer who considers the mystery novel to be the most honest form of literature, with its caged logic from which the narrator cannot escape” (Capecchi 32).²⁹

In his manipulation of the traditional structure of the detective novel Sciascia reflects the subversive nature of organized crime without alienating his readers. The pretext of criminal investigations allows him to scrutinize the multiple facets and effects of criminal activity in their natural context. According to Philippe Renard, “It is well-known that the police investigation is well-suited to Sciascia’s way of thinking, this provides him a scalpel with which he uncovers the entire society...” (97).³⁰

The presence of this enigmatic network of corruption, reciprocal favors and protection amongst powerful individuals in Sciascia’s mystery novels polemicizes them within the tradition of classic detective fiction. Sciascia challenges that a mystery set in a

²⁹ “È colui che considera il ‘giallo’ come la forma più onesta di letteratura, con la sua gabbia logica dalla quale il narratore non può uscire.”

³⁰ “L’indagine poliziesca, è noto, corrisponde bene alla *forma mentis* di Sciascia: essa lo fornisce di un bisturi col quale mette a nudo l’intera società...”

Sicilian context that mirrors Sicilian reality (and later set in an Italian context that mirrors Italian reality), paradoxically cannot be solved in accordance with the tradition of the genre, for crimes are rarely solved in Sicily, and indeed, it is an anomaly when the guilty party is officially accused. The sensation that order and logic have been restored at the conclusion of criminal investigations in Sicilian society does not exist and therefore, the traditional structure of the detective novel cannot be fulfilled. In reference to Sciascia's avoidance of a solution, Stefano Tani comments, "The suspension of the solution leaves the lack of justice and the related mechanisms of power and corruption standing bare and unpunished in a 'decapitated structure', so that they become the real theme and purpose of the fiction" (91).

The mystery novel as written by Sciascia can only end with a sense of defeat, for it is not possible for the investigator-protagonist to prove the true nature of the crime and punish the perpetrators within the official framework of law and justice. It is impossible to restore logic and impose an order that did not previously exist. Sciascia challenges the premise of the detective novel that societies are based on logic and order and that a democratic system ensures justice for all citizens. This innovative and subversive nature of Sciascia's mysteries prompted Italo Calvino to comment on the impossibility of the mystery novel within a Sicilian context, "...how the impossibility of the mystery novel within the Sicilian environment is demonstrated" (Calvino, Foreword *To Each his Own*).

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³¹ "...come viene dimostrata l'impossibilità del romanzo giallo nell'ambiente siciliano."

Mystery Novels with a Social Purpose - Communicating the Possibility of Change

Sciascia's detective novels highlight the complicity required at various levels of provincial and national governments, in addition to the reticence of the Catholic Church (and its occasional direct participation in illegal activities) in order for a complex organization like the Mafia to operate. Sciascia turns the spotlight on the corruption and malfeasance that prevail amongst politicians, representatives of the judicial system, law enforcement officials and clergy members. He recalls their responsibility as elected public servants and spiritual leaders as he highlights the devastating consequences of their morally reprehensible *in-action*. This is supported by Anne Mullen's assertion:

The 'decapitated structure' of Sciascia's detective novels, his game playing with traditional aspects of detective fiction, is for a specific purpose, not for delight in play itself. The disguise of fiction and, more specifically, the simplicity of conventional detective writing, allowed him to communicate more complex notions regarding the nature of politics, power, and mafia, as well as other more metaphysical concerns. (99)

In a compilation of articles written by Sciascia and published by Bompiani, *To Future Memory – if Memory has a Future (A futura memoria- se la memoria ha un futuro)*, Sciascia states the only adjective that can be used to describe the Mafia is changing (*cangiante*). His detective novels convey the transformational nature of organized crime and social dynamics that he witnessed during a span of nearly thirty year, from 1961 to 1989. To this point: Claude Ambroise has defined Sciascia's writings as a work in progress: "Sciascia's work is a work in progress, that constitutes the

reflection of a world experienced by him, in which the association Sicily-Italy-planetary society continues to undergo modification” (31).³²

In his first detective novel, *The Day of the Owl* (1961), the structure of the Mafia is demystified, as the protagonist, Captain Bellodi, draws clear connections between Don Arena, a high-ranking member of the Mafia, and the suspects of a murder investigation. Because Don Arena is respected (i.e., feared) by government officials and industry leaders, Captain Bellodi’s efforts to prosecute him in a court of law are inevitably undermined. Despite the overwhelming evidence that connects Don Arena to a hired hit man; corrupt government officials will protect him by testifying on his behalf, confident that their reputations as honorable and upstanding citizens will discourage further investigation.

The connections delineated in *The Day of the Owl* are more ambiguous in subsequent mystery novels to mirror the growing complexity of the Mafia in the years that followed the creation of the First Italian Republic and throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. During the post-war decades organized crime on the island underwent a radical transformation; from the suppressive environment of the fascist regime it evolved into a more sophisticated and expansive organization involved in arms trafficking as well as the production and distribution of illegal drugs. This dramatic development greatly increased the economic interests at stake causing the Mafia to become a more violent organization that required increased participation from corrupt officials to operate effectively.

³² “Quella di Sciascia è un’opera in progress, che costituisce la riflessione su di un mondo da lui esperito, in cui è andato modificandosi il rapporto Sicilia-Italia-società planetaria.”

Sciascia's novels parallel the changing times in which he wrote. In the novels he published subsequent to the *Day of the Owl*, the individuals responsible for orchestrating criminal activity remain anonymous with their identity shielded by an increasingly violent network of power and protection. Although the complicity of government and industry leaders remains obvious, their involvement is evermore difficult to prove. It has always been a challenge to define the Mafia because of the elusive nature of this well-protected organization (in part owing to the "internal fear" it generates that binds its participants and victims to a "code of silence"). Sciascia insists that organized crime could not exist without the support and participation of high-ranking government, judicial and law enforcement officials.

Stylistic Innovations of the Protagonist

Sciascia's investigators are a variety of state official such as: Captain Bellodi in *The Day of the Owl*, Inspector Rogas in *Equal Danger*, the Deputy in *Death and the Knight* or the Brigadier in *A Straightforward Tale*, or civilians such as Professor Laurana in *To Each his Own* and the Artist in *One Way or Another*. While some may succeed in uncovering the truth behind the crimes they investigate, not a single one will see official justice imposed. This is an important element of his novels; it permits Sciascia to communicate the existing corruption implied in his mysteries from the perspective of a variety of inspectors and allows each novel to be viewed in an independent, organic setting.

This stylistic element deviates from the European tradition of the mystery genre in which the figure of the inspector is the same individual from one story to the next as in the case of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's investigator Sherlock Holmes, Simeon's Inspector Maigret and Manuel Vazquez Montalban's P.I. Pepe Carvalho. Sciascia's deviation from this tradition equips each protagonist with a unique perspective and experience that effectively reinforces Sciascia's message.

In *The Day of the Owl*, Captain Bellodi not only meets with the Mafia boss Don Arena, and gathers evidence connecting him to criminal activity; he will convict him in a court of law. The conviction will be overturned in appeals court on the testimony of "honorable" individuals who provide a false alibi for the accused and yet, this outcome and "official resolution" (albeit an incorrect one) to the mystery at hand is as close as any of Sciascia's investigators will ever come to revealing the truth and imparting official justice. Some of the protagonists of subsequent novels are assassinated to prevent them from making their revelations public. While the investigators are continually frustrated in their attempts to restore law and order this figure simultaneously undergoes an important demographic transformation that represents hope for Sicilians in their struggle for a just society free of organized crime. Sciascia's first investigator Captain Bellodi in *The Day of the Owl* embodies a degree of hope as the novel ends with his decision to continue his struggle in Sicily for truth and justice, despite the futility of his previous efforts. Captain Bellodi's behavior is exemplary as he is willing to make personal sacrifices for the betterment of society. Through his determination Sciascia communicates the selfless and ongoing efforts required in order to eradicate this centuries' old problem of Mafia activity. Despite his valiant struggle to see justice

served, the Captain is always regarded as an outsider by his Sicilian colleagues and those he intends to protect, because he is not a native Sicilian and thus his attempts to effect change in Sicily encounter resistance and remain largely unappreciated.

Claude Ambroise refers to Sciascia's protagonists as "defeated" or "vinti" (in the tradition of Giovanni Verga). Like Giovanni Verga's characters who were defeated by a corrupt and exploitative system that prevented them from improving their social condition, Sciascia's investigators are defeated by a system of corruption that prohibits them from fulfilling the traditional role of the investigator as a restorer of logic and order. Ambroise states: "With the profile of this character during the second half of the 1950's Sciascia seems to foresee his subjective work that will carry him from Bellodi (*The Day of the Owl*) to the Deputy (*Death and the Knight*), from a relative hope to desperation" (34).³³

Of the six mystery novels cited, each concludes with the defeat of truth and justice, for all six of Sciascia's investigators are undermined in their efforts to make the truth known and impose justice. Their voices are suppressed by the social mechanism of power that violently resists change and that seeks to silence those who draw attention to its exploitative nature. When his detective novels are read in a chronological order the "devolutionary process" to which his protagonist-investigators are subjected is evident. As the result of a nationwide campaign intended to raise public awareness and combat organized crime during the decades in which Sciascia wrote, one would expect the figure of the investigator to evolve and become more effective in solving crimes and imparting justice. Instead, the investigator's ability to discover the truth and to impart justice within

³³ "Con il profilo di questo personaggio della seconda metà degli anni '50 del nostro secolo, Sciascia sembra antivedere un suo travaglio soggettivo, che lo porterà da Bellodi (*Il giorno della civetta*) al Vice (*Il cavaliere e la morte*): da una relativa speranza alla disperazione."

the framework of the law is perpetually diminished. Each of Sciascia's investigators is increasingly inept at restoring order and logic and their efforts appear evermore futile when contrasted with the surmounting corruption. The intensifying violence present in the novels that follow *The Day of the Owl* culminates with the assassination of the Deputy in *Death and the Knight*, who is brutally murdered despite the fact he is dying from cancer. The debilitating cancer that is slowly robbing him of his life (yet not his will) serves as a metaphor for the destructive nature of organized crime and its crippling effects on society. His murder represents the more immediate threat of danger for anyone who dares to expose this labyrinth of power and corruption in which the Mafia is embroiled. In reference to the death of the Deputy, Natale Tedesco writes: "Within the clear diagram of the detective story, the pathos of human suffering and of an existential uneasiness has been introduced" (69).³⁴

Sciascia's own increasing frustration and disillusionment with the inability of Sicilian authorities to make the necessary personal sacrifices required to affect social change is experienced by his protagonists as if they were to represent his alter ego. Upon the publication of his penultimate mystery novel, *Death and the Knight* Sciascia stated: "Even if I continue to write, this is a book that closes for me [...]. It closes that which is my life experience, my judgment on existence, on Italian things, on the sense of being alive and on the sense of death. It is true; I am serenely desperate. I think that nothing will change any longer in Italy, at least during the arch of my short life" (*Il venerdì di Repubblica* 137).³⁵

³⁴ "Nello schema lucido della detective-story si è introdotto il pathos del dolore umano, del malessere esistenziale."

³⁵ "Anche se continuerò a scrivere, questo per me è un libro che chiude[...]. Chiude quella che è la mia esperienza di vita, il mio giudizio sull'esistenza, sulle cose italiane, sul senso dell'essere vivi e sul senso

Despite Sciascia's disappointment with the lack of meaningful change he witnessed during his career, he subsequently wrote one last mystery novel, *A Straightforward Tale*. Sciascia once said that if he were a pessimist, he would stop writing, a statement that attests to the importance Sciascia attributed to the act of communication in defying this culture of conspiratorial silence (*omertà*) and to his undying hope in the possibility for change. It is also an acknowledgement that the social conditions that have fostered a culture of conspiratorial silence, will take more than a few decades to change. It is crucial to continue the struggle for social justice irrespective of how slowly a culture seems to change, for progress is sometimes barely perceptible.

The title of Sciascia's final detective novel, *A Straightforward Tale*, published shortly after his death in 1989, ironically implies that despite what high-ranking law enforcement officials eagerly insist, the investigation at hand is anything but straightforward. Upon the discovery of a dead body, the state prosecutor demands a written report as soon as possible, observing: "This is a simple case; we must conclude the investigation as soon as possible and not allow it to become more complicated...Go write the report, straight away" (24).³⁶ The Commissioner's refusal to consider all of the evidence and his insistence that the death is a suicide calls his integrity into question and alludes to his underlying complicity in the organized criminal activity that motivated the murder. From the beginning the Commissioner warns the Brigadier not to romanticize the events and to use the logical (and of course, convenient) explanation that the death

della morte. È vero, sono serenamente disperato. Penso che nulla cambierà più in Italia, almeno nell'arco della mia breve vita."

³⁶ "Questo è un caso semplice, bisogna non farlo montare e sbrigarcene al più presto... Vai a scrivere il rapporto, subito."

was a suicide that requires no further investigation. It is an open and shut case, “a simple case” and should be left as such.

However, unlike his previous investigators, Sciascia’s final protagonist is not defeated upon the novel’s conclusion. The brigadier of *A Straightforward Tale* represents a radical departure from the fate of his predecessors as he is the son of a laborer from a Sicilian farming village. He represents hope for the future of Sicilian society, for he is an average citizen of exceptional moral character who struggles to discover the truth and impose justice. This is Sciascia’s lasting message that the future struggle against the Mafia rests in the hands of those who are adversely affected by it. Although he is falsely accused of the “accidental” murder of his superior, which was clearly an act of self-defense, the fact that he survives an attempt on his life is significant. The highly esteemed qualities possessed by Captain Bellodi in *The Day of the Owl*, his courage, his desire to make changes that will positively affect others, and his willingness to make personal sacrifices, more than twenty years later, are embodied by a native Sicilian. This may be the single most important factor to defeating organized crime.

This seemingly insignificant evolution of the figure of the inspector is crucial to understanding Sciascia’s belief in the possibility for change. Sharing Antonio Gramsci’s ideology that revolution must come from within the existing system, Sciascia implies that a social revolution is required to dismantle the Mafia. However, Sicilians (everyone in Sicily is in some way indirectly if not directly affected by organized crime) must make the sacrifices required to create a just society in which people are held responsible for their actions and *in-action* and punished accordingly if all individuals are to be granted equal

protection by the official system of justice. Their silence in the face of organized crime must end if they ever wish to see it eradicated.

Sciascia's Cultural Legacy and Message of Hope

Lacking the tone of disillusionment and frustration that pervades *Death and the Knight*, Sciascia's last literary effort, *A Straightforward Tale* conveys his lasting message of hope for the future and for social justice. The title eloquently conveys Sciascia's conviction that nothing in life is ever as straightforward as it may appear on the surface. One must continually question the official version of events in the quest for a just and fair society. Everyone should feel as deeply disturbed by the social iniquities that abound, as Sciascia did when standing in front of a classroom of hungry and tired elementary schoolchildren. Until society develops a collective moral consciousness, it will continue to accept these inequities as an inevitable part of the status quo. Sciascia's final protagonist reflects his own endless quest for the truth and his belief in the ability of good to prevail, the driving force behind his lifelong literary contribution and the hopeful message with which he chose to seal his literary expression. Natale Tedesco writes: "In the story entitled *A Straightforward Tale*, published in this terrible November of 1989, Sciascia wanted to defeat desperation yet again with an offer of hope with which his research concludes, that of his last "paisan," conveyor of truth, "He continued singing along the path towards home" (71).³⁷

³⁷ "... nel racconto *Una storia semplice*, pubblicato in questo terribile novembre 1989, egli ha voluto sconfiggere ancora una volta la disperazione, con quell'offerta di speranza con cui si chiude la ricerca del suo ultimo, 'paesano', portatore di verità: <<Riprese cantando la strada di casa.>>"

The exceptional moral qualities possessed by Sciascia's protagonists make them unique. In the overwhelming presence of corruption and greed, they are alone in their pursuit of the truth and in their desire to see official justice imposed, for they regard justice and liberty as the basis of civil society. In a sense, Sciascia's protagonists are autobiographical, for they share certain traits with their author. Sciascia was a serious and pensive individual, a reclusive figure who used words sparingly and chose each word he wrote with deliberate intention. The increasing cynicism of his protagonists is reflective of his personal frustration with the lack of concrete change during his career and the unwillingness of politicians to serve the interests of those they represent by making the necessary sacrifices to defeat the Mafia.

Sciascia's growing sense of despondency and disillusionment is conveyed in the protagonists' increasingly challenging task of uncovering the truth. The books his protagonists read, their reflections upon justice and civic duties are Sciascia's own; through his investigators-protagonists Sciascia makes his pleas public. The words and suggestions of his protagonists are often his own, such as his call for politicians to conduct a fiscal review of the banking system; the system that too easily accommodates organized crime by handling the illegally obtained proceeds of Mafia activity as reflects Captain Bellodi in *The Day of the Owl*.

The narrative mechanisms of Sciascia's detective novels appear subversive on various levels: formal, thematic and metaphorical. At the onset of Sciascia's detective novels the reader is immediately thrust into the action of the narration. There is practically no attention devoted to the physical setting or to details not connected with the criminal investigation that lies at the crux of the narration. In a sense the protagonists are

Sciascia's only developed characters, for their thoughts are revealed as they contemplate the evidence of a case, philosophize about human nature, social history and the possible factors that motivated a crime. Interestingly, nothing is known about the investigators outside the realm of their work expect for perhaps their origin; there is no mention of their private lives other than some cultural references they make about literary works they have read or the visual arts they prefer.

Sciascia's protagonists are defined through their actions and thoughts in reference to the crimes at hand, as well as their reflections on history, politics, justice and civic duty. As little is revealed of their personal lives, they appear two dimensional and in this manner Sciascia conveys his conviction that an individual's merit is defined within the greater context of society. Actions have merit in terms of how they contribute to society and affect others.

Through his focus on actions, Sciascia's aim is clear, to communicate a specific message and to not detract attention from it with superfluous details. He personally holds individuals accountable for their actions or *in-action* and demonstrates the consequences of either path. Sciascia challenges that all members of a civil society have the duty and obligation to protect their fellow citizens but no individual has a greater moral obligation than members of the judicial system and the Church. Antonio Di Grado refers to the complex articulation (also Pirandellian) of Justice as a predominate theme in Sciascia's works (11).³⁸ In the words of Antonio Di Grado: "By that 'context,' testimonial and responsible and that bloody inquisition imply a more complex articulation of a theme that is central in Sciascia: Justice."

³⁸ "Ma quel 'contesto' omologante e corresponsabilizzante, e quella inquisizione cruenta, implicano pure una più complessa articolazione (anche questa pirandelliana) d'un tema che è centrale in Sciascia: la giustizia."

The direct narrative style and clarity of Sciascia's language give his social denunciations a poignant force that effectively communicates his social condemnation. His use of dialect is nominal, so as not to obfuscate the connections he wishes to highlight between organized crime, corrupt politicians, industry leaders and the Church, and to ensure a wide readership throughout Italy and abroad. In the preface to *Salt in the Wound* Sciascia writes:

I have not had any problems with expression, with form if not subordinated to the demands of rationally arranging the known more than the recognizable and to document and to recount with good technique (for which, for example, it is more important to me to follow the evolution of the detective novel than the course of aesthetic theories). (11)³⁹

Through the genre of the detective novel he creates a window into the Sicilian reality in which he was raised and his intellectual creativity had its cultural roots. Sciascia shares his personal vision with readers through the thoughts and words of his protagonists in their quest for the truth. The investigator's struggle to unveil the truth in Sciascia's detective novels is analogous to the author's existential search for absolute truths regarding justice and civic duty. As had the French Illuminists such as Voltaire and Stendhal, whose writings were fundamental to Sciascia's literary formation, Sciascia has repeated his belief in human reason and in the liberty and justice that rise from it on multiple occasions.

The detective novel has often been regarded as an ideal genre for postmodern expression. For example, Carol Lazzaro-Weis interprets Sciascia's mystery novels in a Postmodern key referring to the tension created between what is rational and what is not

³⁹ "...da allora non ho mai avuto problemi di espressione, di forma, se non subordinati all'esigenza di ordinare razionalmente il conosciuto più che il conoscibile e di documentare e raccontare con buona tecnica (per cui, ad esempio, mi importa più seguire l'evoluzione del romanzo poliziesco che il corso delle teorie estetiche)."

as a “mockery of extreme rationality”(49) and Michael Holquist claims that Postmodernism defeats the ‘mechanical certainty, the hyper-logic of the classical detective story’ to prove that not everything can be rationalized (148). Yet Sciascia preferred the genre for its tendency to follow reason and logic. Sciascia’s attitude concerning the importance of content over aesthetics is summarized in the quote by Georges Bernanos he chose for the preface of *A futura memoria*: “I prefer to lose readers rather than deceive them” (11).⁴⁰

Interested with neither the “entertainment value” of his literary contribution nor its commercial success- instead, Sciascia insisted that literature had value only in terms of its social impact; in its ability to stimulate debate and raise awareness of social ills. He had faith in the power of literature to effectively communicate the human experience and to serve as a catalyst for an enhanced awareness of the Sicilian reality that he regarded as a metaphor for all of humanity. Sciascia, as had Pirandello, struggled with life and form. In *Black on Black* Sciascia writes: “And so what is literature? Perhaps a system of ‘internal objects’ (I use Professor Whitehead’s expression with impertinence) that variably, alternatively, unexpectedly shine, eclipse, shine and eclipse- and so on – towards the light of the truth, As if to say: a solar system” (254).⁴¹ According to Antonio Motta:

Here is the crux that can reveal the sense of his works to us; his placing himself in front of the word not as an aesthete, but with the profound conscience that creating literature is the work of science, of history; with the conviction that literature is the artifice that does not investigate the world of metaphysical

⁴⁰ “Preferisco perdere dei lettori, piuttosto che ingannarli.”

⁴¹ “E allora che cosa è la letteratura? Forse un sistema di ‘oggetti interni’ (e uso con impertinenza questa espressione del professor Whitehead) che variamente, alternativamente, imprevedibilmente splendono, si eclissano, tornano a splendere e ad eclissarsi – e così via – alla luce della verità. Come dire: un sistema solare.”

certainties but of the realities when the bitterness of doubt grows more than the nice hopes. (393)⁴²

One of Italy's most socially engaged authors of the Twentieth Century, Leonardo Sciascia's literary contributions are considered by some critics to contain a universal message destined to transcend temporal and geographical boundaries and for which Sciascia's works will find their niche in the cannon of classic literature. While his mystery novels are innovative, their irresolvability and failure to restore logic breaks from the tradition of the genre, they may be read as a metaphor of the malice that plagues all societies. His literary production is a testament to the strength and importance of the individual will and of the civic responsibility to which all members of society have a moral obligation to uphold. In an article entitled "The Friend of the Defeated- Sciascia and Verga," Claude Ambroise refers to the Sciascian truth as the denouncement of a writer committed to a battle against the ideas that dictate life in his society ("L'amico del vinto-Sciascia e Verga." *Conferenza su Leonardo Sciascia e la tradizione dei siciliani* 35).

Perhaps more interesting than his detective novels themselves are Sciascia's reflections upon the role his literary contribution played in effecting change within Italian society. In an article published in *L'Espresso* in 1983 and later included in *To Future Memory*, Sciascia writes:

Twenty-five years ago, when stumbling upon a news story based on a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies that I had attended, I had the idea to write *The Day of the Owl*. What a Sicilian from the western provinces of a certain shrewdness and awareness knew about the Mafia was not little. In every town, in every

⁴² "Qui è il nodo che può svelarci il senso della sua opera; il suo porsi di fronte alla parola non da esteta, ma con la coscienza profonda che fare opera letteraria è fare opera di scienza, di storia; con il suo essere convinto che la letteratura è artificio e che non indaga il mondo delle metafisiche certezze, ma quello delle effettualità dove l'acido del dubbio cresce più delle belle speranze."

neighborhood of the town Mafia bosses were known as were the commanders and the officers of the Carabinieri (military police). It was known which politicians these men “carried” or supported (that they recommended to the voters basically) and from which they were in turn supported in their illegal systems of profiting. (*To Future Memory* 67)⁴³

In an article written for *Il Corriere della Sera*, January 26, 1987, and later included in *To Future Memory*, Sciascia reflects on the ineffectiveness of politicians in their organized campaign to combat the Mafia. While the government presented the public with a façade of progress in the war against organized crime, the intention to fully dismantle this vastly complex network was dubious given the corruption involved within both the law enforcement and justice systems. He states: “The processions, the round tables, the debates on the Mafia, in a country in which rhetoric and falsification are behind every corner, serve to appease and create an illusion of doing something and especially when nothing concrete is being done” (*To Future Memory* 143).⁴⁴

Sciascia states that no one was willing, nor prepared to confront the issue of the Mafia in the early sixties upon the publication of *The Day of the Owl*. The entire Antimafia squad that was subsequently created to dismantle the organization known as the Mafia simply provided a superficial mask to look as though the Mafia was being dealt with when in reality a few cases were completely blown out of proportion and highly publicized to create the appearance of a solidified and serious effort to combat organized crime. This bitter revelation is perhaps best captured in his reflection on the case of Enzo

⁴³ “Venticinque anni fa, quando, innestandosi su un fatto di cronaca, una seduta cui avevo assistito alla Camera dei deputati, mi venne l’idea di scrivere *Il giorno della civetta*, quel che della mafia poteva conoscere un siciliano delle province occidentali, di una certa sensibilità e perspicacia, non era poco. In ogni paese, in ogni quartiere cittadino, capi e gregari erano conosciuti quanto i comandanti le stazioni carabinieri e i carabinieri; conosciuti erano gli uomini politici che loro “portavano” (che raccomandavano, cioè, all’elettorato) e dai quali erano in effetti portati; conosciuti i loro sistemi di illecito arricchimento, per lo più consistenti in mediazioni imposte e qualche volta, ad evitare l’imposizione, richieste.”

⁴⁴ “I cortei, le tavole rotonde, i dibattiti sulla mafia, in un paese in cui retorica e falsificazione stanno dietro ogni angolo, servono a dare l’illusione e l’acquietamento di far qualcosa: e specialmente quando nulla di concreto si fa.”

Tortora,⁴⁵ of whose innocence Sciascia was convinced. The irony Sciascia wishes to highlight is that Tortora is finally arrested for a crime that he did not commit whereas on each occasion in which he had been acquitted he was in fact guilty (*To Future Memory* 38). Sciascia contends this example was analogous to the overall inefficiency of the Antimafia force.

He reflects upon the precious opportunity lost during the 1960s when it was possible to eradicate the mafia during a crucial phase of its evolution, its transformation from an agrarian-based and insularly confined phenomenon into a complex global organization that involves the production and trafficking of drugs and weapons. In fact, this transition together with significant technological advances completely altered the nature of organized crime; the substantial amount of money and power produced by the Mafia's new activities make it an evermore violent and ruthless organization with increasingly global ramifications and its perpetrators evermore difficult to trace. In the appendix to a later edition of *The Day of the Owl*, Sciascia writes:

I wrote this story in the summer of 1960. Back then the government was not only uninterested in the phenomenon of the Mafia, but it explicitly denied its existence. The session of the Chamber of Deputies represented in these pages is fundamentally the response of the government to an interrogation of public order in Sicily. It seems unbelievable considering that just three years after a parliamentary commission to investigate the Mafia was ordered. (135)⁴⁶

He argues that it was inexcusable for members of the government to deny the existence of organized crime in the sixties where there was plenty of evidence in circulation that

⁴⁵ Enzo Tortora was a popular anchorman on national RAI television, who was falsely accused of being a member of the Camorra and drug trafficking. He became an icon of injustice and a reminder of one of the gravest miscarriages of justice of the Italian judiciary system. 23 Aug. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enzo_Tortora/>.

⁴⁶ “Ho scritto questo racconto nell'estate del 1960. Allora il governo non solo si disinteressava del fenomeno della mafia, ma esplicitamente lo negava. La seduta alla Camera dei Deputati, rappresentata in queste pagine, è sostanzialmente, nella risposta del Governo ad una interrogazione sull'ordine pubblico in Sicilia, vera. E sembra incredibile: considerando che appena tre anni dopo entrava in funzione una commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla mafia.”

documented mafia activity, i.e. the parliamentary inquiry on the economic and social conditions in Sicily written in 1875, that of Leopold Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino from 1906 and 1910 as well as the memoirs of the ex-prefect Cesare Mori who was sent to Sicily by the Fascist government to repress all Mafia activity with unlimited power.

Sciascia frequently wrote opinion columns for *La Repubblica* and other major newspapers. He stated that the only way to eradicate the problem of the Mafia is to open up bank records and to conduct fiscal reviews. When first published his mystery novels served to effectively stimulate a public discourse. In fact, one of the Antimafia magistrates later assassinated by the Mafia, Giovanni Falcone, told Saverio Lodato in an interview that members of his generation were greatly influenced by Sciascia's first novels, the writer with the merit of providing Italians with an introduction to the phenomenon (i.e., The Mafia) otherwise literally silenced, ignored, denied" (Lodato 9).⁴⁷

Sciascia was not interested in creating entertaining literature but rather in reflecting a social reality that is fraught with injustice and criminality. He maintained that Justice is not an esoteric concept to be applied ad hoc; it is the inalienable right of every individual and the pillar of civil society. Sicilian governing and spiritual institutions have failed in their responsibility to exemplify the highest standards of moral and ethical behavior, depriving countless individuals of Justice over the centuries. It is through this lens that Sciascia viewed the world, that of Sicily as a microcosm for social ills that plague Italy and beyond. The profound impact of Sciascia's literary contribution in the fight for social justice should not be marginalized; his courageous denouncement

⁴⁷ "Una volta Falcone, in un'intervista mi disse che quelli della sua generazione si erano formati sui primi romanzi di Leonardo Sciascia, scrittore che aveva avuto il merito- osservava- di dare a tutti gli italiani almeno l'infarinatura di un fenomeno altrimenti letteralmente taciuto, ignorato, rimosso."

of social ills through the genre of the mystery novel incited continued social debate about one of Italy's most complex social problems: that of the Mafia.

2

Dialect in the Mystery Novel of Andrea Camilleri: The Crossroads of Theatrics and Social Engagement

The fight against Mafia, which is the first problem to solve in our unfortunate and beautiful land, must be not only a cold repressive action, but a moral and cultural movement, involving everyone, especially younger generations, the most fit to feel the beauty of the fresh taste of freedom that sweeps away the foulness of moral compromise, of indifference, of contiguity and, hence, of complicity.

—Paolo Borsellino

2.1 Life

Educated by priests at a boarding school, Andrea Camilleri vividly recounts a formative experience from that education, a game known as “accipe” which enforced the use of Standard Italian language over dialect and had a marked effect on him. “Accipe”, a Latin verb meaning, “to take” or “to receive”, was a game played with a small wooden stick. The game rules dictated that when a student said a word in dialect, whoever held the stick would hand it to that student and say “Accipe (You take it)”. The receiver of the stick had to hold it until another student uttered a word in dialect, and this could take days. At night, the child in possession of the stick had to kneel for two hours while the others immediately went to sleep. In retrospect Camilleri says it was a very useful exercise for writing and that after having been the recipient of the stick a few times he was extremely cautious not to speak in dialect. Camilleri later observed: “Perhaps I write

books full of Sicilian dialect as a way to vindicate myself from the torture I suffered during my youth.” (Lodato 72)⁴⁸

Andrea Camilleri, Italy’s most widely published author of the Twentieth Century (Lodato 53) has led an interesting and artistically prolific life. He was born to Carmella and Giuseppe Camilleri in 1925 in the small Sicilian town of Porto Empedocle, in the province of Agrigento, one of the poorest provinces in Italy. He was born on September 6, on The Feast of San Calogero which occurs the first Sunday of September, the saint to whom his mother prayed when she was pregnant, and was therefore baptized, Andrea Calogero. His mother had given birth to two children before him, a son who died at a few months and a daughter who died of an infection when she was two years old. As a result, Camilleri’s parents were very protective of him, often not allowing him outside to play with other children. He was often surrounded by adults, many of whom were avid readers; and as a result, he began to read and write at a very young age.

Camilleri’s maternal grandmother Elvira was a very influential figure in his life who encouraged his sense of wonder and imagination and fostered his interest in literature. His paternal grandfather, one of the wealthiest men in the province of Agrigento, ran the family business of sulfur mining, like the Pirandello family. In fact, his paternal grandmother was a first cousin of Luigi Pirandello; she was married into the Camilleri family as a means of consolidating the sulfur industry into the hands of few families.

For secondary school Camilleri attended the Ginnasio-Liceo Empedocle, frequented decades earlier by Luigi Pirandello. Indeed, one of his close friends, Gaspare Giudice, would later become one of Pirandello’s best-known biographers. In 1941, at the

⁴⁸ “forse scrivo ‘sti libri, pieni di dialetto siciliano, per vendicarmi delle torture subite in gioventù.”

age of sixteen, Camilleri crossed the Straits of Messina for the first time, to attend an international rally of young fascists in Florence where he had been invited to present his report on an ideal theatrical repertory for fascist youth along with a comedy “The Mountains” (“Le montagne”) by Giuseppe Romualdi that he had produced and for which he won second place in the competition.

By the age of twenty Camilleri had participated in several important poetry competitions such as the Saint-Vincent (named after the location in which it is held), that had the famous Italian poet, Giuseppe Ungaretti as the president of its jury. Camilleri’s entry was a finalist, and Ungaretti included his work in the anthology entitled, *The Poets of Saint-Vincent (I poeti di Saint-Vincent)* which was published in the prestigious series by Mondadori, “The Mirror” (“Lo Specchio”). In another competition held in Lugano, Switzerland, that had Carlo Bo and Gianfranco Contini as members of the jury, Camilleri was selected as one of fifteen finalists from more than 300 participants. Other finalists included Andrea Zanzotto, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Danilo Dolci, Maria Corti and David Maria Turoldo.

Like Leonardo Sciascia, Camilleri was a teenager during the Second World War and has vivid memories of the hardships they endured, the occupying forces and the socio-cultural transformations that occurred after the war. He recalls the liberation as he experienced it in Serradifalco in the province of Caltanissetta, where he hid with his family, except for his father who was working as vice commander of the Port in Porto Empedocle. Reflecting upon the American landing, which occurred during the night of July 9 and the morning of July 10, 1943, Camilleri recalls that it was the first time in months that he heard the birds sing as he awoke to silence after a night that lacked the

usual sounds of trucks, artillery and aerial bombardments. Although he cried upon seeing American tanks and jeeps, in addition to the feeling of liberation he experienced, he sensed a new sort of occupation. Initially embarrassed by his tears, he later read with empathy that Leonardo Sciascia had also cried on that historic day. Camilleri's hometown of Porto Empedocle was obliterated by the Allied forces; when the young Camilleri returned to look for his father once the fighting stopped, he could no longer recognize the town in which he grew up.

After the liberation by American forces, his father went to work with the Azienda Siciliana di Transporti/Sicilian Transport Company in Enna, and the rest of the family followed. It was not possible for Camilleri to pursue his dream of studying literature at the University of Florence, for although Sicily had been liberated by the Allied forces, Florence remained under German occupation until the fall of 1944. So instead, he enrolled at the University of Palermo in Modern Literature with a specialization in philology. Camilleri's desire to teach abroad was thwarted by a low grade he received on an Italian exam after an argument with the proctor; an unfortunate incident that destroyed any desire he had to teach in Sicily. It was not until decades later, at the National Academy of Dramatic Arts, that he would discover the joys of teaching.

In the aftermath of the Second World War there was a debate about the possibility of Sicily ceding from Italy. Camilleri rejected the separatist movement and felt that if Sicily should separate from Italy, it would risk facing the domination by landowners and pro-monarchy sectors (*proprietari terrieri, agrari, monarchici*), the very economic, social and political block that had controlled and suffocated the island for centuries. Camilleri and his friends rebelled against the separatist movement and during this time

they collaborated on a newspaper entitled *Baciamo le mani alla libertà* (*We Kiss the Hands of Freedom*). The only edition to be printed included editorials in which they addressed the occupying American authorities with pleas such as: “Do you want to help us out? There are worse Fascists than those you have arrested and you still have not realized this. We are ready to give first and last names” (Lodato 138). Shortly following the publication of the first edition, their office was raided during which a cache of weapons and portraits of Mussolini were discovered in a hollow wall. Camilleri and his friends, who had no knowledge of the weapons or the portraits, were arrested and beaten during interrogations about their source. While no formal charges were brought against them, this incident would later compromise Camilleri’s employment opportunities. Ironically, it was an anonymous letter that had alerted authorities to the presence of the cache of weapons and thus, Camilleri personally experienced the destructive consequences that result from the eagerness of authorities to accept the contents of an anonymous letter as the undisputed truth.

In 1948 Alba De Cespedes published Camilleri’s first poems in the prestigious political and literary magazine entitled *Mercury* (*Mercurio*) while other poems appeared in a magazine run by young communists entitled *Patrol* (*Pattuglia*) and in a magazine by Bompiani known as *Fishbowl* (*Pesci rossi*). That same year Camilleri wrote his only comedy entitled, *Judgement at Midnight* (*Giudizio a mezzanotte*), which won first place at a competition in Florence whose panel of judges included important figures from Italian theater, such as Silvio d’Amico. Camilleri traveled to Florence to accept his prize during an award ceremony held at the Palazzo Vecchio and he was asked to give a speech on the cultural situation in Sicily. On this occasion he met some of the most important

Italian literary figures of the day: Montale, De Robertis, Luporini, Pratolini and others. Afterwards he joined Nicolò Gallo and others at the famous literary café Le Giubbe Rosse.

At the end of 1948, Silvio D'Amico, the Director of the National Academy of Dramatic Arts in Rome, was attempting to reestablish the academy with greater participation by people involved in theater. He invited Camilleri to take the entrance exam for directors and to present his thesis on *Così è (se vi pare)* [*Right You Are (If You Think You Are)*] by Luigi Pirandello,⁴⁹ which included a critical textual analysis as well as ideas on how to direct it, costumes, lighting and scenography. In 1949 Camilleri won a highly coveted scholarship that paid 30,000 Liras per year for three years to study at the academy under the guidance of Orazio Costa, one of Italy's most acclaimed theatrical directors.

Although theater was not his first passion, Camilleri was fascinated by Costa's genius in teaching how to read a theatrical text, to analyze it and to realize it on stage. They met every morning from eight o'clock until noon and Costa explained to him that there was no difference between literature and theater, that theater was, in fact, great literature. Camilleri refers to learning from Costa during his first year at the academy as a tremendously formative experience, and refers to Costa as the only true maestro of contemporary Italian theater.

To his dismay Camilleri was expelled from the academy after his first year. While they were staging a production in the Tuscan town of San Miniato, Camilleri and his friends would sneak into the convent of the Clarisse (Poor Clares) where the female

⁴⁹ Luigi Pirandello was the recipient of the 1934 Nobel Prize in Literature, "For his bold and ingenious revival of dramatic and scenic art." 14 Sept. 2009.
<http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1934/index.html/>.

students were housed to spend the evenings with their girlfriends. One morning Camilleri and his girlfriend overslept and were discovered by a nun who came to wake up the girl and fainted upon seeing the two in bed together. This prompted a huge scandal and when Silvio D'Amico was asked to take action Camilleri lost his scholarship and was expelled. Orazio Costa was unable to intervene on Camilleri's behalf because Camilleri had argued with Silvio D'Amico. Offended by something Camilleri had said, D'Amico burst out: "You are disgusting, foul, vulgar, terrible, like all Sicilians!" When Camilleri challenged, "Because you have known many?" D'Amico's response was, "No. Just one, Luigi Pirandello. And that was enough" (Lodato 198).⁵⁰

After his disgraceful exit from the Academy, Camilleri worked odd jobs until Costa offered him a job as assistant director at Rome's Repertory Theater and D'Amico's son hired Camilleri as an editor for the *Encyclopedia of Theater*, for which he contributed pieces on contemporary French and Italian theater and compiled a film bibliography.

After difficult years of making ends meet, Camilleri finally got his break in 1953 when he directed *We Made a Journey (Abbiamo fatto un viaggio)* by Raul Maria De Angelis. This production was warmly received and Silvio D'Amico gave it a positive review that read, "With this production Andrea Camilleri has duly paid and earned his entrance into the world of theater" (Lodato 203).⁵¹

Camilleri never truly aspired to a career in established theater but preferred lesser-known, more avant-garde theater. He directed Arthur Adamov, was the first in Italy to direct, *Endgame (Finale di partita)* by Samuel Beckett, and was involved in less popular

⁵⁰ "Lei è uno schifoso, turpe, vile, orrendo come tutti i siciliani", "Perche lei ne ha conosciuti molti?" "No. Uno solo: Luigi Pirandello. E mi è bastato."

⁵¹ "Andrea Camilleri esordisce con questo spettacolo e devo dire in coscienza che paga – alla grande – il suo biglietto d'ingresso nel mondo del teatro."

forms of theater such as “Teatro dei satiri” and “Teatro Pirandello.” Always on the fringes of “official” theater (similar to his later literary production), he did what he liked, and was indifferent to theater aimed at mass consumption.

In 1953 he met his future wife Rosetta, a graduate of the University of Milan, who was living in Rome and had volunteered as an assistant for a Camilleri production. They married in 1957. He then took the entrance exams for RAI, the Italian Radio and Television Corporation— exams also taken by the academic Umberto Eco and journalist Bruno Vespa. Out of 3,000 applicants, Camilleri was one of the 100 applicants to be admitted to the final oral examinations. Although he was told that he would be one of the final candidates admitted, he never received the “official” call to confirm his appointment. He later discovered from an inside contact that the RAI selection officials had received unfavorable political information about him that dated to his collaboration on the newspaper *We Kiss the Hands of Freedom*. The information the marshal of the military police in Porto Empedocle shared with RAI destroyed Camilleri’s chance for employment at RAI and made him a victim of political ostracism.

At the end of 1958, after the political denunciation against him had been discredited, Camilleri was offered a job on RAI’s third radio program, which broadcast classical music, poetry and other cultural programs. He later transferred to RAI Due (Channel Two) to direct televised broadcasts. In 1964 he produced eight comedies by Eduardo De Filippo and *The Inquiries of Commissioner Maigret (Le inchieste del commissario Maigret)* by Simenon with Gino Cervi. He also taught at the Center for Experimental Cinematography from 1958 to 1965 and from 1968 to 1970.

In 1974, when Orazio Costa left the Academy of Dramatic Arts, he encouraged Camilleri to apply for his post. Thus ironically, Camilleri entered the Academy, from which he had been expelled twenty years earlier, as a Professor of Theater Direction, a position he held from 1974 to 1997. Prior to the literary success that he would enjoy later in life, Camilleri was best known professionally as a stage director (not only for theater but also for television on various RAI channels), as a professor at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, and as a poet. He directed some 110 works for the theater, more than a thousand radio broadcasts and approximately eighty performances on television.

In 1967 and 1968 Camilleri spent much time in a clinic with his sick and elderly father; an experience that triggered a personal journey of the memory, in which he searched for his Sicilian roots, as well as his cultural and human identity. These reflections prompted his desire to recount certain life experiences in his first novel, *The Way Things Go (Il corso delle cose)*, which he dedicated to his father. The title of this novel is insightful for it is based on an observation by the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty from his novel *Sense and Nonsense*, "...the way of things is sinuous." ("...il corso delle cose è sinuoso") that is to say, things are not straightforward and they often are not what they seem. Ruggero Jacobbi, one of the first critics to comment on this novel observed:

This sentence perfectly describes a certain Sicilian reality that we have become familiar with, from Capuana to Pirandello, from Brancati to Sciascia, that seems to escape from the hands of the observer, tangled as it is in simple yet dark human movements, of ceremonial gestures that allude to a second nature, a hypothesis of man that is cannot be measured according to the parameters of logic. (Camilleri *The Way Things Go* Preface)⁵²

⁵² "Il titolo del romanzo prende lo spunto da una frase di Merleau-Ponty, 'Il corso delle cose è sinuoso.' Frase che si attaglia perfettamente a certa realtà siciliana che abbiamo imparato a conoscere da Capuana a Pirandello, da Brancati a Sciascia. Questa realtà sembra sfuggire tra le mani dell'osservatore, tutta

Camilleri felt the need to publish as he sought to share his stories with an audience. Although he wrote his first novel *The Way Things Go* in 1967-68, he did not find a willing publisher until eleven years later in 1978. His difficulty in publishing this novel was in part the result of its Sicilian-based language that was deemed too provincial, too dialectical and difficult to understand. In 1978, a friend of Camilleri's at RAI suggested that they adapt his unpublished novel, *The Way Things Go* for television. It was not until they were working to serialize the novel on television, that a small publishing house named Lalli approached Camilleri with an offer to publish his work. They agreed to publish *The Way Things Go* free of charge, if the name of their publishing house were included at the end of the title on the television production. Thus, Camilleri's first novel was finally published in 1978 as a result of its connection to television.

Camilleri's second novel, *A Thread of Smoke (Un filo di fumo)* was published in 1980 by Garzanti publishing house and unlike *The Way Things Go*, it enjoyed national distribution. That same year Camilleri uncovered documents that shed light on a little-known massacre of 114 Sicilians that took place in his birth town of Porto Empedocle in 1848. He approached Leonardo Sciascia⁵³ with the documents he had found and proposed that Sciascia write a book about it (he had already written a historical essay entitled, *On Behalf of the Infidels [Dalla parte degli infedeli]*). Sciascia was not interested in undertaking the project but promised Camilleri that if he wrote it himself he would have it published by the Palermitan publishing house Sellerio. From 1980 to 1984 Camilleri wrote the historical novel, *The Forgotten Massacre (La strage dimenticata)*

intessuta com'è di moventi umani elementari ma oscuri, di gesti cerimoniali che alludono a una seconda natura, a un'ipotesi dell'uomo non misurabile secondo i parametri della logica.”

⁵³ Camilleri first met Sciascia in Rome in the late 1950's when he wanted to adapt the *Notarbartolo Crime (Delitto Notarbartolo)* as a script for television (which Sciascia refused to do) and again in 1962 as he directed Sciascia's, *The Day of the Owl* for the Teatro Stabile in Catania with Giancarlo Sbragia.

which recounts in astonishing detail the events that occurred nearly 150 years earlier. As promised, it was published in 1984 by Elvira Sellerio who would later become Camilleri's principal editor.

Eight years passed before Camilleri, who claims to have undergone a crisis in writing, published another novel. However, his most productive years in theater direction occurred during this period from 1984 to 1992 and he concluded his directional career with his best productions, including two of Pirandello's plays, *The Mountain Giants* (*I giganti della montagna*) and *The Fable of the Substitute Son* (*La favola del figlio cambiato*). Years later in 2001 Camilleri would write a biography on Pirandello entitled *Biography of the Substitute Son* (*Biografia del figlio cambiato*). Giorgio Prosperi, an important critic noted that "Andrea Camilleri is a director who has studied Pirandello for a very long time" (Sorgi 69).⁵⁴

In 1992 Camilleri published *Hunting Season* (*La stagione della caccia*), a historical novel that grew from the voluminous documents contained in the 1875 parliamentary inquiry on the conditions in Sicily. The novel *Hunting Season* was born from a joke contained in these documents that reads: "The president of the parliamentary commission asked the mayor of a small town from Sicily's interior if any violent crimes had occurred recently in his town, to which he responded, 'No, your Honor, absolutely not. Except for the pharmacist who killed seven people for love.'"

Although Elvira Sellerio was disturbed by Camilleri's style of writing, *Hunting Season* became his second publication with Sellerio in 1992 and was included with *The Forgotten Massacre* in the "Notebooks from the Sicilian Library of History and

⁵⁴ "Andrea Camilleri è un regista che ha lunghissimamente studiato Pirandello."

Literature” (“Quaderni della biblioteca siciliana di storia e letteratura”), a series dedicated to historical documents and Sicilian narrative. Upon reading the novel Leonardo Sciascia criticized Camilleri’s use of dialect, “Andrè, there are too many Sicilian words. You wrote a beautiful book, *A Thread of Smoke*. Be careful: excessive dialect reduces the comprehension. I’m not speaking from a commercial point of view, but from the point of view of transmitting an idea” (Lodato 239).⁵⁵ For Sciascia, the distinction between an essay and a novel was a very important one, and it was necessary to modify the language accordingly.

Camilleri states that his novel *Hunting Season* was pivotal in terms of technique, “For me as a writer an important fact occurred: I passed from the somewhat theatrical corality of a novel such as *A Thread of Smoke*, to an attempt to define the characters in search of a protagonist. This is my most bitter novel” (Sorgi 72).⁵⁶ The novel sold well; a second edition was published and two years later it was transferred to “The Memory” (“La memoria”) series, a collection of narrative works.

Between 1992 and 1993 Camilleri wrote the historical novel *The Seal of Agreement* (*La bolla di componenda*) based on documents that referred to the widespread dispensation of a “special” stamp by ecclesiastical powers in Sicily. This stamp was radical as it granted recipients absolution from *future* crimes they intended to commit. The word “componenda” signifies an accord or compromise reached, that is intended to resolve a contentious issue between two parties.

⁵⁵ “Andrè, troppe parole siciliane ci sono. Tu hai scritto ’sto bellissimo libro che è *Un filo di fumo*. Stai attento, eccedendo in dialetto ti tagli comprensione. Non lo dico dal punto di vista commerciale, lo dico dal punto di vista della trasmissione di un’idea.”

⁵⁶ “...a me come scrittore succedeva un fatto importante: passavo dalla coralità un po’ teatrale di un romanzo come *Un filo di fumo* a un tentativo di definizione dei personaggi, alla ricerca del protagonista. È il mio libro più amaro.”

As Camilleri continued to focus on his writing technique he became conscious of the manner in which he created his stories, starting with a single fact that had impressed him and writing the story around the fact, as if in concentric circles. As he gradually felt the need to rationally plan his writing, he followed the advice that Sciascia had given him years earlier to consider writing mystery novels, the genre that Sciascia felt offered writers the truest form of expression (Sorgi 73). In 1994 Camilleri published his first mystery novel with Sellerio: *The Shape of Water (La forma dell'acqua)*. Admittedly unable to create a plot from scratch, Camilleri begins with a fact or conjecture upon which he builds his story. With regards to *The Shape of Water* he states:

I do not know how to invent stories out of thin air; I need a source of truth. Then I remembered an episode that occurred years ago in Lazio when they found a local notary dead. Poor thing, it's not that he wanted to frequent prostitutes, but he died in his lover's house and they left him there, in the woods, with his pants pulled down. It was an episode that seemed intentionally staged to encourage people to invent their own conjectures. That's how the murder of the engineer Luparello occurs in my novel, *The Shape of Water*, at the bottom of a series of canals and connections that are Vigàta's committee of political-mafia affairs that Inspector Montalbano investigates for the first time. (Sorgi 74)⁵⁷

The novel's protagonist, Commissioner Salvo Montalbano would inspire Camilleri as an author and catapult him from relative obscurity onto the national literary stage to become Italy's most published author of the Twentieth Century.

As Camilleri felt Montalbano was not a completely developed character in *The Shape of Water* he wrote *The Terra-Cotta Dog (Il cane di terracotta)*, a novel intended as an exercise to better develop his protagonist. Published in 1996, *The Terra-Cotta Dog*

⁵⁷ "Io le storie non me le so inventare di sana pianta; ho bisogno di una spinta di verità. Allora mi è venuto in mente un episodio accaduto anni fa nel Lazio, quando trovarono un notevole locale morto. Poveraccio, quello non è che si voleva sputtanare, ma era morto in casa dell'amante e l'avevano buttato lì, in un bosco, con l'aggiunta dei pantaloni calati. Era un episodio che sembrava fatto apposta per costruirci su delle congetture. Così, accade nel mio romanzo per l'assassinio dell'ingegner Luparello, sullo sfondo di quella serie di canali e collegamenti che dà forma, *La forma dell'acqua* appunto, al comitato d'affari politico-mafioso di Vigàta, su cui per la prima volta indaga il commissario Montalbano".

marks the true birth of the Inspector Montalbano; the character who would unexpectedly fuel Camilleri's fame and the mass appeal of his mystery novels, an occurrence referred to by Saverio Lodato as the "Camilleri phenomenon" ("Il Caso Camilleri").

2.2 The Mystery Novel and Inspector Montalbano

This research examines the first seven of Camilleri's mystery novels to feature the Inspector Montalbano.

2.2.1 *The Shape of Water*

Published by Sellerio in 1994, Camilleri's first mystery novel *The Shape of Water* is set in Vigàta, a fictional small Sicilian town in the southwest province of Agrigento, "An imaginary center of the most typical Sicily" (Camilleri *The Snack Thief* 247).⁵⁸ The novel opens with the discovery of a dead body, that of the Engineer Luparello, an influential political and the newly elected head of the local Christian Democratic coalition. Although the engineer is highly respected and considered a morally upstanding citizen, his half-naked body is discovered in a car by two trash collectors at the Mànnara (the name of a rural location that is the scene of drug use and prostitution). An autopsy reveals that he died of natural causes and yet Montalbano is reluctant to close the investigation. He perseveres to uncover the true circumstances of the politician's death and learns why his body was discovered in such a sordid location, most unexpected of a man known for his calculated behavior.

⁵⁸ "Il centro più inventato della Sicilia più tipica."

Montalbano's investigation reveals that Luparello's secretary and closest political advisor, the lawyer Rizzo, a man widely known to have ties to the local Mafia, gave the order to move Luparello's dead body to the Mànnara to ensure that the scandalous circumstances of his death posthumously scar his impeccable reputation. In doing so, Rizzo embroils Luparello's faction of the Christian Democratic Party in a scandal intended to shame its members into submission so they will accept a leader from the rival faction to succeed Luparello as party president. Thus, the honorable Cusumano from the opposing faction is named head of the Christian Democratic Party and in an unexpected move, he appoints the lawyer Rizzo as party secretary.

The mechanization of corruption becomes apparent when powerful individuals such as judges and bishops anxiously question Montalbano's motives for prolonging the investigation. Luparello's political allies are eager to put an end to the rumors surrounding his death-- to protect his memory as a highly respected member of the Christian Democratic Party and their own political futures. At one point a bishop expresses his gratitude for Montalbano's "Christian charity" and discretion in barring media access to photos of the dead minister in his car with his pants around his knees. Yet Montalbano gave this order prior to learning the identity of the deceased; he would do the same for anyone, powerful politician or otherwise. The bishop also sends the message to Montalbano to be "prudent" in his investigation, implying that he should not prolong his investigation, nor should he uncover evidence that would reveal the politician's compromising behavior.

When the lawyer Rizzo is later found dead people are quick to conclude that he was killed by the Mafia. However, Montalbano discovers that it was, in fact, Luparello's

young lover and nephew, Giorgio, who killed Rizzo as retribution for tarnishing his uncle's memory and then took his own life out of desperation. In an ironic twist, Luparello's murder is a true "crime of passion"⁵⁹ that the public believes to be a Mafia-related crime. Upon the novel's conclusion Montalbano solves the mysteries yet only after the characters have imposed extrajudicial justice.

2.2.2 *The Terra-Cotta Dog*

Camilleri's second detective novel to feature Commissioner Montalbano, *The Terra-Cotta Dog* (*Il cane di terracotta*), was published by Sellerio in 1996. Set in Vigàta, the novel opens as Montalbano's childhood friend Gegè Gillottu, boss of the criminal district the Mànnara, asks to meet with Montalbano. Gegè explains to Montalbano that he has always paid a monthly "pizzo" (a percentage of his earnings as protection) for his prostitution racket to the infamous crime boss, Gaetano Bennici (nicknamed Tanu u Grecu, "the Greek") who covertly controls all prostitution in Sicily. Tanu, who is accused of multiple homicides and has been in hiding for many years, asks Gegè to arrange for a private, unofficial meeting between himself and Montalbano.

Montalbano disregards official protocols and agrees to a secret meeting with Tanu, informing no one of their encounter, not even the chief of police. At this meeting Tanu asks Montalbano to stage his arrest but to make it appear as if he has been arrested against his will. Tanu explains to Montalbano how the changing times have adversely affected organized crime using the analogy of an old-fashioned cart driven by "men of

⁵⁹ The "crime of passion" defense is a motive to justify murder that is commonly used by the Mafia to disguise the true nature of crimes. A homicide that is ruled a "crime of passion" typically carry a lighter sentence than a homicide motivated by any other reason.

honor.” The cart has wheels that must be constantly greased through bribes to politicians, judges, union leaders, banks and company owners. Some of the “men of honor” of Tanu’s generation questioned the organization’s need to grease the wheels and as a result different carts appeared. Some thought that carts were too slow and upgraded to cars whose young drivers studied law and economics in Germany and the United States. This new mentality and advances in technology have transformed organized crime: from a network of personal connections, in which codes of honor are respected and the Mafia has a social function (that of settling agrarian disputes and providing “protection”), into an increasingly violent and impersonal organization devoid of an “honor code”.

Tanu turns to Montalbano because he respects him and considers him “one who understands things” (“Perché lei, e me lo sta dimostrando, è uno che le cose le capisce”) (25) and therefore can appreciate Tanu’s need to save face (“...mi necessita tanticchia di triatro per salvare la faccia”) (24). Therefore, one night with a few of his trusted men, Montalbano heads out to arrest Tanu in accordance with their plan. The arrest of this long-wanted crime boss generates tremendous publicity and prompts the Antimafia squad in Palermo to demand Tanu’s transfer to their custody.

While Montalbano reluctantly takes part in a news conference, the Antimafia squad is transferring Tanu to an undisclosed site when their vehicle is riddled with bullets, killing the escorts and critically injuring Tanu. Just before he dies, Tanu tells Montalbano the location of a hidden cave, where a trafficking operation stores its weapons cache and other black market goods. With this revelation Tanu rewards Montalbano for having orchestrated his arrest.

The same evening that Tanu is arrested, an armed robbery of a large grocery store outside of Vigàta takes place and is later connected to the trafficking operation revealed by Tanu. The only witness able to implicate the store owner in the robbery is killed in a car crash (the brake cables were severed), the night before he is supposed to meet with Montalbano to reveal an important detail he witnessed the night of the robbery. Luckily, the man had sent a letter to Montalbano detailing what he witnessed, in the event that he should not be able to keep his appointment with the commissioner. The store owner (believed to play a vital role in the trafficking operation) is assassinated shortly after Montalbano's deputy Mimi Augello places him under surveillance, without Montalbano's authorization. The commissioner is clearly frustrated with Augello's naiveté in thinking he could place an individual suspected of Mafia activity under surveillance, without the Mafia's knowledge. While the store owner is merely a low-ranking member of the trafficking operation, he is a vital link to the more powerful members that Montalbano wishes to pursue. As in Sciascia's mystery novels, the trail that leads to the powerful bosses of this illegal operation abruptly ends when a grocery wholesaler in Catania, believed to be the boss of the assassinated store owner, is killed by a bomb when he opens the door to his villa.

Following a press conference about the discovery of the cave and the trafficking operation, Montalbano receives an anonymous phone call; the caller condemns Montalbano's role in the "theatrical performance" (the staging of Tanu's arrest) and promises that Montalbano will pay for it. When Montalbano receives a frantic call from Gegè asking to meet with him somewhere safe, the stage is set for the attack that ensues

on a dark, deserted beach where Gegè and Montalbano are sprayed by gunfire that kills Gegè and leaves Montalbano for dead.

Upon Montalbano's release from the hospital, he abandons the investigation into the arms trafficking operation to solve the mystery of a murder that occurred decades earlier. Inside the cave where the smuggled weapons are discovered, Montalbano uncovers an inner chamber containing the corpses of two young murder victims whose bodies were placed there during World War II. His pursuit of this decades-old mystery reveals a story of violence and murder whose perpetrators have long since died. The novel ends with a meeting between Montalbano and the elderly man who orchestrated the cave burial of the bodies fifty years earlier and then migrated to northern Italy to start a new life. Ironically, it is easier to discover the truth surrounding a murder that occurred fifty years earlier than it is to uncover the truth in contemporary cases that involve the Mafia.

2.2.3 *The Snack Thief*

The Snack Thief (Il ladro di merendine) is Camilleri's third mystery to feature the Commissioner Montalbano. Published in 1996, the novel opens with the murder of a Tunisian day laborer who boards a boat to join a nocturnal fishing expedition and is gunned down by another boat in international waters near the port of Vigàta. Although the official investigation is conducted by the town of Mazzarà, the port of departure, Montalbano becomes involved (albeit "unofficially") when he discovers a connection

between this murder and that of a retired local businessman, Mr. Lapecora, who was stabbed to death in the elevator of his apartment building.

Montalbano's investigation reveals that Mr. Lapecora was blackmailed to reopen an import-export business that served as the cover for a Tunisian drug smuggling operation. He learns that the man murdered on the fishing boat was Tunisia's most wanted drug and arms dealer and the organizer of the smuggling operation that used Mr. Lapecora's business as a cover.

Surprisingly, Mr. Lapecora's death did not have a direct connection to the drug smuggling operation. He was killed by his wife, not out of jealousy (she knew that he was having an extramarital affair) but out of greed, because he was spending exorbitant amounts of money that she feared would lead to their financial ruin. Mr. Lapecora was having an affair with a Tunisian woman named Karima, who provided cleaning services and sexual favors to retired local men. When Karima (who is also the sister of the renowned Tunisian drug smuggler) is later murdered by the Italian Secret Services, Montalbano hides her young son François, the only witness to his mother's death, to save his life.

Montalbano asks a friend at a local television station to publicize various details of Karima's murder during a broadcast, a move that forces the Italian Secret Service to arrange a meeting between Montalbano and the Secret Service agent, Colonel Perin Longherin. During this meeting the Colonel discusses the murder of the Tunisian drug dealer, his sister Karima and another witness and explains why they had to eliminate certain individuals. In exchange for his silence, Montalbano blackmails the Colonel so that he will exhume Karima's body (vital to securing her son's financial future) and block

Montalbano's pending promotion to vice-chief of police (Montalbano fears a promotion will mean more bureaucracy and less investigating). Although Montalbano solves the mystery surrounding the deaths of Mr. Lapecora and the Tunisian drug lord, the results of his latter, unofficial investigation will never be made public because of the involvement of the Italian Secret Services. Not unlike the cases that involve Mafia activity, the presence of the Italian Secret Services also ensures that official justice will not be enforced.

2.2.4 *Voice of the Violin*

Sellerio published Camilleri's fourth novel to feature Salvo Montalbano, *Voice of the Violin (La voce del violino)* in 1997. This novel represents a distinct change in Montalbano's attitude toward the law which is manifested in his investigative techniques and interactions with the new chief of police. The former police chief whom Montalbano greatly respected and considered a fatherly figure (much like Camilleri viewed Leonardo Sciascia), retires at the end of Montalbano's third investigation, *The Snack Thief*. This change of authority creates a crisis for Montalbano-- the new Chief of Police Bonetti-Alderighi, a northern Italian whose disparaging attitude toward southern Italians and lack of cultural understanding make it impossible for Montalbano to respect him.

As the novel opens, Montalbano discovers a crime scene by pure chance when he drives by an isolated villa and intuitively senses that a crime has been committed there. With no legal grounds on which to investigate, he picks the lock to illegally enter the villa where he discovers the naked corpse of Michaela Licalzi. Unable to open an

investigation based on his illegal discovery, he asks a friend to make an anonymous phone call to the police to prompt a search of the villa.

When Montalbano uses a bathrobe to cover the nude murder victim, a forensic scientist accuses him of contaminating the crime scene. As a result, the new chief of police (who strongly dislikes Montalbano) transfers the investigation from his command to the ambitious Commissioner Panzacchi, a fellow northerner and friend of the police chief. Commissioner Panzacchi's investigation has devastating consequences for the pursuit of justice. As his team looks for someone to blame, they immediately bring the engineer Di Blasi to the station for questioning. Di Blasi has a mentally handicapped son Maurizio, who is known to be obsessed with the deceased victim and yet no one believes him capable of such a crime. While the father is being questioned at the station, Panzacchi and some of his men search for Maurizio in the vicinity of the family's country house. When spotted by Panzacchi's team Maurizio runs into a cave to hide. When he finally emerges he is waving a shoe in his defense, which the officers mistake for a weapon and respond with lethal force.

In a panic, those involved in the wrongful death of Maurizio Di Blasi conspire to frame him and his father. They claim that Maurizio threatened them with a hand grenade and that they fired in self-defense. To support their story they steal the hand grenade from Di Blasi's villa and place it at the crime scene, whereby implicating Mr. Di Blasi in the aiding and abetting of murder. Guattardaro, a prominent defense lawyer who represents members of the local Mafia, asks the journalist Nicolò Zito to arrange for his meeting with Montalbano. During the meeting, Guattardaro presents Montalbano and Zito with a videotape of the murder of Maurizio DiBlasi, filmed by some of his

“acquaintances”. Montalbano ironically reflects that in this rare instance in which Guattardaro and his cohorts could serve as witnesses for a crime that does not involve the Mafia, they are most eager to perform their civic duty, especially if it sheds light on the corrupt behavior of public officials. Montalbano refuses to use the videotape, as he does not wish to involve himself with the lawyer and the men he represents. Through other means Montalbano and his team make the truth surrounding the circumstances of Maurizio’s death and Panzacchi’s illegal actions known to the public. Amid an uproar of public indignation Panzacchi is forced to resign and Montalbano and his team resume their “unofficial” investigation into the death of Michaela Licalzi.

Montalbano’s persistence is crucial to solving the murder of Michaela Licalzi. He learns that her lover, Guido Serravalle, an antiques dealer from Bologna with substantial gambling debts, killed her to steal an antique violin she possessed worth millions of Euros. As Montalbano questions Guido in his hotel room, Guido suddenly pulls out a gun and fatally shoots himself. The clue that led Montalbano to Serravalle was a plane ticket under the passenger seat of Licalzi’s car – a car that should have been thoroughly searched at the beginning of the investigation. Had Montalbano not been removed from the case, a search of the car likely would have revealed this invaluable clue, averting the wrongful death of Maurizio Di Blasi and the suicide of Guido Serravalle.

2.2.5 *Excursion to Tindari*

Montalbano’s fifth appearance occurs in *Excursion to Tindari (La gita a Tindari)* published in 2000. In this mystery of cyber-crimes, Montalbano’s aversion to technology

and the internet are reinforced and he begins to show his age (he is approaching fifty) through his reluctance to embrace the changing times.

The novel opens with the murder of Nenè Sanfilippo, a twenty-year-old, shot in the face in front of his apartment building, the same building from which an elderly couple named Griffo is reported missing. While those investigating the murder of Sanfilippo think it is a coincidence that the missing couple is from the same apartment building, Montalbano is convinced there is a connection between the two. The missing couple is found executed in an abandoned stable in the countryside. Montalbano learns that they had rented the place to Sanfilippo who used it as an office to operate his internet-based, global mafia activities that include: drug smuggling, organ trafficking and pornography.

At first glance, Sanfilippo's murder appears to be a "crime of passion". He was having an affair with the wife of a world-renowned surgeon, Dr. Ingrò, who therefore had a motive to kill Sanfilippo. In fact, the truth is far more complex. Montalbano learns through a friend of Dr. Ingrò's wife that Dr. Ingrò and Sanfilippo knew each other, as they were both involved in the same organ trafficking operation organized by the Sinagra Mafia family. Dr. Ingrò operates an exclusive private clinic in Sicily and is known to perform surgery on wealthy individuals from around the world. A compulsive art collector, Dr. Ingrò accumulates tremendous debt by acquiring works of art he cannot afford. One day the Mafia approaches him with a solution to his financial woes-- if he agrees to perform illegal organ transplants, they will pay him incredibly well. Through its global network, the Mafia provides the wealthy transplant recipients and the organs,

which are taken against the will of defenseless victims that include: prisoners, refugees and children.

In an ongoing crusade the police chief has stripped Montalbano and his team of their investigative powers; instead they must investigate petty crimes while the squad in the neighboring town of Montelusa oversees all homicide investigations. Montalbano has strict orders to investigate only disappearance of the elderly couple and not the murder of Sanfilippo but when he discovers a connection between their murders he cannot resist.

As in the novel *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, Montalbano has a personal encounter with the head of a local Mafia family, Don Balduccio Sinagra. Summoned to his personal residence, Montalbano meets with Don Balduccio who asks him to arrest his grandson Japichinu, who is hiding from the law, and discloses his location. Like Tanu u Grecu, Balduccio contemplates the advent of the new Mafia and how the “code of honor” by which the Mafia has abided for generations is no longer respected. Ironically the head of the Sinagra family shares Montalbano’s feelings of being overwhelmed by advancing technology, more sophisticated weaponry, and an indiscriminate attitude towards killing. Surprisingly, Don Balduccio Sinagra is not truly concerned about his grandson’s well-being, but instead gave the order to have him killed; the grandson had strong ties to the new mafia and was able to dispose of his elderly grandfather whenever he wished.

When Montalbano and his men go to arrest Japichinu, they find him dead, likely killed by his grandfather’s bodyguard. In that moment Montalbano understands that Sinagra had hoped they would make the discovery public whereby providing Sinagra with an alibi. Montalbano refuses to do the Mafia’s bidding-- instead he tells his men to walk away from the scene, as if they had never seen it. Montalbano will not reveal this

discovery, nor will he make his findings public in the murder investigations of Nenè Sanfilippo and the elderly Griffo couple; for he is conducting underground, unofficial investigations. He does, however, ask his friend, the journalist Nicolò Zito to publicize the story of Dr. Ingrò and the organ trafficking operation so that these horrendous crimes may be known and stopped.

2.2.6 *The Smell of the Night*

The Smell of the Night (L'odore della notte), Montalbano's sixth appearance published in 2001, is the mystery of a talented and charismatic accountant, Emanuele Gargano, who suddenly disappears after cheating numerous people out of their life savings with an elaborate financial scheme. Initially, Montalbano says he does not understand finance and entrusts to his deputy, but later becomes involved in the investigation when he meets some of the elderly victims and feels morally obligated to bring the accountant to justice.

While some individuals assert that the Mafia is involved in Gargano's disappearance and that he is likely dead, Montalbano is of the opinion that the accountant is living comfortably on an exotic island. When one of the accountant's assistants, Giacomo Pellegrino, is reported missing, Montalbano learns of the romantic involvement between Gargano and Pellegrino, who likely blackmailed his boss after discovering his scam. When Montalbano finds Gargano's car submerged in the sea along with Pellegrino's body and motor scooter, he makes an anonymous phone call to the police chief to alert officials of the discovery.

Montalbano's relationship with the chief of police further deteriorates when the chief questions him about an old case (*The Snack Thief*) in which he took possession of the bank book of a murder victim, implying that Montalbano is corrupt. In reality, Montalbano had entrusted the bank book to a notary and stipulated that its contents be distributed to the victim's son on his eighteenth birthday. Montalbano's diminishing respect for his direct superior has a direct correlation to his increasingly unorthodox behavior. When he discovers that his favorite olive tree⁶⁰ has been uprooted to make way for the construction of a villa, he smashes all of the villa's windows along with statuettes of the seven dwarfs and sprays "JERK" (STRONZO) in green spray paint on one of its walls.

The novel ends with Montalbano's discovery that it was another assistant of Gargano's, Mariastella, who killed Giacomo and submerged the car with his body and scooter inside. Mariastella was obsessed with Gargano and with protecting his reputation. At the end of the novel, Montalbano walks through her house as if he is living the plot of the Faulkner novel, *Homage to Emily (Omaggio a Emilia)*. To his horror he discovers Gargano's lifeless body wrapped in nylon and lying in the guest bedroom. Mariastella appears to have suffered a nervous breakdown and shot Gargano in the heart (out of love – to save him from scandal and dishonor), then she placed his body in her guest bedroom and carried on as if nothing had happened. Every morning she returns to the office where she patiently awaits for her true love Gargano to walk through the door. Out of his compassion for Mariastella and the tragic life she has led

⁶⁰ The symbol of the olive tree and its significance to Pirandello warrants further study. Sciascia writes in *Alfabeto Pirandelliano* that as Pirandello was dying he told his son, in reference to his final unfinished comedy, *The Mountain Giants (I giganti della montagna)*, that he had resolved "everything" with the presence of a large, Saracen olive tree in the middle of the stage. Sciascia interprets the Saracen olive tree to symbolize memory (50).

Montalbano considers not making his discovery public, to allow people to continue to believe that the deaths were committed by the Mafia. In the end his actions are dictated by his loyalty towards his profession and the justice the victims deserve.

2.2.7 *Rounding the Mark*

Rounding the Mark (Il giro di boa) published in 2003 is Camilleri's seventh and most important mystery to feature Montalbano. It is unique as it is based on an inquiry of child-trafficking and the illegal immigration of minors to Italy conducted by Carmelo Abbate and Paola Ciccioli and published by *Panorama* on September 19, 2002.

The novel opens with an extremely agitated Montalbano commenting to his girlfriend Livia on the events surrounding the G8 summit held in Genoa⁶¹ and his disgust with the behavior of law enforcement in Genoa and Naples, "Livia, I don't *feel* betrayed, I *have been* betrayed; it is not a question of feelings. I have always conducted my job with honesty, as a gentleman. If I gave my word to a delinquent, I kept it. That is why I am respected. That has been my strength, do you understand?" (12).⁶²

The mystery begins as Montalbano swims in the sea in front of his home and collides with a decomposing corpse. The only thing evident from the corpse is that the

⁶¹ The Genoa Group of Eight Summit protest, from July 18 to July 22, 2001, was a dramatic protest, drawing an estimated 200,000 demonstrators. Dozens were hospitalized following clashes with police and night raids by security forces on two schools housing activists and independent journalists. People taken into custody after the raids have alleged severe abuse at the hands of police. On July 20, a 23-year-old activist Carlo Giuliani of Genoa, was shot dead by Mario Placanica, a Carabinieri officer, during clashes with police. Images show him throwing a fire extinguisher at the carabinieri's vehicle before he was shot and then run over twice by the Land Rover. Placanica was acquitted from any wrong-doing, as judges determined he fired in self-defense. 14 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/27th_G8_summit/>.

⁶² "Livia, io non mi *sento* tradito. Io *sono stato* tradito. Non si tratta di sensazioni. Ho sempre fatto il mio mestiere con onestà. Da galantomo. Se davo la mia parola a un delinquente, la rispettavo. E perciò sono rispettato. È stata la mia forza, lo capisci?"

wrists and ankles had been bound with steel cord. A local fisherman explains to Montalbano that given the currents along the coastline the corpse came from a relatively short distance, despite the advanced state of decomposition. A photo of the victim, generated with facial reconstruction techniques, bears an uncanny resemblance to a man in their database; a man from the mainland, who was reported deceased years earlier.

A fellow inspector asks Montalbano to meet him at the port as he needs a favor and there Montalbano observes the Coast Guard as it guides a boat of illegal immigrants safely to shore. The port inspector tells Montalbano this is a daily occurrence, and that many less fortunate boats do not make it to shore: numerous lives are lost as people attempt to reach Sicily in search of better living conditions in Italy or elsewhere in Europe.

As the passengers disembark and are guided towards immigration services, Montalbano observes a little boy run off and hide. A woman Montalbano assumes to be the mother, is hysterically calling and running after the child when she falls and injures her leg. Montalbano persuades the boy to come out of his hiding spot and then he and his mother are promptly whisked away in an ambulance. As Montalbano replays the sequence of events in his mind, he is certain that there was more to the child's fear than he had understood. When Montalbano looks for the child at the hospital he is surprised to find that there is no record of him and his mother being admitted. When he learns that the little boy has been struck and killed by an automobile on an isolated rural road, he vows to investigate the disappearance of this child and mother to find those responsible for this boy's death. Montalbano's fellow investigator is not surprised to learn of the disappearance of this mother and child. He tells Montalbano that most evenings there is

at least one boat that arrives from North Africa or elsewhere with as many as one hundred and fifty illegal immigrants aboard and that illegal immigration in Sicily is a grave social problem that government officials in Rome have done nothing to remediate.

Thus, when Montalbano is approached by a journalist who has written extensively on the complex network of child trafficking, he begins a private investigation into this growing global phenomenon. The journalist explains the severity of the problem: “Only last year, and I am relaying official statistics, just under 15,000 minors unaccompanied by an adult were detained in Italy...almost 4,000 a nice percentage, no? came from Albania, the others from Romania, Yugoslavia, Moldavia. You must include the 1,500 from Morocco and those from Algeria, Turkey, Iraq, Bangladesh and other countries. Is the picture clear?” (205).⁶³ The journalist tells Montalbano that these children are killed for their organs, sold into slave labor or prostitution, sold to pedophiles and on occasion, are intentionally maimed so that they will earn more when begging on the streets.

Montalbano learns that some paramedics and ambulance drivers transport newly arrived illegal immigrants to the hospital where they are met by a third party and disappear without a trace, instead of being admitted to the hospital. In the case of the young boy killed, the woman was not his mother but a stranger who accompanied the child on the journey in exchange for a reduced fare. The paramedic responsible for transporting the woman and child to the hospital, Mr. Marzilla, became involved in the trafficking operation to solve his financial woes. His wife owned a local gift shop in

⁶³ “Solo l’anno scorso, e le riferisco dati ufficiali, sono stati rintracciati in Italia poco meno di quindicimila minori non accompagnati da un parente”. “...quasi quattromila, una bella percentuale, eh, provenivano dall’Albania, gli altri dalla Romania, dalla Jugoslavia, dalla Moldavia. Nel conto sono da mettere i mille e cinquecento dal Marocco e poi quelli dall’Algeria, dalla Turchia, dall’Iraq, dal Bangladesh e da altri paesi. È chiaro il quadro?” (The statistics quoted are taken from Abbate, Carmelo, and Ciccioli, Paolo. “Bambini, la grande caccia.” *Panorama*. 19 September 2002: 47-53. Print.)

town and when they refused to pay the “pizzo,” or protection to the local Mafia, the shop was burned to the ground and the family went into substantial debt in order to rebuild. Marzilla was approached by the Mafia and told they would reduce his debt, if he agreed to partake in their child trafficking operation. His job was to ensure that certain illegal immigrants, mostly children, were not checked in at the hospital but instead delivered to a third party awaiting their arrival. When Montalbano interrogates this paramedic and discovers that he sedated the child, who was later killed when he attempted to escape, he becomes enraged and strikes Marzilla (similar to his assault on Colonel Perin Longherin in *The Snack Thief*). Marzilla reveals the Mafia member who organized the child trafficking operation, Don Pepe Aguglia, a local contractor suspected of usury and agrees to keep Montalbano abreast of future arrivals in which he is scheduled to take part.

The commissioner discovers that the dead body he encountered while swimming is that of a man involved in the child trafficking operation he is investigating. Wanted by law enforcement officials elsewhere in Italy for smuggling, he killed someone in his place to avoid capture. Once he was officially declared deceased, he relocated to Sicily, to work in the child trafficking operation until he was disposed of by the ruthless ringleader.

The novel ends as Montalbano and his team bust up this trafficking organization. One evening four boats suspected of carrying clandestine immigrants head for various points along the southern Sicilian shore, completely occupying the Coast Guard’s attention. Montalbano learned beforehand that these boats are diversions to detract attention from the target of the child trafficking ring, a boat with seven young children aboard, that approaches the coast unnoticed and enters a hidden grotto that lies below a

remote rural villa. As his men surround the villa, Montalbano enters the grotto to engage in a fatal shoot-out with the notorious Tunisian ringleader, Jamil Zarzis that leaves Zarzis dead and the commissioner critically injured.

The title of this novel, *Rounding the Mark*, was inspired by a boat race that Montalbano witnessed in which one of the contenders refused to circle the buoy and return to the finish line as the rules dictate. Instead, the boat continued straight ahead crashing into the judges' boat- an apt metaphor for Montalbano's increasingly obstinate behavior in the face of evermore horrific crimes and ineffective official investigations.

2.3 Analysis of Montalbano Mysteries

Leonardo Sciascia encouraged Camilleri to consider writing novels in the mystery genre; but while their mystery novels share some affinities in terms of content, Camilleri's mysteries differ tremendously in their development of characters, treatment of the Mafia, the complexities of the crimes investigated, and prose style. These differences reflect the social evolution that has occurred in Sicily during the decades since Sciascia first published *The Day of the Owl* in 1961.

At first glance, their novels appear to have much in common: many of their plots are set in Sicily, the Mafia is omnipresent, and not a single one of their mysteries concludes with the victory of official justice. However, upon closer examination, it is clear that some of the seemingly subtle factors that differentiate their novels mirror significant societal changes that have occurred in Sicily since the 1960s.

Sciascia's mysteries are set in different locations across Sicily and northern Italy and while each novel features a different protagonist, his investigators are committed to uncovering the truth and imparting official justice. By contrast, Camilleri's crime novels all take place in the small Sicilian town of Vigàta, an imaginary town that serves as a metaphor for a typical Sicilian town, and they feature a sole protagonist, the Commissioner Salvo Montalbano. Camilleri named his protagonist Salvo Montalbano as homage to his close friend, the Catalan mystery novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1939-2003). In *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, Montalbano is portrayed as reading a mystery by Montalbán that features his detective Pepe Carvalho, a middle-aged man whose unorthodox investigative techniques and gastronomic passion are reminiscent of Salvo Montalbano's. Camilleri's use of a sole protagonist establishes continuity from one novel to the next as it serves to humanize the protagonist; Montalbano's personality evolves⁶⁴ as he ages, together with his audience. The presence of a lone investigator conveys Camilleri's conviction that the admirable qualities Montalbano possesses are unusual—his incorruptibility and unwavering passion for the pursuit of truth and justice is an anomaly in present-day Sicilian law enforcement.

Montalbano the Protagonist

The fact that Montalbano is Sicilian is crucial to his success as an inspector. His command of local communicative codes and cultural nuances allows him to gain the trust

⁶⁴ Giovanni Capecchi, in the first study dedicated to Camilleri, comments on the evolution of Montalbano's character. Unlike George Simenon's Inspector Maigret who is immutable, Montalbano is a protagonist who evolves from investigative enthusiasm to tiredness. (*Andrea Camilleri*, 68).

of Sicilians-- victims, witnesses, colleagues and mafiosi alike. His refined ability to interpret the subtle messages contained in spoken and (more importantly) unspoken communication is his greatest strength. He is frequently called upon by members of the community to investigate an incident they find suspicious. For example, Nicolò Zito, a friend and television journalist appeals directly to Montalbano in a broadcast in *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, urging him to investigate a crime that the public feels is being covered up. Mrs. Luparello, the widow of a murder victim in *The Shape of Water*, pleads with Montalbano to investigate obscure details of her husband's death – details that she is convinced prove that political forces acted to posthumously destroy her husband's reputation. Even Montalbano's detectives encourage him to unofficially investigate a case in *The Voice of the Violin*: when people seek the truth, they turn to Montalbano.

Montalbano is a detective by nature, an instinctual hunter spurred by an innate sense of justice. He is a morally upstanding individual who refuses to compromise and believes that citizens should take their civic duties seriously and help less fortunate individuals. He frequently displays a cantankerous disposition and shuns what he perceives to be meaningless bureaucratic and social conventions. Montalbano is a highly introspective individual who appreciates life's simple pleasures such as: swimming in the sea by his beachfront, good food and wine, good company, literature and the arts. He has great esteem for Sicilian artists that include the painter, Renato Guttuso, the dramatist Luigi Pirandello and the author Leonardo Sciascia.

Relentless in the pursuit of justice, Montalbano continues to investigate cases that have been officially closed when he does not agree with the official verdict. Just as Leonardo Sciascia was relentless in bringing the phenomenon of the Mafia to the public's

attention, Camilleri's protagonist will not be deterred from his quest to uncover the truth and to see justice served. Although the chief of police reprimands Montalbano in *The Shape of Water* for frequently complicating affairs, he expresses total confidence in Montalbano's judgment and abilities as an investigator. Indeed, he considers him a friend whose "intelligence, keenness and depth of perception and above all civility in human relationships are incredibly rare in this day and age" (154).⁶⁵ To the police chief's dismay, Montalbano is not interested in professional advancement; he refuses promotions that would mean increased administrative responsibilities and less time for investigating.

Despite the creation of an Antimafia squad in the 1960s, Sicilian law enforcement has been infiltrated by the Mafia on various occasions. Montalbano is hesitant to collaborate with other precincts for fear his investigations would be compromised if their details were intercepted by corrupt officers. He is respected for this keen ability to perceive reality as it is. In *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, the journalist Pretia describes Montalbano as an exceptional figure: "His ingenious intuitions make the Investigator Salvo Montalbano of Vigàta perhaps a singular figure in the panorama of investigators on the island and, why not? In all of Italy" (125).⁶⁶

Like the presence of the Mafia, the mistrust and defiance that average citizens harbor towards law enforcement in Sciascia's novels is still present in Montalbano's investigations. At one point in *The Voice of the Violin*, Montalbano questions a housekeeper in a hotel who asks, "Are you cops?" which prompts Montalbano to reflect: "How many centuries of abusive police were responsible for Sicilian women fine-tuning

⁶⁵ "intelligenza, l'acume, e soprattutto una civiltà nei rapporti umani assai rara al giorno d'oggi."

⁶⁶ "una delle intuizioni geniali che fanno, del commissario Salvo Montalbano di Vigàta, una figura forse unica nel panorama degli investigatori dell'isola e, perchè no? dell'Italia tutta."

the ability to detect a cop in an instant?” (46).⁶⁷ In *The Shape of Water*, the men who discover a dead body at the Mànnara (the name of a rural location that is the scene of drug use and prostitution) head straight to Montalbano’s office to report their discovery (after they first alert the Mafia); they can confide in Montalbano and he will not treat them as suspects:

They headed towards town, straight to police headquarters. The idea of going to the Carabinieri had not crossed their minds; there, a Milanese lieutenant was in charge. The investigator, Salvo Montalbano, instead, was from Catania and when he wanted to understand something, he understood it. (17)⁶⁸

Just as Sciascia underscored the importance of Sicilian investigators in his novels (witness the only investigator who is not killed, a Sicilian in Sciascia’s final mystery novel *A Straightforward Tale*), the fact that Camilleri’s inspector is Sicilian is crucial to solving the mysteries. Decades after Sciascia’s writings, there is still a lack of trust towards outsiders, in particular northerners, many of whom neither appreciate nor understand Sicilian culture and possess a disparaging attitude towards Sicilians. In Camilleri’s fifth mystery *Excursion to Tindari*, the new police chief Bonetti-Alderighi, a northern Italian, speaks with contempt of the Sicilians’ intuition and their conspiratorial code of silence (omertà), acknowledging that his inability to decipher Sicilian non-verbal communication is a professional disadvantage. Whereas the previous chief of police was a man Montalbano deeply respected and worked well with, his successor Bonetti-Alderighi fails to understand local customs and is suspicious of Montalbano and his colleagues. When Montalbano’s deputy Mimi Augello requests a transfer to a precinct

⁶⁷ “Sbirri siete?” “Al commissario venne da ridere. Quanti secoli di soprusi polizieschi c’erano voluti per affinare in una fimmina siciliana una così fulminea capacità d’individuazione di uno sbirro?”

⁶⁸ “Si avviarono verso il paese, diretti al commissariato. Di andare dai carabinieri manco gli era passato per l’anticamera del cervello, li comandava un tenente milanese. Il commissario invece era di Catania, di nome faceva Salvo Montalbano, e quando voleva capire una cosa, la capiva.”

outside of Sicily, the chief of police comments that the time has come to eliminate the Mafia clique in the precinct of Vigàta. Montalbano's interactions with Bonetti-Alderighi are contrived and fraught with subtle irony when Montalbano speaks in standard Italian, the communicative mode he regards as the evasive and superficial language of bureaucracy, in contrast with the local Sicilian dialect that he considers expressive and sincere.

Unorthodox behavior

In response to the new police chief's attitude of superiority, Montalbano's behavior becomes increasingly defiant and unorthodox under his command. For example, although he had previously entered suspects' houses under false pretenses, he now illegally enters villas without a warrant when he suspects that a crime has been committed. He destroys private property, strikes a suspect during an interrogation, and physically assaults an Italian secret service agent. The increasingly extreme nature of his behavior mirrors the escalation of organized criminal activity that resorts to abuses of the most basic human rights.

In fact, Montalbano's success as an investigator is largely a result of his unorthodox behavior. For example, he is willing to speak directly with Mafia members and maintains contact with unsavory characters, such as his childhood friend Gegè who manages the Mànnara. He believes that, although these individuals have chosen paths in life that are at odds with the law, they are still human beings worthy of respect. In later novels such as *Rounding the Mark*, Montalbano grows increasingly irritated with the

behavior of law enforcement officials in Sicily and Italy, and he loses respect for his profession owing to their use of excessive force and abuse of power, especially after the mistreatment of protesters at the G8 summit in Genoa in July of 2001.

Communist Ideology

Montalbano's actions consistently reveal his communist ideology. He is a champion of the weak and the powerless, and he frequently defends the less fortunate as in *The Shape of Water* when he intervenes to help a trash collector who plans to sell a valuable necklace he found at the Mànnara to pay for his child's medical expenses. Montalbano negotiates a deal with him to return the jewelry, thus protecting him and his family from the Mafia, which is trying to recover it, and he simultaneously ensures that the man receives a substantial finder's fee. In *The Terra-Cotta Dog* Montalbano helps his friend Ingrid to escape the unwanted advances of her father-in-law by threatening to expose his behavior with compromising photographs. In *The Shape of Water*, Montalbano bars journalists from photographing a dead body found in a compromising position, to spare the family members of the deceased pain and embarrassment. When officials commend Montalbano for his discretion regarding the high-profile victim, Montalbano responds that he would have done the same for any victim, regardless of their political and social connections. In an interview with the journalist Saverio Lodato, Camilleri states:

An aspect of Montalbano which I have not mentioned that should be considered is his relationship with popular manifestation. When his men tell him, 'Investigator, you are a hell-bent communist,' it is because he has an idea about social relationships that is not widely accepted. When laid off workers protest

in front of a factory and the director calls the police, Montalbano's deputy Mimì Augello is injured by a flying rock and Montalbano comments: 'It's good for him.' 'What do you mean, it's good for him?' And he responds, 'Call the Carabinieri. In these instances, we don't go. Because,' he says harshly, 'the workers are laid off and the director continues to receive his salary. And I have to go defend the director? I am on the side of the laid-off workers. We can say to them: 'People, let's try to use some common sense,' but we cannot defend the director.' This is the idea of Montalbano. (Lodato 384)⁶⁹

In Montalbano's later investigations, his cultural sensitivity acts as a detriment; as the nature of crimes and their context grows increasingly elusive and technologically advanced, he can no longer exploit the same cultural tools and this creates a crisis for him. Accordingly to Camilleri:

He is a true cop, a true sleuth that never conducts an abstract investigation. He always conducts investigations in an 'environment' that he seeks to understand. It can be a town, a district, a neighborhood, a family inside any of these in which a crime has occurred. He wants to understand. He wants to interpret the codes of conduct of that family, of that district, of that town, because otherwise he cannot solve the investigation. (Lodato 376)⁷⁰

Camilleri portrays the effects of technological advancements and globalization on organized crime. Increasingly complex and heinous crimes are planned and perpetrated over the internet; rendering the criminals and their victims faceless as they are stripped of any local character that could reveal their identity. In one instance, Camilleri imagines his hero refusing to participate as the protagonist of a short story, "Montalbano Refuses"

⁶⁹ "C'è un aspetto di Montalbano che va considerato e che non ho detto: il suo rapporto con la manifestazione popolare. Quando i suoi gli dicono: "Comissario, ma vossia è comunista arraggiato", è perché lui ha un'idea dei rapporti sociali che non è precisamente d'ordine. Quando gli operai mandati in cassa integrazione protestano davanti alla fabbrica e il direttore chiama la polizia, viene mandato Mimì Augello che rimane ferito da una sassata e allora Montalbano commenta: "Ben gli sta". "Come, ben gli sta?" E lui risponde: "Voi chiamate i carabinieri. In questi casi, noi non andiamo. Perché" dice brutalmente, "gli operai sono in cassa integrazione, il direttore continua ad avere lo stipendio. E io devo andare a difendere il direttore? Sto dalla parte dei lavoratori licenziati. Possiamo dire loro: Ragazzi, cerchiamo di avere un po' di buonsenso", ma non possiamo difendere il direttore". Questa è l'idea di Montalbano."

⁷⁰ "È un poliziotto vero, uno sbirro vero che non fa mai un'indagine astratta. Conduce sempre un'indagine sul "territorio" che cerca di conoscere. Può essere un paese, un rione, un quartiere, una famiglia dentro la quale si è svolto un determinato fatto di sangue. Vuole capire. Vuole interpretare i codici di comportamento di quella famiglia, di quel rione, di quel paese, perché altrimenti l'indagine non gli riesce."

(“Montalbano si rifiuta”), which pokes fun at the Cannibal Authors (Gli autori cannibali). He writes, “The only time I spoke with Montalbano was when he called me refusing to participate in the story that I was writing. ‘If you want to write a story of this type’ he said, ‘take me out of it because I don’t want to have anything to do with these stories’” (Lodato 375).⁷¹

Recurrent Themes – The Mafia

Camilleri’s novels no longer need to draw attention to the Mafia, by now a publicly acknowledged phenomenon (in large part thanks to Sciascia), whose omnipresence in Sicilian society is reflected in the obscure nature of the crimes Montalbano investigates. In fact, Camilleri says referring to the assassination of the Antimafia magistrates Falcone and Borsellino, “It was an exceptional awakening of consciouness for a country that needed heroes...the death of those two magistrates signaled the point of no return... It was no longer possible to pretend not to see what the Mafia was. One had to realize” (Lodato 272).⁷² While Sciascia’s goal was to bring the parasitic and socially destructive nature of the Mafia to the public’s attention, Camilleri merely alludes to the organization, simultaneously reflecting the evasive nature of the organization and refusing to glorify it. Camilleri tells Saverio Lodato:

I never truly wanted to write about the Mafia, I used it as a background; its existence cannot be denied, it is a component that must be included. The Mafia

⁷¹ “L’ unica volta che ho parlato con Montalbano fu quando mi telefonò rifiutandosi di partecipare al racconto che stavo scrivendo. Se tu vuoi scrivere un racconto di questo tipo – mi disse – tirami fuori, perche io non ci voglio avere a che fare con queste storie.

⁷² “Fu una presa di coscienza eccezionale per un paese che aveva bisogno di eroi.” “La morte di quei due magistrati segnò il punto di svolta totale... Non si poteva più fingere di non vedere che cosa fosse la mafia. Tutti dovettero prenderne coscienza.”

is always included in my stories because it is inevitable but I have never written a book about the Mafia. (24)⁷³

Camilleri uses the phenomenon of the Mafia as a lens to familiarize his readers with Sicilian culture, to draw attention to this serious social ill that plagues the island and has far reaching global consequences. Since the publication of Sciascia's first mystery novel, the phenomenon has become ubiquitous and infiltrated so many facets of daily life on the island that its existence is often ignored with cynical resignation. In fact, the public is so resigned to the constant presence of Mafia crime that they attribute crimes to Mafia activity that are totally unrelated as in *The Shape of Water*, when the murder of the lawyer Rizzo is assumed to be a Mafia hit but is instead a "crime of passion". As Rizzo is widely known to be the link between powerful politicians and the Mafia, everyone assumes his death was ordered by the Mafia. In fact, in the same novel the two trash collectors who find the dead body of a renowned politician state that they first notified the Mafia lawyer Rizzo of their discovery, to remain in his good graces and later collect on a favor (perhaps employment as surveyors, for which they have been professionally trained). A trash collector justifies his behavior to Montalbano by quoting a Sicilian proverb that underscores the vital importance of favors to economic survival and social advancement, "Investigator, you know better than I, that if one does not find the wind in his favor, he does not sail" (70).⁷⁴

Inspector Montalbano's dialogues with the Mafia bosses Tanu u Greco and Don Balduccio Sinagra are reminiscent of Captain Bellodi's meeting with Don Arena in

⁷³ "Io non ho mai voluto scrivere veramente di mafia, l'ho adoperata sempre come sfondo; non se ne può negare l'esistenza, è una delle componenti e io ce la devo mettere. Il mafioso è sempre presente nei miei racconti, perché è inevitabile. Però, un libro sulla mafia non l'ho mai scritto."

⁷⁴ "Commissario, lei u sapi megliu di mia, se uno non trova ventu a favuri, nun naviga."

Sciascia's *The Day of the Owl* and yet, the dynamics of the meetings differ radically. While Captain Bellodi had summoned Don Arena to his office to question him about potential Mafia activity (no one had been able to prove anything prior to that point), Tanu u Greco and Don Balduccio (both accused of multiple homicides and the former has a warrant out for his arrest), reach out to Montalbano through their associates to request an unofficial meeting with him outside of the precinct. During these encounters, they discuss the new direction of the Mafia, they lament that the code by which "men of honor" live is no longer respected, and they ask Montalbano for his help. As the rules of engagement change, they too, like Montalbano, find it difficult to adapt to the changing times. In *Excursion to Tindari*, Don Balduccio explains to Montalbano that the members of the "new Mafia," who are technologically savvy, possess sophisticated weaponry and do not abide by a common code of conduct, will soon replace the families in Vigàta that historically controlled criminal activity.

Since Sciascia published *The Day of the Owl* in 1961, the Italian national government has created Antimafia squads to combat organized criminal activity. As a reaction to these squads the act of "repenting" or turning state witness has become popular among Mafia members. Montalbano expresses skepticism towards "the repentants" (*i pentiti*) and refers disparagingly to the act of repenting in *Excursion to Tindari* as a fashionable trend: "Everyone, from the Pope to the last Mafia member seeks penance for something" (66).⁷⁵ The mention of the Pope and the Mafia in the same sentence underscores Camilleri's belief that the Mafia could not exist without the tacit acceptance of the Catholic Church. Referring to the phenomenon of repenting Camilleri says, "For me the term is wrong. I have always said, it is useless to repeat it, these are

⁷⁵ "Tutti, dal Papa all'ultimo mafioso, si pentivano di qualche cosa."

not 'repentants'. In fact, these feel so little repentance that they contextually can continue to kill. Repentance is a moral occurrence, a state of the soul"(Lodato 281).⁷⁶

Montalbano doubts the effectiveness of the Antimafia squads, for they too are not only infiltrated by the Mafia, they are governed by politicians who have ascended to power within a system of corruption. He questions how corrupt judges, politicians and law enforcement officials-- men directly involved in or complicit with organized crime-- could possibly combat the illicit activities from which they benefit and to which some owe their appointments. In *The Shape of Water*, Montalbano makes the following observation in reference to the engineer Luparello who rose to power in the ranks of the Christian Democratic Party:

And in the shadows and silence for nearly twenty years he served until one day, strengthened by all that he had clearly seen from the shadows he made his own servants, above all the honorable Cusumano. Then the livery had encouraged him to make Portolano a senator and Tricomi a deputy (the newspapers called them 'brotherly friends' and 'devoted followers'). In short, the entire party in Montelusa and the province passed through his hands as did eighty percent of all public and private contracts. Not even the earthquake set off by some Milanese judges [reference to Mani Pulite⁷⁷] that shook up the political party in power for 50 years had touched him: rather having always stood in the background now he could emerge from the shadows to lambaste the corruption of his fellow party members. In the course of a little less than a year he had become the bishop [of the chessboard sort] of renewal and by the acclaim of the party members [i.e., those who were 'signed' up], provincial secretary: unfortunately, only three days stood between the triumphant nomination and death. (32)⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Per me il termine è sbagliato. L'ho sempre detto, è inutile ripeterlo: questi non son "pentiti." Infatti, sono così poco pentiti che contestualmente possono continuare ad ammazzare. Il pentimento è un fatto morale, un fatto dell'anima."

⁷⁷ This is a reference to Mani pulite (Italian for *clean hands*) a nationwide Italian judicial investigation into political corruption held in the 1990s, following the scandal of Banco Ambrosiano in 1982, which implicated mafia, Vatican Bank and P2, and the Maxi Trial of the mid-1980s. *Mani pulite* led to the demise of the so-called *First Republic*, resulting in the disappearance of many parties. Some politicians and industry leaders committed suicide after their crimes were exposed. The corruption system that was uncovered by these investigations was usually referred to as Tangentopoli, or "bribeville." 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_pulite/>.

⁷⁸ "E in ombra e in silenzio per quasi vent'anni aveva servito, finché un giorno, forte di tutto ciò che nell'ombra aveva visto con occhi acutissimi si era fatto a sua volta dei servi, primo fra tutti l'onorevole Cusumano. Quindi la livrea l'aveva fatta mettere al senatore Portolano e al deputato Tricomi (ma i giornali

Like the detectives in Sciascia's novels, who are warned not to question individuals considered "beyond suspicion", at least one of Camilleri's detectives (a friend of Montalbano's from another precinct) is transferred when he dares to investigate individuals whose reputations and social standing are expected to protect their actions from scrutiny. In *The Shape of Water*, it is rumored that the lawyer Rizzo formed the link between the engineer Luparello and the Mafia, and yet all attempts to investigate this relationship are blocked:

Rizzo was rumored to be the bridge between the engineer and the mafia and on this precise argument the inspector had had an opportunity on the sly to see a confidential report that mentioned currency trafficking and laundering dirty money. Suspensions, of course, and nothing more, because those suspicions had never had the opportunity to be verified: every request for authorization to investigate was lost in the meandering hall of justice that the engineer's own father had designed and constructed. (33)⁷⁹

In reality, those who seek to eradicate organized crime often fall victim to it: witness the violent fates of the two Antimafia magistrates, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino⁸⁰, who were assassinated in separate incidents in the early 1990s. In

li chiamavano 'fraterni amici', 'devoti seguaci'). In breve tutto il partito, a Montelusa e provincial, era passato nelle sue mani, così come l'ottanta per cento di tutti gli appalti pubblici e private. Nemmeno il terremoto scatenato da alcuni giudici milanesi, che aveva sconvolto la classe politica al potere da cinquant'anni, l'aveva sfiorato: anzi, essendo sempre stato in secondo piano, ora poteva uscire allo scoperto, mettersi in luce, tuonare contro la corruzione dei suoi compagni di partito. Nel giro di un anno o poco meno era diventato, come alfiere del rinnovamento, e a furor d'iscritti, segretario provinciale: purtroppo, tra la trionfale nomina e la morte erano passati solo tre giorni."

⁷⁹ "Si diceva magari che Rizzo fosse il ponte tra l'ingegnere e la mafia e proprio su questo argomento il commissario aveva avuto modo di vedere di straforo un rapporto riservato che parlava di traffico di valuta e riciclaggio di denaro sporco. Sospetti, certo, e niente di più, perché quei sospetti mai avevano avuto modo di farsi concreti: ogni richiesta di autorizzazione alle indagini si era persa nei meandri di quello stesso palazzo di giustizia che il padre dell'ingegnere aveva progettato e costruito."

⁸⁰ Giovanni Falcone was killed with his wife Francesca Morvillo (herself a magistrate) and three policemen: Rocco Di Cillo, Antonio Montinaro, Vito Schifani, near Capaci on the motorway between Palermo International Airport and the city of Palermo, May 23, 1992. The armored Fiat Croma in which he was traveling was blown up by a bomb (350 kg of explosives) that had been placed in trenches dug by the side of the road. 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Falcone/>.

In 1992, Paolo Borsellino was killed by a car bomb in Via D'Amelio, Palermo, less than two months after the death of his good friend Giovanni Falcone. 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Borsellino/>.

Excursion to Tindari Montalbano reflects on the pleasure that their deaths would have given the mafioso Don Balduccio Sinagra:

Dazed and agitated by this absolutely stunning offensive of justice, after decades of languid repose, Don Balduccio, who felt rejuvenated by thirty years with the news of the assassination of the island's two most valiant magistrates, was suddenly assailed by the aches and pains of old age when he learned that he who would take over as the head of the prosecution was of the worst possible sort: from Piedmont and possibly a communist. (111)⁸¹

While Sciascia's mysteries highlight the relationship between politicians and members of the judicial branch, Camilleri focuses instead on the general population and the idea of "decent people" ("gente per bene"). He underscores that the widely accepted attitude "I saw nothing, I know nothing," is largely to blame for perpetuating Mafia activity. Camilleri's mysteries expose the decades-old mentality that accepted and encouraged the notion of "decent people," and that they should mind their own business and not become involved in matters that do not concern them. For generations, people refused to talk about crimes they had witnessed; they justified their behavior by reasoning that it did not involve them, even though these crimes may have involved other innocent people. In an interview referring to "decent people" Camilleri says:

The same people who closed the window, the good middle classes, you understand, if they needed anything that they were not able to obtain legally, they turned to the Mafia. The Mafia existed only when it was convenient and this meant that the middle classes enabled it to exist and prosper. (Lodato 29)⁸²

⁸¹ "Frastornato e squieto per questa assolutamente inedita offensiva della giustizia, dopo decenni di languido sonno, don Balduccio, che si era sentito ringiovanire di trent'anni alla notizia dell'assassinio dei due più valorosi magistrati dell'isola, era ripiombato di colpo negli acciacchi dell'età quando aveva saputo che a capo della Procura era venuto uno che era il peggio che ci potesse essere: piemontese e in odore di comunismo."

⁸² "Però gli stessi che chiudevano la finestra- la buona borghesia, per intenderci-, se avevano bisogno di qualche cosa che non potevano ottenere attraverso la legge, si rivolgevano al mafioso. Il mafioso esisteva solo quando faceva comodo. E questo significava che la buona borghesia gli dava il visto per l'assistenza e la sopravvivenza."

While Captain Bellodi resigns himself to the impossibility of prosecuting the Mafia in Sciascia's *The Day of the Owl* ("It is useless to try and prosecute someone like this [referring to Don Arena]: there will never be sufficient evidence: the silence of the honest and the dishonest will always protect him" [107].⁸³), Camilleri's mysteries highlight the evolution of a collective moral consciousness and a changing attitude towards organized crime that has occurred in Sicily since 1961.

In Montalbano's opinion, the Mafia could not exist without the unspoken complicity of everyday citizens, as well as the rampant corruption of government and law enforcement officials and members of the church. In *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, a reference is made to the head of a Mafia family who had been at large for decades in Sicily and resembles the real-life "boss of bosses", Bernardo Provenzano, known to have undergone surgery in various clinics across the island where doctors ignored his identity. Older characters in Camilleri's novels comment on the fact that for previous generations it was taboo to mention the Mafia. In that same novel an elderly gentleman, Mr. Burgio, says of a friend's father who was known to be involved in black-market smuggling:

In our house you did not talk about Stefano Moscato... he had been in trouble with the law, ... in those times, in civilized and decent families, one did not talk about such people. It was like talking about shit, excuse me. (203)⁸⁴

This attitude is confirmed by Montalbano's elderly friend Mrs. Cozzo in *The Snack Thief*. A woman Montalbano says he would have liked for a mother, he has great respect for Mrs. Cozzo and regards her as an exemplary citizen for her conviction that an individual has a moral obligation to become involved when he/she has witnessed a crime, regardless

⁸³ "È inutile tentare di incastrare nel penale un uomo come costui: non ci saranno mai prove sufficienti, il silenzio degli onesti e dei disonesti lo proteggerà sempre."

⁸⁴ "In casa nostra non si parlava di Stefano Moscato...aveva avuto guai con la giustizia, ... in quei tempi, nelle famiglie delle persone civili, perbene, non si discorreva di questa gente..."

of the consequences. When Mrs. Cozzo observes suspicious activity at a warehouse she contacts Montalbano and tells him:

For decades ‘decent people’ from here have done nothing but repeat that the Mafia did not concern them, that it was not their business. But I taught my students that the attitude of ‘nenti vitti, nenti sacciu’ ‘I saw nothing, I know nothing’ was the worst of the mortal sins. (61)⁸⁵

Even if diminished since the decades in which Sciascia wrote, this centuries-old Sicilian diffidence and lack of trust in law enforcement still exists, and Camilleri’s mysteries depict Sicilians as suspicious of law enforcement and cynical about its power to affect change. While many citizens are still unwilling to become officially involved in criminal investigations by volunteering information about what they have witnessed, they are more inclined to reveal what they “know” in an anonymous letter. In Sicily the use of such letters is commonplace, and it is mentioned in nearly every mystery novel written by both Sciascia and Camilleri. However, neither the content nor the veracity of such letters makes them important, but rather their social impact: recipients of anonymous letters immediately become the subject of gossip and scrutiny. They are often used as decoys, like the anonymous letter sent to the pharmacist in Sciascia’s *To Each His Own*: the letter arouses the postman’s curiosity and soon everyone in town knows of its existence. After the pharmacist and his friend are killed, the letter is thought to contain the motive, when in fact it was written to divert officials from the true motive for the crime. Anonymous letters provide easy solutions to complex crimes- typically at the expense of innocent individuals.

⁸⁵ “Per decenni la gente perbene di qua non ha fatto altro che ripetere che la mafia non la riguardava, erano cose loro. Ma io, ai miei scolari, insegnavo che il ‘nenti vitti, nenti sacciu’ era il peggiore dei peccati mortali.”

In Camilleri's mysteries anonymous letters are increasingly creative and popular, as are anonymous phone calls. In *The Snack Thief*, Mrs. Lapecora receives anonymous letters announcing that her husband frequents a prostitute three times a week. In fact, Mr. Lapecora is being blackmailed, but instead of turning to the authorities for help, he alerts the wife by means of anonymous letters, in the hopes that she will intervene. Ironically, Mrs. Lapecora responds to her husband's desperate pleas by killing him, not because of the affair, but to put an end to his reckless spending. In *Rounding the Mark*, a concerned citizen sends an anonymous letter to Montalbano with a newspaper clipping that contains a clue in an ongoing investigation. And in *The Voice of the Violin*, a local Mafia member makes an anonymous call to the journalist Nicolò Zito to reveal that the events of a fatal police shooting did not occur in the manner in which police claim. Spurred by his unorthodox behavior, Montalbano himself uses anonymous phone calls to alert officials of discoveries he makes in his unofficial investigations. For example, in *The Scent of the Night*, he makes an anonymous call to the police to report the discovery of a car containing a dead body. In *The Voice of the Violin*, Montalbano asks a friend to make an anonymous phone call to alert officials that she suspects a crime has occurred, whereby prompting an official investigation of a crime that Montalbano has discovered unofficially.

Through Montalbano and his colleagues a window into contemporary society is created when they comment on recent criminal activity in their province, emphasizing that the crimes they investigate are not anomalies. In *The Shape of Water*, Montalbano asks the coroner when he can expect autopsy results and the coroner describes the victims that he must examine before Montalbano's cadaver, all of whom suffered gruesome and

violent deaths. Again in *The Shape of Water*, upon learning of a death by natural causes, the police chief comments ironically on how nice it is to know that someone in their lovely province actually died of natural causes, because it sets a good example.

Montalbano reflects on the contemporary news that he reads, such as the unemployment rate reaching astronomical levels in the south, or the proposed secession from Italy by the northern political party the Lega Nord (Northern League).⁸⁶ He laments that there is barely enough water at his house to take a shower as the town provides water every three days and reflects on the irony of Sicilians being surrounded by water yet rarely having enough for their daily needs. In *The Snack Thief*, Montalbano observes the condition of the roads in Sicily: some of which seem to lead nowhere and others that have guardrails painted red to memorialize the death of a prosecutor, judge or policeman, as in the case of Giovanni Falcone.

Camilleri's novels highlight a myriad of social problems amongst which the seriousness of illegal immigration is emphasized. In *The Shape of Water*, Montalbano sadly considers the illegal activities that take place at the Mànnara and the newly arrived immigrants who work there:

At the Mànnara Gegè could inaugurate his market specialized in fresh meat and a rich variety of light drugs. The majority of the fresh meat came from eastern countries, finally liberated from the communist yoke that, as everyone knows, deprived humans of all dignity: at nighttime between the bushes and the sandy dunes of the Mànnara that reconquered dignity returned to shine. There was no lack of women from the third-world, transvestites, transsexuals, Neapolitan she-males and passive Brazilian queens; there was someone for all tastes, luxury, festivity. And business flourished, to the great satisfaction of the military,

⁸⁶ Lega Nord (North League for the Independence of Padania) is a political party that advocates greater regional autonomy, especially for the Northern regions and has at times advocated secession. 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lega_Nord/>.

Gegè, and those whom had granted Gegè permission for the right percentage.
(11)⁸⁷

During one investigation Montalbano is surprised to learn that areas of western Sicily inhabited by the Arabs centuries ago are now home to schools (some illegal) that cater to the children of Arab-speaking immigrants from Tunisia and Morocco.

Camilleri's novels are examples of social denouncement-- it is clear that his opinions are synonymous with those of Montalbano⁸⁸ and that these novels are intended as a forum to highlight destructive social ills. Camilleri's greatest attribute is to expose his readers to the new and dehumanized face of the Mafia. *Rounding the Mark* is Camilleri's most important mystery, as it calls attention to a growing problem present in Sicily, Italy and around the globe today: that of child trafficking. This mystery is unique, as it is based on an inquiry into child-trafficking and the illegal immigration of minors conducted by Carmelo Abbate and Paola Ciccioli entitled "Children, The Great Hunt" ("Bambini, la grande caccia") published by *Panorama* on September 19, 2002. This article contains chilling statistics; for example, nearly 15,000 children arrived in Italy unaccompanied by a parent between July of 2000 and November of 2001. These children ranged in age from newborns to 17 years and originated from countries around the globe. They are frequently accompanied by adults who pretend to be the legal guardians in

⁸⁷ "Gegè pote inaugurare alla mànnara il suo mercato specializzato in carne fresca e ricca varietà di droghe sempre leggere. La carne fresca in maggioranza proveniva dai paesi dell'est, finalmente liberati dal giogo comunista che, come ognuno sa, negava ogni dignità alla persona umana: tra i cespugli e l'arenile della mànnara, nottetempo, quella riconquistata dignità tornava a risplendere. Non mancavano però femmine del terzo mondo, travestiti, transessuali, femminelli napoletani e viados brasiliani, ce ne'erano per tutti i gusti, uno scialo, una festa. E il commercio fiorì, con grande soddisfazione dei militari, di Gegè, e di chi a Gegè aveva accordato i permessi ricavandone giuste percentuali."

⁸⁸ Camilleri said in an interview, "Montalbano shared my words, from A to Z." ("E Montalbano condivise le mie parole dalla a alla zeta.") Lodato, Saverio. *La Linea Della Palma: Saverio Lodato fa raccontare Andrea Camilleri*, Milano: Rizzoli, 2002.

return for a reduced fare on the passage to Italy. Once these children have arrived in Italy, they are incredibly difficult to track and are often exported to other countries. Commonly forced to beg on the streets, some children are intentionally crippled so that they will earn more, while others are forced into slavery, child pornography or prostitution or even killed for their organs. The authors of this inquiry tell the story of women whose situations are so hopeless that they become pregnant with the intention to sell their newborn infants.

Camilleri's treatment of the media is very different from that in Sciascia's novels. Montalbano has valuable connections to local journalists that allow him to diffuse information (sometimes false) to prompt those involved in a crime to come forward. His good friend Nicolò Zito, a journalist with the private television network Retelibera, is often ready and willing to help Montalbano in any way. At one point Zito comments, "Come on, what do you want me to say or do on the news? That is why you are here, aren't you? By now you are my hidden director" (*The Voice of the Violin* 120).⁸⁹ On one occasion Zito implores Montalbano during a live broadcast to investigate an unresolved incident he feels has been left unanswered by officials; and on a different occasion Montalbano gives Zito a list of specific questions to ask a police commissioner during a news conference. Unlike Sciascia's characters that are manipulated by the media, Captain Bellodi's words are deliberately taken out of context to generate a sensationalist headline for a local newspaper-- Montalbano manipulates the media as an investigative tool to further his inquiries.

⁸⁹ "Avanti, che vuoi che faccia o dica al telegiornale? Sei qua per questo, no? Tu ormai sei il mio registaocculto."

While Sciascia's mysteries are relentlessly serious, Camilleri's novels are rife with humor that derives from the actions and language employed by his characters. With the exception of Montalbano, Camilleri's characters are not well-developed as many appear in only one novel. Those present in multiple novels: Livia, Montalbano's girlfriend from Genova, his colleagues and his friends Ingrid and Nicolò Zito, resemble stock characters from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, stereotyped characters devoid of psychological development whose actions follow a predictable pattern.⁹⁰ Camilleri's strength lies in his theatrical fortitude: his experience as a stage director charges his characters and their dialogues with a dynamic quality that permeates the pages of his novels to create a highly entertaining literature. For example, when Montalbano interviews the residents of an apartment building about the death of their neighbor, the reader can visualize the neighbors on various floors as they poke their heads out of their doors to eavesdrop as the inspector questions other tenants. The synchronicity of their actions gives the scene a dramatic effect and the expressive nature of their daily drama serves as a continual source of humor.

Camilleri renders his characters' concerns as petty and pathetic when contrasted with the terrible crimes he investigates; often, their lack of regard for others gives them a grotesque quality. For example, after Mr. Lapecora is found dead in the elevator of his apartment building, in *The Snack Thief*, Montalbano interviews Lapecora's neighbors to retrace the elevator's stops and determine when he was last seen alive. The behavior of some residents is shockingly callous. One woman is very upset, not that there has been a murder, but that she is forced to take the stairs because the elevator is out of order when

⁹⁰ A form of improvisational theater popular during the 16th and 17th centuries that included standardized situations and stock characters whose particular mask and costume dictated their role.

she returns from shopping. Montalbano describes her as mad as a bull with her nostril flaring. Another tenant rode in the elevator with the dead body because he has a bad leg and did not want to take the stairs. He is unashamed about his actions and instead is concerned with retrieving a bottle of wine that he forgot in the elevator that has subsequently be classified as evidence. His sole preoccupation is his wife's reaction, should she discover he lost a bottle of wine; he has no remorse for his actions and shows no respect for the dead. While this man justifies his actions to Montalbano, others are not as forthcoming about their unexemplary behavior. That morning Mrs. Piccirillo and her daughter were the first to discover Mr. Lapecora's dead body on their way out. Yet rather than notify the authorities, they return to their apartment and pretend that nothing had happened. When an agitated Montalbano confronts them about their deplorable indifference, they reply that they are "decent people", and they did not want to announce such a discovery and become the center of gossip, so instead they did nothing, which prompts Montalbano to think:

And those two decent people had left the cadaver to be discovered by someone else, perhaps less decent? And if Lapecora was agonizing? They did not care about him in order to save...What? What thing? (27)⁹¹

In Montalbano's mind, their failure to uphold their civic duty- to offer assistance and to notify authorities is inexcusable, and he has them arrested for failure to give assistance (*omissione di soccorso*.) Not only are they arrested, Montalbano tells an officer to make the arrest as loudly as possible so that everyone in the apartment building would hear it.

⁹¹ "E quelle due persone per bene avevano lasciato che il cadavere venisse scoperto da qualcun altro, magari meno per bene? E se Lapecora agonizzava? Se ne erano fottute di lui per salvare...Che? Che cosa?"

As a result of their desire to escape scrutiny they become the center of far more gossip than they could have had imagined.

Language

One of the most fascinating and novel elements of Camilleri's mysteries, is the language he employs. Unlike Sciascia, whose succinct prose and use of standard Italian language is intended to communicate with the widest possible audience and facilitate the comprehension of his ideas, Camilleri's novels are best characterized by their unusual language, a mixture of words and expressions from Sicilian dialect and standard Italian. His stories evoke events that take place in a small town in Sicily; and he believes that only with the use of dialectal words and expressions can his readers capture the essence of the daily situations that unfold on the island. Camilleri writes to share contemporary Sicilian culture and its social ills with his readers; that *is* his message. He asserts that only through an understanding of the local culture as expressed in its language and linguistic idioms can one grasp the essence of Sicilian society and the context in which his mysteries unfold. Camilleri challenges readers to embrace his dialectal creation and in doing so they engage in a pact with the author (cognizant of the pact or not) - to trust that what is initially unclear will be explained by the context. Language is what makes Montalbano such a dynamic character and a successful investigator. His ability to easily adapt to any environment by using the appropriate register to communicate puts others at ease and makes them more willing to cooperate with the investigation. He is masterful in

his use of bureaucratic rhetoric as well when using the standard Italian language to meet with the chief of police, in news conferences and when speaking with non-Sicilians.

The language employed in Camilleri's novels is fascinating. When the novels are read in chronological order, Camilleri's increasing use of dialect is apparent. In successive novels the reader encounters dialectal words that they learned in an earlier novel and that are now left un-translated. The expectation is that the reader has learned the word previously from context and can recall its significance. Montalbano often guides the reader through the recognition process of dialectal words as in this example from *The Terra-Cotta Dog*, in which Mr. Rizzitano returns to Sicily after an absence of several decades. When Mr. Rizzitano asks Montalbano, "Can you set the table for me here?" ("...Può conzarmi qui?"), he uses the Sicilian verb that prompts Montalbano to think: "Conzare, apparecchiare." (Set the table [Sicilian verb], set the table [standard Italian verb], respectively). "Rizzitano said that Sicilian verb like a foreigner who forced himself to speak the local language" (263).⁹² In *The Shape of Water* Montalbano uses a Sicilian verb and then its meaning is explained, "Now I am going to 'tambasiàre', he thought as soon as he arrived home. Tambasiàre was a verb he liked, it signified to wander aimlessly from room to room with no direction, occupying oneself with things of no importance"(151).⁹³

Camilleri's teaching of dialect is artful in its subtleness; initially an Italian word is used to be later substituted with its Sicilian equivalent, when it is clear from the context that two words have the same meaning, as in the case of "polpette" and "purpiteddri" (the

⁹² "Conzare, apparecchiare. Rizzitano disse quel verbo siciliano come uno straniero che si sforzasse di parlare la lingua del posto."

⁹³ "Ora mi metto a tambasiàre" pensò appena arrivato a casa. Tambasiàre era un verbo che gli piaceva, significava mettersi a girellare di stanza in stanza senza uno scopo preciso, anzi occupandosi di cose futili."

Italian and Sicilian words, respectively, for meatballs). Occasionally entire sentences are uttered in dialect and no translation is offered; as in *Rounding the Mark* when Montalbano asks a farmer “viddrano” who witnessed the death of a young boy killed in a hit and run, whether or not he felt it was an accident. The farmer responds in his local dialect, “Tu nun pensu, signuri miu. Iu nun vogliu cchiù pinsari. Troppu tintu è addivintatu lu munnu.” (“I don’t think anything about it sir. I don’t want to think anymore. The world has become too evil.”) Montalbano reflects upon the farmer’s comments as he simultaneously deciphers the meaning for the reader: “The last sentence was decisive. It was clear that the farmer had formed an exact opinion of the events. The young boy had been intentionally run over; slaughtered for a reason beyond comprehension. But afterwards the farmer had wanted to cancel that opinion of the events. The world had become too evil. It was better not to think about it” (112).

Camilleri uses language as a source of welcome comic relief, in contrast with the horrific and serious nature of the crimes depicted in his novels. For instance, one evening while enjoying a glass of whiskey on Montalbano’s balcony, Augello tells his friend and boss Montalbano that he has decided to get married. Instead of using the Sicilian expression (“maritarsi”) he uses the standard Italian expression (“sposarsi”) and Montalbano confuses this word with the similar sounding (“spararsi”) which means to shoot oneself. Rather than congratulate his vice-deputy, Montalbano slaps him across the face in an attempt to make him come to his senses and to prevent him from shooting himself (*Excursion to Tindari* 49). Expressions that are commonly used in Sicily are explained by Montalbano as well. In *Rounding the Mark* offensive graffiti that contains the word ‘cornuto’ (cuckold) is sprayed on the police station wall and Montalbano muses,

“Imagine in Sicily an offensive saying that did not contain the word cuckold. That word was a registered trademark, a typical mode of expression of a so-called Sicilian attitude” (15).⁹⁴

Another important aspect of communication in Camilleri’s detective novels is the unspoken word and the critical messages that are transmitted non-orally. Without his fine-tuned ability to perceive subtle unspoken clues, Montalbano would not be able to successfully solve mysteries. In *Excursion to Tindari* when Montalbano meets with Don Balduccio Sinagra, the elderly head of the Sinagra Mafia family, two subtle messages are communicated to him. In order to decipher these messages he must replay the conversation in his head, word by word and silence by silence. Later, Montalbano receives a phone call from Don Balduccio’s lawyer who asks Montalbano a series of questions; their meanings are entirely implicit, alluded to and non-literal. A non-Sicilian investigator very likely would not be able to decipher such a subtle code. As Montalbano has been asked for a favor he does not wish to grant he carefully communicates his decision by responding, “And what do I have to do with it?” To which the surprised lawyer responds “nothing” and then adds slowly and with a particular cadence to send a specific message, “You have absolutely nothing to do with it” (*Excursion to Tindari* 120) These words form a code to communicate to Montalbano that they understand that he has declined to do them a favor.

Circumlocution is a favorite tool of the Mafia for avoiding self-incrimination. Frequently the actual message is not what is verbally communicated. For example, Don Balduccio once wished to construct a house in the countryside in a secluded location

⁹⁴ “Figurarsi se in Sicilia, in una scritta offensiva, poteva mancare la parola cornuto! Quella parola era un marchio doc, un modo tipico d’espressione della cosiddetta sicilitudine.”

where he would be at a great distance from neighbors and difficult for his enemies to attack. As he wanted to pave a driveway that was a few miles long and would need to cut through other peoples' property, he asked the individuals for their permission but did so in an indirect way so as not to reveal why he needed such seclusion: "Through metaphors, proverbs and anecdotes, he had made them understand how much of an insufferable bother the presence of strangers in the nearby area caused him" (*Excursion to Tindari* 110).⁹⁵ All of his neighbors, despite the inconvenience, allow Don Balduccio to pave his driveway through their property, for they understand the real reason for his request for solitude; they are acting when they agree to accept the verbal discourse as being the sole discourse.

Fare tiatro

Another communicative phenomenon frequently referenced in Camilleri's mystery novels is that of "fare tiatro" (role-playing). It is used in a wide variety of situations when one does not wish to reveal his true intentions or motive. In *The Shape of Water* the widow Mrs. Luparello describes her "tiatro" to Montalbano – she pretended to faint during her husband's funeral mass and left the church immediately for she feared the large presence of politicians and hypocrites to be the perfect target for a bomb. Montalbano is a maestro at "fare tiatro" and it is one of his invaluable investigative techniques. On one occasion he enters a suspect's house under false pretenses; invited in by the suspect's mother he has a quick look around while the suspect is out. The

⁹⁵ "Attraverso metafore, proverbi, aneddoti, aveva loro fatto intendere quanto la vicinanza di strànei gli portasse insopportabile fastidio."

individual under suspicion later calls Montalbano to ask why he had gone to his house to “fare tiatro”, whereby revealing the common nature of such theatricality in a small Sicilian town. In *The Terra-Cotta Dog* Tanu u Grecu, a wanted Mafia member, seeks to turn himself in but he must save face and make it appear as if he is arrested (“mi necessita tanticchia di triatro per salvare la faccia”) so Montalbano arrests Tanu, to create the appearance that he has been taken by surprise. However, Tanu’s enemies, likely skilled in the art of role-playing themselves, are not amused, as a threatening phone call to Montalbano demonstrates: “This is your death speaking. I want to tell you that you won’t get off easily, you cuckold of an actor! Who did you think you were fooling with that comedy you pulled off with your friend Tano? You’ll pay for this, for having tried to pull one over on me” (71).⁹⁶

Camilleri and the Sicilian Tradition of Social Denouncement

Camilleri’s use of the mystery genre to critique contemporary Sicilian and Italian society is best appreciated and understood in the context of Leonardo Sciascia’s mystery novels. Through the genre of the mystery novel, Camilleri continues the Sicilian tradition of social denouncement, as embraced by Sciascia. Sciascia’s mysteries are the key to understanding the evolution of a Sicilian moral consciousness, which is exposed through a chronological reading of Camilleri’s mystery novels.

⁹⁶ “La to’ morti, parla. Ti voglio dire che non te la passerai liscia, cornuto d’un tragediatore! A chi credevi di pigliare per fissa con tutto quel triatro che hai fatto col tuo amico Tano? E per questo pagherai, pi aviri circato di pigliàrinni po culu.”

The chief of police featured in Camilleri's first three mystery novels, a man who is never referred to by name and is highly-respected by Montalbano is, in effect, a caricature of Sciascia. He is a highly-cultured, intelligent and reserved individual who contemplates social injustice and has fought his entire career against organized crime. His relationship with Montalbano is of a paternal nature; he offers Montalbano advice and collaborates with him on his cases. Indeed, at times he asks Montalbano for translations of dialectal words, reminiscent of the occasions in which Sciascia discouraged Camilleri from the use of dialect in his novels. The police chief's decision to leave Sicily (occurs at the end of *The Snack Thief*, the third novel to feature Montalbano) is significant: it serves as a metaphor for the disappearance of the initial protagonists in the fight against organized crime; men such as Sciascia, Falcone and Borsellino, who possessed the desire and cultural tools necessary to defeat the Mafia.

This change of command marks a turning point for Montalbano's investigative methods; they become increasingly unorthodox under the police chief's successor, the northerner Bonetti-Alderighi. Montalbano's lack of respect for his new superior reflects the disappointment and frustration Camilleri and Sciascia felt regarding the government's Antimafia squad and its failure to affect change. Montalbano is an official investigator, a representative of the State who conducts "unofficial investigations" to solve his mysteries in response to the government's inability to defeat organized crime. Official justice seems nonexistent; together with the truth, justice has gone underground.

Sadly, the window of opportunity to successfully combat the Mafia has passed in Sicily and the transformation from the old to the new Mafia has occurred, as reflected in Camilleri's novels. The result is a technologically savvy, highly violent, global operation

that is evermore difficult to defeat. Saverio Lodato asked Camilleri in an interview at what stage in the fight against the Mafia, Italy is at today and Camilleri's responded:

I believe that today we face an even more difficult situation. The victories won against the Mafia, in the line of Falcone-Borsellino – this list of deaths that we cited before, this monument that we are all of part of- those victories, I was saying produced a fruit. They prompted a change in strategy as the Mafia has rediscovered the value of underwater navigation with a periscope. (Lodato 296)⁹⁷

He adds, "Imagine that I was rereading, as I often do with Sciascia's novels, *The Day of the Owl*. It seems like that novel was written a century ago, owing to the acceleration of the Mafia's violence as such that today he wouldn't know how to create a character like Don Mariano Arena, except for in a historical novel about the Mafia" (Lodato 309).⁹⁸

The historical novels of Sciascia and Camilleri are of paramount importance for understanding their contemporary mysteries, as they examine the social injustice that has plagued the island for centuries. It was in response to intense social inequity that the Mafia was born and grew to play an important role in Sicilian society.

⁹⁷ "Credo che oggi siamo di fronte a una situazione ancora più difficile. Le vittorie contro la mafia ottenute, nella linea Falcone-Borsellino- questo elenco di morti che facevamo prima, questo monumento nel quale ci mettiamo tutti – quelle vittorie, dicevo, hanno prodotto un frutto. Hanno portato a un cambiamento di strategia della mafia che ha riscoperto il valore del navigare in immersione col periscopio."

⁹⁸ "Pensa che rileggevo, come faccio spesso con I libri di Leonardo, *Il giorno della civetta*,. Sembra un libro scritto un secolo fa, perche l'accelerazione della violenza della mafia è stata tale che oggi lui, un personaggio come don Mariano Arena, non saprebbe crearlo, se non in un romanzo storico sulla mafia. *Il giorno della civetta* è il primo romanzo contemporaneo nel quale compare la mafia."

3

History as Key to Modern Social Injustices: The Historical Novels of Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri

3.1 Historical Novels

Sciascia and Camilleri's historical novels and essays provide an invaluable key to understanding the Sicilian culture portrayed in their modern detective novels. Both authors have devoted a tremendous amount of time and energy to their research of occult events in Sicilian history. They would argue that it is impossible to understand modern Sicilian culture without a critical examination of the island's history. Their historical novels examine social injustice in Sicily and the powerful forces responsible for it: foreign domination, the feudal system, the State, the Church and the Mafia.

The novels highlighted in this chapter trace the connection between institutions such as the State, the Church and the Mafia, whereby revealing an array of cultural phenomena that exist to perpetuate this imbalance of power. Recurrent phenomena throughout their novels include: the ubiquitous men's social club known as "the circle,"⁹⁹ the notion of being "beyond suspicion" "incensurato" (which has evolved into the modern-day notion of "gente per bene"), Mafia symbolism, the importance of non-verbal communication, cuckolding/crimes of passion and anonymous letters.

⁹⁹ (i.e., the noble's club or a club of culture and progress: *il circolo dei nobili* or *il circolo di cultura e progresso*) frequented by nobles, clergy members of the professional community and mafia that either pertain or not to these categories.

3.2 Historical Novels of Leonardo Sciascia

3.2.1 *On Behalf of the Unfaithful*

Sciascia's historical essay *On behalf of the Unfaithful (Dalle parti degli infedeli)* published in 1979 is based on the true story of Monsignor Angelo Ficarra, the Bishop of Patti, a small town in Western Sicily. Following the 1946 and 1949 defeat of the Christian Democratic Party in Patti's local administrative elections, Monsignor Ficarra was persecuted by his superiors for his refusal to become politically active and influence the votes of parishioners. The decennial attempts of church officials to force him to renounce his position as the Bishop of Patti were unsuccessful; their refusal to cite the real reasons they sought his expulsion prompted his rebellion to defend the truth and justice.

Interestingly, Sciascia wrote this novel, based on the true story of Monsignor Ficarra who receives an anonymous letter accompanied by an article from the Catholic weekly newspaper *The Roman Observer (l'Osservatore romano)*, a paper read exclusively by clergymen, fourteen years after the publication of *To Each His Own* (1965) in which an anonymous letter is traced back to that very newspaper. The letter sent to Monsignor Ficarra is clearly written by a priest and the article that accompanies it extols the virtues of a deceased bishop with whom, the author laments, Monsignor Ficarra had too little in common.

In addition to numerous letters received from Cardinals throughout the novel, Monsignor receives a letter from the head of the local Christian Democratic Party in which he is reprimanded for having officiated the marriage of a communist. The head of

the DC reminds him that all communists are supposed to be excommunicated by the church. Sciascia writes, “When one really thinks about it, there is always in Italian things, tragedy, drama, comedy or farce a <<marriage that should not take place>>” (*The Betrothed*, Chapter 1) (30).¹⁰⁰

In 1957 Monsignor Ficarra is finally stripped of his title as the Bishop of Patti and named the Archbishop of Leontopoli, what appears to be a non-existent town.¹⁰¹ That same year an article in the weekly newspaper *The Express (L'Espresso)* questions the discharging of bishops and makes a reference to the bishop of Patti stating that the church tribunal (congregazione concistoriale) was alarmed by his manuscript entitled *Religiousness in Sicily (Religiosità in Sicilia)* that contained explosive material documenting the phenomenon of superstition on the island and recommended the criteria and methods to extract it. Additionally it was said to highlight the moral and cultural deficiencies of the Sicilian clergy and the parishioners' lack of adherence to a life of Christian morals. However, the true reason he was forced from his position as bishop was his refusal to become politically involved and influence his parishioners as he had been asked to do. This novel clearly highlights the complicity of the church in the Sicilian electoral process.

Sciascia states that he related with this character and his unwavering faith in truth and justice. In the notes he writes, “...I never would have believed that at a certain point in my life I would find myself telling the story of a bishop (Sicilian and in charge of a diocese in Sicily) apologetically and ex abundantia cordis: without detachment, without

¹⁰⁰ “A pensarci bene, c'è sempre nelle cose italiane – tragedia, dramma, commedia o farsa che siano – un ‘matrimonio che non s’ha da fare’ (*I promessi sposi*, capitolo 1).”

¹⁰¹ Interestingly Sciascia could find no reference to Leontopoli, outside of the Catholic Encyclopedia which states such a town existed 30 kilometers outside of Cairo and was home to a Jewish temple.

irony, without aversion.... that having followed “bad” priests for so many years and in so many books that inevitably I bumped into a “good” priest” (67).¹⁰²

3.2.2 *Death of the Inquisitor*

In 1967 Sciascia published *Death of the Inquisitor (Morte dell'inquisitore)*, a historical essay that examines the death of Friar Diego La Matina of Racalmuto, Sicily (Sciascia's home town) who was burned at the stake by the Holy Inquisition in Sicily, known as the Sant'Uffizio, in 1658. Sciascia contends that history has intentionally forgotten the fate of Friar Diego and much of the Inquisition that occurred in Sicily. Of his numerous works Sciascia stated that this essay was the most important to him and it was the only one that he continued to reread and ponder as he felt it was unfinished (7). Although Sciascia read everything he could find written on the Inquisition in Sicily, he was unable to find a single document that explained to Friar Diego's heresy; instead he found a single reference made to the book the Friar had written that purportedly contained heretical ideas. What prompted his continual imprisonment, torture and eventual death by the Inquisition is a mystery. While imprisoned for a fourth time in 1657, Friar Diego killed the inquisitor Don Juan Lopez de Cisneros, in one of the two recorded occasions in which an inquisitor died at the hands of a prisoner.

While in Spain attempting to research the Inquisition in the 1960s, Sciascia learned from book sellers that it was suspect to talk about the Inquisition and to ask about books written on the subject. He writes:

¹⁰² “Ma non avrei mai creduto che ad un certo punto della vita mi sarei trovato a raccontare la storia di un vescovo (siciliano e titolare di una diocesi in Sicilia) apologeticamente ed ex abundantia cordis: senza distacco, senza ironia, senza avversione. ... che l'aver per tanti anni e in tanti libri inseguito i preti 'cattivi' inevitabilmente mi ha portato ad imbattermi in un prete 'buono'.”

...but in terms of the Inquisition it was necessary to be cautious. And it appears that it is necessary to be cautious also in Italy and anywhere, on the subject of the inquisition (lower case i); there are people and institutions that are sensitive, pertinent ways of saying, thinking of the nice flames of a time. And it brings to mind the passage from *The Betrothed* when the sacristan, upon the invocation of Don Abbondio, begins to ring the bells to alert the countryside and each one of the good people that was hiding in Lucia's house, <<they seemed to hear their given names, last names and nicknames in those rings. >> That is what happens at the very mention of the Inquisition: many gentlemen hear themselves being called by their given name, last name and card number of their party registration. And I am not speaking, evidently, of only Catholic gentlemen. Humanity has suffered and still suffers other inquisitions; therefore, as the Pole Stanislaw Jerzy Lec says, prudence requests that you do not speak of the rope neither in the house of the hanged nor in the house of the hangman. The effect therefore that *Death of the Inquisitor* has had upon these gentlemen, the sufficiency with which they have either spoken about it or not spoken about it, is the other reason why this work is so important to me." (8)¹⁰³

Prior to Friar Diego's death, a public notary from Racalmuto was persecuted by the Inquisition, allegedly for professing Lutheran opinions. Sciascia doubts that the notary had truly professed Lutheran ideas and ironically asserts that it would have been easy to formulate accusations of Lutheranism against anyone without taking into account the fundamental indifference of Sicilians towards religion. Sciascia contends that there was no heresy to combat but rather, the irreligiousness of the Sicilian population (34, 35). He writes:

It is still easy today, speaking about things of the Catholic religion with a farmer, a sulfur miner, and also a gentleman, to isolate as Lutheran propositions

¹⁰³ "...ma in quanto all'Inquisizione bisognava andar cauti. E a quanto pare bisogna andar cauti anche in Italia e dovunque, in fatto di inquisizione (con iniziale minuscola), ci sono persone e istituti che hanno la coda di paglia o il carbone bagnato: modi di dire senz'altro pertinenti, pensando ai bei fuochi di un tempo. E viene da pensare a quel passo dei *Pomessi sposi* quando il sagrestano, alle invocazioni di don Abbondio, attacca a suonare ad allarme la campana e a ciascuno dei bravi che stanno agguatati in casa di Lucia 'parve di sentire in que'tocchi il suo nome, cognome e soprannome.' Così succede appena si dà di tocco all'Inquisizione: molti galantuomini si sentono chiamare per nome, cognome e numero di tessera del partito cui sono iscritti. E non parlo, evidentemente, soltanto di galantuomini cattolici. Altre inquisizioni l'umanità ha sofferto e soffre tuttora; per cui, come dice il polacco Stanislaw Jerzy Lec, prudenza vuole che non si parli di corda né in casa dell'impiccato né in casa del boia. L'effetto, dunque, che *Morte dell'inquisitore* ha fatto su questi galantuomini, la sufficienza con cui ne hanno parlato o ne hanno taciuto, è l'altro motivo per cui tengo a questo lavoro."

certain judgments on the sacraments, on the salvation of the soul, the ministry of priests; without speaking of judgments on worldly interests and the worldly behavior of priests. But, in effect, those judgments cannot be vaguely considered heretical propositions; they are, in relation to religion, something more and even worse: they move from a total and absolute repulsion to the metaphysical, to mystery, to the invisible revelation; from the ancient materialism of the Sicilian population. With regards to confession, for example, there was no need for Luther to arouse the diffidence and repugnance of Sicilians: this sacrament has always been regarded as an excogitation, let's say, licentious; a contrived manner by a socially privileged category, that is to say of priests, to enjoy sexual liberty on others' territory, and in the act itself of censuring such a liberty for the unprivileged; that the privilege for a Sicilian, more than in the liberty of enjoying certain things, consists of the pleasure of prohibiting them to others. The celibacy of priests ended up looking like a trick, a fraud: to not descend to arms on the treacherous soil where women dispose of men's honor, to assure themselves invulnerability. And the veto that husbands, fathers, brothers enforced on their women relative to confession descended from this conviction. In terms of confessing themselves, they did not feel it was appropriate for a man to confess his feelings, his weaknesses, his secret actions and intentions to another man; nor that a man such as priest was invested with the power by God to excuse? their sins, nor that their sins truly existed. The only notion that a Sicilian man had about sin could be condensed in this proverb: *Cu havi la cummidità e nun si nni servi, mancu lu confissuri cci l'assorvi*; which is exactly the ironic reversal not only of the sacrament of confession but the fundamental principal of Christianity: he who does not know how to take advantage of each comfort and occasion in which the possessions and in particular women of others are offered to him will not be absolved by the confessor." (32)¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ “È ancor oggi facile, parlando di cose della religione cattolica con un contadino, con uno zolfataro, ed anche con un *galantuomo*, isolare come proposizioni luterane certi loro giudizi sui sacramenti, sulla salvazione dell'anima, sul ministero sacerdotale; senza dire dei giudizi sugli interessi temporali e sul mondano comportamento dei preti. Ma effettivamente tali giudizi non si possono nemmeno vagamente considerare come proposizioni ereticali; sono, in rapporto alla religione, qualcosa di più e di peggio: muovono da una totale ed assoluta refrattarietà alla metafisica, al mistero, all'invisibile rivelazione; dall'antico materialismo del popolo siciliano. Nei riguardi della confessione, per esempio, non c'era bisogno di Lutero per suscitare la diffidenza e repugnanza del siciliano: sempre questo sacramento è stato considerato come una escogitazione, per così dire, boccacesca; un modo escogitato da una categoria socialmente privilegiata, cioè quella dei preti, per godere di libertà sessuale sul terreno altrui, e nell'atto stesso di censurare una tal libertà nei non privilegiati; ché il privilegio, per il siciliano, consiste, più che nella libertà di godere certe cose, nel gusto di vietarle agli altri. E lo stesso celibato dei preti finiva con l'apparire come una specie di astuzia, di frode: per non scendere ad armi pari sull'infido terreno dove le donne dispongono dell'onore degli uomini, per assicurarsi invulnerabilità. E da questa convinzione discendeva il veto che i mariti, i padri, i fratelli ponevano alle loro donne relativamente alla confessione. In quanto al confessarsi essi stessi, non ritenevano fosse cosa da uomini il confessare ad un altro uomo i loro sentimenti, le loro debolezze, le loro occulte azioni e intenzioni; né che un uomo come loro fosse investito da Dio del potere di rimetter loro i peccati; né che i peccati esistano davvero. La sola nozione che l'uomo siciliano ha del peccato, si può considerare condensate in questo proverbio: *Cu havi la cummidità e nun si nni servi, mancu lu confissuri cci l'assorvi*; che è appunto l'ironico rovesciamento non solo del sacramento della confessione ma del principio fondamentale del cristianesimo: non sarà assolto dal confessore colui

The evening before Friar Diego was burned alive he was subject to a brutal interrogation by nine members of the Inquisition that lasted the entire night, a scene that Sciascia summarizes:

It is one of the most atrocious and incredible scenes of human intolerance ever represented. And how these nine men full of theological and moral doctrine, who vented their rage on the condemned (but that every so often went to re-energize in the warden's apartment), they remain in the history of human dishonor, Diego La Matina affirms the dignity and the honor of man, the strength of thought, the tenacity of will and the victory of liberty. (71)¹⁰⁵

Unfortunately, Diego La Matina's book and the recorded proceedings from his trial were burned in the courtyard of the Steri Palace in 1783, along with all of the denunciations, the trial documents, the books and other writings pertaining to the inquisitorial archives. Of the event an aristocratic reporter wrote: "It encountered common applause, being that if such memories, with God's will, happened to come out, it would have been the same as painting a black note on many families of Palermo and the entire kingdom, such was it with the noble ranks, thus was it with the honest and refined ones [ranks]" (83).¹⁰⁶

Sciascia notes that evidently the reporter was more concerned with the names of the denounced rather than the inquisitors. He concludes:

...it should be noted that it would have been difficult for the royal notary (of the court) to dare to break, and in the ceremonial register, that code of silence (omertà) that surrounds the case of Friar Diego to which even the diarists,

che non saprà profittare di ogni comodità ed occasione che gli si offre, della roba altrui, e della donna altrui in particolare.

¹⁰⁵ "È una delle più atroci e allucinanti scene che l'intolleranza umana abbia mai rappresentato. E come questi nove uomini pieni di dottrina teologica e morale, che si arrovellano intorno al condannato (ma ogni tanto vanno a ristorarsi nell'appartamento dell'alcaide), restano nella storia del disonore umano, Diego La Matina afferma la dignità e l'onore dell'uomo, la forza del pensiero, la tenacia della volontà, la vittoria della libertà."

¹⁰⁶ "Incontrò il comune applauso, stanteché se tali memorie, che Dio liberi, fosser per avventura venute fuori, sarebbe stato lo stesso che macchiare di nere note molte e molte famiglie di Palermo e del regno tutto, così del rango de' nobili, che delle oneste e civili."

complied. Because, unusual behavior relative to the facts that touch upon religion and aristocracy (it is not superfluous to recall the case of the Baroness of Carini), that of the authors of chronicles and daily publications is a real and true form of silence: a unanimous confirmation of the official version of things, of the familiar mystifications... (86)¹⁰⁷

3.2.3. *The Council of Egypt*

In 1963 Sciascia published the historical novel *The Council of Egypt (Il consiglio d'Egitto)*. Set in Palermo in 1782, it recounts the story of a complex fraud conceived by a Benedictine chaplain who originated from Malta named Don Giuseppe Vella.

When the Moroccan ambassador to the King of Naples is shipwrecked off the coast of Sicily, Vella is asked by the Viceroy of Palermo to act as his interpreter. When the Bishop Monsignor Airoidi asks the ambassador to review an ancient Arabic text, known as the *Codex of San Martino*, to ascertain its contents, Vella schemes a clever plot that will put him in good standing with the crown. Although the ambassador replies that the codex is merely one of numerous accounts of the life of the prophet, Vella interprets the ambassador's message as a confirmation that indeed, the codex is a rare and precious document that details the Arab conquest of Sicily and the history of Arab rule on the island.

¹⁰⁷ “E infine c'è da notare che difficilmente il protonotaro del Regno si sarebbe azzardato a rompere, e sul registro del cerimoniale, quell'omertà intorno al caso di fra Diego cui persino i diaristi, nel segreto del loro scrittorio, si erano attenuti. Perché, non inconsueto comportamento relativamente a fatti che toccano la religione e l'aristocrazia (e non è superfluo ricordare il caso della baronessa di Carini), quella degli autori di cronache o diari è una vera e propria forma di omertà: a solidale conferma delle versioni ufficiali o officiose, delle mistificazioni familiari...”

As the only individual in Palermo who understands both Italian and Arabic, the chaplain conceives of an elaborate scheme to translate the “precious codex” into Italian, a document that contests baronial privilege and demonstrates that the nobles’ land belongs to the crown. Overnight Vella is catapulted from a social position of relative obscurity to that of a socially prominent, powerful individual; he gains instant notoriety with the Palermitan nobles who are nervous the contents of the codex will reveal that their land was acquired through usurpation. Vella is showered with invitations and lavish gifts by those who seek to influence his translation of the codex, to reflect their family fortunes in a favorable light.

This novel is set in the context of the Enlightenment and portrays the Sicilian nobles, who ordinarily follow French fashion and literature, as fearful of enlightened philosophy and the social reforms the Viceroy of Palermo threatens to impose. Reputed to have imprisoned a prince for giving hospitality and protection to a pair of assassins, the nobles (who refer to themselves as the “salt of earth of Sicily”) are scandalized by the Viceroy’s protection of the Jansenists; social radicals who propose that the nobles should pay tax on their estates just like the bourgeois. The nobles’ power is undermined as the use of titles falls out of regard and the crown is forcing them to repay their creditors immediately.

Representatives of the church benefit from the social inequalities as much as the nobles do. Together they commiserate as many prelatures have been relieved of their notable stipends. Like the nobles who manipulate legal codes to ensure their power and position within society, the Church too abuses its power as it seeks to perpetuate the status quo from which it benefits. In reference to the daunting task of translating the

codex, a Marque ironically asks the Monsignor Airoidi where scholars will turn when it is time for them to write on the Holy Inquisition in Sicily. This is an inference to the destruction of the official archives of the Holy Inquisition in Sicily that bear testament to the centuries of activity by the Inquisition on the island. Additionally, the symbol and motto of the Inquisition are chiseled off the façade of its headquarters in the Steri Palace, as if the Inquisition never happened.

When revolution abroad prompts the crown to relax its pressure on the Sicilian barons, the Viceroy abandons his attack on Sicilian feudalism and leaves the island in defeat. Having come to Sicily from Paris he states that he was sent, “from the citadel of reason to the hic sunt leones, to a desert where the sands of an irrational tradition bury the trail of any forward-moving spirit.” (80) The story concludes with the discovery of Don Vella’s fraud (now referred to as his Excellency Giuseppe Vella Abbot of San Pancrazio), and the brutal torture and death by guillotine of a young lawyer whose planned Jacobin revolt is revealed by a would-be participant during confession. Saddened to hear that the young lawyer he had befriended will be executed Vella reflects:

The cruelty of the law, the practice of torture, and the atrocious executions, several of which he had witnessed in the past, had never disturbed him: he had assigned such things to the category of natural phenomena or, to be more precise, had thought of them as natural corrective measures, not unlike pruning vines or trees, and just as necessary. He knew that there was a book by someone called Beccaria that opposed torture and the death penalty: he knew of it because Monsignor López had only recently ordered any copies of it to be sequestered. (189)

Upon learning of his friend Vella’s fraud, the lawyer comments, “Every society produces the particular kind of imposture that suits it best, so to speak. Our society is a fraud, a judicial, literary, human fraud- yes, I would say human too, for it is fraudulent in its very

essence” (144). I would argue that of all of Sciascia’s writings *The Council of Egypt* most eloquently elucidates his thoughts on the centuries’ old social injustice in Sicily.

3.3 Historical Novels by Andrea Camilleri

3.3.1 *The Way Things Go*

The Way Things Go (Il corso delle cose) Camilleri’s first novel written in 1967-1968, was published for the first time in 1978 by the publishing house Lalli di Poggibonsi (after being rejected by Mondadori, Marsilio, Bompiani, Garzanti, Feltrinelli and Riuniti...). In an interview Camilleri told Marcello Sorgi, “I believe the reason why the text was refused was its language” (Sorgi 62).¹⁰⁸

The story begins as the Carabinieri Tognin and Police Marshall Corbo interrogate an illiterate farmer about the discovery of a murdered shepherd whose body is found on his property. The farmer is clearly uncomfortable in the presence of the police and curses his bad luck that the assassin chose his property to dump the body on. He knows that his unwitting involvement in the case will end badly for him and cites a proverb to describe his unfortunate situation: “Jump the fence and screw the farmer” (“Salta il tronzo e va in culo all’ortolano”) (14). Carabinieri Tognin (from Venice) questions the farmer about the significance of a pair of shoes placed on the victim’s chest, a non-verbal message that the victim tried to escape from the Mafia (15). The ironic tone the farmer uses to explain the symbolism conveys his belief that the man was naïve to think that he could escape the

¹⁰⁸ “Credo che la ragione per cui il testo [*Il corso delle cose*] veniva rifiutato fosse proprio il mio linguaggio.”

Mafia alive. Although initially the farmer is reluctant to talk, an overnight stay in the police station persuades him to divulge that he found the body with a note attached to it. Written in upper-case, block characters (stampatello), indicative of anonymous letters; it was read to the illiterate farmer by his eight-year-old son. It warned not to contact the police for three days.

Alluding to the brutality that was frequently attributed to Sicilian law enforcement, the Marshal Corbo frightens the farmer into talking by assuring him that he is nothing like the infamous Marshal Cangemi. “The one from the special squad of Mazzara – whose methods for giving voice to the deaf and dumb were legendary – but that upon polite request, he could easily become like Marshal Cangemi and worse” (40).¹⁰⁹

In a seemingly unrelated event, shots are fired at the story’s protagonist Don Vito Macaluso as he enters his apartment building one evening. Clearly the gunman fired as a warning, intentionally missing an easy target. Vito is enraged by the silence that lingers after the shots are fired and the fear and apathy it implies. No one dares to ask if Vito is alright. The streets are eerily silent; they clearly prefer not to be connected to Vito or this apparent attempt on his life. This event prompts Vito to exam his conscience, yet as he reflects on his life, his actions and relationships he cannot imagine why someone would want to hurt him and he is unsure of how to react.

After the shots are fired, Marshal Corbo heads to the town’s main square, which is oddly deserted; even the stray dogs are in hiding, as apathetic as the humans. Although everyone in this small town is clearly aware of the shooting, the following day people

¹⁰⁹ “quello del nucleo speciale di Masàra- I cui sistemi per ridare la parola ai sordomuti spaziavano in dimensioni da leggenda – ma che, a gentile richiesta, poteva benissimo diventare come e peggio di Cangemi.”

react with surprise when someone in the local café dares to comment on the shooting, “Someone was shooting?” (*Hanno sparato?*) This same comment is repeated in Sciascia’s twentieth-century detective novels.¹¹⁰ This attitude of ‘I saw nothing. I know nothing’ is less prevalent in Camilleri’s contemporary mysteries owing to the rise of a collective moral consciousness and awareness of the mafia that Camilleri claims everyone gained when Falcone and Borsellino were assassinated.

Vito is a man who avoids conflicts and has lived with his hands over his eyes, refusing to acknowledge things as they are. Vito’s father had left a monthly sum of money in his will to an elderly man known as Mammarosa who used to work in his factory. Every month Vito delivers this sum to Mammarosa (which resembles a monthly *pizzo*) and Mammarosa asks Vito if there is anything Vito needs. Vito refuses to understand that this man clearly has some sorts of connections that he could use to help him; instead, Vito wonders how Mammarosa, who lives in a tiny, dirt-floor, one-room hut, could possibly help him. Although it is implied that this man has connections that would allow him to help Vito, Vito is obstinate in his refusal to acknowledge the obvious. This scene beautifully captures the dark, obscure nature of the Mafia. Likely there was some connection between Vito’s father and Mammarosa that explains this *pizzo*: Vito could be paying the monthly *pizzo* for his own business operations without realizing what that monthly sum signifies... There is a connection, a network that surrounds Vito that he is unaware of or that he chooses not to acknowledge.

Vito remembers that the previous evening when the shots were fired his next door neighbor, the widow Tripepi, was sitting on her couch with the balcony doors open. To

¹¹⁰ In Sciascia’s *The Day of the Owl*, The food vendor asks, “Someone was shooting?” (“Perché” domando il panellaro, meravigliato e curioso “hanno sparato?”.) Sciascia, Leonardo. *Il giorno della civetta*. Milano: Gli Adelphi. 2002. 14.

determine whether those shots could have been intended for her, he knocks on her door yet a mere glance at her face reveals that she was not the intended target- an instance of how Sicilians communicate without using words. Camilleri comments:

There is a legend that goes two Sicilians accused of an unknown crime in a foreign country, were put into separate cells so that they cannot communicate prior to interrogation. As they are taken to the foreign king the following day they exchange a quick glance. Your majesty! One of the guards screamed who was also Sicilian, by now it is futile. They spoke! (44)¹¹¹

The shooting is discussed in local cafes, at the barber shop and at the social club “*il circolo*” (where men of elevated social status meet to discuss politics, literature, local events and women). While one man attributes the crime to the Mafia, another uses an interesting logic to insist that the Mafia does not operate in their town:

A Mafia crime? Are you serious? Our town has always been a foolish country, a stupid one, here one can count the homicides from the past ten years on one hand and always they had to do with some cuckold, personal matters, a hot-headed drunkard. But all private, personal matters. (44)¹¹²

In response the other asks about a bomb that exploded the previous week and the Mercedes that recently blew up, were those not Mafia crimes? Prompting the reply, Yes, those were Mafia crimes but they happened in the neighborhood that is inhabited by newly settled immigrants from the Sicilian town of Comisini; they imported their Mafia, and therefore it cannot be considered a Mafia crime of Vigàta. He continues:

“I told the mayor that the new electricity generating station, the chemical plant, and the cement factory would not have brought any benefit to our town, on the contrary!... He who leaves the old path for the new...” the other responds, “Exactly. And in conclusion our youth continue to leave for America and Germany while workers from the north arrive here and others from the interior

¹¹¹ “Racconta una leggenda che due siciliani, accusati in un paese straniero di non si sa quale reato, fossero stati messi in celle separate perche fra loro non comunicassero prima dell’interrogatorio. Portati l’indomani davanti al re straniero, si erano rapidamente scambiata una taliàta. – Maestà- aveva allora gridato una guardia, siciliano anch’esso- oramai è tutto inutile. Parlarono!”

¹¹² “- Delitto di mafia? Vogliamo scherzare? Il nostro è sempre stato un paese babbo, un paese stupido, qui gli omicidi, in dieci anni, si contano sulle dita di una mano sola, e sempre si è trattato di qualche cornuto risentito, di interessi, di qualche ubriaco di cervello caldo. Ma tutti fatti private, personali.”

with whom it is better not to get involved.” (46)¹¹³ [This reference to the workers from the north alludes to the common occurrence of the national government to transfer individuals to Sicily as punishment; individuals who were guilty of extortion or other abuses of power, a mover that exacerbated the existing problem of corruption and Mafia activity on the island.]

Some speculate that the attempt on Vito’s life involved the Mafia and others point to Peppi Monacu, a farmer whose wife had an affair with Vito for years; perhaps he suddenly felt the need to avenge his honor, a common and widely accepted explanation for murder. Vito’s friend encourages him to go and talk with Peppi to resolve the matter saying, “And what do you know about the brilliant ideas a patient cuckold might have? One day his horns itch more than usual, and he picks up a gun and shoots” (66).¹¹⁴ At one point Marshal Corbo comments that he is not surprised that this old story between Vito and Peppi’s wife has resurfaced as a possible motive for the attempt on Vito’s life; it is the perfect theory to deflect attention from the real perpetrator (98, 105).

Marshal Corbo is paid a secretive visit by a northern official from the Treasury Department, who tells him that the dead shepherd was purportedly involved in a drug trafficking operation and that he suspects a connection between the shepherd’s death and the attempt on Vito’s life. He asks Corbo what the shoes left on top of the victim’s chest signify and Corbo explains:

You see Captain here we not only like to kill, but to kill with an explanation. I kill you this way or that way because you did this or that to me. If you spoke when you were not supposed to, I will put a plug in your mouth; if you caused me a great disappointment that merits death, I place the leaf of a prickly pear on your chest so that you may enjoy the thorns that you gave me. If you want to

¹¹³ “Io glielo dissi al sindaco che la nuova centrale elettrica, la Montecatini e il cementificio non avrebbero portato nessun beneficio al nostro paese. Anzi.” “Chi lascia la via vecchia per la nuova...” “Appunto. E in conclusione I nostri giovani continuano ad andarsene chi in America e chi in Germania e qui arrivano questi operai del Nord o gente dell’interno con la quale è meglio impastare la pane a parte.”

¹¹⁴ “E che ne sai tu che alzata d’ingegno può avere un cornuto paziente? Un giorno che le corna gli prudono più del solito, piglia e spara.”

escape, I take the shoes off your feet and I say to you: do you see that you are barefoot? Where will you escape to now? (68)¹¹⁵

Asked about Vito Macaluso, Corbo answers that he has a spotless criminal record

(*incensurato*) to which the captain, cynical of spotless records ironically retorts:

Last year, a person who has been on our radar for fifteen years, who between '33 and '40 was convicted of theft, forgery, receiving stolen goods and again for theft, and who was signaled to us by Interpol and the Narcotics Bureau as a frequent drug trafficker, was recently declared to be of good civil, political and moral conduct and he obtained a weapon's permit. With that said, what do you have to tell me, seriously, about your spotless record? (69)¹¹⁶

Speculating about the death of the shepherd, the Captain tells Corbo that the shepherd had no way out; he was forced to choose between the law and the Mafia. The Mafia had no choice but to eliminate him because he posed a threat as a weak link in the chain that connects the most remote trafficker to the last drug user. When a link in the chain is exposed, as in the case of the shepherd; the chain can be traced link by link to the big players in Tangers or Beirut (71).

In the Captain's mind it is a foregone conclusion that the Mafia is behind both the shots fired at Vito and the shepherd's death. The reader learns of potential Mafia involvement through scenes such as that in which the evening news report is read aloud to Don Pietro. The evening news reports that officials are of the opinion that the shepherd's death was motivated by a question of interests among shepherds and it is clear

¹¹⁵ "Vede, signor capitano, da noi hanno il gusto non solo di ammazzare, ma di ammazzare con la spiegazione. Io ti ammazzo così e così perché tu hai fatto questo e quest'altro. Se hai parlato, e non dovevi, io ti metto un tappo in bocca; se mi hai dato un dispiacere che merita morte, ti metto sul petto una pala di ficodindia, e così ti godi tu le spine che hai dato a me; di conseguenza, se tu vuoi scappare, ti levo le scarpe dai piedi e ti dico: hai visto che sei ridotto a piedi nudi? Dove te ne scappi, ora?"

¹¹⁶ "L'anno scorso- una persona che teniamo da quindici anni, che fra il '33 e il '40 è stata condannata per furto, falso e ricettazione e poi nuovamente per furto, che è stata segnalata da noi, dall'Interpol e dal Narcotic Bureau come abituale trasportatore di droga, in questi giorni è stata dichiarata di buona condotta morale, civile e politica e ha ottenuto il porto d'armi. Ciò premesso, che ha da dirmi- sul serio- circa il suo *incensurato*?"

from the context that this opinion is pleasing to Don Pietro, who obviously is very interested in the investigation of the shepherd's death and likely ordered it to happen (90).

At the novel's conclusion Vito learns that his close friend Masino was not only involved in the shepherd's murder but in the attempt on his life as well. Overwhelmed by this sudden realization, he shouts at Masino that Masino is not his friend. Masino counters that, on the contrary, he asked that Vito be given another three days to live, an opportunity to change his behavior and avoid being killed. If it were not for him, Vito would have been killed the evening the warning shots were fired. With his final gesture Vito pulls out a gun and he and Masino shoot and kill each other (135).

The story concludes as two townspeople hypothesize about Vito's death. As Masino broke Vito's jaw and knocked out his front teeth, they conclude their brutal struggle was about a woman, it was a crime of passion, as if jealousy were the only motive for such a violent death. The novel's final sentence is an ironic comment that alludes to the Sicilian tendency to explain Mafia murders as crimes of passion, "How do you want to explain it? I told you, it seems, the other day. Here in our parts, people only die from cuckoldry" (138).¹¹⁷ This quote perfectly captures the sense of hopeless resignation that resonates throughout the novel.

3.3.2. *A Thread of Smoke*

In 1980 Garzanti agreed to publish Camilleri's historical novel *A Thread of Smoke* (*Un filo di fumo*), with the condition that Camilleri include a Sicilian glossary. By the

¹¹⁷ "Come la vuoi mettere? Glielo dissi, mi pare, l'altro giorno. Qua da noi, si muore solo di corna."

time this novel was republished with Sellerio in 1997 the glossary had become superfluous owing to the increased exposure of his readers to Sicilian dialect. Set in the imaginary town of Vigàta in 1890, this story was inspired by documents that belonged to Camilleri's grandfather (the owner of a sulfur mining business), which warned against a dishonest sulfur merchant.

The novel begins as the son of a dishonest sulfur merchant called Whitebeard (*Barbabanca*)¹¹⁸ goes door to door to ask competing sulfur merchants whether they have sulfur for sale. Whitebeard must immediately gather sulfur to fulfill an order promised to a Russian client, or he would be forced to close his company, Salvatore Whitebeard and Sons (*Ditta Salvatore Barbabanca e Figli*). It is clear the merchants of Vigàta have conspired to ensure Whitebeard's ruin for they stand in solidarity in their refusal to sell him sulfur. It is the delayed delivery of a telegram that puts their plan in motion: Whitebeard learns of the Russian order for sulfur the morning their ship approaches Vigàta to fulfill the order. At a meeting of the local social club the Circle of Nobles, the postmaster's complicity in the plot is revealed when he asks whether the others are happy with his performance (i.e., the delay of the telegram).

Residents of Vigàta anxiously await the sight of smoke on the horizon which signifies the arrival of the Russian ship and Whitebeard's downfall. They refer disparagingly to Whitebeard as a "self-made man" (23) as he rose from the working, lower-class to become a powerful merchant in the socially rigid society of late nineteenth-century Sicily. However, the smoke on the horizon can also signify the social change that looms on the horizon in Sicily during 1890 and his advancement threatens the

¹¹⁸ Whitebeard is a pejorative nickname that was given to Salvatore Romeres when he moved to Vigàta. A potter by trade, his beard was often dirty with chalk and clay. When he later became a powerful sulfur merchant the locals referred to him as Whitebeard to recall his lower-class origin.

security of men whose social status is derived from birthright, as opposed to merit.

Whitebeard is despised for both his social advancement and his unscrupulous business practices, which have forced a number of companies to fail. It is implied that it would be impossible for an honest man to enter the sulfur business and make a profit.

Interestingly, Father Imborbone speaks of Whitebeard with more contempt than those who have been forced into ruin by his business practices, “That man has done more damage than a shark in a tuna net. Because Whitebeard is the wave of this new society that teaches not to respect anyone” (23).¹¹⁹ More than the nobles whose titles are falling into disuse and whose baronial privileges and protection are in jeopardy, the priest feels threatened by this new lack of respect for the existing social order that Whitebeard represents. Clearly Father Imborbone enjoys a powerful position in local society and would be adversely affected should the lower classes refuse to accept their condition as exploited laborers. The hypocrisy of the church, the nobles and the bourgeoisie is exposed: they condemn corrupt business practices only when they are committed by those of a lower social class. When an outsider such as Whitebeard forces his way into their industry, they complain he does not abide by the same “honor code”, much like members of the “Old Mafia” generations later complain to Montalbano about the advent of a “New Mafia” in which their code of honor is no longer respected.

Numerous recurrent themes of Camilleri’s novels are present in *A Thread of Smoke* such as play-acting (*fare il teatro*). As Whitebeard’s son knocks upon each door to ask for sulfur, the merchants revel in the act of telling him they do not have any sulfur when in fact they do. Cognizant of the delight these merchants experience as they turn

¹¹⁹ “È un uomo che da noi ha fatto più danno d’una fera, ed era giusto. Perché Barbabianca è la schiuma di questa nuova società che insegna a non aver rispetto di nessuno.”

him away, he comments on the play-acting that is revealed through subtle gestures and a glimmer in their eyes. The engineer Lemonier (an outsider from Turin) plays an important role, as he comments on the Sicilian customs that are foreign to him such as the powerful use of nonverbal communication. As he describes the engineer Camilleri writes:

...during his two years of living in Vigàta he had learned to understand something about Sicilians. The engineer was convinced that it was not the words that they said nor the gestures they made; instead it was necessary to pay attention to how they said those words and how they made those gestures. Nuances, rippled wavelets, imperceptible changes of rhythm and intonation: these were the things that mattered. (20)¹²⁰

Through his depiction of Father Imborbone, the local priest who is anything but devout and sets a terrible moral example, Camilleri comments on the history of corrupt church officials in Sicily. Father Imborbone's interest in maintaining the existing social order that allows a small percentage of the population to benefit at the expense of the masses is underscored. When Lemonier asks about the unfolding of current events, Father Imborbone exclaims with delight, "Romeres is screwed!" (S'è fottuto Romeres!), and tells the story of Romeres' rise to power and how he came to be called Whitebeard. To which the astonished engineer asks, "And as a poor potter he managed to become so powerful?" ("E da povero vasaio è riuscito a diventare questa potenza?") When someone responds, "A true self-made-man" Father Imborbone corrects him, "A true fucked-made man." ("Un vero e proprio fotte-made-man.")

¹²⁰ "... che nei due anni di permanenza a Vigàta aveva imparato a capire qualche cosa dei siciliani. Non erano le parole che dicevano, non erano i gesti che facevano, s'era persuaso l'ingegnere: bisognava invece stare attenti a come dicevano quelle parole, a come facevano quei gesti. Sfumature, increspature, impercettibili mutamenti di ritmo e di intonazione: erano queste le cose che contavano."

When the priest mentions Whitebeard's politics and says, "...As for those people who drag out the Sicilian Fasci¹²¹ and fill their mouths with bullshit like social equality, emancipation and collectivization..." Marquis Curtò (the only member of the Nobles Club to embrace an enlightened philosophy towards social order) interrupts, "I don't understand what you're driving at." The priest crudely responds "I'm not driving at anything, your Excellence; you're the one who should drive it up your ass!" (24).¹²²

Father Imborbone is a glutton who has fathered several children with his housekeeper. The common townspeople joke that confessing to him will hasten one's death, as the priest will exploit any information from which he can derive personal gain. Reinforcing the common opinion of the priest as a fraud and a hypocrite, upon learning of his death, a man runs through the town shouting that anyone with relatives in hell who wishes to send a care package should seize the opportunity to send it with the hell-bound Father Imborbone; for there is no doubt regarding his destination. (62)¹²³

In a discussion at the Nobles Club concerning the "Parliamentary Inquiry of Sicily of 1875," the marquis and priest comment that Northern Italians always have the attitude as if they are going to teach something to Sicilians. When the marquis remarks that the men from the sulfur industry they interviewed were incredibly honest people, the priest emphatically agrees while his ironic tone and sly grin indicate the opposite is true. The men reflect that initially the commission proceeded seriously, until they were distracted

¹²¹ The Siciliani Fasci (1891-1894) was a popular movement, of democratic and socialist inspiration, which arose in Sicily between the years 1891 and 1893 and whose aim was the collective organization of farmers, workers and miners, especially in the areas rich with sulfur. 11 Sept. 2009.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasci_Siciliani/.

¹²² "...a questi che hanno tirato fuori la storia dei fasci siciliani e si riempiono la bocca di minchiate come eguaglianza sociale, emancipazione, collettivizzazione..." to which the Marquis Curtò di Baucina responds "non capisco dove voi volete andare a parare." And Padre Imborbone, "Io non paro niente, egregio, è lei che deve andare a parare il culo!"

¹²³ "Cu avi a mannàri trusciteddi o' nfernu, murì u parrinu Imburnuni."

by this “tale” of the Mafia and began to write fantasy stories. When someone makes the analogy of Sicily as a sick tree the Baron Raccuglia adds that according to Franchetti e Sonnino, the national government was guilty of sending the worst police employees to the island in an attempt to hasten the death of an already sick tree¹²⁴. If the national government is a doctor, he says, it needs to not only diagnose illness but also to find a remedy. Speaking of the harm that the unified government caused the weaving industry in Sicily they comment that when Garibaldi arrived at the town of Marsala there were roughly 3,000 weavers in operation and that after unification only 200 were left. When their materials started to arrive from afar, prices doubled and most weavers were forced out of business.

The discussion at the Nobles Club later shifts its focus to the worth of human beings. When asked how many people live in town, the Baron Raccuglia responds that there are eight or nine noble families and about thirty bourgeois families for a total of approximately 300 people. To which the engineer exclaims “But there are 9,000 people in town!” The baron replies that the others do not matter. The attitude of arrogance and disgust towards the lower-class and the conviction that they are worthless is equally apparent in the actions of the wealthy. The abject poverty and misery in which the majority of the town’s population subsides does not weigh on the conscience of those who frequent the Nobles Club. Camilleri writes: “A description of merchant activity in the port of Vigàta included from Baldassare Marullo’s essay entitled: *Vigàta’s likely Origins, Development, Activity and Needs (Vigàta nelle probabili origini, nello sviluppo, nell’attività e ne’ suoi bisogni)*, describes the plight of cart drivers, dock workers and the

¹²⁴ This is a reference to the practice of the national government of sending state employees guilty of corruption or other abuses of power to Sicily as a sort of punishment whereby exacerbating the existing problem of corruption and Mafia activity.

porters who carry heavy loads of sulfur upon their backs. Over time the porters develop bloody sores from the heavy weight that rubs against their backs, a woeful condition whose absence they lament when unemployed, “My sore healed” (mi si sanò la piaga)” (66).

A Thread of Smoke provides valuable insight to the living conditions and attitudes prevalent in post-unification Sicily as well as the intense resistance of the upper class to the societal changes that were underway.

3.3.3 *The Forgotten Massacre*

In *The Forgotten Massacre (La strage dimenticata)* published in 1984, Camilleri pays homage to the 114 prisoners (servi di pena) incarcerated in the tower of the pier hamlet (then under the jurisdiction of Agrigento). Confined in abysmal conditions, these men were suddenly killed one evening in January 1848 by Bourbon soldiers who guarded the tower. Camilleri seeks to rectify this historical miscarriage of justice through its failure to record a truthful official account of the events that surrounded the death of these prisoners. This historical reenactment is a tribute to the countless injustices suffered by the poor and the vulnerable throughout Sicilian history.

In the early 1980s Camilleri stumbled upon documents that referred to this massacre in his hometown of Porto Empedocle (a district of Agrigento in 1848) and he approached Leonard Sciascia with them suggesting that he should a book about it. Sciascia was not interested but told Camilleri that if he wrote it himself he would help him to publish it with Sellerio.

Camilleri relies upon various documents to relay the history of the tower and reconstruct the chain of events that surround the death of these prisoners. The names of the 114 deceased are recorded in the official town register as having perished between the night of January 25th and the morning of the 26th. However, Baldassare Marullo, the mayor of Porto Empedocle more than half a century later, contradicts this date and in 1926 writes that the date of death was January 18, 1848. This discrepancy of dates and details documenting how and when the bodies were removed from the tower prompts Camilleri to investigate the veil of conspiracy that shrouds this tragic event. He recalls that his grandmother, Carolina Camilleri (born a decade after the massacre at the pier tower) was repeatedly told a different version of these events by her mother.

Camilleri reflects on the historical domination of the tower and considers the centuries of foreign occupation in Sicily prior to Italian unification. This defensive tower that was constructed to keep external aggressors at bay later confined internal “enemies.” After countless oppressors some Sicilians regarded the newly created Italian State as yet another unwelcome domination of their land. When the massacre took place, the tower of the pier hamlet (La Torre della Borgata di Molo) was one of three locations on the island that were still under Bourbon control.

The documents Camilleri consults such as *On the Actual Conditions of Prisons and the Means to Improve Them (Della condizione attuale delle carceri e dei mezzi per migliorarla)* written in 1840 by Carlo Ilarione Petitti di Roreto and *Prisons and Civil Society (Carcere e società civile)* by Guido Neppi Modona explain the penal codes in existence in 1848. Interestingly, these documents state that a single count of theft carried a sentence of three to ten years in prison while the violent crime of assault and battery

(non-life threatening) received a sentence of one month to two years (24). In *Prisons and Civil Society* Modona writes:

In reality the detainees, because of their social status and the types of crimes they committed, are not of interest to anyone, rather they represent a threat to the classes in power... Therefore it should not be a surprise that political imprisonment aims in reality to separate the population of detainees from society, to destroy it and to keep it in harmful conditions for the longest possible time, releasing it, afterwards, in a worse condition. (24)¹²⁵

Incredibly, more than 130 years later, in January of 1987, Sciascia wrote an article in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* that focused on the existence of this exact problem in the 1980s (*To Future Memory* 119).

To write *The Forgotten Massacre*, Camilleri researches prison reforms and the miserable conditions of jails over the centuries that are lamented in songs, such as that recorded in Antonino Uccello's *Prison and Mafia in Popular Sicilian Songs* (*Carcere e mafia nei canti popolari Siciliani*):

This cell is so cold; it is like a lair that spouts water from all of its walls.

Sicilian - Ch'è friddu stu dammusu, è comu un gniazzu/
ca acqua spanni da tutti li mura

Italian - Com'è fredda questa cella, è come un covile/
che getta acqua da tutti i muri

(*The Forgotten Massacre* 26)

The chain of events that led to the death of the 114 prisoners is subject to debate.

Camilleri describes a tense political situation in which a proclamation inciting Sicilians to

¹²⁵ “In realtà i detenuti e per la loro provenienza di classe e per il tipo di reati che commettono, non interessano a nessuno, anzi rappresentano un pericolo per i ceti che detengono il potere ... Non deve quindi stupire che la politica carceraria miri in realtà a respingere dalla società la popolazione dei detenuti, a distruggerla e a porla in condizione di non nuocere per il periodo più lungo possibile, restituendola poi fiaccata.”

overthrow Bourbon rule was widely posted in Palermo on January 9, 1848. Although there was no mention of uprising in the pier district, the Bourbon soldiers in charge of the tower were very nervous about their uncertain position of power. When a large crowd including relatives of the inmates gathered outside the tower, the inmates were encouraged by the attention and they began to raise a ruckus inside. As the crowd grew increasingly vocal and agitated the guards took cover inside the tower. To prevent an attack by the inmates from behind, the guards forced the prisoners into a confined common area in the pit of the tower. When they closed slots in the tower's walls, they sealed the tower's air supply, slowly suffocating the prisoners inside. As the prisoners' screams became hysterical, the head guard Major Sarzana commanded his soldiers to throw three petards into the pit. All 114 prisoners inside the tower were killed as a result of this seemingly innocuous action. As he describes the slow and painful death of the prisoners, Camilleri aptly compares their gasps for air to that of the tuna fish killed in the ancient Sicilian fishing tradition *La Mattanza*¹²⁶: "Contrary to the tuna that die in a frightening silence, the prisoners screamed desperately" (39).¹²⁷

The blame for the incident fell on the crowd gathered outside the tower rebelling against the law and order of the Bourbons as they tried to liberate their loved ones from the tower. These 114 men and their families were deliberately forgotten by history as no historian cared to document their fate. The men responsible for their deaths lived unpunished as they advanced their careers and suffered no negative consequences for their actions.

¹²⁶ *La Mattanza* is a Sicilian fishing tradition of Arab origins that takes place off of the northwestern coast of Sicily each June. Tuna fish enter a labyrinth of nets to end trapped in the "death chamber", the final net that is hoisted from the water so that the fish suffocate to death.

¹²⁷ "Contrariamente ai tonni che muoiono in uno spaventoso silenzio, I forzati fanno voci da disperati."

3.3.4 *The Seal of Agreement*

While Sciascia's modern mystery novel *One Way or Another* demonstrates the impotence of the church to serve as a positive moral force within society, Camilleri's historical novel *The Seal of Agreement* (*La bolla di componenda*) published by Sellerio in 1993 investigates the church's sale of an indulgence stamp. Camilleri asserts that through the sale of this stamp to absolve sins, the church played an active role in promoting criminal activity and perpetuating social injustice. Although the sale of plenary indulgence was expressly forbidden by the ecclesiastical authorities, the church in Sicily continued to profit from the annual sale of a stamp that absolved men from their *future* sins. Rather than deter individuals from committing sins that, in accordance with church doctrine, would lead to eternal damnation, the church encouraged such behavior from which it reaped a profit. This novel is fundamental to understanding Camilleri's attitude toward the institution of the Catholic Church and its historically destructive and parasitic role within Sicilian society.

Camilleri dedicates this book to his three daughters telling them, "...this way I explain myself better" (...così mi spiego meglio). In order to understand Sicily's current social problems, one must study the island's history prior to Italian unification to understand how the existing mechanisms of corruption were modified to benefit the national government. Referring to the important role that agreements (*componenda*) played in Sicilian society, he gives examples of historical situations in which the outcome of events was radically altered by an agreement. Although the indulgence stamp has become obsolete, the agreements remain.

Camilleri calls attention to multiple references to the indulgence stamp contained in *The Inquiry of the Social and Economic Conditions of Sicily (l'Inchiesta sulle condizioni sociali ed economiche della Sicilia [1875-1876])*¹²⁸, an important, unofficial study conducted by Franchetti and Sonnino that provides valuable insight into nineteenth century Sicily. Although an official inquiry was conducted, *Inquiry of the Social and Economic Conditions of Sicily by the Parliamentary Commission (Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulle condizioni sociali ed economiche della Sicilia)*, it was not published until nearly a century later. Camilleri asserts that it is important to differentiate between 'official history' recorded by the powerful, and the true version of events.

Commenting on how little has changed in Sicily over the past decade, Camilleri says of the new parliamentary commission created in 1962 to investigate the "phenomenon of the Mafia," (one year after Sciascia's publication of *The Day of the Owl*):

I can affirm, with no fear of being incorrect, that the state could have saved itself the expense (that certainly was not a nominal amount) for the oversight of the new committee. It was sufficient to change names and to update the findings from one hundred years earlier because the questions are identical, the answers the same and the result a perfect copy. (47)¹²⁹

¹²⁸ "In 1876, Franchetti traveled to Sicily with Sidney Sonnino to conduct an unofficial inquiry into the state of Sicilian society. In 1877, the two men published their research on Sicily in a substantial two-part report. In the first part Sonnino analyzed the lives of the island's landless peasants. Franchetti's half of the report, *Political and Administrative Conditions in Sicily*, was an analysis of the Mafia in the nineteenth century that is still considered authoritative today. Franchetti would ultimately influence thinking about the Mafia more than anyone else until Giovanni Falcone over a hundred years later." "He saw the Mafia as deeply rooted in Sicilian society and impossible to quench unless the very structure of the island's social institutions were to undergo a fundamental change. The Franchetti-Sonnino report was attacked, disbelieved and labeled as 'unpatriotic'. It is now considered one of the most coherent and comprehensive accounts of the Sicilian mafia and its surroundings." 11 Sept. 2009.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopoldo_Franchetti/>.

¹²⁹ "Posso affermare, senza timore di essere smentito, che lo Stato poteva risparmiarsi la spesa (che certo non sarà stata di lire centomila) per la gestione della Commissione nuova. Bastava cangiare nomi e aggiornare la scrittura degli atti di cent'anni avanti. Perché le domande sono identiche, le risposte uguali, il risultato gemellare."

He also states that the commission could have truly learned something about the real conditions of the island had they interviewed manual laborers, day workers and sulfur miners as opposed to mayors, nobles, and land owners.

In Pallota's historical dictionary an agreement (*componenda*) is defined as "A transaction between militia and criminals that is based on the victim of a robbery retracting the charges against the accused in exchange for the return of a portion of his possessions" (31).¹³⁰ Camilleri claims this is the secular version descendant from the original indulgence stamp that consisted of a tariff paid for an official stamp issued by the clergy (*bolla*) that included a percentage paid to the church for the crimes committed. The purchase of a stamp on behalf of the criminals automatically solidified a pact (79). Camilleri adds, "The indulgence stamp is a pure and simple, and I repeat, devastating *pactum sceleris*: only that one of the parties is the highest spiritual authority, the Church, here certainly not *mater* but the sinister *magistra*" (97).¹³¹

When questioned during the inquiry about agreements on the island, the Baron Perroni Paladini spoke in great detail on the highway robbers (*brigantaggio*) and militia (*militia a cavallo*) that operated in the countryside, armed groups that had nothing to do with the military police (*carabinieri*) or the police/public security forces (*le forze di*

¹³⁰ COMPONENTA - Forma di compromesso, transazione, accordo *fra amici*. Veniva stipulate tra il capitano della polizia a cavallo e i malviventi o i loro complici in una data età storia della Sicilia. Grazie alla componenda, il danneggiato poteva rientrare in possesso di una parte di ciò che gli era stato sottratto; in cambio ritirava ogni denuncia. Tutto veniva dimenticato, magari con scambio di cortesie formali, di dichiarazioni di rispetto. In tal modo l'ufficiale di polizia *sistemava* le cose, creando una prassi, una forma di *giustizia* al di fuori delle leggi ufficiali. Si formava, anche per questa via, una legge, una legalità diversa, e anche questi elementi, seppure marginali, tornano nel discorso generale di ciò che può essere la mentalità mafiosa. E d'altronde chi può sostenere che sia del tutto scomparso? Piuttosto è da pensare che al posto dell'ufficiale di polizia possa intervenire la mafia, in un ruolo di mediazione, di *giustizia mafiosa*. In tal caso, *il padrino*, oppure il *boss*, decide: si restituisca in parte o si restituisca tutto. (Una transazione tra militia a cavallo e malviventi in base alla quale il derubato ritirava la denuncia contro il ritorno in possesso di una parte dei suoi averi.)

¹³¹ "La bolla di componenda è un puro e semplice, ma torno a ripetere devastante, *pactum sceleris*: solo che uno dei contraenti è la più alta autorità spirituale, la Chiesa, qui certamente non *mater* ma cattiva *magistra*."

pubblica sicurezza). He explained that the militia who protected land owners and their possessions were often accomplices of the highway robbers or they received a monthly salary from them.

The attitude of ‘I saw nothing, I know nothing’ (‘nenti vitti, nenti sacciu’) that is present in Montalbano mysteries (albeit less so than in Sciascia’s mysteries), has its roots in this novel. To avoid seeing who bought the indulgence stamp, the women who were attending mass would sit in a location that blocked their view of the confessional where the stamp was dispensed. They would cite the proverb, “He who knows less (people), lives longer and grows more” (“Chi meno conosce, più campa e più cresce”) (98). Perhaps the importance of the indulgence stamp and its omnipresence on the island is best captured in a statement made to the commission by the Lieutenant General Avogrado di Casanova, when he said, “The moral environment, the atmosphere that one breathes in the history of Palermo, is found in the indulgence stamp” (62).¹³²

¹³² “Il milieu morale, l’atmosfera che si respire nella storia di Palermo, si trova in questa bolla di componenda.”

4

The Disappearance: Sciascia and Camilleri as Epigones of Pirandello

A key to Sciascia and Camilleri's literary goals lies in their disappearance novels. Sciascia's *The Mystery of Majorana* and Camilleri's *Disappearance of Patò* eloquently synthesize each author's approach to social denouncement through literature as they inextricably link their authors to the Nobel prize-winning playwright Luigi Pirandello, who hails from the same southwestern province of Sicily and to whom they are artistically beholden. These three authors share a fascination with the role of the individual in the context of the greater social good and the theme of disappearance (the perceived freedom from social conventions that assuming a new identity offers), a link that reveals an intriguing element of the Sicilian psyche. Just as art can imitate life and life can imitate art, there are many commonalities amongst the disappearance novels of these three authors, a verisimilitude that links the disappearance of Pirandello's protagonists with those of Sciascia and Camilleri.

Pirandello's novel, *The Late Mattia Pascal (Il fu Mattia Pascal)*, published in 1904, portrays the protagonist Mattia Pascal as an average man who, dissatisfied with his life, goes to Monte Carlo for a holiday. When he learns that he is presumed dead, he eagerly assumes a new identity to start a new life with the money he has won gambling.¹³³ Disillusioned with his new identity and the lack of freedom it offers, he

¹³³ A similar disappearance occurs in Camilleri's novel *Rounding the Mark*. A man involved in a clandestine immigration operation and wanted for armed robbery, is found dead in a ravine. However, the dead body is that of another man, intentionally killed in his place. Presumed dead he assumes a new identity and continues his illegal activities elsewhere (165).

eventually returns home with the intent of resuming his old existence, but discovers that he is no longer mourned and his wife has remarried. This novel underscores the importance of the social bonds between individuals and the extent to which man's existence is defined by his social relationships, as well as the oppressive nature of social conventions.

Ultimately Mattia Pascal does not inspire sympathy, for he is completely absorbed with his own individual experience, placing his desires and happiness before that of all others, including the dead individual to whom he owes his new existence. In the epilogue entitled, "A Warning on the Scruples of the Imagination," Pirandello writes that an event in life may be absurd but that a work of art cannot be. He continues:

But I received an even greater consolation from life itself, or rather from the newspaper accounts of life, about twenty years after the first publication of this novel of mine, *The Late Mattia Pascal*, which is now being republished once again. This book, too, when it first appeared, was almost unanimously hailed as unbelievable.

Well, life has chosen to give me a proof of its truth to a really exceptional degree, even down to certain minute details which were invented by my imagination. The following article was to be read in the *Corriere della sera* on March 27, 1920: "A Living Man Visits His Own Grave." (260)

The article recounts the presumed suicide of a man and the subsequent remarriage of his wife, almost identical to the events that transpire in *The Late Mattia Pascal*, to which Pirandello writes, "And now, remembering the old accusation of incredibility, imagination takes pleasure in proving how incredible life can be, even in such novels that, without meaning to, she copies from art" (262).

In stark contrast with the frivolous and vain existence of Mattia Pascal, the Sicilian physicist Ettore Majorana, the protagonist of Sciascia's novel *The Mystery of*

Majorana (La scomparsa di Majorana), is an extraordinary individual who, figuratively or literally, sacrifices his life to save the human race from annihilation. While the figure of Majorana embodies Sciascia's ideal of exemplary social engagement and *caritas*, the profound historical significance of his self-sacrifice, bears a resemblance to that of Jesus Christ.

In 1975 Sciascia published *The Mystery of Majorana*, a novel that retraces the career and mysterious disappearance of the historical Ettore Majorana, a brilliant, young theoretical physicist whose studies and early career in quantum physics coincide with the Fascist Party's rise to power in Italy.

Born in Catania in 1906, Majorana graduates from the University of Rome with a degree in Theoretical Physics under the direction of Enrico Fermi in 1926. His thesis is entitled: *The Theory of Quantum Mechanics of Radioactive Nuclei (La teoria quantistica dei nuclei radioattivi)*. He worked at the Physics Institute in Rome and was said by Fermi to possess a highly superior intellect, akin to that of Galileo or Newton (87).¹³⁴ Majorana would often scribble highly complex equations on cigarette packages only to discard them, as he did with a theory known as the subatomic exchange force (“forza di

¹³⁴ In 1938 after the disappearance of Majorana, Enrico Fermi said of him, “Because, you see, there are different categories of scientists in the world. People of second and third rank, that do their best but, do not get that far. People of the first rank, who arrive at discoveries of great importance that are fundamental for the advancement of science. But then there are geniuses, like Galileo o Newton. Well then, Ettore Majorana was one of those. Majorana had that which no one else in the world has; but unfortunately, he was missing that which is easy to find in other men, common sense.” (“Perché, vede, al mondo ci sono varie categorie di scienziati. Persone di secondo e terzo rango, che fan del loro meglio ma non vanno molto lontano. Persone di primo rango, che arrivano a scoperte di grande importanza, fondamentali per lo sviluppo della scienza. Ma poi ci sono geni, come Galileo e Newton. Ebbene, Ettore Majorana era uno di quelli. Majorana aveva quello che nessun altro al mondo ha; sfortunatamente gli mancava quel che invece è comune trovare negli altri uomini: il semplice buon senso.”)

scambio”) that was published years later in 1932 and originally accredited to the German Nobel prize winning scientist Werner Heisenberg.¹³⁵

After receiving tenure as a professor of physics at the University of Naples, Majorana becomes withdrawn from his family and colleagues. On the evening of March 25, 1938, he purportedly boards a ferry from Naples to Palermo and that is the last contact he has with his family and colleagues. A suicide note revealing Majorana’s intention to jump from the ferry is found but an official investigation into his disappearance does not find a body, nor does it provide clues as to his whereabouts. His family is adamant that Majorana, who is deeply religious, did not commit suicide. They insist that police conduct a search for him in the monasteries of central and southern Italy, where they believe he fled to escape secular life and the ‘progress’ of science.

Sciascia’s novel contemplates the disappearance of Ettore Majorana in the context of the theoretical advancements being made in nuclear physics during that time and what these discoveries could have entailed for the human race. Sciascia maintains that Majorana was a visionary who foresaw the destructive ends to which the Fascists would exploit his theories in nuclear fusion. His decision to withdraw himself from the secular world, and thus, from the study of physics, was an instinct of self-conservation and a moral decision to protect and preserve human life.

This novel is Sciascia’s homage to Majorana; it encapsulates his admiration for Majorana’s keenness of perception and moral responsibility in refusing to participate in the destruction of human life. Sciascia writes that Sicilian scientists like Majorana are an

¹³⁵ Werner Heisenberg (5 December 1901 – 1 February 1976) a German theoretical physicist who made foundational contributions to quantum mechanics and is best known for asserting the uncertainty principle of quantum theory. In addition, he made important contributions to nuclear physics, quantum field theory, and particle physics. 11 Sept. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_Heisenberg/>.

anomaly and that Sicily has contributed little to the natural sciences as a result of the centuries' long presence of the Inquisition on the island (84).¹³⁶ He further asserts that Majorana consciously sought to create a mythical figure of the refusal of science with his supposed drowning (83).

Majorana was said to be an avid reader of Pirandello, and Sciascia emphasizes the connection of his disappearance to the dramatist, "He did everything possible to live, in the manner of Pirandello, as a 'solitary man'" (62).¹³⁷ However, while many compare Majorana's disappearance to that of Pirandello's protagonist Mattia Pascal, Sciascia argues that Majorana's aspirations more closely resemble those of Pirandello's protagonist Vitangelo Moscarda in his novel *One, No one and One Hundred Thousand*. He writes:

He prepared himself for his own disappearance, he organized it, he calculated it; we believe that there lived in Majorana – in contradiction, in opposition, in counterpoint – the awareness that the facts of his brief life, when put in relation with the mystery of his disappearance, were capable of creating a myth. (82)¹³⁸

During his personal investigation into the disappearance of Majorana, Sciascia learns that a man who had visited a Carthusian convent around 1945 was told that there was a "great scientist" living a contemplative life among them at the convent (92).

¹³⁶ "Obviously, the affirmation is not intended to be incontrovertible in the sense that Sicily has not produced a single scientist for more than two thousand years because Sicilians are incapable of science. A similar affirmation on our behalf always entails historical reasons: and amongst these the presence- longer, uninterrupted, more evasive and capillary than in other regions of Italy – of the Inquisition, the Spanish Inquisition." "Ovviamente, l'affermazione non vuole essere apodittica nel senso che in Sicilia per più di due millenni non è venuto fuori uno scienziato perché i siciliani sono negati alla scienza. Una simile affermazione da parte nostra sempre presuppone delle ragioni storiche: e tra queste la presenza- più lunga, più continua, più invadente e capillare che in altre regioni d'Italia – dell'Inquisizione, dell'Inquisizione spagnola."

¹³⁷ "He does everything to live, in a Pirandellian sense, as a 'solitary man'. "Farà di tutto per vivere, pirandellianamente, da 'uomo solo'."

¹³⁸ "...mentre più si confaceva alle sue aspirazioni il protagonista di *Uno, nessuno e centomila*; preparandosi dunque la propria scomparsa, organizzandola, calcolandola, crediamo baluginasse in Majorana – in contraddizione, in controparte, in contrappunto – la coscienza che i dati della sua breve vita, messi in relazione al mistero della sua scomparsa, potessero costituirsi in mito."

During a visit to the convent, Sciascia asks a friar whether it is possible that a scientist could be living amongst them and the brother smiles slightly, spreads his arms and asks, “But if one had been a scientist or a writer or painter before?” (94).¹³⁹ Sciascia interprets the friar’s ambiguity to signify that the moment in which one joins the convent he rejects his previous identity and therefore, it is impossible for there to be a “great scientist” living amongst them but it is probable that there is a friar living amongst them who was previously a “great scientist” in his secular life.

If *The Mystery of Majorana* offers an example of life imitating art, Andrea Camilleri’s 2000 novel *The Disappearance of Patò* (*La scomparsa di Patò*) offers an example of both art imitating life and of art imitating art. The preface to *The Disappearance of Patò* is a quotation from Sciascia’s novel *To Each His Own*¹⁴⁰ that refers to the real-life disappearance of Antonio Patò in 1890, a disappearance that was absorbed by popular culture in the form of a proverbial expression to signify the mysterious disappearance of people or objects.

The Disappearance of Patò is set in March of 1890 and it parodies the true disappearance of Antonio Patò, the Director of the local branch of the Bank of Trinacria, an upstanding citizen and a valued member of the professional community. For the fifth consecutive year the director plays the role of Judas in the annual reenactment of the “Mortorio”, a sacred representation of the Passion of Christ staged on Good Friday. In

¹³⁹ “Ma Se uno fosse stato “prima” scienziato, “prima” scrittore o pittore? Allarga le braccia, leggermente sorride.”

¹⁴⁰ “Cinquant’anni prima, durante le recite del “Mortorio”, cioè della Passione di Cristo second il cavalier D’Orioles, Antonio Patò, che faceva Giuda, era scomparso, per come la parte voleva, nella botola che puntualmente, come già un centinaio di volte tra prove e rappresentazioni, si aprì: solo che (e questo non era nella parte) da quel momento nessuno ne aveva saputo più niente; e il fatto era passato in proverbio, a indicare misteriose scomparizioni di persone o di oggetti.”

accordance with his role, in which he is banished to hell, Patò falls through a hole in the floor of the stage; but unlike previous years, he is never to be seen or heard from again.

While an investigation into the disappearance is initially entrusted to Montelusa's Public Security forces, it soon becomes a rare joint investigation that includes the Carabinieri. (Typically investigations are entrusted either to the Public Security forces [the local police] or to the Carabinieri [the National Military Police], two separate and competitive entities.) To the amazement of the locals and to the discomfort of powerful individuals, the delegate and the marshal set aside the competitive nature of their law enforcement agencies and work together to investigate the disappearance. They were likely instructed to work together because it was thought that their improbable collaboration would hinder their investigation, not facilitate it. In defiance of their superiors' orders not to follow certain leads or question certain individuals, the delegate and the marshal investigate various hypotheses without the knowledge of their superiors, who clearly have been ordered to obstruct the investigation. As homage to Sciascia (for whom Camilleri had tremendous admiration), Camilleri creates a scene of art imitating art: In an effort to determine the origin of an anonymous letter, the detectives attempt to employ a technique they attribute to Professor Laurana, the protagonist in Sciascia's mystery novel *To Each His Own* (132).¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ "Impressed by the similarities of the words contained in the anonymous letter received by the accountant Patò ("You that play the role of Judas are worse than him") and the concept expressed by Father Giustino Seminara at the main Church during the holy mass, requested by Mrs. Mangiafico, Patò by marriage, we were reminded of an episode that occurred some time ago in a town nearby when a doctor and a pharmacist, who met up to hunt together, were both killed. The delegate Laurana, who was responsible for the investigation, managed to discover the author of the anonymous letter; that forewarned of the homicide, composed with letters from a newspaper like that sent to Patò." (Colpiti dalla simiglianza tra le parole contenute nella lettera anonima fatta pervenire al ragioniere Patò ["Tu che fai la parte di Giuda sei peggio di lui"]) e il concetto espresso da padre Giustino Seminara nella Chiesa Madre durante la Santa Messa volute dall signora Mangiafico maritata Patò, ci siamo sovvenuti di un episodio capitato qualche tempo fa in un paese vicino quando un dottore e un farmacista, recatisi insieme a cacciare, eran stati assassinate entrambi.

Camilleri parodies the investigation into Patò's disappearance through a series of newspaper articles, private letters and official police correspondence that suggest reasons for his disappearance. While Patò's wife believes that he hit his head during the play and is suffering from amnesia, unable to find his way home, more imaginative explanations are offered for his disappearance such as: he intentionally disappeared,¹⁴² he was killed by the Mafia, or he was kidnapped because of his relationship with his powerful uncle, a senator and the undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, as well as a major shareholder in the Bank of Trinacria that Patò directs. A visiting priest delivers a fiery sermon in which he denounces theater as the "devil's work" and says that Patò's rendering of Judas was so realistic (plus, anyone who would volunteer for such a role must have a natural propensity towards evil), that his impersonation created a tragic inversion in which he was truly banished to hell. Meanwhile, an astronomer from the Royal Society proposes that his scientific theory "The Theory of Interstices" (based on Galileo's coordinates of time and space) explains Patò's disappearance as he fell through an opening in space and either fell forward or backward in time.

The collusion of powerful individuals to hinder the investigation into Patò's whereabouts fuels public outrage. A local newspaper publishes a judge's letter asking why the relationships between the Bank of Trinacria and certain powerful politicians (an implicit reference to Patò's uncle) are not being investigated and a less affluent citizen

Orbene, il Delegato Laurana, che sul duplice omicidio aveva l'incarico d'indagare riescì a scorporare l'autore di una lettera anonima, che l'omicidio preannunziava, composta con ritagli di giornale come quella mandata al Patò.")

¹⁴² At a certain point the detectives change the subject of their reports from "Scomparsa" to "Sparizione" and insist that the latter more aptly describes the circumstances as they are convinced that Patò willingly disappeared while *scomparsa* better describes one that has disappeared against his will or has deceased. As a result they are ordered not to quibble over semantics.

expresses his frustration on a town wall, “Is Patò dead or is he hiding?” (“Patò è morto o si è nascosto?”)

The novel concludes with the final report from the delegate and marshal to their superiors in which, forced to close their investigation, they conclude Patò disappeared of his own volition. After meticulously planning his escape and that of his lover (the wife of the Regional Director of the Bank of Trinacria), Patò stole a large sum of money (entrusted to him after hours by a member of the Mafia with the understanding it would be deposited at the Bank of Trinacria the following morning). After reciting the role of Judas in the “Mortorio”, Patò escaped through the trap door as his part in the play required; never to be seen or heard from again.

Like Majorana, Patò resembles Pirandello’s character Vitangelo Moscarda for he too, patiently and cunningly planned his escape. However, like Mattia Pascal, Patò selfishly seeks to abandon his existence and the obligations it entails to enjoy a new identity.

Sciascia and Camilleri embody diverse approaches towards literature and social engagement that are well-reflected in their treatment of the theme of disappearance. Sciascia’s novel *The Mystery of Majorana* portrays an extraordinary, quasi-mythical individual, whose esoteric, intellectual contributions would have had profound implications for civilization. His selflessness in making perhaps the greatest personal sacrifice may have saved countless lives and changed the course of humanity.

By contrast, Camilleri’s *The Disappearance of Patò* parodies the true disappearance of a man whose hedonistic motivation was to start a new life with his lover. The integration of dialect into the narrative adds a comic force that perfectly

conveys the absurdity of the official investigation into the disappearance. The public's outcry is of a choral nature and voices the frustration of average citizens with the law enforcement's collusion with the social elite, politicians, the Church and the Mafia. This outrage is crudely expressed in graffiti and in letters (written by individuals whose literacy skills are dubious), and reflects the modes of communication that were most available in 1890 to the predominately illiterate masses. Camilleri sheds light on Sicilian popular culture of the last century, for he feels the only way to truly understand Sicilian culture and the injustices that plague it is to examine the small, historical events-- events that may seem unimportant in the greater scheme of history yet offer much insight into modern Sicilian society.

CODA

Imagine that I was rereading, as I often do with Leonardo's novels, *The Day of the Owl*. It seems like that novel was written a century ago, due to the acceleration of the Mafia's violence as such that today he wouldn't know how to create a character like Don Mariano Arena, except for in a historical novel about the Mafia.¹⁴³

Andrea Camilleri (Lodato, 309)

The narratives of the present study constitute an invaluable contribution to both Italian literature and to the genre of the mystery novel. The stylistic innovations that define Sciascia and Camilleri's detective novels and the social impact of their extensive literary production warrant considerable recognition and analysis.

The scope of their narratives, the exploration of social justice within the microcosm of a Sicilian context, is an attempt to understand and improve the human condition. Their courageous denouncement of the conspiratorial code of silence, that enables a destructive Mafia culture to exist in modern Sicilian society, exemplifies the engagement required to instigate social change.

The absence of the restoration of logic and order within the detective novels of Sciascia and Camilleri is a radical subversion of the traditional form of the mystery genre. Their defeated protagonists demonstrate that the genre of the mystery novel does not function within a Sicilian context in which justice is an anomaly. In portraying the elaborate network of corruption that exists within Sicilian culture, their narratives offer a rare window to Sicilian reality and the social problems that plague the island.

¹⁴³ "Pensa che rileggevo, come faccio spesso con i libri di Leonardo, *Il giorno della civetta*. Sembra un libro scritto un secolo fa, perché l'accelerazione della violenza della mafia è stata tale che oggi lui, un personaggio come don Mariano Arena, non saprebbe crearlo, se non in un romanzo storico sulla mafia. *Il giorno della civetta* è il primo romanzo contemporaneo nel quale compare la mafia."

It is important to study modern Sicilian society for the organized criminal activity that operates on the island affects Italy, Europe and beyond. Sciascia and Camilleri implicitly force their readers to acknowledge the dire consequences of the crimes that their novels depict. Their denouncement of the culture of “See nothing, know nothing” is a condemnation of those whose silence constitutes tacit complicity.

Although Sciascia was the first to write a novel that had the Mafia as its subject, Camilleri has continued this Sicilian tradition of social engagement through literature, to become the most widely read contemporary Italian author of the Twentieth Century. The integration of Sicilian dialect in his texts is a bold linguistic experiment that has been enthusiastically embraced by readers in Italy and abroad.

To observe the changing attitude that has taken place in Sicily since Sciascia first incited a nationwide public debate about the phenomenon of the Mafia, his mysteries should be read in a chronological order. To perceive how Camilleri’s mystery novels are the continuation of the tradition of denouncement embraced by Sciascia, his mystery novels should be read in the key of those of his predecessor.

In the tradition of the enlightened philosophers, these authors critique the mechanisms of power responsible for the stark social inequality in Sicilian society as they search for truth and justice. The struggle for social justice is an admirable human activity and the unique Sicilian sensitivity that prompted these authors to devote endless energy to this intellectual pursuit is worthy of additional research.

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