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Should we "Sicilianize" Our *Weltanschauung*? Leafing through Sciascia in Search of the Meaning of Society, Power & Conspiracy

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ABSTRACT

Aim and subject. This piece argues that the philosophical bedrock of conventional social science, including political economy, is a collection of over-aestheticized platitudes (viz., "the great books of the West"), whose common thread is, for the most part, a utilitarian and tritely moralistic appreciation of the human condition and human behaviour in general. In the search for an alternative poetic phenomenology, it is here proposed that the fiction of Leonardo Sciascia (1921–1989) might be a more promising platform. **Method**. Social scientists would be better off taking their literary cues from the Sicilian writer, whose insights on the physiology of power are here, as a **result**, subdivided and analyzed in the following sections: the elevation of "Sicily" to a standard categorization of modern societies; a typological description of woman and men; the facelessness of Mass-Man; the functionalism of the Mafia; society and power, Justice; fictional narrative; and theology. **Conclusion**. Economists are interested in the work of Leonardo Sciascia when studying the problems of the incoming criminalization of the economy and the curtailment of the state (for example, in terms of issuing money), as well as the further merging of economic elites (oligarchy) with state power (plutocracy).
Keywords: Sicily; Italy; power; mafia; crime; south; terrorism; theodicy; capital punishment; literature; theology; psychology; cultural studies; sociology; history; gender; criminology; democracy; oligarchy; conspiracy; politics

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Должны ли мы «сицилизировать» наше мировоззрение? Листая Sciascia в поисках смысла общества, власти и заговора

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Предмет и цель статьи — представить доказательства утверждению, что философская основа традиционных социальных наук, включая и политическую экономию, представляет собой набор чрезмерно эстетизированных банальностей, общим местом которых является по большей части утилитаристская и моралистическая оценка человеческого состояния и поведения в целом. **Метод.** В поисках альтернативной литературной феноменологии автор предлагает использовать научные труды Леонарда Шаша (1921–1989), всемирно известного своими публикациями о сицилийской мафии, которые могли стать многообещающей платформой для формирования новых экономических и социологических концепций. **Выводы**. Социологам, безусловно, были бы полезны взгляды сицилийского писателя на физиологию власти. Исследователям-экономистам при изучении проблем криминализации экономики и свертывания государства (например, в части эмиссии денег), а также дальнейшего срастания экономических элит (олигархии) с государственной властью (плутократия) также были бы интересны многие книги Леонарда Шаша.

Ключевые слова: Сицилия; Италия; сила; мафия; преступление; юг; терроризм; теодицея; смертная казнь; литература; богословие; психология; культурология; социология; история; Пол; криминология; демократия; олигархия; заговор; политика

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Introductory: In Need of New Lenses

> Poiché nulla si sa di sé e del mondo se la generosità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende.[1]
>
> Leonardo Sciascia, *La Strega e il capitano* [1, p. 13]

For the time being, the question could be whether it would be gainful to peep at this inexplicable world of ours through the pellucid cameo of Leonardo Sciascia's (1921–1989) Sicily. Just for the length of, say, a season; indeed, being it understood that this cameo, or any lens, even if *intagliata* more or less artfully, is still a "lens." And as far as lenses are concerned, these appear to be prosthetic devices which the irreversible dimming of our waking state condemns to rapid obsolescence: lenses condemned not just by the corruption of our spiritual eyesight, but also, by time, which erodes them all.

Of course, one could retort that if such is the fate of all dusty and abraded lenses, certain "crystal visions," instead, certain "immortal insights" have kept their crispness, their clarity throughout the ages: it is that story of the grain, the kernel of truth and beauty etc., which these insights (of the "great poets and thinkers") putatively possess; and which allegedly account for their longevity, as well as their entitlement to front-row seating in all manuals of the world's libraries. And truth be told, seeing these titanic "regulars" — and their many dwarfish accompanists — monopolizing the bistros of our academic youth (and the taverns of our tedious mid-season), century after century, is justified cause for concern and/or consternation: not that anyone is thinking of impugning Aristotle & Plato, Hobbes & Spinoza, Shakespeare & Dante, Hegel & Marx, Locke & Rousseau; but was there truly nothing else, nothing just as good, or — God forbid — *better* in their day and age? Or even before and since?

Or, possibly, in this fanfare against boredom, impugning the tenure of (some of) these bigwigs is precisely what one ought to do. Who made them kings anyway? Was it the good taste of "public opinion" or the better taste of political impresarios bent on feeding "public opinion"? There is something insufferably teleological and thereby daftly *conservative* in this conjectural metaphor that some higher principle of cosmic economics kneads the plasm of human creation into a glassy iceberg of worthless floes capped by a dome of priceless gems (the "big names"). To progress in the *cursus honorum,* we need constant reassurance that what we are poring over are truly the diamonds in the spire rather than lesser vitreous shards used for ballast. But can we be certain that the mass underwater does not hide far greater treasures than the artefacts endlessly publicized and imposed overhead? An (uncharted) archipelago of whole icebergs of misunderstood geniuses?

As it generally goes, a few ("heterodox") practitioners periodically attempt a timid revolt against State-mandated curricula and periodically fail not only for mistaking nobodies for greats or scavenging the inedible organs of those rated great already but especially for spending most of their time invoking the Greats' pardon for not citing them enough especially when they are trying their best not to. An even more despaired fringe of students of political economy has gone so far as to seek shelter in the alternative spaces of decadent literature & conspiracy theory. It is to the plight of this miserable lot that the present piece is dedicated. I wish to write on behalf of all students of social mystique (Pessoa) "in search of an author."

Yes, let us say it: the classics are a sore disappointment to the militant sceptic: more often than not, the "great books" convey (totalizing)

[1] If the generosity of men, of literature will not teach him, one knows nothing of himself or the world (The Sorceress and the Captain).

messages and impressions that are altogether too abstract, too "pure," too presumptuously self-possessed of a conception of "the good." These prescriptive breviaries are all designed to convey a self-evident intimation of what is "right" —and, *nota bene,* this could be for the sake of moral edification, State-management, revolution, or otiose and debauched depravity alike. But the crux of the whole affair is that these august writings consecrated to the "good" strike their admonitory roots in a specular conception of "*evil*," which, itself, is the most lamentable caricature ever drawn by the intellectual tradition of the West.

Consider for instance (a micro-sample of) Machiavelli's "classic" fresco of Man's cynical opportunism,[2]

1. The reason is that nature has so created men that they are able to desire everything but are not able to attain everything: so that the desire being always greater than the acquisition, there results discontent with the possession and little satisfaction to themselves from it. From this arises the changes in their fortunes; for as men desire, some to have more, some in fear of losing their acquisition, there ensues enmity and war, from which results the ruin of that province and the elevation of another.

Or

2. And the world has always been inhabited by men who share the same passions. There are those who serve and those who rule, and there are those who serve unwillingly, those who serve willingly, and those who rebel and are chastised.

And

3. The reason for this is a fact about men in general: they are ungrateful, fickle, deceptive, cowardly and greedy. As long as you are doing them good, they are entirely yours: they'll offer you their blood, their property, their lives, and their children — as long as there is no immediate prospect of their having to make good on these offerings; but when that changes, they'll turn against you.

It gets a tad better, but not much, with the following aphorism:

4. "It is necessary to take such measures that, when [people] believe no longer, it may be possible to make them believe by force".[3]

Poor "Mal-chiavello": as he himself wrote to a friend, politology was for him not a job but a devotion; a devotion which compelled him, *venuta la sera*, to swap out dirtied clothes for "royal and curial vestments" so that he could immerse himself in a spiritual session with his (and our) "classics," — his revered "antiqui huomini."[4] It is a beautiful image. And yet for all Machiavelli's keenness, the result is so unimaginative that one cannot help feeling shortchanged on evil's true nature with yet another cheap parody. Do the learned doctors of academia really believe that knowledge of Machiavelli's *Prince* is a sine qua non for fathoming the essence of power? And, besides, what are we to do, for the purpose of politological theorizing, with, say, the wicked progression of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Dante's *girone* of the usurers, or even Plato's political aretaics? Precious little, in fact. Sub-

[2] Of which the Anglo-Saxon mainstream is so gluttonous.

[3] 1. La cagione è, perché la natura ha creati gli uomini in modo che possono desiderare ogni cosa, e non possono conseguire ogni cosa: talché, essendo sempre maggiore il desiderio che la potenza dello acquistare, ne risulta la mala contentezza di quello che si possiede, e la poca sodisfazione d'esso (Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio, The Discourses, Book I, Chapter 37, 1517). 2. Il mondo fu sempre ad un modo abitato da uomini che hanno avuto sempre le medesime passioni, e sempre fu chi serve e chi comanda, e chi serve mal volentieri, e chi serve volentieri, e chi si ribella ed è ripreso (Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati, On the Method of Dealing with the Rebellious Peoples of Valdichiana, 1503) 3. Perchè degli uomini si può dire questo generalmente, che sieno ingrati, volubili, simulatori, fuggitori de' pericoli, cupidi di guadagno; e mentre fai loro bene sono tutti tuoi, ti offeriscono il sangue, la roba, la vita, ed i figliuoli, come di sopra dissi, quando il bisogno è discosto; ma, quando ti si appressa, si rivoltano (Il principe, The Prince, Chapter XVII, 1513) 4. Conviene essere ordinato in modo che, quando [i populi] non credano più, si possa fare loro credere per forza (The Prince, Chapter VI).

[4] Venuta la sera, mi ritorno a casa ed entro nel mio scrittoio; e in sull'uscio mi spoglio quella veste cotidiana, piena di fango e di loto, e mi metto panni reali e curiali; e rivestito condecentemente, entro nelle antique corti delli antiqui huomini, dove, da loro ricevuto amorevolmente, mi pasco di quel cibo che solum è mio e ch'io nacqui per lui; dove io non mi vergogno parlare con loro e domandarli della ragione delle loro azioni; e quelli per loro humanità mi rispondono; e non sento per quattro hore di tempo alcuna noia, sdimentico ogni affanno, non temo la povertà, non mi sbigottisce la morte: tutto mi transferisco in loro ("When evening has come, I return to my house and go into my study. At the door I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire, and I put on my regal and courtly garments; and decently reclothed, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them," Letter to Francesco Vettori, 10 December 1513).

lime verbalisms, all of them, with a more or less cogent relation to the realm of fact, but none being actually *realistic* — highly stylized but not veridical. Impressionisms, fragments. And all too aesthetic. The touch of the classics is all too *contrived*.

But is this not the *very best* the West can offer? Namely, the usual menu of majors and minors: the Debussys and the Saties, the Dalís and the Massons, the major (*The Laws*) and minor (*Menexenus*) dialogues?

And so it is that the politologist wakes up daily to a state in which his so-called phenomenology is a discharge of images, sounds and verbalisms, a mass of symbols, of which he may only hope to make sense by arranging it in artistic —generally narrative— form. Screenplays or, more simply, stories —*fables convenues*, they say (of official historiography; to this we shall return). This phenomenological mass is some kind of semi-palpable *feuilleton*, syncopated by nightmarish free-falls, that eludes close companionship on account of two fundamental mysteries: one, as said, is the realm of "evil," and the other is what may be designated as the "micro-macro" transition phase, namely the enunciation of the set of laws that govern the correlation of the psychology of the single to that of the *collective*. Without these two elements, one cannot expect to cover much ground. And, in this regard, majors and minors appear to have just as little to offer to the social sciences. Or possibly not: maybe the minors might be "better" after all. Faced with such a challenge — i.e., of making proper politology — the student may indeed find it moderately gainful to rummage through crates of lenses and cameos in various states of wornness and, with guided luck, gather a bagful of such prisms and utilize them to filter information in varying, novel arrangements with a view to creating proper space for theory.

Leonardo Sciascia's "Sicily" might be of use here: a sample of his best (political) work yields a microcosm that gravitates around the issue of *power*. His literary production affords a variety of insights into the ways in which social and individual (psychological and sentimental) life is shaped by more or less pronounced variants of the drive to subjugate (fellow human beings). This applies to the bulk of humanity, to which Sciascia's "heroes" are, as we shall see, the protocolar exception. This type of exploration is bound to yield some truth(s); at the very least, considered the substantial (though mostly provincial) success Sciascia was able to achieve in his lifetime, a survey of his work may also give a taste of what (a current of) the Italian intelligentsia of the 60s and 70s sanctioned as "acceptable" political fiction —stylistic technique aside, *"arti di pinna"*[5] in Sicilian, [2, p. 32] which, in the case of Sciascia, is indubitably superlative.

Because, at home, they are presently regarded as (twentieth-century) "classics," Sciascia's works, especially his mafia and detective novels, have been the frequent object of publicistic as well as scholarly analysis (not to mention their cinematographic adaptations), they will not be approached here with systematic historiographical or cultural curiosity: rather, the purpose is to sketch an outline of Sciascia's *comédie humaine* — from the foundational beliefs to prophecy by way of institutional analysis (viz. how does the power system, at its most basic level, actually function?).

Whether what emerges from this little exercise turns out to be, all things considered, "better" than, say, the constructions of Machiavelli, Freud, or Aristotle is, at heart, not the issue. Or, maybe, that is precisely the issue: let us take, then, this rhetorical provocation as the expression of a quasi-frivolous need to reset the clock on socio-political investigation. This we may do by living less and less a vapid, psycho-cerebral life of stupefied dependency on the *obesas publicaciones* of the classics, and, occasionally, begin, instead, to breathe with alternative works of fiction, and acquire, with the infantile obsessiveness of the collector, one *minor* lens at a time, and…play with it. Let us disclaim: there is not "a whole lot" in Sciascia that the reader has not heard before in some form or other. But what there is, is a self-contained story as good as any; it is told by an author who was intrigued by power and who thought sociology one of the two[6] great impostures of our time: [3, p. 20] for us students of political economy perennially on the prowl, that is reason enough to reload our pens and scribble about it.

[5] Literally, pen-artistry.

[6] The other is architecture.

"Sicily"

> Sono piuttostso un scrittore italiano che conosce bene le realtà della Sicilia, e che continua a essere convinto che la Sicilia offre la rappresentazione di tanti problemi, di tante contraddizioni, non solo italiani, ma ma anche europei, al punto da poter costituire la metafora del mondo moderno.[7]
> Leonardo Sciascia, *La Sicilia come metafora* [4, p. 78]

Sicily as a metaphor of the modern world.

First of all, Sicily is an island: a self-contained territorial entity which, for ages, and despite itself, has served as one of the chief thoroughfares of the Mediterranean. On account of its geographical location, the isle was forced to acquaint itself repeatedly with the *violence* of war and the rituals of invasion and conquest (the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Normans, the French, the Spaniards, the British, the Piedmontese, the Austrians, the Spaniards again, the Germans, the Anglo-Americans, and "the Italians"…); for Sciascia, the sense of formidable impotence deriving from the protracted exposure to such a bloody *sarabande* of foreign marauding princes, viceroys, generals, bureaucrats & Demo-Christian margraves, and the cult of perennial usurpation to which they severally sacrificed with each passing dominion, has entrenched the Sicilian mind into a conch of trepidant and diffident solitude.

E a un certo punto l'insicurezza, la paura, si rovesciano nell'illusione che una siffatta insularità, con tutti i condizionamenti, le remore e le regole che ne discendono, costituisca privilegio e forza là dove negli effetti, nelle esperienze, è condizione di vulnerabilità e debolezza: e ne sorge una specie di alienazione, di follia, che sul piano della psicologia e del costume produce atteggiamenti di presunzione, di fierezza, di arroganza […].[8] [5, p. 13]

It is thus precisely because it is such a "lonely" place that "Sicily is perfectly in accord with the world." [4, p. 46]

Conquest and brutal arrogation have engendered fear and a tacit acceptance of prepotence as the chief way of life; and insularity, added to the mix, has forged a human type whose barbarousness and cynicism are keen. And, clearly, such a type is socially inseparable from, and inconceivable without, a highly stratified society, one in which virtually no "enlightened" bourgeoisie separates a mass of baked, semi-human campesinos from a noxious set of parasitical potentates, maniacally fixated on prerogative. The average Sicilian is terrified of the future —so much so that the future tense does not exist in the dialect— and the spiritual obtuseness inexorably acquired in the wasteland makes him seek apprehensive solace in material possession: he physiologically craves *la roba*, he craves "stuff."

Woman

Woman exists only as part and parcel of *la roba:* chattel, proper. To the Sicilian man, she is the incarnation of sex and lust, and her body, along with wealth, is one of the two foci of his regressive acquisitiveness; as such (especially as a prey, as fair game, if curvaceously attractive), woman looms as a living shadow of man's fear of being entirely dispossessed by the fundamental unaccountability of the morrow. In this connection, the only notion of guilt entertained by the Sicilian is condensed in a proverb according to which not availing oneself of an opportunity (*la cummudità*)—i.e., of the glaring occasion of taking another's wife and property— is a sin so great as to exceed any confessor's forgiveness. Which is to say that in a world as unsympathetic as only ours can be, possessing as many women as may be in reach and grabbing as much stuff as may be on hand, is a commandment. And what you should expect from your neighbor is precisely what he must expect from you — scruple or hesitation could be fatal: the complete reversal of Christian morality, notes Sciascia. [6, pp. 33–34] Hence man's existential feeling of precariousness and insecurity —sharpened on the one hand by the merciless joust for status in a spiritual realm bereft of intellectual tradition, and contaminated by the contorted urges of carnal appetite, on the other— force him to create a

[7] I am rather an Italian author who knows the reality of Sicily well, and who remains convinced that, of the many problems and contradictions affecting not just Italy, but Europe as well, Sicily casts a reflection so vivid that it could be construed as the metaphor of the modern world.

[8] At a given point, insecurity and fear are overturned into the illusion that such insularity, with all of its conditionings, impediments and rules, represents strength and privilege when, in truth, by experience and direct manifestations, it is the condition for weakness and vulnerability: and from this comes a sort of alienation, of madness, which, on the psychological and cultural planes, yields a disposition prone to presumption, conceit, arrogance […].

type of theatrics, whose poses and grimaces he conjures to mask the repellent scramble of lecherous envy and self-loathing facelessness that sizzles beneath. For the Sicilian male, woman and wealth are thereby suffused with an aura of unclean "religiosity."

Woman thus needs to be invoiced, and while sensuously fertile, periodically taken stock of, in the patrimonial synopsis of the husband's possessions, like any other major assets of his net worth. Vexed, molested, and smeared since puberty by man's unconscionable and repugnant urge to ground himself (barbarously) through her —because, nothingness that he is, he possesses nothing truly his to affirm himself with—, she spends the rest of her (mature, and unshapely) days seeking (no less barbarous) revenge. A foul sort of vengefulness, to which Sicilian women give free rein so soon as they take charge in "the horrible matriarchy" they have managed to erect within the familial nucleus behind the back of men too busy overpowering one another. The matriarchs typically exact revenge by poisoning topically all of their township's interpersonal and familial currents with an unceasing flow of artfully disseminated mendacities, vicious instigations, and blasts of provocatory dirt variously flung behind an iron mask of psychopathological, "frightful conformism." [6, p. 14]

In this sense, and in this (psychic) "space," woman is, without the shadow of a doubt, even more irrecoverable, even more damnable than man, the savage author of her barbarous fall: she is more lost than man himself. In terms of imagination and redemption, she always contributes less than he does; in the hierarchy of play she is always less than he is, vicariously diminished always. When she is desirable and desired —and dignified by status through marriage—, she perforce *manipulates*, and, like the intoxicatingly bodacious character of Luisa Roscio, she may even astutely perform as a willful accessory to (repeated) murder when so required by a conspiracy of lust, power and betrayal, such as that recounted in *A ciascuno il suo* ("To Each His Own," see below). [7]

When unmarried, mishandled, and still very much carnally alive, woman drifts and suffers a squalid life of emotional and sexual disarrangement. Tumbling down from one seigniorial palace to another patrician manse, she is the object of palpation and contemptuous obsessiveness at the hands of masters whose house she keeps while moonlighting as a *sorceress* —a curse on God for giving her this life!: floating by half in the low-tenacity broth of prostitutes, drifters, and petty delinquents, yet strongly breathing despite it all, she sells amulets and casts spells for a mass of folks that know no God but only disagreeable saints. Not technically beautiful, but rousingly physical, earthly, and utterly confused, woman-as-sorceress is the ideal scape-goat of the "system" — a system like the inquisitorial office of the city of Milan (Salem is everywhere), whose prosecutors had one forlorn commoner, Caterina Medici, strangled before burning her dead body at the stake for witchcraft in 1617. [8] Caterina's last, rich and influential, patron, who was afflicted with chronic gastritis and an all-consuming morbid fixation for her, succeeded, with studied malevolence and the doctored testimony of a local intrigant, in "convincing" the authorities that she was the demoniacal source of his abdominal affliction: with the leverage of torture, false witness, and extracted confession, she was effectively and plausibly accused of having caused every single miscarriage in town (child mortality, illnesses, etc.) for the entire length of her domestic service, and finally dispatched.

In sum, woman matters enough to make a mentionable appearance on the stage only if she is sexually vibrant: if exceptionally beautiful, she may count on being married (or coupled) very young; on deceiving (more or less) perfidiously to gain status in her prime; and on intriguing to maintain privilege from mid-life to elderly demise. Otherwise, depending on her degree of tenacity she may either survive a peripheral life of domestic anonymity, eventually tempered by late matriarchal vendetta, or, with paroxysmal alternations of fortune —from the domestication of white magick to sacrificial tragedy—, run the ramble of the part-time Wiccan. The triad: in sum, woman summarizes herself in one (or a third of each) of three manifestations: the mindless vixen turned botoxed harpy, the hyper-hallucinated housemother, or the disenfranchised fuzzy-eyed enchantress.

Types of Men

Men, for their part, are essentially subdivided into five categories: a) "men" (of honor); b)

half-men; c) pygmies or dodgers (*gli ominicchi*, *i furbi*); d) assfucks and cuckolds (*i piglianculo, i cornuti*); and e) *quaquaraquàs*.

In Sciascia, the vaguely philosophizing recital of these various typologies is assigned not to a literate heteronym, but to his lead Mafioso roles: [9, p. 204] the intimation seems to be that the study of human character would be more appropriately condensed into a *bestiaire*, and, therefore, that the summary exposition of the latter is better left to a ruffian. The Mafiosi are natural leaders of the barbarous realm —namely of the underworld— whose management they have been tacitly entrusted with by the overlords of high society — on this, they are all understood (we shall address this aspect when discussing "the System"). Just as hazily understood in all of this, though never explicitly expressed, is the notion of *tenacity*. The Mafia boss is the strongest within its stunted, socio-psychologically *inferior* domain (the microcosm of violence of delinquency), and as such he recognizes in the nobleman his own peer, his counterpart in the upper hemisphere of society. What the slumlord perceives as a wealthier "equal" is, in truth, the mirror image of himself among no less fierce, but —in terms of "commitment to purpose"—, [10, p. 237] more evolved, more *tenacious* strata: the gangster and the aristocrat are, in fact, peers in that they are both barbarous leaders sharing the same violent and predatory mindset, yet the dignitary avails himself of superior psychological resources (through heredity and upbringing) to exercise power — a power which, on the other hand, the lead mobster can only aspire to wield in brutal and subservient fashion (with a socio-historical leap in influence, however, which we will address hereafter).

The hidalgo and the racketeer are both men of honor, and both are barbarians —though divided by tenaciousness—, but not all tenacious types are necessarily barbarous. Truculent men of honor are willfully unaware of, and unconcerned by the penal code of the bourgeoisie, but they will acknowledge considerately, and only under very particular circumstances, just one category of their social and spiritual law-abiding and law-enforcing "enemies": and that is the rarest caste of the incorruptible (and lettered) detectives and magistrates that uphold the law on their own principled, yet intelligently flexible terms, without "playing" or abusing the judicial machine. This type of hero worthy of the thugs' "respect" stands as the archetypal —and tenaciously benevolent— exception to a sea of all-encompassing wilderness, in which "justice" is, at best, a farce, and all men abstractly subjected to it are, in the super-optimistic case, "half-men." That is, nondescript conformists with half the guts of the "real" men. But, to Sciascia's Mafiosi, the reality is grimmer: there are far more *pygmies* around than half-men: i.e., overgrown children whose life is expended in monkeying the behavior of adults; not to mention the even more numerous assfucks and cuckolds —that multitude of unforgivable, unctuous, and hypochondriacally self-absorbed oafs that periodically allow others to despoil them of an ever dwindling sexual and pecuniary capital. "Thieves" and "imbeciles," variously intended, marinate in the same cauldron as the cuckolds and assfucks: they are one step below the primates, who survive by means of astute trickery and expedients. And at the very bottom of the ghastly litter creeps the object of (the Mafioso's) unbounded and self-evident disgust: the amorphous swarm of "the people": hapless and squalid, obtuse and unsightly, and useless as ever —a swarm of low-form humanoids, beasts actually, so far below the threshold of assertive, rapacious manliness that, incapable even of proper speech, they, like ducks, manifest their insufferable presence by "[quaquara]-quacking" the few (monotone, repetitive, and predictable) lines that caption their perfectly meaningless and redundant existence.

Colorful as it may be, of course, the classification remains coarsely mono-dimensional: it is a declension of exclusively *predatory* types ranked by degree of tenacity (from alpha males to remissive pigtails); other significant divides such as, say, *spiritual drift* (oppressive vs. non-violent and compassionate) —which, as said, is tangible whenever the hoodlum tacitly acknowledges the valor, and thus the honor, of the capable detective—, or *proneness to death*, are not systematically combined in the schema, which, thereby tacitly suggests that, seeing how the world spins, the *tableau humain* of the Mafioso, despite its boorish enunciation, will serve its basic interpretational purpose

As a side note: these five behavioral-spiritual casts seem archetypical; they are fixed. Baboons, say, are rather unlikely to rule the roost (although one can never be quite so sure). In any event, it

would be safe to assume that, in general, "men of honor" live at the top of their hill in one form or another. The others, with functional logic, deploy themselves in descending order of auxiliary serviceability: quaquaraquas, e.g., are perforce hard-toilers (slaves) and/or soldiers. Sad to say, Aristotle comes to mind here (viz. "natural-born slaves"). Finally, if anyone was curious as to what drives the advancement of the single individual among his peers (and exceptionally across social strata), here is what one of Sciascia's "women" has to say on the subject: "I happen to know a rather wide circle of self-made men: and I can assure you that they've been made, all of them, by others —others, who, in turn, have been made by circumstances, combinations, and shady deals, which, even if momentous enough to break into history, remain, for all that, fortuitous and miserable." [11, p. 96].

Nobodies

One Mario Bruneri, a weird sort of Lombrosian psychopath, starts his earthly adventure as a type-setter, in Turin. He has a wife, from whom he would separate, and a son: he is known to be a decent man and a good worker. The (Great) War, which Italy joins in 1915, changes things. Bruneri dodges the draft, feigning illness. Thereafter, accompanied by a new woman, herself the successor to another lover who denounced him for abuse, he drifts entirely into a life of imposture. Defrauding one private party after another (other type-setters, business-owners…), he soon makes himself known to the hounds of justice. He changes name and flees to another city, where, with unsuspected talent, he improvises, launching a journal of literary criticism (!), while defrauding new acquaintances no less creatively than the old ones. Having, past this second spell, consumed entirely the margin for fraudulent maneuver, to survive, he goes on petty-thieving, until, one day, in 1925, he is caught stealing in a cemetery, and apprehended. Brought to the station he dissembles his identity, acting the raving fool, beautifully. Sent to Turin's madhouse, he figures he has got it good: three meals per day, warm clothes, peace and quiet. His moll is starving out there; his wife and boy are not living it up either; but what is a burnt small-time-shyster with a taste for *Cyrano* and erotic limericks to do? And so he rides the system a little while longer until the directors of the asylum, tired of paying free lunches to a putative amnesiac who does not look all that insanely forgetful, put his picture in the local paper, "Do you know this man?," hoping that family would show up to reclaim him.

And at this juncture begins the real madness. In the published photograph, Bruneri's wife recognizes her husband at once, and, lovingly, keeps mum, knowing he is better off committed than locked up if his identity were revealed. But one Renzo Canella of fair Verona, the brother of Giulio Canella, a once respected professor of literature who, as a commissioned officer of the Italian army, had gone missing in action in Macedonia, swears that the man in the photograph is his brother. The resemblance is uncanny.

Canella instantly travels from Verona to Turin to encounter Bruneri, who, smelling forthwith a golden opportunity to escape the most squalid of miserable ends, squeezes out of his persona all the twisted genius and charm psychopaths are frequently endowed with to attempt a winning impersonation of this other man, of this other, intellectually and musically-accomplished, bourgeois, higher than himself. It is going to be difficult. They meet, and talk for a few hours. Bruneri is *not entirely* successful. Renzo Canella is not conquered, at first: in the man before him he does not recognize the brother. But upon reaching Verona, he is not so sure anymore.

Logically, the following step is to bring into (the) play Canella's wife, Giulia, who dressed and coiffed as she was in 1916 when she first came to be courted by Giulio, shows up at the mad house, and the emotion that seizes both upon eyeing each other is, allegedly, overwhelming. She has no doubt: the man is her husband. Ten years she had pined for her beloved, inconsolably, and, presently, miraculously, he has "returned," returned from the dead, as it were. But another faction, made up of Canella's erstwhile colleagues, friends and acquaintances, protests against what they decry as an outrageous, usurpative sham. The doubt as to the ontological substantiveness of this man confined that looks so much like the missing professor Canella sparks a national case, a true media sensation. Italy divides herself between "Cannelliani" and the skeptics. As for the Fascist regime, this last seems, for rather obscure reasons — possibly to cleanse somehow the rather tarnished name

of war veterans and to distract the masses from the political maneuvers by which it is achieving consolidation — to be leaning on the side of the former party.

Canella's family hires the nation's best legal talent to have the amnesiac of Turin released into its custody. The request is satisfied. And so Bruneri "goes back" to Giulio Canella's prosperous home, and to his young and winsome wife, to live the bliss of a second honeymoon; and a child is conceived. But, after a few weeks, the system throws a wrench in the works of the Canellas by recalling to the asylum the "amnesiac," whose release order, in fact, had to be signed by a magistrate only after having conducted the proper identity verification. As a note issued by the local police had informed the judicial authorities that the institution's inmate was but a picayune swindler, the presiding judge orders that Bruneri be detained *sine die*, not until, that is, the true name of the amnesiac is ascertained.

The State fought the Canellas, in the courts, for the length of four years (1927–1931), at the end of which the tribunal published a sentence that vindicated the skeptics: for the Law, the amnesiac was the police's old contumacious acquaintance, Bruneri. But, because the regime favored him in the role of Canella, Bruneri never served the four-year-and-fifteen-day sentence that awaited him: fantastically, he was issued a passport and allowed to "escape" to Brazil, where he ended his days in the Italian colony of San Paolo as one erudite Professor Julio Canella, who also took the time to write an impassioned memoir about his "struggle."

The trial had been punctuated by 142 testimonies, appeals, counter-appeals, cross-examinations, deliberations and counter-deliberations of both counseling teams: surreal moments in which Giulio Canella's friends and acquaintances had come to vet the dissembler's musical, academic, and literary knowledge; his memories, recollections, and facts, details known only to the "real Giulio"; and tics, body language, physicality, physiognomic comparison…Obviously it was not Giulio Canella: one inch shorter than the professor, Mario Bruneri could not, like him, conceptualize, or play the piano at all, but, again, the evidence, though preponderantly in his disfavor, was never quite fully conclusive: indeed, a few of those particular facts that only Giulio could have known, Bruneri had God-knows-how known, intuited, too, stunning somewhat the witnesses. And, the wife — this wife, who fought hardest, harder even than Bruneri himself to effect the "substitution" — had to have had the last word, understandably: she would have known, wouldn't she? "I have lived with him [Bruneri] in intimacy," she declared, and, truly, what better proof of love's identity is there than the intimate embrace? All seems to be flowing into mythological grooves, as usual. As if becoming a Euridyce in reverse, she made no mistake this time around; she never looked back from the moment she caught sight of (what she possibly wished was) her (psychopathic) Orpheus at the gates of a bedlam. But, truly, can love-making be the ultimate confirmation of the lover's name? Still according to myth, was it not agreed that Psyche was never to gaze upon her lover's visage? And it was Eros, Love itself, that made love to her. To Psyche, *the psyche*…

What did those two eventually reminisce about when they held hands?

It is a true story, which Sciascia relates, with the razor-sharp and magnificent terseness that is his trademark, in *Il teatro della memoria*, one of his "inquests," —reconstructions of bizarre public affairs from chronicles and archival documentation.

What is the moral of it?

That we are nothing. We are mass-men, faceless, unknowing, and perfectly interchangeable. Systemically replaceable, each and everyone. "So highly mutable is life in each and all of us," Sciascia comments, "that when 'forms' imprison it, fictions become reality." [12, p67] According to the catechizing self-hypnosis of modern Liberalism —the dominant credo of the age—, we are ego-driven creatures with given, a priori "preferences" and more or less "strong personalities." Nothing could be falser. We are beings far disconnected from the ego, we are a blob of animal life stripped into a tangle of instincts, as C.G. Jung would say, which we painstakingly attempt, through the course of our lives, to mesh and bundle together in the illusion that we are one, that we are whole, by saying "I," "me." Precisely because we are so soluble, shifting, paper-thin, disassembled, and anonymous, all we do when interacting with one another is go through a collection of masks, and a list of pre-recorded catchphrases. Life's proverbial ups and downs, crises, "transformations," and moments of perdition are all symptoms of a general

sense of existential inconsistence, which fuels this (often circular and absurd) chase of meaning, of self-identification. Beings so psychologically, so internally disaggregated, as mass-humans are, are perforce in constant need of moral, ethical admonition. And fads.

Histrionic ability in this space is clearly a key asset, as shown, indeed, by the terrific performance and life-adventure of our Bruneri. In truth, than diligence the impostor's homework rather demands intuition: it is a mask's shape and features that he has to study and memorize, before choosing, as in this case, to fasten it upon his own head indefinitely. Through experience and the juju of his practical madness, Berneri had acquired such a fine knowledge and understanding of the posology of modern life's vacuity, that, re-born a true delinquent (after the war), he nonetheless managed to pour himself so completely into the standardized mold of "the professor" that he made Canella's moral and religious ethos *genuinely* his own. A studied exploit of impersonation brought about a complete "moral reversal": through an act of artistic mimicry, the psychopathic chameleon had absorbed so successfully the full countenance of the other as to assume, in deed and word, all the moral connotations of an "honest life." And this is to infer that the transformation may be complete, i.e., believed by the impersonator himself, when the new husk and the space surrounding it are felt to be *stable and secure:* at that point, the dissembling psychopath in all of us may go on believing that he is, in fact, Canella, i.e., the more fortunate "other."

As part of the western (movie) audience we tend to be much more familiar with the (pulp) criminological scenario in which the psychopath lives deceitfully his whole life, keeping his gruesome mysterium to himself, while preying serially upon unwitting victims. In keeping with the above observation, such would, then, appear to be the pattern when the social environment stalked by the chameleon is neither stable nor secure. But assuming that the degree of blood-morbidity affecting the psyche of the impostor is not high, one may otherwise expect him to stop vampirizing others so soon as he identifies a cocoon in which he feels he may take comfortable cover, for life. As Bruneri seems to have done. However that may be, because the mechanisms of the psyche are still too mysterious, there is no intent whatsoever to generalize here. Suffice to say, then, that Bruneri, like most of us, in fact, could fake virtually everything: charm, wit, erudition, glib, *mondanité*, and *true* moral deportment. When tested, he floundered a bit on the intellectual plane, [11, p66] but could by no means surmount his total musical illiteracy and technical non-proficiency. So, part of the moral would seem to be that, possibly, *music* is the only, the realest, most inimitable of all life-materials: a touchstone of self-awareness.

People have subjective images of themselves that are illusory. They miss the objective reality entirely and are unable to give an honest description of themselves that would be recognizable by their friends and acquaintances. This sort of existence, literally and strictly, is a kind of sleep-walking, sleep-talking, and so forth, and it demonstrates a passive and meager waking existence, which we cannot fail to admit as objectively abnormal. [12, p. 92].

The Functionalism of the Mafia

> La mafia è un'associazione per delinquere, con fini di illecito arricchimento per i propri associati, che si pone come intermediazione parassitaria e imposta con mezzi di violenza, tra la proprietà e il lavoro, tra la produzione e il consumo, tra il cittadino e lo stato.[9] [13, p. 42].

We know it, the Mafiosi perform an essential duty for so-called "conventional" —i.e., rigidly oligarchic & caste-sedimented— society: *they manage the plebs*, which generally is a non-tenacious, superstitious and impulsive creature. [6, p. 75] They manage it ruthlessly because they *despise* it. And, as far as efficiency is concerned, this is how it should be because the psychological basis, the "chrism" of power, is indeed contempt (*il disprezzo*): or, to be precise, contempt legitimized by iniquity. And ordinary people "thirst for iniquity." [14, p. 82].

Between opulence and misery, the Mafioso establishes his interstitial, yet pivotal, position by keeping enough or no thieves whatsoever

[9] The Mafia is a criminal organization, devoted to the unlawful enrichment of its associates, which obtrudes itself by violent means as a form of parasitical intermediation between property and labor, between production and consumption, between citizen and State.

(depending on the grandee's rank and condign level influence) from trespassing onto seigniorial property, by negotiating and brokering the restitution of stolen *roba*, and by carrying out various deeds of intimidation on behalf of the self-same lordly class. Nowadays, with a similar degree social opportuneness, the functionalism of the mob summarily consists in the management of three essential societal functions: narcotics, gambling, and prostitution —with a political add-on, as we shall discuss.

The mobster, though sanguinary and "*religiosissimo*" [8, p. 112] (which is to say, perniciously superstitious himself —"devout" [10, pp. 293–331] —, like the sheepish plebeians he professes to loathe), effectively performs, in this honorary guise of ghetto-pontifex, a key societal role. He is the "good" mobster, a chief in the proper position and chain of command. Not lacking in generosity, courage and smarts, he lights up intermittently with a "flicker of juridical conscience." [9, p. 197] By enforcing "a bloody and primitive code of law," he brings order and peace in "a putrid and immobile reality." [8, p. 67, 110]

And to top it all off, the Sicilian Mafia-chief is thrown upon history not without modern expectancy, for he differs in one important respect from the politicized brigand who, in the former Reign of Naples, fought the constituted order for the dispossessed sake of the most retrograde alliance of ecclesiastical and baronial power. Unlike the monarchist *bandito*, the Sicilian Mafia-chief, for his part, managed to find an economic entente with the industrializing elites of the North, Italian and otherwise. This he did by gradually occupying the place that once been that of the blue-blooded "leopards" (*i gattopardi*) of the aristocracy. Through usury and all manners of more or less defiant expropriations of nobiliary tenure, he succeeded in fashioning himself into an agrarian entrepreneur, one who could thereby harness the fortune of his agricultural capital to the promising outlets of the European markets. [5, pp. 76–78] He is thus a *bourgeois sui generis*, a bourgeois of "the second degree," so to speak: savage, yes, yet nonetheless politically and historically *aligned*.

To one of his lieutenants, who, in a rare moment of conscientious political reflection, wondered why, after having successfully sided in a historical coup (the "revolution")[10] with the Liberal faction against the royalist incumbent, they — "the honored society"— would not dare, or deign to ameliorate, even by a little, the sustenance of the "people," Don Gioacchino Funciazza in Sciascia's play, *I Mafiosi,* barks out in a furious reply: "There is no such thing as 'people'! There are only persons!" The mere suggestion of "the people," as a needful object of dutiful obligation, fills the don with an irrepressible, bilious urge to spit.

"Good" as he might have occasionally been for a "putrid" environment, the Captain of the Ghetto remains for all that a survivor: to him, as for Jeremy Bentham, or the late Dame Margaret Thatcher, society does not exist; nor does *humanity*, for that matter. What is he to make, indeed, of the annoyingly alliterative pairing of "human" and "humane"? As if the etymon were itself self-evidently suggestive of Man's instinctive bent to empathize with and commiserate his fellow human-beings, when the truth, the don avers, is exactly the opposite: "And what does 'human' mean?" he apostrophizes provocatively, "If it means something of man, of men, then I will tell you that there is nothing more human than robbing your neighbor blind." [9, p. 161] The philosophy of "la roba," again.

A natural-born organizer, a Social Darwinist, and a visceral Liberal to boot, the Mafioso, thus promoted to the rank of class-B entrepreneur with the "revolutionary" effacement of old dynasties by modernity's new elites, not only retains *ex officio* the tutelary title of gatekeeper of the slum, but, by dint of it, acquires new preponderant influence. He recognizes that in the era of mass theatrics, mass movement, *and mass-men*, the institutional hold he has on the (votes and opinions of the) quaquaraquas has projected him and his from mere bouncers of the aristocracy to king-makers. If it is so, concludes Don Gioacchino, it is pleonastic even to speak of the "(honored) society" as such: after the Liberal swerve, the Mafia no longer exists as the unavowed, semi- clandestine security corps of the nobility —namely, as something distinct from the traditional body of "the reign." It is now part and parcel of modern society. [10, p. 204, 212] Not (part of) the "deep State," but (of and in) the State, *tout court*.

[10] The "revolution" by which the House of Savoia, the "modern" faction, toppled the old dynasty of the Bourbons, in the early 1860s (for the "unification" of Italy).

Society & Power

Cumannàri è mègghiu ca fúttiri[11]
Sicilian proverb

Society is essentially animated by a tripartite core of aristocracy, plebs and literati: [8] in modern parlance, elite(s), mass, and intelligentsia. In Sciascia's fictionalized and skillful reconstruction of Sicily's attempts at "independence" in the 1700s, [8], [15] the entities embodying the arch-immobilist, "decadent," and defeatist core of the isle are Spain and the Church. Empire and Ideology.

The masses squat at the bottom of the pyramid. Crude and appetent, they crave public crucifixions; and though they sympathize with the petty thief, they will not forgive sins of lèse-majesté: forever crippled in the spirit, they remain arch-conservative to the death —theirs and especially that of the heretic, whose life "the System" ritually excoriates as often as possible for their sovereign voyeurism (i.e., the lust for public executions).

From the depths of this base humanity —street-vendors, cobblers, carpenters, porters, petty artisans, and day-laborers— the elites draw the *pugnalatori*, the "knifers," whom the subtle minds of the State-agencies' political bureaus eventually organize into "brigades" for the contingent purpose of "creating panic" when the situation demands it. "The reason for being [of the *pugnalatori*], their function, and their 'service' consist exclusively in the shifting of power ratios —of established powers, that is. And, one may add, in shifting them not by much." [17, p. 138]. To recount one juicy instance, such panic-inducing brigades of knifers were thrown into play one fine October day of 1862 in Palermo, the capital. On that occasion, the city lived through a flurry of random stabbings, which, according to the authorities' report, appeared to have been committed with a view "to attempt directly the destruction and subversion of the present form of government." Sciascia assembled a narrative of the event by parsing the official documents.

The mechanism of terror is failsafe: if caught red-handed by mischance, the masterminds may always deny culpability by claiming they were merely playing the *doppio gioco*, all the better to infiltrate the terrorist cells —or, by claiming that the maneuver was part of a general drill under the responsible and all-seeing watch of the police and general Intelligence, namely by fluttering the classic "false-flag" denial. At the other end, by grace of their spiritual debilitation and consequent ultra-conservatism, the dregs are loyal to their patrician commissioners, and, therewith ready, if apprehended by their masters' factional enemies, to die on the gallows without squealing. They are men of honor: they will never talk; they shall never implicate the "princes": this is *omertà*, the honorable code of silence. And they are not afraid of death either. It thus is understood that, in the event of their honorable dispatch, the absentees are bound to provide for the knifers' families. [18, pp. 20, 23, 28, 76] Noblesse oblige. It may be noted in this respect that although the knifers' tenacity might be low, their composure in the face of *death* by execution —by far, the noblest renunciation of greed— leavens the bi-dimensional outline of their truculent persona into a more enigmatic composite of brutality and heroism —a compound (low-tenacity, barbarism plus proneness to, or at the very least, fearlessness in the face of, death) which has not infrequently exercised a certain attraction on commoners and sophisticates alike. This is a notorious phenomenon that we will address in the final section.

The State. In any event, *pugnalatori* and false-flag ops aside, the average citizen is and remains, by definition, a cuckold ("il popolo è cornuto"). [8, p. 53] And the one to cuckold the people is *power* itself, as wielded in sequential order by: 1) priests, 2) politicians, and 3) Mafiosi. Of the latter, we have said. For their part, priests and politicians are, by definition, the governors of the State-Church tandem: or rather, the politicians have inherited, through and in the State, what used to be the Church's power of inquisitorial intrusion. Until 1783, when it was abolished, the Tribunal of the Inquisition had been strong in Sicily. To Sciascia, the Inquisition was the most abhorrent, arbitrary, and sinister form of prerogative ever exercised by humans in institutional form. Behind the demoniacal hypocrisy and demented fanaticism of its sanctimonious canons lay a cruelest apparatus of repression, buttressed by an efficient intelligence network. This last has bequeathed to modern Liberal States the category of the *familiare*, [6, p. 15] namely, that of the high-level informer —a

[11] Being boss is better than fucking.

position, as noted by the Spanish chroniclers of the era, fancied by the totality of "*los ricos, nobles, y los ricos delinquentes*."[12] The low-tenacity, low-class obverse of the Inquisition's "familiar" is, of course, the cops' *confidente*: [8, p. 21] traditionally, the supergrasses are former peasants, previous offenders, who earn their keep by collecting usury on behalf of the *galantuomini* (the gentlemen of leisure), and keep afloat by ratting on small criminal fry to the State's bloodhounds. The *confidente*'s, admittedly, is an uncomfortable role, pinioned as he is by the contractual allegiance to the nobility, the hatred of the fellow-*gueux* whom he duns, the potential reprisals he may expect from those he burns, and his "treasonous" services to the police. Along with the *bandito*, the *confidente* serves as the lord's poverty-stricken, low-tenacity ancillary. Unlike the *bandito*, however, because he ekes out a miserable living by double-crossing other *misérables* like himself, the *confidente* is greedily attached to life, so much so that the only human thing he knows is an agonizing fear of death, in which he squirms daily, until death, finally, with retributory punctuality, strikes. [8, p. 29].

Priests in "Catholic" Sicily are for the most part "rapacious, ignorant, and substantially atheistic." [4, p. 128]. The moral and cultural limitations of the Sicilian clergy are, in fact, fitting considering how fantastically irreligious Sicilians are: "It is hard to find in the soul and in the culture of other peoples," says Sciascia, "a vision of life so rigidly and coherently in opposition to the evangelical message. We may even add: no people in the world, among those officially denominated as Christian, has possibly ever wrought from within such a total disaggregation of the Christian values." [5, p. 195]. The fold has the shepherds it deserves. And so it goes with the minorities. Good folk have their priests too, heroes, indeed, who occasionally have the audacity to say no, the audacity to rebel, as did one Angelo Ficarra, bishop of the diocese of Patti (northeastern tip of the isle). In the founding period following the years of transition from the American invasion of Sicily (7/1943) to the Liberal-electoral triumph of the Christian-Democrats (4/1948) —who came to be closely identified with the Church and the new imperial dharma of the United States—, Monsignor Ficarra refused to "bend to the shady and insane pretenses of three or four megalomaniacal priests, seconded by some exalted laymen and an equivocal demimondaine (*donnina*)." In his comment to the epistolary between Ficarra and a high prelate of the Roman curia, Sciascia notes that Ficarra misjudged, failing to recognize that these are the things — megalomania and exaltation — that, the world over, drive the contest for the acquisition of *power*. This was politics, proper. As Ficarra, however, wanted to act according to conscience, he configured his pastoral activity, which is the priest's politics, as the most perfectly "un-political" testimony a man could profess. [19, pp. 35, 41–42, 51].

In Liberal modernity, i.e. in "democracy," it is the politicians, as said, that have taken over in the name of the State the bureaucratic machine of Catholic Spain. The "Sicilian priests" themselves have departed. They have been reborn as publicists and academics — the near totality thereof being just as, if not even more than their sacerdotal predecessors, rapacious and ignorant. Their labor is mostly one of propagandistic "interpretation": in sum, they falsify the record, as a matter of routine, in order to justify, or better, to "legitimize" the privileges of the caste from which they themselves have secured, or have striven to secure, tenure. This is so because, as a matter of fact, "history does not exist."

La storia non esiste. Forse che esistono le generazioni di foglie che sono andate via da quell'albero, un autunno appresso all'altro? Esiste l'albero. Esistono le sue foglie nuove: poi anche queste foglie se ne andranno; e a un certo punto se ne andrà anche l'albero: in fumo, in cenere. La storia delle foglie. La storia dell'albero. Fesserie! Se ogni foglia scrivesse la sua storia, se quell'albero scrivesse la sua, allora diremmo: eh sí, la storia…Vostro nonno ha scritto la sua storia? E vostro padre? E il mio? E i nostri avoli e trisavoli? Sono discesi a marcire nella terra né più e né meno che come foglie, senza lasciare storia…[13] [16, p. 59].

[12] The wealthy, the noblemen, and the wealthy delinquents.

[13] Do they perchance exist, the generations of leaves that have departed from that tree, autumn after autumn? The tree exists, as do its new leaves: eventually, even these leaves will go; and so will tree itself, in smoke, in ashes. The history of leaves, the history of the tree. Nonsense! If every leaf wrote its story, and so the tree, then we'd say: well, yes, history…Your grandfather, has he written his story? And your father? And mine? And our distant forefathers?…They have gone down to rot in the dirt, just like the leaves, without leaving any history behind…

This rumination is recited by the protagonist of *Il consiglio d'Egitto,* Don Giuseppe Vella —a fictional projection of a crafty Maltese deacon risen to infamous celebrity through sensational forgeries of Sicily's ancient chronicles (1749–1814) —, whom Sciascia resurrects in a finely chiseled historical reverie of the days surrounding the 1782 conspiracy of an illuminist lawyer, Francesco Paolo di Blasi, against the Bourbons' regime. The moral intimation in this case seems to be that historiographers and (social) scientists, both, are makers of narratives, and narratives are necessarily impostures and imbroglios since "every society creates the sort of imposture that, so to speak, suits it." Therefore, the vibe pulsating through the new priesthood is perforce acrimonious, not only because, as Kissinger sneered, the stakes are so small, but more so because the work of daily falsification required of them is at best an exploit of mediocrity. And the fight among medians can only be waged in the tightest of margins. This holds as a rule, then, except for the rare Vellas, who, at least take the trouble to dream up entire codes from scratch, expending therefor far greater loads of energy and talent, and deserving thereby the higher honors on account of more meritorious (corrupt) work. The conclusion Sciascia draws from this existential assemblage of power and discourse is straightforward: it is precisely because *culture* itself is "more or less consciously, an imposture"; it is because it is "a tool in the hands of the baronial power, and thus a fiction, a falsification of reality, of history" that more or less grandiose documental forgeries of the "record" always have a chance of succeeding. If the drafting of history weren't itself a fakery, it would be impossible to fake it; [18, p. 126] likewise, why refrain from cheating "the system" if the system itself were not set up to cheat you in the first place?

Such, then, is society: a tyrannous circle of high-tenacity princes and bureaucrats commanding, and commandeering resources from, a mass of ferociously devout toilers, whose three effluents are: knifers, stool-pigeons, and quaquaraquas. In the spiritually under-developed psychic space, the Mafiosi mediate between these atrophied swarms and the mighty gentlemen of leisure, while keeping up their game of brutal hostility versus the half-men and assfucks of the mid-level State apparatus of repression. This last, in turn, is a juridical figment erected for the protection, and in the name, of the middle-class, which, though inhabited for the most part by half-men, is the (ever-shrinking) breeding-ground for heroes, that is, high-tenacity benevolent, compassionate types.

A gung-ho pro-Enlightenment Gallicist, mad with passion for Voltaire and the *philosophes*, Sciascia thought Reason and the word of the Law the be-all and end-all of (social) life. Sentiment, triggered by reason alone made it clear to him and all moderns of his ilk that there is no sin beyond lying and wishing the suffering and humiliation of others. A creed so linear knows no hell and finds everyday its Paradise in the city of Paris [20, p64] (truthfully, that alone makes Illuminist conversion worth considering…). For the educated Sicilian, it so seems that the mythologizing powers of attraction have their residence in France.

Therefore, prototypically, heroes are Paris-adoring bourgeois who swear by logic; but they may also be (exceptional) priests who believe in God (God forbid), or aristocratic music enthusiasts— like that eccentric and Mozart-fanatic, Baron Pisani, who threw himself body and soul into the sufferance of "madmen," and rose to international glory, it was said, "for establishing in the mid-XIXth century the most advanced mental institution of its kind in the most backwards region of the West" (Sicily, that is). [5, pp. 69–72] In Sciascia's universe, conscientious and capable detectives, a few magistrates, lawyers with ideals, physicians and well-traveled artists, [19, p. 40] and, exceptionally, the erudite farmer, are all plausible candidates to the cult of heroicness, which, as a matter of fact, is more a Calvary than a gentle trail of initiation. The loneliness and isolation of Sciascia's hero symbolizes in simple, classic fashion the challenge, the perennial difficulty encountered daily by the cultivated men of the "half-way class" as they struggle to enact to the best of their often limited abilities the compassionate principles that animate them in a world, "Sicily," that thwarts them from all quarters. Squeezed between the conservative inarticulateness of qua-qua-ra-quacks from below, and the overmastering menace of the elitist paymasters from above; not knowing how to break through to the ones, who are more barbarized by the minute, and in constant, blackmailing subjection of the barbarizing others, the bourgeois ends up backstabbing other no-less-pusillanimous *clercs* ever more frequently.

Therefore, the middle-class man, hampered to boot by his own cuckolded double, obeys the directives of the higher-ups, complying, and forgets about the rest of humanity altogether. The impulse to rebel is thus virtually suppressed. Yet when it is authentic, it is a midwife to greatness. Potentially a hero, the middle-class individual chooses to conform, instead, by tossing out his better half, and so spends the rest of his life hallucinating that he is whole.

Finally, beyond masters and slaves, the third buttress of conservatism, is the rife middle-class traitor, the *literatus:* the scholarly falsifier of history, who, deceitfully, employs prose to fashion new gospels *ad usum delphini*. He is the academic hack, the fabricator of more or less finely edited potboilers and miscellaneous discursive junk, which is dished out, in "schools," to budding men and women in perfunctory preparation of life's absurd pantomime of power. Nowadays, as modern intelligentsia, the new academic Liberal priesthood, to which the Anglophone and globalizing elite entrusts the souls of its mid- to high- level recruits, thereby performs, yet with indescribably greater sophistication and *savoir-faire*, the catechumenal function that had once been that of the Pro-Spanish Inquisitorial arm of the Church.

And, in conclusion, all of the above, modernized and re-elaborated, is presently subsumed under the ominous designation of "democracy." Democracy, which, once again, in the peerless phraseology of the Mafioso is "a beautiful invention, something entirely made up, by people who can shove one word up the ass of the next and all the words up the ass of humanity." [8, p. 54].

Justice

A Sicilian proverb says that "La furca è pi li poveri, la giustizia pi li fessi" (the gallows is for the poor, justice for suckers). [21], [126].

Speaking of justice in Sicily *c'est faire du mauvais esprit*; it is a tasteless joke. It is unwarranted to do so, however, not because justice exists, in fact, elsewhere —say, in the empyrean of Paris or, say, Scandinavia (?)—, but because in (modern) "Sicily" justice is altogether a different thing from the hypnotizing mantras of conventional ethical injunction learned in school. This is so because moral compendia and primers of virtuous (or unvirtuous) conduct make the mistake of assuming, good or bad as he innately might be —though overwhelmingly bad he certainly is, and in "Sicily" it is a sin to believe otherwise—, [26, p. 29] that Man is awake. In "Sicily" all are asleep; all are asleep with the possible exception of the heroes, who, in any case are so few and far between, and so cosmically ineffectual as to pose no impediment to a universal state of spiritual free-fall.

If one had been convicted, and served time, on false charges, what would he say to an investigator that has come to interrogate him in connection to the mysterious assassination of the very judge that condemned him?

"Sì, ero innocente…Ma che vuol dire essere innocenti quando si cade nell'ingranaggio […]?"

"Ma non tutti sono innocenti" disse [l'ispettore]. "Dico: quelli che capitano nell'ingranaggio."

"Per come va l'ingranaggio, potrebbero essere tutti innocenti."

"E allora si potrebbe dire: per come va l'innocenza, potremmo tutti cadere nell'ingranaggio."

"Forse […]."[14] [15, p. 29].

We have heard this before: no one is really innocent. If no one is innocent, the judicial apparatus seems to function as some kind of sacrificial altar that demands a holocaust of time-blood in the form of more or less violent punishment for any manifestation of intolerable deviance. It is as if humanity were one giant organic ball of flesh whose weaker limbs and useless protuberances (the poor and the suckers), *when resisting coercion into the constricting structure of a foreign encasement* —the apparatus of power broadly defined— must undergo some kind of bodily and/or psychological Procrustean mutilation. And here is the "surprise": from the (meat-) grinder's standpoint, the specific identity of those getting the axe it is a matter of perfect indifference so long as "a fixed quota" of soon-to-be-amputees is regularly dragooned to the courts and variously dispatched through the adjudicating body. And that is because, as we have learned from the story of Bruneri, deep down, as "Sicilians," we are replaceable nobodies, mere mouthpieces.

[14] "Yes, I was innocent, but what good does "innocence" do when one falls into the meat-grinder [of the judicial system]?" "But not all of them are innocent" said [the inspector]. "I mean: of all those that have been thrown in the meat-grinder." "As the meat-grinder goes, they could all be innocent." "Then one could say: as innocence goes, we could all be thrown into the meat-grinder." "Maybe so […]."

The quibbling Mafioso, who, with Liberal disingenuousness, spoke of the inexistence of society, clearly, did not, could not, go deep enough. The wrap-up, in this regard, is better left to a high priest, such as the personage of the President of the Supreme Court in *Il contesto*, who, twisting the Liberal aphorism into its nihilistic negation, affirms that individuals themselves are non-existent; and because there are (virtually) no ego-conscious individuals in *modern mass-society*, there can be no individual responsibility either: "individuals" make up an aggregate, society, that is tangible enough, whose substance, however, is de-individualized soullessness. On the plane of raw barbarous interchange, societies can be said to amount to diverse collections of masks, and modulated vocalisms to match, which, combined in more or less numerous and assorted patterns, make up what we refer to as cultural expressions. Many of them are universal. There remains, then, the lava of barbarous violence that intermittently squirts through these masks —that is why it is said that, outwardly, suspect and culprit differ but little (*Paulum distare videtur, suspectus vereque reus*,[15] Ausonius). And to obviate these outbursts, there is *the Law:* "the Law," sentences the ethereal Jesuit of Sciascia's 1974 novel, *Todo modo*, "is the invention that we are all guilty." [3, p. 102]. Therefore, since apprehending and trying every single culprit at all times and in all places, is, de facto, impossible, one might as well extend to peace-time society the war-practice of "decimation" — ten of yours in reprisal for each of mine killed.

[Il mestiere di giudice, di poliziotto] presuppone l'esistenza dell'individuo, e l'individuo non c'è. Presuppone l'esistenza di dio, il dio che acceca gli uni e illumina gli altri, il dio che si nasconde: e talmente a lungo è rimasto nascosto che possiamo presumerlo morto. Presuppone la pace, e c'è la guerra…[…] Questo è il punto: la guerra […]: e il disonore e il delitto devono essere resituiti ai corpi della moltitudine, come nelle guerre militari, ai reggimenti, alle divisioni, alle armate. Puniti nel numero, giudicati dalla sorte.[16] [[3, p. 99].

A nation of irresponsible nobodies, whom the State's tribunals, mechanically and indiscriminately, obliterates in droves, is a society alright, yet one of insects. This vision leaves nothing to the imagination; the argument Sciascia lends to the chief magistrate is a naked ode to power. And the deceiving simplicity of this lean peroration of brute force, expounded with aplomb, is a key to the deeper mysteries that lie in the "terrifying" [1, p. 29]. soul of the Administration's powers of castigation, especially as they relate to the *sovereign* notion of "bloody restitution to the multitudes" (public opinion demanding executions), and to the factual inexistence of "real" individuals. Not surprisingly, it is to God that the President of the Supreme Court inevitably returns when alluding, in conclusion, to the effective sacredness of his role in the State's apparatus of repression. Wherever power is resisted, he avers, wherever the legitimacy of might is insanely questioned, authority "feels" the universal exigency to use force *criminally* in order to beat down these delicts of lèse-majesté. The coda of the argumentation is perforce theological: it is exclusively by overturning the Law into violent, i.e. criminal, repression of grave insubordination that men grant God access, the only access there is, to their world. And this god, concludes the high magistrate, is clearly not the [god of Gnosticism] that is fain of hiding himself. [15, p. 100].

Simple Stories

S.: an unidentified Sicilian borough; late fifties, January 16th. It is 6:30 in the morning, the bus for Palermo, jam-packed, is about to depart from the main square. "One moment," says the ticket agent to the conductor: a man in a dark suit is running toward the bus-stop. As the doors re-open to let him board, two shots ring out. With a swoosh, the man collapses, dead — ambushed, as it were. The Carabinieri are immediately on the scene. None of those present seems desirous to talk, but it does not take long to learn that the victim, Salvatore Colasberna, is the president of a construction coop. He was clean, and an honest builder, who did serious work, very much unlike the totality of his

[15] Small difference there seems between the real and supposed guilt.

[16] [The profession of the conscientious policeman] is predicated on the existence of the individual, but there is no such thing. It is predicated on god, of the god that blinds the ones and enlightens the others, the god that likes to hide: and he has remained hidden so long that we may presume him dead. It is predicated on peace, and yet we're at war… […] That is exactly the point: war…: dishonor and crime must be restored to the bodies of the multitudes, much like in war they are restored to the fighting regiments, the divisions, the armies. Punitively mown down in number, judged by fate.

peers (Colasberna being the proverbial exception), who, by default, rely, instead, on "protection" to erect ramshackle edifices on lopsided asphalt. A Sciascian hero *par excellence*, and a 'continental' from the North, Captain Bellodi (of the Carabinieri) is in charge of the investigation.[17] Soon after the murder, he receives an anonymous letter, an account tasting strongly of veraciousness: in brief, it relates how Colasberna had stubbornly refused to join the local construction consortium, which is "supervised" by the mafia. The supervision does not simply entail "protection," but it gives the protégés a steady pro-rata entitlement to State contracts, and a guaranteed participation in all urban and zoning projects of the region, which the Mafia is deputized to manage by way of its functionalist connection to the political elite. Colasberna was prideful, proud of his professionalism and honest attention to detail: he was the type that would not listen, that would not bend. He would not listen when a don came early on to threaten him through that typical *dire sans dire*, which like the wrong side of an embroidery, is the undecipherable tangle underlying a set of unambiguous patterns; nor would he bend when, six months previously, a bullet purposefully missed him, not by much, late one night, as he climbed his doorsteps, back from work. To validate this scenario and corroborate motive, Bellodi has convened to the station Colasberna's brothers, who are also his partners; except for Giuseppe Colasberna, the brothers do not utter a word, nor does Giuseppe, even remotely, follow the captain in this sort of considerations. They are all too scared. Bellodi finally dismisses them after obtaining a writing sample from each, which reveals, in fact, that Giuseppe is the author of the letter. All the while, a woman has been waiting outside his office to inform the Captain that her husband, a landscape gardener, has gone missing —gone missing, that is, the very day of the murder. The captain orders a search.

Meantime, in Rome, word of Bellodi's zeal has climbed its way up to the higher reaches of the political establishment. As they ogle a hat-check girl unstitching her dress with a piercing stare, a Mafioso, in Rome for "business," and "his congressman" confabulate in a chic café: 'This Bellodi' says the one, 'has been in charge for a mere three months and is already doing damage; now he is even snooping into the region's zoning contracts…' 'We'll see what we can do', responds the other.

For Bellodi, the next step is to tap the local informer. Usually, after a crime, this last shows up at the station *sua sponte;* this time, however, they had to summon him: Colasberna's murder is evidently of the "heavier" sort. Calogero Dibella, aka *Parrinieddu*, Sicilian for "lil' priest," earned the moniker for his glib tongue and evergreen hypocrisy. A highwayman in his youth — "poverty made me do it" —, the delinquent went semi-"legit" after doing time by taking up the trade of debt-collection on behalf of usurer-patrons charging 100 percent. Navigating gingerly between the shoals of the old mob and the bootlegging reefs of the rising clans, Dibella thought he could take on the additional task of *informante* to gain semi-impunity for his bruising labor of "receivership." Altogether, he knows it: he plies a dangerous routine. Stool-pigeons are tragic figures in the realm of low-tenacity. It is cold sweat he is now sweating. Sitting before Bellodi, he speaks the most to say the least, as men of his trade always do, especially when the stakes are high (as they gradually appear to be). Of course, Bellodi is not deceived, though he nods, periodically, pacing, as it were, the beat of that *fearful* rush incessantly racing through *Parrinnieddu*'s veins. The captain persists: could it be, then, that the murder is directly connected to the local mafia's pork barrel politics? And if so, the captain continues, "all I need is the name of someone who gave Colasberna a few hints…"

Unlike his predecessors, Bellodi, the northerner, is gentle, charming; he speaks softly, respectfully, and unthreads the ropes of the interrogation with a congenial directness that disconcerts, spins Dibella about. So much so that he finally, inexplicably slips, by blurting out two names: Ciccio La Rosa, he says, or Saro Pizzuco. The first name is obviously a red herring, but the second, well, the

[17] The character of captain Bellodi was inspired by a true major of the Carabinieri, the Piedmontese Renato Candida, who served as commanding officer of the base in Agrigento in the fifties. Candida and Sciascia became personally acquainted in the summer of 1956, and developed a strong friendship, which survived Candida's "opportune" transfer, not long thereafter, from Sicily to his native Torino for having written (and published thanks to Sciascia himself) an "embarrassing" book on the Mafia (and its political contiguities). When Sciascia's novel was published in 1961, Candida, invited to comment on it, noted that while the Mafiosi were depicted realistically, the personage he inspired, Bellodi, was not: too idealized, in his view. Candida died in 1988, a year before his friend [14, p. 45, 162].

second is the link of a chain, which, one hierarchical link at a time, leads straight to God almighty. 'Tis done, *Parrinieddu* is a walking corpse.

Meantime, in Rome, the murder of Colasberna is now at the center of several congressional inquiries, all of them solicited and staffed for the most part by Communist MPs, always keen on harassing the (*sottinteso:* Christian-Democrat) conservatives by pouring mounds of salt, relentlessly, on the open gash of the "Sicilian question."

"His Excellency," the unnamed, top-level, Sicilian *referente* of the Mafia in the capital, is giving instructions to two members of his staff; the situation is crystal clear: this Bellodi, what with his past as a Resistance fighter, is obviously a crypto-Communist, as well as a prejudiced northerner, who right off the ferry, has fleshed out his northern prejudices by painting "Mafia" on every wall; we're understood: this Mafia thing — the urban legend of a secret organization with its fingers in every pie does not exist; it is conspiratorial gibberish, paranoia; we have got to nail the murderer in this Colasberna affair and enable the minister to chalk it up to some money-tainted vendetta or a crime of passion; *politics has got nothing to do with it*; so let's see if we can do something about this Bellodi: *ima summis mutare*,[18] do you understand Latin? Not Horace's: I mean my own.

The landscape gardener that had now gone desaparecido for five days is one Paolo Nicolosi — originally from the neighboring town of B.; he had moved to S. after his wedding. That day, at the same time the bus was departing for the capital, he had walked out of his home and packed the mule with his tools: they were waiting for him at a farmstead five miles away; he never showed up. Now, considering that Nicolosi had no trouble whatsoever with the law, and, therefore, that there was no reason to suppose his disappearance could have been a "settlement" in a larger feud, two other possibilities could be entertained. Either that Nicolosi had lost himself in some kind of honor duel — the ongoing affair of Nicolosi's wife with an employee of the local power company being public knowledge (Nicolosi, i.e., being just another "cornuto") — or, cuckold or not, that he saw something he should not have seen. In fact, Bellodi reasons, the gardener must have seen, *and recognized*, Colasberna's killer, because the street Nicolosi lives on is the only way of escape from the scene of the ambush. Nicolosi's (pretty) wife is brought once more to the station: she relates how, that morning, her husband had momentarily returned to the house to fetch his cigarettes and told her — still in bed, half-asleep — that he had seen a man, an acquaintance, run down the street. A name, they ask? No, he mentioned a nickname. Which? After considerable pressure, they finally squeeze it out of her: *Zicchinetta*, after a Sicilian card game. In S., there is nobody known by that nickname.

But there is in B., Nicolosi's homestead. His name is Diego Marchica. Marchica has the standard resume of the Lombrosian delinquent of the (post-déco) South: break-in at eighteen (1935, convicted), and from then on, the open prairies of a life of crime: arson, armed robbery, illegal possession of arms, criminal conspiracy (1943, absolved by a US tribunal — no surprise there),[19] participation in armed gang warfare (captured in a shootout with the Carabinieri, convicted), homicide (actually a "contract," acquitted, 1951), and, in 1955, aggravated manslaughter (convicted). The psychological profile in his dossier describes him as an alert and most skillful delinquent, an assassin of absolute reliability, yet also as possessing a temper capable, when dunked in alcohol, of sudden blazes of brutality. Most important, though, is a report in his file which details how, recently, a Sicilian notable and parliamentarian had appeared at a political rally flanked on his right by a doyen of the local mafia and, on his left, by Marchica himself: a not so subtle hint that, with such friendships, the man might be hard to jolt.

Later, that evening, *Zicchinetta* is arrested.

Having seen Dibella acting squirrely not long before a sudden, and very much unwelcomed spurt of police activity in their borough, the mafiosi put 2 and 2 together and dispatch the informant to hell with a couple of bullets. Knowing what awaited him, though, Dibella takes his leave by ratting out one more don (by letter, mailed to Bellodi), a big one, as the final touch to his (sorry) existential canvas: don Mariano Arena.

[18] Valet ima summis, mutare et insignem attenuat deus: the divinity may turn the highest into the lowest, and diminish the proud (Horace, Ode XXXIV).

[19] This was in concomitance with America's endorsement and resurrection of the Mafia as an "anti-Fascist" auxiliary/ally within the larger scope of its invasion of "the Boot" in July 1943.

Bellodi now has three fish to fry: Marchica-*Zicchinetta*, and *Parrinieddu's* two "gifts": Saro Pizzuco, whom he has just taken into custody, and (God help him) Mariano Arena. The plan, initially, is to marinate each in solitary confinement so as to weaken resolve and provoke incertitude. Afterwards, Bellodi does the following. Arena, he momentarily sets apart. He then predisposes two interrogation rooms, one facing the other from two opposing wings of the station; adjusting the lighting, he makes sure that, from either room, one can perfectly see inside the other. Marchica is brought in, and Bellodi begins to grill him about Nicolosi, the gardener (who allegedly saw him bolting from the crime scene). While Marchica writhes with predictable recalcitrance, on cue, the station's sergeant suddenly busts the door open and says to Bellodi: 'he made his mind'. On the doorsill, behind the officer, ruffled and exhausted and plainly visible to *Zicchinetta*, stands Saro Pizzuco. As instructed, the sergeant withdraws as suddenly as he had materialized; only to reappear, shortly thereafter, followed by Pizzuco in the office opposite Bellodi's. Marchica can clearly see how the one talks, and talks, while the other takes notes. *Zicchinetta* panics: Pizzuco is squealing. After some time, the officer returns with what appears to be Pizzuco's signed confession. With his eye on Marchica, Bellodi smoking, and nodding to the officer: 'go ahead, read it'. The confession recounts how, a while back, Pizzuco did, in fact, tell Marchica of Colasberna's "offensive" (inflexible) behavior, and that *Zicchinetta*, to cleanse the affront, had offered at once to punish the constructor on Pizzuco's behalf. But being Pizzuco a man of upright and peaceable principles, he had obviously refused. Not long thereafter, so the story went, Marchica went ahead and killed Colasberna anyway. This much could Pizzuco confirm, when a few days after the murder, Marchica himself allegedly came to tell him that, recently, having to bump "someone" off, he then had been forced to bump off one more — the second target being, by implication, the missing Nicolosi. Than this Pizzuco claimed to know nothing more. Finally, that there could be a "higher" (viz. political) level of responsibility in the affair, he denied categorically. Bu this whole "confession" is a fake, artfully forged by the Carabinieri. In a flare-up of rage, Marchica instantly bites the bait. Let Samson die with all the philistines, it is now his turn to speak: yes, in December, he did encounter Pizzuco, and this last had offered him 300,000 lira to waste Colasberna. A month later he did, and thereafter took shelter in Pizzuco's farm, whence this last, according to plan, drove him back to B. The hitch: as Marchica was racing out of town, Nicolosi had recognized him and called him by name. Of this he had told Pizzuco, who had reassured him, saying he 'would take care of it'. And that was that. Having thus wrangled a genuine confession out of Zicchinetta, Bellodi clinches the entrapment of this prisoner's dilemma by feeding it to Pizzuco, who, upon hearing it, screeches and seethes: 'blackest infamy; May the vengeful heavens blast Marchica and his for seven generations': of course, he knew Zicchinetta, superficially, that is; and had always kept him at arm's length, knowing what he's worth; the story of the contract he allegedly put out on Colasberna is pure madness; true, he had given the constructor advice, friendly advice; nothing more. The phone rings on Bellodi's desk; the captain listens, hangs up, looks at Pizzuco: 'let's start over'. 'Start over?' 'Yes, they tell me they have discovered the weapon that killed Colasberna, a sawed-off gun; they found it in the hands of you brother-in-law just as he, following your instructions, was about to get rid of it —in a cavernous area nearby, where, most likely lies buried Nicolosi's corpse as well. You can either plead guilty for commissioning, via Marchica, a double murder, or exonerate the latter, by confessing to both killings'. Pizzuco, fast on his feet, shifts gears, opting for a third preordained version, which, lo and behold, differs from the Carabinieri's fake but for a few minor aspects —namely that Marchica had asked to spend a night in Pizzuco's country-house to take care of some business the following day, and obtained permission to use a rifle he found therein for going hunting early the next morning. Too trusting for his own good, Pizzuco had suspected nothing, not until he was arrested; thereupon he had instructed his brother-in-law to dispose of the weapon. No mention whatsoever of Nicolosi (the variation), and none, of course, of higher complicities (the taboo). Bellodi has nevertheless ensnared two hawks with one hoax.

The news of don Mariano's capture hits Rome like a seismic shock. Papers have even spalshed on the front page an ancient photo of one of the Republic's kings side by side with Arena himself — mighty imprudence (to have let the paparazzi so

close) — and what an easy gift, all of it (photo & arrest), to the Communists (!). On sudden alert, the apparatus moves forthwith to control the damage: for one, Bellodi's definitely got to go; tactics-wise, there is only course: provide Marchica —the first link of the chain — with an alibi; after that, the prosecution's case may easily go to dust; and as for the belly's beast, problem solved: feed it one more crime of passion: viz. the infidelity of the gardener's wife — which, however, can cover only one of two murders (three, actually, including the informant's), but no matter. Meanwhile, Bellodi comes face to face with Mother Mafia as the aging don, taxed and bedraggled, is finally brought to him for questioning. There ensues a lyrico-sociological dialogue on the Mafioso's existential outlook. The story of half-men, pygmies, and "under-ducks" is the characterological preamble to an exhibit of the don's entitlements, to wit: his categorical, merciless contempt for quaquaraquacks (like *Parrinieddu,* whom he says to have barely known); the expanse of acres and acres and acres of land; the rent these yield and the even vaster ciphered accounts of funds withheld from the tax authority; a daughter boarding at a hyper-posh Swiss *collège;* and the violence and death, as the game's prominent utensils, framing it all —tacit, never avowed. For an enemy, though, Arena likes Bellodi: 'you are a man', he tells him; he might indeed be a cop, yet he is one possessing the dignity and graciousness of a true warrior. Vice versa: 'And so are you', requites Bellodi, not without emotional discomfort: feeling somehow that these monsters' chieftainship, by bringing a semblance of order in the slum's violent expanse of hopeless squalor, is itself meritorious of some sort of (awkward) acknowledgement. For all the mutual "respect" in enmity, the interrogation ends on the usual note(s) (it is impossible to *"pigliari di lingua"* a Mafioso):[20] [2, p. 111] the don claims to know nothing of Colasberna; Pizzuco he knows: he is good guy, and Marchica a bad one for having implicated the former. Amen.

Sometime later, it is from his native Parma, where he is "convalescing," that Bellodi, reading the papers, is apprised of the way in which his painstaking investigation has been disassembled by the regime (which pays his salary) into nothingness. Having personalities of impeccable credentials vouchsafed for Marchica — It was testified that on January 16th, *Zicchinetta* was, in fact, hosing the hedges in the estate of a renowned physician, fifty miles from S.—, the accusatory edifice had come irremediably undone. As for Marchica's confession, it was discarded as the fruit of deceit: believing he was being burnt by Pizzuco, he had shot himself in the foot by confecting a mish-mash of preposterous calumnies just to take the other down. And Pizzuco had reciprocated in like fashion, vengefully blasting his opposite with a tornado of equally outlandish mendacities. It had been one nasty mega-fluster — courtesy of shifty Bellodi. And the gun? Yes, if anything, Pizzuco might have been guilty of unlawful possession. A veniality. As if nothing had ever happened, don Mariano Arena, for his part, had gone scot-free; evanesced in sibylline ether. There remained the three murders: the cases had been re-opened, and, thank heavens, the police had made good progress by arresting Nicolosi's adulterous wife and her long-time amoroso, the employee of the power company.

Bellodi is encircled by friends, up there, up north: 'What is the Mafia anyway?' they ask. 'It's hard to explain'. And as he paces back to his place, alone, at midnight, in the icy air of his city slathered in creamy snow, Bellodi distinctly senses that, underneath pangs of confusion, he is in love with Sicily; he knows he would see her again — and that she'd break him.

Il giorno della civetta[21] (1961).

* * *

One August day in 1964, Manno, the pharmacist of a small locality in Sicily receives an anonymous letter composed with newspaper cutouts that, threateningly, foretells his death. A week later, on the inauguration of the hunting season, Manno is shot dead along with his long-time hunting partner, the town doctor, Roscio. Next

[20] Literally, "to catch [someone] by the tongue": that is to say, to expose somebody's mystifying argument by leveraging its contradictions, or to bring him through subtle questioning to slip, to give away unwittingly a guarded secret.

[21] The Day of the [She]-Owl: the title is inspired by Shakespeare's tercet in Henry VI (Part III, Act V, sc. 4): "And he that will not fight for such a hope/ Go home to bed, and like the owl by day/If he arise, be mock'd and wonder'd at." What Sciascia implied by citing Shakespeare is subject to interpretation: either that the owl by day represents the (regime's culpable) pretense of fighting an evil it is actually colluded with (the Mafia), or that whoever dares to defy the regime will, like the owl by day, be disgraced and ostracized.

to the bodies, the only clue of the crime scene, a cigar butt, of the brand Branca. One of Manno's acquaintances, Laurana, a high school teacher of Latin and Italian, and a bachelor, decides to play detective. He, too, has a clue: the motto *unicuique suum* ("to each his own" — hence the title of the novel *A ciascuno il suo*) that could be discerned on one of the letter's snippets is indubitably from the Vatican's main organ, the *Osservatore romano*. The murderer, Laurana deduces, has a sacerdotal connection. Probing, he further deduces, by exclusion, that the copy of the *Osservatore* used for the threat-note can only have come from the home of the town's archpriest, who also happens to be the uncle of Luisa Roscio, the widow of the murdered doctor: a woman deemed, by all accounts, "very beautiful," by which folk elliptically conveyed that she was a buxom bombshell. At his social club, which, encompasses virtually every "man" in town, Laurana one evening shares with a little pride and immense ingenuousness the deductions he derived from his find of the "unicuique suum." Among those present is Rosello, the archpriest's nephew, and first-cousin of Manno's widow, who draws Laurana aside as they are leaving the club. Exuding affability and only a smidge of interest, Rosello, a lawyer by profession and the town's chief political wheeler-dealer, finesses Laurana for further information: 'What is this story of the *Osservatore romano*?…'

As the investigation stalls, Laurana, undeterred and lost in his own private-eye reverie, perseveres. Calling on the widows of the double murder, the condolences he brings to them are merely a pretext for interrogating the women and learning something more about the habits of the deceased husbands. Though, for all the years they had known each other, she had never stirred anything "physical" in the timid and sexually-repressed Laurana, this time around, sobbing before him, the curves and carnality of Luisa Roscio, mournful and clad in tight black, dizzy the professor with sudden, lacerating arousal.

A few weeks go by, and, while subbing in another city, Laurana runs into a former high-school classmate, now a Communist MP. This last, commenting on the murder of Roscio, confides to Laurana that, a few months back, Roscio had come to see him in Rome, at the Parliament, to ask whether he would have given political backing to a devastating exposé Roscio was preparing against a local potentate in his province. Roscio had incriminating papers to back up the denunciation. No name was yet uttered. But before he could, in a follow-up trip, reveal names, documents, and information to his friend, Roscio was murdered.

Upon returning home, Laurana relates the whole story to Rosello, who, manifesting heartfelt curiosity for this development, takes Laurana at once to Roscio's home, where the widow, apprised of her husband's trip to Rome, accedes with apprehensiveness to her cousin's request to search the office of the dead husband for the incriminating dossier. The search yields nothing; and Laurana walks out damning himself for trumpeting his murder theory and visibly upsetting the poor widow, for whom his lust intensifies with each successive encounter. It is by chatting with the town's parson not long thereafter that Laurana learns, however, that the only local potentate in town worthy of the name is none other than Rosello himself. Not wishing to think the unthinkable or to pass (what he believes are) the juicy fruits of his summer "inquest" to this big- and loud-mouthed priest, whom, like all priests, he dislikes and mistrusts, Laurana keeps his thoughts to himself.

As the summer ends and the schools are about to re-open, Laurana finds himself thinking less and less of the affair, until, one early September day in Palermo, fate steers him right back to it. Climbing the stairs of the Ministry of Justice, on his way to a bureaucratic errand, Laurana runs into Rosello. In fine mood, Rosello is that day in the company of the Honorable Abello, one of Sicily's most influential politicos, and, slightly to their side, of a mute, rough-looking man wearing heavy, metallic American-style shades. While juggling the few words of a desultory erudite exchange, in which the puissant Abello surpasses Laurana effortlessly, the latter eyes with curiosity the gnarly-looking thug standing next to the suits. Sensing the teacher's inquisitive gaze, what appears to be a peasant in urban disguise extracts a pack of cigars, one of which he lights, to relieve his visible nervousness. Laurana takes a mental note: it is a Branca. Gleaning additional clues from talking to other acquaintances, and to an ever twitchier Rosello, it is not long before Laurana realizes that the *pugnalatore* he saw with Rosello at the Ministry is indeed a first-rate untouchable, a Mafia boss by the name of Raganà. Laurana is

advised by friends to stay clear of that circle lest his nosiness should lose him. He wishes one could finally touch these untouchables, but the wisdom of his confidants retorts that given the present situation —a situation in which, say, the culpable breaking of a State-sponsored dam kills more people than thousands of Raganàs in two decades, and in which the whole of Sicily's able-bodied male population has emigrated, leaving agriculture, and the little industry the isle possesses, in a state of virtual abandon; given such a situation, the Raganàs will stay just where they are.

Now there remains for Laurana to draw up scenarios. And there is only one plausible explanation. Everyone knew it: Rosello and his cousin Luisa had been lovers; long before and, evidently, after Luisa's marriage to Roscio (the archpriest would not allow a marriage between first cousins, for which special dispensation was required). The husband finds out, but, determined to fight for a woman he loves, he enjoins Rosello to break it off and threatens, otherwise, to crush him by baring the remarkable depth and extent of his corruptness, in Rome, with a nation-wide scandal. No less determined to stake his (lover's) claim on Luisa, or, rather, resolved to own her entirely, and pre-empt any sort of political sabotage, Rosello orchestrates the whole sinister plan, the decoying note to the pharmacist, etc.

Meantime, the talk of the town is the forthcoming "reparatory" marriage of Rosello with his widowed cousin. The union is perfectly in order, the townsfolk unanimously agree: Roscio's orphaned little daughter needs a new daddy and, *much more importantly*, the loose pecuniary ends of the doctor's (and now Luisa's) *roba* must presently be re-sutured "inside the family." Knowing her indisputably guilty, Laurana feels instinctive disgust for Luisa and for what is the de facto murderous complicity of the entire community in giving the union its choral blessings. Yet, sullied of blood, adultery, and deceit, the filthy aura she oozes no less instinctively conspires to invert Laurana's sense of moral revulsion into an even more intensified — damning — obsession to possess the voluptuous vamp. One November day, by pure chance, Luisa happens to be on the bus that takes Laurana every morning to his classes in Palermo. She invites the professor to sit next to her, where she cushions him with the side of her thigh and breast; and they so ride together; she, bantering, and he, choked by desire, barely in control of his faculties. Upon arriving in the big city, though, she suddenly changes countenance, and, in a low, serious tone, confides to him that she has traveled to the capital to dig into the mystery surrounding her dead husband's incriminating folders: she, too, then, suspects her cousin of criminal design and begs Laurana to help her in seeking justice against Rosello. On hearing this, Laurana is torched by a blaze of exhilarating relief and sexually-biting bliss. To coordinate their plan, they agree to meet later that night at a café. But Luisa never turns up; instead, a dejected Laurana is picked up outside the café by a vaguely familiar face from back home, materialized behind a wheel out of nowhere —and driven to a sulfur mine to meet his death under a canopy of detonated rubble.

The final scene is set against the engagement party of Rosello with his cousin, which is held at the manse of their uncle, the archpriest, one year, to the day, after the murder of Luisa's husband. In a backroom, the men talk. Capturing bits of information here and there, and filling the blanks with common ugly sense, all had divined in a day what the moral, lettered Laurana had partially reconstructed in thirty: namely that Roscio, after uncovering the ongoing tryst of the cousins, had gone to the archpriest with an ultimatum: either the archpriest expelled his nephew from town or he would go to Rome with burning papers he had photographed in Rosello's office. Told this much by his uncle, and panicking, Rosello had schemed at once to eliminate Roscio.

As for the "poor professor," what could anybody say? Laurana? "He was a cretin."

* * *

1971. The scene of *Il contesto (una parodia)* is set in an imaginary, pseudo-tropical country. Possibly in some remote corner of Latin America. The mood is sultry and insidious — as sultry and insidious as the seventies were in sultry and insidious regions. Space and surroundings appear languid and over-baked by failure; the style, if any, is tumbledown baroque and intermittently modern-by-half (with a 15-year lag). It is a cock-eyed and occasionally sinister termitary in the fists of a rancorous few, glued together by the makeshift ethos of *"pressapoco."* The atmosphere enveloping it all is one of bland, rarefied unreality such as one may breathe, say, in Belgium or

Canada; altogether, the stage is made to look like Borges's Argentina but the stylized cityscapes we are scanning are all too reminiscent of Italy, or, more specifically, of our good old "Sicily."

For the first time in the nation's republican chronicle —it is a sweet evening in May— a notorious, active magistrate is shot to death by a mysterious assassin. The country is in shock. But the investigation leads nowhere. The lack of progress is such that the police call in their best man, inspector Americo Rogas. Before Rogas may even begin to make sense of the murderer's design, the killer strikes again. In a city seventy miles away from where the inspector is leading the inquest, another judge is felled, a shot through the heart. Two judges in less than a week; same m.o., same caliber bullet, possibly fired by the same gun; Rogas reasons: this smacks of vendetta —the revengeful murders of a man wrongly accused who seeks retribution by scourging his former henchmen. Third time's the charm; Rogas waits. And four days later, like clockwork, a third justice is murdered in a neighboring city. Rumor has it that this last victim had embezzled galore; Rogas follows the lead without much enthusiasm, while his higher-ups keep pushing for the fail-safe theory of the lone, homicidal maniac. Meanwhile Rogas further learns that, for a decade, years ago, the first two victims had been colleagues at the criminal court of justice in the nearby city of Algo. And things take an even eerier turn when, right at that time, in Algo, a fourth judge is slain; and, then, a fifth, in a far off district. Taking the latter for a coarse ruse meant to sidetrack him, Rogas does not budge from Algo; he is ever more certain that this is the (serial) work of an avenger. To track him down, he orders from the tribunal's archives transcripts of all the trials jointly presided and adjudicated by the first two victims. After a process of elimination, he narrows down the search to three men presently re-delivered to civilian life whose dossiers exhibits similar trajectories: no prior criminal record, a plea of non-guilt, and imprisonment on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Rogas goes on the hunt. The first two are nondescript martyrs, now living a flat existence, straining to forget. But the third one, a man by the name of Cres, has vanished. He had been found guilty of attempting to poison his wife and accordingly served a five-year sentence. Rogas is sure this is his man, and just a little less sure that he has been condemned unjustly, although the possibility that he had been framed by the wife —who had cleaned up the accounts and, flush with unconcealed gaiety, disappeared immediately after the trial— attracts him more than the reverse scenario of premeditated uxoricide.

In any event, Cres is gone, leaving no trace, most likely hiding somewhere, resourcefully, under a false name, with false papers, on the prowl, ready to dispatch magistrate number six. And, punctually, in the capital, shortly after Rogas goes back to the station to draw up his report, a district attorney is mown down by gunfire. This time, however, there are witnesses. Though they were not spectators to the murder, these claim to have seen a couple of disheveled youths fleeing after the shots were fired. Disheveled youths. What a relief. The public exults: from the clergy to the nation's International Revolutionary Party,[22] by way of the Establishment's entire political arc, the silent majority feels vindicated. It was about time. In light of the ceaseless tumult unchained by these underground cells (*groppuscoli*) of young, violent agitators — it's the seventies (!) —, public opinion found it indeed inexplicable, if not unconscionable, that the authorities should have wasted so much precious time chasing a wild vengeful goose instead of stalking the truly dangerous game. Despite his earnest, logically argued protestations, Rogas is enjoined by the chief of police to put the phantomlike Cres out of his mind and to hunt down the "terrorists," instead, which is presently the politically correct thing to do. Not forgetting Cres for an instant, Rogas nonetheless obliges by betaking himself to the political bureau, where he is instructed to locate and interrogate Galano, the guru-editor of the extremist press organ of the revolutionary, extra-parliamentary Left. Caught off guard by Rogas's visit and visibly agitated thereby, Galano, the stereotypical intellectualizing sedition-mongering parlor-phony of the *comédie libérale* — depicted as an upper-class puff of craven, egomaniacal, verbose, and thoroughly compromised nothingness — attempts to deflect Rogas's bad business by pointing, not surprisingly, to "the Right": Rogas had better look for his quarry amongst the Catholic fanatics that have nested in "gruppo Zeta," a neo-anarchist squadron fronted by an ex-priest. The outfit, everyone

[22] Obvious reference to Italy's Communist Party.

knows it, is financed by Narco, the proprietor of the country's main department store chain. As Rogas is about to pay the tycoon a visit, another chief magistrate is assassinated elsewhere; it is the seventh victim. That evening, Narco's palatial residence hosts a social gathering. Though he has been sent by the head of the political desk, Rogas holds no formal invitation to the gala. Among the guests (Galano, too, is present), entertained by Narco himself, is the Minister of the Interior, no less, Rogas's bosses' boss, who castigates the inspector's intrusion, 'What do you want here?'

Summoned to the ministry the following day, along with the director of the political bureau, Rogas is served a pithy summation of the game's current articulation by the minister, who, in so doing, affects unexpected and candid joviality. After thirty plus years of political mismanagement, he avers, there comes a time when putting into play one terrorist formation or the other, both being useful to him as Minister of the Interior, may be just what is needed for the State. It is a form of insurance for tidying over the regime when the epochal/political situation appears to be taking, as it now happens, a turn towards "revolution" (or rather, toward some form of "progressive conservatism"). Such a generational shift in the name of radical "change" signals somehow the historical necessity to hand over the regalia, or at least share them overtly and formally with the institutional "enemy" of the Left, i.e., the International Revolutionary Party. *In extenso*, the minister's rationale is as follows. Terrorism as a political tool has, in this context, a dual valence: the repression of Right-wing violence always provides the conservative party with the welcome opportunity to regain/reinforce legitimacy in the core constituencies (law & order), whereas the *unanimous* criminalization of Left-wing terrorism has the additional benefit of *legitimizing the Left* in the eyes of the conservative electorate (the gentrification of Socialism), which is precisely what the minister and his peers presently wish to see. The politico concludes: it is, indeed, time that the bureaucrats of the "revolutionary" opposition step up to the plate and relay their conservative brethren in dirtying their hands at the helm of the State. Addressing directly the chief of the political bureau with reference to the serial assassinations, as he is about to dismiss both men, the minister congratulates him for harassing the terrorist *groppuscoli* and exhorts his interlocutors to keep doing so: that is fully in line, he confides, with the wishes of Mr. Amar, the Secretary General of the International Revolutionary Party.

The message is clear: Rogas understands; his superior less so. Outside the ministry, following a hunch, Rogas suggests that it might be a good idea to pay Riches, the Chief Justice, a visit: because he might be next on Cres's list. Further disconcerted and wanting less and less to do with any of this on a strictly personal (physical) level, the head of the political desk consents to Rogas's initiative. Following a winding alleyway past the hypersentineled gates enclosing the lush green-belt wherein Riches and a few other heavyweights have their vast abodes (consisting of one unpermitted addition after another), Rogas reaches a clearing; beyond it lies the apartment complex inhabited by the magistrate. Strangely, that day, several armored, government-issue limousines are parked in the clearing; the license plates and insignia are revealing: for one, that the chief of police is there (on recognizing him, the chauffeur waves at Rogas), and so is some top brass of the air force. Rogas cannot guess the provenance of the others. Walking into the concierge's booth, he identifies himself and asks to see the Chief Justice. He is told unceremoniously that he cannot be received today; he should try his luck tomorrow. 'And these gentlemen', asks Rogas indicating the limousines, 'who are they?' The concierge conveys that Rogas had better mind his own business. Before catching the bus on the way back, the inspector tarries intentionally so as to spy on the armored caravan on its way out, hoping to discover the identities of the other dignitaries. He further manages to recognize the Foreign Minister, and the brigadier general of the Federal Guard. The following day, he is urgently summoned by the chief of police. What was he doing at Riches's, nosing about and asking annoying questions? Ah, still hot on the trail of Cres? His boss reassures him: Rogas has nothing to worry about, nothing to suspect: the chief of the Supreme Court is highly protected; and, if Rogas really wishes to know, he, and the other gentlemen, whose vehicles he had spotted the other day, were not at the magistrate's, in fact, but at an afternoon party of the Italian ambassador, who lives in the same building. Motioning him away, the chief advises Rogas to use caution in his forthcoming interview with Riches. Im-

mediately thereafter, Rogas verifies the story of the party at the Italian ambassador's; it is a lie. That same afternoon, the inspector is granted his audience by the Chief Justice. The man, a masterpiece of arrogance, scans Rogas sitting before him: 'So, you think they want to kill me?' Rogas immediately goes into his pitch, conjuring Cres's shadow, explaining the man's story, his grudge, and especially the circumstance that it had been Riches himself who, all those years ago, had confirmed the five-year sentence in appeal. Not appreciating underlings making insinuations, not to mention spilling the worms out of the can of judicial error onto his lap, the magistrate sees fit to bludgeon Rogas with a long, excoriating invective (with annotations) on the anti-Catholic and anti-Illuminist necessity to administer "justice" by decimating defendants indiscriminately, as if they were sacrificial victims of war in peacetime tribunals: to pass judgment, Riches pontificates, is akin to effecting transubstantiation at mass: it is a sacred rite; 'judicial error' he sentences, 'does not exist'. Rogas finally desists and upon taking his leave, questions the judge: 'do you feel sufficiently protected?' 'What do you think?' replies Riches, who, for an instant, looks visibly frightened.

Walking out of the elevator, his instincts are suddenly abuzz: Rogas has the sensation of looking into a mirror. But he is gazing at another man, who stands in front of him, waiting for the lift. Rogas walks out, his mind revving up: features, height, build…It *must* be Cres. Here he is, then, skulking in the very building of the chief custodian of the Supreme Court. For a flash, instinct would seem to compel the inspector to turn around immediately and go back up to prevent a slaughter long foreknown. But by the time these thoughts have firmed in his head, Rogas is already on the bus, riding back to his place: having the world rid of Riches and his ilk, he broods, is not a bad prospect after all. Rogas now sides with Cres; intimately, Rogas *has become* Cres. A news release of the last hour announces the violent death of another magistrate, the eighth of the series.

The morning after, the inspector devises the agenda for the day. What is happening is clear: 1) a cabal gravitating around Riches is about to stage a coup d'état; and 2) under a false name (that of a Portuguese merchant, as Rogas would ascertain) the serial avenger is burrowing inside the complex of the Chief Justice. Rogas resolves to contact an old friend of his, Cusan, and tell him everything, just in case. Cusan is a writer and a respected intellectual with excellent connections to Amar and his International Revolutionary Party. Obviously troubled by Rogas's account, yet desirous to help, as well as to shield his friend, who is now overtly tailed by the spooks of the secret police, Cusan offers to go directly to Amar and inform him. But Rogas sinks the offer, saying he would warn Amar himself the following day, and then report back to Cusan.

The week-end elapses without any signs of life from Rogas, until the subsequent Monday Cusan learns from the news that Rogas and Amar had been found dead in two different rooms of the capital's national art gallery. According to the official version, the killer — a bearded man in fitted pants, presumably a young (Right-wing) terrorist — had followed the secretary Amar, a notorious art aficionado, inside the museum, and killed him. Coincidentally, and likewise driven by the love of art, inspector Rogas, was visiting the gallery at that time, when he heard the shot. Trying to stop the killer, he too was fatally wounded in pursuit of the assassin. The midday newscast ends with the further announcement that His Excellency Riches, Chief of the Supreme Court, has been found dead, murdered in his apartment.

After 48 hours of anguished deliberation, Cusan, who, understandably, fears for his life, finds enough courage to come out into the open by arranging a meeting with the vice-secretary of the International Revolutionary Party. In what used to be Amar's office, after capturing Cusan's testimony on tape, the vice-secretary pauses to stare the writer in the eye: 'What if I told you', he gravely begins, 'that Amar has been killed by your friend Rogas?' Cusan short-circuits, uncomprehending. The vice-secretary produces a folder and hands it to the writer: the ballistic report shows unarguably that the bullet in Amar's body was fired from Rogas's gun. Rogas, in turn was, de facto, put down by the famous bearded man, who is not a terrorist, but an agent of the secret services. Why? Cusan asks, in a state of hallucinated disbelief: why would Rogas do that? And why would the secret police silence him afterwards? Why not give the man, even if caught *in flagrante*, a hearing, at a trial? *Raison d'état*, rejoins the other, 'let's be

realistic, Mr. Cusan. We could not risk the onset of a revolution —not at this time'.

Pause.

'I understand', echoes Cusan, 'not at this time'.[23]

* * *

Setting: a nondescript small town in Sicily. At 9:37 pm on a Saturday evening, in March 1989, the operator of the local police station receives a phone call. The chief is not in, and the detective is on his way out; Antonio Lagandara, the sergeant, takes the call. He jots down the information, assuring the caller they would send someone as soon as possible. 'Who was it?' asks the detective. The sergeant tells him that one Giorgio Roccella, who lives in a country house ten miles away, wants the police to come right away for there is "something" he wants to show to them. 'That can't be', interjects the detective: Roccella is a diplomat, living abroad; that manse of his has been in a perennial state of abandon for as long as anyone can remember. 'So, what do we do?' 'It's probably a prank', says the detective, 'go check the place out tomorrow morning'. The following day, accompanied by two agents, Lagandara drives to Roccella's country seat. He notices that the stately manor is surrounded not by walls, but by warehouses, whose doors are bolted with brand new padlocks. And through a window, he and his men discern the figure of a man slouched over his desk. Once inside, the policemen find that the man is not asleep, but dead, with a bullet hole in his temple. The gun, a German pistol dating from WWI, lies on the floor to the right side of the armchair. It appears to be suicide. But it isn't: the sergeant reasons that in the case of suicide the arm should be limp over the Mauser, to the side of the corpse, and not resting on the desk over a hand-written note reading: "I have found." That strange period after the word "found" sets the reel spinning inside the sergeant's head. He imagines that Roccella had begun drafting his memo for the police shortly after his 9:37 pm call. Then, someone, the assassin, buzzes the doorbell. Roccella lets him in, believing it is the police. The gun is on the table already, for his eventual defense; Roccella is nervous. The guest feigns curiosity for the antique revolver, asking leave to examine it; he picks it up and shoots Roccella in the head. Seeing that the latter had begun writing something, the killer affixes the period after "found" to make it look like a suicide note. Militating against the suicide hypothesis is also Roccella's fountain pen, which lies on the desk, *capped*. It had to have been murder. Inspecting the rest of the house, the policemen gather additional clues: the kitchen has been recently used; the attic is littered with several busts of saints (the bigger of the lot being that of St. Ignatius, whose likeness the non-devout sergeant does not recognize); and the yard, crisscrossed as it is by multiple tire tracks (trucks?), reveals a flurry of recent activity.

Less than two hours after the find, Police and Carabinieri are investigating. Through various testimonies, the authorities piece together the backdrop to the case. We learn that the ex-diplomat Roccella, theretofore retired to Edinburgh, had rather suddenly decided to return to his native estate to recover two sets of valuable epistolary exchanges (between relatives of his and Luigi Pirandello and Garibaldi respectively). Until then, a priest, Father Cricco, had been charged to keep half-an-eye on the property. Upon entering his estate, Roccella had been puzzled by the recent installation of a land line, of which he knew nothing. But even more unsettling was the discovery, in the attic, hung above the chest containing the packs of said missives, of a famous painting —a famously *stolen* painting, that is. Shaken, right before placing the fateful 9:37 pm call, Roccella had telephoned a personal friend to inform him of these weird circumstances.

The case is further jolted by the discovery of two more dead bodies, those of the local train

[23] The finale is ambiguous for the crucial denouement at the art gallery is artfully redacted from the narrative: either Rogas had all along suspected Amar of being deeply involved in Riches's conspiracy —in keeping with the avowed aim of the Minister of the Interior of coopting overtly the "revolutionary" Left—, or, more likely, he obtains confirmation of such an intent from Amar's deportment and answers in the course of their "secret" rendezvous at the gallery, which is left to our imagination. Amar could have been the one chosen to front the coup. In any event, inferring this much implies that Rogas had, from the outset, entertained serious qualms about Amar's integrity (hence his insistence, before Cusan, of seeing the secretary himself), and thereby contemplated the eventuality of dispatching the politician at the gallery, there and then. Thus Rogas would carry out this final ritual murder as if he were Cres's double —the punisher in whose "reflection" he had seen himself, in the final stages of the story. Rogas becomes Cres, one joining the other, both dissolving in the scourge, in that wave of karmic death, which had begun with the lone revenge of a presumed uxoricide. With the joint immolation of Riches and Amar —the two "opposing" masks of power— "justice" is symbolically meted out, at last.

station-master and his assistant. A Volvo is seen leaving the station shortly after the estimated time of the murder. Hearing on the radio that the police is hunting an automobile just like his, the driver of the Volvo — a travelling salesman of pharmaceutical products —, resolves to take himself immediately to the precinct. He relates to the police how he had noticed that a local train had been blocked for hours by a semaphore signal, whose mechanism seemed to have broken down. The salesman had stopped to talk to the conductor, who had asked him to drive up to the train station and inform the master of the malfunction. The salesman had done so, and while speaking to the master, he had caught sight, in the back, of two more men intent on rolling what appeared to be some kind of "carpet." Shown by the chief of police the ID pictures of master and assistant, the salesman, however, denies having ever seen those faces.

The authorities decide to conduct a third inspection of Roccella's villa. All key witnesses are driven to the scene; the chief and sergeant are present, followed by a platoon of officers, and, in cauda, the detective, who invites Lagandara to lead the way, being this, he says, his first time on the premises. Oddly, the doors to the warehouses are wide open, the padlocks gone, nobody knows how: the smell from the inside is an acrid blend of alcohol, burnt sugar, and soaked eucalyptus leaves. Once more, they all amble from room to room, unearthing nothing new, all the way up to the dark attic, whose light-switch lies, hidden almost, behind the bust of St. Ignatius. The first time, the sergeant had gone through an entire matchbox to locate it. And as they all shuffle in the dark amid mounds of bric-a-brac, the detective taunts the sergeant, 'what are you looking for?' 'The switch.' 'Ah, right, you could never find it. It's not hard: it is behind the bust of St. Ignatius'. Click.

Early the next day, detective and sergeant both sit at their desks in the room they share, the one oiling his firearm, the other (feigning to be) reading the newspaper. His senses on maximum alert, screened by the paper, Lagandara clutches a pistol in the top drawer of his desk. Finished with the cleaning, the detective "tests" the gun pretending to take aim in rapid succession at the lamp, the calendar, the door handle: one-two-three, then, in a flash, points the gun at the detective and squeezes the trigger. But before he could direct his shot, Lagandara had plunged to the side firing his gun and lodging a bullet straight through the detective's heart.

In camera, the authorities reconstruct the case. In sum, the detective was the ringleader of a gang, which had used Roccella's uninhabited estate as a narcotics refinery and repository for fencing precious items (the painting). Warned of the proprietor's unanticipated return by the famous phone call, he had postponed the police's intervention by going personally to Roccella's, killed the diplomat, and organized the immediate evacuation of the gang's implements, and of the painting. All such incriminating evidence, in turn, must have been conveyed to the local train-station, where master and assistant — accomplices both — must have refused to store it, defiantly so. For this they were killed. This explains that the Volvo's driver saw not the train-station personnel, but their murderers. In closing, the shooting at the station and the detective's death, police, Carabinieri, and magistrature concur to divulge as an "accident."

The final scene takes place in the police station. It is hectic. A funeral parlor has been set up, where the body of the detective awaits the solemn adieu of the force, along with the benediction of the local priest, our Father Cricco. The priest has just arrived to the premises. Going the other way is the man of the Volvo, who has finally been released from custody after having dispatched the formalities. On the doorsill, as he is rushing out to freedom, he comes across Father Cricco. "The priest stops him with a hand gesture: 'I think I recognize you. Aren't you a parishioner of mine?'" [25, p65] The man curtly denies and flies off, relieved and exhilarated. But, while driving away, he suddenly recalls, that priest, yes, he was the train-station master. For a moment, he considers going back, to the precinct, but, on second thought, decides otherwise, and continues driving the other way, singing.

Una storia semplice.

God, Sovereignty, Irreligiousness & Conspiracy

Now, can "Sicily" —like the sun and trees, the crystals, tarantulas, and parasites…— be the work of God? Of any god (hidden or manifest)? Not really knowing, Sciascia takes literary shelter (Dostoyevsky)[24] in a notorious and anguishing

[24] One could say that Georges Bataille took this question as the point of departure of his entire a-theologia [24, p. 281]; e.g., it was also very present in the vision of Eugène Ionesco: "I have

question of Christian theology: namely, that it is an error to think that Christ wishes to forestall evil, [3, p78] because sin, suffering, and violent death would not be possible unless there were a "force" capable of "redeeming" such scourges, of bringing solace to sufferers, of *forgiving* the consummation of infamies. Another way of stating the predicament is Georges Bataille's challenge: cannot God's promise of infinite forgiveness be understood as an invitation to commit unbounded atrocities? Thus, if God exists, everything is *allowed;* conversely, if he does not exist, nothing is allowed.

Considering, then, that the systematic perpetration of infamies is the accepted rule under the "Sicilian" sun, we must deduce therefrom that (a Sicilian) God exists. But it clearly is not a cuddly divinity, but a rather cynical, perfectly inscrutable overseer, who, in the final analysis, *is of (vexatious) concern only to heroes*. Heroes, like the legendary figure of Fra Diego La Matina (1622–1658), a trouble-making friar who finds mention in the Sicilian chronicles for being the Inquisition's only victim fortunate enough to have slain, with a sharp piece of iron, his persecutor, Juan Lopez de Cisneros, during an interrogation. Fascinated by Diego like other writers before him, Sciascia appropriates the friar's tiny, faded icon (virtually nothing is known of his life-history), and re-paints him as some kind of anti-Spanish gallant-preacher. What is recorded, instead, is the ritual unfolding of Diego's execution. Preceded by an unusual cortege of horse-mounted monk-inquisitors, whose regal solemnity moves the mob to tears, Diego — the anarchoid *toro* following the monachal *picadores* — is then served to the crowds. And as the commoners, loud and vulgar, badger him, asking him to repent, he hurls back at them as many profanities as he can before being gagged and muzzled by henchmen in attendance. But in extremis, Diego does repent and vows to submit, in exchange for his life; and in support of his plea, he cites scripture (Ezechiel 33:11): "nolo mortem peccatoris, sed ut magis convertitur, et vivat."[25] However, the "vivat," replies the confessor, quibbling, is intended in the spiritual sense, not the corporal one. Die he must. This can only mean, Diego concludes, that "God is unjust." [6, p80] Sciascia seals it thus: "In the very moment in which his defeat appeared to him hopeless and irremediable, and identifying his personal tragedy with the tragedy of existence […], Diego turns his [life-long] rebellion against iniquity […] into an arraignment of God." [6, pp. 92–93]

In this connection, an isolated instance in which Sciascia acknowledges respectfully— though not without a tinge of discomfort — the militant presence of God under the Sicilian sun is that of the noble Tomasi family of Palma Montechiaro in the seventeenth century. The clan's lead pasionaria was one Sister Maria Crocefissa, who, since the age of fourteen, had lived with her mother and three sisters in a monastery erected by her father, known as il "Duca santo" (the holy Duke). Following the example of the Duke — and in complete opposition to the "Sicilian" social model, whereby the Mafia comes into being as the baron's private security against the larcenous siege of the rural rabble — the Tomasi devoted themselves body & soul to alleviating the pain, need, and indigence of their estates' people and vassals. The acquisition of slaves was strictly forbidden; and their daily, intense charitable work was carried out with a flattening drive of self-effacement so pure that the family's profession of humbleness was sublimely transmogrified in all those typical, and frightening, manifestations of the "sacred impure." They routinely excoriated, bled their bodies, self-flagellating and engraving the names of Christ and Mary in their flesh, or swept the dirty floor with their tongues. Acts of this variety, which have been the repertoire of several Catholic saints and mystics, represent the "turbid" practice of the *human-as-sponge*, who pacifies the earth by absorbing ritually the pain through bloody self-mutilation and cleanses it by sucking its filth. We spoke of Sciascia's discomfort. Respectful and admiring though he might be of the piousness of the Tomasi and, accordingly, of

been baptized in the Orthodox Church […]. At eighteen I felt a more pressing need of finding what is referred to as God and I saw a monk from Mount Athos. I asked for confession. He told me: 'So, what is it that you have to tell me? — Father, I have done horrible things.— Well, yes, I don't really care'. I wanted to tell him what I did — 'Yes, yes, before telling me what you have done, tell me, do you believe? —Well, I don't know, I would like to know myself — Well, that is the most important thing: whether you've done whatever, whether you've killed, whether you've been incestuous, whether you've stolen, all of that, is the way of the world, it has no importance; one must believe, that is all'." [25, pp. 247–248].

[25] "I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live."

their quasi-superhuman sense of social justice, the writer's acknowledgement of God's work in reporting these facts is, in fact, always uneasy: "It must have been a mixed sentiment of respect, of veneration, a sense of horror coupled with piety, which these poor subjects of Palma felt for their masters." [5, pp. 56–57]

All this business of human-sponging mars what this post-modern Illuminist wishes he could have recorded as an azure, if rare, example of good work done by good Christians. But, again, God's presence — whether it be signaled by Diego's everlasting grudge, or by the Tomasi's devotional morbidity, or, paradoxically, by God's far more frequent absence ("silence") in the face of distressed invocation — seems to obscure a picture that is already bleakest: it is the "sovereignty" of it all: no matter what we attempt in the name of the good, either we find ourselves perennially forestalled (or eventually swayed) by sheer barbarousness and the basic, nauseating, mechanisms of *power*, the contours of which we have outlined above, or we manage to achieve it partially, compromisingly, and often in air of purulent strangeness. Most of the time, then, there is no God; he hides; and when he surfaces, he either reveals himself as the actual mastermind of power's crude game, which most of us instinctively hate to play, or some kind of grand Luciferic philanthropist.

As mentioned earlier, very rarely do historical shake-ups yield "new men," who, in turn, are supported by a clergy that believes in God and a handful of police officials sufficiently impervious to excommunication (by the Church of State) as to weaken, *momentarily*, the older, refractory clergy in charge of the conventional, "Sicilian" order. [5, p. 61] But these are mere flashes in an otherwise continuum of conservative consolidation; brief heroic intervals, during which God is brought into play either through doubt or heroic self-abnegation. But most of the time there is no question of God whatsoever, because the average "Sicilian" has no interest in seeking a word or sign from him: there is nothing to gain therefrom, in the immediate. And that is why *saints* acquire paramount importance in his animistic day-to-day living: the Sicilian feels them a great deal closer to his own heart. Because they had walked the earth, and had been mortal, saints "indubitably had to have been more powerful than God." [5, p189, 193] Apparently, not even the story of Christ, who is said to have likewise walked the earth and died a human death, can bring the Sicilian to gaze up from his earthly inquietudes. "This utterly irreligious manner of intending and professing a religion that is nonetheless firmly, rigorously, and meticulously codified in every aspect of the cult, internally and externally, strikes its roots in a profound materialism, in a complete imperviousness to anything having to do with mystery, invisible revelation, and metaphysics." [5, p. 195]. In this sense, totems and idols are more fitting: they satisfy, legitimize the prurient impulse to feud with all neighbors; and they provide regular occurrences — the "festivity" of such and such holy patron or patroness — that allow the Sicilian to break free from the cage of his existential and psychological solitude and merge, however briefly, in the collective. Finally, when they gather to hail the Virgin — "bedda madri" [2, p. 38] — as mater dolorosa, allergic as they are to any kind of transcendence, "Sicilians" never contemplate divine redemption through sacrifice, they rather play out the psycho-drama of their *mal di vivere*, in the flesh, striving to exorcise all along the utter terror they feel for death. [2, p. 199, 202, 203].

Sciascia, at any rate, is not so keen on plumbing this divine affair too deeply. Religion's existential conundrum clearly disturbs him, but he manages to keep it out of his mind somehow, knowing that the time of the Church has passed anyway ("its squalid present, and its inevitable demise"). [3, p. 31]. He seems, then, to espouse reluctantly some variant of nihilism —namely, the credo of the void begetting god-knows-how (the possibility of) order, which, ultimately can be kept afloat by one thing only. Like his heroic protagonists, Sciascia believes in *the Law*, in the rational and enlightened observance thereof. But no matter whither one turns, the question remains: whose Law, and in the name of what? Not even Sciascia is so sure about this "Law," or anything else, anymore. He cannot make sense of God; he cannot make sense of his compatriots, who, historically, have thirsted for the blood of public executions, yet, no less ravenously, bestowed on the executed the chrism of sainthood; and, speaking of "the Law," he cannot even make sense of the (humanitarian) conviction that it is a noble thing to fight and obtain a reprieve for a man sentenced to capital punishment. This consideration brings him to assess the significance of life itself. If this life of

ours is merely an absurdity; if "all this" is merely "a dream within dream," wouldn't the concession of a few more days, wouldn't the postponement of the agony allow the man in death row to dream for some time, say, "cleaner" dreams, and eventually cross onto the other side with a more peaceful, more "religious" heart? It is convenient — Sciascia concedes—, it is easy for the juror to save his soul by rejecting, by saying no to the horror of the death penalty while the system inexorably, indifferently grinds on; but what does the suffered obtainment of a postponement (of the execution) actually represent in the incomprehensible play of this congeries of sensations, which we grossly describe as a "dream"? Is the compassionate juror really saving his soul, and could the tortured animus of the reprieved offender be somewhat purified through repentance in overtime? To believe so, Sciascia concludes, is "a fantasy." [26, p. 65, 107–108].

In the final analysis, we know it, explaining the purpose of creation is impossible. Can the behavior of humans, on the other hand, say something about the deeper, hidden mechanisms of life in general — something beyond the triteness of "dog-eat-dog" as suggested by the cycle of Nature's food-chains? If ascribing the mystery of existence to the design of a single "architect" poses unsurmountable conceptual, theodicean difficulties, the attempt to psychoanalyze such an architect through an interpretation of his "dream(s)" should be even more daunting (viz. whose dream? How does God dream?). Should we, then, content ourselves with the archaic (and no less conceptually unmanageable) credence that life is a game imagined by a cohort of demons, and/or of gods? In other words, are we all victims and preys like the men and women of the Iliad? Do these gods live to *conspire* against us, and we against each other? If so, is violence the principal means for acquiring power, and, likewise, is conspiracy the premeditative foundation to the sum of humanity's power-motivated acts of (physical and/or psychological) brutality? Maybe so; Sciascia is not explicit on this. In the Iliad, the gods stood above men, Zeus commanded the heights of Parnassus, and *blind chance* (Τὺχη) stood over Zeus. The Iliad, too, is somewhat Sicilian. Sciascia imagined the story of a Mafia-infested town that, one day, finds itself suddenly torn, and eventually shaken to its foundations by a bloodiest and interminable feud. The rage of the battle is bemusing, and the townsfolk are at a loss for explanations. As the confrontation escalates, the patriarchs —rational men all of them— set out at once to pacify the opposite tribes, wondering all along what could have started the vendetta and kept it going so ferociously, for so long. Across clannish divides, they meet, they talk, they reckon; and they learn that two-thirds of the killings are neither the work of one clan nor that of the other. Allegedly, an extraneous party is fueling the bloodshed. Who, what can it be? A third, underground faction, bent on the sabotaging the other two? A lone gunman? Or is this all the result of a covert operation conducted by the Carabinieri with a view to wipe out summarily the vermin they cannot otherwise imprison with due process ("if the government, in order to forestall over-population, occasionally encouraged the spread of cholera, why not think that the Carabinieri could be secretly intent on eliminating the Mafiosi?")? As the honored society solicits the counsel and intervention of their political sponsors in the capital, the boss of the old mafia is gunned down. But, then, after this last outrage, the truth emerges. We discover that the bloodbath had been provoked and fomented by one man alone, the town's pharmacist. Singlehandedly, he had unleashed his fury against the local Mafia — all of it — because years ago, his engagement to a young woman, much richer than he, had been opposed by the girl's family. Seeing his steel resolve to marry their daughter, the parents had requested the Mafia to step in in order to dissuade the indigent pharmacist; fearing the Mafiosi would have made good on their threats, the girl broke off the relation and married a peer. Having thus informed one another of the true assassin's identity, the mobsters restore the peace and the cartel's activities. Shortly thereafter the man's body is found, sprawled on a chair before his pharmacy, the heart blasted by a shotgun shot. There stood "the cadaver," Sciascia writes, "of the man who had succeeded in sowing death and fear in the ranks of one of Sicily's fiercest Mafias." [9, p. 126, 128]. Above the pusillanimity of half-men and half-women, above the Mafia, above the State and its standard connivances and conspiratorial routines, and above Zeus's "Justice"; above all that, the random and blind rage of a lover wronged.[26]

[26] The thematic structure is similar to that of Il contesto.

Such, then, appears to be the configuration of life's game: a spiritual pandemic in the etheric backdrop, whose tangible fruit is a chronic scourge of varying intensity ("the decimation" — of soldiers, in war, or defendants, in peace). It is effected by a solitary angel of death, who exploits, manipulates in estranged humans the sanguinary wrath of wounded pride. In the midst of this wave, of this magnified radiation, mechanized clusters of men (the "institutions") conspire against one another through the impersonal channels of this "machine," to the obvious and general detriment of the quaquaraquacks. And at the bottom of the pyramid, the quaquaraquacks survive, endure; but, mostly, they emulate — pettiness and petty betrayals aside —, knowing that their salvation, if any, can only occur by being coopted somehow into the complicit silences of power, be it via the Mafia or the State (or both).

Before killing the lights, Sciascia has an alter-ego ask him: "I was wondering, are you still terrified, are you still scared?"

"Yes."

"So am I, of everything." [26, p. 108].

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