The (Im)possibility of Detective Fiction in Sicily: Sciascia, Camilleri and Piazzese

by

Maximiliana Henze

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Italian Studies
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Abstract

This thesis examines the detective fiction of the Sicilian writers Leonardo Sciascia (1921-1989), Andrea Camilleri (1925-) and Santo Piazzese (1941-). All of the works discussed are detective novels set the south-western part of Sicily. The authors chosen for analysis use a traditional, formulaic and popular template of the detective story, or some variation thereof, and their novels all contain the figure of the detective as a protagonist and organizing narrative device. The contemporary Sicilian detective novel, as demonstrated by the works of the three selected writers, reveal the importance of place. This thesis compares and contrasts the manner in which the Sicilian locale or setting is depicted, related to, constructed, invented and contextualized by each author. The idea of Sicily as a simulacrum is also discussed. As each author recreates his settings in novel form, these simulacra go on to form connections with, overlap or negate other literary spaces, not all of them located in Sicily or even Italy. The places of the novels are examined with reference to real cities, towns and communities. Furthermore, the emphasis is on how these fictional representations are created or fit into relationships with other texts and genres. There is also the relationship between the detective and the city or community in which
he operates. Familiar tropes and connections between writing and walking, and interpretation and pursuit that compare the detective to the reader are also examined. The novels are read as investigations of Sicily, in addition to the investigations of specific murders or cases outlined in each mystery, and the detectives illuminate their readings and observations of the place and the people who inhabit it, as much as they solve crime. Finally, I consider the familiar lineage of investigative forefathers and literary predecessors, not necessarily Sicilian or Italian, featured in the novels of all three authors. The manner in which each author uses and struggles against the detective genre and these traditions is another of the main topics of this investigation.
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Introduction

In 1961 Leonardo Sciascia published *Il giorno della civetta* and founded the contemporary Sicilian crime novel. While the actual beginning of the literary genre of detective fiction in an Italian setting and written by an Italian author has to be back-dated to sometime in the last century\(^1\), and even the first Sicilian mystery or crime novel\(^2\), preceded Sciascia’s mystery, by about sixty years, Sciascia’s first novel was deeply influential to Sicilian writers who followed him. The author began writing and publishing in 1950 and his early artistic production consists of a satire on fascism, poetry, a work on Pirandello, an autobiographic novel inspired by his experience as an elementary school teacher in his home town, works about Sicily and his views on communism, the influence of the U.S.A. and the unification of Italy. His political engagement and his ruminations about Sicily, his native island, and its people are evident from his very first books. It was not until 1961, after living for one year in Rome, that he published his

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\(^1\) Crime fiction in Italy officially began in 1929, the year the Milanese publishing house Arnoldo Mondadori issued its first yellow covered paperback. The first books in the Mondadori series were English novels in translation by, S.S. Van Dine, Edgar Wallace, Anna Katharine Green and Robert Louis Stevenson. Leonardo Sinisgalli, the poet and art critic, in an article reviewing the four novels in December of 1929 used the term *romanzi gialli* to define the content and to link the genre to the Mondadori publishing house. The first Italian authors of this new “yellow” genre were published under the Mondadori label in 1931. See Andrea Camilleri, “Difesa di un colore,” www. vigata.org/bibliografia/colore.shtml, consulted September 8, 2017. Prior to Mondadori making the term *giallo* synonymous with *romanzo poliziesco*, critics acknowledge some early local practitioners of the crime fiction genre. See Loris Rambelli’s *Storia del ‘giallo’ italiano* (Milan:Garzanti, 1979), Maurizio Pistelli’s *Un secolo in giallo: Storia del poliziesco italiano (1860 – 1960)* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005). The earliest real Italian crime novel is usually considered *Il cappello del prete* by Emilio De Marchi, published in 1888 (see Luca Crovi, *Tutti i colori del giallo. Il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco a Camilleri*, Venice: Marsilio, 2002).

\(^2\) Luigi Capuana’s *Il marchese di Roccaverdina* published serially in *L’Ora* of Palermo in 1900 and in book form the year after is the first Sicilian crime novel, set in Spaccaforno. The train of events is set in motion by a homicide perpetrated by the character after which the book is named. It is a reverse mystery, as the guilty party is known, and it tells more of the descent into madness of the title character, in the manner of Dostoyevski’s *Crime and Punishment*. It is set in rural and feudal Sicily and it does much to bring to the fore of the narration the society of the times. In 1936, Ezio d’Errico was the first Sicilian writer entered the Mondadori stables with *Qualcuno ha bussato alla porta*. His novels are set in Paris and feature a French police detective.
sixth book and his first novel, perhaps one of his most famous and influential publications. He used the traditional detective formula, with a few twists of his own, and for this he is often credited as the one who successfully “imported” the detective fiction genre to Italy. He is also an innovator of the literary phenomenon of the Sicilian crime novel.

This thesis discusses the works of Leonardo Sciascia, Andrea Camilleri, and Santo Piazzese, three Sicilian authors of detective or crime fiction. These three writers are arranged in loose chronological order. There is an attempt to build a kind of lineage, but it is by no means comprehensive. Leonardo Sciascia definitely precedes the other two writers, his active period beginning as early as 1961, in contrast with Camilleri who began publishing novels about thirty years later. Things become complicated in questions of chronology and lineage when one considers that Camilleri is roughly the same age as Sciascia, but Inspector Montalbano does not hit the streets of Vigàta until after Sciascia’s death. Piazzese’s novels coincide with the first few adventures of Camilleri’s Inspector Montalbano, so it is difficult to justify the idea that Camilleri influenced Piazzese. These authors were chosen because they are all writers born in Sicily who have set their works in contemporary Sicily and they all have a detective, either amateur or professional, as the protagonist.

The terms “detective fiction”, “crime fiction”, “poliziesco”, “giallo”, “noir”, and “thriller” are used rather freely and interchangeably in criticism, popular culture references, and book reviews. In this thesis, I have chosen only works that can be fitted into the “detective” category, specifically books that use the detective as a central protagonist and organizing device. The story of crime and investigation is what unites all the works discussed in this thesis. I am not limiting the discussion to the slimmed-down, puzzle-oriented “whodunnits”, strewn with clues and suspects, of the Golden Age between the two world wars, popular in England and the United
States, but that is one of the prime traditional forms and models of the genre. The Golden Age, with all of its lists of “rules”, has, of course, inserted itself into every discussion of crime fiction for the last eighty years. Works that deal with crime or criminal elements of Sicilian society that have not dispensed with the detective protagonist-hero, and that in fact, use the figure of the investigator as a fulcrum to manipulate the plot and the author’s message, are the ones selected.

The term *giallo* is specific to Italian criticism. In the English-speaking world, the *noir* is not used to describe any category of detective fiction, and, in fact, refers predominantly to something else, the *film noir*. The word *noir* used in relation to crime fiction has origins similar to that of the term *giallo*, namely the black covers of the Parisian publishing house Gallimard’s *Série noire* founded in 1945 and mostly comprising of Anglo-American detective and crime fiction of the hardboiled variety in translation. In general, in Italy, the *giallo* describes a kind of crime novel of the reassuring variety, with a happy ending that reaffirms the initial societal order that was violated by the criminal act. The *noir*, on the other hand, operates in an atmosphere of pessimism, nihilism, distrust and corruption from which there is no redemption or happy ending. *Noir* is not a genre. It is a way of seeing and interpreting the world. These terms can be confusing, for they do not describe different genres or even subgenres, but often blur and contaminate each other. For instance, Sciascia’s *Il Contesto* and *Todo modo* both begin as rather optimistic investigations, and in the case of *Il Contesto*, the investigator is even an idealistic type, but they both descend into hellish downward spirals and pessimistic portrayals of a corrupt society from which there is no escape. One can begin reading a *giallo* only to discover that it is, in fact, a *noir*.

It is useful to point out the double structure of the detective story as outlined in Tzvetan Todorov’s “The Typology of Detective Fiction”. This form of literature has a complex double
narrative: an absent story, the story of the crime, and the story of the investigation. The first story, that of the crime, is already complete before the book begins, while the second account of how the reader, narrator and characters came to know about what really happened comprises the entire plot of that very detective story. The Golden Age model, or the “whodunnit” generally has a very geometric structure. Todorov cites Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*, for its logical outline of twelve suspects, twelve chapters, and twelve interrogations, book-ended by a prologue and an epilogue. (45) While there is no novel in this study thus organized, Todorov’s further observation that the two stories that characterize the literature of detection, those of crime and inquest correspond to the two aspects of every literary work, *fabula* and *sjuzet*, translated as “story” or what has happened in life, and “(plot of a) narrative” or how the author presents it to us. (45) This outline described above lays out the structure of what Todorov classifies as “classic” or “traditional” detective fiction, but it is also the kernel of all stories and all literary works, as isolated by the Russian Formalists. According to Todorov, in the classic detective formula, the first story is absent, but real, the second story is present, but insignificant; however, in the American version of the detective story, what is known as the hardboiled school, or the thriller, the second story is more fused with the first to the point that the second story holds ascendancy over the first, which is somewhat suppressed. While Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, early practitioners of the “thriller” ³ identified by Todorov, preserve the element of mystery, the second story moves to the centre of the narration. Description of milieu,

³ Todorov in this essay cited here does not distinguish between the thriller and the hard-boiled school of detective fiction and in reference to Todorov neither do I. However, I generally avoid the term and acknowledge that the thriller refers to an action driven crime novel that does not necessarily contain a detective, nor is crimesolving a necessary component. See the chapter called “The Thriller” by David Glover in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
specific characters and behaviour take precedence in the second story over the simple detection of truth. The detective in the hardboiled detective novel is constantly at risk, whereas he enjoyed an immunity in the Golden Age.

The novels of Sciascia, Camilleri and Piazzese are all about the milieu and the trials of the individual detectives, who are integrated into the universe of the other characters. The three authors chosen for analysis all use a traditional, formulaic and popular template, or some variation thereof, to tell the story of Sicily and its people. G.K. Chesterton wrote about the value of the popular detective story in 1902, calling it “the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life”, and he specifies that it is the poetry of London, the metropolis, the urban text of histories and meanings. “Popular art in all ages has been interested in contemporary manners and costume” (Chesterton 4). The detective, a new and modern kind of protagonist, in existence from the mid-nineteenth century, marks a distinction from earlier narratives. The presence of the character of the detective and nineteenth century detection’s concern with the city are significant aspects of the form’s modernity. A century on, however, narratives in which a detective-protagonist walks through his environment and reads its symbols still have currency. In the books of these three novelists, what mysteries do their detectives read as they move through their man-made Sicilian environment? What signs and symbols of history, ideology, culture, aesthetics, society and political life are planted in the Sicilian landscape?

The three Sicilian authors all refer self-consciously to the detective fiction tradition. Stefano Tani, in fact, refers to Sciascia’s work as the anti-detective novel, or an inverted form of the genre, which frustrates the expectation of the reader. While the anti-detective novel is not necessarily a separate genre opposed to the traditional whodunnit, I would argue that all three
authors take a metaliterary approach to their subject – meta in the sense that they are totally self-aware of the traditions and conventions with which they engage. For in this Sicilian strain of the “yellow” genre, there is the question of whether or not it is even possible to conduct a traditional investigation. In Sicily, and in Italy, there is almost too much to be said about the milieu. In an atmosphere where “illustrious corpses” are unearthed and conspiracy theories are reported as news, where it is impossible to understand what is reality and what is fantasy, it is almost absurd to become interested in an investigation of a personal crime and to identify an individual who is the guilty party. Does this fact make Sicily or Italy an ideal or an impossible backdrop for detective fiction? In these novels of Sciascia, Piazzese and Camilleri, one cannot take for granted many of the traditional aspects of the detective novel. The reader is never sure of the moral identities of any character, except for the detective in these novels, or their political reach. Evidence disappears, witnesses are murdered and the detective is racing against the criminals who are also hunting the detective. The criminals may even be his superiors or his elected politicians. Do all of these irregularities constitute a new genre? Todorov is of the opinion that “a new genre is created around an element which was not obligatory in the old one” (48).

Comparisons
Many points of similarity link Sciascia, Camilleri, and Piazzese and their detective fiction. First, apart from their geneological ties by virtue of their birth and upbringing in geographical proximity to each other in the western part of the island, there are familial and proprietary ties that these authors seek to establish with the Sicilian authors, not necessarily of the mystery genre, that preceded them. Then, there is also the familiar lineage of investigative forefathers and literary predecessors, not necessarily Sicilian or Italian, which can be tied into
their writings. Poe’s Dupin, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, Simenon’s Maigret, Chandler’s Marlowe, to name a few, also walk through the pages of these Sicilian detective novels. The manner in which each author uses and struggles against the genre and these traditions is one of the main topics of this investigation.

There is a unity of place in the novels discussed. The plots of all the mysteries unfold in a Sicilian setting. The Sicilian born authors have chosen to locate their fictions in the Palermo – Agrigento – Racalmuto part of the island, even though two of the authors were not living in Sicily during the period of writing. Their shared geographical context and how it is portrayed in the texts becomes more than just a setting or backdrop. At times, Sicily, or the specific parts of the island featured in each writer’s books, appears to be the real protagonist.

A third similarity between the three is their use of the character of the detective. Whether the main investigator of each detective story is Sicilian or Italian or another outsider figure, whether he is an official police detective or a private individual, and whether he is the narrator or just the one of the protagonists narrated, the fact that all three authors have not dispensed with this central figure unites them. These detectives use the conventions of investigation to solve murders, restore order, to fight organized crime and to interrogate Sicilian identity. The quality that differentiates crime writing, especially the serial novels of the eighteenth century (the Newgate novels in England and the romanzo d’appendice in Italy from which detective stories descended), from detective fiction is the textual space allotted to the figure of the detective. While the novels selected have very different protagonist-heroes, they are all structured entirely around the ingenious deductions of a charismatic detective.

Despite all the above stated similarities among the detective stories of Sciascia, Camilleri and Piazzese, the strategies employed in this thesis to discuss the different authors, to compare and contrast them, and to reveal points of interest and meaning in their works, are somewhat selective and predatory. The detective is a rather picaresque hero. He is a single character who moves from background to background interacting with different sets of people from different walks of life. In this manner, my critical methods also move and adapt as I read through the different books. While there are many shared features in the works of these three authors of detective fiction, there are also many differences. I do not apply the same critical approach in each chapter, and I do not test every novel against the same criteria. I attempt to appeal to different paradigms of thought as I move through the readings. Nevertheless, every path can be connected with every other one. In this discussion, any conclusions I draw in connection with one author, I attempt to connect with the other authors in some form, but perhaps with a different emphasis.

The authors I have selected are all quite different from each other. My work began with Leonardo Sciascia and the other two authors depend upon Sciascia. Their works follow those of the writer of \textit{Il giorno della civetta}, and they rely upon the fact that his work was read and absorbed into the culture first. Sciascia set up the initial problematic of setting a detective story in Sicily and Camilleri and Piazzese’s works are reactions to Sciascia’s use of the genre to expose the political climate of his time. The Montalbano novels were chosen because he is a series detective and a police officer. Furthermore, Camilleri fits the description of a full-time practitioner of the genre. I later added Santo Piazzese and his detective-protagonist Lorenzo La Marca because I wanted an amateur detective. If for instance Montalbano is Camilleri’s “solution” to the Bellodi problem, I wanted to work with someone who tackled the Laurana
problem. There is also a progression in the treatment of space in the works. Sicily as depicted by Sciascia, Camilleri and Piazzese becomes increasingly post-modern, vital, hybrid and hyperreal.

**Leonardo Sciascia**

This thesis represents a journey through Sicily that departs from the piazza “silenziosa nel grigio dell’alba” of 1961, where a *panelle* seller lurks on the edges and tries to fade into the shadows, and two shotgun blasts stop the dark suited man running for the commuter bus in his tracks. This incipit from *Il giorno della civetta* marks the moment when the detective story cleared customs and landed in Sicily.

Leonardo Sciascia writes from his unique Sicilian experience. For this reason, Sciascia’s novel *Il giorno della civetta* represents a number of “firsts” in Sicilian and Italian literature. It is by his own admission the first novel to offer an unapologetic depiction of the mafia, at a moment in history when the government was not only disinterested in the mafia phenomenon, but was in denial over its existence (*Civetta* 135). His novel brings to light the inability of the authorities to handle investigation into corruption. He exposes many of the hidden aspects specific to Sicilian civic life, such as the linking of families with political parties, the treachery of alliances and allegiances, the calling in of favours that do not benefit society as a whole. Although his novels are structured around the detective and the reading of clues that lead to the resolution of a crime, there is always another overarching message that the entire society is complicit. Sciascia’s *impegno*, his political mission, is to reveal what has long been obscured. For this reason, the chapter on Sciascia begins with a discussion of Sicily, and how he presents his native region. Sciascia’s tendency to differentiate his locale and his setting for his mysteries corresponds to
some of the key concepts of post-colonial discourse. The way in which Sciascia writes demonstrates an awareness that he is writing from the margins of Italian culture and that the centre of reference is elsewhere. As Sicily was never a colony of Italy, but it was once a powerful state in its own right, the critic Alessandro Carrera uses the term “internal colonialism”\(^5\) to describe the somewhat particular situation of the southern Italian island regions of Sicily and Sardegna. He also writes with the view of presenting his locale to a foreign reader. There is a sense of transferring and translating the detective story format into a Sicilian setting and the manner in which those formulaic templates of crime-solving break down in the current reality of modern Sicily. He is appropriating and reformulating a colonial mode of analysis.

In setting a fiction in the social and political climate that is entirely corrupt and impenetrable, Sciascia is deliberately making a place for himself within a major literature. I also discuss Sciascia’s “deterritorialization” his manner of subverting and decoding the dominant social code in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of minor literatures, as I attempt to outline the writer’s place in the crime fiction genre and the Sicilian literature traditions.

Finally, I look at Sciascia’s detectives, all of whom are driven by ideals of justice, but are ineffectual at delivering it. The twentieth-century Sicilian author draws connections between his detective-protagonists and the aspirations of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century France, a historical period and a geographical context remote from his own times. The ineffectual, incorruptible, and idealistic, almost spiritual, investigators seem to derive from another time and place, and they cast a different perspective on the injustices of Sciascia’s own period.

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\(^5\) See the chapter entitled “Identità nazionale e colonialism interno” in Il Principe e il Giurista (Rome: Peraldo editore, 2001) and pages 52 to 55 for Carrera’s discussion of what makes an Italian author a post-colonial author or an autore postcoloniale interno.
In keeping with the lines of thought mentioned above, I also explore the instances of intertextuality in Sciascia’s novel. There is the familiar trope of the detective being like a reader of signs and symbols, but it is Sciascia’s own preoccupations with the Enlightenment, with French literature, with Sicilian history, that leads one along the path of looking for links and connections between texts, narratives and traditions.

Andrea Camilleri

The chapters on Andrea Camilleri focus on the series featuring the Commissario Salvo Montalbano, the head of the Vigàta police station. Even though some of his other novels feature crimes and Sciascia-like investigations that lead to historical illumination, such as *Il corso delle cose*, it is the Montalbano series that is of interest because its novels are entirely structured around the detective figure and his brilliant deductions, his movements in his society, and his control over the cases he investigates. Salvo Montalbano differs from Sciascia’s detectives, especially as he is a series detective. As a police officer and an authorized detective, he represents the state. His series of novels represent different episodes and they deal with different problems that beset contemporary Sicily. His cases link picaresque but not intrinsically related episodes together. As a Sicilian, he experiences the society up close. The discussion of the Montalbano novels is divided into two chapters. The first deals predominantly with the character of the detective. The chapter compares and contrasts the Sicilian police officer against Sciascia’s unique investigators, all of whom end up dead, isolated, or without sufficient authority to solve any individual crime. With Montalbano, there is the possibility of the insider’s view of the Sicilian society. The detective becomes a figure akin to an anthropologist who studies his own culture. Montalbano, however, is not just a figurative descendant to Sciascia’s detectives or an
answer to the previous author’s unsolved cases. Montalbano is a true police officer and a true detective, who investigates contemporary Sicily for himself, although he retains some of the same Enlightenment issues, especially concerns regarding the excesses and abuses of power. More than Sciascia’s detectives, Montalbano is a figure that emerges through his dialogue, speech and utterances. I compare Camilleri’s investigator with other well-known detective types in the genre: the hard-boiled gumshoe or private eye and the more cerebral type that populates the novels of the Golden Age. Many references to other books, other fictional detectives and other media can be found in the novels. A dialogue between texts and characters is an extension into the investigation of the type of detective and the type of Sicilian that Montalbano represents.

An examination of the Vigàtese head of the local police department becomes more self-referential and post-modern by the end of this chapter, as I look at Camilleri’s theatrical presentation of his hero. Irony, humour and an awareness that he is living a fiction become more dominant features of the Sicilian detective in some of the later episodes of the Montalbano saga. This change in the approach to looking at our hero leads to the following chapter, which discusses Vigàta and the nearby city Montelusa in which the police headquarters are located.

Camilleri’s Vigàta has become more than a backdrop onto which to showcase his characters and plots. There are many parallels between Camilleri and Sciascia’s works, including and not surprisingly a shared commitment to narrating Sicily. All of Camilleri’s stories are situated in the Porto Empedocle – Agrigento area, (called Vigàta and Montelusa respectively in the novels), and much of his criminal literary realm shares several of the features delineated by Sciascia. Camilleri’s Vigàta has grown out of the boundaries set by Sciascia’s fiction. In creating his own literary *topos*, his own type of *locus amoenus*, in which he can examine the defeat of reason in Sicily, confront the laws of *omertà* and examine the bureaucratic inefficiencies of the
government, the author provides a stable context and optimistic outlook that is far removed from Sciascia’s locales. Vigàta as a simulacrum is discussed in this chapter. A simulacrum, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms, supposedly, “bears no relation to any reality whatever” (6). It has replaced reality. This chapter examines how Camilleri’s innovative use of language in his narration constructs this hyperreal Sicily. As Michel de Certeau writes in *The Writing of History* (1975), “Writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum, of the impossibility of one’s own place” (327): thus, to write about the history of a place is a function of mankind’s feeling of loss, mourning and absence. This is not to say that Camilleri’s bears no resemblance to the real Sicily and that one cannot discuss and debate the author’s social commitment. On the contrary, there are critics that match up all of the various plots and mysteries with salient topics in the current events of Sicily, Italy, Europe and the world. It is just that Camilleri’s Vigàta enters other circuits, inserts itself in other histories, and makes connections with other areas of artistic expression. Furthermore, other parties now have a stake in the construction of Vigàta. With its change in its official denomination to Porto Empedocle Vigàta in 2003, Camilleri’s birthplace has welcomed identification with its famous son’s constructed world. Owing to the series unparalleled success, Inspector Montalbano has become a popular figure in Italian media and on European television. Camilleri’s initial focus on the social ramifications of the fictional crimes committed in the small-town universe of Vigàta has expanded to encompass issues on a global scale. While the plots all unfold on Sicilian soil, they direct attention to a universal human condition, with their concerns with human rights and justice.
**Santo Piazzese**

With the third selected author, the analysis shifts to the north to the city of Palermo. There is a further shift in perspective, as Piazzese, like his detective and narrator Lorenzo La Marca, is a native Palermitan, who continues to reside in the city of his origins, in contrast with Leonardo Sciascia and Andrea Camilleri who both lived outside of Sicily for most of their adult lives. This fact of being on the spot and remaining at the scene of investigation tends to give Piazzese’s characters a unique point of view with relation to events they are narrating and the setting they inhabit. This thesis discusses the novels in which Lorenzo La Marca is the narrator, *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* and *La doppia vita di M. Laurent*. La Marca is a kind of amateur detective who comes to his investigative role through chance. He is thrust into the investigative role by the accident of finding the body of an old acquaintance hanging from a branch of a tree in the gardens of the university department at which he works as a professor of biochemistry. The narrator’s style is rich in oxymorons, irony, self-irony, excessive citations, and continuous referentiality. The first-person voice of the narrator is the highly subjective perspective through which the reader views the city of Palermo. The city is described piece by piece, or rather, step by step, as the detective-protagonist moves through it. The crime capital, La Marca’s designation for Palermo, emerges as a postmodern locale replete with cultural connections to other places, other literatures, other media, as well as a place haunted by history and the narrator’s personal past.

In this chapter, the detective is likened to the *flâneur*: the urban figure who walks the city, seeks knowledge and appreciates aesthetics. The *flâneur* is an observer. While he might feel at home in the streets and walk amongst crowds of people, he remains apart from the crowd. He does not participate. He observes the crowd as he makes note of the other phenomena he sees in the city. This literary type from nineteenth century France, drawn from Charles Baudelaire’s
“The Painter of Modern Life” (1963), has become an emblem of modern life in the metropolis. Under Walter Benjamin’s scrutiny this observer of the marketplace, and wanderer of the city becomes an observer of the damaging effects of modernity. G.K. Chesterton and Edgar Allan Poe speak of the detective in similar terms, as an essentially modern figure, a chronicler of the present and a contradiction-laden figure detached from the anonymous crowd. Lorenzo La Marca’s wandering through the streets of Palermo parallels his wandering through the intricacies of his mysteries, and exhibits flâneur-like behaviour in his gaze, the way he processes and catalogues evidence, like Baudelaire’s “botanist of the streets”. La Marca always has a comment, a reference, and a citation about every phenomenon that meets his senses.

Sherman Young argues that the romantic figure of the flâneur has become impossible in the twenty-first century city such as Sydney, Australia. The sprawling city criss-crossed by highways discourages meandering and exploration. Instead of the journey, the emphasis shifts to the destination and speed in reaching it. Although La Marca includes scenes of driving in his narration, he still interacts intimately with the city. Perhaps owing to the fact that the intricate medieval layout of the streets of Palermo cannot compare with the grid-like street layout of the Australian city, La Marca remains more invested and engaged even in his travels by car. He leads us into out-of-the-way spaces to which only he has access. The urban environment is not a largely aesthetic distraction viewed through the windshield. However, the idea of Young’s driveur extends itself to embracing travel of the information highway as well. The city becomes a tableau upon which information flows oblivious to its environment. In this manner, La Marca’s travel by car leads him to explore an alternate geography of the mind. In the narrator’s case, this alternate space is not necessarily spatial; it encompasses the past, the fictional worlds of his
favourite novels, movies, and also music, and imagined cities existing in the real world that he has never visited.

In spite of all the inter-textual references that litter his narrative, there is La Marca’s insistence of being Sicilian. His cases have their roots in Sicily and the fact of being native to Palermo aids to his solutions. The detective tackles the problem of the mafia in the first two cases. In these novels, the mafia is both a constant threat under which Palermitans live and it is also a literary *topos*. The interplay between reality and fiction and the connections between the two as the hero follows his investigation to its conclusion are examined in this chapter.
Chapter One: Leonardo Sciascia

With *Il giorno della civetta* (1961), Leonardo Sciascia wrote the first contemporary Sicilian crime novel. By writing this novel, his first full-length fictional work and his seventh book, he broke the conspiracy of silence over the mafia and political corruption in Sicily and started the trend of Sicilian detective fiction. The author certainly did not identify himself as a mystery writer or as a mafiologist as he published only six novels that properly adhere to the formula: *Il giorno della civetta, A ciascuno il suo* (1966), *Il contesto* (1971), *Todo modo* (1974), *La cavalliere e la morte* (1989) and the posthumously published novella *Una storia semplice* (1989). Proportionately few of his writings are proper detective stories. As a writer, Sciascia cannot be identified exclusively with the detective story, and he made use of autobiography, historical fiction, a type of essay-exposé and poetry; however, many of his other works have an investigative bent, delving into the serious issues that have shaped the history and politics of Sicily. According to Joseph Farrell, Sciascia “proclaimed his own adherence to a Sicilian school of literature, with a line of descent that went back through Vitaliano Brancati to De Roberto, Verga, Capuana and Pirandello and forward to Gesualdo Bufalino and Vincenzo Consolo; Sciascia had reservations over others, such as Elio Vittorini and Tomasi di Lampedusa” (Farrell viii). None of these other authors are mystery writers; nevertheless, Sciascia views himself in the same tradition. Like these other writers mentioned above, Sciascia’s frame of reference was formed by Sicily – its geography, history, morality and intellectuality. Sicilian detective fiction has grown out of realism and historical fiction, rather than the mystery tradition. Subsequent Italian and Sicilian crime and detective fiction writers look upon Leonardo Sciascia as a founder of the genre. It was not, however, until the publication of *La forma dell’acqua* (1994), Andrea
Camilleri’s first novel of the series featuring the police superintendent Salvo Montalbano that crime fiction set in Sicily became the literary phenomenon that it is today. Nowadays, there are a number of Sicilian writers exclusively using the detective fiction genre and creating works set in their native land. These writers have raised the Sicilian mystery to a stature that rivals its Anglo-American counterparts in popularity. Many contemporary Sicilian writers use the detective fiction genre and their island as the setting for explorations of their cultural identity.

A number of interesting issues stem from reading Sciascia’s detective novels. First is his relationship with Sicily, the setting of the three detective novels discussed in this chapter, *Il giorno della civetta*, *A ciascuno il suo* and *Una storia semplice*. A key element that unites the Sicilian author’s entire opus is his engaged relationship with the history, politics and culture of his native region. He tends to focus on the problems of contemporary Sicily and their complex rapport with its historical intellectual background. Another significant discussion point is Sciascia’s relationship with the genre of detective fiction. Generic subversion is one of the tools Sciascia uses to interrogate the mechanisms of power in politics and in literature. The author incites in the reader the expectations of a juicy mystery, only to frustrate it, and he does this to demonstrate the difference between the corrupt Sicilian context and other places. Given his aims to prove or at least highlight the difference between the best of the Enlightenment and worst of Sicily, his protagonists are all in some way unreliable and ineffectual. Although some of them may embody heroic ideals, the rather abrupt endings of these investigations seem to betray the reader’s trust in these detectives. None of them are able to break through the wall of silence and the stranglehold of the mafia on all civic life in Sicily. The idea that Sciascia’s protagonists are

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6 Some examples include Valentina Gebbia, Piergiorgio Di Cara, Gaetano Savatteri, Domenico Cacopardo and Gaicomo Cacciatore.
operative on an intellectual or cerebral level and they are portrayed as rational beings in the context of an unhealthy social body constitute the final points of interest in this chapter.

**Sciascia and Sicily**

The presentation of Sicily within Sicilian literature itself is nothing new; it is, in fact, something of a tradition. Sicily is one of the most well articulated places in Italian literature, and Sicilian writers have shaped the modern Italian literary canon. Despite contributing to the definition of a national literature, Sicilian writers, of the period following the Unification of Italy, such as Verga, Pirandello and Tomasi di Lampedusa have been in a dialectical position with relation to continental Italian literature and culture; they have been eager to write about a difference between Sicily and the Sicilian people and the rest of Italy. Similarly, Sciascia’s first detective novel, an indictment of the mafia and corruption at the highest levels of Italian government, introduces the idea that Sicily is a fantastical locale in opposition to a rational Italy and that it does not operate according to the same rules or logic as other regions or nations, whether in Italy or in Europe.

Sciascia’s tendency to define his own region as being in opposition to the dominant national culture of unified Italy corresponds to the some of the key ideas of the Orientalist or post colonial discourse. Edward Said, a literary and cultural critic, well-known for his book *Orientalism* (1978), throughout his career was interested in the way people of the Western world perceive the people, customs, institutions, objects, and traditions from a different culture. His intellectual reputation is founded on his literary criticism of canonical authors such as Joseph Conrad, Jane Austen, Rudyard Kipling and W.B. Yeats as well as his critique of Orientalism. Said acknowledges that society, politics and power have left their mark upon literature. False and
romanticized images of Asia, originating in Western literature, have created a polarity between West and East. The critic is of the opinion that identity is not only a repository of collective experience, but it involves the construction of opposites or “others” in order to better define “us”. Said contends that Asia or the Orient has been constructed taking European perspective as the norm from which the “exotic” and “inscrutable” Orient deviates (Said 1978: p. 40 and 54). Curiously, Sciascia participates in Orientalist discourse by portraying his own culture as “other”, “exotic” and “inscrutable” (Chu 1998 79). In Sciascia’s writing, Sicily is differentiated from other places. It does not struggle against the dominance of the national culture of unified Italy; rather it deviates from the normative expectations of other Western cultures. The argumentative and contrary writer continually asserts that the climate of political corruption and organized crime that infects all of Sicilian society is pervasive, that there is a bit of the Sicilian everywhere, that “la linea della palma” or “la linea del caffè ristretto” moves ever to the north. This metaphor, from the last pages of Il giorno della civetta, is an ironic inversion of colonialism. The “European powers” seek to control and dominate the Orient by creating a difference of cultural inequality and depicting a weak, irrational and feminized Other, in opposition to the rational strong and masculine West, and this relationship is the key binomial of all detective fiction, with the detective representing reason, civilization and good, while the criminal represents irrationality, savagery and evil. This opposition, outlined in such absolute language, is a bit of a generalization, especially in the hard-boiled tradition, in which the detective often moves comfortably between the two milieux, Sam Spade, for example, playing the police and the criminals against one another for his own benefit. Nevertheless, Sciascia in his portrayal of crime-solving in Sicily aligns his society with the qualities that are supposedly “other” from the Western standpoint. He then creates another metaphor of the invasive Sicilian substratum that is
infiltrating the entire Western world with its organized crime, corrupt politicians, and the complicity of common citizens.

Sciascia, like Luigi Pirandello and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, demonstrates an awareness that he is writing from the margins of Italian culture and that the centre of reference is elsewhere. The Risorgimento, the failure of the new Italian state to effect positive social change in Sicily and the marginalization and dispossession of Sicilians resulting from unification are well frequented themes in Sicilian literature. The “delusion of history” is what Vincenzo Consolo calls this familiar literary topos in an interview with Daragh O’Connell (245). Italo Calvino, in his 1965 letter to Sciascia, comments upon a common tendency in Sicilian writers to explore Sicilian reality to an exhaustive and almost neurotic degree:

As early as 1965, Calvino in his ironic critique touched upon what many readers of Sicilian literature would dwell upon: the marked tendency of Sicilian writers to be both authors and anthropologists of their own culture. According to Alessandro Carrera, the “internal post-
colonial novel” as it manifests itself in a Sicilian setting is concerned with much the same issues that Calvino identified in this letter. Carrera describes the condition of post-colonialism, which he then translates into an Italian setting to describe some qualities of the literature of the diverse Italian regions:

Una comunità che racconta se stessa e per se stessa, originariamente non crea istituzioni letterarie: crea dèi e crea miti. Solo quando il tempo e l’alterità cominciano a insinuarsi nella narrazione mitica, il mito inizia quel processo di secolarizzazione che lo porterà o al banco del tribunale della verità logica o davanti al muro cieco del romanzo nevrotico (44).

Carrera distinguishes between the types of artistic production of the colonizing culture from that of the culture of the subaltern. The need for explanation, differentiation and the protection of one’s origins begins in the presence of the Other against which the dominant culture can be contrasted and defined. For subaltern cultures, or people who have undergone a period of having a foreign culture being imposed upon them, the need to explain oneself is always present. Carrera posits that internal post-colonial novels seek to mimic the myths of an imperial culture through the narration of foundational myths that seek to explain the origins of their own culture. Because of the ambitiousness of these projects, the post-colonial novels bear resemblance to Freud’s family history of the neurotic (Carrera 23). In the case of Italy, some of the regions have illustrious and noble histories that were incompletely or insufficiently incorporated into the history of the nation after Italian unification. Many of the Italian regions lost the dignity of being nation-states to become a mere region amongst many, a fact which has led to many writers of these regions to dig into the past and reinterpret history.  

7 The family romance is from a short paper from 1909 that attempts to explain the conscious fantasy, later repressed, in which a child imagines that his birth parents are not his real parents. The fantasy usually begins around the time of the liberation of the individual from the authority of the parents, a most necessary and painful process, as normal progress in society rests upon the
In a similar manner, the genre in which Sciascia writes has long lurked at the margins of literature. Frederic Jameson in his 1986 article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” discusses the difference between genre fiction and canonical fiction. Jameson argues that it is difficult and perhaps fruitless to show that “Dashiell Hammett is really as great as Dostoyevsky and therefore can be admitted [into the literary canon]”. Jameson classifies what he calls the “third world” novel and genre fiction as non-canonical literature. The attempt to prove the “greatness” of these peripheral forms of literature on the part of their advocates is, according to Jameson, “a self-defeating strategy because it borrows the weapons of the adversary.” (65) Many critics have taken umbrage with Jameson’s use of the term “Third-World Literature” and his prescription of realism and allegory to literature of countries that have undergone a post-colonial phase and of people whose own culture has been dominated by another, foreign culture. Jameson’s states that “third-world texts” exhibit a greater ratio of the political to the personal, thus making such texts initially alien to the conventional western reader. These texts “necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (Jameson 69). Although Carrera expresses disagreement with the seigniorial tone of Jameson’s article, he cites Jameson to make his case that literature of the Italian regions bears resemblance to the post-colonial novel. Carrera coins the term romanzo opposition between successive generations. Often the fantasy parents are of noble lineage, or more successful, brave, beautiful and famous than the actual parents. The fantasy does not replace reality, rather the neurotic, too beleaguered by the real world chooses a situation with believable elements, built up and embellished over time to embellish his own familiar genealogy. When a child or young person in the process of emancipation is slighted or underappreciated, he finds vent in the idea of being a stepchild or an adopted child. The child’s imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free of parents and replacing them with others who reflect more accurately how the child perceives himself. See Freud, S. (1909). Family Romances. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906-1908): Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’ and Other Works, 235 – 242.
*post-coloniale interno* to describe Italian novels of certain writers of the regions, whose works argue against the idea of a homogeneous European system of values. A novel that can be described as expressing the features of *post-colonialismo interno* narrates the history of a civilization to a reader who lies outside of the cultural community in which the work is produced. This type of text, according to Carrera, “Narra una differenza, ma lo fa in una forma che il mainstream può accettare. Accetta il linguaggio del mainstream, ma solo allo scopo di narrare una differenza per la quale il mainstream non avrebbe posto.” (Carrera 43). It is interesting that Jameson classifies genre fiction with Third World texts. It is a bit strange to think of Dashiell Hammett and Sherwood Anderson, both from the U.S.A. as being classed with Third World or post-colonial writers. However, in a hierarchy which places Dostoyevsky at the top, Hammett and Anderson could be seen as interlopers and upstarts from this position. Even though Sicily is part of Europe and does not fit with the classification of Third World or a colony, Sciascia’s writings are highly politically engaged and systematically use a non-canonical form, the detective story, to address his concerns. He makes use of the “us” versus “them” terminology when referring to Sicilians as opposed to other people; and his novels seek to explain Sicily and Sicilian ways to a non-native audience.

In non-canonical texts reality, social issues, ideology and lived experience return to artistic production. Luca Somigli states in his introduction to the special issue of *Symposium* devoted to Italian detective fiction:

> By focusing on crime, a violent breach of the social order, detective fiction traditionally—and more so in recent years—has cast its critical eye on the here and now, on the immediate social context, which it portrays in all its ugliness. Unlike the modernist or the post-modern novel, popular fiction still believes that the gap between signifier and signified can be filled, and that language can represent the world. Thus, paradoxically, its apparent naïveté becomes its strength: Popular fiction, in other words, does what
high literature can no longer do; it seeks to hold up a mirror to the world (68).

Many critics insist that Sciascia departs from the formula of the traditional detective narrative and they are in fact reluctant to classify the Sicilian writer as a *giallista*, lest it compromise his “greatness” as an Italian writer. Instead they call his works anti-detective fiction, documentary narrative, *giallo contestuale, fantapolitica, narrazione civile*, and other such inventions that serve to differentiate Sciascia from the common producer of texts of a pulp sub-genre. In contrast to such critics who tend to exclude Sciascia from the genre, Margherita Marras credits the Sicilian writer as fundamental to the importation and proliferation of this foreign genre into the Italian context. She asserts that the current direction of Italian detective fiction follows Sciascia’s contribution to the genre in its exhibition of “national-regional” concerns. Crime fiction in Italy has a peculiarly educative function. The genre is regarded as a tool, or a weapon, to expose serious real-life issues, unlike its original function of entertainment in its classic form.

*The Impossibility of Detective Fiction in a Sicilian Setting – Sciascia’s Plots*

Sciascia’s fundamental concerns were for reason, truth and justice as related to the historical and contemporary political situation and problems of Sicily. Sciascia finds in the mainstream genre of detective fiction the means to explain his culture to a reader that lies outside of his culture. In particular, his novels illustrate the struggle between the sanitized versions of history and the mafia controlled substructure that governs daily life and daily politics. The detective novel is a suitable vehicle to express his sense of public responsibility. Vincenzo Consolo, who had a low opinion of the genre of detective fiction, once asked Sciascia why he deigned to write in this particular popular form. Consolo's antipathy for the form arose from the fact that the writing in detective novels lacks style or poetry. The writing has been reduced to
mere function, and it is a form that favours content over form, communication over expression. For precisely these qualities, Sciascia found the detective novel a useful vehicle for engaging in social critique. Consolo writes:

Capi allora il giovane letterato, che era chi adesso qui scrive, che cosa nascondeva il sorriso di Sciascia, capì cos'era per lo scrittore il racconto poliziesco: uno strumento - il più opportuno e il più valido forse, il più robusto e più appuntito, il più lucido senz'altro - per affrontare la realtà, la oscura, terribile realtà siciliana (Consolo 4).

The structure of the detective novel functions as a useful framework for confronting the terrible social and political reality of Sicily. Sciascia’s use of what, until recently, was essentially a “foreign” genre associated with Anglo-American and French literary traditions, illustrates a tendency to “write back to the centre”, a purposeful adoption of a marginal genre to engage in a dialogue with the dominant cultural centre. (Ashcroft 7) Consolo takes issue with the quality, or lack thereof, found in detective fiction, but acknowledges that Sciascia’s novels use the popular formula in order to engage with the larger number of readers and put Sicilian issues onto the world map. In a sense, the serious political message is made more palatable and reaches a wider audience by its injection into an already accepted popular art form. The arguments that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari advance about Kafka’s method of expression in Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature can enlighten our discussion of Sciascia. The theorists explain that a minor literature is not that of a minor language; instead, it is the literature of a minority group in a major language. To a certain extent, Sicilian writing in the Italian language can be considered to contain a “high coefficient of deterritorialization”(16). Standard Italian is like a “paper language” or an artificial language, to employ Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, a language distanced from the space it seeks to delineate.

Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible – the
impossibility of writing otherwise. The impossibility of not writing because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature [...] The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality. And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses [...] (16).

The word “impossibility” occurs many times in Deleuze and Guattari’s text when speaking about Kafka’s writing situation. Kafka’s work is revolutionary in the way it affects the language in which it is written. A language that is a “major” language - in Kafka’s case German - is affected by a strong deterritorialization factor and is subjected to a series of displacements that subvert it and propose a new way of using it. Deleuze and Guattari employ the term “territorialization” for codification or interpretation according to a dominant social code. “Deterritorialization”, conversely, signifies to de-code, to break down, subvert and resist interpretation. Deterritorialization is crucial for minorities that want to remain minorities and affirm perspectives that are not those of the culture they inhabit. Deleuze and Guattari go on to assert that everyone, not only minorities, suffers from interpretation, and that no one wants to be measured against the standards and by an agent of a dominant social code. Hence the word “impossibility” that is so often reiterated, in conjunction with Kafka as well as in conjunction with Sicilian writing is an assertion of a desire to remain impenetrable, unique, and impossible to interpret. This subversive act can be argued to affect the detective story formula, an inherited template from a major culture, when Sciascia chooses to use it. To use a metaphor form Deleuze and Guattari, the revolutionary writes as a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow (18).

The second feature of minor literatures is that everything in them is political (17). In what the French philosophers call “major literatures” the social milieu is just the backdrop against which the characters and plot appear in high relief. In Sciascia, in contrast, an individual murder,
criminal act or case is connected to all of Sicilian society, the domestic, economical, social, and juridical values that define it. To write about an individual intrigue in Sciascia is a mere excuse to expose the whole other story behind and leading up to this unique case. The third and final distinct characteristic of minor literature is that “in it everything takes on a collective value (17)”.

Through literature the writer produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism and a minor writer is allowed “all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (17). Sciascia uses two kinds of tools in writing about his native locale: a standard language and a familiar easily identified popular genre. He uses both to assert his difference from both.

The credit for the first detective story has generally been given to Edgar Allan Poe and his “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), and the genre itself is considered to have begun with the appearance of the brilliant, but eccentric, character of the detective, Auguste Dupin and Poe’s successful plot. In Italy, there was an appetite for imported and translated detective novels, but no native tradition that could compete with the avid consumption of foreign books.8 Leonardo

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8 The story of the origins of Italian detective fiction must be backdated by at least a century from the publication of Il giorno della civetta. Maurizio Pistelli in his Un secolo in giallo: Storia del poliziesco italiano (1860 – 1960) describes how the Italian crime story rose out of the popular serials, the romanzi d’appendice, such as I misteri di Napoli (1869-70) by Francesco Mastriani, inspired by the popularity of the same phenomenon in France, especially the famous Les mystères de Paris by Eugene Sue, published in serial form between the years 1842-43. These serial novels brought together many characters from different walks of society and contained realistic descriptions of the poor living in a metropolitan setting. The first proper Italian crime novel featuring a detective was Il cappello del prete (1887) by Emilio De Marchi. These “misteri” type novels were a crossover between the gothic and realistic literary trends, with mysterious elements containing crime and crime solving. In 1929, Mondadori initiated publication of its series of mystery/crime novels with yellow covers, called I libri gialli, and the name stuck. The original Mondadori series consisted almost exclusively of works in translation from British and American mystery, crime, pulp novels. The establishment of the Mondadori catalogue was the beginning of the rise of “domestic” crime fiction in Italy. During the fascist period, the Mussolini government imposed a minimum quota of 20 percent devoted to Italian authors in any series. Ironically Mussolini found it vital to his political success to control the
Sciascia was not the first Italian writer to make full and systematic use of the detective genre. Nor was the native of Racalmuto the first Sicilian giallista. There is, however, a persistent tendency to assign to the incipit of Il giorno della civetta (1961) the value of being the moment when the detective novel cleared customs and entered Sicilian territory. Being the first Italian writer to offer an account of the mafia in Sicily through a work of fiction does make Sciascia the originator of the contemporary Sicilian detective novel. After 1961, it became impossible to have a Sicilian detective or to set a work of detective or crime fiction in Sicily without mentioning, at least tangentially, the mafia. Sciascia’s detective novels, Il giorno della civetta, A ciascuno il suo (1966), Il contesto (1971), Todo modo (1974), and Una storia semplice (1989) use the genre “to explore dilemmas of political morality and to expose political chicanery” (Farrell 61) in Sicily. Every individual twist of the plot in these novels is a comment upon the unhealthy social body, that is Sicilian society enshrouded by the inherited laws of omertà. According to Sciascia, in his Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco, the classical Anglo-American, Golden Age, or classic detective novel is taken as the standard, and it is designed to provide diversion and act as a pastime. While there is nothing Golden Age about his fiction, Sciascia invites comparison with this rule-bound, formulaic version of the genre to raise the readers’ expectations, only to frustrate them. The author’s strategy of generic subversion or deterritorialization is key to his intent to write about his culture, and simultaneously resist interpretation by the mechanisms of power.

media, and tried to contain the artistic freedom of many of the most popular national pastimes, such as the cinema and publishing; however, his national quota spurred many Italian writers to enter the lucrative field of crime fiction (Pistelli 106). Many of the country’s most popular giallisti such as Alessandro Varaldo and Augusto De Angelis, writing in the 1930s had still to fight against the predominance of foreign crime fiction. Ezio d’Errico of Agrigento is the first Sicilian full-time practitioner of the detective story, beginning his career with Qualcuno ha bussato alla porta (1936). D’Errico’s commissario Emilio Richard was a serial detective, but all of his cases are set in Paris and his investigations begin after Simenon’s Maigret retires.
The reader of traditional or formulaic detective fiction relies upon law, reason and justice, to restore order and to rout out the contaminating disorder of murder. Agatha Christie describes her own intentions for her detective stories in her autobiography:

When I began writing detective stories I was not in any mood to criticise them or to think seriously about crime. The detective story was the story of the chase; it was also very much a story with a moral; in fact, it was the old Everyman Morality Tale, the hunting down of Evil and the triumph of Good. At that time, the time of the 1914 war, the doer of evil was not a hero; the enemy was wicked, the hero was good: it was as crude and simple as that. We had not then begun to wallow in psychology. I was, like everyone else who wrote books or read them, against the criminal and for the innocent victim (437).

One cannot approach a Sciascia novel with complacency and the expectation that all will be all right in the end, that Evil will be hunted down and Good will triumph, as Agatha Christie does. Therefore, the critical function of Italian detective fiction that Somigli identifies in the citation above, of holding up a mirror to the world, is not a quality that is inherent to the Golden Age of detective fiction. The Queen of Crime was “not in any mood” to think critically about the structure of the stories she wrote or the crimes themselves. On the other hand, Italian detective fiction attempts to write in a space that uses a lot of the basic tenets of the genre in order to be recognized as proper detective stories; however, it does not take anything for granted and questions not only the crimes, but the society in which these crimes are set. It does not assume that there are only two sides to the story: Good and Evil; or criminal and victim. The politicized nature of the contemporary Italian version of the mystery is what differentiates it from the traditional take on the classic Whodunit. Sciascia’s everyday reality was very different from Agatha Christie’s, but he could have chosen to write in that familiar upper-middle class type of puzzle-based mystery. Instead he took the formula as a point of reference, and concerned himself with detailing all the problems of making his characters and settings fit. Sciascia’s plots are
accounts of all the deviations from the detective fiction template effected in order to set such a
story in contemporary Sicily. As Raymond Chandler opines in his essay, “The Simple Art of
Murder”, the classic detective novel is rarely realistic,

If the mystery novel is at all realistic (which it very seldom is) it is
written in a certain spirit of detachment, otherwise nobody but a
psychopath would read it. The murder novel also has a depressing
way of minding its own business, solving its own problems and
answering its own questions. There is nothing left to discuss,
except whether it was well enough written to be good fiction.(2)

Even though crime is real enough, the classic detective story operates within a circumscribed
cast of characters and tends to leave out the real conditions of a large portion of society. Sherlock
Holmes’s clients, for instance, came from all classes, but the more interesting crimes are nearly
always committed by the well to do. The lower depths of the great cauldron of London are
present as atmospheric details in Dr. Watson’s accounts of the cases of the great detective, but
they are not disturbed or examined. This idea of not disturbing the established order of society is
precisely the problem of the classical detective story, in Sciascia’s opinion. The Sicilian
detective novel must overturn the some of the major conventions of the genre, in order for it to
function in a Sicilian setting. Some major presuppositions necessary to the functioning of the
traditional “Whodunnit” that are treated with skepticism in the Sciascian reworking of the genre
are, according to Joseph Farrell:

that justice and law [are] in perfect coherence with each other; that
society [finds] itself ranged alongside ‘its’ detective in its struggle
with crime, even when that detective [is], like Sherlock Holmes an
outsider of wayward personal practices; that the criminal [is] a
deviant, an agent of chaos whose misdeed proceeded from
individual deficiencies, and not from flaws in the functioning or
value system of the society itself …” (63).

These traditional ingredients of the classical detective story are difficult if not impossible to
incorporate into a novel set in a society that is not ordered, just, and harmonious. Rather than
propping up the fiction of an idealized society, Sciascia unmasks a society in which justice is an impossibility.

The critic John Douthwaite identifies a second type of detective story that he calls the “critical trend” or the Hard-Boiled detective story. The American hard-boiled school, itself a product of American literary realism “performs functions antithetical to the mainstream trend, varying from a critique of society, to a debunking of the classic detective genre, and to innovation in the novel (Kafka, Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Gadda).” (11-12) In the modern novel and the post-modern, there has been an increasing level of disconnection between the signifier and the signified, the idea that words no longer refer unproblematically to any real-life situation. Douthwaite’s essay is about Andrea Camilleri’s Montabano novels, and he does not necessarily assume that all hard-boiled novels will redress this imbalance between narrative and reality. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the tradition has changed since “classic” times; while it is certainly true to speak of Sciascia’s or Camilleri’s detective novels as exploding the old Agatha Christie template, it must be acknowledged that this second, newer type of detective fiction exists. The hard-boiled genre also has a long and influential history, that addresses the realities of the industrialized metropolis Many critics seem to side with Raymond Chander in his opinion that hard boiled detective fiction is more realistic since it lays aside the more genteel tropes of the drawing-room whodunnit, but “despite its often more vivid depiction of the contemporary city, the hard-boiled story at its core was no less a popular fantasy than ‘the old cut-and-dried type of detective story’ it sought to displace (McCann 43). As Sean McCann observes, the “urban landscape was a dreamworld, an exaggerated image of the metropolis as a battlefield of crime lords and corrupt officials that drew as much from the traditions pop imagery and urban folklore as it did from direct observation.” (44). The hard-boiled detective story has its
own myth of origin. This detective tradition does not derive from the Golden Age, English, or puzzle-type Who-Dunnits of the Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie school; rather it grows out of the myth of the American frontier. Once the frontiersmen, the old western hero, traveling westward to settle lands peopled by natives, imposing their own brand of justice and civilization, reached California, the limit of the continent, they collided with the world of Raymond Chandler, an environment at the periphery. When the pilgrim can go no further west to make his fortune, the culture of promise and good fortune deteriorates and festers, becoming the lawless cities in which crime rules. The hard-boiled detective, like the western hero is a liminal figure: he stands alone poised between the bureaucratic laws of an ontologically depraved society that he cannot fully support or represent, on the one side, and the outlaws and savages, on the other. Sciascia’s “open structure” detective story, which many Italian critics treat as completely innovative, may not be so by English or American standards. It mimics or represents the inconclusive nature of crime detection in Sicily, a hard-boiled world, and illustrates the perpetual lack of resolution to mafia crimes. Sciascia exposes the mafia and the political corruption that pervades Sicilian life. The mafia is what, for Sciascia, differentiates Sicilian crime from crimes committed in other lands. Unlike the frontier hero or the American private-eye, who “has at least the chance to seize his heroic mission and remake his world” (McCann 45), Sciascia’s detective-protagonists never succeed.

Even though the above is a direct quotation from the chapter entitled “The Hard-Boiled Novel” by Sean McCann in The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction, I would like to emphasize that the classic hard-boiled detective, despite having “at least the chance” does not often succeed either, or their successes are only partial. Sciascia’s detective novels have a lot in common with the hard-boiled novel as it brings the hors texte within the text. The administration
of justice often takes place after the novel has ended on an extradiegetic level, especially in novels of the Golden Age. Although the detectives discover the truth, which Bellodi, Laurana, and the brigadiere of Una storia semplice certainly do, the problems encountered in the attempt to administer justice through official channels often dispel the illusion of closure briefly achieved from the revelation of the truth.

The presence of the mafia and the absence of a neat resolution make many of the Sicilian author’s peers and critics hesitate to classify Sciascia as a true giallista, a writer of detective stories, preferring the more general category of “crime”. For instance, Italo Calvino refers to A ciascuno il suo as “il tuo giallo che non è un giallo” in a letter to Sciascia upon reading a manuscript of this novel in 1965, “il divertimento di vedere come il giallo viene smontato, anzi come viene dimostrata l’impossibilità del romanzo giallo nell’ambiente siciliano” (Calvino 538). This “impossibility of detective fiction in a Sicilian environment”, as Calvino describes it, refers to the impossibility of a happy denouement with the restoration of order and the solution of the crime at the end of a detective story by Sciascia. The presence of the Mafia makes it impossible for a properly realistic criminal investigation in Sicily to operate according to the formula of the conventional detective tale: the cathartic procedure of the plot from crime (preferably murder), to investigation, to identification of the culprit, to the administration of justice, and resulting in a restoration of trust in the social order, is not found in a Sciascia novel. As outlined by S.S. Van Dine in Rule 13 of his “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” (1928)\(^9\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Secret societies, camorras, mafias, et al., have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be}
\end{align*}
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\(^9\) Van Dine’s “Twenty Rules” are rather tongue-in-cheek and humourously intended. Rather than prescribing strict rules to be followed, they describe the main predilections, conventions and clichés typical of the Golden Age mystery. Van Dine’s rules are often compared to Knox’s “Ten Commandments”.
sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds (191).

While crime is certainly possible in a Sicilian setting, a genre based on the solution of a murder as though it were an intellectual puzzle may seem at first impossible in Sicilian society. Murder, the crime of choice in the classic detective novel, is investigated and solved by an exceptional problem-solver in the traditional manifestation of the genre. In Sciascia’s model of investigation, murder is also generally the crime that initiates the investigative process that exposes an underlying web of criminality that has wide social implications. The focus then shifts from the individual murder to the social body that covers it up. After the publication of *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) and Sciascia’s subsequent notoriety, it became very difficult, if not impossible, to write crime fiction set in Sicily without acknowledging, at least tangentially, the mafia. According to Giuseppe Petronio, after Sciascia, some mafia presence is *de rigueur* in any decent Sicilian crime novel. He explains:

perché la società siciliana, con le sue connessioni tra mafia e stato impediva la scoperta del colpevole o fermava al momento opportuno il poliziotto onesto che aveva capito, un tema che sarebbe diventato poi quasi canonico nella narrativa poliziesca italiana (Petronio 186-7)

Murder investigations involving the mafia, and local and national politics are often derailed and dismissed. Motives are misattributed to small-time crooks or jilted lovers, thus shielding the powerful behind-the-scenes operators. This type of impasse, owing to the corrupt nature of society has become the hallmark of the Sicilian crime novel. Sciascia’s detective stories all reaffirm the author’s feeling of pessimism about the impossibility of justice in Sicily (or Italy or in general). It is better, simpler, more efficient just to shoot the guilty party, as the honest young *brigadiere* of *Una storia semplice* discovers.
This final novella, ironically titled “a straightforward story”, and posthumously published, is the only instance in which a successful kind of wild justice is meted out. In this discussion of Sciascia’s plots and the way they interact and intersect with the basic detective story plot, I depart from tradition and discuss the author’s final detective story first. It is the most formulaic, but it demonstrates most clearly how the Sicilian crime scene cannot be rationalized by this Anglo-American tradition of storytelling. Most of Sciascia’s mysteries end up with the detective dead or ostracized by the authorities. This short novel is inspired by a real event – the theft of the Caravaggio Nativity with St. Francis and St. Lawrence from the Oratorio di San Lorenzo in Palermo in 1969. This story is the most simply plotted of any of Sciascia’s mysteries, beginning rather abruptly with the reporting of a crime by telephone by a certain Giorgio Roccella. The informant asks to speak to the questore, but his call is transferred to the commissario’s office. A brigadiere takes the call, as his superior officer is just getting ready to leave the office. The commissario convinces his subordinate that the caller, who is asking for an off-site meeting with a member of the police, should not be taken seriously. At the outset we have an instance of the bureaucratic shuffle and the passing off of responsibility. The two officers at a police station, a commissario and a brigadiere become the detectives of this story. The two officers had been working together in this investigation, but at cross-purposes, within a bigger struggle for ascendancy, typical of Italy, between the police and the carabinieri. The corruption of institutions is illustrated by the various encounters with the agents of the state and representatives of the church.

Even though the word mafia does not itself appear in Una storia semplice, its presence is obvious in the machinations of the investigation. All of Sciascia’s officially branded detective fiction refers to the mafia, or a metaphorical mafia-like organization, as in Il contesto and Todo
Modo. The fact that the mafia exists in Sicily is what makes the detective story in its pure form impossible in novels set in this environment. Joseph Farrell explains:

In Sicily, the problem for the detective is not merely the fact that the mafia exists and carries the threat that civilization could be plunged again into chaos, but also that history has fostered the conditions in which mafia crime can be covered by omertà (the code of silence), can be protected by various strata of ‘decent’ society and thus flourish in conditions of normality. The policeman is thus forced to do more than conduct an investigation into a specific crime; he has to investigate history, and even to stand outside history and offer judgment from a ‘metaphysical’ plain (62).

In a society where gangsters, art thieves, and drug dealers are not regarded as criminals and outlaws, it is difficult to interest a detective in a single homicide. It is impossible to root out the evildoers and restore the social order when individuals who commit crimes and deal in subversive and underhanded enterprises also hold public office, or are members of the clergy. It seems as though the Sicilian author labels his native island as a deviant culture, corrupt to its core. Sciascia’s mission is to reveal that the mafia has been operational in Sicily for centuries, and that its workings are so intertwined with the workings of church and state that it is impossible to separate the complex relationships between individuals. The reason that it is so difficult to identify and punish a particular mafioso or the entire organization is the fact that collusion with those holding power runs too deep. The entire society would descend into chaos for all powerful individuals, whether political leaders, captains of police, heads of institutions, chief executives of businesses, educators, clergymen, mafia bosses, are “all products of the same world and share a common cultural outlook” (Farrell 64). Society is ranged alongside the criminal and the persistent investigator is the one who disrupts the existing order in Sciascia’s world.
Una storia semplice is as straightforward as a Sciascian detective story can be, without losing all the trademarks of the author’s particular vision of society. The mafia present here is the big city version of the criminal organization, a professional syndicate of heroin dealers and art thieves. The investigation seems to move forward in a linear fashion, from the anonymous phone call, to the discovery of the body, to the hypotheses of suicide or murder, an investigation of the scene of the crime, and following up of some mysterious clues and interrogating witnesses, and finally, to the uncovering of the complicity of the commissario by his own subordinate officer the brigadiere. There seems to be no counter-investigation, as there is in Il giorno della civetta, no behind-the-scenes negotiations in the back rooms of power. The straightforwardness of this mystery is undermined in the end. The commissario is guilty of murdering Roccella and staging his suicide. Furthermore, this same commissario is involved in the drug dealing and art stealing that necessitated Roccella’s death in the first place. Even though we read the scene in which the commissario planned to shoot his brigadiere while pretending to clean his gun, but is, instead, shot himself by the same quick acting brigadiere, the authorities bury the evidence of the superior officer’s criminal complicity and conceal the true manner of his death by labeling it a tragic accident. Although the main culprit is dead, there is no sense of justice at the conclusion of this tale, for society has not been cleansed of the cancer threatening its well-being. The detective is not celebrated and the criminal is not unmasked either. To further shatter the harmony of the ending, the innocent suspect known only as the driver of a Volvo, or “Volvo man”, is released from the police station and passes Father Cricco, who is at that moment entering to bless the body of the commissario, and recognizes the priest as a person seen at the railway station at the time of the murders of the two station guards. The Volvo man decides to remain uninvolved, rather than to reenter the police station he had just left and become embroiled once again and to
an even greater degree in the mess of the justice system. The network of complicity appears even vaster with the final revelation that the church is involved in the criminal activities of the mafia. In this atmosphere of collusion and omertà, there is a sense at the end that there are many buried instances of illegality and criminality within the justice system that continue to operate. Since the priest remains at large and presumably still collaborates with the other unseen powers in his criminal cohort, the partial victory at the commissario’s death is annulled. The brigadiere’s discoveries and unveilings and removal of the guilty party is dismissed as an accident, and Sciascia’s sense of despair and pessimism at possibility of ever rooting out all the criminal elements from society dominates the ending of his final detective story.

**The Detective or the Owl that Hunts by Daylight**

As demonstrated by the above discussion of Una storia semplice, the classic Golden Age or hard-boiled crime-solving plot does not integrate well into a specifically Sicilian situation. The plot is linear, but the detective does not triumph at the end. Leonardo Sciascia’s ironic use of the classic narrative structure and plot devices of detective fiction has been influential and inspirational to subsequent Sicilian detective fiction writers. The exploration of the phenomenon of the mafia, the bringing to light all the deals executed in darkness, and the stating of inconvenient truths, remain unfinished business that contemporary Sicilian and Italian novelists have taken upon themselves to continue. However, there is no continuation of Sciascia’s characters. There are no subsequent investigations of Bellodi or the brigadiere, the two detectives that were not killed in the course of their investigations. Sciascia does not create for us a recurring character in whom we can trust, a man to negotiate and mediate the mean streets for us, who is not himself mean, to paraphrase Chandler from “The Simple Art of Murder”. There is
no Sciascian Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot to intercede for us. The author arouses a sense of great injustice, but communicates only frustration, when those agents of justice, the good policemen, find themselves with their hands tied, or worse, killed, or marginalized by the system in which they attempt to operate. Captain Bellodi of Il giorno della civetta, Sciascia’s first novel, admittedly, is not much of a protagonist.

From the outset, the reader sees Bellodi, a Captain of the Carabinieri, from the outside. We are not immediately privy to his thoughts, his point of view, or his motivations, but we see him through the eyes of others describing him. The author suspends and postpones Bellodi’s grand entrance. This feature of the narrative isolates the detective. The investigator is portrayed as the intruder into a set society, with firmly established conventions, codes of conduct, and morals, while the criminal is protected by that society and is interconnected with all the systems of power operating within it. The criminal is no longer the deviant individual that must be tracked down and punished, a significant inversion of one of the tenets of the classic detective story. The Captain is first described by the heterodiegetic narrator from the viewpoint of two suspects brought to the station for interrogation. “Il capitano era giovane, alto e di colorito chiaro; dalle prime parole che disse i soci della Santa Fara pensarono ‘continentale’ con sollievo e disprezzo insieme ...” (Civetta 17). The speech of the captain of the carabinieri, Bellodi, reveals him to the members of a local company of builders as a “continental”, someone outside of their culture and someone with whom they do not share a common world view. He is immediately dismissed as someone who is no threat and unlikely to get very far into the investigation, because in their opinion, “i continentali sono gentili ma non capiscono niente.” (Civetta 17) This character from the North is a convenient figure that enables the author to cast the novel as dialectic between this closed community in Sicily and the rest of Italy. The presence
of the captain from Parma necessitates a series of explanations as to the nature of the people
from the point of view of their mentality and culture to their use of language. His local
mareciallo can simultaneously enlighten his captain and the reader that the local word ingiuria
signifies a nickname; however, Bellodi’s Sicilian colleagues, the suspects and the entire
community believe that, in the end, the foreigner will be unable to decode the three homicides
and the internal logic of the society will remain opaque to him. The narrator describes the
mareciallo’s opinions about his captain’s course of investigation, enacting the dialectic between
cultures in conflict:

Il maresciallo non capiva perché il capitano stesse applicato a
studiare quelle scritture. “È come spremere una cote, non esce
niente” disse, alludendo ai fratelli Colasberna e soci, e a tutto il
paese, e alla Sicilia intera (22-23).

Through Bellodi’s interaction with his Sicilian counterparts, Sciascia affirms Sicily as an insular
space. This citation from the beginning of the novel still depicts Bellodi through the point of
view of another character, this time a colleague who doubts the detective’s ability to investigate.
The other police officer expresses his opinion that Bellodi is engaged in a fruitless act and has no
hope of success. The maresciallo conveys his own apathy through his description of Bellodi, for
instead of being galvanized into action to assist his captain through the tricky parts of gathering
facts and proofs in an unfamiliar setting, he rather passively accepts that the police have only a
minor part to play in this investigation and wonders why his superior officer has not understood
his role – to play by the unstated, but inherently understood, rules.

In this manner, the protagonist’s status as the great detective and paladin of justice is
compromised: his introduction is second-hand and oblique. The narrator does not describe him;
instead, the narrator presents Bellodi through the impressions of his colleagues and his
opponents. In his first appearance in the text, he is overheard on the telephone. Captain Bellodi’s
fellow officers view him with distrust as an interloper and an outsider, a view entirely consistent with the contempt with which the suspects brought to the station for questioning treat him. The suspects view the officer in charge as an ineffectual and non-threatening investigator, who will ask his questions, fill out his official forms, and consign the matter quietly to his files. This quality of the narrative is in direct contrast with the presentation of the classic detective. The narrator of the Golden Age detective story usually gives a flattering view of the protagonist. Dr. Watson has made a second career of documenting all of Sherlock Holmes’s cases and Captain Hastings gushes fawningly over Hercule Poirot. Miss Marple, on the other hand, is often depicted through the eyes of the other characters as a batty old spinster, but that is all part of her master plan, to pass unnoticed as a non-threatening presence until she delivers her final reckoning. After World War II, Italy’s taste in detective fiction had turned away from the British and towards the American practitioners of the genre, but even these hard-working gumshoes speak for themselves, or they have unnamed narrators who follow them around, informing the readers of the mental and emotional states of the sleuths themselves. They also acquire an existentialist dimension that Miss Marple, Poirot and Holmes don’t have. In *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo* there is a choral presence, that manifests itself in a running commentary, random murmurs, and rumourous mumblings directed at the detective protagonist. It is the voice of public opinion and the status quo. At the end of both novels, the impression is that “everyone” already knows who killed the murder victims, but no one understands why the detective insisted upon investigating the crimes. This trend begins with Captain Bellodi, who must then act alone as the agent of justice in a corrupt society. However, unlike the hard-boiled detective, the modern-day knight-in-shining-armour or slumming angel, society closes ranks against him. The detective in Sicily must investigate the crime at hand and simultaneously
interrogate the society, which has produced and condoned this constant level of criminal activity, collective guilt, and silence.

The innocent as well as the guilty all equally attempt to evade police scrutiny. Before the investigation gets properly underway the detective himself is discussed and assessed from outside sources. In a café in Rome, two unnamed, suspiciously well-informed Sicilians discuss his relative merits. They do not like the new Captain of *Carabinieri* of the town of C., nor did they like his predecessor in the job. It is clear that these anonymous characters are people of power as they express distaste for Bellodi’s dedication to justice and his association with the Left, and demonstrating a casual familiarity with the political notable who appointed Bellodi. In these opening scenes, Bellodi has been preemptively stripped of the reader’s confidence in him as an investigator by two speakers who are not proper characters in the novel and who, furthermore, are not even in Sicily. However much personal integrity or intellectual acumen he brings to the task, it is obvious that he is only a puppet. He has been given his station by the honourable *commendator* Zarcone, who could just as easily send him away if he comes to any uncomfortable conclusions. It is only after Bellodi’s relative station with respect to the powers-that-be and the society-at-large is clarified that his character is sketched out as one of the *dramatis personae* in this investigation. Joseph Farrell summarizes Sciascia’s presentation of Bellodi’s *curriculum vitae*:

The character of Bellodi has long constituted the principal problem in this book. Sciascia himself agreed with the critics that his detective was less the simulacrum of a credible being than the incarnation of an aspiration. Bellodi is the paladin of justice, quite ‘sans peur et sans reproche’ representing an idealized view of law, an aspiration towards a state cleansed of corruption a belief in a civil society purified of violence and injustice. Educated, fair-minded and honest, his choice of the police as profession was an ethical and political consequence of his Resistance activities, his membership of the partisans and opposition to Fascism. His
subsequent life and professional activity represented an application of the principles learned then, and a continuation of that anti-Fascist war by other means (Farrell 71).

Bellodi, in Farrell’s opinion, is a useful character. As a policeman, an idealist, and intellectual, he can perform the anthropologist’s task of investigating Sicilian society. As an outsider, Sciascia can use him to express all the issues and problems that differentiate Sicily from the rest of Italy. Bellodi comes to a realization towards the end of the novel, that the family is the Sicilian state. As a ‘continentale’, with his received second-hand knowledge of the culture coming into direct conflict with his experience of criminal investigation on site, amongst the locals, he is able to convey to the reader these significant cultural epiphanies:


[...] che la famiglia è l’unico istituto veramente vivo nella coscienza del siciliano: ma vivo più come drammatico nodo contrattuale, giuridico, che come aggregato naturale e sentimentale. La famiglia è lo Stato del siciliano. Lo Stato, quello che per noi è lo Stato, è fuori: entità di fatto realizzata dalla forza; e impone le tasse, il servizio militare, la guerra, il carabiniere. Dentro quell’istituto che è la famiglia, il siciliano valica il confine della propria naturale e tragica solitudine e si adatta in una sofistica contrattualità di rapporti alla convivenza. Sarebbe troppo chiedergli di valicare il confine tra la famiglia e lo Stato. Magari si infiammerà dell’idea dello Stato o salirà a dirigerne il governo: ma la forma precisa e definitive del suo diritto e del suo dovere sarà la famiglia, che consente più breve il passo verso la vittoriosa solitudine (101-102).

At this point in the novel, we are privy to the captain’s thoughts, as he expands on his position in the “noi – loro” dialectic, with the term “noi” referring to non-Sicilians. The idea of the State in the consciousness of people elsewhere is equivalent to the institution of the family in Sicily. To the people Bellodi encounters in the course of the investigation, collaboration with the police is dangerous, as Sicilian history teaches that the state and the upholders of law are the enemy.
Salvatore Colasberna, the victim in this novel, was a prosperous building contractor who refused to pay protection money to the mafia. Owing to the total control of the mafia over the public and the unwillingness to regard the criminal organization as a dangerous force that will rupture the harmony of civilian life, Bellodi is forced to rely on the many and plentiful anonymous letters and the testimony of a paid informer. The investigation of this murder resulted in two additional murders as well as that of the informer Calogero Dibella, otherwise known as Parrinieddu. The law according to Parrinieddu is more an instrument of power, self-interest and violence, rather than a fair system by which one conducts one’s social affairs. It is a system forcibly imposed from above operating on the principles of people in power who live elsewhere, a set of rules that are always in flux, as opposed to something that is immutable and equal for all. The informer goes to the police out of desire to temporarily benefit himself, rather than any faith in the justice system. When by mistake he reveals the name of one of the men involved in the murder, he knows that he too will be hunted down and killed. Don Mariano Arena, the mafia spokesman has a very similar philosophy with respect to the state and to the law. The difference is that the mafia boss is able to make connections with those in government. He is also bolstered by the system of a complicit society that will side with local power.

The climax of the novel is Bellodi’s interrogation of Don Mariano, which becomes a kind of duel of wits between two opposite but equal opponents. This is the only occasion in Sciascia’s fiction in which such a character as Don Mariano Arena, a mafia boss, appears. In subsequent novels, the mafia does not have such an eloquent and somewhat charismatic character as representative. Don Mariano and Captain Bellodi share a moment of reciprocal respect for one another, but there remains the great divide, for the mafioso “philosophy” is a complete reversal of the captain of the carabinieri’s guiding values. Joseph Farrell compares this encounter to the
final encounter between another fictional detective hero and his archenemy. He writes: “The mutual, but limited, esteem, is in part a literary convention which made Holmes and Moriarty see in each other the only opponent of equal mettle, but is also an expression of the isolation of the detective in a hostile society” (73). Don Mariano pays Bellodi the compliment of calling him a “man”, as in mafia terminology the “man of honour” is reserved for the highly trusted members. A “man”, according to Don Mariano, is also the highest of his five categories of humanity. The questioning of don Mariano runs a twisted course through all the events surrounding the murders and takes on a circular and abstract quality, touching upon the church, humanity, death, compassion and delusion. The mafia boss evades every accusation, and even though Bellodi’s questions depict a very plausible trail connecting all the deaths, he is unable to pin the guilt upon Mariano Arena. The little dance between the two opponents, while the high point of the novel that outlines the whole logic and motives behind the crimes, ends with a bow and the detective and master criminal go their separate ways. Farrell’s intertextual reference to Holmes and Moriarty serves to highlight the difference between the detective in Sicily and the traditional detective of crime fiction. The arch-nemesis of Bellodi is an organization, peopled by many figureheads and is supported by government parties and endured by the general public, not an individual, while Sciascia’s detective is a completely solitary figure. After some false alibis are provided for certain key suspects, Bellodi is removed from the investigation. He goes on a little vacation in Parma, his home city, where he mulls over the events of his recent investigation in a café with a friend. Meanwhile, in Rome, government officials tidy up the loose ends. Bellodi, recollecting in tranquility his recent clash with the criminal world and the illogical functioning of state and the public, waxes lyrical upon his experiences, calling Sicily “incredible”. Despite his futile clash with authority and his failure to bring anyone to justice, or to instill any confidence in
himself as an upholder of law to the residents of the Sicilian town in which he was stationed,

Bellodi has a contradictory response to Sicily. He professes to love it and promises to return. The lyrical quality of the captain’s recollection of Sicily puts some distance between Bellodi and the investigation. He describes his experiences with a fondness that he did not have while in the moment. He distances himself from the plot and moves to an almost metatextual narrative level. He becomes a representative of the author’s investigation and exposé of the functioning of the state and the complicity between the state and organized crime. It is in this withdrawn state, ruminating upon the recent events of the past that Bellodi delivers his prophecy, which itself has entered the canons of literature, that “la linea della palma” moves to the north, that all Italy and the world would become Sicily.

“A me è venuta una fantasia, leggendo sui giornali gli scandali di quel governo regionale: gli scienziati dicono che la linea della palma, cioè il clima che è propizio alla vegetazione della palma, viene su, verso il nord, di cinquecento metri, mi pare, ogni anno... La linea della palma.. Io invece dico: la linea del caffè ristretto, del caffè concentrato.. E sale come l’ago di mercurio di un termometro, questa linea della palma, del caffè forte, degli scandalì: su su per l’Italia, ed è già oltre Roma...” (125-6)

The protagonist presents some concluding remarks to his case, that are delivered as a parable and riddled with imagery. The author’s view that the mafia is not a local problem particular to Sicily, but a universal menace, is voiced by Captain Bellodi. The mafia became the metaphor for all power. It was the lens through which Sciascia viewed all of contemporary society.

The term “mafiologist” is one that particularly annoyed the author. Sciascia writes, “Non c’è nulla che mi infastidisca quanto l’essere considerato un esperto di mafia o, come oggi si usa dire, un ‘mafiologo’”. Sono semplicemente uno che è nato, è vissuto e vive in un paese della Sicilia occidentale e ha sempre cercato di capire la realtà che lo circonda, gli avvenimenti, le
persone” (III 797). The author’s reputation as an expert on the mafia results from the fact that other Sicilian writers, his predecessors and his contemporaries, in their depictions of these other aspects of lived experience in their native land, had for the most part omitted to examine the mafia in depth. In 1972, in an afterword to the novel, he specifically states that *Il giorno della civetta* is primarily but a “per esempio” of the definition of the mafia as parasite of society. He writes:

> Ma la mafia era, ed è, altra cosa: un “sistema” che in Sicilia contiene e muove gli interessi economici e di potere di una classe che approssimativamente possiamo dire borghese; e non sorge e si sviluppa nel “vuoto” dello Stato (cioè quando lo Stato, con le sue leggi e le sue funzioni, è debole o manca) ma “dentro” lo Stato. La mafia insomma altro non è che una borghesia parassitaria, una borghesia che non *imprende* ma soltanto *sfrutta* (Civetta 137).

He claims that he was the first Italian writer to give a non-apologetic representation of the mafia phenomenon (III 769). This statement is a criticism of some of the other Sicilian writers, who preceded him, of omitting to identify the mafia as the criminal organization that it is. According to Daragh O’Connell in his essay on the role Mafia and Antimafia in the work of Sicilian novelist Vincenzo Consolo, the canonical writers of Sicilian literature, such as Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), Luigi Capuana (1839-1915), Federico De Roberto (1861-1927), Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896 – 1957) largely ignored or de-emphasized the presence of mafia in Sicilian culture, focusing instead upon the conflict and contrast of Sicilian and northern Italian culture. Sciascia was the first and most important writer to fictionalize the Mafia, to engage in discourse with it. Sciascia accused these eminent Sicilian writers of literary *omertà*. Verga and Capuana were Sicilians and founding fathers of *verismo*, that school of realism in literature that devoted itself to the accurate depiction of the reality of misery, poverty, abject social conditions, and crime, following the nineteenth-century trend set
by Zola of telling the stories of the lowest strata of society with uncompromising realism. By failing to identify the mafia as the force that had kept Sicilians in subjection and poverty, these other writers were failing in their mission as exponents of verismo. Many Sicilians, according to Sciascia, deny the very existence of the mafia, as they do not wish to be tarred by the same brush, they view all commentary on the mafia as slander against all of Sicily. They avoid mention of the mafia, deny its existence, or if they are pressed to admit the reality of the mafia, assert that is not so bad and certainly no worse than the criminality in other places. Capuana’s essay *L’isola del sole* (1899) goes so far as to attack Franchetti and Sonnino, the authors of a famous report on Sicilian social conditions that exposes the hold of organized crime on Sicilian life. Up until the publication of *Il giorno della civetta*, no writer used their work to examine Sicilian history and the mafia in critical terms. Even historians, sociologists, and folklorists depict the mafia in flattering terms. In “Filologia”, a short story, Sciascia has one of his characters quote from Giuseppe Pitré who describes the mafioso simply as a misunderstood, valorous and courageous man and the mafia as “la coscienza del proprio essere, l’esagerato concetto della forza individuale, unica e sola arbitra di ogni contrasto, d’ogni urto d’interessi e d’idee [...]” (I 1325). Pitré, a respected nineteenth-century folklorist, and his naive attitude as an uncritical defender of all things Sicilian, is severely ridiculed in this ironic short story. Sciascia was the first writer who was openly hostile to the mafia and he sought to bring this attitude to the Sicilian general public.

*Il giorno della civetta* contains one scene in which the mafia is discussed with skepticism by two unnamed authority figures following Bellodi’s progress in the investigation. One of the interlocutors says “[...] è da un pezzo che debbo parlarvi di questo Bellodi. Questo qui, caro amico, è uno che vede mafia da ogni parte: uno di quei settentrionali con la testa piena di
pregiudizi, che appena scendono dalla nave-traghetto cominciano a verder mafia dovunque…”

(34). Although speaking ironically and in jest, these two figures manage to undermine Bellodi. They depict him as a Don Quixote figure tilting at windmills, fighting against an imaginary enemy. Thus, by evading “reality” and denying the existence of the mafia, the “legend” of the organization persists, as does its hold over civic life in Sicily.

“Mendolia... Ha detto cose da far rizzare i capelli: che la mafia esiste, che è una potente organizzazione, che controlla tutto: pecore, ortraggi, lavori pubblici e vasi greci... Questa dei vasi greci è impagabile: roba da cartolina del pubblico... Ma dico: perdio, un po’ di serietà... Voi ci credete alla mafia?”

“Ecco...”

“E voi?”

“Non ci credo.”

“Bravissimo. Noi due, siciliani, alla mafia non ci crediamo: questo, a voi che a quanto pare ci credete, dovrebbe dire qualcosa. Ma vi capisco: non siete siciliano, e i pregiudizi sono duri a morire. Col tempo vi convincerete che è tutta una montatura” (35).

The mafia, therefore, becomes an unfounded accusation leveled against Sicily, in the words of the speakers. It is a matter of consensus among Sicilians, whether those in power and in collusion with the organization, or those subjected to the brutality of living in the cities and villages dominated by the mafia, that the mafia is a myth. Any outsider who comes into this closed society with ideas of fighting against or uprooting the mafia is accused of prejudice and discrimination against Sicily. Bellodi, in this novel, is the only individual who openly confronts the problem of the mafia and the omertà that perpetuates its silent operations on all levels of society. His task becomes impossible because the mafia, in the opinions of those who live and work with it, does not exist. There exists a flourishing culture of denial about the mafia that Sciascia satirically portrays in this discussion. The notables in their backroom machinations seek to translate all information and proof of mafia complicity received by Bellodi into the realm of myth and fiction.
Sciascia’s Sicilian Substratum and Intertextuality

All of Sciascia’s detective novels make reference to political events and crimes in the real world. The inspiration behind *A ciascuno il suo* is identified in Giuseppe Traina's book on Leonardo Sciascia as the assassination of Cataldo Tandoj, a police superintendent in Agrigento in 1960. Sciascia's intention was to portray the failure of the political centre-left in Italy and the eternal fascism of the Italian State (Traina, 41-42). The novel illustrates a social environment completely under the control of the mafia: mafia collusion is evident in the police, the judicial system, politics and the church. The two murders by shotgun of completely innocent victims are typical crimes committed by the rural mafia of Sicily. Even more characteristic is the deadly silence of the entire community who intuits the truth of the situation without investigation. This silence on the part of the community blocks the course of justice and abets the criminals, perpetuates the complex system of secret pacts and indecipherable codes of behaviour, and renders the police investigation comically ineffectual. The conspiracy of silence has been mythologized as *omertà*, and through this secrecy everyone becomes an accessory to the crimes of the mafia. Sciascia's novel unveils the almost rhizome-like underground workings of the mafia in Sicily in the way the criminal society touches every aspect of social life and governs the behaviour of people from every social stratum. *A ciascuno il suo* is not, however, exclusively a novel about the mafia. Its basis in current political events and its concerns for injustice, the failure of Christian Democrat Party and the weakness of the political parties of the left portray an incisive reading of the historical situation in Italy after the Second World War. The specific assassinations and crimes of *A ciascuno il suo* are metaphoric of the general unease prevalent in politics in the 1960s and 1970s that extends beyond the scope of the novel.
In addition to informing the public of the political situation in Sicily, Sciascia's crime novels comment on and reject certain patterns found in historical and detective fiction. The normal course of detection is frustrated at every turn. His plots do not move from crime to investigation to solution and punishment; rather, every move by the investigator is countered by obstructions from mysterious powers, and the general public passively and silently connives at preserving the criminal status quo. *A ciascuno il suo* is perhaps the most successful detective story of Sciascia’s entire opus. It has a properly developed protagonist that guides the reader through the complex, many-layered investigation that exposes the culprits of the crime, and uncovers many uncomfortable truths of Sicilian village life. Professor Laurana, “a man with a closer resemblance to a Dr. Watson than a Sherlock Holmes” (Farrell 77), is a teacher of Italian and history, and a native of the village in which the events of the novel unfold. The detective, although limited and flawed, is an outsider by virtue of his nature and personality, rather than his birth, and performs the necessary function of being both a host and interpreter to the reader, and a participant in the events of the novel. The plot is complex and coherent. It is Sciascia’s mystery novel that delves most deeply into the mechanics of the Sicilian concept of family, and an incisive exposé of the morals and customs that reinforce the social codes of conduct of a deviant society, driven by fear and desire for respectability. It is also the most intertextual of the detective stories. The author holds up a mirror to his world, and offers a reflection of his Sicily, but also to literature and to the genre of detective fiction.

Laurana discovers who is responsible for the murders of the local pharmacist and doctor of his village, but is unable to bring the criminal to justice. The reader discovers that the whole village has known from the outset who was responsible for the murders and, as Laurana gets closer to the solution, the society as a whole unites to thwart his investigation. The reader is
frustrated, for the novel--approaching closure and a happy dénouement--suddenly shifts ground; social powers intervene, a substitute solution is imposed, and the truth is buried by the State. Anne Mullen in her essay on Sciascia's detective fiction describes the situation at the end of the novel: "The ironic twist in both Civetta and Ciascuno is that the serious crimes which were instigated with the mafia complicity of politicians at Rome are trivialised in varying degrees for having involved 'cose di corna' ('cuckoldry') as befits the Sicilian setting, thus exonerating the powerful perpetrators." (Mullen, 98). This final unfulfilled desire for justice is a classic Sciascian ending. The conclusion to his second novel of crime in Sicily is highly reminiscent of Il giorno della civetta, but the figure of the detective and the course of the investigation itself delves deeper into the mentality and morals of a society living under the silent rule of the mafia.

Part of Laurana’s failure is due to the fact that he is also an outsider. At first, one might presume that Laurana would have the advantage over a character such as Bellodi, being a native of the village. By nature of his work and personality, he is estranged from his native village. He embarks upon the investigation owing to his curiosity. He becomes a danger to himself, because he is drawn into a situation that he cannot fully fathom, as one who is detached from village social life, but he also lacks the authority and the security of the law. He sees the society through the filter of literature and not in its entirety.

Laurana non diceva parola. Tutto il gran discorrere che di solito si faceva al circolo sulle donne quasi sempre seguiva con divertimento. Una serata al circolo, per lui era come leggere un libro: di Pirandello o di Brancati, secondo i temi e gli umori della conversazione; ma più spesso di Brancati, per la verità (109).

Laurana is more of an observer to the evening social circle in his village. Through his protagonist’s detachment, Sciascia finds a vehicle for ironically referencing his Sicilian
predecessors. Here Vitaliano Brancati’s typical depiction of the all-male social circle is recreated in the village of the double-homicide. The “staid pillars of society”, as dubbed by Joseph Farrell (76), meet to talk about women, as a kind of sexual currency, an extension of the movement of power and property in the community. The conversation turns to the attributes of the young, beautiful, and newly available widow of Roscio. On his infrequent visits to the circle, Laurana does not participate in discussions. He observes with the attention of the historian the behaviour of his fellow men. The introverted academic accurately reports the nightly gossip, and simultaneously conveys the eternal and cyclical quality of social interaction in the Sicilian countryside. Through Professor Laurana’s discomfort in this scene, and the way he invokes Brancati and Pirandello who are themselves deprecating of the male Sicilian attitudes towards women, Sciascia records his dismay that these social standards are perpetuated. It is in these social groups in which men have been meeting nightly forever that one finds the breeding ground of the culture of passive acceptance and collusion with organized crime. The members of the circle all have positions of authority in the small village, but they all echo the same views, and in this way they resemble the villagers of the novels of Giovanni Verga, the Greek chorus that intones the wisdom of the ages, the “unchallenged, lapidary quasi-proverbial truths” (Farrell 77).

Our detective-protagonist, however, falls short of the status of hero. He bears greater resemblance to the inept, the “man without qualities”, the main character of Robert Musil’s modernist novel who is taking a vacation from his life, or Zeno Cosini. Laurana’s lack of any profound essence is his main character trait, along with being completely unaware of the codes of conduct that underlie all social interaction in his world. He lacks a certain Sicilianess, and his discoveries as he digs through the many layers of the deceit, prejudice, and tradition, in the
course of his investigation, provide a curious point of view of the outsider who is also an insider. He presents a portrait of a decaying *fin-de-siècle* world.

In an authorial intervention, Sciascia, in the form of the anonymous omniscient narrator, speaks of the methods of crime solving:

> Che un delitto si offra agli inquirenti come un quadro i cui elementi materiali e, per così dire, stilistici consentano, se sottilmemente reperiti e analizzati, sicura attribuzione, è corollario di tutti quei romanzi polizieschi cui buona parte dell’umanità si abbevera. Nella realtà le cose stanno però diversamente: e i coefficienti dell’impunità e dell’errore sono alti non perché (o non soltanto, o non sempre) è basso l’intelletto degli inquirenti ma perché gli elementi che un delitto offre sono di solito assolutamente insufficienti. Un delitto, diciamo, commesso o organizzato da gente che ha tutta la buona volontà di contribuire a tenere alto il coefficiente di impunità.

> Gli elementi che portano a risolvere i delitti che si presentano con carattere di mistero o di gratuità sono la *confidenza* diciamo professionale, la delazione anonima, il caso. E un po’, soltanto un po’, l’acutezza degli inquirenti (59-60).

A crime, as depicted in the other detective stories devoured by avid readers, is not like a painting. Only in his dreams does the “real world” function with such effectiveness as in detective fiction. The author disagrees with the idea that a crime encloses all the necessary clues for its solution, provided all stylistic and material elements are processed rationally by a detective of the right caliber. Sciacia dismisses the approach of most detective stories of studying the crime scene. He emphasizes that in reality, or at least in Sicily, much more depends upon the workings of society, the professional informer, the anonymous tip-off and chance.

Chance is the main reason that led Laurana into investigating the crime. He was a good friend of Dr. Roscio, but he happened to be in the circle when the anonymous letter containing the death threat to Manno, the pharmacist, was being discussed and displayed. He approaches his investigation of the double homicide, which runs parallel to the official investigation, conducted
by police, in a manner of the historian, literary critic and anthropologist. Unlike Captain Bellodi, Laurana is merely driven by curiosity, familiarity with the victims, and admiration of the womanly qualities of Luisa Roscio and not an overarching devotion to justice and ethical ideas, nor is he backed by the official power of the state. While the official investigation centres around the women that frequented the pharmacy and the possible extra-marital relationships in which the pharmacist Manno could have been engaged, Laurana, as a specialist in Italian and Latin literature is drawn to the words of the anonymous letter threatening the pharmacist. In particular, he catches sight of the word "unicuique" on the reverse side of the threatening letter as the pharmacist is showing the letter to a marshal of the carabinieri. The letter is composed of scraps cut out of newspaper and glued to a sheet of paper. Laurana, caught staring at the letter, attempts to excuse himself. He says:

"Stavo leggendo il foglio dall'altra parte" si scusò il professore. Il maresciallo abbassò la mano, ripiegò la lettera.
"Forse sarebbe bene che a questo modo la leggesse anche lei" disse, un po' urtato, il professore.
"Faremo quello che c'è da fare, non dubiti" disse il maresciallo con sussiego. E riprese a dettare (Ciascuno 17).

This conversation encapsulates the diverse paths taken by the parallel investigations: the unofficial and the official. The official investigation seems either comically ineffectual or complicit with the corrupt social powers. As the marshal of the carabinieri suggests, the official investigation limits itself to doing all that is necessary, but no more, following all of the correct procedures without too much emphasis on discovering the truth. The marshal hints that Laurana should mind his own business. Laurana persists in looking at the case from the other side. After the murders, Laurana at first approaches his investigation as a game that may result in nothing, but may also augment the official investigation. In keeping with his own advice of looking at the letter from the other side, Laurana traces the appearance of the unicuique headline to an
ecclesiastical newspaper and comes to the conclusion that the assassin has something to do with
the church. Sciascia’s investigators often become fixated with written evidence upon which they
try to focus all their powers of rational deduction. Laurana’s *unicuique* is like the “evidence”
found at the scene of the crime in *Una storia semplice*, a scrap of paper with the words, “Ho
trovato.” written on it. These scenes of reading generally do little to advance the investigation,
but demonstrate the detective’s level of awareness of the inner workings of society. In Sciascia’s
opinion, the acute mind of the investigator has only very little to do with the solution of the case.
The last time Laurana is seen alive, he is seen reading in the *Caffè Romeris* a book of Voltaire’s
love letters. The other men in the café observe that Voltaire is little appreciated in contemporary
Sicily. For Sciascia, reason, or Voltaire, is of little use in solving crimes. According to Joseph
Farrell, “Reason has, for Sciascia, a different function. Reason, or Voltaire – the two terms are
virtually interchangeable in Sciascia – is the basis of civic and ethical value systems, not the
*modus operandi* of the investigator” (78). Voltaire’s absence in Sicilian society reveals an
absence of rationalist standards. Elena Past refers to Sciascia’s protagonists as “enlightened
detectives” and Paolo Laurana is a prime example of the “introspective, disembodied, discursive
subjects that exist primarily as rational and not corporeal beings”. She explains “Sciascia
frequently uses the Enlightenment in ironic terms, pointing out the tragic differences between the
best of the eighteenth century and the worst of Sicily.” (Past 50) Laurana’s problem is that he is a
naïve reader and misreads the enlightenment. By choosing to read Voltaire’s *Lettere d’amo*,
rather than a treatise on justice, as he waits in vain for the widow Roscio, a woman whom he
imagines he is rescuing, but who has really betrayed him to her relatives who will make him
disappear, the narrator reveals that Laurana misses the sense of some of what he is reading even
though the letter seems doubly obscene in the Italian translation (*A ciascuno* 132). Past is of the
opinion that “As the central detective-figure, it is particularly significant that Laurana has chosen the wrong Enlightenment path to follow – individual sentiment, instead of universal philosophy – and that he furthermore does not even understand his Voltaire very well.” (75) Reason, grace, or impartial justice is often overcome by power in these intellectual puzzles set in Sciascia’s Sicily.

To continue our discussion of reading and misreading, Laurana's investigations, his rational analysis of *unicuique*, eventually reveal a web of conspiracies linking the state, the family, and the church. The parallel inquiry into these three institutions is conducted for the benefit of the reader to expose their inadequacy and diseased natures. Laurana claims that the intended victim was the local doctor, Roscio, and Manno the pharmacist was just collateral damage. Dr. Roscio's widow is the niece of the priest, Dean Rosello. Dr. Roscio's murder was orchestrated by the local Mafia at the instigation of the lawyer Rosello, a politician of the Christian Democrat party, the cousin and lover of Dr. Roscio's wife. Rosello set up an elaborate ruse to murder both the doctor and the pharmacist because Roscio had threatened to reveal Rosello's corrupt deals in politics and business. Rosello at first assists the schoolteacher in his investigation, but it later becomes apparent that Rosello's pretence at assistance is an effort to keep track of Laurana's progress. Once Rosello becomes aware of the teacher's discoveries, he sets a trap involving the widow of Dr. Roscio. The widow, with whom Laurana is a little enamoured, pretends to suspect her cousin and gets Laurana to agree to a meeting in the nearby capital city. From there Laurana is abducted and murdered. A year after Dr. Roscio's death, the Dean announces the engagement of his niece and nephew. At the engagement party the local gossip reveals that the whole village had already understood the details of the crimes almost implicitly, without benefit of any professional or amateur investigation.
Other aspects of the crime that the whole village had perfectly comprehended and accepted, but towards which Laurana remained obtuse, are the facts that the state has no real presence, and the church and the family are the real operators in this drama. The Archpriest Rosello is the head of the family and the institution of the church in the village. The self-appointed detective discusses the case with Roscio, the father of the murdered doctor. Professor Roscio tells Laurana of his opinion of his son’s involvement with his wife’s family, “Perciò non mi è piaciuto che fosse andato a infilarsi in una famiglia di cattolici, col suo matrimonio... Dico cattolici per modo di dire, mai conosciuto in vita mia, qui, un cattolico vero: e sto per compiere novantadue anni...” (69) Catholicism, according to the father of Roscio is an institution devoid of spirituality in Sicily, but the guardian of la roba. Farrell explains the cult of la roba in southern Italy:

In a peasant society unchanging from generation to generation, permeated by a sense of fatalism, la roba provided the basis of a system of belief a unit of self-esteem, a guarantee initially of survival and then of prestige; when associated with the mystical notion of family, it became the secular equivalent of immortality (Farrell 79).

Laurana’s mother knows how the values of the society will affect its workings. According to the investigator’s mother, the fact of the widow Roscio marrying her cousin Rosello would not be

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10 La roba is also the title of a novella by Giovanni Verga originally published in 1880, in which a farmer eventually succeeds in acquiring all the properties of a powerful baron. The main character’s attachment of material goods is extreme and all consuming. Verga uses the narrative technique of straniamento, which describes the character and events from a point of view outside of the main character. He mixes this technique with a point of view from a narrator within the world being represented, as well as the perspective of the popular narrator, one who shares the mentality and values of the people. There is sense of disorientation in Verga’s novella as we read about the main character from these separate points of view. Farrell does not cite Verga at this point, but there is a connection between these citations from Farrell and Sciascia and Verga’s novella.
forbidden by church law, because the need to reunite and perpetuate la roba is of more import than obedience to the laws of the church:

“Non è la stessa cosa: ora diventa quasi un’opera di carità...
Sposare una vedova con una bambina, riunificare la roba...”
“Opera di carità rimettere assieme la roba?”
“E come no? Chiede carità anche la roba”
‘Cristo, che religione’, pensò Laurana. (120-121).

The religion of material well being supersedes all other laws of state and church. The woman the doctor married, Luisa Roscio, “una donna da letto”, in the words of her father-in-law, is the owner of the family roba. She unites the concepts of family and things. She is dangerous and alluring, appearing as a pawn and the prize in the machinations of the Archpriest Rosello, and an object of lust to the men of the nightly social circle. Ultimately, she is the femme fatale who enthralls the detective, appeals to his manly urges to protect the weak, and leads him to his death. As a widow, marrying her cousin, she can advance and protect the goods accumulated by the family in a very Sicilian sense. It is this deviant notion of family upon which the mafia is built.

Giovanna Jackson's description of Sciascia's rejection of certain patterns found in the traditional detective novel can be applied to A ciascuno il suo. The criminal of the traditional detective novel is an individual in opposition to society, while the detective acts on behalf of society and is supported by society in his investigation and in bringing the criminal to justice:

A complete reversal of these terms is found in Sciascia's detective novels: here the criminal is backed up by society, or to be more precise, a large segment of the population forms the collective criminal body. The single lawbreaker is supported by a widespread net of agreements and secret pacts. In Sciascia's case the crime is never "personal" but, rather, it is designed to aid the realization of other non-personal crimes for the interest of a large corporation or a political party. The crime is only a link in a series of crimes. (Jackson, 11-12).
What Jackson says of Sciascia’s straining against the cage of the Golden Age rules of the genre is accurate, but one must also take into consideration how even the tradition has changed. Why then, do critics tend to compare this politically conscious Sicilian writer with Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle? It seems that Jackson’s observations do not speak to the hard-boiled school, and that comparisons with Hammett and Chandler are not invited into the Sicilian discourse of detective fiction. Why harp on the ways in which Sciascia departs from Golden Age set-up? Part of the reason, in my opinion, is that Sciascia invites comparison with this most restrictive and formulaic version of the detective story, just so he can subvert it. Paolo Laurana is a Golden Age hero in a hard-boiled world. The author runs interference between these two traditions playing them off and against each other. G.K. Chesterton’s concept of the detective story as the romance of the modern city from his 1902 essay does not hold true for the stories written in the period between the world wars. The settings in the archetypal English mystery are highly restricted, the lower classes play very minor roles, there are multiple suspects, but the criminal usually comes from the same social class of the victim. Sciascia too sets the scene in a small provincial town, in which social relationships in civic life, family life, and in the religious community have remained essentially unchanged for generations. Because of the immutability of village life, Laurana has cast himself as a rational detective, who will solve the case thorough his analysis of the clues at hand. Sicilian society, however genteel and Brancatian it may appear, does not subscribe to the golden age concept of “fair play”. As Elena Past explains, “many of Sciascia’s novels fruitfully use the convention of the detective genre to activate and then undermine readers’ expectations.” (Past 49) The detective fails in his attempt to shed light on the homicides, but his failure illuminates the historical and ideological differences that underlie all of Sciascia’s writing.
As Laurana eventually discovers, in direct contrast to the tenets of detective fiction, the criminal Rosello is strongly supported by the most powerful people in his community. He is an integral part of the political and religious fabric of the town. The entire town is involved in preventing Laurana from discovering and revealing the truth. Even Luisa Roscio, the widow, was involved in covering up the murderer’s tracks. Even Laurana's elderly mother with whom he lives is involved in the conspiracy of silence. The investigation is manipulated by women, although from the sidelines, as they are neither detectives nor murderers themselves. They exert either a tempting erotic allure, or an emotional maternal hold upon the protagonist that define the direction of the investigation. Yet Laurana completely ignores or is naively unaware of the strong hints given by many of the villagers, including his own mother, not to look too closely at the situation. His quest for truth sets him apart from the others in the community, for as one who grew up in Sicilian society he should have been aware of the unspoken rules of the game.

"Era un cretino" is the judgment of don Luigi, one of the eminent townspeople, because Laurana's candid honesty penetrated the public facade of the town. Sciascia describes him as "Un uomo onesto, meticoloso, triste; non molto intelligente, e anzi con momenti di positiva ottusità" (46). Sciascia's reference to Laurana's obtuseness is with respect to his inability to decipher the codes of conduct that govern his society. Sciascia continues his characterization of Laurana as a mild but resolute man: "Ma ormai si sapeva che la sua gentilezza nascondeva dura decisione, irremovibile giudizio; e che le raccomandazioni gli entravano da un orecchio per subito uscire dall'altro" (Sciascia, 45-46). He is judged as being an idiot, not because of any lack of culture or intelligence on his part, but because he was stupid enough to ignore the signals and hints given by everyone in his acquaintance. He endangered himself because he waned to uphold his rational ideals and devote himself to an investigation that probed too deeply into the omnipotent and
mysterious subterranean forces that move within that society. Laurana’s life and career was devoted to reading, but he lived too much in his books, and was completely unable to read the codes that govern his social milieu. He also falls for the oldest trick in the book – the disconsolate and beautiful widow. In this respect, Laurana does not resemble the foreigner Bellodi, a police captain and man from the north. Bellodi is a principled professional police officer with the aim to expose and root out the corrupt elements of Sicilian life. Laurana is Sicilian, and while his rejection of the corruption of his society and his obdurate pursuit of the truth mark him as an outsider, he has no mission to punish the murderers, but looks for advantage to himself. He imagines protecting the widow Roscio from evil forces who murdered her husband, and the hope of gaining her favours motivates him.

Sciascia describes Laurana's predicament: "la vicenda aveva un che di equivoco, di ambiguo… E nell'equivoco, nell'ambiguità moralmente e sensualmente si sentiva coinvolto" (112). The sensation of involuntary complicity on the part of Sciascia's amateur detective is another departure from the formula of detective fiction. Laurana, having discovered the complex web of deception and corruption that motivated the murders, and having received confirmation that the murderers were closely associated with political powers and the church, suddenly begins to doubt his own position within the network of social relationships of the town. Laurana has absolutely no intention of reporting his interpretation of the crime to the officials. His motives for maintaining silence can in part be attributed to a sense of caution and hope that he would escape the same end as the pharmacist and Dr. Roscio, and in part to distrust in the authorities. He reflects upon his motives for maintaining his silence:

… era una sorta di oscuro amor proprio che gli faceva decisamente respingere l'idea che per suo mezzo toccasse giusta punizione ai colpevoli. La sua era stata una curiosità umana, intellettuale, che non poteva né doveva confondersi con quella di coloro che la società, lo
The citation above illustrates that Laurana's motives for maintaining silence are connected to an obscure sense of guilt or even pride, tempered with the desire not to get involved with matters of the State. Antonio Pietropaoli in his essay "Il giallo contestuale di Leonardo Sciascia" comments on Laurana's sudden ambivalence in his pursuit of justice. The critic attributes Laurana's inaction at the very point where a happy denouement to the novel seems imminent to a sudden awareness of Laurana's own "Sicilian substratum". He writes: "In Laurana agisce dunque una specie di sostrato omertoso che lo lacera e dimidia tra una 'complicità' di fondo e la "curiosità intellettuale" di superficie. Di lui viene infatti sottolineato, anche se in materia erotica, che è 'della stessa razza'" (Pietropaoli, 233). In the above passage from the novel, Laurana appears very human and fallible. He is not the incorruptible moral centre of the traditional detective novel. Although he persists in his investigation out of intellectual curiosity, his uneasy solidarity with Rosello and his assassins prevents him from bringing order out of chaos and revealing the truths of the corrupt society.

Some of Sciascia's early novels contain Sicilian idioms and the jargon of the Mafiosi, but *A ciascuno il suo* is relatively free of dialectal expressions. In this and subsequent novels, Sciascia has begun to erase the specifically Sicilian aspect of his language and even his settings, in order to make his work more metaphoric and reflective of his sense of social responsibility. Giovanna Jackson identifies *Il giorno della civetta* as the work that best illustrates Sciascia's use of language where there is an "endless flow of Sicilian expression linked firmly to the action" (Jackson, 76). The police captain Bellodi is a man from the north, thus necessitating a series of
translations from Sicilian to Italian. In light of the fact that these translations occur between one Italian and another, the linguistic differences emphasize the dramatically diverse worldview of Sicilians with respect to other Italians.

Strangely enough, in *A ciascuno il suo*, Professor Laurana is in need of translation when speaking to other Sicilians. Carrera cites an article of the critics Riva and Parusa, “L’autore come antropologo” to illustrate that there is a real centre of hegemonic power in Italy and yet the myth of a unified national literature persists despite the fact that the particularly Italian “internal colonization” has a much longer history than external colonization. Riva and Parusa posit that when speaking of the cultural Other with respect to Italy one must consider, above all, the Other that lies within the Italian culture that is “dapprima negato poi ricercato e progressivamente valorizzato o mitizzato in risposta a una crisi di coscienza (borghese)” (Riva 243). In the case of Italy one must deal with a paradoxical colonialism in which the roles of the colonized and the colonizers are in constant flux. In *A ciascuno il suo* there is an even more ironic instance of translation. Laurana goes to Palermo to speak to professor Roscio, the elderly father of the murdered doctor. Professor Roscio says:

Certe cose, certi fatti, è meglio lasciarli nell'oscurità in cui stanno… Proverbio, regola: il morto è morto, diamo aiuto al vivo. Se lei dice questo proverbio a uno del Nord, gli fa immaginare la scena di un incidente in cui c'è un morto e c'è un ferito: ed è ragionevole lasciare lì il morto e preoccuparsi di salvare il ferito. Un siciliano vede invece il morto ammazzato e l'assassino: e il vivo da aiutare è appunto l'assassino. […] un morto è una ridicola anima del purgatorio, un piccolo verme dai tratti umani che saltella su mattoni roventi… Ma si capisce che quando il morto è del nostro sangue, bisogna far di tutto perché il vivo, cioè l'assassino, vada presto a raggiungerlo tra le fiamme del purgatorio… Io non sono siciliano fino a questo punto: non ho mai avuto inclinazione ad aiutare i vivi, cioè gli assassini, e ho sempre pensato che le carceri siano un più concreto purgatorio… Ma c'è qualcosa, nella fine di mio figlio, che mi fa pensare ai vivi, che mi dà una certa preoccupazione per i vivi… (Sciascia, 70-71).
Although professor Roscio is speaking Italian, he interprets the same proverb from two different points of view. The Sicilian interpretation of the proverb, "the dead man is dead, let's help the living" assumes that the living man is in fact the murderer of the dead man. The manner in which the Sicilian helps the living man is to either help him escape justice, or to kill him out of revenge. The professor goes on to stress that he is not Sicilian in that way. Although Sciascia is using an Italian expression, he demonstrates that the Sicilian point of view is completely different from the continental Italian point of view, and that not all Sicilians are consistent among themselves in their interpretations of the same expressions. This citation suggests that one really has to be part of that society and understand its codes in order to intuit the meaning of these expressions.

Proverbs are essentially collective beliefs of a community, which after long usage become the truth and perpetuate the conceptions of “order” and “reality” of the collective. Laurana’s failure to interpret the proverb in an appropriately Sicilian fashion, even though he is a schoolteacher and well versed in Latin and Italian literature, excludes him from the hierarchy of power.

Bellodi represents “un diverso modo di concepire la legge ed è portatore di ideali e valori scaturiti e affermatisi in un ambiente diverso” (Marras 108). He provides a counterpoint to the Sicilians who perceive “lo Stato come un’entità estranea, la cui autorità è legata soprattutto a rapporti di forza e a molteplici imposizioni quali ‘tasse, servizio militare, la guerra, e carabiniere’ (93)” (Marras 108). Bellodi presents an occasion for Sciascia to situate the reader within the text. The reader interprets the events of the novel from the point of view of the representative from the “continent”, the outsider to the plot taking place in Sicily. Passages in which the omniscient third-person narrator presents a conversation between two Mafiosi, one old and the other young, in which the old one explains to the young how Sicilian society functions, or how police officers and “cornuti” operate on a different moral and even logical system of ethics and politics from
“us” Sicilians, such passages allow Sciascia to fulfill the double function of author and anthropologist. Carrera is of the opinion that the post-colonial novel leaves the category of fiction and narrates simultaneously a cultural reality. “Il progetto di una letteratura come antropologia, o di un’antropologia come letteratura, richiede insomma la doppia presenza di un autoctono e di un viaggiatore, di un margine e di un centro, di un colonizzato e di un colonizzatore.” (Carrera 43) As we have seen in *Il giorno della civetta*, the reader, along with the character of Bellodi, views the Sicilian culture from the point of view of the Other and we investigate intercultural truth of another people. As Carrera demonstrates with the novels of Lampedusa and Satta, the internal post-colonial novel is addressed to a continental Italian reader. Even when a reader belongs to the same cultural group as the author, he temporarily accepts the terms of reading: to read his own culture from the perspective of the cultural other. Laurana, however, of *A ciascuno il suo* illustrates what Rivas and Parusa call “l’Altro che è in sé”. In the end, Laurana belongs to the same race as the assassins and is defeated by his own sudden ambivalence to the pursuit of justice, his “Sicilian substratum” in Pietropaoli’s words mentioned above. He is fundamentally incapable of acting as the incorruptible moral centre of the traditional detective novel. He views the law and the policemen and judges as belonging to a different species, as paid instruments to deliver the vengeance of the law upon the transgressors. At the point of potentially informing some authorities, Laurana finds in himself an obscure sense of pride and identifies strongly with his people, who have endured centuries of infamy, oppression and defeat at the hands of a remote state (*Ciascuno* 115-116).

This struggle between the Self and the Other, between the thinking subject and the object of thought or theorization, and even the idea of conceiving oneself in terms of an Other that are present in *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo* situate Sciascia’s work in post-colonial
discourse. Edward Said applies the notion of discourse, as a set of conventionally accepted references, a *topos* to the representation of a (foreign) culture.

The central point in all this is, however, as Vico taught us, that human history is made by human beings. Since the struggle for control over territory is part of that history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. [...] My way of doing this has been to show that the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another, different and competing *alter ego*. The construction of identity—for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction in my opinion—involves the construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us”. Each age and society re-creates its “Others.” Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of “other” is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (Said 331-2)

In Said’s conception of Orientalist discourse, even the dominant culture’s sense of self is conceived in relation to an Other. In applying this strategy of assigning positive and negative values in binary oppositions to Sciascia’s work, we reveal the dialectics of the internal post-colonial novel. The moment in which Bellodi enters the novel and is thrown into the murder investigation, he is forced to negotiate the apparent contradiction of the silence of the suspects he interviews and a mass of anonymous letters detailing many and various theories of the townspeople. As the captain deciphers the workings of the society, Sciascia explains what is Sicily and who are the Sicilians. In his role as author anthropologist he defines his island and his people in terms of a perceived opposite, the continental Italian.

Mark Chu suggests that Sciascia participates in Orientalist discourse in his portrayal of his own culture as Other. Sicilians in the Italian literary tradition have long been the object of study of non-Sicilians, as well as the object of self-study. The internal post-colonial author
opposes the central power and asks what it means to be a colony or a peripheral region, while remaining at the same time a part of the nation.

One way in which Sicilians’ participation in the discourse manifests itself is in the production of texts which purport to represent Sicilian reality. There is however, a tendency occasionally to forget that Sciascia, like other writers, Sicilian and non-Sicilian, interprets the reality of Sicily, and that his understanding is mediated by methodological prejudices—reason and representation—and by the textual tradition of which he is part (Chu 70).

Sciascia is considered to be an authority on all things Sicilian and even other writers, Vincenzo Consolo, for example, do not challenge his role as the founder of Sicilian detective literature. Sciascia’s literary texts have taken on such a status of truth and authority that one forgets that his novels, indeed, belong to the dimension of literature and to fiction, rather than to that of anthropology.

Carrera explains that as Lampedusa takes on the role of novelist-anthropologist through the desire of the character of don Fabrizio to explain the Sicilian way of life to the continental character, Chevalley, the novel leaves the domain of literature and seeks to communicate ideas and conditions. He describes the reality of Sicilian subalternity with respect to the process of national unification. Similarly, Sciascia offers an explanation to the readers of his novels, but Chu’s issue is the fact that Sciascia’s explanations are received uncritically, and that the reader seems to forget that the Sicilian writer has interpreted his own territory and that he has constructed it in terms of his own literary prejudices. Sciascia constructs through his mystery novels a myth of Sicily that bears some resemblance to what Carrera calls the collective “romanzo familiare nevrotico” that attempts to rewrite the story of a marginalized society and to present it from within the culture of the colonized people, rather than as a peripheral and inferior
culture. The *romanzo familiare nevrotico* is the means by which Sicilians pride themselves on their fantastic and illogical past, and is a reconstruction of regional identity.

All three novels, *Il giorno della civetta*, *A ciascuno il suo*, and *Una storia semplice* end with the uncompromising pessimism of the author. The detective, the sole enlightened individual in a diseased society run on connivance and passive silence, is either dead, alienated, or just ignored. Sciascia exposes all the defensive and misleading myths of the mafia perpetuated by previous Sicilian writers writing about their native island. He also explodes the safe rational functioning of the detective story formula in his cleverly dysfunctional detective stories. The uniqueness of Sciascia’s detective story formula, according to Calvino, is the idea of the traditional *giallo* dismantled and the demonstration of the “impossibility” of detective fiction in a Sicilian setting. It seems that by withholding resolution, Sciascia is acting subversively. Nowadays, the unresolved and unsuccessful case is more commonplace and it is important to contextualize the failures of Sciascia’s idealistic detectives to appreciate the Sicilian author’s innovation. As a self-conscious point of contrast, towards the end of *Todo Modo*, the police investigator makes reference to Agatha Christie’s *Ten Little Indians* and laments that if things keep going as they have been, everyone involved would be murdered and they would have to resurrect one of the suspects to find the murderer. There is, however, no neat and miraculous conclusion to *Todo Modo* or any novel by this author, only the defeat of the ideals of proper detective stories. Rather than following another detective fiction tradition, such as the hard boiled or the thriller, Sciascia relishes the constraints of an almost Golden Age manifestation of the formula, so that he can practice generic subversion and struggle against the mechanisms of power, both political and literary. He highlights the contrasts between the ideal detective, the
completely satisfactory crime-fighter, and the network of crime, corruption, and oppressive societal norms that defeat him.
Chapter Two: Andrea Camilleri’s Montalbano Series

Andrea Camilleri, the second detective fiction writer selected for this thesis, is influenced by Sciascia and takes up Sciascia’s challenge to use this popular form as a means to investigate the social problems of Sicily. His detective-protagonist, the police Commissario Salvo Montalbano, had his debut in Italian crime fiction with immediate popular success in La forma dell’acqua in 1994, five years after the publication of Leonardo Sciascia’s final novel, Una storia semplice. Despite being one of the great successes in Italian publishing, the detective story represents something more to Camilleri than a mere commercial product, created for public enjoyment. Although this writer from Porto Empedocle is roughly the same age as Sciascia, he came to novel writing late in life, after a career as a director and screenwriter in stage, film and television. His first novel Il corso delle cose was published in 1978 and he only properly embarked as a practitioner of the serialized Sicilian detective novel fourteen years later. He shares the same mandate as his predecessor: to draw attention to Sicily with a focus on the social issues that trouble the island. Indeed, Camilleri only took up the torch after Leonardo Sciascia passed it on. In the “Afterword” to La prima indagine di Montalbano, Camilleri mentions that the plots in that collection of stories do not rely upon murder, but of his other novels in the Montalbano series, in which dead bodies abound, he notes, “Del resto, i morti ammazzati, nelle mie storie, sono sempre stati un pretesto” (341). Camilleri, like Sciascia before him, uses the well-established detective story formula as a pretext to discourse on the social climate in Sicily and to distinguish it from other places.
Sciascia has defined the literary landscape of contemporary Sicily. Authors such as Andrea Camilleri choose to inhabit Sciascia’s world or to create fictional locales contiguous and tangential to Sciascia’s context. Camilleri’s fictional town of Vigàta is still located in Sciascia’s Sicily. For this reason, the author is the successor to Sciascia. To follow this discussion from Sciascia to Camilleri to Piazzese is to construct a loose chronology and lineage of detective fiction in Sicily. Camilleri describes a conversation with Sciascia about Sicilian writers:


Sciascia’s rapport with all Sicilian public figures is proud and possessive. He views other countries and cultures as points of comparison and contrast with Sicily. Sciascia has been accused of having an obsession with Sicily, his tunnel vision approaches “monomania, causing him at times to view other countries and cultures not for their own sake but for the insights they offered into Sicilian life.” One of his lifelong projects was to “ritrovare un tessuto di legami sotteranei tra Francia e Sicilia, queste due entità così distanti” according to the critic Jacqueline Risset (55). By France, Sciascia refers to the Enlightenment and eighteenth-century thinkers and philosophies. As Elena Past states, “for Sciascia, Sicily and the Enlightenment went hand in hand as parallel obsessions, an historical period and a geographical context that his writing repeatedly juxtposed” (58) Some of Sciascia’s views on the Enlightenment period that focuses on issues of justice, power and the law and how these historical concerns intersect with his desire to delve deeper into how these issues manifest themselves in Sicily are more explicitly dealt with in his historical novel Il Consiglio d’Egitto (1963) and Candido ovvero un sogno fatto in Sicilia (1977), than in his crime fiction. Camilleri is similarly focussed on Sicily. Like his
predecessor, Camilleri has more than one series or type of novels: the Montalbano novels and the historical novels, set in nineteenth century Vigata, as well as his Trilogia delle metamorfosi and other publications. The Montalbano novels share with Sciascia’s detective novels the thematic interest in the bureaucratic abuses of power, political corruption and the workings of the justice system that so pervade Leonardo Sciascia’s novels. Camilleri can be regarded as equally obsessed with Sicily as Sciascia was. He is inspired by accounts of real criminal events, current political events, and historical documents, both real and invented, looking for ways in which he can tell these stories from the Sicilian perspective. According to Pezzotti, “Camilleri claims a literary value and the role of social watch-dog for crime fiction” (Pezzotti 2014: 136).

**Introducing Montalbano**

Camilleri differs greatly from Sciascia by his use of a serial detective. It is only with the character of Salvo Montalbano that Sicily can answer the demand for a home-grown Sherlock Holmes figure. With Montalbano, Camilleri creates an indubitably popular and repeatable format. The cases and adventures of this police inspector become stories about a detective and histories of a place rather than plot driven puzzles. This particular detective-protagonist becomes the principal agent of coherence of the series. Montabano is what “brands” this particular commodity that is Sicilian detective fiction, replete with sun, sea, history, the mafia, moral traditions and customs dating back to the time of the Greeks, and, of course, local cuisine. This feature of having the same detective in a series of many novels aligns him with traditional crime fiction in which the detective is not only the constant presence linking each episode to the whole, but he is also the only point of coherence and constancy in a chaotic world. The detective is the moral centre of the fictional universe, in Camilleri as he is in Chandler, Hammett, Doyle,
Christie and Simenon. The crimes investigated by Montalbano all reach some kind of resolution, but not necessarily an unproblematic conclusion in which justice is served, and Montalbano becomes like the good reader that decodes every puzzle, whether by means of police work, intuition, or his ability to understand the human, or Sicilian, psyche, unlike Laurana of Sciascia’s *A ciascuno il suo*.

Camilleri consciously inserts himself into the social discourse of the Sicilian “subject-object” with the introduction of his detective that would become the protagonist of a series of popular novels. In general terms, a subject is an observer and an object is a thing observed. A particular difference in this relationship is found in Sciascia’s work: the subject and the object become a single entity. Sciascia turns his observations upon his own people, territory and history. Through Salvo Montalbano, Camilleri also contributes to the production of texts that purport to investigate, explain and interpret Sicilian reality in the manner of his predecessor, Leonardo Sciascia. Mark Chu’s idea of the Sicilian subject-object, already cited in the chapter on Sciascia is applicable to the manner in which this concept works in the Montalbano novels. Chu compares the situation of the Sicilian writer with reference to Said’s description of Orientalist discourse. The Orient is a system of knowledge, less a place than a *topos*. Through this system of knowledge about another “foreign” culture, “we” Europeans, as thinking and reasoning subjects define and distinguish ourselves, through the establishment of binary oppositions from “those” Orientals, the object of our study and the focus of our theories. The Sicilian subject-object refers to the many texts, purporting to represent Sicilian reality, authored by Sicilians themselves; thus Sicilians, as an object of study, are the focus of research of Sicilian reasoning subjects. In the case of Sicily, there is no longer the distinction of the “reasoning subject from the implicitly non-reasoning object of reasoning” (Chu 79). In the many texts of Sicilian authors that have been
accepted into the Italian literary canon, Sicily and Sicilians are presented as foreign, unknowable, savage, and different from other places and people in Italy. Some observations of F.R. Jameson from his essay “On Raymond Chandler” (1970) are relevant to our discussion of the Sicilian subject-object:

European literature is metaphysical or formalistic, because it takes the nature of the society, of the nation, for granted and works out beyond it. American literature never seems to get beyond the definition of its starting point: any picture of America is bound to be wrapped up in a question and a presupposition about the nature of American reality. European literature can choose its subject matter and the width of its lens; American literature feels obliged to put everything in, knowing that exclusion is also part of the process of definition, and that it can be called to account as much for what it doesn’t say for what it does. (126)

Sicilian authors face the same issues as the American authors considered by Jameson. They are part of “European literature”, but their major works and major authors reflect a similar desire to redefine its starting point. Before deciding what the story is about, there is a need to explain or introduce who they are and where they come from.

Sicily in the hands of a non-Sicilian writing subject is reduced to being a place observed, an object of study. Camilleri tackles this problem prior to introducing his protagonist, Salvo Montalbano. As early as the first chapter of *La forma dell’acqua*, a recent attempt at resolving the problem of public order in the south on behalf of Piedmontese and Friulani officials resulting in the increased traffic in prostitution in Vigàta is used as background information to introduce the first crime scene:

quindi i due avevano risolto d’inviare in Sicilia alcuni reparti militari a scopo di “controllo del territorio”, in modo d’alleggerire carabinieri, poliziotti, servizi d’informazione, nuclei speciali operativi, guardie di Finanza, della stradale, della ferroviaria, della portuale, membri della Superprocura, gruppi antimafia, antiterrorismo, antidroga, antirapina, antisequestro e altri per brevità omessi, in ben altre faccende affaccendati. In seguito a
questa bella pensata dei due eminenti statisti, figli di mamma piemontesi, imberbi friulani di leva che fino al giorno avanti si erano arricreati a respirare l’aria fresca a pungente delle loro montagne, si erano venuti a trovare di colpo ad ansimare penosamente, ad arrisascare nei loro provvisori alloggi, in paesi che stavano sì e no a un metro d’altezza sul livello del mare, tra gente che parlava un dialetto incomprensibile, fatto più di silenzi che di parole, d’indecifrabili movimenti delle sopracciglia, d’impercettibili increspature delle rughe. (Forma dell’acqua 10-11).

The well-established antipathy towards functionaries of state from Northern Italy is introduced at the outset of the Montalbano series, setting the scene for an exploration of the oppositions outlined in the social discourse on Sicily. Camilleri’s awareness of the islanders’ subaltern position within the context of Italian culture and politics is placed at the centre of the first chapter, prior to the appearance of the character of the police officer Salvo Montalbano, demonstrating the Sicilian author’s willingness to engage in and contest this issue. This move to postpone our hero’s entrance attests to the necessity to define or redefine the author’s starting point. Although he shares the same language and geography of other Italian authors, Camilleri chooses to highlight some major differences, and perhaps confront some preconceptions of the Italian reader. Irony and cheerful light-heartedness seem to characterize the narrator’s analysis of this attempted solution on the part of the unified Italian state to “control the territory”. The lightness in the tone of the narration reflects the lightness with which the central government dealt only superficially with the matter in Sicily, by sending very inexperienced representatives. Historically, the increased presence of continentals in official positions in Sicily following the parliamentary inquiry on Sicily in 1875 quickly reveal the state’s ignorance of the Sicilian situation, its incapacity to act constructively and its indifference to the future of the region. The narrator refers to a more recent decision on the part of a minister to send more officials from continental Italy as a means of resolving “i problemi dell’ordine pubblico nel sud” (10). The
narrator ridicules these interventions or “solutions” that come from outside of the region by describing the minister’s colleague in charge of dispatching the military forces as resembling an illustration of Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi’s fictional character known for having a long nose that becomes longer while telling a lie. While the exaggerated and extensive list of law enforcement and civic organizations to be “alleviated” by the extra recruits seems to demonstrate thoroughness and seriousness in the handling of the problem, this hyperbole turns to comedy by the end of the list with the words “e altri per brevità omessi”, a stock phrase that parodies bureaucratic language, in addition to emphasizing the fact that this list is far from brief. The playfulness of “in ben altre faccende affeccendati”\(^{11}\), the last words of which echo each other combined with the alliteration (antimafia, antiterrorismo, antidroga, antirapina, antisequestro) in the organizational names reduce the efforts of the eminent statesmen to the burlesque or the mock-heroic. By prefacing this ironic account of the state’s mission in Sicilian territory with the mere mention of Pinocchio, the narrator sets up the terms in which these aims should be read. Relentlessly, the narrator extends his commentary to the type of person sent to represent the cultural centre. The military units sent to Sicily are, indeed, composed of Friulian and Piedmontese soldiers from the mountainous northern regions; however, the depiction of these new recruits as mama’s boys still too young to shave who are fulfilling their obligatory military service disqualifies them as model representatives of anything. In contrast to the impressive list of agencies that these forces from the North aim to reform, we find a list of the relic of their stay: discarded papers, plastic bags, beer and pop cans, dried excrement and a sea of condoms. It is significant and ironic that this description of La mànnara, Gegè Gullotta’s domain, prefaces this parenthesis on an attempt to resolve public order issues in the South. Aside from the irony that

\(^{11}\) This is a quote from the poem *Sant’Ambrogio* by Giuseppe Giusti v. 15, a poet and satirist from the *Risorgimento* period. This poem is directed towards a functionary of the police.
the "clean-up" delegation from the North creates, in reality, more garbage, the juxtaposition of La Mànnara and the details of the operation emphasize the gap between perception and reality. These soldiers are presented as young, inexperienced and literally out of their element. The people who command them are either indifferent or ignorant. The reference to the fact that these interlopers who could potentially resolve the Southern Question speak a different language is the final irony of this citation. The envoys are unsuited and unable to mediate between the government they represent and the natives. The Sicilian dialect is described as incomprehensible, and this determination is obviously an attempt on the narrator’s part to present the speech of his own territory from an external perspective, to address a lack of understanding between Sicilians and other Italians, not just on the level of language and words, but of values. This cognitive gap is compounded by the whole system of communication, comprising of silences, subtle movements of the facial features and the famous "taliata siciliana"\(^\text{12}\). The humour of this section derives from the incongruity between the supposed magnitude of the assigned task and the unqualified personnel sent to fulfill it. This lack of understanding indicates a more basic impossibility of comprehension or even the impossibility to communicate at least for these particular chosen delegates. It is significant that Camilleri, describing his first crime scene in Vigàta, the fictional locale of all the Montalbano series, makes reference to an outsider’s viewpoint. The problem of maintaining control in the South and its attempted solution is portrayed in highly ironic terms that undermine the validity of this continental or Northern viewpoint, but the fact that Camilleri invokes it to describe and introduce his fictional territory embedded on the real island of Sicily indicates an awareness of the fact that many of his early

\(^{12}\) In Italian "guardata" or "occhiata" and although there are many kinds of communicative looks and glances used by the Sicilian characters in the Montalbano books, Camilleri describes these meaningful looks that speak volumes as if they were a characteristically Sicilian method of silent communication that takes place in an instant.
readers did not instinctively understand the Sicilian point of view. He presents Sicily in terms of the prejudices and stereotypes that may have preceded his own narration of his land. He presents Sicily in contrast to other places and other people. He describes his town and his people in terms of what they are not, by arguing against these preconceptions.

The gamut of modern crime featured in the Montalbano novels, from murder to supermarket robberies to gun running to drugs and illegal organ transplants, reveals the underlying criminality of terrorism, the secret services, international politics, corrupt local politicians and organized crime, and is no different from much of contemporary crime fiction. However, through his critical commentary on Sicilian society and people in the course of the investigation of crimes, seeks to present his culture and his worldview in contrast to that of the Italian north. It is useful to keep in mind, at this point, that this northerner is also a projection, an idea, that Camilleri plays with to compare and contrast the Sicilian mentality and to give textual space to the description of regionally-specific customs. The citation above highlights the differences between the expectations of the northerners, all representing the state, and expecting to encounter and provide aid to the police services in addition to fulfilling the myriad of official functions also listed above, in contrast to the reality of daily existence in Sicily. In this manner, the opening of the Montalbano detective series briefly sets the scene through this encounter with the Sicilian landscape, its people, its social problems and its political context prior to introducing any of the main characters.

The first mention of Salvo Montalbano, the character that would dominate Camilleri’s series of detective novels, presents the protagonist in the context of this self-other dialectic:

Si avviarono verso il paese, diretti al commissariato. Di andare dai carabinieri manco gli era passato per l’anticamera del cervello, li comandava un tenente milanese. Il commissario invece era di
Catania, di nome faceva Salvo Montalbano, e quando voleva capire una cosa, la capiva. (*La forma dell’acqua* 17)

The fact that Montalbano is from Catania is essential to the characters that report the crime to the official sources. His capacity for understanding, alluded to above, does not have much to do with his superior mental capacities, rather to the fact that he is Sicilian, an insider with roots in the society he investigates, in contrast to the “tenente milanese”. He is a member of the “club” who is able to decipher all the secret codes of speech and social conduct. It is significant that Montalbano is an official investigator rather than a dilettante, because of the longstanding and difficult history between the official and unofficial in the Sicilian manifestation of this genre.

Camilleri’s figure of the inspector seems to be created in response to and in an attempt to address the problems of Sciascia’s fictional investigators. Although Camilleri’s fiction is quite different from Sciascia’s, Camilleri had admitted using Sciascia as a reference. Even after Sciascia’s death, Camilleri turns to Sciascia’s works during the writing process, often randomly selecting and re-reading one of Sciascia’s books, for inspiration, confirmation or simply to recharge his “batteries” (Lodato 249). Because of his familiarity with Sciascia’s work and the importance of Sciascia in Sicilian detective fiction, it is reasonable that Montalbano would have been created with an awareness of his Sciascian predecessors.

The critic Jennifer Holt describes the problem of Bellodi of *Il giorno della civetta*, an officer of the carabinieri: “costituisce una anomala figura di autorità per la realtà siciliana, non solo per la sua competenza, ma anche perché ben intenzionato nella ricerca della giustizia” (49). Bellodi’s investigations have only a limited success and he is thwarted in his efforts to bring the guilty parties to justice. As we have seen, his status as an outsider, “un contintentale”, does not inspire confidence in the potential witnesses, who either withdraw their reluctant testimonies or merely disappear. The community as a whole closes itself against outside prying and even his
colleagues, superiors and political representatives in Sicily and Rome treat his attempts with diffidence, while, not exactly, refusing to cooperate. Sciascia’s amateur detective, Laurana, the schoolteacher and native of the community of *A ciascuno il suo* proves to be equally ineffectual at exposing and punishing the criminal.

Camilleri attempts to solve the Bellodi or Laurana problem: the lawyer manqué (Bellodi had studied law before joining the police), the idealists, God’s policemen, and the ineffectual but Enlightened investigators of Sciascia’s detective fiction. Montalbano’s Sicilian roots are integral to his success as an investigator. Camilleri invests his character, a police officer, with the proper authority to effect justice and at the same time ensures that he will not be defeated by “la realtà siciliana”. Great emphasis is placed upon the fact that Salvo Montalbano is someone who *understands things*, as opposed to other representatives of the state. This positioning of Montalbano ensures that the police officer cannot be dismissed as one of “them”, an outsider unfamiliar with local ways, nor can his superiors discount his local knowledge. According to Douthwaite, Montalbano’s status as a regular policeman of the local Vigàta police force and an insider reflecting the outlook of his society departs from the prototype of both classic and hardboiled detective fiction: an amateur or a “special” investigator called in from the central body. Douthwaite writes: “And, crucially, he is an actor in that society, in a social sense, reflecting the values of that society as a human being. Hence the views he expresses of society are of paramount importance for the social message these novels convey. (15)” The critic continues to contrast Montalbano with Sherlock Holmes, the classic figure of the detective, who is “a stereotype, a god”, rather than an individual. In Douthwaite’s terms, Montalbano differs from the famous serial detective, who symbolizes the values and ideology of bourgeois society and defends it from the corrupting forces of disorder. However, Douthwaite does not mention...
that Holmes grew out of English society and the English literary climate of the late nineteenth century, a period in which England was still in its colonial phase. English literature of that period, even in its pulp forms, did not seek “explain” itself to anyone; rather it was an extension of the nation’s domination over other territories and peoples. Holmes is a product of a dominant civilization that, according to Carrera, recounted itself to itself by creating gods and myths, whereas Montalbano demonstrates acute awareness of being the detective-anthropologist of a territory undergoing a period of internal reevaluation of identity.

Simona Demonitis, on the other hand, suggests that Camilleri’s books lack a traditional detective figure:

Come in molti dei libri di Sciascia, nei romanzi di Camilleri manca il poliziotto tradizionale che consegue alla giustizia i criminali e le sue indagini portano invece spesso verso una verità possibile ma impossibile da affermare. Così Montalbano può con un certo disincanto ammettere di essere perfettamente consapevole che facilmente una verità processuale segue un cammino parallelo (quindi, per definizione, convergente) a quello della verità reale, come due binari che pur marciando nella stessa direzione non sempre confluiscono nella medesima stazione. (Demonitis 158)

13 The critic points out similarities between Salvo Montalbano and all of the Sciaccian detectives who fail to turn criminals over to the justice system. While Montalbano has an anti-establishment streak, and has little regard for the rules of police bureaucracy, he never fails to restore some kind of order, to solve the case, and to smooth over the disruptions in his personal life too. When

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13 While I somewhat agree with the comparisons between Montalbano’s and Sciascia’s characters, I would like to point out that even in classical detective fiction the “verità processuale” is often left out of the narrative. The establishment of the truth is usually the main event of any “Whodunnit” and what follows in the courts is usually elided in the text. The execution of justice, one presumes, will be taken care of on an extradiegetic plane. The administration of justice is not always in the hands of due process even in the Golden Age detective novels. For instance, in Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie, the murder victim was himself a murderer who had been exonerated in a trial by jury, and the twelve conspirators on the train collaborated to execute the criminal that the law was unable to punish.
all of Sciascia’s would-be heroes end up dead or ostracized, Montalbano always gets his man, even when he does so in the most unorthodox manner. Montalbano’s successes, in the sense that he always manages to arrive at an explanation so that at least the readers understand the mystery, and the fact of his continued existence – he has not been assassinated, transferred, demoted, or fired – mark him as the opposite of the tragic investigators that populate Sciasca’s pages. Combine Montabano’s successes with his authority as an official police officer and you get something that is utterly lacking in Sciascia, a popular dependable formula, a seasoned tool that is always ready to demystify the impenetrable nature of crime in Sicily. On the other hand, Sciascia’s detectives are all unique. They each exist in only one book, novella, or story, and they are “dealt with” by the end, never to return. Even though Montalbano indeed shares many of the values of Sciascia’s detectives, he differs from them in his effectiveness; he is able to return again and again to repeatedly challenge the injustices that never quite go away from his fictional Sicily.

Elena Past writes about the ways in which Montalbano is “a perfect exemplar of the traditional detective, a figure often described by his critics in precisely these lofty deific terms. The investigator described by Sciascia in the ‘Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco,’ the incorruptible, infallible representative of justice...” (96) Although, as Demonitis suggests, Montalbano shares many of the values held by the investigators of Sciascia’s novels, Past argues that there are a great number of differences between the protagonists of the two different Sicilian authors. Montalbano hardly embraces the system and has little respect for procedure, but his attempts to unmask the guilty and the deceitful are often successful, and even the less successful and less than wholly satisfying endings do not come at great risk to his person, his freedom or his position in society.
In Montalbano’s debut novel, his perennially absent girlfriend, Livia, who lives in the north of Italy, accuses the inspector of playing God: “Ti sei autopromosso, eh?” domandò Livia dopo essere rimasta a lungo in silenzio. “Da commissario a dio, un dio di quart’ordine, ma sempre dio.” (La forma dell’acqua 169) and later in Il ladro di merendine, Montalbano’s third case, the detective interrupts his reading of Sciascia’s Il Consiglio d’Egitto to write to Livia about his case:

Tu una volta mi rimproverasti una certa mia tendenza a sostituirmi a Dio, mutando, con piccole o grandi omissioni e magari con falsificazioni più o meno colpevoli, il corso delle cose (degli altri). Forse è vero, anzi certamente lo è, però non credi che questo rientri anche nel mestiere che faccio? (Il ladro 242)

According to Past, in this letter to Livia, in which he asserts that his tendency to “play God” to alter the course of events, is part of his job, Montalbano presents himself as the ideal of the good detective and the good reader:

Montalbano neatly describes himself as a perfect exemplar of the traditional detective, a figure often described by his critics in precisely these lofty, deific terms. The investigator described by Sciascia in the “Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco, ‘the incorruptible, infallible representative of justice is Montalbano, this figure endowed with the light of illuminating Grace. (Past 96)

By making the connection between Sciascia’s essay and the qualities of Inspector Montalbano, Camilleri does, in some sense reply, to this lack in Sciascia – the exposition of the crime at the conclusion of the novel. Nevertheless, there remains the gap between understanding the culpability of the guilty parties and delivering them to justice. The closure at the conclusion of many of the Montalbano books are disquieting and any restoration of order remains only partial and temporary.

Camilleri’s use of Livia provides his narratives with a certain metatextual quality. Montalbano writes letters and makes phone calls to Livia, thus creating a kind of narrative
account of his cases to a reader who is a character, yet not an actor in the mysteries. She is the absent partner that “both intrudes and is missing” (Rushing 35). The enjoyment the reader derives from serial detective fiction is the thrill of the chase, the immersion into the world of the detective. The resolution of the mystery, according to Rushing, somewhat steals the reader’s satisfaction. Narrative irritation, such as Livia’s constant disagreements with the great detective, and the contention of his superior, the new questore, Bonetti-Alderighi (who first appears in the fourth novel of the series La gita a Tindari), serves to prolong and defer completion. She represents a foreign perspective, as she is not Sicilian, but more than anything, their interactions provide an occasion for explanation. Her presence allows Camilleri to play with the genre in a post-modern sense. As the “traditional” detective, Montalbano must maintain a level of remove between himself and his lover; the great investigator must remain unfettered and unencumbered. In this case, Livia also represents the distance between the north and the south and their differing perspectives. Montalbano then becomes a reader and interpreter not only of the crimes, but also takes on the responsibility of explaining his world to his missing significant other. His letters to Livia on two occasions followed readings of Il Consiglio d’Egitto, just as his great exposé to his boss the questore at the end of La forma dell’acqua followed some commentary on Sciascia’s Candido. The author plays with several different genres, demonstrating familiarity with the traditions of Sicilian literature and the canons of crime fiction.

The character of Gegè Gullotta, who figures in the first two novels, La forma dell’acqua and Il cane di terracotta is useful to further distinguish Montalbano’s personality as a detective. Gegè, a small-time crook operating on the fringes of mafia-run prostitution and drug dealing world has a longstanding friendship with Montalbano and plays several roles in the novels. As boys in elementary school they sat together in a classroom presided over by their teacher, Gegè’s
sister Marianna; as adults on the opposite sides of the law, the two maintained their friendship.

His relationship with Montalbano reveals the human and moral dimensions to the character of the detective. In conversation with lieutenant Donizetti of the carabinieri, Montalbano makes the following assertions:

“Si, è mio amico” disse Montalbano con chiara intenzione polemica.

and later in the same conversation:

“Ah, si? Il che significa che lei è in grado di sapere, in questo preciso momento, dove sono e cosa stanno facendo i suoi amici bergamaschi.” (Cane di terracotta 146)

We see Montalbano’s reaction to Donizetti’s scrutiny of his way of life and his professional methods. As stated above, it is polemical to admit to an officer of the carabinieri a friendship with a criminal type. In doing so, Montalbano challenges Donizetti’s implied criticism of Montalbano’s professional ethics. He refers to Donizetti’s Bergamaschi friends rather scornfully, implying not only that Montalbano is “tied to his land, has deep social roots” (Douthwaite 17), but also revealing Donizetti’s Otherness. At this point in the narrative, Donizetti is an outsider who is demonstrating a simplistic attitude towards the people he is required to work with, govern, serve and protect. Donizetti demonstrates an “us-against-them” attitude with the forces of law on one side and the Sicilians on the other. Montalbano, in his outraged reference to Donizetti’s friends, shows an awareness that he is being accused of belonging to the same camp as his delinquent friends.

To add to Gegè’s roles as friend, criminal, local police informant and victim of a mafia-style hit, Gegè also functions as the detective’s foil, a role Douthwaite describes as a feature of the classic detective story, “permitting the story to move forward and the reader to be “fed” with
new information which the author skillfully manipulates to keep up the suspense.” (17) A foil is a character that emphasizes the traits of the hero. In Montalbano’s case, there is no single Sancho Panza or Doctor Watson, no faithful sidekick; rather, Montalbano exists within a network of personal, professional, civic, neighbourly and casual relationships. Any character appearing in any detail in any of the Montalbano series can, at times, act as a foil to delineate Montalbano’s character. For example, in *Il cane di terracotta* alone, the detective has detailed interactions with such various figures as il preside Burgio and his wife; Alcide Maraventano, an elderly and eccentric recluse; Farid Rahman, the Tunisian professor; Ingrid, the Swedish wife of a prominent local citizen and former racecar driver who leads a rather idle life; his girlfriend Livia; and Adelina, his housekeeper and cook who prepares the most delicious meals typical of the region that are described in exquisite detail. Apart from fellow police officers and other official members of the investigation, with whom Montalbano also has individually described relationships, these other people help to define Montalbano’s character, in addition to helping him with his work. This departure from detective tradition, on the author’s part, emphasizes that it is the society that is being depicted in the novels, rather than plots.

The protagonist of the Camilleri’s series is a simple policeman at the head of the local Vigàta force, rather than a specialist assigned to a centralized body. In *Il cane di terracotta*, the reader discovers that Montalbano is resistant to promotion. He prefers to remain in the small port town rather than recreate his life in another setting. In the classic detective story, the police are inefficient and stupid, while the private detective or the specialist from Scotland Yard is a kind of God of Detection. Douthwaite underlines the unusual situation of Camilleri’s humble police officer in detective fiction; he writes,

> police stupidity in the Montalbano novels highlights both the inefficiency and the corruption of the state as an institution as well
as the consequent damage to the citizen. Montalbano himself is often impotent, unable to solve the myriad of senseless and violent crimes that are routine in modern life, mafia crimes being a cogent point (18).

Although the delicate matter of arms trafficking uncovered through the mafioso Tano u grecu’s deathbed confession is the more important case in *Il cane di terracotta*, Montalbano delegates it to Mimi Augello, the Vigàta station’s second in command, while the chief devotes himself to a fifty-year-old mystery dating back to the Second World War. The *questore* in this novel, Montalbano’s superior who is on friendly terms with his officer and supportive of Montalbano’s investigative methods, accuses Montalbano of indulging himself in a useless case.

“Senta, Montalbano” attaccò appena furono soli “io capisco benissimo le sollecitazioni che a lei possono venire dal ritrovamento dei due assassinati nella grotta. Mi consenta: la conosco da troppo tempo per non prevedere che lei si farà affascinare da questo caso per i risvolti inspiegabili che presenta e anche perché, in fondo, se lei trovasse la soluzione questa si rivelerebbe assolutamente inutile. Inutilità che a lei sarebbe piacevolissima e mi scusi, quasi congeniale” (168)

The mystery of the terracotta dog is the story within the story. Using the literary device of the frame narrative, or *mise-en abime* (or *incastramento* in Italian), the lines of investigation in the second Montalbano novel are double. On the level of the framing investigation Montalbano makes a pact with “Tanu u grecu” to arrest the mafia don. The mafioso, despite the theatrical arrest, is subject to an assassination attempt by his former associates who suspect betrayal during his transport to Palermo by police. Tano then retaliates by giving Montalbano information on the location of a hidden cache of weapons. While searching the Crasticeddru, the location indicated by the mafioso, Montalbano’s officers discover a smaller sealed grotto, concealing two artfully placed cadavers among a staged scene with carefully disposed objects, which include a statue of a terracotta dog, coins that went out of circulation fifty years previously, and a bowl that may
have contained water. There is also, incidentally, a third level of reading or investigation beyond this case of the bodies in the grotto, as Montalbano discovers through a friend of a friend, the professor of Tunisian origin, Farid Rahman, a correspondence between the scene in the grotto and a legend of seven sleepers that derives from the Koran.

Montalbano focuses on the mystery of the terracotta dog, a futile investigation, according to the *questore*. This decision emphasizes Montalbano’s powerlessness in the mafia investigation. His awareness of his own position as a minor player in the law-enforcement machine becomes apparent through his choice and focus. The arrest of Tanu and the discovery of the arms bring Montalbano some notoriety and congratulations from above, but the detective is left with little satisfaction, for cases of such a scope must run along a prescribed course and must involve the appropriate levels of bureaucracy. While the guilty parties may be captured and imprisoned, Montalbano has little hope that justice will be served. In short, there is not much detection involved in following Tanu u grecu’s leads. The “gratuitous nature of detection” (Douthwaite 21), as pointed out by the *questore*, is satisfied by the more worthy and mysterious discovery of the two bodies in the grotto. Fascination, mental stimulation, the draw of the past and local history, and an escape from boredom while recovering from an attempt on his life are the satisfaction afforded by the case of the bodies in the grotto. In the same conversation with the *questore* cited above, it is significant that Montalbano’s neglect of the gun-running investigation and his possible promotion are also mentioned. The pure intellectual activity of detection provides our protagonist with the means of escaping, at least in part, from a reality in which he cannot fully control his circumstances, in which he cannot fully resolve cases to his own satisfaction and put the world to rights. In the case of his career advancement, Montalbano
admits that the possibility of having to change his habits, of having to leave Vigàta “gli faceva venire qualche linea di febbre” (*Cane di terracotta* 169) and are thoughts best avoided.

The character of Montalbano, his traits of exploring his personal limits and of being tied to the contradictory workings of his community, is a feature that dominates all of the novels in the series. Professor Pintacuda, a character of *Il ladro di merendine*, refers to Montalbano’s decision to favour the case of the terracotta dog in the previous novel as an example of Montalbano’s tendency to use his work to escape reality. He accuses Montalbano of trying to avoid reflecting upon the fact that his father is dying of cancer. He says, “Il suo è stato un modo finissimo e intelligente di continuare a fare il suo non piacevole mestiere scappando però dalla realtà di tutti i giorni... Quando si deciderà a crescere, Montalbano?” (*Ladro di merendine* 233-4)

Montalbano loses himself in the purely intellectual rigour of the game of detection, for example in the terracotta dog investigation, in order to minimize his involvement in the mafia-related case. The avoidance of the terrible reality of the mafia in daily Sicilian life is “a symptom of a society which is sick” (Douthwaite 22). According to Douthwaite, Montalbano has a nihilistic attitude or at least an attitude approaching nihilism. While Professor Pintacuda’s accusation may seem a harsh criticism of one of the great detectives of the genre, the fact that these novels reveal the hero’s weaknesses at all demonstrate that Montalbano is human, individual and even ordinary, as opposed to being a stereotype, a representative or an abstraction. Many paragraphs in the series are, indeed, devoted to Montalbano himself mulling over his own shortcomings, motivations and ethics. His interaction and many types of relationships with other characters weave him into the social, political and mundane fabric of his place. In using such a personal, individual and flawed (in a normal human rather than tragic way) protagonist, Camilleri cannot really represent all of Sicily or define all Sicilians; however, by means of the way Montalbano
moves through his landscape and interacts with the people he encounters through the course of his police work, the author attempts to portray the complexity and interconnectedness of life in his native land and to provide a critique of it.

**The Man of Honour**

Emphasis must be placed upon the character of Montalbano as an effective detective that aligns himself with the hard-boiled tradition of detective fiction. While fighting crime is Montalbano’s full-time job as a police officer, detection is also a pleasure undertaken for its own sake. Crime solving and discovering the truth provides its own satisfactions that, for Montalbano, can outweigh satisfaction in his personal life. Echoes of Sciascia’s Bellodi, “era nato sbirro così come si nasce preti o cornuti” (*Giorno della civetta* 52) can be found in Montalbano, the tenacious and solitary hunter. In *Il ladro di merendine* (1996), Camilleri reveals that Montalbano lives for the game of detection:

> Se l’era sentita subito, a pelle, che la storia del motopeschereccio *Santopadre* non era cosa, aveva fatto di tutto per starne alla larga. Ma ora il caso lo aveva agguantato per i capelli e gli aveva fatto sbattere la faccia contro, a forza, come quando si vuole insegnare ai gatti di non fare pipì in un certo posto. Sarebbe bastato che Livia e François fossero tornati tanticchia più tardi, il picciliddro non avrebbe visto l’immagine di suo zio, la cena si sarebbe svolta in pace e tutto avrebbe pigliato il verso giusto. E maledisse il suo irrevocabile sangue di sbirro. Un altro al suo posto avrebbe detto: “Ah, sì? Il bambino ha riconosciuto suo zio? Talè, che caso curioso!” E avrebbe portato alla bocca la prima forchettata. E invece lui non poteva, doveva andarci per forza a sbattere le corna. L’istinto della caccia, l’aveva chiamato Hammett che di queste facenne ne capiva (124-5).

The phrases that appeal to blood, skin and instinct underscore the fact that Montalbano is, above all, a cop. He detects for its own sake and is prey to biological forces that make it essential to dig to the bottom of any given mystery at the cost of his relationships with people close to him and at the sacrifice of any normal domestic life. External forces such as chance seem to conspire with
the detective’s biological predestination to compel him, almost violently, to persist in his hunt. Montalbano’s subjection to the powerful attraction to the game of detection is laden with allusions to hunting, battle, instinct predetermination and compulsion, making the character’s dedication to his job seem more like a vocation, like something instinctive, primal, animalistic and beyond his control. The narrator invokes Dashiell Hammett of the American hard-boiled school to point out the driven nature of the protagonists, and to excuse and justify Montalbano’s character. At this point, the narrator is positioned inside Montalbano’s head as he talks back to another writer of detective fiction. The narrator (and to a certain extent Montalbano himself, especially in the later novels and short stories) makes this intertextual and metatextual reference to the tradition of detective fiction. His invocation of the other writer calls upon the reader to place the Montalbano stories in a greater literary context. Hammett’s detectives, who in the narrator’s opinion understood such matters, also serve to establish a literary lineage for the Sicilian investigator. Raymond Chandler, in his essay largely devoted to praises of Dashiell Hammett’s fiction, *The Simple Art of Murder*, describes the necessary traits of the hard-boiled hero, the product of “certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment”, an author who is a “realist in murder”:

> But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world (Chandler 12-13).

If according to Chandler, the writer of the hard-boiled detective novel attempts to realistically portray the true nature of contemporary crime and society, “a world in which gangsters can rule
nations and almost rule cities” (Chandler 12), the detective must act as the redeeming quality, the man of honour in a corrupt society. Otherwise, without the presence of the detective’s consciousness to mediate between the world depicted and the reader the novel becomes simply a thriller, a kind of plot-driven, out-of-control ride in which the reader is bounced from surprise to surprise. In effect, the detective makes sense of an often senseless and confusing world. Through these reflective passages in which the detective examines his position in a case, in relation to the people around him or in relation to his role in the police hierarchy, Camilleri’s detective engages intellectually with his assigned role as an official peacekeeper. His role and character develops as the novels build upon each other. Through his protagonist, the author can portray a society and write social commentary. However, Montalbano’s reflections often reference literature and art, indicating an attempt to make sense of his own motivations and to compare his own character with other documented models of being and acting.

Chandler’s “man of honour” has particular resonance in the context of Sicilian literature. The “man of honour” in Sicilian terms is a man dedicated to the patriarchal values, secrecy, discretion, elaborate codes of honour, the practice of omertà (conspiracy of silence) and an absolute loyalty to the membership of Cosa nostra. The old mafia, the anti-state organization dating back to Garibaldi’s time was determined to prevent “northern” institutions from gaining ascendancy in the Sicilian territory. Camilleri draws the distinction between the modern mafia, in which criminal activities have become ends in themselves, and the old Cosa nostra that “used its criminal activities to create an alternative economic, social, and cultural world that challenged the state, meanwhile trying to preserve pre-modern values of rural-patriarchal societies” (Aguirre 152). Indeed, Tano, himself a mafia boss of the old style, speaks disparagingly of the new men of honour who give up the old ways, lose their ties to the south, study law or economics in the
United States or Germany, and drive around in their Maserati or Ferrari (Il cane di terracotta 23). The old-style Sicilian man of honour as he comes across in Tano’s description, was committed to the old-fashioned and traditional values. The old mafia was intent upon preventing the south from becoming a victim of the north and the tide of progress, modernization, and capitalism that would strip power away from the southern elites and erode their cultural identity. This kind of idealistic and almost mythical mafia has not been seen in Camilleri or Sciascia’s lifetime, if it ever existed, but this tension between old and new pervades the literary mafia of Camilleri’s novels. Therefore, Chandler’s term “man of honour” while clearly applying to the hero in the Anglo-American tradition is rendered dubious in the Sicilian context, as it applies equally to the villain and raising him to the status of an anti-hero. Camilleri muddies the waters himself by having Tanu u grecu choose Montalbano in whom to confide. Tanu explains, “Perché lei, e me lo sta dimostrando è uno che le cose le capisce” (25). This capacity to “understand things” recalls the first statement in which Montalbano’s name appears in the entire series and it is emphasized in various novels as a key characteristic of the protagonist. A dangerous criminal, a fugitive from the law and a murderer with multiple brutal homicides to his name appeals to Montalbano’s understanding. Tanu draws upon a thread of commonality between himself and his natural enemy. He explains that his father was an “omo d’onore ai tempi in cui la parola onore significava” (22) and clearly expects Montalbano to understand the old values; moreover, he believes that the police officer is driven by similar values. The character of “Tanu u grecu” recalls and is surely inspired by don Mariano of Il giorno della civetta. Sciascia’s mafioso of the highest echelons of his brotherhood has a similar respect for Captain Bellodi of the carabinieri, whom he regards as a real man. Further intertextual echoes are found when Tano remarks that Montalbano is the first police officer to use the formal “lei” with a mafia boss. This feature of
seeing a common dedication to act honourably in a police officer on the part of a criminal
complicates the idea of honour itself when viewed in the context of Sicilian crime. It may appear
that Montalbano is corrupt because he descends to the level of a powerful leader in the mafia
organization and agrees to oblige him with a theatrical arrest on the criminal’s terms. Hints of
this negative attitude towards Montalbano’s integrity are present in the interactions with some of
his colleagues of the police, the carabinieri and the judicial system. Montalbano’s understanding,
however, extends to Tano’s regret for the decline of the old ways and the need to save face.
Montalbano’s sympathy lies not with the criminal organization, their activities, or with the
pervasive fear that they instill in the daily life of a mafia-run society, but with the man himself
and with their common human feelings.

As a writer of the post-Sciascia phase, Camilleri must acknowledge the presence of the
mafia in his novels. As with all detective fiction set in Sicily, the mafia and its pervasive
presence in civic life in Sicily differentiates Sicily from other locales. Even if a particular crime
is not mafia related, the organization’s involvement or culpability is at least considered. As
Camilleri explains the presence of the mafia is a necessary part of the background and
atmosphere of a crime novel set in Sicily; however, the author is not particularly interested in
writing about the real criminal organization.

Io non ho mai voluto scrivere veramente di mafia, l’ho adoperata sempre come sfondo; non se ne può negare l’esistenza, è una delle componenti e io ce la devo mettere. Il mafioso è sempre presente nei miei racconti, perché è inevitabile. Però, un libro sulla mafia non l’ho mai scritto. E per due motivi: primo, perché del mafioso si finisce inevitabilmente per fare un personaggio di un certo spessore. Se tu pigli don Mariano Arena de Il giorno della civetta, ti accorgi che è un uomo simpatico. Quando divide l’umanità in uomini, mezz’uomini, ominicchi, pigliainculo e quaquadraqua, esprime una saggezza contadina... Riletto oggi, ti sembra un libro stellarmamente antico rispetto alla feroce evoluzione successiva. Io,
For many reasons, rather than writing a well-researched exposé of the crimes of the modern organization, Camilleri prefers to let the pervasive mafia presence filter through as part of the culture, and to build upon literary antecedents. About the real mafia, the author says, “Non voglio esaltarli, o comunque dare loro dignità letteraria” (Lodato 24). This decision to deny the mafia any voice is in keeping with one of the traditional guidelines of detective fiction. To cite S.S. Van Dine’s rules again, number 12 states:

There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature (191).

As already mentioned in the Chapter on Sciascia, Van Dine’s rules treat the art of the detective story as a game, and to a certain extent, Camilleri’s Montalbano novels deal with largely manageable puzzles that are solved by the great investigator. For a true detective story to be worth reading, there must be a single criminal who is a worthy opponent for the detective-hero. Fighting such an organization as the mafia, makes for dissatisfaction and a lack of resolution in the novel. As demonstrated in Il cane di terracotta, the mafia-related crimes are not very interesting, even though they feature heavily in the day-to-day police work of Inspector Montalbano. Even though the detective knows who is responsible for the ambush upon himself and Gegè, and despite the fact that he retaliated and killed the assassins, Montalbano derives little satisfaction or interest in pursuing the ramifications of this crime to their conclusions, perhaps because he knows it would lead nowhere. Instead he focuses on the mystery of the
terracotta dog that reveals a crime of passion and the diabolical machinations of a single black nature.

Santo Piazzese, another contemporary Sicilian writer of detective fiction, also leaves the direct reference to the mafia out of his fiction despite writing in the epoch shortly after the first Maxiprocesso di Palermo (1986-7) that resulted in the continuous bombardment of essays, novels, documentaries, televised inquiries, and television dramas with mafia content upon the public. Apart from being only as informed about the mafia as the average resident of Palermo, Piazzese attributes his omission of the mafia to his literary ambition and perhaps snobbism. He expresses a view similar to Camilleri’s when he explains:

La scelta di lasciare la mafia sullo sfondo fu una scelta molto ragionata, ma anche ambiziosa. Pensavo che farla affiorare qua e là nel libro, evocarla senza farla mai diventare un personaggio tridimensionale, e sopra tutto sforzarmi di accennarne come a una realtà così immanente nella città e nella società palermitana da rendere superfluo metterne a fuoco i meccanismi, le logiche, i modus operandi, sarebbe risultato ancora più efficace – perché più inquietante – che scrivere un libro nel quale fosse protagonista (Ferlita 23).

Through a literary forum, Piazzese seeks to evoke “una condizione permanente di sub-mafiosità della quale il più delle volte non siamo coscienti” (Ferlita 19-20), rather than including actual characters affiliated with the mafia. Unlike Piazzese, Camilleri does include mafiosi as characters and mafia crimes in his novels, but his motives behind these inclusions are similar to those of Piazzese. He desires to provide a complex picture of society: a society in which the mafia has a longstanding influence and a greater continued presence in daily life than in other locales.

In Il ladro di merendine, the narrator describes the reactions of the residents of the apartment building in which Mr. Lapecora was found dead in the elevator. Mr. Culicchia is
concerned only with retrieving his bottle of Corvo that he dropped in the elevator next to the body, while he chose to take the elevator rather than walk up the stairs, being fully aware of the cadaver. Similarly, Mrs. Piccirillo and her daughter return to their apartment after discovering their dead neighbour and do not feel the need to call the police. When Montalbano forces them to admit the truth, they try to justify themselves:

“Non volevamo andare a finire sulla bocca di tutti” ammise disfatta la signora Piccirillo. Di subito però ebbe uno scatto d’energia, gridò istericamente:

“Siamo persone perbene, noi!”

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

The desire to save face is what guides Mr. Lapecora’s neighbours. The ironic insistence upon this self-proclaimed quality of perbenismo is criticized by the incisive voice of Montalbano himself in the last paragraph of the citation, who wonders himself, “What if Lapecora were dying?” Even though the mafia does not really figure in this novel, we see a society that lives under the permanent condition of sub-mafiosità, as described by Piazzese. In the social comportment of average citizens towards each other, fear of involvement and retaliation outweighs regard for one’s neighbour in a society accustomed to living with the necessity of silence with regard to bearing witness to criminality. These two women demonstrate that the persona perbene behaves as though these unpleasant problems do not regard them and feel no moral obligation to consider assisting someone living in the same building. According to Holt, to

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14 For a basic survey on the mafia, answering such questions as “What is the mafia?”, “Where does it get its power?”, and “Why is it so difficult to defeat?”, I consulted Silvana La Spina, La mafia spiegata ai miei figli (e anche ai figli degli altri) (Milan: Bompiani, 2006). To explain the concept of omertà, La Spina cites a proverb “La tistimunianza è bona sinu a quannu nun fa mali a lu prossimo”. There is no source cited for this proverb, delivered here in Sicilian dialect, and she implies that the concept of the code of silence passed from the mafia to Sicilian culture a long time ago, from as early as medieval times.
ignore the existence of such omnipresent problems is not only irresponsible, but dangerous.

“Questa stessa mentalità genera la tranquilla persuasione che certi membri della società siano intoccabili, che per qualche virtù nascosta siano al di là di qualsiasi sospetto. Sciascia, in particolare, fa vedere la facilità con cui i veri colpevoli si nascondono dietro la pretesa di essere intoccabili, sia che si tratti di un arciprete sia che si tratti di un magistrato incensurato” (47). In this case, however, we see Mrs. Picirillo and her daughter reacting automatically: the reluctance to cooperate with the police and the fear of retaliation against informants is part of traditional Sicilian “morality” whether one senses the influence of an arciprete or magistrate in the offing or not.

Lest the reader develops too much of a negative impression of the Sicilian general public, there is the reaction of Mrs. Vasile Cozzo to echo Montalbano’s indignation and exasperation. She says to Montalbano:

Per decenni la gente per bene di qua non ha fatto altro che ripetere che la mafia non la riguardava, erano cose loro. Ma io, ai miei scolari, insegnavo che il ‘nenti vitti, nenti sacciu’ era peggiore dei peccati mortali. E ora che tocca a me di contare quello che ho visto, mi tiro indietro? (61)

The 70-year-old, retired schoolteacher, confined to a wheel-chair makes the connection between the Tunisian terrorist, his sister Karima and Lapecora, and reports it to the police. The use of “per bene” again reinforces the criticism of the conspiracy of silence that many conventional Sicilians accept as the only mode of civic being. The contrast in language, as Douthwaite explains, underscores the intentionality of the critique for Mrs. Vasile Cozzo speaks in standard Italian, while using the dialect to present “the non-interventionist righteous stance she is refuting” (27-28).
In this society, it is not only the mafia that is corrupt, but also the police and the political institutions that govern it. About the workings of the government and its unflatteringly drawn representative in *Il ladro di merendine*, Colonel Lohengrin Pera and his “compagnucci della parrochietta”, the police commissario remarks, “La burocrazia italiana, di solito lentissima diventa fulminea quando si tratta di fottere il cittadino” (231). The pessimistic image of the Italian state as an organization dedicated to working against the average citizen is the consistent theme that runs through the third Montalbano novel. *Il ladro di merendine* contains three different but interrelated crimes: the murder of a Tunisian sailor in Mazzara, a man found dead in the elevator of his apartment building in Vigàta, and a young boy who steals snacks from local schoolchildren. It is this last most minor crime, committed by the orphaned Tunisian child François, that gives this novel its title, ironically highlighting the least important, but the most personal, aspects of this investigation over the others from Montalbano’s perspective. The most space in this novel is devoted to the Tunisian sailor and it seems to be rated as the most important crime. However, by naming the novel after the snack thief, the author emphasizes the extreme disregard for an individual’s fate shown by governments. It is the questore that points out to a reluctant Montalbano that the Mercedes automobile that regularly picked up Karima, François’s mother bears a blocked license plate, thus implicating secret service involvement in at least one of the deaths surrounding these interconnected sub-plots. Montalbano bullies Lohengrin Pera into admitting the state’s complicity by filming their interview with a hidden video camera and humiliating him by breaking the diminutive and pretentious official’s glasses and mobile phone; nevertheless, the assassinations of Karima, her brother Ahmed, and Aisha, the elderly Tunisian woman, all perpetrated by the secret service go unacknowledged and unpunished.

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15 “Pera” means “pear” in Italian.
While Pera admits that Karima was assassinated, the state’s representative does not feel that the police and the secret services are deserving of Montalbano’s disdain or critique. He justifies the service’s role in the matter:

“Come avevo intuito” disse Lohengrin Pera “lei ha capito tutto. Ora la prego di riflettere: lei, come me, è un fedele e devoto servitore del nostro Stato. Ebbene...”.
“Se lo metta in culo” fece piano Montalbano.
“Non ho capito”.
“Ripeto: il nostro Stato comune, se lo metta in culo. Io e lei abbiamo concezioni diametralmente opposte su che cosa significhi essere servitori dello Stato, praticamente serviamo due stati diversi. Quindi lei è pregato di non accomunare il suo lavoro al mio”.
“Montalbano, adesso si mette a fare il don Chisciotte? Ogni comunità ha bisogno che qualcuno lavi i cessi. Ma questo non significa che chi lava i cessi non appartenga alla comunità”.
Montalbano sentiva la raggia crescergli, una parola in più sarebbe stata di sicuro sbagliata (217).

In this citation, Pera expects Montalbano to share his devotion to the state and the same ethical code. Montalbano’s position is sneeringly compared to that of Don Quixote, because the police officer will not accept the action of the state as being necessary and just. Pera uses the metaphor of cleaning toilets to justify his acceptance of his limited role in a conservative state and he expects Montalbano to perform an equally tacit clean up of the less salubrious aspects of state condoned activity. Don Quixote, Cervantes’s deluded and useless crusader, is invoked to belittle Montalbano’s idealism. Yet Lohengrin Pera is no Wagnerian knight despite his first name. In fact, the savagely contradictory name applied to this character indicates that Montalbano’s disgust coincides with the author’s. The character’s delusions that his official toilet cleanings or enemas serve a grand purpose in a just society are demeaned through Camilleri’s satire.
Montalbano cannot sympathize with a state that deems it necessary to murder or “neutralize” inconvenient illegal immigrants. Montalbano says to Pera, “Colonello, l’ho già avvertita: in mia presenza non usi la parola morale” (217), with the express meaning that the values of Pera are
not moral in the least. The only action left to Montalbano in the aims of reestablishing the social order is to get Karima’s body identified so that her son can inherit the large amount of cash found in her flat. In *Il ladro di merendine*, the protagonist’s view conflates with the author’s negative worldview to convey a sense of the author’s extreme disillusionment with modern society, a globalized post cold-war society which has lost its bearing, which has no faith in its institutions, and which has turned to personal achievement and personal gain as the only values worth cherishing. A very bleak picture indeed, but one which might be said to characterize not simply Sicilian or Italian society, but the whole of present-day Western society (Douthwaite 30).

It is in this novel of severe criticism of the state that the *questore* exits the scene and retires, because he finds himself out of step with the corruption of the modern world (207), leaving Montalbano with one less protector in the powers above who shares his ideals.

**Montalbano’s Little Grey Cells**

Critics and scholars have rarely compared Inspector Salvo Montalbano with any heroes of the golden age of detective fiction, such as Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple, owing mostly to the fact that these types of detective stories centre on the puzzles and the motives of the guilty parties, with the action taking place in an isolated segment of society, while ignoring, for the most part the larger political context. The Montalbano novels, in contrast, focus less on the individual cases and their relative resolutions and give more importance to the greater picture of the Sicilian society that is built up while reading the series. However, our detective hero Montalbano is not so hard-boiled. Instead the narratives emphasize the protagonist’s mental activities and introspection. He often retreats from the action and visits the Saracen olive tree in order to mull things over in his *ciriveddro*. 
Detection for Camilleri’s protagonist is more often carried out through his thoughts and words than by his rushing into action. As cited at the beginning of this chapter, the dead bodies that litter the pages of the typical Montalbano novel are just a pretext. Often scenes of reading serve to introduce the solution to the mysteries. The key clue or the missing piece is often arrived at through some time alone in contemplation or reading a book. More than a man of action, Montalbano is more appropriately classified as the perfect reader. The commissioner in *La forma dell’acqua*, Montalbano’s immediate superior, is sympathetic to his inspector stationed in Vigàta. The old *questore* of the first three novels and Inspector Montalbano share a great appreciation of irony; they are both sensitive to the differences that mark their situations and their cases as particularly Sicilian, and they can joke about them. They both are great readers who tease out the hidden meanings, double meanings and metaphors of any text. In a telephone conversation with Montalbano, the commissioner is curiously overjoyed that the mysterious death of a local politician in scandalous circumstances—he is found by a couple of garbage collectors in parked car an area that is used as an outdoor cruising ground or brothel with his pants and underwear down—is due to natural causes. He says:

Mi pare bello che qualcuno, in questa nostra splendida provincia, si decida a morire di morte naturale, dando il buon esempio. Non trova? Altre due o tre morti come questa dell’ingegnere e ci rimettiamo in carreggiata col resto dell’Italia. (*La forma dell’acqua* 38)

The commissioner Burlando immediately makes the comparison with the rest of Italy. The reader is envisaged as a continental Italian and even the *questore* feels the need to address the

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16 It is also possible to consider it “autoethnography”, a sort of critique that posits a reader both internal and external, but focussing on the highly subjective involvement with his own social context. See Hayano, David M. "Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects." *Human Organization* 38, no. 1 (1979): 99-104. The old paradigm of an insider explaining this
cultural centre and explain or mitigate Sicily’s status, not necessarily literary, as a crime capital of the nation.

The great irony at the end of *La forma dell’acqua* is that Montalbano discovers a reality that cannot be revealed. The solution to Luparello’s death is not a real solution to the crime as there was, in effect, no murder, only the transporting of the politician’s body after a heart attack and placing it in a compromising situation in order to frame another party and to put pressure on yet another provincial notable. Early in the novel, in another telephone conversation between Montalbano and his superior, the *questore* mentions that a bishop with whom he had discussed the case quoted Pirandello:

“Sì, invece. Ha citato i *Sei personaggi*, quella battuta in cui il padre dice che uno non può restare agganciato per sempre a un gesto poco onorevole, dopo una vita integerrima, a cause di un momentaneo sfaglio. Come a dire: non si può tramandare ai posteri l’immagine dell’ingegnere con i pantaloni momentaneamente calati” (30)

To Montalbano’s surprise, the commissioner continues to joke that the minister, however, did not cite Pirandello, because he is not Sicilian. At the end of the novel, the police commissioner Burlando refers to Sciascia’s *Candido* (158). The discussions between Montalbano and his superior, here and in subsequent novels with other older characters, often attempt to draw upon some literary common ground in order to situate the cases upon which they are working into a collective history of Sicily that comprises literary history. In this case, Burlando is from the north of Italy, but he enters the Sicilian shared past with Montalbano through reading. The double plot that is characteristic of many Montalbano novels resembles that of Sciascia’s layered detective world to an outsider may not apply to such an extent. Camilleri is different from Sciascia in that he ultimately writes genre fiction, which by virtue of its formulaic nature does envision a global readership that breaks down the traditional insider/outsider dualism.
stories that discover the underlying corruption that makes every crime apparently insoluble.

Behind the apparent situation of Luparello found dead with his pants down, is the careful *mise-en-scene* orchestrated by his political opponents. The widow Luparello gives voice to the concept that gives the novel its name: water has no shape, rather it takes the shape of its container. She encourages Montalbano not to stop at the shape of water and to persist in his investigation to discover the truth. This investigation to discover the truth is useless and the offenders unpunishable by virtue of the fact that the notable engineer died of a heart attack. This expression of difference between appearances and reality descends from Pirandello, but Montalbano’s reading of it conflates this literary game of mirrors with the Sicilian way of life.

*Un sogno fatto in Sicilia* is the subtitle of Sciascia’s *Candido* as pointed out by the characters in this novel. Camilleri exploits intertextuality to emphasize the fact that he is creating fiction and is part of a lineage of Sicilian fiction and Montalbano draws a parallel between Pirandello, Sciascia and his cases to question the nature of Sicilian reality. What operates on one hand as an entertaining work of art is also a commentary on a metaphysical level of the uncertainty of identity and the relativity of reality. Elena Past claims that Montalbano cites Sciascia to attain “a very un-Sciascian end” (98). The manner in which Montalbano offers a brilliant exposé that explains all the outstanding mysteries, including the cryptic title of the novel, is, according to Past, “an essential element of a classical detective story, but is completely lacking in Sciascia’s detective fiction” (98). The reader is fulfilled by the conclusion to *La forma dell’acqua* in a way that no conclusion to a Sciascia novel satisfies. Camilleri’s use of Sciascia draws the series more deeply into the realm of postmodern play. His adherence to the structure of the classic detective story is noted, but it is also mocked by his use of humour and lightness. Camilleri does not entirely adhere to any form of the genre: the police procedural, the Golden Age clue puzzle
mystery, the thriller, the hard-boiled novel, or the pessimistic expose of corrupt forces that cannot be contained or changed. Past highlights the degree of removal from Sicilian society in Camilleri’s work, owing to his constant and ironic pushing at the generic limits. There is a great difference between Camilleri’s literary representation of Sicily and Sciascia’s Sicily. However, this is not necessarily a critique of Camilleri’s seriousness or commitment. Camilleri plays with the difference between representation and truth. He often removes his discussion of pertinent issues such as the Mafia phenomenon, the relationship between the North and the South, and political corruption, from the physical action to give voice to the issue in a more cerebral or even theatrical theoretical space.

The removal of the physical dimension is often a hallmark of the typical Montalbano novel. Violent murders are a way of life and part of the job for the chief inspector, but the author does not dwell on the gory details or get wrapped up in chasing down all the clues. The detective often passes up the opportunity to be party to the examination of the body. He prefers to get his information distilled through the scientific terms of Dr. Pasquano, the grumpy old medical examiner, after the post mortem analysis. Personality-wise he is also contrasted with the public prosecutor Tommaseo who revels in all the physical details of the murder victims, often asking probing questions about the attractiveness of the victim and delighting in hearing about deaths involving sexual violence. Montalbano’s own physicality is often de-emphasized. There is a surprising lack of physical portrayal of Montalbano, even though many viewers of the RAI television series have an image of the actor Luca Zingarelli as their detective hero. The books themselves do not offer descriptions of how the protagonist looks; instead, they focus on his subjective point of view and his interpretations of his experiences. According to Elena Past,

17 Barbara Pezzotti mentions Elena Past and Mark Chu as critics who dispute Camilleri’s literary value and political commitment (Pezzotti 136)
“These mental activities are frequently the subject of narration” (102). Events are often replaced with introspection and reflection. Montalbano often withdraws into his mind to put together the clues to the mystery, for instance in *La pazienza del ragno*. It is in such a quiet moment that he solves the case, “nel ciriveddro sò alcuni dati apparentemente incollegabili tra loro improvvisamente si saldavano e ogni pezzo s’assistimava al posto giusto nel puzzle da comporre” (*La pazienza del ragno* 121). His desire to understand and interpret aligns Montalbano more with the more cerebral forms of the detective genre. Often the case comes to the detective in a kind of premonitory dream before the phone call from Catarella that signals the beginning of the adventure. Almost every novel, apart from the first one, begins inside one of the sleeping detective’s dreams. For example, in *L’età del dubbio* (2008), the inspector dreams he is at his own funeral, Catarella tells Montalbano that he is dead and Bonetti-Alderighi, the Commissioner, does not authorize him to investigate his own death. Livia is not in attendance and explains on the phone that she does not have time to attend the funeral and is taking this opportunity to end their relationship, which has dragged on so long. Absurd, ridiculous, incredible, or tragic situations, which often seem to have nothing to do with the cases in question, serve to emphasize Montalbano’s inner life. The dream visions often present an abstract allegory of the entire case and the plot of the novel as a whole before it unfolds. The dreams often present details or images that recur later in the narration, such as a coffin seen in a dream that is later explained by the end of the book. There is a sense of simultaneity about the dreaming descriptions at the beginning of each book that rather defies the more linear process of the detective narration. The clues to the mystery are not always found in the dreams, but often Camilleri uses the occasion to set out the priorities and preoccupations that are plaguing the protagonist at that particular point of narration. Age-long concerns such as corruption in the
government, immigration and trafficking, mix with existential thoughts of death, aging and his relationships in these dreams. These aspects of the novel, this shift in focus from murder investigations to the biography and inner life of the aging inspector, serves as the irritant Robert Rushing speaks of when discussing why we read serials. The solution to each novel does not resolve the ongoing concerns that drive us to continue reading Montalbano’s adventures.

Throughout the course of the series, Montalbano is often tempted by female characters, some of them witnesses, some of them peripherally involved in the cases. In *La luna di carta* (2005), he attempts to struggle against his physical desire for a woman by swimming in the sea. He tells himself to erase or wash away the physical Montalbano and to leave behind only the *commissario* Montabano, “una funzione quasi astratta, colui che è preposto solo a risolvere il caso, senza sentimenti personali. Ma mentre se lo diciva, sapiva benissimo che non ne sarebbe mai stato capace” (95). In this example, the protagonist uses the physical act of swimming to attempt to distract his bodily urges, so that his mind is clear and free to detect. This mini scene of reflection is rather typical of Montalbano’s tendency to transfer the action of the investigation into his mind. This attempt to separate the mind from the body, the professional investigator from the private man, is a running theme in Montalbano’s investigations. Interestingly, the physical action in the series often surrounds scenes involving food or women. Our detective and gourmand would prefer not to mix the two activities of eating and talking. In *Il cane di terracotta* as the detective prepares for a meal at home, he remarks, “Gli piaceva mangiare da solo, godersi i bocconi in silenzio, fra i tanti legami che lo tenevano a Livia c’era magari questo, che quando mangiava non rapriva bocca” (41) and then he continues to compare himself to Maigret and contrast himself to Pepe Carvalho. Through the narration of Montalbano’s thoughts, the narrator makes the link between the protagonist and other fictional detectives, thereby situating his
character in a fictional universe that draws attention to its own artificiality. Montalbano’s various entanglements with the \textit{femme fatale} figure of the novels demonstrate that he is human to the core without becoming the dupe of the hard-boiled school. He can fall prey to his desires, but he manages to keep the physical element at a distance from the arrest and punishment of the criminal. Past cites an example from \textit{Il campo del vasaio} of the disembodied criminal (102). Often a sensual woman holds the key to the mystery, but when the pursuit of the criminal coincides with the pursuit of a woman, the chief inspector handles the complications by keeping a barrier of dialogue and discourse between himself and the criminal. In this book, Commissario Montalbano writes a letter to another colleague working out of a different unit with his explication of the case. It is the other police officer who makes the arrest. The villain in this novel is a stereotypical \textit{femme fatale}, who conspires to murder her husband and sets out to seduce Mimi Augello, Montalbano’s \textit{vice-commissario}, his second in command. Montalbano transfers the act of her physical arrest to somewhere “offstage”, where we hear reports that everything has been handled and confirmation that threats have been neutralized, but we are not privy to the final moments in that chase.

\textit{“It is only a paper moon …”}

Robert Rushing is of the opinion that the reader of crime fiction series is complicit in the act of “forgetting real violence in favor of a spectacle manufactured for his passive enjoyment” (126). Camilleri’s detective has often consciously made just such a choice for us, as he does in \textit{Il cane di terracotta} when he chooses to investigate the bodies of the lovers in a cave, rather than the mafia crimes. When his own body is out of commission, for example when he is in hospital recovering from gunshot wounds, his mind continues to investigate and by extension entertain us
with puzzles. This withdrawal into the realm of introspection is not necessarily an accusation about the lack of realism to Camilleri’s novels. They just demonstrate the compatibility between the theatrical use of scenes of internal dialogue and the detective novel and how Camilleri, the author, consciously references both the theatre and detective fiction.

According to Elena Past, Camilleri’s aesthetic of disembodying the characters is very theatrical. Much of the novels are dialogue-driven, allowing for static scenery and personalities and relationships to be hashed out through arguments. Past writes:

As we have seen, dialect is one important part of his style, but other elements also contribute to the creation of a world that is self-consciously a stage, a world in which the linguistic effects of existence are more pressing and more powerful than the physical effects. Camilleri’s staunch reliance on dialogue to drive the action perpetuates the Beccarian tradition of the physical disappearance of the actors in the crime scene. Montalbano’s reliance on theatrics as a part of his investigative strategy puts emphasis on the hypothetical, rather than physical, material evidence as a strategy in criminology. (101)

Elena Past validates the seriousness of Salvo Montalbano’s investigations in the Italian crime fiction sphere by making a connection between Camilleri’s hero and the Enlightenment-era theorist on penal and judicial reform, Cesare Beccaria (1738 – 1794). His work Dei delitti e delle pene (1764) focuses on judicial reform.18 Past posits a corresponding Beccarian investigator, a

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18 Past’s book Methods of Murder discusses the theories of Cesare Beccaria and Cesare Lombroso in relation to contemporary Italian crime fiction. While Lombroso’s work concentrates on the offender, Beccaria’s primary area of concern was the system rather than the criminal. In my review of this book in Quaderni d’Italianistica 34:1, 2013 p. 288-289 I briefly describe Past’s application of Beccaria’s work. The explanation that follows of Beccaria’s philosophy is taken from this review and should enhance the understanding of the use of the adjective “Beccarian”.

Beccaria’s approach “begins with the idea that the system, and not the criminal is the primary object of study, the first consideration when contemplating the problem of crime” (15). Past identifies the strategy of introspection, a process of mental investigation, to Beccaria’s methods. The Enlightenment thinker has reconstructed the criminal subject. In Beccaria’s Dei delitti e delle pene, the criminal becomes the “citizen-delinquent”, a “disembodied criminal” a
kind of detective-philosopher who hunts down his prey through his acute mental processes. Camilleri’s police commissario Salvo Montalbano is, in Past’s estimation, such a Beccarian thinker. The Sicilian investigator retreats into his own mental space to mull over the crime, to dialogue with himself and to imagine a solution.

The action in a Montalbano mystery is mostly verbal, and the plot is moved forward through conversations or through the reporting of the protagonist’s mental activity. In a few short stories in Gli arancini di Montalbano, “Il gatto e il cardellino,” “Catarella risolve un caso,” and “Una brava fimmna di casa,” dialogue is the exclusive form of narration that drives the plots to their conclusions. In other cases, the detective works out solutions through writing letters and he even writes letters to himself, referring to himself as Montalbano Uno and Montalbano Due.

Attention to dialogue, to speech patterns and characteristic expressions that remain consistent from episode to episode, and interior monologues, are all features that link Camilleri’s work to the theatre. Past compares Beccaria’s technique of imaginative identification with the crime scene to Camilleri’s theatrical style: “Whereas in Beccaria, however, theatrics (in the form of inventing monologues in the mind of the hypothetical criminal) becomes a means for understanding justice, in Camilleri, justice becomes a privileged subject of inspiration for theatrics” (104). These comparisons with an eighteenth century philosopher and criminologist
forge connections between Sciascia, Camilleri and Beccaria. Camilleri’s theatrical style\textsuperscript{19}, albeit lighthearted, humourous and ironic, does not necessarily belie the seriousness of his impegno.

In \textit{Il cane di terracotta}, Montalbano stages a raid and a takedown of the mafia boss Tanu u Grecu.

\begin{quote}
\ldots si sentiva profondamente ridicolo, gli pareva d’essere diventato un personaggio da film di gangster e non vedeva perciò l’ora di dare il segnale d’isare il sipario...

Montalbano ne ebbe pena, ma non poteva certo andargli a contare che si trattava di una messinscena, dall’esito dubbio, è vero, però sempre di cartone. (29)

Con una certa rabbiosa tristezza il commissario si rese conto di essere stato degradato da eroe da film di gangster a personaggio di una pellicola di Gianni e Pinotto (30)

Montalbano fu pronto a recitare la sua parte di spalla, come viene chiamata in triatro.

\textquote{“Fermo! In nome della legge, fermo o sparo!”} (31)
\end{quote}

Often, when enacting these cop-like scenes and making these public arrests, the narration turns into a self-conscious parody. The commissario feels quite ridiculous like an actor in one of the “film ‘mirricani”. These scenes are a means for understanding justice, or understanding that justice cannot always be achieved through straightforward means in a corrupt government. Camilleri has Montalbano refer simultaneously and equally to theatre (“isare il sipario”) and cinema (“da eroe da film di gangster a personaggio di una pellicola di Gianni e Pinotto”) in the above description of the staged arrest of the mafia boss. Theatrical moments in the novels have a

\textsuperscript{19} Camilleri’s early career was in theatre and television, so Past makes the connection between the internal monologues, Camilleri’s theatrical style and Beccaria. In many ways, the internal monologue is actually quite difficult to do in a theatrical context and this device recalls the voiceover narration of classic American Film Noir, often based on literary sources in the hard-boiled tradition. For instance, \textit{The Maltese Falcon}, \textit{Double Indemnity}, and \textit{Sunset Boulevard} use the voice-over. Camilleri may also be playing with this convention.
self-reflexive function: they refer to the novel as representation and emphasize the Vigatese simulacrum.

Acting for our detective-protagonist is a means for achieving his ends, either justice or poetic justice, while cutting through the bureaucratic crap that encumbers every step the police department takes. Montalbano reluctantly scales mountains of paperwork in every novel, but these forms and documents never make it into the narrative, nor do they affect the plot. Montalbano eases his way through encounters with the antagonistic Commissioner Bonetti-Alderighi by means of his theatrics. He congratulates himself after surviving one such confrontation, “A Hollywood avrebbe fatto sicuramente carrera. E capace che ci scappava un oscar” (*La pista di sabbia* 224). Or in *Le ali della sfinge* he thinks while questioning a suspect in a pre-planned scenario to extract a confession, “Qui ci stava bene ‘na risatetdda tanticchia sinistra che gli arrinisci alla perfezioni” (197). Role playing on Montalbano’s part is an occasion for humour and lightheartedness in the narratives, but it also artistically motivated. Montalbano’s interactions with his superior are often reduced to superficial bouts of repartee, and the inspector is usually at cross-purposes with the chief of police Bonnetti-Alderighi. Rather than delving deeper into this antagonistic relationship, the author keeps this contact between these characters on an external level. In Camilleri’s efficient and theatrical style, the questore is always portrayed briefly and for a purpose, in his office at Montelusa, and never out at the crime scene. In this manner, their personalities come out against the grain, reluctant, hostile, stubborn, as Bonnetti-Alderighi attempts to impose his will upon a particular case and Montalbano tries to pacify him, or get permission to proceed on the case, or requests to be removed from a certain case. The characters themselves are pretexts to the lines they utter, demonstrating in each novel, briefly, that justice is not always served by going through the normal channels, and that the
questore, a representative of the institution from the north of Italy, who remains insulated in his office at headquarters and shielded by receptionists and secretaries, does not understand how things are really done in Sicily. Or reading a bit further into this questore-commissario double act, one may deduce that the questore is really aware of how things are done in Sicily, but he is also acting out a set part; consequently, these scenes underscore the questore’s connivance with the political forces that put obstacles in Montalbano’s way. The chief of police knows that his subordinate understands the situation, but legally, Montalbano cannot do anything to remove these obstacles.

Theatricality is, according to Camilleri, a Sicilian trait: it is their heritage and their birthright. As Elena Past deduces from her analysis of the way in which Camilleri navigates the vast repertoire of cultural material, “Yet, the lesson of Montalbano is another, one removed from the social background that the investigator cheerily presents: it may be that, in Camilleri’s formulation, art is the patrimony of Sicilians (as Calabrò implicitly suggests), and not crime or injustice or corruption” (105). Although Montalbano through his theatricality represents a type of good Sicilian who gets to the bottom of things, and frequently refers back upon himself significantly as a character in a Simulated representation of Sicily, the protagonist is still charged with the responsibility of being the mouthpiece of the author. Even though the novels continue to achieve a temporary restoration of the status quo at their conclusions, we are made aware that Vigàta is nested inside the sick body politic of a corrupt Sicily, despite being insulated by robust literary borders.

While I have compared Montalbano with the detectives of the Golden Age and the hard-boiled tradition of American fiction, he has also been taxed with the additional responsibility of the anthropologist, of explaining his culture to a reader that lies outside of his culture. By
extension, Camilleri feels obliged to provide social criticism and commentary on current events in politics from his own point of view. This viewpoint, owing to the popularity of the novels, then becomes representative of his culture. Before the publication of Il giro di boa in 2003, Camilleri admitted to being uncertain about the future of superintendent Montalbano in the light of the police involvement at the G8 summit in Genova in 2001. The author explains his dilemma about the character of Montalbano in his interview with Saverio Lodato:

E allora i romanzi dove Montalbano è protagonista non possono ignorare la realtà circostante… a Genova buona parte della polizia non si è comportata come ci saremmo aspettati. Ora per capirlo, non occorre essere schierati politicamente. Le immagini le vedi. Quindi cosa ha visto Montalbano? (Lodato, 379).

Camilleri is of the opinion that the novels featuring Montalbano must take into account current realities. During the occasion of the G8 summit in 2001, the author was confronted with images of a police force that did not behave in the interests of public security and used excessive violence against protesters: a young protester was shot by the police and the police used tear gas on the crowd of spectators. The author was also presented though the news media with the image of the government that made a great show of securing the red zone area where the international heads of state were meeting, but left the city of Genova unprotected. Confronted with these images in which the police and the official Italian forces behaved in a manner that betrayed the public's trust, the creator of Montalbano found himself unable to continue to reconcile his commitment to social responsibility and his sense of guilt by association for having created a popular fictional character that is a police officer.

Not only was Camilleri ashamed of the behaviour of the police in Genova, but also the recent events seemed irreconcilable with the type of investigations normally conducted by his detective in the microcosm of Vigàta. It would have been impossible to ignore the recent
political events, as the character of Montalbano has a developed social consciousness, a deep moral sense, and favours left-wing political ideals. Montalbano, however, is a traditional cop.

Camilleri explains the character of his detective:

Montalbano è un poliziotto vero, uno sbirro vero che non fa mai un'indagine astratta. Conduce sempre un'indagine sul "territorio" che cerca di conoscere. Può essere un paese, un rione, un quartiere, una famiglia dentro la quale si è svolto un determinato fatto di sangue. Vuole capire. Vuole interpretare i codici di comportamento di quella famiglia, di quel rione, di quel paese, perché altrimenti l'indagine non gli riesce. È un poliziotto che ha bisogno di concretizzare (Lodato, 376).

Montalbano is a true detective who needs to make things concrete; he devotes himself to a certain investigative procedure, which is confined by traditions of the detective fiction genre. Camilleri is unwilling to exceed these limits, since he refuses to let Montalbano enter the horrors of the physically violent crimes portrayed by other writers of crime thrillers, nor does he allow his novels to descend into the despair over the pessimism and futility regarding the state of Sicily. His creation of Salvo Montalbano and Vigàta is the creation of an ideal investigator in an ideal simulation of a small Sicilian town; however, the controversies that rock the foundations of contemporary Sicily - an island still run on political favours and corrupt bureaucracy in which the mafia still holds sway, and the ports are constantly inundated by waves of the dispossessed in the form of refugees and illegal immigrants – still make their presence known in Camilleri’s picturesque fictional Sicilian universe. In this space between the real and the fake that the Montalbano novels inhabit, everything is political. The social milieu, the greater social reality is no mere backdrop. Individual cases, or concrete specific cases in which Montalbano becomes embroiled, magnify the whole other story of Sicily, its commercial and social reality, its culture, its history and its justice system, and its values.
Chapter Three: Vigàta and Language

Camilleri’s use of a highly individual hybrid language is one of the most prominent features of his novels. Montalbano’s Vigata is a fictional Sicilian port town based on the author’s birthplace Porto Empedocle, but its hyperreality is constructed, in part, through the author’s combination of standard Italian and dialect. The reader, through reading and looking for meaning in the texts, is complicit in validating Camilleri’s pidgin or idiolect and his construction of his world, a simulacrum of Sicily, populated by his version of Sicilians. By accepting Camilleri’s changes to the language, and persisting in the acquisition of new vocabulary and grammar in order to follow his plots, the reader aids the construction of the author’s fictional universe on some level and affirms Camilleri’s Sicily as something existent and comprehensible. This chapter examines Camilleri’s use of language in relation to the way it is used to construct Vigàta. It also explores the idea of Vigàta as simulacrum and of how Sicilian and Sicilians are also constructed by Camilleri’s narration.

Vigàta derives from the nearby place name, Licata; however, there is no relation between the places, only in the sounds of their names. Camilleri revealed that Vigàta was really inspired by a childhood locus amoenus, or the courtyard of his school, in which students would gather during breaks or to await the buses. The schoolchildren that came from the surrounding area told stories of their hometowns or villages. It is the union of these stories that made up the imaginary town that the author named Vigàta.

It is also significant to note is that in the author’s anecdotal account of his childhood experience with world building, his precursor to Vigàta was not built in a day or on any one occasion. It was a fictional space built up over many occasions of storytelling, by several
different points of view. The author did not invent Vigàta exclusively as a backdrop for his
detective, Inspector Montalbano, but he also sets his other fiction in the same place, but in a
different time, the nineteenth century, in novels such as La stagione della caccia (1992), Il
birraio di Preston (1995), Un filo di fumo (1980). In his first novel, one that does not feature his
famous police inspector, Il corso delle cose (1978, revised 1998), he discusses some motives for
creating a fictional location that so closely resembles his native Porto Empedocle:

At least at the outset of this novel writing enterprise, the author sought to stage his stories on
familiar ground, in a locale of which he can boast to have intimate first-person knowledge of the
geography, and a thorough understanding of the people and their motives. For the practical
convenience of not having to build his setting from the ground up, he chose a place that he
knows thoroughly, but to avoid unfortunate coincidences and damaging reputations of real
people or real institutions, he chose to give this other name to his model. However, at this stage
there is still an indication that Camilleri envisioned a connection between his fictional world and
other locations that are not contiguous with Vigàta or Sicily in either geography or time, given
the above mentions of London, New York, Bond Street, and Fifth Avenue. Given his references
to the ways in which he experienced these other locations, through film and television, he hints at
an awareness that his own setting for his fantasies will also be a mediated view of the place, filtered through his art, his memories and through the other forms of fiction that he has enjoyed and processed. Similar to the way in which Sciascia was concerned with France during the Enlightenment, Camilleri is interested in drawing connections between Sicily and other places, between contemporary Sicily and past Sicily and making it all relatable and contiguous in his constructed world. The creation of his hyperreal Sicily is by design of the author, but forces outside of the author have served to exacerbate the situation.

The fact that, as mentioned above, Porto Empedocle changed its official denomination to Porto Empedocle Vigàta in 2003, and the publication of a guidebook to Montalbano’s world (Clausi 2006) that traces the movements of the detective-protagonist onto a real map of Sicily, further conflate the authentic with the fake\(^2\). Forces outside the novel, such as our culture or collective consciousness, conspire to translate Vigàta from the page, to the television screen, to a true place in its own right, with which ‘readers’ can interact. Fans can go in search of Montalbano’s world, which represents a kind of typical Sicily, by following an itinerary outlined on various websites for the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento or the Camilleri Fans Club. The construction of Vigàta, Camilleri’s fictional world, in real-life Sicily is carried on and passed on by entities and organizations unrelated to the author. In visiting Porto Empedocle Vigàta and Agrigento (Montelusa in the novels) area in search of Montalbano, one can find an idealized transposition of an invented reality superimposed upon a few disperse locations in South-

\(^2\) The fictional Sicily represented by Camilleri has overflowed into reality as a result of the immense popularity of the television series. However, the latest news, which will exacerbate the phenomenon of Sicily as a textual reality is the fact that the television series is considering transferring Vigàta to Puglia. They have encountered lack of cooperation with the Porto Empedocle city council. Furthermore, Camilleri approves. This means a loss of tourism for Porto Empedocle and Sicily. [www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/home/586722/lite-sul-set-di-montalbano-sicilia-no-riprese-in-puglia-crocetta-chiama-produttore.html](http://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/home/586722/lite-sul-set-di-montalbano-sicilia-no-riprese-in-puglia-crocetta-chiama-produttore.html) (consulted on September 19, 2017).
Western Sicily. Camilleri is not the only author to engage in world-building, but the extraordinary difference lies in how willing the city of Porto Empedocle is to contribute to the creation of a virtual Sicily. In Jean Baudrillard’s use of the term, a simulacrum is not only a copy of the real, but a copy that becomes an alternative truth, or a replacement of reality: the hyperreal. For Baudrillard, the concept of the simulacrum is negative, “It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (1). He writes in “The Precession of Simulacra”, the first chapter of *Simulacra and Simulation*:

> Such is simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is Utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. (6)

Baudrillard describes simulacra in terms of a deterioration of reality. The old methods of reproduction, the map, the mirror, the trompe l’oeil presume a territory, a referential being or a substance as its basis. Today’s simulations replace the real. Baudrillard continues to outline the path of deterioration in *Simulacra and Simulation*:

> Such would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

The simulacra to which Baudrillard refers consist of series of signs and symbols, generated by culture and by media, which construct a perceived reality. These constructs, according to Baudrillard, have saturated modern life to the extent that all meaning is rendered meaningless –
the simulacra are not based on reality and they do not conceal a reality, but humans move among and have experiences with these symbols and signs that have replaced the real. Baudrillard uses the short story “On Exactitude in Science” (1946) by Jorge Luis Borges as an analogy of the “precession of simulacra”. Borges’s tale, a single paragraph short story about the map-territory relationship, takes the form of a literary forgery, posing as a citation from a work of travel and exploration. Borges elaborates a concept from Lewis Carroll’s *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* of a map that had the scale of a mile to a mile. In Borges’s story, an empire created a map so detailed and exact that it was as large as the empire itself. The map expanded and was destroyed in correspondence to territory conquered or lost by the empire. When the empire crumbled, the map remained in fragments, sheltering the odd vagrant. In Baudrillard’s reading, it is the map in which people live: reality is crumbling away from disuse, but the people of this empire continue to ensure their place in the representation of it is properly detailed by the map makers. Language and ideology, in which language increasingly becomes caught up in the production of power relations between social groups are phenomena, as Baudrillard theorizes, which contribute to the lack of distinctions between reality and simulacra. Language and ideology cannot help but create simulation. In this way of thinking, the more language is used, the more it refers to itself and its own working, rather than to real things and lived experiences. The scope of Vigàta has grown to be a simulacrum on this scale.

In Baudrillard’s world, a kind of post-modern apocalypse, there would no longer be any external referent for a place such as Vigàta. The works of Baudrillard can be read as a kind of lament and a nostalgia for the “old reality”. However, Gilles Deleuze takes the position that a simulacrum is not, necessarily, a negative construct and distortion of reality. Simulacra, according to Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* are “those systems in which different relates
to different by means of difference itself. What is essential is that we find in these systems no prior identity, no internal resemblance” (299). Simulacra, in this conception, can be the means through which accepted ideals or “privileged position” could be “challenged and overturned” (69). Deleuze and his frequent collaborator, Felix Guattari do not develop a theory of simulation in any one place, but they use the concept of the simulacrum throughout their work, without becoming mired in Baudrillard’s post-modern cynicism. For Plato, the production of simulacra represents a move away from the real, into unreality, and Baudrillard builds upon this progression of successively unreal reproductions. Deleuze, on the other hand, argues for a continual production of the real. In an article entitled “Plato and the Simulacrum”, Deleuze argues that the simulacrum is not really a copy of a copy, but a different type of phenomenon. The words “copy” and “model” bind us to the ideas of representation and reproduction; however, the process of production and function of simulacra are vastly different from their supposed models (48-49). For instance, Camilleri’s Vigàta, a space created in text, bears only a deceptive resemblance to any real town. A copy is made to replace its model, but a simulacrum enters different circuits. Deleuze uses the example of Pop Art in “Plato and the Simulacrum” to explain how, unlike copies, the simulacrum has broken out of the copy-model relationship to take on a life of its own. Pop Art does not become an equivalent of the “model”, but it turns against it and its world in order to open up a new space for the simulacrum’s proliferation. It is a differentiation and the simulacrum affirms its own difference (56). Camilleri uses his Vigàta as a “fake” location for his police procedurals. Its location with respect to real places in Sicily, Italy, Europe or the world is unspecific. This Italian writer, living in Rome, who is from Sicily and also sets his stories there, is not the first or only author to set up an imagined location in which to stage all of his fictions. Camilleri could be using the events and characters set in the microcosm of Vigàta
as a reflection and comment on real social problems, or it is also a possibility that these locations, personalities and plots are used as a substitute reality for the purpose of entertainment. The reality of the “model” is a question that comes to the forefront when reading the Montalbano novels in light of the theories of Baudrillard and Deleuze. Reading Baudrillard, one asks whether the “real” did ever exist, or if simulation is all there has ever been, but this philosopher does not provide any clear response. Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that simulation departs from “a regularized world comprising apparently stable identities or territories”. From this basis, the process of simulation produces the real, a “more-than-real” on the basis of the real: "It carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced." (Anti-Oedipus 87).

"Simulation," Deleuze and Guattari write, "does not replace reality . . . but rather it appropriates reality in the operation of despotic overcoding, it produces reality on the new full body that replaces the earth. It expresses the appropriation and production of the real by a quasi-cause" (210). In A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari need to resort to new terminology to describe the modes of simulation without constant reference to the terminology of replication and representation, for “art” is also a form of simulation that recreates a territory, but one that is not spatial. They discuss, in Chapter 10, the concept of double becoming, in which two terms are swept up into a process that transforms them both21. This becoming is a collective process as the philosophers suggest, even when it originates with a solitary artist. Deleuze and Guattari allow for the creation of a working simulation, through art, that may then be reintegrated into society.

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21 p. 305 gives examples of how becoming is always double citing special effects in Hitchcock’s Birds, Moby Dick – the characters Captain Ahab is engaged in becoming whale, while the whale simultaneously becomes an unbearable pure whiteness – and the tarantella which is a strange dance in which one who is suffering from a tarantula bite becomes the spider through the dance, while the spider in turn becomes a pure silhouette, pure color and pure sound to which the person dances.
Vigàta is often seen as such a place given the amount of discussion and critique of Camilleri’s *impegno*.

All art, including (and especially) all novels, create a simulacrum. Even if the author uses an existing place as the setting for his fictional plots, he is never able to deliver the real thing through words. The places in the novels could only copy, represent or feign an infinitesimal part of the real Sicily. In return, in part owing to the serial and repeatable nature of the Montalbano novels, and in part knowing about the author’s Sicilian origins, readers are tempted to search for an original for Vigàta in the real world, and to draw parallels between what is happening on the page and the events and issues in the real Sicily. According to Robert Rushing, “the cognitive pleasure produced by the unfolding of a Camilleri mystery is slight; what is significant is the reader’s initiation into a series of social problems” (33). The author, according to Rushing, creates panoramic geographical and social landscapes through the novel series that overshadows the entertainment value of any of the individual cases taken in isolation. Camilleri’s desire to narrate Sicily is compared with a parallel desire in the works of Leonardo Sciascia. For instance, Elena Past admits that “the Montalbano novels share thematic interest in the same Enlightenment issues present in *Dei delitti e delle pene* [by Cesare Beccaria] and, in particular, in Leonardo Sciascia’s novels: concerns regarding the excesses, the inadequacies and the abuses of both power in the abstract and of the justice system in particular” (83). Simona Demontis argues that Sciascia and Camilleri share a common viewpoint, and that in many of the big cases affecting the mafia, politics, and the state of the island, only partial successes are possible, “anche i casi che deve risolvere Montalbano raggiungono quasi sempre una soluzione parziale e il poliziotto deve accontentarsi della ‘mezza messa’” (167). According to Maurizio Pistelli, Camilleri shares with Sciascia a political passion, the desire to confront the burning topics in his land of origin:
Sciascia costituisce per Camilleri un modello intellettuale più che linguistico, del quale egli apprezza in primo luogo la passione politica, la capacità di affrontare e interpretare i temi d’attualità più scottanti, l’intenso rapporto d’amore e la sete di conoscenza per la sua terra d’origine (56).

Camilleri shares with his mentor and predecessor the idea that detective fiction cannot solve or answer all the lingering questions related to the contemporary political climate, but it has the potential to state the problems, describe situations, and decode the environment in which they arise and proliferate. Where the two detective fiction writers differ is in the fact that Montalbano, in the end, always gets his man. Demontis concedes that “rispetto ai protagonisti di Sciascia, però, il commissario scopre sempre tutta la verità” (167). Past is of the opinion that the optimistic outlook and the serial nature of the Montalbano novels create a virtual Sicily.

Camilleri asserts that he is concerned with real issues; however, the place that Camilleri named Vigàta is deemed to be, by the critic Past, a copy of a non-existent original because of his use of a consistent narrative scheme and the novels’ popularity and their predictability. While Sciascia is congratulated for his realistic depiction of the defeat of reason in post-Enlightenment Sicily, and the ponderous, pessimistic and cyclical nature of Sicilian history is celebrated in its depressing defeatism in *I Malavoglia* (Verga), *Il Gattopardo* (Tomasi di Lampedusa) and *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* (Sciascia), Camilleri’s “optimistic” novels get cited by Past as an example of a Sicilian theme park, a Disneyland. The Montalbano series enters other circuits.

The self-consciousness of the simulacrum created by the author exists as a commentary to how culture is manufactured in the twenty-first century. The protagonist Salvo Montalbano in the novels acknowledges the fact that there is another version of him out in the world: he writes letters to Montalbano Due, he watches himself on the television series, and he writes letters to his author Andrea Camilleri. The humour and playfulness that characterize the novels seem to lend
credence to the idea that Camilleri’s Vigàta and Sicily are imaginary locations that are superficial and false, especially to those detractors (for example the Sicilian novelist Vincenzo Consolo) that question the sincerity of his political commitment. However, it also draws attention to the fact that Sciascia’s Sicily, and Pirandello’s Sicily, and all other writers’ Sicily, are also literary representations. About forty years passed between *Il giorno della civetta* and the first Montalbano novel, and twenty more years have elapsed since the start of the commissario’s novelistic adventures. Sicily has changed, inevitably. Barbara Pezzotti is one of the critics that argues for Camilleri as an important voice in crime fiction and that all of his novels are inspired by actual events or problems that are affecting the island at this time. However, while I do not disagree, I find the idea of Camilleri’s Sicily as a simulacrum, and entering into relationships with other simulacra, compelling. Furthermore, the two concepts of Montalbano’s world are not mutually exclusive especially in Baudrillard’s version of the simulacrum. People, the creators and consumers of popular culture, the readers, interact with culture and media very differently now than in the days when Leonardo Sciascia was on the bestseller lists. Camilleri’s work is political, but it is also post-modern and self-conscious. His Vigàta-Montelusa is filtered through memory (he has not lived in the area for about sixty years, but visits often) and created by layers of stories. He inserts references and pays homage to Leonardo Sciascia, and this addition of certain details or relics from Sciascia’s works does certainly add a bit of “reality energy” to his manufactured world as Past suggests: “Leonardo Sciascia’s work serves as an indispensable set piece, a remnant of a real fictional world that lends verisimilitude to the constructed Vigàta” (93), but he also refers to other writers such as the Belgian Georges Simenon, and the American Dashiell Hammett. His critique of Sicilian society enters into relationships with other systems of thought and other artistic traditions. His Vigàta expands and proliferates to other countries in the
world and through other media, television, websites, and tourism. It derives its “reality” from other sources, by using other “real fictional” worlds as “evidence” for its own existence. In Montalbano sono Pistelli proposes another way of regarding the geographical area from which Camilleri, Sciascia and Pirandello originate, the southwestern region bounded by Porto Empedocle, Agrigento, and Regalpetra. The critic describes the area as, “un ben preciso retroterra geografico e culturale, questo, che non è relegato a svolgere un ruolo di semplice e neutro fondale, ma assurge spesso a vero e proprio co-protagonista delle storie narrate” (45). As a co-protagonist, Vigàta can perform other roles denied to it as a setting to house the Montalbano characters.

**Camilleri and Language(s)**

For Camilleri, a new language, an invented language, was necessary to describe an invented place: neither standard Italian nor Sicilian were sufficient. This hybrid language is used throughout the Montalbano novels. Pezzotti cites many of the current theories and debates about Camilleri’s unique language choices in aid of her exploration of the significance of place in the Montalbano series. Although Camilleri asserts that Italian was insufficient to express his ideas since it represented a sort of foreign or bureaucratic idiom (Camilleri 1998, 142) and that Pirandello, a Sicilian writer that shares with Camilleri a certain heritage and kinship, also distinguishes between Italian as the language of concepts and dialect, as the language of feelings (Capecchi 2000, 10), Camilleri uses both and neither. As Pezzotti states, Camilleri’s language is accessible to any Italian speaker, and it resembles Sicilian, but it is not quite the same, just as Vigàta is similar to Porto Empedocle, but is not quite the same (138). Demontis links Camilleri’s choice of a fictional town with his linguistic choices, as both the standard language and the
traditional dialect fall short of conveying an accurate sense of the complex reality of modern Sicily (57). Many critics tend toward treating Vigàta as a reflection of reality rather than a simulacrum in Baudrillard’s sense in which reality is lost, and people just live in a fictional world that perpetually refers to other fictions. Leonardo Sciascia and his fictional works, to which Camilleri frequently refers, use language and dialect very differently. For Sciascia, there is a strong connection between language and the world. The Sicilian words are used sparingly in *Il giorno della civetta*, for example, and they add more than local colour and verisimilitude. There the dialect words come as a bit of a shock and bring with them implications of a certain depth of meaning hidden below the surface of the text. The protagonist learns to understand the crime and simultaneously decodes Sicilian society, while the reader is educated in Sciascia’s Enlightenment morality. Camilleri should not be read mimetically, or not entirely so. It is more difficult to separate the real, the representational, the simulated and the blatantly fake in his novels. The reader could look for lessons about “what Sicily is really like”, this complex modern reality, in the Montalbano novels, but often embedded in Camilleri’s world are fragments of Sciascia amongst other writers, impostors, and inventions, all of which have taken on a life of their own.

Vigàta is the physical setting and the context for the Montalbano series. The notion of context can be used to describe Vigàta in two ways: as verbal context and social context. Vigàta, according to this idea, functions as the setting, but since it is a fictitious locale, it also functions as a setting in a more philosophical sense. Socially and spatially, we can locate Vigàta in Sicily,

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22 Bargieddu (Ital. Bargello; Eng. Chief of Police)
Il vecchio disse che forse il nome giusto era Barricieddu, o forse Bargieddu: ma in ogni caso significava malvagità, la malvagità di uno che commanda; ché un tempo i Barruggieddi o Bargieddi comandavano i paesi e mandavano gente alla forca, per piacere malvagio (*Il giorno della civetta* 93-94).
but its creator has reserved the right not to identify his setting with any real port in the vicinity of Agrigento, similarly his “Sicily” is not necessarily coincident with the real island. At this point it is useful to refer again to La forma dell’acqua, and the metaphor of the title with respect to the Camilleri’s use of place. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the shape of water is a phrase introduced by the widow of the deceased in order to draw attention to the importance of context and how it affects interpretation. As water takes the form of the container, truth can take the shape that is most comfortable to it. The metaphor of the shape of water can be applied to Vigàta as the container, or context, for Camilleri’s views. Camilleri is interested in representing not only a physical place, but also a state of mind. In the first mystery of the series, Luparello’s widow reminds Montalbano that the search for truth is optional. She explains her use of the phrase “la forma dell’acqua”:

“Questo sta a lei scoprirlo, se ne ha voglia. Oppure può fermarsi alla forma che hanno fatto prendere all’acqua”.
“Non ho capito, mi scusi”.
“Io non sono siciliana, sono nata a Grosseto, sono venuta a Montelusa quando mio padre ne era prefetto. Possedevamo un pezzetto di terra e una casa alle pendici dell’Amiata, ci passavamo le vacanze. Avevo un amichetto, figlio di contadini, più piccolo di me. Io avevo una decina d’anni. Un giorno vidi che il mio amico aveva messo sull’orlo di un pozzo una ciotola, una tazza, una teiera, una scatola di latta quadrata, tutte colme d’acqua, e le osservava attentamente. “Qual è la forma dell’acqua?”
“Ma l’acqua non ha forma!” dissi ridendo: “Piglia la forma che le viene data” (FA 110).

The widow of the deceased gives voice to the title of the novel that introduces the character Montalbano and the fictitious locale, Vigàta, thereby emphasizing the multiple forms that the truth can take and how much any particular interpretation depends upon its container, “la forma che le viene data”, upon circumstances in which the events and people are placed. Mrs. Luparello is the one that suggests a shift in point of view when looking at the death of her husband. In this
instance, being a non-Sicilian helps; this is in contrast to Montalbano who is someone, in the words of Tanu u grecu, who “le cose le capisce”, since he is Sicilian. She is convinced that a crime is involved, but that crime is not a homicide, but a political crime. It is up to Montalbano to look at the facts in a different context in order to arrive at the truth. It is significant that the explanation of this metaphor for the truth – its relativity, its many-layered nature, its shapelessness – and how it is transferred to a concrete physical image of looking at the shape of the container in order to determine the shape of water, is presented as a reminiscence, a story within a story. Mrs. Luparello, instead of explaining what she means by the shape of water, narrates an event from her childhood. Furthermore, she feels it is necessary to preface her tale with the fact she is not Sicilian. She is an outsider by birth, and although she has lived her adult life in Sicily, she brings an outsider’s point of view to the events under scrutiny. With Mrs. Luparello providing an important key to the unraveling of the mystery, more of a context shift, or a guide to reading the existing clues, Camilleri emphasizes the importance of place as a factor in interpretation. The place in which Montalbano operates and the place of origin of Camilleri’s characters and narrator play a significant role in the constructing the subject position in the novels. In Camilleri, the subject is the consciousness through which the action of the novels is experienced, but it is not accidental that this author’s subject is Sicilian and this subjective consciousness is situated in and shaped by the fictitious Vigàta. Being on-site and a man on his own turf has been essential for Montalbano’s interpretation of the subtleties of all of his cases.

On the other hand, throughout the novels there are always characters who do not understand, or do not want to understand, the “real” working of any given case or of Sicily, in general. For instance, there is the “new” questore Bonetti-Alderighi who appears in the fourth novel *La voce del violino* and with whom Montalbano clashes frequently, for the new questore is
an innovator and bureaucrat who desires to renew and update the police station of Vigàta and disapproves of Montalbano’s methods. Bonetti-Alderighi, a northerner, has an image of Sicily as a savage lawless place, and of Sicilians as savages. This “colonial” stereotype is reinforced by Montalbano, both unwittingly and intentionally. This relationship is acted out for us at the beginning of *L’odore della notte*:

Bonetti-Alderighi si scantò. La faccia di Montalbano, illuminata a metà, era una stampa e una figura con una maschera africana, di quelle da mettersi prima dei sacrifici umani. E poi, tra la Sicilia e l’Africa non c’era tanta distanza, pensò fulmineo il questore agghiacciando” (41).

In this instance, the new *questore* is trying to make an issue out of a case before his time in office, the case involving the Tunisian boy in *Il ladro del merendine*. This interchange is one of many between Montalbano and his superior, in which he is called to report to headquarters. It has little to do with the plot, but everything to do with establishing where Bonetti-Alderighi is “coming from”, which preconceptions and cultural ideologies inform Bonetti-Alderighi’s worldview. Similarly, we see where Montalbano is “coming from”. In this instance, Montalbano manages to intimidate the *questore* and forces him to leave the boy out of his private problems with Montalbano’s performance as a member of the police. In the quotation above, the *questore* reveals his negative image of Sicily, but his misunderstanding and obtuseness turns out to be the means by which Montalbano is able to intimidate him. In these lines, we view Vigàta, temporarily, from the point of view of an outsider. The reader is treated to an apparently firsthand view through Bonetti-Alderighi’s eyes. True, it is a limited view, fraught with exaggerations and somewhat paranoid stereotypes that bring to bear all the past experiences and prejudices of the outsider. This is all expressed within the context of an interview between Montalbano and the *questore*, which becomes a confrontation between two ideologies, two
conflicting views of Sicily. But before we jump to the conclusion that we are being treated to how a northerner really thinks of Sicily, we must keep in mind that it is the narrator that mediates between the reader and Bonetti-Alderighi’s thoughts. To further contextualize, this narrator identifies himself as Sicilian through his diction; for the terms “si scantò”, “pinsò” and “agghizzando” are definitely not the word choices that a character such as Bonetti-Alderighi would make for himself. Through this narrative intervention, the reader is prevented from the too comfortable belief that we are experiencing Bonetti-Alderighi’s thoughts directly. Instead we are treated to a double irony. We are reminded that Montalbano’s superior has not, in fact, said anything, and we are just reading the narrator’s interpretation of Bonetti-Alderighi’s facial expression. We are borrowing a sense of what Bakhtin describes as “outsidedness” in *Speech Genres*:

Outsidedness: “There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the culture through the eyes of this foreign culture. This idea, as I said, is one-sided. Of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be a duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot really see one’s own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others.

In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it
has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths” (Speech Genres 1986, p.7).

The Sicilian author, when writing about his own culture cannot really see his own situation with objectivity. While the Sicilian native can be an authority of sorts on all things Sicilian, he lacks this quality of “outsidedness” that according to Bakhtin is a powerful factor in understanding. In this example, the “outsidedness” of Bonetti-Alderighi is exaggerated and spoofed, for it quite obviously lacks any sort of creativity and objectivity. Contrarily and ironically, in a manner rather typical to Camilleri, the Chief of Police’s position as an outsider does not offer any special objectivity or insights into the place or the people he is supposed to manage. Keeping in mind that this is the “insider’s” view of a certain type of “outsidedness”, Camilleri’s text interprets Northern stereotypes of Sicily. The reader does not have any idea what the character of the questore is thinking; instead we are treated to the unflattering stereotype of the bigoted Northern Italian official, by a narrative voice that has betrayed itself as Sicilian.

Camilleri’s texts thrive on and play with stereotypes and oppositions. Chu suggests that it is appropriate to draw upon Said’s theories “if one considers the frequency with which Sicily, or at least the western half of the island is defined as essentially ‘Arab’, and thereby assigned all the negative values of the binary oppositions” (Chu 78). Synchronic essentialism, a key representational strategy of orientalism described by Said, is cited as a strategy in the Sicilian discourse that uses “the copula to describe ‘Sicily’ and ‘the Sicilian’ as fundamentally timeless and unchanging entities: like the Oriental outlined by Said, ‘the Sicilian’ is ‘irrational depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’ …” (Chu 79). This tendency to use the copula and these totalizing
statements of identity results in the consequent use of oppositions, used either implicitly or overtly, to create a polarized relationship between Sicilians and “Others”, perhaps most obviously Europeans or Northern Italians. So, if the Sicilian is “savage”, the European is “civilized”. When regarding texts on Sicily, these oppositions are used so often and reinforced so much that “by force of repetition, acquire the status of “natural truths” (79). Chu extends this argument by stating that “the nature of the discourse on Sicily is rendered more complex by the substantial textual contribution of Sicilians themselves to that discourse” (79). Chu uses the term the Sicilian “subject-object”. In Cartesian philosophy, there is a division between the object, res cogitata, the things and entities of the world “out there”, and the subject, which perceives the objects. Human experiences are perceived and processed by the subject. In literature, the subject is the mind or the perspective through which the events of the novel are mediated. Interestingly, in many manifestations of writing on Sicily by Sicilians, the subject (observer) and the object studied are the same. In this example, Camilleri is interpreting a Northerner’s stance towards the Sicilian people. He assumes that the new questore carries the standard prejudices and preconceptions, but the narrator reveals himself as Sicilian. This scene becomes more of a dramatization of the polarizations between the Sicilian subject-object and the Northern Italian. In the past, it has often been the Northerner, or the European that has been the thinking subject. Camilleri’s text does cast Bonetti-Alderighi in a kind of parody of observer, a rather ineffectual and biased anthropologist.

Montalbano’s relationship with Livia, his “continental” girlfriend is also coloured by a sense of otherness. According to Pezzotti, “misunderstanding between the couple is often caused by a linguistic quid pro quo” (134). Livia is not physically present in Vigàta throughout the course of many investigations and she is present more frequently as a voice on the telephone or
her words in a letter. Their long-distance exchanges do not usually contribute to the unraveling of the cases, rather as the series progresses, the connection between Livia and Montalbano is characterized by more absences and more misunderstandings, culminating in La danza del gabbiano, in which Livia is present in Vigàta when Montalbano hears that Fazio has been kidnapped, but Montalbano completely forgets about her existence and does not even inform her that he will not be meeting her for lunch and returns several days later to an empty house and a note on the kitchen table.

However, even the old questore, who was more understanding of his rogue detective than Bonetti-Alderighi, has to interpret Sicily through foreign eyes. At the conclusion of the first novel of the series, the questore has to invoke Sciascia’s novel, Candido, in an attempt to tone down and simplify the police inspector’s convoluted explication of the crime. He says to Montalbano, “Si ricorda che il protagonista a un certo punto afferma che è possibile che le cose sono quasi sempre semplici? Io questo volevo ricordarle” (158). The words of many of the important Sicilian and European writers of the twentieth century appear in the Montalbano novels. In this instance, Sciascia’s character is cited at the moment of exposition of the case, right before all the secrets and mysteries are revealed. The questore, a well-read individual and the chief of police, tries to find a ready-made frame of reference though which to interpret the events. Sciascia as a Sicilian is cited by the sympathetic questore in order to give his understanding and reading of the events credibility. Montalbano counters with a reminder of the subtitle of the work “Un sogno fatto in Sicilia” and re-interprets the Luparello situation as more of a nightmare. It is significant that in Montalbano’s world, the exposition of the truth, the denouement of a case, the debates over the salient points of a mystery, is prefaced by a citation of a work of fiction, a novel, in order to give the solution greater “reality”. This is another
instance of how Vigàta, or Camilleri’s recreation of Sicily, has so captivated the collective imagination that it stands as the dominant image of that place. In this fictional world, all the proofs and authorities cited are, similarly, fictional; they refer to and interact with other spaces and territories in literature, rather than to anything in the real world. As with the explanation of “la forma dell’acqua”, we have, once again, a story within the story: a reference to another narrative that provides a method for interpreting the facts of the case. Elena Past states:

Camilleri’s use of Sciascia, while constituting a declaration of a certain poetic leaning (that of pertaining to the realm of sicilianità, of plying questions of justice and contemporary politics, etc.), then also makes evident his postmodern, double degree of removal from the Sicilian society he represents. Ironically, those elements that most evidently contribute to the appearance of Sicilianness in his writing are details that, ultimately, take him further into the world of postmodern simulation, into impostura... (98)

Camilleri’s use of intertextual references highlights the artificiality of his chosen medium used to reflect upon contemporary society. His portrait of contemporary Sicily, despite the presence of pressing concerns such as corruption, the immigration of foreigners, organized crime, and the erasure and removal of the old geographical and national boundaries, is self-consciously an art form, rather than a documentary, owing to his artificial literary language and other narrative devices that characterize his novels.

Language is just one element that Camilleri uses to construct subjectivity. Other features found in the Montalbano series are the dominance of dialogue, theatricality, and literary intertextuality, but they are all devices that find their expression through language. Language is the key that opens the door to Camilleri’s Sicily. The mystery writer’s use of dialect words mixed with standard Italian, and further mixed with his own neologisms, hung together upon the scaffolding of fairly standard Italian syntax is one of the most notable elements of his work. However, Elena Past acknowledges that, “It is a system not immediately transparent to the
uninitiated; according to the author’s own admission, many Sicilians fail to recognize his terminology” (Past 91). Even though this chapter will not study the specific use of dialect, nor the linguistic mechanics of Camilleri, but discuss the relationship of language and subjectivity, it must be noted that Jana Vizmuller-Zocco has untangled a bit of Camilleri’s web of languages in her essay on *L’odore della notte*. She reveals that characters who are not Sicilian speak Italian, while older characters speak in the dialect of Porto Empedocle, Camilleri’s native town, for example Clementina Vasile-Cozzo of *Il ladro di merendine*, as well as some of the underprivileged characters. As mentioned before, the author uses his new, original and entertaining language for the other Sicilian characters, including Montalbano and the narrator, which is often situated in Montalbano’s consciousness. Vizmuller-Zocco describes the author’s language as neo-standard Italian into which is inserted a “Sicilian branch” (39). Clues to deciphering the more abstruse utterances in this new language are scattered through comic scenes involving at least some words in standard Italian. Furthermore, our induction into Camilleri’s linguistic realm is gradual and cumulative. *La forma dell’acqua* contains considerably less of this hybrid language than, for instance, *L’odore della notte*, in which narration begins from inside one of Montalbano’s dreams. Vizmuller-Zocco has expressed the view that it is the character of Montalbano who interprets, translates and mediates all levels or meaning and reading in this series. Montalbano navigates through all levels of society.

Despite the assertion that the detective moves through all levels of society, Mark Chu advances the argument that the novels present a somewhat standard stereotypical image of Sicilian society. The novels tend to neutralize and trivialize the hard facts that surround the issue
of organized crime in Sicily (Chu 2011 92)\(^2\). Furthermore, “the parodic representation of the speech of anonymous immigrants,” (94), such as the maids employed by the commissario’s Swedish friend Ingrid, tends to dehumanize the generic extracomunitari, despite the character Montalbano’s attempt to show compassion towards individual immigrants. These accusations do not stand unchallenged. Pezzotti, reading Vizmuller-Zocco suggests that she “successfully argues that Camilleri does not convey a stereotypical image of Sicily, but rather performs a vital literary operation that places the official Italian language and the Sicilian dialect on the same level. It also gives the latter a literary dignity which mainstream scholarship still denies it” (Pezzotti 150). Language is the most notable tool that Camilleri uses to situate the subject in a particular critical relationship with various discourses.

In post-colonial theory, one of the ways in which an imperial force establishes its dominance over a culture is through the imposition of a standard version of the national language. The standardization of language and the marginalization of all variants as “impurities” is a particularly significant common ground that Italian literature shares with post-colonial literature.

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-

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\(^2\) Mark Chu takes umbrage with the fact that Camilleri does not go all the way in his critique of the government. The author in the opening of La forma dell’acqua condemns certain political decisions to deploy the army in Sicily in “Operation Sicilian Vespers” (25 July 1992 – 8 July 1998) as ineffectual, given that the territory is really controlled by the local mafiosi, but he omits to reference the reason for the decision, the murders of the anti-mafia prosecutors, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, in May and July 1992. He also calls attention to Montalbano’s decision in Il cane di terracotta to focus on a fifty-year-old murder rather than narrate the story of the takedown of the mafia boss, Tano u grecu, which opened the novel. (2011 92) For Chu, Camilleri’s impegno is a strategy to provide local colour and sell more books. While Chu acknowledges that Montalbano’s racism and objectification of women do not reflect the opinions of the author, his protagonist and mouthpiece’s “liberal credentials are suspect” (93)
colonial voice. For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing which follows is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture. (Ashcroft 7-8).

“Impurities” can be said to characterize Camilleri’s writing. In his case, not even a “pure” form of any known dialect is used. With respect to the subject position in Camilleri’s Montalbano novels and in Sicilian literature in general, one could argue that these authors (such as Sciascia, Verga, and Tomasi di Lampedusa) act, as Alessandro Carrera suggests, as anthropologists of their own culture. They invent a position that is both inside the culture, yet they attempt to maintain a critical distance. Camilleri makes free with language and resists standardization and avoids the simple exercise of documentation of an existing dialect. Camilleri resists being put into the standard subject position of the post-colonial writer, but nevertheless still dialogues with, and acknowledges a standard. In Camilleri, there is not so much a power struggle but an underhanded teasing of the dominant centre of power, simply by indicating through language that the self-appointed centre cannot possibly understand the problems of Sicilian society, nor can it get the jokes and insults levelled at the centre. The particularly Italian version of the post-colonial discourse is a factor in the Montalbano novels; however, Camilleri’s engagement with it is not at any anthropological level. He seeks to undermine the hierarchical structure of power, but his techniques are often ironic and satirical, taking him further into the world of the postmodern and the unreal.

In the case of Italian, the standardized form of the language is, indeed, “the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated” to quote Ashcroft again. As illustrated in the Montalbano novels, it is the language of bureaucracy and authority. This language is no longer, however, associated with, or closely tied to the reality of any single place. The
national language of Italy has literary and poetic origins in the Middle Ages, and while Dante Alighieri’s Florentine became the basis for modern standard Italian, the Florence of today is hardly an imperial force that wields power over its conquered states. By the time of Italian Unification, 1861, the standardized language had been diffused throughout the peninsula through the written medium, but not through speech. The literary and poetic standard has, furthermore, been refined by centuries of importations from local vernaculars, used in powerful courts and the dialects of wealthy commercial centres. Tuscan-derived standard Italian is the language of literature and the media, but it does not exist in its “pure” form anywhere. Regional variations affect the way the standard is transmitted through speech and writing. Many referents to the place and culture of the speakers are betrayed even in variations found in even a cursory look at Italian television. Place, or place of origin, has a significant role in understanding and interpretation in the Montalbano series. The dialects, in contrast to the standard, are connected to, and have history in very specifically delineated geographic places. They evolved and developed in connection to and out of experience with living in a real territory. Sicilian writers, writing in Italian, have the awareness that the language they are using has origins elsewhere and that meaning may similarly lie in this unspecified “elsewhere”. Curiously, when speaking of Italy and Italian literature, the national language precedes any sense of nation and unity. Camilleri plays with this irony. Camilleri’s borrowings from a variety of linguistic sources does recall Vizmuller-Zocco’s assertion of granting literary dignity to the dialect, but the fact that the author does not resort to pure dialect, if such a language exists, demonstrates the need to redefine the culture and to wrest authority from an unspecified Italian (or Sicilian) cultural centre. Like Borges’s map, centuries after the Florentine “linguistic empire” has fallen, standardized Italian is still in use without many significant changes. In Montalbano’s world, the standardized form of
the national language seems to be insufficient to describe the reality that the protagonist inhabits. Like the homeless who shelter in Borges’s map, the users of Italian are outsiders and foreigners, either the representatives of the authority of “elsewhere” or immigrants who are trying to make contact with the natives on a linguistic common ground. This language is certainly inadequate to be used by the observing subject to adequately narrate the events that unfold in Vigàta.

The problem of language in the presentation of social reality is not necessarily a Sicilian problem. Frederic Jameson discusses this issue in the detective fiction of Raymond Chandler. The critic speaks of how Chandler’s books take place in Los Angeles, but it is simultaneously the Californian city and a world of the author’s own creation. Chandler’s microcosm is a dark local world subjected to a local power apparatus that is beyond appeal, where money and naked force rule. Through language, style, slang, and invented idiom, the American author creates his setting and context:

In Chandler the presentation of social reality is involved immediately and directly with the problem of language. He thought of himself primarily as a stylist, and there can be no doubt that he invented a distinctive kind of language, with its own humor and imagery, its own special movement. But the most striking feature of this style is its use of slang, and here Chandler’s own remarks are instructive:

I had to learn American just like a foreign language. To use it I had to study it and analyze it. As a result, when I use slang, colloquialisms, snide talk, or any kind of offbeat language, I do it deliberately. The literary use of slang is a study in itself. I’ve found that there are only two kinds that are any good: slang that has established itself in the language and slang that you make up yourself. Everything else is apt to be passé before it gets into print. (Letter of March 18, 1949 to Alex Barrish in Raymond Chandler Speaking, p.80)

But slang is eminently serial in its nature: it exists as objectively as a joke, passed from hand to hand, always elsewhere, never fully the property of its user. In this, the literary problem of slang forms
a parallel in the microcosm of style to the problem of the presentation of the serial society itself, never present fully in any of its manifestations, without a privileged center, offering the impossible alternative between an objective and abstract lexical knowledge of it as a whole and a lived concrete experience of its worthless components (Jameson 134).

Chandler and his renowned first-person narrator and private eye are innovators in the genre. Chandler’s trademark fast-paced use of the American vernacular and his distinctive delivery of apt ironic one-liners are the author’s personal means of putting his cachet on the genre. Interestingly, Chandler’s language appears to be a natural imitation and record of the way his characters speak, but it is really quite studied. His realistic details transcend realism, as his narrator uses quite polished and poetic language to epigrammatize a seedy and sordid environment. There is a precedent within the genre for using a distinctive kind of language. Camilleri’s style and use of language are personally and politically motivated. He may not be referring to Chandler and the hard-boiled American tradition, but this author’s concerns with language and his relationship with the Sicilian environment of the Montalbano stories are connected. Like Chandler, Camilleri has dug his own niche in the genre of detective fiction. Camilleri is not the first writer to understand that if language can create the world, then the use of slang or alternate linguistic expressions creates a parallel microcosm within it.

From the opening sentence of La forma dell’acqua the narrator introduces his new language, and his new place the imaginary Vigàta, prior to introducing his hero. The narrator seeks to negotiate a gap between the reader, accustomed to texts in the canonical standard, and the author’s hyper-Sicilian world.

Lume d’alba non filtrava nel cortiglio della “Splendor”, la società che aveva in appalto la nettezza urbana di Vigàta, una nuvolaglia bassa e densa cumpigliava completamente il cielo come se fosse stato tirato un telone grigio da cornicione a cornicione, foglia non
From the outset, the reader is introduced to several non-standard words amongst which we find ‘cataminare’ and ‘arrisbigliarsi’ and later, still in the first pages of the book, the natives of this port town are described as people who have their own diverse system of communication in opposition to the national standard: “tra gente che parlava un dialetto incomprensibile, fatto più di silenzi che di parole, d’indecifrabili movimenti delle sopracciglia, d’impercettibili increspature delle rughe” (11). The impossibility of communication with the natives is an idea introduced at the beginning of the series. The system appears at first impenetrable and also non-verbal. As the reader navigates the novels, he or she builds a “Camillerian” expertise that cumulates and amplifies with the reading of each successive episode in the series. “Language itself thus engages readers in a relationship of complicity with Camilleri’s world, for comprehension implies, on some level, an affirmation of this fictional version of Sicily as existent and understandable” (Past 92). As Past suggests, the linguistic system of the author defines and makes real his unique position as subject-object: an observer that is part of the world that he is observing and interpreting. The observer is also creating, making and living in this constructed world. While the characters endear themselves to the reader, and the idea that perhaps “taliare” is indeed better than “guardare”, that the verb “babiare” more aptly expresses our take on the situation and that we are also “di pirsona pirsonalmente” stakeholders in this fictional Sicily – as we become inducted into Camilleri’s linguistic system, we simultaneously reinforce his interpretation of Sicilian reality. The author’s language does more than highlight the dialects of North versus south, the contraposition of Sicily and Italy. This constant dialogue with a “cultural centre” that is a feature of “insular” literatures is an element that is introduced early into the Montalbano series. As discussed in a previous chapter, the choice of a Sicilian investigator is a move on the
author’s part to avoid the patronizing situation of an outside or foreign investigator that solves of Sicily’s problems. In fact, the questore Bonetti-Alderighi is just such an outsider who illustrates that a Northerner cannot understand Sicily, or is compelled not be by historical and political pressures. Even though this dialectic is present in the Montalbano novels, this issue remains unresolved and Camilleri does not promote the Sicilian side of things, because he is an Italian author, born in Sicily, residing in Rome. Just as the dialect of the Sicily of his youth will not suffice for narration of Montalbano’s adventures, the idea of Sicily as an island, separate from the mainland, an unchanging, backward and insular place, characterized by criminality, does not convey the author’s idea of being Sicilian. As changes have been made to pre-conceptions of place, a new hybrid language has been adopted to capture in words the new reality to which it refers; however, this hybrid is not used, accepted or loved by all the characters who dwell within the novels.

It is misleading to speak of a single new Camillerian language, as the Montalbano novels present an intersection of many dialoguing and duelling languages that together delineate a new conception of place. Reiteration of certain of the more inventive, ironic and unique dialogues lead the reader to believe that he or she has a special understanding of Camilleri’s world. For instance, no one, really, speaks like Caterella, but he always features in a few dialogues in every case.

“Dottori ah dottori!” vociò Catarella dallo sgabuzzino. “Ci devo diri una cosa d’importanzia! [...] Ci voliva diri che tifonò il dottori Arquaraquà” (Luna di Carta 183-4)

Long acquaintanceship with Catarella, a police officer and a minor character mostly assigned to work the reception desk, habituates readers to his garbled linguistic utterances. This character’s ineptitude is curiously obvious and his utterances are comically fantastical. But out of the mouth
of the character cast as the fool comes the literary reference to Sciascia’s quarquaraquà. The name “dottori Arquaraquà” is funny, but Don Arena in Sciascia’s *Il giorno della civetta* uses the term to describe the lowest of five categories of men, below the men, half-men and little men - "...E infine i quaquaraquà: che dovrebbero vivere come le anatre nelle pozzanghere, chè la loro vita non ha più senso e più espressione di quella delle anatre..." (109). The idiomatic “quaquaraquà” became most famous in the public imagination and it is associated with the world of the mafia and the rules that govern it. Why are they so low on the scale of humanity? It seems that in mafia terms it refers to an informer. Catarella’s slip of the tongue may be just a throwaway line and bear very little reference to its intertextual referent, allowing, as Past suggests, “a spark of recognition on the part of the reader” (93). The critic asserts that this garbled quotation reinforces the verisimilitude of the “constructed Vigàta. Like the elegant canals of ‘Venice’ in the Walt Disney World theme park, Epcot Center, Sciascia is a form of cultural capital in Camilleri’s invented Sicily (93). It should be noted that the landmarks, the references included to give the Montalbano novels verisimilitude and credibility refer to a fictional source. Past’s use of Disney World as an example recalls Baudrillard and Umberto Eco’s analyses of Disneyland as alternate realities. Eco writes in *Travels in Hyperreality* that “The pleasure of imitation, as the ancients knew, is one of the most innate in the human spirit; but here we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it.” (46). The pleasure taken in being complicit in Camilleri’s universe is derived from knowing the characters somewhat “personally” through reading and from living through their experiences. Catarella is, in light of Eco’s interpretation of Disneyland, better than the real thing. As readers, we become used to Catarella’s personality and even though no one really speaks like him, or can really be so inept
and obtuse as he is, his presence lends the series a kind of predictability and reality. We even look to Catarella for some truths about the cases and about human nature in general, for as his police colleagues acknowledge, Catarella may not be efficient, but he is trustworthy and definitely a creature of Vigàta. Even though Montalbano has at least one convoluted and exasperating dialogue with Caterella in every novel, it is obvious that Catarella is loyal, has local knowledge and Montalbano definitely considers him one of the team and one of the family. In *La pazienza del ragno* the detective decides to remember Catarella in his will, along with Livia, who is in a sense his wife and not his wife, and with Francois, who is sort of his son, but not really his son. This act will cement their relationship. In another adventure which landed Montalbno in hospital, he received blood from Catarella, the only match of all his acquaintances and colleagues at hand. In this way, Montalbano can be said to be “part Catarella”. In fact, Catarella represents the other part of the Sicilian stereotype: the savage, tinged with madness, the simpleton with the brilliant insights. In dialogue with Montalbano, we get a more in-depth picture of this manifestation of the “typical” Sicilian. Their double act, in which Montalbano also becomes a reluctant stereotype of the comic Sicilian, is a set piece found in every novel.

In Bakhtin’s theories, an expression, within the context of an exchange – he uses the term “word” or “utterance” to refer to each specific instance of speech – is the main unit of meaning, as opposed to sentences out of context, and is formed through a speaker's relation to Otherness (other people, others' words and expressions, and the lived cultural world in time and place). A "word" is, therefore, always already embedded in a history of expressions in a chain of ongoing cultural and political moments. Bakhtin writes, "I live in a world of others' words." (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 143) With a single word, Catarella, and by extension the author, situates his subject in several ongoing discourses: about the state of the island and its relation to power;
about the self or the Sicilian thinking subject in relation to the object, which is not the other, but is also the self. It also invokes Sciascia’s pessimism towards the struggle against the systemic corruption that plagues Sicily, and the history of social engagement on the part of enlightened Sicilian writers, but it issues its own individual response. To call upon Bakhtin again: "Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive... Any utterance is a link in the chain of communication." (Speech Genres, 68) Camilleri’s response is to laugh, to counter serious cultural problems with humour, not to minimize or show dissent with Sciascia, but to place the reader more thoroughly in his world.

The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context. (Dialogic Imagination, 284).

When we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form. We usually take them from other utterances, and mainly from utterances that are kindred to ours in genre, that is, in theme, composition, or style. (Speech Genres 87)

Catarella’s speech is certainly exempt from being neutral and his system of language does not adhere to any dictionary. With Catarella “citing” Sciascia, the author is showing kinship with Sciascia’s ideology in addition to bringing to bear Sciascia’s texts on Montalbano’s Vigàta. Bakhtin’s approach to the subject was dialogic. For Bakhtin, the subject is fluid or unfinalizable. Although a person cannot be completely understood, known or labeled, the person is revealed through the exchange of utterances. When speaking of fiction, one assumes that the author must have insight into the subjective world of the hero. The Montalbano novels are narrated by an impersonal omniscient narrator that occasionally follows the commissario-protagonist inside his “ciriveddro” and relates the thoughts of our hero. This narrator uses the same mishmash of utterances from dialect and Italian as the detective, so it is tempting to identify author, narrator
and hero as a single entity. In the sort story “Montalbano si rifiuta” we find the protagonist taking umbrage with the path of the narrative and entering into dialogue with the author, or more specifically the character Camilleri in the text, about his refusal to exceed the limits of the genre. In this story, we see the slippage between two conceptual sets: hero/author or I-for-myself/other. Bakhtin uses interchangeably the terms “hero” and “I-for-myself”, which is an experiential mode of subjectivity in the essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” written in the years 1922-24.

The author by this scheme is often referred to as other for the author’s “outsidedness” or “transgradience” enables him “to collect the hero and his life and to complete him to the point where he forms a whole by supplying all those moments which are inaccessible to the hero himself from within himself” (14). Bakhtin himself is rather slippery and often blurs the distinction between the boundaries between author and hero. In “Montalbano si rifiuta”, the hero challenges the authority of the author: as the author attempts to complete his hero, his hero rejects the path upon which his author has set him.

Taking as a point of departure Camilleri’s hybrid language, this chapter discussed the way the author has created an artificial town, Vigàta, in which to set his investigative adventures. This artificial town, like the concept of the simulacrum, bears a superficial resemblance to a small Sicilian town in the Agrigento area, but it does not faithfully reproduce it in all respects. Camilleri’s textual town can be viewed as a copy of a copy, in Baudrillard’s sense of the simulacrum, which deteriorates into the progressively unreal, but in Camilleri’s own way, remains fantastical and playful, rather than depressing. When Camilleri uses different linguistic varieties in his text they highlight the materiality of language, as varieties of patterned sound. Similarly, Vigàta, a city constructed in text may not refer anymore to a real place in Sicily. The work seems to have taken on a life of its own, and to have carried reality beyond its beginnings.
and to have opened up a space for continued iterations of the real, as Deleuze and Guattari propose, the novels can be said to challenge and overturn existing models. With these theories in mind, this discussion has proposed a connection between the artificiality of Vigàta and the artificiality of language, or the chorus of different languages, and to situate them in the discourse of Camilleri’s Sicily. Connected with this issue is the construction of subjectivity in the text. In Sicilian fiction, there is a constant question of and struggle with “point of view”. When a Sicilian novelist writes a novel set in his own territory and using his own people as protagonists, he enters into discourse with other authors who have set their works in Sicily, but have portrayed it from the outsider’s perspective, or other Sicilian authors who have set their works in Sicily using Sicilian characters. In any case, there is an awareness that other texts, other philosophies and other perspectives have been used to map this territory. This discussion has attempted to reach an understanding of Camilleri’s simulation of Sicily and the subjective consciousness or the subjectivities in plural through which this place is experienced. While it may be obvious that the town of Vigàta and the Montelusa area are Camilleri’s inventions, it still remains a question as to whether these fictional places are situated in a real Sicily, or whether Camilleri has reinvented the island as a whole. Camilleri’s invention of his own terminology, his borrowing from dialect and jargon, and his variations of the standard language, resemble the same techniques used and described by a few of the theorists cited, such as Deleuze, Guattari, Bakhtin and Baudrillard. The theorists invent their own terminology to turn against or break out of certain well-established discourses and to cover new territory.
Chapter Four: Santo Piazzese

Santo Piazzese, born in Palermo in 1948, describes himself as “un biologo prestato alla
scrittura”. He studied biology at the Faculty of Science at the University of Palermo, and he
worked for his entire career, retiring in 2010, at the same university. Santo Piazzese’s novels
depict a modern Palermo, a locale his narrator, Lorenzo La Marca, self-consciously and
somewhat ironically refers to as the crime capital. In his second novel with the same narrator,
Palermo is styled as ‘l’ex capitale del crimine’ 24 (Doppia Vita 130). This designation, as well as
its subsequent reiteration with the prefix “ex”, is assigned casually, almost as a joke, and without
serious explanation, keeping with the style of the narrator. Piazzese’s first three novels of
detective fiction, I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia (1996), La doppia vita di M. Laurent (1998), and
Il soffio della valanga (2002) are set in Palermo, and his fourth novel, Blues di mezz’autunno
(2013), which is his third with La Marca as the narrator-protagonist, takes place in Erice at the
Centro Ettore Majorana and the invented Isola della Spada dei Turchi, and it departs somewhat
from the genre of criminal investigation.

One of the priorities of the narrators of Piazzese’s detective novels is to illustrate, explore
and define Palermo. The author employs two different narrators: Lorenzo La Marca is a first-
person narrator, a biologist and researcher, much like the author, and the accidental detective and
protagonist of I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia and La doppia vita di M. Laurent; a third-person
narrator takes over in the third mystery, Il soffio della valanga, and the protagonist becomes La

24 Near the beginning of the first novel, the narrator comments: “Magari era una giornata di
fiacca, nella capitale del crimine” (I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia 18). In Piazzese’s second
novel, the same character in conversation with a man from Lugano on an airplane from Vienna
to Rome: “ - Ma, secondo lei, Palermo è ancora la capitale mondiale del crimine? [Man on plane]
- Si decide ogni quattro anni: dipende da chi è il sindaco [Lorenzo La Marca]” (La doppia vita
di M. Laurent 47).
Marca’s good friend, Vittorio Spotorno, a commissario of police and a professional investigator. The picture of Palermo that comes across is complex and multifaceted, as a result of having two narrative voices. The quality of the place appears radically different depending upon whether one sees it through the eyes of the amateur detective or the more impersonal voice of the third-person narrator that follows the police officer. The picture of Palermo is highly subjective and entirely filtered through the perspective of the narrators. This may be true of any work of fiction, but it is significant here because Piazzese’s location functions as more than a container for the plot. The narrative voice focuses its scrutiny upon its setting. The city of Palermo becomes the object of study in the eyes of the narrators, as much as the mysterious events that drive the plot. In this desire to elucidate and present his native city, the author is in good company. As demonstrated in the discussion of Sciascia and Camilleri, Sicilian writers like to write about Sicily.

The detective-flâneur

In addition to the city, this chapter focuses on the figure of the detective, for he is our guide to Palermo and its inhabitants. The discussion centres on Lorenzo La Marca, the narrator-protagonist of I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia and La doppia vita di M. Laurent, with occasional references to Vittorio Spotorno, the character of the commissario of police. La Marca, by presenting himself as the accidental detective, adopts the pose of the flâneur. Walter Benjamin discusses this figure of the urban dandy who walks the streets in many of his writings, but one consistent view of the flâneur is that of “the quintessential modern subject, a figure that embodies modernity’s new modes of perception and subjectivity and illustrates the process of urbanization and industrialization” (Herzog 16). Benjamin closely associates the work of Nineteenth-Century French poet Charles Baudelaire with the figure of the flâneur, as this
threshold figure of the man who strolls the streets of Paris observing all and participating little was a pose that was adopted by the poet. “In Baudelaire Paris becomes for the first time a subject of lyric poetry”, Benjamin writes in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (156). The philosopher emphasizes the “gaze of the flâneur” and describes this person as someone at the margins of the city and of the bourgeois class, who seeks refuge in the crowd. The flâneur is a disengaged and cynical personality in Baudelaire’s poetry, a modern urban spectator, an amateur detective, and investigator of the city. Although Benjamin often cites Baudelaire in his theories about the flâneur, he traces the origin of the flâneur to Edgar Allen Poe, the inventor of the first literary detective (Herzog 18). Poe is mentioned in “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century’ in conjunction with Baudelaire and he is credited with developing “early contributions to the physiognomies of the crowd”. Benjamin writes, “The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city lures the flâneur like a phantasmagoria” (156). It is in Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd” (1840) in which Benjamin finds his detective-flâneur as well as his darker side, the fugitive-flâneur. Benjamin relocates Poe’s protagonists to Europe and to France in particular when he cites Poe in connection to his thoughts on the interiors of Nineteenth Century Paris:

To live means to leave traces. In the interior these are emphasized. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupant also leave their impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into being. His “philosophy of furniture,” along with his detective novellas, shows Poe to be the first physiognomist of the interior. The criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie (155-156).

According to Benjamin, Poe is also one of the first to explore this tension between the experience of public life and that of private life in the form of the detective story. The metropolis as a mysterious crowd of strangers can be traced to the nineteenth century. Benjamin’s “dialectic
of *flânerie* uses several examples from Poe’s 1840 short story, “The Man of the Crowd”, published one year before “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”. Todd Herzog makes the connection between Poe’s *flâneur* and Benjamin’s theories:

> The dialectic of *flânerie* is also a dialectic of modern modes of perception in a world marked by alienation and inexplicability. In the city as mystery, one is always being observed and at the same time one is always anonymously hidden among strangers. Poe’s *flâneur* represents and responds to this modern condition with an invocation of criminalistic fantasy in which the individual imagines himself as a fugitive at once hidden and under constant surveillance. (18).

Poe, Benjamin, Baudelaire, and the *flâneur* do not, however, remain safely in the nineteenth century and remote from twenty-first century Palermo. Santo Piazzese invites these connections to works and theories outside of his own texts by making the title of his first novel, *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia*, a calque of “The Murders of the Rue Morgue”, practically a translation into Italian, as well as a trans-location to Palermo, Sicily, through the Italian street name. The narrator, Lorenzo La Marca is a *flâneur*-like figure, whose most notable quality is his ability to comment on everything he sees, experiences, reads, watches, or remembers. La Marca’s narration is rife with intertextuality and citations from other sources. He describes in detail his navigation and perambulations through the streets of Palermo, but throughout the novel the reader is aware that the narrator is not only presenting contemporary Palermo, for the past is also brought to bear on La Marca’s descriptions. His personal past, the historic past, the past of figures in detective fiction, past books read, past films watched, and past music enjoyed, are intertwined in modern day to day life of La Marca and are all observed and processed by the *flâneur*’s gaze, and then brought to light in the narrator’s descriptions of his crime-solving experiences. Piazzese’s *flâneur* is not just an urban stroller, he also moves through time, both personal and cultural.
Life in the “ex-crime-capital” and all that it implies

As well as inheriting the tradition of a particular relation to his environment through his use of the flâneur-detective in his work, Piazzese also inherits the specific geography bequeathed to him by other Sicilian writers of detective fiction. In keeping with our investigation of Sicilian authors of detective fiction, we must consider Piazzese as an author of the period following Andrea Camilleri’s rise to fame. Piazzese interacts very self-consciously with the detective fiction genre and with his position as a Sicilian writer. He cites Camilleri as the writer who “had the merit to make the giallo popular among Italian readers” (Pezzotti 183). As a fellow Sicilian writer, Piazzese pays homage to the fact that Camilleri has put Sicily on the map of international crime fiction. Furthermore, Piazzese does seem to be using Camilleri’s map, or at least having his characters occupy the same fictional reality as Salvo Montalbano and his team of detectives in Vigàta. In Piazzese’s Palermo, Camilleri’s simulacrum of Vigàta exists in the “real life” of his characters. When La Marca comes to his friend commissario Vittorio Spotorno’s house for dinner, Amalia tells him that her husband is on the phone with Inspector Montalbano, “una gran brava persona, però sta con una che non fa per lui. Forse se la tiene perché lei vive al nord” (Doppia vita 98). She hints that in these commissario to commissario phone calls they mostly just talk about food. In this imagined telephone call, Piazzese, rather casually, acknowledges Camilleri as the writer who made crime novels set in Sicily prominent and briefly cites a few of the well-known motifs of the Montalbano series: the detective’s long-distance relationship with Livia, and the detailed and celebratory descriptions of meals eaten by Montalbano. This reference to Montalbano by Amalia in Piazzese’s second novel also acknowledges the themes of subjectivity and otherness in the forms of the relationship between the Sicilian and a Northerner, as well as the stereotypical depictions of Sicily, Sicilianess, and local colour that also permeate
Piazzese’s novels\(^{25}\). Piazzese is not derivative of Camilleri, but he acknowledges that he is working in previously charted territory. Even though *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* (1996) was published two years after Camilleri’s *La forma dell’acqua* (1994), it was drafted ten years earlier and cannot really be considered a by-product of the Camilleri literary phenomenon. However, by the time Piazzese published his second book, the author takes the opportunity to celebrate and capitalize upon Camilleri’s fame, by making his fictional world contiguous with Camilleri’s. Ironically, referencing Vigàta as a real place in the La Marca-Spotorno world lends his own vision of Palermo credibility, as Camilleri’s simulacrum of Sicily precedes Piazzese’s in time and in reputation. In his novels, we have the intersection of the real and the fake, complicated by intertextuality that both lends reality to Piazzese’s inventions and undermines the referentiality of his fictions.

Piazzese’s characters inhabit a fictional world, but it is not a world entirely invented by the author. The verisimilitude of this fictional locale is compounded by intertextuality. Not only do La Marca and Sportorno operate in a contemporary Sicily, in which Salvo Montalbano and Livia also exist, but the author also works with Sciascia’s legacy and Pirandello’s interpretations of these locales. There are also enough detailed references to the real Palermo for critics to view the parts of Piazzese’s novels that deal with the city to be genuine exposés of modern life in the crime capital of the world.

\(^{25}\) The sumptuous descriptions of food found in the Montabano novels are not part of the La Marca vocabulary. This mention of *commissario* Spotorno and *commissario* Montalbano speaking of food can be seen as a nod to Camilleri’s detective. Food is also featured as a memory trigger of symbolic dimensions when La Marca eats boiled octopus in the neighbourhood La Vucciria. This reference is discussed later in this chapter. In general, food is mentioned, especially local food, but it does not have the same place of prominence as it does in the Montalbano novels.
In an interview with Barbara Pezzotti, Piazzese explains his motives for publishing his first novel:

What made me publish *I delitti* in the end was something that happened during a trip to Tunisia in 1995. An elderly man in an isolated oasis called Safran asked me where I came from. I answered, “Palermo, Sicily, Italy.” He then said, “Totò Schillaci and Totò Riina.” A soccer player and a Mafia boss. How was it possible? A twenty-five hundred-year-old city with a beautiful port in the Mediterranean, with ruins from many different civilizations and a rich genetic heritage, is known for a soccer player and a Mafia boss? It was then I decided to publish my book (Pezzotti 182).

This anecdote, or a variation thereof, has also appeared in another interview with Salvatore Ferlita (2007). The fact that the author repeats this anecdote on more than one occasion when asked to speak of his novels gives credence to the idea that Piazzese wants to present the “real Sicily”, a view of normal life in post-Baronial Sicily, apart from all the hype of mafia, sports and seafood. These stereotypes somehow provide a voice against which the author and narrator can argue their case. Piazzese states that he does not want to use crime fiction to criticize Italian society, or to write through metaphors, but to write simple stories, “However at the end of the day some metaphors have snuck into the fabric of my novel” (Pezzotti 180). In a sense, Piazzese inherited certain metaphors by choosing to write in the Sicilian detective genre, such as the idea of Sicily as metaphor inherited from Leonardo Sciascia. His novels, especially those with the first-person narrator Lorenzo La Marca, engage in a conscious dialogue with a reader, who is a cultural outsider to La Marca’s Palermo.

In his second novel, La Marca comments, “La nostra è una metropoli ambigua spesso schizoide, quasi sempre paranoica” (*Doppia vita* 188). Barbara Pezzotti echoes La Marca’s metaphor when she describes the author’s depiction of Palermo as “schizophrenic”; with this analysis, the critic personifies the setting. The city, however multifaceted and apparently
contradictory in its presentation, is not the protagonist. The narrator of the first novel does his best to evade his responsibilities as the Hero, Detective and Narrator and attempts to displace them onto the setting. He opens the novel with an ellipsis, “... le Breton, le Breton..., non fu lui a dire che una storia ben ordinata dovrebbe cominciare con la nascita del protagonista? Nel mio caso, scordatevelo” (11). He proposes instead, “Se proprio vi serve un protagonista, beh, diciamo che è il tempo, inteso come weather, of course” (11). From the outset, we have the displacement of roles and the conflation of the setting with the protagonist. In fact, the ellipsis is a physical sign of the blank space where the first-person narrator should be. Our encounter with the consciousness that will guide us through the mystery to its solution is deferred. Instead there is a reference to and a paraphrase of an unspecified “le Breton”\(^{26}\) and his theories on the nature of the well-ordered narrative. These ideas of the proper way to begin a story originate outside the text, and the narrator immediately rejects that formula. To complicate matters, the narrative voice rather off-handedly and ironically, translates “il tempo” as “weather”, when it could also be read as “time”, and given that La Marca has already renounced his authority as the protagonist and voice of the author, the reader could reasonably feel at liberty to interpret or translate however he sees fit. As to which interpretation, if any, is important in creating meaning in the text, the narrative voice is so off-hand that the reader is left to decide for him or herself. La Marca’s personality, however, is unlike any form of weather or natural forces; it is much more intrusive. And very soon, the reader gets to know his communicative style, which is very personal, subjective, ironic, self-critical, detached, metaphoric, a story narrated through a series of cultural references.

\(^{26}\) Although Piazzese does not specify, this is probably a reference to Auguste Le Breton (1913 – 1999) the French novelist writing about the criminal underworld.
The third novel, *Il soffio della valanga*, seems to describe a different Palermo, but this is the result in the change from first person narration to third person narration that centres on the character of Vittorio Spotorno, a police inspector and friend of La Marca, who appears as a character in the first two novels. We have the effect of the same place, same time frame, and some events in common, but two different subjectivities. Subjectivity is the condition of being the subject, of being the consciousness through which the narrated events of the novel are filtered. There were exigencies of verisimilitude and realism that caused Piazzese to change his protagonist to a police detective inspector. The author asks in an interview with Salvatore Ferlita in *Palermo, i luoghi del noir* (2007), “Ti sembra normale che un biologo che lavora all’università abbia questa facile accessibilità al delitto?” (58); Piazzese changed his protagonist from La Marca, the biologist and professor, to a police inspector

*perché mi affascina molto la tecnica dello spin-off, cioè delle storie che nascono per gammazione da altre. Come pure l’idea di un universo libresco, effetto di un unico Big Bang, con dentro cioè tutti gli astri, pronti a essere di volta in volta esplorati e collegabili tra loro. Il mio terzo romanzo ha addirittura un certo grado di specularità rispetto al primo, al punto che le due storie si svolgono più o meno nello stesso tempo* (58).

The literary spin-off is a new work or body of work derived from or inspired by another fictional work. The spin-off is a technique that takes advantage of a previously invented world, either by another author, or in this case another work by the same author. The world-making process of writing has already been established in another work, perhaps some of the characters have also been invented, and the author just has to convey the plot to the reader. The spin-off, as a media phenomenon, affirms the reality of the settings, the characters, and the cultural issues found in the fictions.
It is unclear, rather deliberately so, on the narrator’s part, why Lorenzo La Marca ironically introduces himself as a kind of non-protagonist or anti-protagonist. Whether to gain himself some amused detachment, or to exhibit irreverence towards the genre, or to frustrate our expectations of a narrator who is detective or assistant: all of these motives are likely possibilities. Nevertheless, despite his protests, La Marca is the narrator who speaks to the reader in the first person, as well as an actor in the events narrated. This narrator desires to act on more than one diegetic level: he attempts to stay detached from the events and present a somewhat objective, extradiegetic level of the story; however, since he is both a narrator and a character who is part of the story being told, this is not possible, especially since he also wishes to convey his actions from his own limited perspective, his feelings and views. His proposal of the weather as the protagonist “Se proprio vi serve un protagonista...” acts rather in opposition to his statement. The weather, a kind of incidental proposal of the narrator because our hero is a self-defined meteopatico (someone subject to weather conditions), does not provide the neutrality and objectivity that La Marca might assume. This proposal personifies the weather and it also particularizes the weather to be Sicilian weather, the days before the sirocco, the hot stormy wind of the South-East, bringing the air from Africa to Sicily. If anything, the text takes off in a metadiegetic direction, which is when the diegetic narrator himself tells a story that is embedded within his own narrative. In this case, his account of the approaching sirocco and the lion in the zoo in Palermo’s reaction to the approaching storm, become a miniature story within the story and a reflection on the qualities of this particular narrative.  

Not only does he make it clear how subjective the point of view is in this novel, but he emphasizes the position of the reader as an

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27 Gerard Genette distinguishes between three diegetic levels in narrative fiction: extradiegetic, diegetic and hypodiegetic or metadiegetic. in Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (Cornell University Press, 1980).
interlocutor, an individual, or a group, to which the text is directed, when he uses the second person plural pronoun in various parenthetical comments and explications throughout his narration. His unique consciousness is cultivated as a kind of one-sided dialogue with someone he is trying to impress. His narrative is littered with expressions in English, French, German, Latin as well as deliberately Italianized spellings of English expressions, such as, “du iù rimenba’, beibi?” (33). Many of the citations of the narrator are throwaways, deemphasized by casual delivery and the rapid-fire bombardment of references, hyperbole, oxymorons, irony and sarcastic self-effacing comments. La Marca is a man who relates the story, his adventure in crime solving, through intertextual references, musical references, filmic references and historical references. The technology of the spin-off, the sequel, the remake, and fan fiction are fully exploited. Rather than describing a context, the author includes a citation, a title or a brief sound bite of the other world he wants to include. Each citation becomes in turn a microcosm of that other world embedded within La Marca’s world, a kind of gateway, metaphorically speaking. His personal depiction of the “real” Sicily is heavily assisted by references to other places, both real and fictional. His “inteso come weather, of course” comment acknowledges English as the language of most of the major works he channels: Raymond Chandler’s character Philip Marlowe, J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye, American Jazz music and classic movies of the Humphrey Bogart era, to name some of La Marca’s favourites. In the narrator’s own words, “Molti eventi delle mie giornate, ma anche i non-eventi, sono marcati da una colonna sonora...” (33). The constant interference of the narrator, functions as a kind of filter between the reader and the plot.

La Marca sets up a relationship with his reader by making several assumptions. The reader, in La Marca’s view, is an outsider to the events narrated, and an outsider to the territory
described by the novel. La Marca introduces and presents his Palermo to a reader who is a kind of visitor to his novel.


Io ci sono nato qui. E ci vivo pure, è chiaro (11 – 12).

There is a continued insistence upon his being Sicilian, a certain “us-against-them” mentality that permeates all of the novels with La Marca as narrator. In some ways, comments such as these on the part of the narrator make clear the narrative mode of the novel. We know that the “I” who conveys the plot to the reader belongs, rather absolutely, to the place in which the story takes place. On the other hand, by trying to shirk the responsibilities of the role of protagonist, La Marca makes certain aspects of his narrative mode unclear and raises the question of the unreliable narrator. Like all unreliable narrators, La Marca is a participant in the events he relates in the first person. Third person subjective narrators, the term used for “unreliable” third person narrators, lack the ability to trick us so absolutely. We are not getting absolutely every indication of the events or the setting through one character’s eyes. La Marca lives in Palermo and we can rely upon him for local knowledge. His geographical and topographical descriptions are detailed and presumably accurate, and suggest that the reader could navigate the streets of the real Palermo, with novel in hand, to home in on any given location, such as the perfect lunch spot after a visit to the now reopened Teatro Massimo. His street-by-street directions, however, become no less detailed when describing the way to locations that do not exist in the real Palermo. His knowledge of the university hierarchy, setting and atmosphere – both he and the author in “real life” are professors in the biochemistry department at a university in Palermo – is
probably also reliable, as well as being key to the process of deduction in the first novel. La Marca’s addiction to the oxymoron, to exaggeration, to irony and to constant citation casts doubt on his reliability as an objective observer of the events. Many fictional worlds interpenetrate the world of the novel, to the point that La Marca seems incapable of having what can be deemed “first-hand experiences”. This is a postmodern element that permeates all of the works that La Marca narrates. It is fitting that the narrator’s description of himself comprises the assertion that he is born and clearly continues to live in Palermo, and references to several dozen of his favourite books, movies, and songs. La Marca attempts to remove himself from the narrative, and to reduce his essence to that of an observer, a thinker and a problem solver, much like the flâneur, who moves through the alienated strangeness of modernity. The features that the narrator wishes to emphasize about himself are his relationship to the city and his role as the mediator between the reader and the city, and the reader and the mystery. La Marca belongs to and operates in the city of Palermo just as Sherlock Holmes belongs to London, or more specifically Victorian London. G. K. Chesterton argued for the metropolis as the space of the modern and that the detective story is the romance of the modern city. Similarly, our protagonist cannot tell the story of these murders without telling the story of his city.

After the discovery of the body and calling in the authorities, in the form of his old friend Inspector Vittorio Spotorno, there is a reference to Philo Vance - the author S.S. Van Dine’s detective of the 1920s and 30s, a dilettante, aristocratic, intellectual and dandyish New Yorker - simultaneous to a spoof of police procedure:

Lo sappiamo tutto cosa si dovrebbe fare. L’abbiamo visto e letto in milioni di film e libri del genere polizierando. Di solito, lo sbirro di turno insinua la mano nelle tasche del morto e ne tira fuori carte d’identità, scatole di cerini con numeri di telefono miracolosi scarabocchiati sopra, ricevute di deposito bagagli, o biglietti del tram usati, dai quali poi Filovàns deduce che il morto ha una
This remark, shared with the detective, earns the narrator an impatient and scornful treatment. However, this observation identifies the narrator as a self-conscious participant in more than the physical, real-life events. For La Marca, on an alternate plane of existence, in the world of detective fiction, the outlined process of detection is one that he has experienced a million times, at least on the printed page or on the silver screen. His tendency is to parody events that are happening to him and to extrapolate them to this fictional plane. Not only is the reader subjected to La Marca’s parenthetical asides, his editorial comments, his constant summoning forth of more words, more texts and never quite arriving at the meaning, but he also imposes his endless *differance* upon other characters.

It must be emphasized that these methods described by La Marca are not really illustrative of Spotorno’s methods, but merely what the narrator imagines as proper police procedure. It is an opportunity for the reader to evaluate La Marca’s qualities as a detective and narrator, because we can compare what he says with the reactions of other characters to his utterances. Although La Marca usually identifies with Philip Marlowe, and imagines himself as the virile, swaggering, strong and silent American investigator, with a sensitive side, in this case, the reader is invited to compare the emotionally distant, ironic, and self-centred narrative voice with the supercilious, obnoxiously affected and highly irritating Philo Vance. S. S. Van Dine’s detective has similarly distracting personal traits to Professor La Marca, moreover, he is often described as a dandy. A dandy is similar to the *flâneur*, but English, and he slightly pre-dates his French correspondent. The *flâneur* is associated with walking, detached observation, and
cynicism, in Baudelaire’s terms “a botanist of the sidewalk”\textsuperscript{28}. On the other hand, the dandy is a participant in the life of the people. La Marca, similar to Baudelaire and Philo Vance, is torn between these two stances.

La Marca’s interpretation of Vittorio Spotorno’s crime solving methods involve endless comparison to his vast experience of detection in pop culture. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Per la verità, Vittorio, oltre a essere uno sbarro tecnologico, è anche uomo d’istinto e d’atmosfera. Ha la sindrome di Maigret. Anche Spotorno, come lui – fatti i debiti raffronti, per carità: vogliamo forse confondere la Palermo vera di Spotorno con la Parigi finta di Maigret? – anche Spotorno ha bisogno di andare in giro ad annusare, a guardare negli occhi la gente, a frequentare i luoghi, a bere e a mangiare le stesse cose delle vittime e degli assassini dei suoi casi. Credo che gli manchino solo le conversazioni con le portinaie. E non perché qui non ce ne siano, ma perché da quelle locali non riuscirebbe a sapere nemmeno l’ora (99).
\end{quote}

According to La Marca, his friend, the police detective Spotorno, was not convinced by the theory that Raffaele Montalbani killed himself, because Inspector Spotorno is too much like Maigret, or suffers from Maigret syndrome, the fictional police detective created by the French author Georges Simenon in the 1930s. The narrator again reveals that for him, understanding comes through reading. His references to other texts litter his entire narrative and provide constant interference between the reader and the events narrated. Even when La Marca is addressing the reader in the second person, as a narrator and a kind of host to his native Palermo, he presents the facts and simultaneously interprets them and offers alternative readings. A bit of La Marca’s reality leaks through in his comparison between Maigret’s Paris and contemporary Palermo in the remark, “E non perché qui non ce ne siano, ma perché da quelle locali non riuscirebbe a sapere nemmeno l’ora”. It is an oblique reference to omertà, the deep rooted and

\textsuperscript{28} From “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) an essay about Constantin Guys and Baudelaire’s conception of modernity.
instinctive “code of silence” and non-involvement in the face of all authority, pervasive in Sicilian society.

The entrance of Michelle Laurent, the medical examiner and former romantic interest of Lorenzo La Marca, is effected in the style of retro American detective fiction or film noir, “La riconobbi subito, nonostante gli occhiali da sole, il look professionale, i riflessi all’henné, e i dieci e passa anni da che non ci vedevamo. Sicuro che la riconobbi” (23). The terse hard-boiled style of narrating events, describing physical features and the casually placed background details is simultaneously Italianized and Anglicized. He continues to describe this first sight of Michelle after ten years, “Primo, lei era viva, visibilmente viva (mortalmente viva, potrei aggiungere, se non fosse che detesto Spillane, e che sto cercando di tenere sotto controllo una certa tendenza a scivolare negli ossimori)” (23). The reader rapidly comes to know the narrator’s literary preferences: he dislikes Mickey Spillane, models himself upon Raymond Chandler’s detective, respects Maigret, is intrigued by Pepe Carvalho, and fancies himself as a belated teenage rebel and exposer of untruths like Holden Caulfield. Lorenzo La Marca’s narrative tone rapidly switches between these different personae. His impressions from this meeting are recounted through fleeting images, smells and sounds:


His reliability as a narrator is not so much compromised, as purposefully dismissed. His citation of Van Dine, Spillane, Chandler demonstrates an awareness of the clichés of the genre. He suggests certain models for reading that can be applied his own text, for example when he writes,
“Uno spot dell’Ente Turismo, più che un flashback”. By identifying the form of the text, whether it is an autobiography, detective novel, poem, advertisement, film, song or letter, for example, this narrator, and narrators in general, attempts to direct the reader’s interpretation of it.

Il vocabolo crepuscolare si può usare solo per gli ultimi western di John Wayne. È stato inventato apposta: prima non esisteva (37).

La Marca, not entirely seriously, makes many suggestions and comparisons to what the text is not, and interferes with the reader’s discovery of what the text is. The false literary history and facetious explanation of the word crepuscolare are examples of our narrator’s playful mentality and the way he portrays the events in which he takes part, as well as events he has experience second hand through other media. To an Italian reader, crepuscolare describes the group of poets writing at the beginning of the Twentieth Century as well as il Western crepuscolare. In English, there is no one word that crosses these genres and historical periods and brings together these two disparate artistic movements. The Italian name given to late Westerns definitely triggers the name applied to the work of poets whose work refers to a condition of decline, even if there is no direct link. Similarly, the Western movies undergo a decline at the end of the 60s. The genre suffers a dip in originality and interest, and the filmmakers themselves depict a sense of disillusionment with the myth of the West. The Western crepuscolare has become a kind of satellite genre. In English, the term Revisionist Western, describes films of this period and genre that question the ideals and style of the classic Western. In the English form, there lacks the sense of nostalgia and regret for the collapse of the American Frontier implied in the adjective crepuscolare, while in Italian it is emphasized. Piazzese leaves it open to interpretation whether these events are revised or treated with nostalgia.

When the westerns of John Wayne and the Crepuscolari make their entrance into the conversation, La Marca is having his first private conversation with the medical examiner and
ex-girlfriend Michelle Laurent in about a decade, and they are discussing the cinematic portrayals of Philip Marlowe, the fictional hard-boiled private detective of Raymond Chandler. He begins with reference to Il lungo addio, “quello di Altman”, and they discuss the merits of Elliot Gould as Marlowe, “una botta di genio”. He states for him, “il vero Marlowe è Robert Mitchum. Peccato solo per il nome: sembra uno starnuto”; followed by the obligatory comparison with Humphrey Bogart:

Bogey è sempre il numero uno. Mitchum però è un Marlowe appena semiesplorato. La dose di amarezza è quella giusta, ma sarebbe stato perfetto se qualcuno gli avesse iniettato dentro quel tanto di tenerezza ironica da fargli pronunciare battute come: Collezione bionde sottovetro, senza farlo assomigliare a un impresario di pompe funebri che ti stia prendendo le misure a occhio (36).

The character played by Humphrey Bogart in several films noir owes much to the hero of the Western: the man bound only by his private code of honour. This man of honour, whether we find him in Casablanca or The Big Sleep has much in common with the hero of the hardboiled school of detective fiction. Reading ahead, Chandler’s Marlowe is the fictional character upon which Lorenzo La Marca models himself, whether in his new role as occasional crime solver or his everyday life. By the time the third La Marca mystery is published, with a gap of about a decade since his last appearance, the name “Marlowe” is revealed to have been a nickname of La Marca’s, dating back to his college days, “nel mio periodo chandleriano, quando eravamo studenti e io non facevo che andare in giro con una Camel tra le labbra, come il vecchio Bogey, buonanima, ne Il grande sonno” (Blues di mezz’autunno 29). This retroactive assignment of this nickname, Marlowe, to young La Marca that predates the protagonist detective’s first appearance in I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia also emphasizes that it is the film version of the detective upon which our protagonist draws inspiration. However, this revelation, the fact that La Marca has
“always” been identified with Marlowe, even by himself, has the feel of a rewrite. The author, having enjoyed this tangential reference, this play of associations between Lorenzo La Marca, Philip Marlowe and Humphrey Bogart in his first two books, has gone back and reinterpreted his character of the narrator and made this metafictional connection more solid, simultaneously weakening the connections to other intertextual references to other characters and bodies of work, such as Holden Caulfield.

Returning to Lorenzo and Michelle’s first private conversation in *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia*, at this point, they go on to discuss movie versions of Chandler’s novels that they would have liked to have seen, such as, “a me sarebbe piaciuto vedere Kubrick, a dirigere Mitchum in un remake de *Il grande sonno*” (37), or versions of Marlowe involving Scorsese and De Niro. All of these acts of reading, critiques, editorial comments, reviews and flights of fancy, are so far removed from any sense of the original work. In speaking of postmodernism in the “Postscript to *The Name of the Rose*”, Umberto Eco expresses the opinion that there comes a moment when the avant-garde or the modern can go no further, “because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of its impossible texts (conceptual art)” (530). Eco’s “Postscript” helps put Lorenzo La Marca and Michelle Laurent’s conversation into the context of the postmodern text, which according to Eco, is a term that “is applied today to anything the user of the term happens to like. Further, there seems to be an attempt to make it increasingly retroactive” (530). The narrator and the woman he loved ten years previously speak of the past, but not necessarily their shared personal past. Instead they take a nostalgic trip through Holywood’s past and their shared experiences of watching, reading, and interacting with past stories. Eco explains, “The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not
innocently” (53). Irony characterizes La Marca’s narrative style, and that is highly appropriate since the detective novel is a genre is motivated by the past, by uncovering past secrets that result in the present mysteries. Both of the speakers go along with this nostalgic and diversionary game. They speak of their past and comment on their present predicament of meeting over the dead body of an estranged acquaintance, by leaving much unsaid. Umberto Eco writes:

I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, “I love you madly,” because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still, there is a solution. He can say, “As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly.” At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated; both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony. (530-1)

Every path can be connected with every other one, in La Marca’s conversations. The things he says in his narration, the things he leaves out, the analogies he makes, and the conclusions he draws are never simple, straightforward or innocent. Every utterance refers back to something outside of the events that he is directly experiencing. The manner in which La Marca reacts to people and interprets his situation has a postmodern element. Similarly, Liala, the prolific and famous author of serial novels, the romanzo d’appendice, is replaced by Barbara Cartland in the English translation of “Postille a Il nome della rosa”. Eco adapts his translation and invokes another cultural icon in English, in order to greater tap into the English reader’s inherited cultural memories and associations. “Barbara Cartland” is a ready-made comparison that Eco can make with little explanation in his translation. La Marca uses similar “translations” from Anglo-American culture and from the English language detective fiction tradition.
In Piazzese’s first two novels, there is no extended comparison between his protagonist and Philip Marlowe, instead many references to many functional characters and settings are casually invoked by the narrator. The effect of *mise en abime*, of the mirroring of images and concepts referring to the text as a whole, in this case, the detective story, is present to such a degree in this part of the story that it renders the meaning unstable. The instability of reality is highlighted by the narrator, for we have to interpose another layer of mediation between the film versions, the possible film versions and the original novels of Raymond Chandler. La Marca’s own narration runs further interference between the reader and the true facts of the mystery. In his own story, the investigation of a death in the biochemistry department in which he works, La Marca is not an unreliable narrator in the sense of Dr. James Sheppard of Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), who narrates the story in the first person, acts as Hercule Poirot’s companion and assistant, and is also the murderer. La Marca is not like Sheppard; he is not a narrator who toys with the detective and the reader and who deliberately conceals the truth and misrepresents himself. He is, nevertheless, unreliable because of his extremely subjective point of view and his constant references to sources outside of his own text.

La Marca reflects upon his own narrative style. He leads an essentially solitary life and he identifies with Philip Marlowe.

Persino il Grande Solitario Marlowe (Philip, non Christopher: hanno in comune il ph perché, in fondo, condividono la stessa acidità di base: ed ecco che mi è riscappato l’ossimoro, poiché la base è proprio il contrario di un acido; l’eccessiva frequenza di ph nelle parole inglesi deve essere l’effettiva causa scatenante del gran parlare di acidità di stomaco che si fa nelle conversazioni ferroviarie delle Isole Britanniche dell’era post-thatcheriana), persino Marlowe, già a pagina uno di *Little sister* vantava almeno la compagnia di un moscone multicolore (*Delitti* 48-49).
La Marca characterizes himself as a loner at the beginning of his first novel, like the fictional Marlowe, a version of the model of the classic American private eye and romantic hero: disenchanted, ironic, detached, with a strong moral compass. As his friend the Commissario Vittorio Spotorno is occupied with other more pressing investigations in his police department, La Marca, the full-time lecturer at a university, feels somewhat alone in his quest to discover the truth about his old friend’s death. Rather than state his purpose plainly, he instead launches into a series of references, comparisons, and overdone explanations, as our hero faces a weekend alone with nothing to do, waiting to hear more about the corpse he has found. For instance, he mentions that he doesn’t cook much while alone, but he does experiment in the kitchen when he has guests with “Ricette con molto pepe e poco Carvalho. Non ho neanche un camino in cui bruciare le opere di Vázquez Montalbán” (46). The reference is an allusion to Pepe Carvalho, another fictional private detective, this time created by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and operating in contemporary Barcelona. Carvalho has the distinctive quirks of personality of cooking and of burning books he has read in the fireplace. Long descriptions of the time-consuming meals he has prepared are part of every Pepe Carvalho novel, as well as the brief mention of chucking a book into the fireplace after dinner every night, although not because he didn’t like the book in question. Piazzese and his character do not give much indication as to how seriously to take each intertextual reference. If we delve into the Pepe Carvalho book burning reference, we discover that the detective, a man of vast culture, burns books because books and culture have taught him nothing about how to live, while Lorenzo La Marca has a more symbiotic relationship with books, especially fiction. Is La Marca offering Carvalho as a contrast to himself, or as a deeper comparison? The titles of the books Carvalho burns are, rather interestingly, generally of the non-fiction category. A journey from kitchen to living room,
involves, for Lorenzo La Marca, diversions into other books. Even some of his references have internal parentheses, such as the mention of Marlowe’s extreme solitude contains the parenthesis on the frequency of the letters ph in English words and its meaning of ph in chemistry. It is a pun that becomes an oxymoron: “acidità di base”. La Marca’s style is characterized by oxymorons.

La Marca also feels an affinity with Holden Caulfield of *Catcher in the Rye*. He writes, “Mi sento una specie di fratello onorario del giovane Holden Caulfield. E l’età non conta, per certe cose. Se si è Holden Caulfield a quindici anni, lo si è per sempre” (*Delitti* 51). After teaming up with Darline, the murdered man’s fiancée in *I delitti della via Medina-Sidonia*, and while he is trying to solve the case, he mentions Holden Caulfield again: “Curiosando tra i miei libri, [Darline] aveva pescato *Il giovane Holden*. Ignorava che l’avessero tradotto in italiano. Ci trovò la metà del mio gergo” (203). J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* and his protagonist, for which the Italian translation of the novel is named, has great enduring influence on 1990s Italian culture and popular literature, especially amongst writers known as *I Cannibali*. Holden, associated with rebellion, teenage angst, cynicism and misanthropy, has become a type of standard-bearer for the new wave of Italian coming-of-age writing. There is even a Scuola Holden, a creative writing, film and media arts institution in Turin, founded by Alessandro Baricco, never mind that the character of Holden, an anti-establishment figure, having been expelled from four prep schools, would have labeled such a program as “phony”. *Catcher in the Rye* serves as common ground for Darline and La Marca. Indeed, *Catcher* is a kind of *topos* of the Twentieth Century. These two characters have their own different relationships with the same book. In La Marca’s case, we realize that the meaning of his text is not imparted directly to his readers, but filtered by his experiences of other texts. The idea of intertextuality, as explored by Roland Barthes in “The Death of the Author” (1968), suggests that meaning does not reside in
the text, but it is produced by the reader in relation not only to the text in question, but also the complex network of texts invoked in the reading process. Our narrator has a dialogic relationship with the Italian text of Salinger’s novel and attempts to connect to Darline, the American fiancée of the murdered man, through continuous explorations of other texts. Darline’s relationship with Rafaele Montalbani, as opposed to La Marca’s relationship with Montalbani, can be viewed as analogous to their respective relationships with the various other texts they encounter together in the course of I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia: La Marca knew the murder victim from long ago, as friend and colleague in the same university department in Palermo, while Darline knew the present Montalbani in his new life in America. Since La Marca is the narrator, we do not see Darline’s perspective of the murder victim or her views of Catcher in the Rye, except indirectly. Early in their acquaintanceship, Darline and La Marca begin a sexual relationship. This liaison initiates without any prelude or explanation, but there is a precedent in the genre of detective fiction. In the hard-boiled tradition, the detective is often involved with the female suspects, clients or persons-of-interest in a case. The hard-boiled detective has a cynical attitude towards romance and towards anything he is thinking, doing and feeling. This relationship with the fiancée of the murder victim, conducted with the approval of Michelle and La Marca’s sister, highlights its role as an extension of the murder investigation. The detectives and antiheros of the novels of Hammett, Chandler and especially Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer, detested by La Marca, use or encounter sex in the course of an investigation. In La Marca’s case, he accepts it

29 Interestingly, Chandler’s Marlowe generally keeps his defenses in place with regard to the women he encounters during the course of his investigations. Humphrey Bogart’s Marlowe is less principled. Sexuality is equated with danger, in Chandler as with his hard-boiled counterparts – a temptation, a trap and the detective’s downfall. While Sam Spade may succumb to the temptations of Brigid O’Shaunessy, against his better judgement, Marlowe remains aloof. See Peter Wolfe’s Something More Than Night: The Case of Raymond Chandler (47 – 50) for his discussion of Chandler’s sexual cynicism.
along with his other duties in the course of discovering the murderer of his old friend and colleague. In fact, Darlene leaves Sicily for good after the investigative phase and La Marca begins his confrontation with the guilty party after her departure.

Although La Marca admits to being too old and too self-aware to be Holden, Piazzese’s narrator claims kinship with the role of disaffected youth. In style, his narrative is also subjective, peppered with insights and contaminated with an overt unreliability. While Caulfield is naively unreliable, La Marca’s style is more of an affectation, more studiedly casual. In La doppia vita di M. Laurent, the narrator, La Marca, again cites Holden Caulfield. It is an instance of a story within a story, a flashback and a memory. At the time of narration, he is in Vienna for an academic conference, but he recalls a previous visit to Vienna with Michelle when they were both young students. They shared a dinner at a cafeteria near the university, encountered a woman dining alone and eating the cheapest possible dish. She was a retired English teacher. They accompanied her home and stepped into her tiny apartment, smelling of cabbages gone bad and she prepared tea for them. It was a clean dwelling, but obviously extremely poor. The narrator recalls, “... ed era una casa veramente povera, pulita, ma povera all’osso, e avevo avuto la tentazione di fare scivolare di nascosto da qualche parte tutti i miei scellini in contanti, e se fossi stato il giovane Holden Caulfield forse glieli avrei anche lasciati, e invece, alla fine, avevo deciso di non farne niente” (33). This time there is the recreation of a scene in memory, and Holden Caulfield becomes a kind of model of behavior that the protagonist aspires to but cannot live up to. In reality, the narrator did nothing, but notes the faded initials on the old tea set of the finest china. The tea set was a remnant of the retiree’s life in happier more affluent times. At the moment of telling, the cafeteria is also gone, and in its place is a Tropicana nightclub, about which he comments, “In ogni città miteeuropea che si rispetti c’è un night-club Tropicana. Di
The Streets of Palermo

The title of Piazzese’s first novel I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia contains a street name. Street names, directions, routes taken by La Marca as he navigates the metropolis are important and idiosyncratic features of this novel. The title of the book, with the street name within, is evocative of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Murders of the Rue Morgue” (1841), and Gadda’s Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (1946), and these echoes indicate that his influences are other than Camilleri. In the case of the comparison with “The Murders of the Rue Morgue”, Piazzese’s title is a calque of the older story’s title, with the name of the street changed from Rue Morgue to Via Medina-Sidonia. The title alludes to other fictional worlds, specifically other landmarks of detective fiction. Poe’s short story, first published in 1841 is generally recognized as the first modern detective story. It is the story that initiated the formation and popularization of the genre as a whole. The American writer’s Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin is a model of the detective, upon which other fictional detectives are based, such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Poe’s detective is pure reason in human form, and he claims, in the story that lends its title to Piazzese’s novel, “my ultimate object is only the truth” (Poe 129). Even if ratiocination is not a particular strong point of our detective, the model of the detached rational thinker is part of La Marca’s fictional cast of characters against which he compares himself. It is, however, La Marca’s dedication to the truth that makes him determined to solve
these crimes, a task for which he is ill equipped from a professional standpoint. *Il pasticciaccio* by Gadda is acknowledged as a masterpiece by the author and it is a canonical classic of Italian detective fiction. Gadda’s landmark incursion into the world of detective fiction is marked by the lack of a real protagonist and a consistent point of view that reflects the author. Instead the detective Don Ciccio Ingravallo seeks to navigate through the chaos of a cacophony of voices, situations, characters, their various idioms, and the different levels of society. These fictional worlds and locations are written into La Marca’s map. All three titles containing street names in which crimes, specifically murders, were committed are superimposed one upon the other in this work. The title itself is an allusion and a hyperrealist map of the territory of detective fiction. The real geography and fictional locales are seamlessly blended in La Marca’s story to the extent that there is no delineation between one and the other. Streets, landmarks, and urban typography are important factors in creating the effect of layers upon layers of simulacra in *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* and in all of the author’s novels. There is an analogy between mapmaking and storytelling that Piazzese exploits.

Di nuovo fuori, dentro l’inferno: arsi, consumati, persi. Lo scirocco sembrava voler esaurire in un solo giorno tutto il monte-gradi disponibile per l’intera stagione.

Sopravvissuta per una specie di miracolo, all’ombra dell’unico albero nel raggio di cinquanta metri, la macchina ci accolse come un’oasi calda in un deserto di lamiere semifuse. Risalii di bolina per viale Regina Margherita, verso piazza Leoni. In primavera dovevano aver concimato i cartelloni pubblicitari, che avevano prolificato lungo la discesa per Valdesi. Infilai via Libertà, fino all’estuario di piazza Castelnuovo. Vortici di foglie di platano e carta in volo planato. All’incrocio con via Cavour voltai a sinistra e continuai diritto fino a piazza XIII Vittime e poi a destra verso la Cala e la Statale 113. Avvertivo un pizzico di tensione in agguato tra cervello e bocca. Dove volevo arrivare?

Metaforicamente, s’intende, ché, topograficamente, il mio pilota automatico sapeva bene dove andare (33).
The journey by automobile, with La Marca at the wheel and Michelle Laurent as a passenger, just after her examination of the body, is one of the many examples of the drives described in the novel that give the reader the impression that La Marca’s story can guide us through the real Palermo. His route is detailed, but so are his descriptions of the heat, the weather, the sensations of the inside of the car, and also his memories, for this is the continuation of the first encounter with Michelle after a ten-year estrangement. The metaphorical landscape traversed in this short drive to Mondello for lunch is La Marca’s shared past with Michelle. Apart from the metaphorical and associative connotations of the journey described in this citation, there is also the detailed route description, in which we see the desire to create, through his text, an accurate map of his territory. Piazzese’s writing is a form of replication and representation, but also a form of simulation that recreates a territory. For interspersed in these descriptions of real Palermo streets and landmarks, there are equally detailed descriptions of how to arrive at the university department, “questo Dipartimento di Biochimica applicata, dell’Università degli Studi della Felicissima nostra città di Palermo che tutto trita, assorbe, metabolizza” (12), in the via Medina-Sidonia. The narrator explains the position of the window of his office at the department with respect to the communal botanical gardens and the street which he first calls via Charlie Marx, while explaining why no one else noticed the corpse hanging from the ficus tree before La Marca arrived at work that day. He then gives an extended parenthesis by way of explanation of the street name:

Ricordo ancora la faccia e il commento di Ruggero Montalbani, Professore e Gentiluomo di Vecchio Stampo, con doppiopetto fumo di Londra e qualche decilitro di sangue blu in circolo, quando si era accorto dell’affronto:
- Bella fine ha fatto il Duca di Medina-Sidonia!
Montalbani è il padre di Raffaele. Almeno lo era, visto che è morto da parecchi anni (14).

The street in the title of the novel has a double name and a double history, explained in the novel. Traces of the Charlie Marx graffiti exist on the sign, as they do in society, and the street nicknamed via Charlie Marx is a dead-end street, a metaphor for the Marxist way (25). These traces are also a metaphor for the “modernization” and “updating” of Sicily through new hegemonies. While the official name commemorating the ducal family Medina-Sidonia echoes the four centuries of Spanish domination in Sicily, however inept the actual Duke of Medina-Sidonia was in real life. The fact that via Medina-Sidonia cannot be found on a map of Palermo either is a further irony.

Many other apocryphal street names are written into Piazzese’s map of Palermo. The invented street and place names are insertions rather than name changes, according to the author in an interview with Salvatore Ferlita. New names are used for places in which crimes are committed, in which the protagonists, criminals and other characters live or work. Apart from the precaution of avoiding giving offence to readers who may live and work in the real Palermo, the choices involved in naming the topical locales establishes literary common places with other works of detective fiction. For example, “via Riccardo il Nero” a topographical epicentre of La doppia vita di M. Laurent, is a translation of Boulevard Richard Lenoir, the home address of Georges Simenon’s Inspector Maigret. La via degli Orefici, off of which runs la via Medina-Sidonia, in which we find Lorenzo La Marca’s place of employment is taken from Maigret’s workplace the Paris police headquarters Quai des Orfèvres, while La Marca’s residence in the
historical centre of Palermo is found in vicolo Valvidrera, is a homage to Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, the Spanish mystery writer and creator of the detective Pepe Carvalho (*Palermo: Luoghi del noir* 34-35). These spatial distortions are accompanied by slight temporal distortions as well, such as references to Forza Italia, in a book that is set prior to its formation. In addition, while drafting *La doppia vita di M. Laurent*, Piazzese chose via del Droghiere as the location of Kamulut, the antiques store owned by the first victim. Via dello Spezio is a real street name in the neighbourhood of Palermo, where Piazzese decided to add the fictional Kamulut. The author wanted to make a connection between the real street name and the fictional one, so the readers familiar with Palermo can situate the events of the novel in the real landscape. The author wasn’t satisfied with the name Droghiere until he happened upon one possible translation of *droghiere* as chandler (Ferlita 44). This happy coincidence of naming appeals to Piazzese and La Marca’s desire to dialogue with the much-admired Raymond Chandler and Philip Marlowe.

I have already discussed the reshaping of reality to conform to fiction earlier in the chapter on Andrea Camilleri’s Vigàta. In particular, I mentioned that Camilleri’s native town Porto Empedocle was given the new designation Porto Empedocle-Vigàta as an homage to the great writer. In the La Marca-Spotorno world, Salvo Montalbano and Livia are real, as demonstrated in the telephone call between the character Commissario Vittorio Spotorno and the *commissario* of Vigàta, while the characters Philip Marlowe, Holden Caulfield, Philo Vance and Calamity Jane remain as fictional personalities and popular culture references. This phenomenon of reality imitating fiction is not particular to Camilleri (or Piazzese), nor is it new. In fact, the most famous address of detective fiction was forced into existence in an attempt to make the real City of Westminster in modern London, correspond to Sherlock Holmes’s London. Initially, Arthur Conan Doyle chose 221B Baker St. as the home address of his fictional consulting
detective, because the fashionable residential street only had houses numbered up to 100, and thus, no real people would be bothered by readers looking for Sherlock Holmes. When the extension of Upper Baker Street was built, the Abbey National Building Society held the address of 221 Baker Street, as their premises in Abbey House occupied the numbers 219 to 229 Baker Street, and began receiving mail addressed to the fictional detective. Rather than ignoring it, the bank employed a full-time secretary to deal with Sherlock Holmes’s correspondence, and to reply in the voice of the great detective. The Sherlock Holmes Museum, on the same block at number 239 Baker Street, was renumbered 221B by Westminster City Council in 1990, and so began the disputes between the City Council, the Museum and Abbey National over ownership of the street number and the Sherlock Holmes mail that lasted until 2005 and the closure of Abbey House. While it is fairly commonplace to insert false addresses into fictional works, it is less common for the reverse to happen, for reality to be reorganized in order to accommodate a false address. Piazzese celebrates the rewriting or remapping of reality, albeit in the context of a work of detective fiction. The address 221B Baker Street has been a literal *locus communis*, literary commonplace or topos in detective fiction since its inception, with countless revisits to the site and to the characters, but its concretization in the real world has given the license to treat the fictional world of Sherlock Holmes as part of the real world. Both the bank and the museum sought to perpetuate the fiction of Sherlock Holmes. Both entities vied for the chance to enter into dialogue with readers, and both claimed ownership to the mail addressed to Sherlock Holmes. Furthermore, the bank employee even responded to letters as Sherlock Holmes. Popular culture feels the need to revisit certain literary common places, such as 221B Baker Street, translating them from the page to reality.
This interaction between Sherlock Holmes and “reality” is mirrored in *La doppia vita di M. Laurent* and the conversation between Spotorno and his colleague, a commissario “in un avamposto sulla costa sud” (98). In Sicilian detective fiction, it is Andrea Camilleri’s detective Salvo Montalbano that has become “real”. According to the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, the dialogic work continues a cognitive and literary exchange with other works of literature and other authors, and conversation goes both ways. The earlier work is changed by the dialogue as much as the present one is influenced, informed or in response to the previous work. This dialogue that extends in both directions, into the past as well as the future, is illustrated by La Marca’s reading, interpretation and assimilation of *The Catcher in the Rye* and the Italian cultural baggage associated with *Il giovane Holden* that comes with it.

**The mafia in Piazzese’s Palermo**

The mafia is an organized crime syndicate of long standing in Sicily. Even though the proper term in Sicilian usage is *Cosa Nostra*, there is the association of the words “mafia” and “Sicily” the world over. The mafia has become a literary *topos*, a *locus communis* that is almost *de rigeur* in any crime novel set in Sicily, especially Palermo, owing to the greatness that is Leonardo Sciascia. As I already discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, in all of Sciascia’s detective stories, the initial apparent societal order is disrupted by a crime, and it is never quite reinstated, not even with the unraveling of the mystery, because that order did not really exist in the first place. *Omertà* and political collusion prevent the investigator from delivering justice, and especially in the case of *Il giorno della civetta*, the traditional “union of investigator and society in the face of crime is replaced by a union of society and criminal, linked by their hostility to the intrusive investigator” (Farrell 64). To a certain extent, Andrea Camilleri and
Santo Piazzese have found a way to work around Sciascia’s problem, by having their investigators be of the people. Montalbano, La Marca, and Sportorno, all belong to territory in which they operate.

Critics of Piazzese comment on the notable absence of the mafia in his first two novels. According to Silvia Roche, Piazzese recognizes his debt to Sciascia, and accepts his legacy and his importance in the detective fiction tradition, but at the same time, Piazzese represents the possibility of a *giallo* set in Sicily without tackling the topic of the Mafia (Pezzotti 85). Piazzese, however, disagrees with the assertion that “the topic of the Mafia is only relevant in *Il soffio [della valanga]*” (Pezzotti 181). For the author, the Mafia is an underlying menace that permeates the text of the first two novels. References to *Cosa Nostra* are tangential, intertextual and casual, with the intention of making it more threatening. He says in an interview, “the Mafia is like air: you don’t notice it, apart from in sensational cases, but it’s there; it surrounds you” (Pezzotti 182). Even though the Mafia does not play a part in the solution of the crimes of the novels featuring La Marca as the amateur investigator, the presence of organized crime is everywhere, and somewhat apparent to an average member of the public. Finding himself in Vucciria, a downtown neighbourhood associated with Mafia action, leads the narrator to comment on *le narcolire* and their presence and effects in the commercial streets of the historic centre of Palermo:

Dall’ultima volta si erano estinte almeno un paio di botteghe. Colpa della crisi. In centro, fino a poco tempo fa, di botteghe ne spuntavano in continuazione, di lusso e di extralusso. Secondo i tamtam indigeni, alcune erano a ciclo continuo: spesa, investimento e ricilaggio delle sudate narcolire.

Ancora oggi, con un po’ di esercizio, non è difficile riconoscere le narcolire. Le individuate nello sguardo dei malacarne che vi fissano con aria di sfida, mentre a cavallo di un motorazzo che sembra una corazzata, se non vi spicciate a spostarvi, sembrano pronti a spianarvi sui marciapiedi di
Mondello. Le riconoscete nelle catene d’oro intorno ai loro colli, e nei Rolex che abbattono la dittatura Swatch intorno ai loro polsi; e nei vortici di nobili firme messe insieme tra casco, occhiali giubbotto, T-shirt, scarpe, e chi sa che altro, per parlare solo di ciò che si vede. Le riconoscete addosso alle loro donne, che scendono impellicciate dalle Mercedes fiammanti, e magari firmano con una croce.

In alternativa, c’è l’approccio statistico. I sociologi hanno calcolato con precisione assoluta, fino alla sesta cifra decimale, la percentuale dei maschi della specie mafiosa annidati tra i cittadini normali: sono uno su cinquanta virgola qualcosa. Quanti sociologi, incrociandomi, mi avevano infilato nel mazzo? E in quanti mafiosi mi ero stocasticamente imbattuto, durante la camminata?

Per togliermi lo sfizio cominciai a contare. Il numero cinquantuno era un tappeto insignificante, sulla sessantina, vestito di grigio. I più pericolosi. Tentai uno sguardo carico di disprezzo. Mi guardò dubbioso. Dopo che ci incrociammo mi voltai e continuai a fissarlo. Si voltò anche lui, e subito accelerò il passo. Lorenzo La Marca, il terrore di Cosa Nostra (53).

What is significant in his internal commentary on his walk through la Vucciria, to the area around the Teatro Massimo and onto via Ruggiero Settimo, is not the encounters with any Mafiosi on his walk, but with the idea that there is probably Mafia presence throughout his walk. There is the description of the gold-and Rolex-laden local operators and their ostentatious women, but there is also the reference to the movement of money, property and political power that changes the look of the streets in the neighbourhood. Money laundering (riciclaggio), the conferring of political patronage (clientelismo), and even the corrupt awarding of building contracts are all present in this passage, but evidence of this activity remains under the surface and barely tangible. On a whim, he tests the theory that one in fifty or so males are operatives of Cosa Nostra. His lighthearted irony does not belie the fact that his little test investigation is inconclusive, as the fifty-first man he sees is rather unremarkable, but the presence of mafia on the streets of Palermo, though intangible, is still pervasive. This walk through the Vucciria crosses paths with another walk described by G.K. Chesterton in 1902. The detective is the
flâneur, walking the city, reading its signs and inscriptions, “But there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol – a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card” (Chesterton 4). The detective reads the city like a text. Even the exercise performed by La Marca of looking at fifty-one men in the streets is prompted by Chesterton, who writes in “A Defence of Detective Stories”, “It is good that the average man should fall into the habit of looking imaginatively at ten men in the street even if it is only on the chance that the eleventh might be a notorious thief” (5). The mafia, however, is not so easily discerned or apprehended, and as these intertextual references suggest, the reputation of the criminal organization is intertwined with the romance of the city of Palermo. As Piazzese suggests, the narration gives the impression that the “Mafia is like air”, it is ever present as a low-level, but constant, threat in one’s everyday perambulations. This subtle, threatening presence is also in evidence in the author’s treatment of the Teatro Massimo in his first two novels. He explains to Darline in I delitti that “Il Teatro Massimo, uno dei più importanti d’Europa. È chiuso, per pochi mesi, dal millenovecentosettantaquattro” (135). The long closure of the Teatro Massimo, for a “brief” period of renovations that lasted about a quarter century, is a definite sore point for Santo Piazzese, who includes in his disclaimer of his first novel, “I personaggi, i fatti, le situazioni del racconto sono del tutto immaginari. Tranne la persistente chiusura del Teatro Massimo” (10). The continued closure of one of the most important theatres of Europe represents the corruption, political in-fighting, and mismanagement of funds, typical of a society in which the organized crime syndicates have deep connections with construction companies. La Marca continues his explanation to Darline:

- Che vuol dire?
- Che non si sa quando riapre.
- Perché l’hanno chiuso?
- Devono fare dei lavori.
- E perché non li fanno?
- Non lo so. Non lo sa nessuno. E non gliene importa niente a nessuno. Un giorno qualcuno ci piazzerà una bomba. Indovina chi? (135)

For Piazzese, the Teatro Massimo is a symbol and an enduring reminder of the Mafia’s power to shape the city and a constant irritation. He harps on this theme in *La doppia vita di M. Laurent*:

Prima di tornare alla macchina ci fermammo a prendere un caffè nel megabar che avevano aperto in via Volturno, di lato al Teatro Massimo. Il teatro, invece, era ancora chiuso, sempre più chiuso, rigorosamente chiuso*. Closed, locked, fermé, geschlossen, zu, cerrado, sbarrato, allapazzato, come la segreta, ultrasorvegliata, incontaminata, metaforica – e, pertanto, inespugnabile – cintura di castità della nostra decana del dipartimento (23-24).

The author’s footnote reads “*Lo era quando è stato scritto questo capitolo*. Palermo, the capital of Sicily, once the home of the most commanding of the Holy Roman Emperors and a centre of poetry, music, and the arts, has a closed opera house at its centre. Piazzese’s use of hyperbole and the constant rants against the closure of the Teatro Massimo may appear off topic, like a joke that has gone on too long, two books too long, but it emphasizes the void at the centre of the city and at the centre of civic life in Palermo. It is physical evidence of the decline of high culture in one of the world’s greatest cultural metropolises. This lacuna is filled, instead, with the mysterious workings of the Mafia that has replaced this grand theatre as a symbol of the city. Interestingly, the final scenes of the film *Godfather Part 3* (1990) were filmed at this long disused opera house. Even though the Teatro Massimo was still closed for renovations, it was opened up and partially refurbished for this film about the Mafia.

The Teatro Massimo, miraculously, reopened in 1998, before the publication of Piazzese’s second novel, thereby diffusing the power of the author’s cultural critique; however, Piazzese and his cynical narrator-protagonist thrive on this kind of confusion between the filmic
and the real. Just as the detective story reading public feels the need to continuously revisit certain literary common places, such as 221B Baker Street, and to continuously rewrite new mysteries for the archetype of the detective Sherlock Holmes to solve, the expectations of the readers of Sicilian detective story involve the inevitable arch-villains in the form of the Mafia. Rather than having a detective hero that protects the city, as Sherlock Holmes in London, who has an address at which one can find him, Palermo has one of the greatest theatres of Europe that has remained closed for a quarter century owing to crime, corruption and political disorganization, but can be used as a movie set. Cosa Nostra and its influence on Sicilian life are real, but Piazzese comments on how they have become less than real through mediation.

Se fossimo stati ai margini della Vucciria non avrei avuto esitazioni: una puntatina al bancone di uno dei polipari di piazza Caracciolo sarebbe stata sufficiente a garantirmi autonomia fino all’ora di pranzo. Anche se devo ammettere che da quando la televisione ha consegnato la piovra all’iconografia mafiosa e all’immaginario collettivo, tutte le volte che mi fermo alla Vucciria per mangiare il polpo bollito, non posso fare a meno di sentirgli uno strano sapore, come di celluloide, e mi aspetto sempre di ritrovarmi un microchip sotto i denti. E dire che non credo nell’immaginario collettivo. Sarà che nemmeno i polpi sono più quelli di un tempo. O più probabilmente anch’essi ormai vengono sintetizzati in Corea (La doppia vita 153).

In these attempts on the part of technology, art, or fiction to hold up a mirror to society, to examine anthropologically the ills of a society, La Marca feels the effects of this commentary, reflection, and distortion on his everyday reality. In a case that is almost the reverse of inserting 221B Baker Street into the real city of London, the mafia has been translated to a fictional plane. The imagery of the giant squid has replaced the organization of which it is symbolic. This duplication suffices to render both the real and the fictional artificial. The organization’s dubious origins and the uncertain meaning and etymology of the word “mafia” seems to reinforce the
narrator’s idea that he is living in a simulacrum, a projection and artificially resurrected version of what was once real. The term “mafia” seems to have less-than-historical origins. The 1863 play *I mafiusi di la Vicaria* by Giuseppe Rizzotto and Gaetano Mosca, which enjoyed great nationwide success had a role in launching the term “mafia” and associating it with the neighbourhood of Vucciria in the collective imagination. The words “mafia” and “mafiosi” are never spoken in the play. The preferred and operative terms appear to be “Cosa nostra” and “uomo di onore”. Even Giovanni Falcone, in 1990, has commented on the overuse and misleading uses of the word “mafia”:

> While there was a time when people were reluctant to pronounce the word "Mafia" ... nowadays people have gone so far in the opposite direction that it has become an overused term ... I am no longer willing to accept the habit of speaking of the Mafia in descriptive and all-inclusive terms that make it possible to stack up phenomena that are indeed related to the field of organized crime but that have little or nothing in common with the Mafia (Lupo 1-2).

In an attempt to apprehend reality through language, the “real’ mafia has somehow eluded these efforts. Falcone, the anti-mafia judge and native Palermitan who was assassinated by a roadside bomb set off by mafia hit men in 1992, lamented that the term “mafia” had come to refer to all the unspecified ills that plague a society. The overuse of the term “mafia” and the proliferation of representations of the mafia in popular media that has captured the public imagination, has served to mask and denature the reality of the situation. Even real things, like the boiled octopus are no longer what they once were. The mafia became known as *la piovra* following the success of a television miniseries starring Michele Placido and Barbara De Rossi in 1984. It was so popular that they made nine more seasons over the course of fifteen years. The term is now commonly used to refer to the tentacular reach of the criminal organization. Piazzese is referring to the show when he says that the octopus now tastes like celluloid. La Marca expresses a bit of
nostalgia for the simplicity of the old truth, the good quality boiled octopus without the added layer of theory that superimposes the metaphor of mafia onto the everyday experience of eating. The plethora of imagery, myths of origin, and fictionalized depictions have affected the narrator’s lived experiences. The television program has dramatized the mafia and has cuplicated certain experiences, such as Falcone’s assassination, and the terminology it established is now common parlance in the real world. The number of misleading references and the overuse of signs, names, or proofs, have served to make it difficult to distinguish between the real and the simulation. The mission of the detective is to apprehend a criminal and to bring him to justice.

Piazzese’s detective, as a literary figure, uses the words of his narration to unravel the mysteries of his crime. His commentary on how the synthesized boiled octopus has changed in taste and meaning, reflects the idea of the “red herring”, the idiomatic expression for the little discoveries that mislead and distract the detective from the important or relevant issues in the case. Or in the case of the mafia and Sicily, the frequent bandying about of the words, the myths and the personalities in popular culture serve to deflect attention from the real issues. To further clarify the different layers of interpretation in this passage, the word mafia still has its original denotation, in Sicily and elsewhere; however, the American production of mafia movies and novels has changed the iconography and the myths of this organization. In some parts of the world in which there is less immediate experience of the mafia, the popular image of the “mafia” supercedes any real knowledge. La Marca sees both overlapping images simultaneously.

In La doppia vita di M. Laurent, Lorenzo La Marca, on his way back from a conference in Vienna, explains the Sicilian personality to an acquaintance on the airplane.

Vede, noi siciliani siamo extremophiles, estremofili: così gli anglosassoni hanno battezzato gli organismi capaci di sopravvivere nelle condizioni ambientali più estreme. Talvolta ce le creiamo, le
According to La Marca, Sicilians as a group are *extremophiles*, and Sicily, in turn, is considered an extreme environment. The mafia, and whether or not it exists, is linked with Sicily and its people in the collective consciousness of the world. This force, this menace, that shapes the Sicilian psyche is something that the narrator posits might not exist, might be a fiction, or might be a collective fantasy. These qualities attributed to the mafia have little to do with the real mafia and everything to do with how these half-formed images have shaped the everyday lives of Sicilians. As Spotorno explains to Darline, mafia crimes render the work of great detectives impossible:

> Da noi, però, c’è anche la mafia, che oscura tutto, che monopolizza le migliori risorse investigative, e non concede a un detective brillante alcuna possibilità di uscire dalla routine, di azzardare qualche volo solitario (*I delitti* 238).

According to Spotorno, mafia crimes differ from real crimes. At the *commissario*’s house, over dinner, Spotorno laments the shortage of real crimes worthy of an investigator such as Maigret, Marlowe or even Ciccio Ingravallo. Spotorno expresses frustration that he must step down from further investigation of the crimes at the university, because his time is dedicated elsewhere. He laments that the fact that his scope as a great detective is limited by the fact that he is a police officer and public servant and his duty lies with his employers. Darline’s presence at his house presents an opportunity for the police inspector to give voice to a complaint that La Marca and Amalia, Vittorio Spotorno’s wife, have heard many times:

The police inspector’s duties prevent him from investigating this real crime, for every respectable and resourceful police officer is bound to carry on the war against the mafia, leaving the path clear for our full-time professor, occasional amateur detective and narrator Lorenzo La Marca to get to the bottom of the deaths of Raffaele Montalbani and Don Mimi at his university department. Spotorno’s distinction between “real” crimes and mafia crimes runs counter to logic, for mafia crimes are real crimes that effect the real life of all residents of Palermo. However, this comment reveals that real life is not as logical or as reasonable as the detective novel. Chaos and catastrophe reign in real life and in mafia crimes, but the intellectual puzzle represented by the classic detective novel compensate for the inscrutability of modernity. The types of crimes that a fictional detective investigates restore reason and causality to the world. Bertolt Brecht argues that the analytic detective novel “enables the reader to practice a certain intellectual operation: piecing together a causal chain of events that leads directly from the crime to the criminal. By limiting the field of possible outcomes of this causal chain, the detective novel presents us with the ability to fix causality to human actions. The crime has motivation and that motivation is attributable to an individual” (Herzog 22). Causality, agency, and logic do not function in a state with the mafia. Spotorno expresses frustration with his role as protector of the people and defender of the law.

La Marca the Reader

In detective fiction, the activities of the investigator are often analogous to that of the reader. He interprets signs, he creates meaning, and he tells the story. This comparison between the two roles of the detective is built into the structure of the classical detective novel and explained in Todorov’s “The Typology of Detective Fiction”. The novel typically consists in the
reconstruction of a hidden prior story – the crime. The role of the reader is thus doubled in any reading of a particular detective story. In La Marca’s case, the protagonist is not only reading clues in order to reconstruct plots, but he is also involved in reading other books and making connections with other stories told in other artforms, such as film.

Piazzese’s amateur detective walks the “mean streets” of la Vucciria, but his representation of the neighbourhood reverberates with signs and secrets. Reading the urban hieroglyphics as he appreciates the poetry of the city is central to the role of the detective according to G.K. Chesterton (p. 4). La Marca practices these simultaneous activities of writing and walking, interpretation and pursuit, as he moves through the Vucciria, strolls past the Teatro Massimo, or wanders into his department at the university. According to Walter Benjamin, “The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd” (Benjamin Charles Baudelaire 48). The detective is able to walk anonymously amongst the crowd making his observations. Benjamin describes the workings of detective fiction and compares it to an “X-ray picture”:

In it, the drapery represented by crime has disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who arranges his walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd. This unknown man is the flâneur (48).

According to this account of the detective, the flâneur-like figure deliberately loses himself in the crowd and does not join in with the activities of the masses. La Marca in these perigrinations through the city uncovers spaces normally hidden from view. He is, however, a bit more invested in his relations with other characters, even if he subjects his interactions to the same level of observation and decoding.
In addition to the reader and La Marca the detective-reader, there is also the character of Darline, the American fiancée of the murder victim, Raffaele Montalbani. Darline functions as a stand in for the reader and as the cultural other. Through the process of dealing with Montalbani’s death, La Marca takes Darline under his wing, and as he investigates the death of his estranged friend, he also has a character who is an outsider for whom he can decode his Palermo, explain its complexities and idiosyncrasies. Darline has another narratological function in that she is able to explain Raffaele, the dead man. La Marca had not seen his former colleague in the biochemistry department at his university. He imagines what his friend’s fiancée might be like:

Des Moines. Iowa. La corn belt. Granturco e maiali. Madre de dios!, là ci sono più maiali che abitanti. Per quello che sapevo su Raffaele, avrei scommesso che se non era finito con una guardiana di porci del Midwest più polveroso era solo perché, in quelle lande, la categoria è estinta da un pezzo. Lì, ora, è tutto meccanizzato.


Ironically, Piazzese seems to take umbrage with outsiders’ ignorance of Sicily, as revealed in the anecdote cited earlier in this chapter about his conversation with a stranger while holidaying in Tunisia, and in his fiction, depicted through La Marca’s encounter with the man on the airplane in La doppia vita di M. Laurent. He questions the source of where outsiders get their facts about his land and his people; however, he has his character flaunt a very limited and heavily mediated knowledge of the States. La Marca proudly reveals that he has only second-hand knowledge of the States gleaned through popular culture. No reputable or authoritative sources are cited as the
fount of his knowledge of American facts and culture. His acquaintance of such places as New York, Los Angeles and Des Moines, indeed, pre-date his acquaintanceship with Woody Allen, that is, they are youthful and childish enthusiasms that have formed his mental landscape that is the United States of America. Part of the challenge in solving this mystery, the death of his colleague and fellow student at the biochemistry department of his university in Palermo, is to understand his friend’s life in a foreign land. Darline is able to provide some of this information and the two work together in an unequal partnership, for in the end it is Lorenzo La Marca and his local knowledge of Palermo society, in addition to his knowledge of biochemistry that allow him to unmask the killer.

Darline is aware of Lorenzo’s misinterpretation of her. He sees her as an embodiment of the States, even after he gets to know her a little. Even though she, conveniently, speaks perfect Italian, she reinforces every preconceived notion of the American woman he has ever had. The narrator invites Darline to visit his sister’s farm in the country, where she lives with her husband and children, and while there, La Marca immediately enters into a dalliance with his deceased friend’s fiancé. Nevertheless, he still projects his stereotypes, preconceptions and expectations of the American woman onto her. He compares her to Calamity Jane after seeing Darline return from riding his sister’s horses. Darline is offended at La Marca’s interpretation of her and his comparison of her to Calamity Jane, but as with all comparisons in La Marca’s world, it is not to the historical Calamity Jane that he refers, but the Hollywoodian iconography. Looking through a book on the frontierswoman, containing photos of the actors who portrayed her, Darline still complains that she sees little resemblance between herself and Doris Day, Yvonne De Carlo, Jane Russel and Jean Arthur, demonstrating that the narrator’s view of Darline does not accord with her own. She sees herself as Michelle Pfeiffer, while he regards her as more of an Eve
Marie Saint (173). During this visit to the narrator’s sister, Darline is reading *Il Gattopardo*, and the narrator has the occasion to explain the differences in their styles of reading. He writes, “Le avevo dato il libro di Calamity, ma lei mantiene i contatti con un solo testo alla volta” (172), unlike the narrator who uses the metaphors of polygamy, dilettantism, and uninhibited promiscuity to describe his own relationship with books, or carpet-bombing when he finds an author about whom he is passionate. He also cites Michelle Laurent as a curiosity in this kind of voracious reading: for about a year Michelle read only writers called Roth and then passed onto Japanese authors. The function of Darline in this novel is not so much to provide an outsider’s view of the crime, Palermo and Palermitans, but more of the narrator’s view of outsiders. Despite their shared quest, their physical intimacy, their daily routine of meeting for lunch during a workday and weekends at his sister’s, La Marca doesn’t really have much of a relationship with Darline as an individual. She remains the American woman and fiancée of the deceased. She also is an example of a different type of reader and researcher. While Darline disagrees with La Marca’s impression of her, she is unable to change his view of her. Although Darline has more at stake personally in getting to the bottom of the murders in the biochemistry department, she does not offer any possible solutions, nor does she suggest any possible suspects. The reason for this is possibly owing to the fact that she is a newcomer onto the scene. She spends her spare time trying to get to know her deceased fiancé’s background, but she does not have enough expertise in either Sicilian society, or in his work to make much progress in the investigation. On the other hand, La Marca is a rather dispassionate observer and somewhat detached from Darline, yet he is expert in his field of professional study and the ways of the Palermitan social order are ingrained in him. It is interesting that he does not accurately understand this woman in his life and perhaps misinterprets her. He reveals that he does not fully grasp Darline, “Era come se esistessero due
Darline. E una delle due non aveva niente in comune con l’illusione stereotipata che noi intellettuali west-siculi, sparuti, raffinati, e superiori, ci facciamo delle ragazze della provincia americana” (202). At the end, it is not until Darline has decided to return to the States and go back to her pre-Raffaele life, to close the parenthesis on her episode with Lorenzo La Marca, that our detective is able to make his move and apprehend the murderer.

In *La doppia vita di M. Laurent*, La Marca meets a woman called Elena Zebensky in Vienna that is associated with the death of the antiques dealer in Palermo. The narrator refers to her as “la Ugro-finna” throughout the novel, up until he finds her dead body. Initially, she was simply the dead man’s mistress, and she had connections to Monsieur Laurent, Michelle Laurent’s father. La Marca also fails to see her as a person until the moment of her death. After discovering her body, the narrator switches quite consciously to calling her Elena Zebensky, rather than by the name of her demographic or national group. While awaiting the arrival of the authorities at the scene of death, La Marca forces himself to combat his sense of repulsion and to examine the scene with detachment and reason. He remarks, “Tutto quello che avevo fatto fino a quel momento era solo una conseguenza quasi automatica delle mie letture del genere sbirresco” (265). At the moment of her death, Zebensky ceases to fit into La Marca’s preconceived impression of her. However, in the next few pages, as Elena Zebensky gains personhood, our detective shows how ill-equipped he is to deal with the complications of a real woman rather than a character or stereotype, such as the femme fatale. He can only operate as a detective in the realm of books and films. Beginning with his entry into La ugro-finna’s apartment for a pre-arranged rendez-vous in which La Marca would have confronted her with proof of her lies and through to the end of the second novel, the narrator makes references to the irreality of his situation.

His foreshadowing of the discovery of Zebensky’s body, is punctuated with ironic and sarcastic remarks about his melodramatic imaginings that he is acting out some heroic role in a film noir fantasy: “Mi soffermai solo per qualche istante sull’idea di mettere tutto per iscritto, a futura memoria altrui, e di spedirlo al mio indirizzo, al dipartimento. Poi mi sembrò troppo melodrammatico. Non eravamo i personaggi di uno stupido libro giallo” (261). He comments in a metatextual fashion, “Stavolta sì, mi sentivo dentro un romanzo giallo” (262). From the discovery of Elena Zebensky, dead with a bullet hole in her temple, he makes constant references to fictional sources, in order to process his real-life experience of finding the body: “Se fossi stato un regista, quello sarebbe stato il luogo ideale per mettere in scena l’inquietudine” (266); “Scattarono foto a raffica. Cosparsero tutto di polverine, come nei romanzi della Cornwell” (267); and another instance each of “come in un romanzo della Cornwell” and “come un film proiettato sullo schermo di una sala parrochiale” appear on page 270. For the rest of the novel, La Marca continues to make comparisons between his own experiences and behavior and what happens in books and films. Although with her death Elena Zebensky has become a person again in the detective’s view, he is still unable to interpret and resolve the all the clues without reference to fictional sources.

Despite our inability to innately trust our narrator’s judgment and understanding of Darline, Elena Zebensky, or any other real-life clues and events, it is La Marca who brings the first two of Piazzese’s plots to their successful conclusions. It is a combination of having specialized knowledge of biology and chemistry and his being a native Palermitan that allows La
Marca to succeed where others have failed. In the investigation into the deaths at the university’s biochemistry department, La Marca is able to interpret the data of twenty floppy diskettes found by Darline in Montalbani’s luggage. These diskettes contain the “protocols”, the records of all purchase of various chemicals and samples for the department over a period of twenty years, dating back to the time when Ruggero Montalbani was the head of the university’s biochemistry department. The police reluctantly allow La Marca copies of these records after commissario Spotorno admits that they do not have anyone one on staff that could possibly make sense of such information. From these records, the narrator notes a fluctuation in the amounts of radioactive caesium purchased over the years. He also discovers that Raffaele Montalbani was trying to rent a Geiger counter to measure radioactivity on one of his last days alive, right after his arrival in Palermo. La Marca deduces that his friend and former colleague was killed for something to do with the protocols and that it was in the tight nucleus of personalities surrounding Filippo Serradifalco that he would find the killer.

It is on the fireworks day, the fourteenth of July, the penultimate day of the Festival of Santa Rosalia, on which important clues and connections that only a native Palermitan can interpret are revealed to the detective-protagonist. In classical analytic detective stories of the 1920s, English, French and American detectives provided a centre of rational deduction and logic in a changing modern world, while in contrast, German crime fiction of this period dispensed with the figure of the detective to focus on the criminal, situating itself in a theoretical space outside of reason, logic and societal order (Herzog 15). The contemporary Sicilian detective novel operates in an environment that favours illogic, inexplicability and chaos, because the mafia dominates much of the civic crime fighting resources. The rest of the world seems quite ready to write crime novels about Sicily, and to tell crime stories through film and
television with the mafia as the protagonist. Nevertheless, even though the police are busy fighting organized crime, Piazzese clings to the model of the detective story with a special investigator with his own particular attributes that allows him to solve a “real” murder. It takes the man on the street, someone who can pass unnoticed in high and low society, with a rational mind, a keen sense of observation and the right background knowledge, like Walter Benjamin’s urban walker or flâneur to solve this mystery. La Marca is just such a threshold figure. Although Spotorno is also born and bred in Palermo, La Marca’s knowledge of biochemistry has granted him an advantage over Spotorno in the case recounted in *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia*. A second advantage is the fact that the university professor is not a police officer and can be invited to rub elbows at social events without raising suspicion. La Marca has been invited to watch the fireworks from onboard a boat owned by the venerable Professor Benito de Blasi Bosco, a gynecologist, member of the university and husband of Michelle Laurent. La Marca’s presence on the yacht is unremarkable because he occupies a social position that intersects several social groups. As a native of Palermo, he has a bit of an acquaintanceship with *i vecchi gattopardi*, the old barons of fine society; as an ex-boyfriend of Michelle, he is familiar with her father and with her friends; and as a member of the university, he is on good terms with many of the guests.

Michelle’s husband, the egregious “Il Chiarissimo Professore Benito de Blasi Bosco”, whom La Marca dubs *il pallone gonfiato*, seems to hold the whole party together. Lorenzo and Darline have the opportunity to observe all the suspects together, under the guise of mingling with his peers and introducing the American “widow” to some local colour.

He notes, “A bordo eravamo una trentina di persone. Con moderato stupore avvistai Fifi Serradifalco. Non mi sarei aspettato che il pallone gonfiato potesse arrivare a invitarlo. Pensai a una manovra di Michelle, per diluire la mia presenza” (240). The presence of Serradifalco, the
department chair, causes some surprise because he has never belonged to the same social group as the gynecologist, and his predecessor at the department, Ruggero Montalbani, another old and important person of influence in both academic and social circles. In fact, at Raffaele’s funeral, La Marca was surprised at the arrival of de Blasi Bosco and the way Michelle’s husband, *il pallone gonfiato* and *il re dei cucchiai d’oro*, marched to the front pew in the church displacing a colleague of the department, and Fifi. The narrator had forgotten that de Blasi Bosco and Professor Ruggero Montalbani were great friends and belonged to the same caste, “quella che fu dei Gattopardi, e che oggi, come qualcuno aveva previsto, va cedendo per sempre il passo a sciacalletti e ioni d’ogni sorta” (100). Even though it was Serradifalco and not de Blasi Bosco who followed in Ruggero Montalbani’s footsteps, professionally speaking, La Marca observes that it is his boss who does not belong.

Even though Serradifalco is the head of the department, the narrator notices that “Fifi aveva l’aria patetica, in chiesa accanto a de Blasi Bosco” (101), and that his director kept casting furtive and envious glances at the gynecologist. La Marca subconsciously reinforces Fifi’s otherness, simply by the fact that he always refers to his boss by this diminutive nickname, while
according Michelle’s husband many and various titles even as insults, thereby emphasizing that Fifi, even as department head, will never belong despite his professional success, because of his humble birth. Much as he despises Benito de Blasi Bosco, La Marca does not question the privilege and entitlement of Professor Montalbani’s old crony to charge to the front pew at Raffaele’s funeral. This episode revealing Fifi’s position as an outsider is reinforced when La Marca sees him on de Blasi’s Bosco’s yacht. Also on the yacht, the gynecologist has on display several group photos of the members of biochemistry department at social and sporting events, with Serradifalco always appearing as if uncertain of his status in the group. In the end, after seeing Darline off at the airport, our detective confronts Filippo Serradifalco and accuses his department chair of the murders of his predecessor Ruggero Montalbani, Raffaele Montalbani and Don Mimi the groundskeeper. The latter two murders are revealed to be symptoms of the first murder. Serradifalco was gradually poisoning his superior with radioactive caesium, which resulted in Montalbani dying of leukemia. The old Professor Montalbani was killed in part to make way for Serradifalco’s ambition to occupy the top post in the department, but also because his director has discovered certain irregularities in the department funds. Although the older man did not cause a scandal, he punished the younger man with his disdain and inflicted his colleague with constant humiliation in private, while keeping up the appearances of great esteem in public. Raffaele confronted Fifi with evidence that his father was murdered by the director, and was killed in turn. Don Mimi had evidence against Serradifalco and was pressuring the chair to keep his residence in the department’s gardens and certain other favours on behalf of other family members looking for work, so he had to go too. A sense of injustice is at the root of Serradifalco’s motive for the original murder. People like Ruggero Montalbani and Benito de Blasi Bosco with their infinite sense of belonging were granted whatever they wanted
professionally and took whatever they wanted personally. Like the serval cats of the extended metaphor, La Marca observed throughout the course of his investigation the many ills that these residual members of the old caste inflicted upon their social inferiors, including the fact Ruggero Montalbani seduced Don Mimi’s young wife, impregnated her, and arranged an abortion with his gynecologist crony de Blasi Bosco, which resulted in her death. Don Mimi, rather than denouncing Montalbani, used this death to secure his position as a resident grounds keeper. The ways of justice, privilege and revenge are not overt in this society, but covert and subterranean and it takes an insider like our narrator to tease out the truth.
Conclusion

The works in this thesis represent a journey through time, from 1961 to the present (or to around 2013), but they reflect movement through a more limited space, that of the southwest corner of the island of Sicily. In exploring the limits and potentials, the impossibility or possibility of detective fiction in a Sicilian setting, one quickly discovers that there is too much potential for crime in real life Sicily, and perhaps, not enough scope for the detective to come across as a hero who resolves a criminal situation and sets society to rights again.

The earliest detective stories studied are those by Leonardo Sciascia, who from the outset determines to assert the difference between a traditional “Whodunnit” and the story of crime solving in Sicily. Sciascia’s narratives are sufficiently self-reflexive to be called a postmodern detective novel, a vehicle to subvert the traditional formula. The subject under investigation in Sciascia’s novels becomes Sicily itself. His novels address issues of power and justice in his contemporary political situation. Although his stories always begin with an individual crime, usually murder, and the reader follows in the wake of a single investigator, it soon becomes clear that it is Sicily itself that is under investigation. He delves into the island’s history and presents his critique of a justice system based entirely on power and political influence. His unapologetic depiction of the mafia and its sphere of influence in Sicily is by Sciascia’s own admission a unique innovation that he brings to the genre. One of the aims of his fiction is to expose the mafia’s reach of power and to demonstrate how its networks underlie Sicilian society and extend through to Italy and the world. His unsuccessful detectives serve to dismantle the character of the traditional detective, and they dialogue somewhat self-consciously with the traditions of the genre itself. The detective-figures of Il giorno della Civetta and A ciascuno il suo dedicate a large part of their investigations to debates on their ideological positions, for instance Bellodi...
spars with don Mariano Arena, a mafia boss and Laurana participates in a salon-like discussion with the old Roscio. The subject of these discussions is never a search for understanding of the murder committed, but a reinforcement of the way Sicilian society works, and an outlining of the way power inevitably triumphs over reason in the milieu in which they work and live.

It may be too simplistic to call Camilleri’s Montalbano novels “well-behaved”, but in many ways, they do conform to many of the expectations of classic detective fiction. Each novel ends with the resolution of the mystery and some kind of closure is achieved when the criminal is revealed. At least Montalbano always discovers the truth, even if the actual trial, conviction and punishment of the criminal usually takes place *hors texte*. The double narrative, which Todorov writes about as a feature of detective fiction, is preserved. The two orders of story, those of inquest and crime, are narrated from the point of view of a narrator that is close to the detective-protagonist. While the detective *commissario* Montalbano does not enjoy the immunity of the detached observer and is vulnerable to the risks of mixing with criminals and running an investigation, he does return again and again to solve crime in yet another mystery novel. The popular success of the detective and his continued presence over a series of books is the greatest difference between Camilleri’s Inspector Montalbano and Sciascia’s unique investigators. However, the story of the crime in the Montalbano series has a different function from the one it has in the classic puzzle-type detective story: it is more of a point of departure, the main interest derives from the story of investigation and suspense over what will happen to the main characters.

While the Montalbano novels conform to the norms of detective fiction in one aspect and each case arrives at a definite conclusion in which all loose ends have been tied up, they depart from the norm in their manner of narration. The detective and his associates are presented in a
highly theatrical format. The plot is driven forward more through dialogue and performative speech rather than through description. The individual cases become a pretext for describing the geographic and social milieu and the development of the voice and personalities of the main characters. Camilleri’s Sicily is often contrasted to Sciascia’s pessimistic portrayal of the same locale, as Montalbano is the head of the police force of Vigàta and successfully fights crime from within the bureaucracy, even though the commissario is still critical of the system that employs him. However, in Camilleri’s series it is the locale that has become impossible and problematic. The Montalbano novels have become highly metaliterary, stories which are dedicated to their own constructive principles and blatantly display similarities between the act of detection and the reading processes. In constructing his Vigàta, a fictional town in the southwest part of Sicily, Camilleri employs an inventive language, a hybrid combination of Italian, Sicilian and terms of his own. Camilleri’s Vigàta becomes a kind of virtual creation, a typical locale in a virtual Sicily that reflects all of the typical attributes of the Sicilian way of life. The chapters on Camilleri discuss the constant comparisons between real places and fictional representations of place in the Montalbano novels. The body politic of Camilleri’s Sicily is still the same rotten, corrupt socio-political landscape as Sciascia depicts in his detective novels; nevertheless, Montalbano’s theatrics and the author’s inventive literary style create a robust narrative system for the author to interrogate his social reality, his geographical context and the individuals that inhabit it.

Santo Piazzese’s novels featuring Lorenzo La Marca, the university professor of biology turned detective, represent some of the most self-reflexive and completely self-aware narratives in this thesis. This chapter focuses as much upon Palermo as upon the point of view of the detective-narrator protagonist presenting the locale. The city becomes at once more detailed and more abstract through La Marca’s eyes. He often presents street-by-street and step-by-step
trajectories through real and fictional locations in contemporary Palermo, but they are filtered through his unique perspective. Every scene he sees, every location he describes from the point of view of his memories, of his personal past, the history of the city, his catalogue of books read, movies watched and music enjoyed. The narrator of I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia and La doppia vita di M. Laurent is a detective by chance and by accident. He is a kind of witness-as-detective, rather than a police detective or private eye. He struggles quite self-consciously with the genre and his crime-solving resources include all the detective fiction he has read and all the movie versions of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe he has watched, an intimate knowledge of the city of Palermo and its society, a detailed knowledge of his professional subject matter, biochemistry, a lifetime spent at the university department in which the crimes take place, and an old friend in the police department, Commissario Vittorio Spotorno. In these cases, the mechanics and conventions of the canonical detective story are examined, dismantled, spoofed and quoted. The narration of the milieu, the description of place takes precedence over any mystery elements in the novels, although the amateur detective does achieve some accurate and thoroughly satisfying results, in line with the most traditional examples of the genre. Above all the discussion of Piazzese focuses on the detective as flâneur, the urban stroller, who moves anonymously through the crowd, observing his fellows, cataloguing their behaviour, and reading and interpreting the signs found in the city itself.

This discussion of all three authors highlights their depictions of place. Piazzese, Camilleri and Sciascia are united in their desire to contrast their particular part of Sicily with other locales in Italy and the world and with other locales in crime fiction. The story of the milieu takes ascendancy over the stories of the individual crimes that they reconstruct. These three authors, although stylistically quite different, all simultaneously deploy and subvert
traditional detective story conventions. Their writings are all marked by intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Perhaps Piazzese’s fictions are the most blatantly citational and postmodern, but Sciascia’s constant nostalgia for the optimism of Enlightenment era theories of justice and criminality still struggles against the expectations of the reader attempting to enjoy a good mystery. The detective, in these works, is still a central and ordering character, but the study of how he functions in society, his values, his interpersonal relationships become prioritized over his success as an investigator. In Sciascia’s mystery novels, most of the time, very little is discovered and the detective is defeated, and this lack of a denouement may argue for the impossibility of justice in Sicilian detective fiction. However, the well-behaved resolutions to Montalbano’s cases and La Marca’s successful two-out-of-two, still do not dispel the greater atmosphere of criminality that concern these authors who set their works in Sicily.
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