SUBVERSION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DETECTIVE NOVEL: A READING OF LEONARDO SCIASCIA'S *TODO MODO*

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Sommario

Nella lettura che si fa del terzo romanzo poliziesco di Sciascia, lo si scompone per dimostrare come l'autore intenzionalmente sovverte, manipola e rielabora la tecnica e gli elementi che costituiscono il 'giallo' come genere. Nel contempo si cerca di decifrare la pletora di citazioni pittoriche e letterarie che s'intrecciano nella trama di questo romanzo teologico, scritto sotto forma di giallo 'metafisico' senza soluzione, se non quella che vuole attribuirgli il lettore fattosi investigatore. Si propone inoltre una ricomposizione del puzzle, *di modo che ne emerga la posizione intellettuale, religiosa e politica dell'autore di fronte al conflitto individuo-potere*.

The aim of this paper is to show how the semiotic matrix of *Todo modo* represents a subversion of the detective novel formula. It will focus on the way solution is suspended and expectations are thwarted, on how the characters of the investigator and the villain equivocally mirror each other, and on how the reader is brought into complex rapport with the text, the narrator and the author. By suspending solution, yet proliferating enticing but often-inconsequential literary and pictorial clues, the writer forces the reader to view the narrator with suspicion and himself become a sleuth with a quest. Not only is the reader compelled to try and resolve what turns out to be contextually an unsolvable mystery, he is also forced to unravel the complexities of the philosophical, religious and political message that the text contains. The reader, like the internal amateur investigator, has to grapple with ambiguous perceptions of reality and overcome all preconceived notions of good and evil.

The detective genre held a particular attraction for the Sicilian Leonardo Sciascia whose *forma mentis* was shaped by the spirit of inquiry of the Age of Enlightenment. In recent years, like many writers of post-modern fiction (Borges, Nabokov, Robbe-Grillet, Eco, to mention but a few), Sciascia has chosen the detective story as the structuring principle for much of his work. With its strong, well-known conventions, the detective novel normally calls for "the hermeneutic act of reading" (Lazzaro-Weis, 1987:42), which Sciascia expects from his readers. He challenges the reader to participate directly in creating and conferring meaning to his 'open texts' (Eco), which are deliberately ambiguous and indeterminate, thus allowing for many possible readings.

Major authors, who structure their plots and derive their techniques from this popular genre, usually challenge the

premises around which the detective novel developed; they refute its reassuring ideology and 'radical rationality'[1] which affirms that there are no threatening, unsolvable mysteries in the universe, only false theories. Critics have termed such novels that subvert their model either 'metaphysical' (Holquist) or 'anti-detective novels' (Tani). A characteristic of such texts is that they question the infallibility of the power of reason by showing its limits when confronted with irrational disorder. Furthermore, they "undermine conventional detective fiction by [providing] solutions without justice and social criticism" (Tani, 1981:112). Sciascia's fictional heroes are therefore increasingly defeated as his novels deal with greater abuse of power and more deeply corrupt societies. *Todo modo*, like all his later novels, is less closely connected with specifically Sicilian issues. In this text, as the author points out in *La Sicilia come metafora*, Sicily acquires metaphoric value[2].

The metaphysical dimension of Sciascia's 'gialli'

The traditional detective novel dramatises "the hunting down of Evil and the triumph of Good" (Agatha Christie); it takes a "moral position" that presents "the crime of murder" as "uniquely wrong and uniquely irreparable" (P.D. James). However, as Evelyn Waugh, the novelist, social satirist and critic, points out, the concern of writers of detective stories is primarily "with the

1 Cf. Michael Holquist, 1971:135-56.

2 "C'è stata una progressiva trascendenza dei miei 'orizzonti' siciliani […] la Sicilia offre la rappresentazione di tanti problemi, di tante contraddizioni, non solo italiani, ma anche europei, al punto di poter costituire la metafora del mondo odierno." (Interview with M. Padovani. Milano: Mondadori, 1979:78).

mechanics of crime and the logic of its discovery, rather than with Good and Evil" (in Farrell, 1995:60). Farrell defines detective fiction as "the modern urban epic" that provides "an arena for a clash of fundamental values" (1995:61). Sciascia reverses the first two aspects and skilfully plays around the latter two: he is very much concerned with the mechanics of detection, but he uses the genre to explore contemporary dilemmas that involve political morality, and to expose the corrupt values of ecclesiastical and political institutions. His 'gialli', far from being pure fiction, always blend factual historical situations with the plot. Moreover, the clash between criminal and investigator tends to assume more of a transcendental and spiritual nature, rather than be of a purely social, political and legal one[3].

The metaphysical dimension of Sciascia's search for the truth is never quite as evident as in *Todo modo*, his third unconventional story of an investigation, inspired by shrewd observation[4] and creative reconstruction of contemporary Italian political reality. The society he portrays is the very antithesis of the rational world of classic detective stories. As in all detective fiction, in *Todo modo* nothing is what it appears to be; "Così è

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[3] In his essay, *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco*, he had already recognised that "[n]ella sua forma più originale ed autonoma, il romanzo poliziesco presuppone una metafisica: l'esistenza di un mondo 'al di là del fisico', di Dio, della Grazia – e di quella Grazia che i teologi chiamano illuminante. Della Grazia illuminante l'investigatore si può anzi considerare il portatore […]. L'incorruttibilità e l'infallibilità dell'investigatore, […] che non rappresenta la legge ufficiale ma la legge in assoluto, la sua capacità di *leggere* il delitto nel cuore umano oltre che nelle cose, cioè negli indizi, e di presentirlo, lo investono di luce metafisica, ne fanno un eletto" (in *Opere*, II: 1183).

[4] Antonio Pietropaoli (1996:6) reports that in an interview Sciascia confirmed that the mysterious Zafer hermitage-hotel in *Todo modo* is none other than Emmaus hotel in the locality of Zefferana Etnea, a few kilometres from Catania, where spiritual retreats, attended by important Christian Democrats, were held.

(se vi pare)" the text seems to say from the outset of what turns out to be a *post factum* confession of sorts (if one chooses to read it thus). Riddled with duplicity and ambiguity, the text seeks to hide as much as it reveals. It is narrated in the first person by an anonymous, agnostic artist, who is a well known painter turned sleuth by chance out of curiosity and boredom (*Todo modo*, in *Opere* II: 101-2)[5], and who also happens to be an avid reader and writer of detective novels (*TM*: 157).

A system of 'eternal objects'

The theme and the context of the narrative are alluded to in the title, *Todo modo*, ('in any way' or '*One way or another'* – as in its English translation). In distorted Latin, it is derived from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, with reference to the best way to serve the divine will. The irony of the title soon becomes apparent as the reader realises that the novel deals with how to go about serving one's own (the State's? the Church's?) political ends. The narrative revolves around the ideological confrontation between the agnostic painter and Don Gaetano, a brilliant Catholic apologist who is a diabolical intellectual in clerical guise. From the *incipit*, Sciascia plays the same game with the reader that Don Gaetano plays with the narrator, who, in turn, plays it with his interlocutor. The unnamed narrator opens his tale with a philosophical reference, linking Kant's notion of a universe governed by "una catena di causalità sospesa a un atto di libertà" to the Pirandellian notion of the "diuturno servaggio" and infinite potential of "l'uomo solo" (*TM*: 101). The way the reader is introduced into an environment

[5] Hereafter *TM*: plus page number.

where *libero arbitrio* seems to be in conflict with predestination, is an early indication that the novel will be no ordinary 'giallo', but, to say the least, a philosophical literary pastiche[6].

The text is framed at both ends by self-conscious literary references: the quotation that juxtaposes Kant and Pirandello[7] at the beginning and, at the end, a long passage from André Gide's *Les caves du Vatican*. The purpose of this device is to distance the text from objective reality and to emphasise that it represents a system of signs, in which truth that points both to the referential world and to other texts, may be found[8]. Sciascia views literature as "un sistema di 'oggetti eterni' […] che variamente, alternativamente, imprevedibilmente splendono, si eclissano, tornano a splendere e ad eclissarsi - e così via - alla luce della verità. Come dire: un sistema solare." (*Nero su nero*, in *Opere* II: 830). This 'cosmic' metaphor of literature could be interpreted to mean that books (the 'eternal objects') are all interconnected; they each gravitate around truth like the planets around the Sun, reflecting it but without any one text ever being able to reflect it completely and definitively. Sciascia believes that the path to truth for an author passes of necessity through conscious awareness and assimilation of the artistic production of others. Consequently all literary activity becomes a simultaneous reading and re-writing.

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6 'Pastiche' in the sense that Sciascia purposely interweaves in his narrative the most disparate literary quotations, biblical echoes, aphorisms and maxims in order to imply by their context, or indicate by their interpretation, quite the opposite of what they are normally taken to mean, thus parodying the notion that absolute truth can be found or can even exist.

7 Pietropaoli (1996:11) attributes it to the critic Giacomo Debenedetti.

8 Cf. "Mai il testo per Sciascia è stato più consapevolmente testo che con *Todo modo"* (Ambroise, in Sciascia, 1989:XXI).

In *Todo modo*, the reader is faced with a multiplicity of signs; their proliferation is already evident from the second paragraph where one reads: "Credevo di aver ripercorso, *à rebours*, tutta una catena di causalità" (*TM*:101)[9]. The apparently tautologous French inserted phrase is the title of Huysmans' most famous novel. In this late 19th century text, sophisticated forms of corruption are described in the context of successive phases of the spiritual odyssey 'against the grain' of an aesthete attempting to transform an abhorred materialism into a spiritualism full of strange allures. The overt indication that the reader is about to follow the narrator on his own inverse spiritual odyssey, which will take him "nella confusione di una bolgia, sul punto della metamorfosi, [che fa] pensare alla dantesca bolgia dei ladri" (*TM*: 137-8)[10], encapsulates the dominant character traits of the protagonist-narrator. Furthermore, it is a metanarrative indication that the course of the investigation will go against the grain. Since nothing is ever invented entirely and everything has already been said before, references to literary and artistic experience function as a sort of shorthand used to communicate subtle or deeper meanings to more sophisticated readers[11].

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9 This oblique reference to the French text is omitted in the English translation.

10 By making reference to Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XXV), Sciascia is prefiguring the metamorphosis of the influential Christian Democrats gathered at the Hermitage into the avaricious thieves and murderers they turn out to be.

11 When questioned on the intensive use of quotations in *Todo modo*, Sciascia replied that he wanted to make the reader an accomplice in the game, specifying that it was not just a game, but a more taxing exercise that required open *re-writing* of the text by the reader. (See Ricorda, 1977: 81, n.1).

Pictorial clues

In the context of a Sciascia murder mystery, no citation can safely be ignored, for it may disguise an essential clue, just as it may be a red herring. The intertextual references provide the keys to unlock the full significance of this text that continues Sciascia's literary reflections on the dysfunction of the State, brought about paradoxically by those who govern and steer it.

Before the narrator meets the impressive line-up of dignitaries who will be staying at the strange hermitage-hotel for a spiritual retreat, he meets five women who are already guests there. He describes his first glimpse of them sunbathing by a shimmering lake in terms of a Delvaux painting[12]:

> stavano in silenzio […]: distese sugli asciugamani a spugna dai colori vivaci, quattro; una invece seduta, immersa nella lettura. Era un'apparizione. Qualcosa di mitico e di magico. A immaginarle del tutto nude (e non ci voleva molto), tra l'ombra cupa del bosco in cui io stavo e la chiarezza di sole in cui stavano loro, con quei colori, in quell'assorta immobilità, ne veniva un quadro di Delvaux (non mio: ché io non ho mai saputo vedere la donna in mito e in magia, né pensosa, né sognante). Era di Delvaux la disposizione, la prospettiva in cui stavano rispetto al mio occhio. (*TM*: 108)

His insistence on it being a Delvaux tableau that meets the eye emphasises the mood and the atmosphere of the scene, along with the narrator's totally different, more cynical view of women.

[12] Paul Delvaux's surrealist paintings have an oneiric quality about them; they depict static, transfixed human forms in mysterious time and space.

More significantly, however, it indicates that the women seemed to be very much out of place in the broader context of their surroundings. What are these half-naked women doing "in quel cieco casermone tenuto da preti" (*TM*: 108) where a retreat is to be held? The answer is a matter of perspective, as the reader will find out later[13]. The narrator often views scenes from the privileged distance of a detached spectator. He maintains an impassive, ironical vision of society and its power games. The reader sees the microcosm of corruption and duplicity in which the protagonist finds himself through the artistic impressions he perceives and likens to well-known works of art.

The narrator claims he grew up in "luoghi pirandelliani, tra personaggi pirandelliani, con traumi pirandelliani" (*TM*: 101), thus it is natural for him to view situations and people from different angles. Most often this is not the case with the unimaginative, predictable official investigators assigned to solving a crime. The artist-narrator's ability to see things in different dimensions puts him at a great advantage when it comes to working out solutions that require things not to be taken merely at face value[14]. He can look out a window and have the impression of seeing, not a row of deckchairs with slumping bodies in them, but a "metaphysical painting" (*TM*: 115), an early De Chirico. The emphasis here again is on surreal, distorted, unbelievable reality, that perhaps other people conveniently choose to ignore.

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[13] To satirise the "cherchez la femme" mentality, i.e. the false trail constantly offered and pursued in many Sicilian and Southern Italian investigations, Sciascia brings the mistresses of the men into picture.

[14] The narrator makes two references to how he devised his theories: "la sviluppai, voglio dire, come il cavaliere Carlo Augusto Dupin sviluppa le sue nei racconti di Poe. […] la soluzione del problema [era] netta e quasi ovvia: molto simile a quella della *Lettera rubata* di Poe" (*TM*: 190).

In this novel several more paintings are discussed in a technique that can be described as Sciascia's use of the 'double image'[15]. Don Gaetano is ambiguously introduced as he who built the hotel on the site of the hermitage, without official opposition to his scheme, because, though "la Repubblica tutela il paesaggio […] Don Gaetano tutela la Repubblica" (*TM*: 105). When the painter actually gets to meet him, he is surprised by the almost hallucinatory effect the priest has on him: at first sight he appears to be a rigid, distant, cold, detached, aloof figure, but he transforms into a charming, warm, paternal, benevolent, hospitable host. The narrator finds himself drawn to the learned Jesuit who is an exceptional conversationalist and connoisseur on a wide range of subjects. Like himself, the priest does not tolerate fools easily and he does not stand in awe of rank and social position. A mutual respect, almost a complicity, develops between them, until Don Gaetano draws his guest's attention to a painting in the crypt. The priest explains that according to local legend it depicts the nearly blind hermit, Zafer, being tempted by the devil with a pair of spectacles, which, should he accept them, would make him read the words of the Holy Scriptures as if they were those of the Koran. The painting is in fact a reproduction by a local artist, Nicolò Buttafuoco, of a Manetti[16] canvas found in the Church of St. Augustine in Siena. Another legend, no less fanciful than the first, based on a play of words on the painter's name, holds that the devil depicted in the painting is a self-portrait of the artist. To the narrator's astonishment it could equally well be the portrait of Don Gaetano, once he dons

[15] Cf. Giovanna Jackson, 1981:50.

[16] Rutilio Manetti (1571-1639), a minor Tuscan painter of the Caravaggio School.

pince-nez glasses, identical to those worn by Satan in the picture.

This elaborate mirroring connects the devil with (in)sight and distortion and alerts the reader to the fact that, like the devil in the painting, Don Gaetano offers his flock his theological and ethical 'lenses', which distort the orthodox teachings of the Church[17] and turn them into the doctrine of power. The ongoing debate between Don Gaetano and the artist reveals that the unusual priest upholds a utilitarian and paradoxical view of Catholicism. His views appal the narrator who is nevertheless fascinated by his Machiavellian mind and his scorn for the crass stupidity of the powerful men who fall prey to his manipulative charisma.

By the time the first murder occurs, almost halfway through the book, the reader is fully aware that the spiritual director of the retreat (a retreat which is a mere disguise for the gathering of secular and religious wielders of power, come together to make and break alliances) is the *eminence grise* that controls their thinking and actions. Yet there continues to be an affinity between the diabolical priest and the sceptical painter, even after the narrator assumes the role of unofficial investigator: both have cynical, non conformist, superior intellects; both have strong convictions; both despise the stupidity of the hypocritical ruling class. The two characters are perfect foils for one another; they present the same *persona* in a game of opposites. With equal force, erudition and wit, they disagree on a wide range of subjects, which significantly include the nature of Pascal's

[17] Don Gaetano's theology, based largely on Pascal, is founded on his catastrophic, nihilistic, tragic interpretation of the history of humanity as a "long fall", a slow but inevitable ethical and metaphysical "shipwreck". See *infra* and also Pietropaoli, 1996:19-25.

Pensées; the connection between the transcendental, eternal aspirations of Christian revelation and the need to operate in a temporal world; the philosophical and doctrinal dilemma concerning the relationship between State and Church[18].

Don Gaetano, the cynical Jesuit who "[a] lu tous les livres"[19], upholds an ideology of corruption. The verbal duel between him and the painter is fuelled by *calembours*, pictorial and literary references that each explains in his own way, thus revealing his true character. Paintings are used as metaphors or as elaborate similes to illustrate a point. When Don Gaetano states that he is a "very bad" priest, but that the Church owes its survival more to bad priests than to good ones[20], he uses the analogy of "The Raft of Medusa". Just as in this famous painting by Théodore Géricault the survivors were those who were most cunning and aggressive, so too does the Church survive by preying on itself and its weakest, lowliest, poorest members (cf. *TM*: 140-141). What happened on the raft of the ill-fated "Medusa" (shipwrecked in 1816) is seen as a parable for the struggle for power. In Don Gaetano's view the State (the ship) is beyond salvation and the Church (the raft) survives only because of its voracity.

Reflecting on the priest's pessimistic, paradoxical views, the narrator refutes the analogy. He maintains that the shipwreck of

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[18] For an in depth theological reading of this 'political thriller', see Joseph Farrell (1995).

[19] From Mallarmé's "*Brise marine*", quoted by Don Gaetano (*TM*: 138).

[20] "Ebbene: sono molto cattivo [… comunque] la sopravvivenza, il trionfo della Chiesa nei secoli, più si deve ai preti cattivi che ai buoni […] Alessandro VI, *malgré lui,* è stato un grande papa. Se mi si chiedesse di scegliere tra Pio X e Alessandro VI…
- Sceglierebbe Alessandro VI.
- Appunto." (*TM*: 139).

the State has not already occurred and that, for him at least, "la via era ancora […] un vascello di equilibrata e librata alberatura" (*TM*: 140). But before he can dispel this disturbing image, by association, he is reminded of the opening words of the Mallarmé poem Don Gaetano had quoted earlier: "la chair est triste, hélas". Does the narrator realise that he too is vulnerable and subject to temptation in order to uphold his convictions? Don Gaetano had just warned his antagonist that "un fanatico è chi ha delle certezze" (*TM*: 139) and, therefore, that his untarnished rational lay religiosity is just as dangerous as his own cynical Catholicism.

Equally disquieting is the cleric's view on crime, responsibility and justice. He supports the axiom that "'Dio esiste, dunque tutto ci è permesso'" (*TM*: 163)[21]. In a world where the existence of God 'permits' everything, where death and destruction is the destiny assigned to humanity, it makes little sense to choose between good and evil, or to distinguish the innocent from the guilty. A man could judge another only if there were no God, and therefore no question of things being preordained; only then would each man be responsible for his deeds and subject to rational laws. As things stand there is no need for legal punishment, since criminals are punished by life itself. The conflict between rationalism and faith in God's justice is pivotal in the philosophical discussions that permeate the entire text and therefore to the solution of the text as a political thriller. While two seemingly gratuitous murders occur in the background, Don

[21] These words are pronounced by the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. In this novel Ivan is vexed by the problem of sin and suffering and their relation to the existence of God. The same "accursed question" is debated by Don Gaetano and the painter. Like Dostoevsky, Sciascia is perturbed by it and therefore motivated to search for truth and find faith.

Gaetano flirts with Jansenist heresy and the amateur investigator, who sets himself up as Inquisitor and Judge[22], finds himself obliquely captured in a web of intrigue that could plausibly justify his own actions becoming transgressive.

Uncertain and ambiguous ending (?)

Todo modo does not follow the traditional model where the murder(s) are in the foreground and the central focus is on the investigation. In this text the antagonist demands more attention than either the unofficial or the official investigators. Public Prosecutor Scalambri and the Inspector, the investigating officers assigned to the case, meet with a wall of silence; the witnesses they question, in true mafia-style, reveal nothing but their indignation at being submitted to the inconvenience of being questioned. The police know they can expect to get no information and no co-operation from the "uomini d'onore" assembled at the hermitage; they are resigned to seeing their inquiry fail or closed as a settling of scores by men defending their honour.

The less defeatist amateur also finds himself alone, unsupported in his investigation. He is driven by intellectual curiosity and his own absolute sense of justice and morality. He can count only on his own observations and deductive powers. However, Sciascia's fictions never end with the predictable arrest of the villain(s) and the execution of justice. The criminals either remain anonymous or they go unpunished. And this is perhaps

[22] Cf. the juxtaposition made by Don Gaetano (*TM*: 175).

Sciascia's most striking deviation from the rules of the classic detective story.

In *Todo modo* the murderer, or at least one of them[23], gets away with it, but the reader is not privy to information regarding his or their identity. The determined reader can, however, try and read all the 'signs' and expose the many 'hidden' clues that, like the letter in Poe's story[24], were always in full view. All the clues lead the reader to believe that the narrator held the brilliant Don Gaetano responsible for the crimes committed in his hotel. The law is powerless against him for he controls those who control the law[25]. Could it be that the astute Don Gaetano had realised the painter was on to him and that he was issuing a challenge to the artist to expose him, if he dared, by inviting him to read Pascal's *pensées* 460-477[26]?

As a man of integrity, the painter must feel compelled to take it upon himself to see that the powerful 'anti-Christ' is defeated.

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[23] This would be the case, either if one of the illustrious guests killed all three victims, or if Voltrano, the second victim, killed Michelozzi and Don Gaetano killed Voltrano, but Don Gaetano's murderer lives to tell the tale.

[24] *The Purloined Letter* is given as a clue by the narrator ostensibly before he goes out to recover the gun with which he later kills the priest. Why would the narrator suggest that the solution to the problem was distinct and almost obvious - very similar to the solution of Poe's *Purloined Letter* (see note 13 above), but omit to share with the reader what he has in fact discovered? Was he merely alluding to the location of the gun or to something else that should be as obvious, like the identity of the murderer?

[25] This is 'innocently' revealed by the receptionist-priest in the opening pages (*TM*: 105).

[26] The English translation refers to *pensées* 426-443. As most editions number each entry differently, one can only surmise that they are the thoughts grouped around the one the narrator reads out: "La vraie nature étant perdue, tout devient sa nature; comme, le véritable bien étant perdu, tout devient son véritable bien" (*TM*: 189). In context it can assume various meanings.

And precisely because Don Gaetano is the dark side of himself, he feels challenged to beat him at his own game; the only way not to succumb to the power of the opponent is to destroy him. Did the narrator not imply this when he quoted La Rochefoucauld's maxim: "Nessuno merita di essere lodato per la sua bontà se non ha la forza di essere cattivo […] ogni altra bontà non è il più delle volte che una pigrizia o una impotenza della volontà" (*TM*: 180-81)? Ironically, when speaking with the scared and resentful Minister who wouldn't know any better, he attributes these words to Scalambri, the prosecutor, who lacks the motivation and the courage to follow through with his investigation. In order not to be similarly compromised, does the narrator not have to commit "an act of freedom" which perforce must go against the very law he upholds?

The narrator seems to have learnt from his experience at the hermitage-hotel that Pascal's notion that "Il n'y a rien de si conforme à la raison que ce désaveu de la raison". He discovered that Voltaire's "il faut cultiver notre jardin" (*TM*: 188) was indeed impossible to sustain, since one cannot avoid involvement in larger issues[27]. The narrator is the only one who suspects that Don Gaetano can be the perpetrator of the murders, even though he reveals that the priest could not physically have been the one to shoot Michelozzi[28]. He is also

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[27] At this point in the text Sciascia writes: "e forse si possono oggi riscrivere tutti i libri che sono stati scritti; e altro anzi non si fa, riaprendoli con chiavi false…"(*TM*: 188). Many critics have interpreted Sciascia's treatment of reason, in this and other texts, as criticism of the naïve belief in reason which the philosophers of the French Enlightenment had. (See: Ambroise (1989) but also his *Invito alla lettura di Leonardo Sciascia*. Milano: Mursia, 1974).

[28] We are told that judging from the dull, muffled sound of the gun, Michelozzi was shot in the back at close range (*TM*: 149), yet at that precise moment Don Gaetano was some ten or fifteen metres away, in front of the victim (see *TM*: 144).

the one for whom having freedom of choice means exercising all one's options, even if, like in the case of Cato[29], committing suicide is required to preserve one's dignity and self-respect.

Don Gaetano hurled an ultimate challenge at the painter when he asked him to do a portrait of Christ for him. During their last conversation, which centred on different artistic representations of the effigy of the crucified Christ, they agreed that only an authentic revelation made by Christ to artists such as Antonello da Messina, Redon and Rouault could produce the perturbing results they achieve. The painter-narrator will only be able to carry out this task once he has had his own revelation which, according to the internal logic of the novel, means once he has exorcised the devil from the priest and observed his metamorphosis[30] from Prince of Darkness to mere mortal. On leaving the hotel, shut down by the police, the narrator leaves, besides the volume of Pascal's *Pensées* given to him by the priest, the picture of Christ he had drawn. This detail, along with the casual confession made to Scalambri, who chooses to ignore it[31], must be evidence enough of the identity of the priest's killer.

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29 This emerges from the conversation with Don Gaetano concerning the similarity between the suicide of Louis XIV's cook, Vatel, and that of Cato of Utica (*TM*: 12).

30 In the description of the dead Don Gaetano, the narrator again makes reference to his glasses, now hanging from a cord attached to his chest and reflecting at an odd angle "un raggio che, di tra le foglie, vi cadeva. Sembrava il particolare di un quadro di caravaggesco minore. E dico minore perché tutto in Don Gaetano morto e intorno a lui, era minore; voglio dire sminuito, ridotto, sommesso: rispetto a come era da vivo" (*TM*: 197-98). It is in stark contrast with his former appraisal of Don Gaetano's dignity and authority which, ironically might have been that of the Pope himself: "Altro che cardinale: poteva anch'essere il papa" (*TM*: 116).

31 "E tu [...] Dov'è che te ne sei andato?
- A uccidere don Gaetano - dissi.
- Lo vedi dove si arriva, quando si lascia la strada del buon senso? disse trionfalmente Scalambri.
- Si arriva che tu, io, il commissario diventiamo tutti sospettabili quanto costoro, e

This solution would satisfy the reader, as some sort of justice would seem to have been done: the grand master of corruption is destroyed by the only one who was able to perceive the full extent of his evil design. Furthermore, as Pietropaoli suggests, the murder of the seemingly invincible champion of evil is simultaneously "a symbolic act of desperate rebellion against the preponderance of evil" and "a declaration of impotence" (cf. 1996: 20-21). It is an admission on the part of the author that the malevolent roots of evil can no longer be eradicated from society because they have infested the very heart of the Church and the State[32]. No self-respecting person should have to tolerate this iniquitous state of affairs.

Todo modo closes with the already mentioned long quotation from the last chapter of Gide's *Les caves du Vatican*. It is the passage in which Julius reveals to Anthime, an ex-free mason converted to Catholicism, that the Pope one sees at the Vatican is not the true Pope. Anthime, disgusted by this revelation, dismounts from the carriage in which he and his brother-in-law are travelling and resumes walking with the limp he had before

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anche più: e senza che ci si possa attribuire una ragione, un movente… Io lo dico sempre, caro commissario, sempre: il movente, bisogna trovare, il movente…" (*TM*: 202).

[32] Joseph Farrell concurs that "the slaying of Don Gaetano provides a resolution to both the theological novel and the detective story; the man who at least morally and perhaps physically was responsible for corruption in society and murder inside the retreat house has been eliminated". Furthermore, "there could be no conciliation between the priest whose vision was dominated by a theology without ethics, and a secularist with a vision of a morality without theology" (1995: 99-100). Farrell, in the most recent monographical study on Sciascia, like Jo-Ann Cannon (1981), also supports the view that the narrator-protagonist refutes the idea of a pre-established order by himself murdering Don Gaetano. Most other critics, including Jackson, sustain the open-endedness of this novel or merely suggest that Sciascia could have implied the same solution as in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, where the narrative-I is also the murderer.

his conversion. From this quotation, one can presume that Sciascia is suggesting that in a similar manner the painter-narrator exits from his adventure 'limping'[33], perhaps shattered in his convictions, but having done what he had to do. Since in mythical tales the foot symbolises the strength of the soul and a limp or a clubfoot spiritual weakness[34], Sciascia could be implying that to uphold one's secular belief in justice and retribution, one has to sacrifice the moral belief in the sanctity of human life. Since *Les caves du Vatican* was conceived as a *sotie*, a farce, based on the obsessions that turn a man into a puppet, not in the sense of a pure idiot, but of a disquieting rationalist motivated solely by his vision or ruling passion, Sciascia could also be saying that potentially any person with strong enough convictions can become "un mostro incomprensibile" (*TM*: 188), capable of taking justice into his own hands.

In my view, Sciascia is making the bold statement that deviation is essential to society for nothing has meaning without its opposite. The reference in the text to Ionesco (*TM*: 152), foremost playwright among the absurdists, is thus not as casual as it may at first seem. It supports Sciascia's own view of existence as an endless series of reflections in mirrors. Each image may for a moment be mistaken for reality, but upon closer examination, it always proves to be an illusion. Likewise, the

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[33] Sciascia defined himself as having become "laicamente zoppo" (see Ricorda, 1977:75).

[34] Cf. Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrant, *Dizionario dei simboli,* vol. II. Milano: BUR,1988: 580.

pursuit of absolute truth (or the beginning of the set of reflections) in this life is a vain exercise.

One must therefore conclude like Claude Ambroise that Sciascia, "scrivendo dei gialli ha illustrato i costumi e le trasgressioni dei tempi in cui gli è toccato vivere. Consapevolmente. Spietatamente" (1992:138). However, "la verità effettuale delle cose" that Sciascia refers to quoting Machiavelli, though intuitively unearthed by the world's best literary talents, often remains buried in the pages of literature.

Through references to Kant, Pirandello, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Sade, Mallarmé, Voltaire, Gide, Ionesco, Freud, St. Luke, Tertullian and a number of other theologians of the early Christian Church, as well as to works by artists such as Delvaux, De Chirico, Guttuso, Manetti, Caravaggio, Rouault, Redon, Gericault, Grünewald, Antonello da Messina and Saul Steinberg, Sciascia touches on fundamental questions of existence and on the very nature of power, justice and reason. In *Todo modo* the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice is eroded, as the investigator becomes the most likely suspect for the third murder. Since he represents the embodiment of Reason, rationalism is shown to be a kind of absolutism as fanatical as the Inquisition, Stalinism or the Red Brigades (all forms of fanaticism that are attacked in Sciascia's writings). On the other hand, salutary scepticism, with which reason must be tempered, is shown to give way to the nihilism one observes in Don Gaetano.

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