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The Realism of Luigi Capuana

Theory and Practice in the Development of Late Nineteenth-Century Italian Narrative

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A Study in the Evolution of Late Nineteenth-Century Narrative in Italy

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Theory and Practice in the Development of Late Nineteenth-Century Italian Narrative

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CONTENTS

Contents (continued)

INTRODUCTION

This volume reproduces the text of a doctoral thesis on 'The Nature and Limitations of Realism in the Criticism and Narrative of Luigi Capuana' submitted in the University of Cambridge. The Bibliography has been abbreviated, while the Introduction has been slightly enlarged. The additions, which consist of some general information on the political and cultural conformation of Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century—and on Capuana's position in that context—may perhaps help to orientate the reader who is unfamiliar with the detail of this particular period in Italy's history.

Luigi Capuana was born in 1839, and his birth-place was Mineo, a small town, still not easily accessible, in the province of Catania. It may seem unlikely that a figure truly representative of Italian culture in the second half of the last century should have sprung from such remote and rural origins. Yet Capuana probably has a better claim to that status than any of his contemporaries; and his Sicilian birth, paradoxically, by no means impeded his rise to this eminence.

Throughout his life Capuana proved exceptionally alert to the events of the moment. As a young man he was able to observe at close hand the exploits of Garibaldi in Sicily, and he made his debut in print the following year (1861) with a maladroit, heroic verse composition entitled *Garibaldi: leggenda drammatica*. In it the leader of the glorious Thousand became nothing less than a demi-god, the product of the love of an angel and a mortal woman. This metamorphosis was a fair illustration of popular feeling in Sicily at the time.

But gradually, after 1860, the South as a whole grew to resent its coerced administrative alignment with Piedmont; and Northerners meanwhile remained in continuing ignorance about the real conditions of life in the South. Communications were poor in this elongated and mountainous new nation. Italy's network of railways was still restricted (2,000 km as compared with England's 17,000 in the same period); and, as historians are fond of telling us, Prime Minister Cavour never even reached Rome on his travels, though naturally he knew London and Paris (and like all educated Piedmontese was more at home speaking French than Italian). So the backward South lay unvisited and abandoned; and in the North the illusion of a Southern agricultural paradise persisted. This paradise, in fact, had quickly become the scene of bloody warfare between Southern bands of brigands and the Italian army: a disturbing phenomenon which, at that critical time, patriots and men of government could not afford to talk about openly, let alone analyse. The vast

disparities of administrative and economic tradition, language and culture, between Italy's component regions inevitably gave a sharp impulse to the myth already taking shape of a glorious, nationwide Risorgimento.

A Sicilian was clearly better placed than a Piedmontese to measure the gap between myth and reality. Yet for Capuana and for Giovanni Verga, Italy's greatest novelist of the period, as well as for many other Sicilian intellectuals who belonged to the early generations of united Italy, patriotism—the myth—came first. Some years later their unswerving support for the monarchy and the forces of government would identify them—as men, if more seldom and less distinctly as writers—with the forces of reaction, especially (and ironically) under the premiership of the Sicilian Francesco Crispi in the nineties. But in the first instance support for the new government was the equivalent of support for progressionism, modernity, nationhood. It involved 'local' self-denial in the interests of a greater political design. So when, over the years, these particular Sicilians reacted negatively to stirrings of discontent among their own impoverished agricultural classes, it was first and foremost because they were patriots: because they had lived, in their youth, side by side with Sicilian separatists; and because they had sensed the perilous appeal to the Sicilian masses of the democratic, anti-monarchical Garibaldi. Thus, at least for an elite, the drama and the urgency of an achieved sense of nationhood increased in proportion to one's spiritual and geographical remoteness from Turin. Precisely the Sicilian origins of a man like Capuana place him at the centre of strictly Italian concerns.

Sicilian education and culture were, however, distinctly old-fashioned, so that an indispensible pre-condition of this central role was acclimatization to modern thinking: in short, the journey North. For generations, Sicilian intellectuals, including Capuana and Verga and Luigi Pirandello, flocked to the great cities of the mainland. If Capuana had deliberately set out to synchronize his passage from city to city with the movements of cultural fashion, he could not have succeeded better. His first destination was Florence, a choice independently corroborated both by Verga and by a third important Sicilian exponent of realism or *verismo*, Federico De Roberto. For several years, between 1864 and 1870, Florence was capital of Italy, 'davvero il centro della vita politica e intellettuale d'Italia', as Verga wrote home in the course of his second visit in 1869, adding 'è indispensabile cominciare da qui la sua strada'.[1] And there was the pressing question, too, of language. If the great Lombard, Alessandro Manzoni, had seen fit to remove himself to Florence in order to refine and at the same time bring alive the language of *I promessi sposi*, it was not surprising that Sicilians, brought up on outmoded Italian texts and all too familiar with dialect, should follow his example.

Capuana's stay in Florence coincided broadly with its years as capital. After the capture of Rome in 1870 Florence lost its capital city status and some of its vitality. Milan, which was not only Italy's richest and most industrialized city, but had also been the most active literary centre for generations before the Unification,

now became the goal of many semi-itinerant Southern intellectuals. Once again Capuana kept abreast of events. He joined Verga in Milan in 1877, and there wrote literary reviews for *Il Corriere della sera*. In the early eighties the cultural focus of the country was to shift once again, this time to the capital, where the publications of that commercially astute editor, Sommaruga, flourished and created a fertile climate for other literary enterprises. (It was not by accident that *Il Fanfulla della domenica* chose this moment to transfer from Florence to the capital where it was edited for some two years by Capuana.) It was here in Rome that he met and wrote of the flamboyant exponent of Decadentism, Gabriele D'Annunzio, a figure who was to dominate Italian letters for some decades, one of the few Italians of this period famous in his life-time throughout Europe.

Though Capuana's sojourns on the 'continent' were interrupted by long withdrawals to Sicily, his life-long activity as critic and journalist, and his strategic changes of domicile on the mainland, put him in contact with an unending range of *literati*. Some are forgotten; but many, like Matilde Serao, D'Annunzio, Neera, Antonio Fogazzaro, Grazia Deledda, have lived on; others, like Verga and Pirandello—never more highly regarded than to-day—owed Capuana their earliest recognition (as well as much personal encouragement). Furthermore, Capuana was among the first of Italy's intellectuals to realize that the obsessional pursuit of a specifically Italian literature could only lead to stagnation. Immediately after the events of 1860 preoccupation with a *national* literature bordered on cultural xenophobia; and if, for the time being, French culture was held up as the epitome of what Italian literature aimed *not* to be, this was no doubt due to a natural desire to shrug off the traditional hegemony of France over Italy in cultural matters. And that desire itself probably owed something to ambiguous political feelings about the nation that had signed the Peace of Villafranca without the benefit of consultation with Italians, and which, until the Franco-Prussian war, kept a garrison in Rome to protect the Pope from incursions by the new state.

After a brief period of self-defensive introspection, Italy opened out once again to European influences, and it was through men like Capuana that she did so. That these influences were chiefly French is hardly surprising. Close political and cultural contacts between the neighbouring countries had long existed, a fact which not even the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire and the Restoration of 1815 in Italy had done anything to change. On the French side one calls to mind the Italy of Stendhal and Mme de Staël: and in Italy the explosion of the Romantic debate in response to Mme de Staël's *Sulla maniera e l'utilità delle traduzioni*, published in 1816; Balzac's visit of 1837; the fact that Manzoni addressed some of his most important theoretical writing to a Frenchman, and, like the great Romantic poet Giacomo Leopardi, wrote fluent French. The reciprocity of interests represented by such prominent writers filtered down to lower cultural ranks; and all educated Italians read French (if not vice versa).

In the second half of the century the significant importation from France was

the doctrine of positivism, deriving originally from the work of Auguste Comte. As it applied to the sciences in Italy positivism stressed the importance of diligent observation and experimentation. In philosophy it was wary of metaphysical theorizing and tended towards materialism. Despite this apparently rather practical and anti-speculative character, positivism was based not only on a faith in the powers of human reason, but on the belief that the whole universe was governed by deep-hidden but ordered laws which reason might little by little uncover. Nineteenth-century Europe subscribed to the myth of progress; and the prevailing atmosphere was one of scientific optimism. Such practical and modestly hopeful attitudes were particularly congenial in Italy, where the idealistic spirit that fired the Risorgimento had given way to somewhat more prosaic considerations now that Unity was achieved. In France Hippolyte Taine had already transplanted the doctrines of positivism into the field of literary criticism, and the novels of Emile Zola, in particular, would embody some of the cardinal discoveries and theories of positivistic science. These two writers were among the chief exponents of literary positivism (or Naturalism) who caught Capuana's attention in the seventies. In Italy the literary movement originally inspired by French Naturalism (but soon acquiring its own independent characteristics) was called *verismo*. Capuana quickly became known as its leader, although his own best novel in the *verista* vein, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, was many years in incubation and did not appear in print until 1901. This late novel none the less shares a family likeness with earlier creative texts where Capuana revealed what was probably his most personal and original contribution to the narrative of the period: a profound psychological realism, an urge to come to terms with the intricate and often unlovely reality of the human psyche.

Realism is a term which can be applied, more or less appropriately, to the novel in all its nineteenth-century manifestations, from Dickens to Dostoyevsky: Naturalism and *verismo* were literary movements that essentially gave sharper definition to the all-encompassing concept of Realism. Adherents propounded the view that narrative should derive from close, even 'scientific', observation of the real world, abhorring facile stimulants of the reader's curiosity. The practical application of the new doctrines, as may be expected, proved extremely diverse both in France and Italy. But one important general result of the stress which fell on the notion of a carefully and objectively scrutinized reality was that Italy's regional life, the life of her lower classes in particular, made a sudden entry into the purview of her writers (and has stayed there ever since). Capuana would have strenuously denied that this deflection of transalpine influences into native provincial channels had any remotely political significance. Yet, when one recalls the problems of new Italy, and the unprecedented prominence of her Southern writers in this period, one seems to hear, behind the official pronouncements of *verismo*, the dissenting voice of Italy's ill-assimilated and underprivileged meridional regions.

Capuana's position as a Sicilian in regard to such protest was, as we said, bound to be deeply contradictory. If this had not been so, he would no doubt have been a less representative figure. For, intellectually versatile and energetic as he was, and explicitly aligned with the ruling classes of the new nation, his impulse was always to move forward, and he regarded *verismo's* concentration on the impoverished classes as a strictly temporary matter: certainly not as a disguised message of protest. While Verga—author of two outstanding novels on Sicilian working people—fell silent, Capuana grew restive, and smarted under the *verista* label which contemporaries had attached to him. He maintained his critical and creative output right up to his death in 1915; and even when he found himself out of step and sympathy with the literary movements that dominated the *fin de siècle* period—Decadentism, Spiritualism, French Symbolism, the turbid Catholicism of Fogazzaro—his theoretical and narrative work continued to mirror new orientations in literature, albeit sometimes in a negative or semi-parodistic vein.

Capuana's half century of literary activity is proof of a remarkable capacity for cultural survival. Some have seen him as the link which knits together into one tradition the criticism of Francesco De Sanctis, that brilliant and impassioned Neapolitan of the Risorgimento generation, and Benedetto Croce, the great philosopher-critic of this century. Certainly Capuana's criticism shows a conscientious pursuit of aesthetic coherence, unusual in work appearing primarily in journalistic contexts. His cultural longevity does not of course mean that his role either as a critic or a narrator was always crucial and central in Italian literary debate. But as Giovanni Gentile, the Sicilian-born philosopher, remarked, 'nessun italiano, uscito fuori dalla propria regione, è stato dopo il 1860 meno regionalista del Siciliano';[2] and Capuana was always a vigilant observer and recorder of contemporary events, detached and humorous enough in his writing to be almost always illuminating about the period in which he lived.

* * * *

The critic of Capuana's work is presented not only with the question of the theoretical contradictions which conditioned his intellectual activity, but, as A. Navarria complained long ago, with the 'vastità stessa dell'opera';[3] to which must be added its daunting multiformity. Ranging from science fiction, stories for children and poetry to drama, narrative, criticism, and 'non-fiction' works on such subjects as spiritualism and Sicilian customs, Capuana's volumes furthermore betray different levels and kinds of commitment, some being produced to meet urgent financial needs, others, like the parodies on the bard of Catania, Mario Rapisardi, starting life as exercises in literary humour, still others being written for polemical or at any rate extra-literary reasons, and yet shedding light on the *letterato*.

Without ignoring these secondary areas, this study sets out to examine the central issue of Capuana's realism as critic and narrator, and to account for its moments of

apparent inconsistency, its limitations and strengths in the course of a long career which until recently has tended to be treated in piecemeal fashion. In so doing it proceeds chronologically, relating Capuana's aims and achievements to the changing cultural context which conditioned them, and relying extensively on articles which have remained buried in the newspapers and journals of both Sicily and the Italian mainland to explore uninvestigated aspects of his critical meditation or to illuminate the areas of obscurity in his development both as critic and narrator. A close analysis of narrative texts has been a main instrument of enquiry in this work: though it aims primarily at an evaluation of Capuana, it also hopes to contribute to the understanding of the period in which he lived.

Since the rationale of my work is to be explained in part by what seemed the shortcomings and the lacunae of earlier critical studies, the main lines of their approach to Capuana may usefully be outlined.

The history of Capuana's critical fortunes provides a startling proof of the persistence of Croce's influence in some sectors of Italian literary criticism. His essay of 1904 was the first attempt at a total vision of the author, and the views expressed there when adopted with little of their original flexibility by subsequent critics became, in my opinion, a major obstacle to a satisfactory reading of Capuana. Croce gave prominence to two problems. He pointed out the contradictory nature of Capuana's allegiances to De Sanctis and to the Hegelian De Meis, to autonomous and heteronomous views of art (and the question was duly re-examined by Vetro, Zangara, Ceriello, and others);[4] and in addition he felt the chill wind of critical detachment blowing through Capuana's imaginative writing: 'troppo vi si sente', he wrote, 'il curioso di psicologia e di scienze naturali', 'il critico che si vale della riflessione'.[5] The theme of critic versus creative writer thereafter became a compelling focus of attention even when Croce's conclusions were reversed;[6] and it invited a compartmentalized treatment of Capuana. As far as A. Navarria, for example, is concerned, the period from 1895 to 1905, when Capuana 'potè essere libero veramente dai suoi concetti estetici e dalle sue passioni letterarie', produced the best of his narrative;[7] while the identical period seems to Ermanno Scuderi particularly rewarding in the field of Capuana's criticism, making his 'un'esperienza paradigmatica di tutte quelle che si sono succedute, prima, in ordine di tempo e di valore, quella di Croce'.[8] In 1967 Palmiro M. Pinagli produced another substantially Crocean reading of Capuana's criticism.[9] A year later Carmelo Musumarra, insisting that Capuana's narrative be regarded as a 'chiara esemplificazione' of his criticism and that both be examined against the background of the 'complesso e tormentato mondo letterario di fine Ottocento', seemed to perceive how the lack of a historical perspective and the perennial, Crocean impulse to separate intuition and reason, art and criticism had created an arbitrary and elusive Capuana; but even he ended by concurring in the view that Capuana's theoretical acumen functioned to the detriment of his creative work.[10]

It seemed essential that such approaches should be abandoned, and indeed the

best documented and most stimulating work on Capuana to date was produced in 1970 by Carlo A. Madrignani, a member of the so-called younger generation of Marxist critics. Madrignani's book shifted interest from the later to the earlier half of Capuana's career, and tended to superimpose the analyst of 'complex' psychological states and the critic of the two series of *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea* on the more standard image of the regional *verista* and the author of *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*. Madrignani's passing judgement on several traditionally respected volumes (notably *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* and *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*) which fell outside the immediate scope of his work was harsh. His strongly politicized approach caused him to abandon Capuana once his materialism, which in Madrignani's view was the true force for renewal in his work, showed signs of waning, and the last part of Capuana's career was dismissed with the words:

> Negli anni successivi al '90 Capuana porta avanti la sua opera di artista e di critico nella direzione di un sempre più deciso distacco dalla base positivistica perdendo così i suoi caratteri peculiari, la sua funzione, mentre i tentativi di adeguarsi ai nuovi tempi non riusciranno più a dargli la precedente compattezza di pensiero e di gusto.[11]

In this way, a large and important portion of Capuana's work remained unexamined; moreover, Madrignani advanced a thesis on the development of Capuana's 'ideology' which, in my opinion, was not entirely acceptable. He was the first exponent of what may be called after Walter Mauro and Giorgio Luti (who soften his severer judgements, while accepting his main argument) the 'involutional' thesis, whereby after his 'scientific', materialistic phase Capuana regresses towards a form of cautious and relatively 'reactionary' idealism.[12] In my view Capuana was involved not so much in an ideological *volte-face*, as, right from the beginning, in a compromise—the compromise of his 'hegelismo scientifico' which remained constant throughout his career, though the changing climate of the times served to emphasize its different components in succession. This explains why the division of Capuana's career into two more or less distinct portions seems unacceptable and why my treatment of Capuana extends to the whole of his later work.

The aims and scope of its different chapters may now be outlined. On the basis of a complete examination of contemporary articles, both those reproduced in *Il teatro italiano contemporaneo* and those never reprinted, Chapter I traces the process of Capuana's adjustment to a modern cultural environment, that of Florence in the sixties, and his conversion to realism and to narrative. In so doing it explores the contribution to Capuana's work of some unexpected sources and discusses the genesis of his 'philosophy', poised between positivism and Hegelianism. It closes with an examination of *Profili di donne*, the point of confluence of Capuana's dawning scientific realism and his sentimental, 'literary' interest in female psychology. Chapter II, which covers Capuana's naturalist phase, shows how brief was the period when scientific materialism seemed to offer him a total approach to reality. An examination of *Giacinta* discusses his debt to French

naturalism, showing the limited use he made of those keys to interpreting human behaviour provided by the naturalists, and how the most original parts of the work centred on psychological intuitions which, though they were not incompatible with a materialistic outlook, tended to provide what may be termed a rationale of the irrational. The second half of this chapter deals with Capuana's 'discovery' of Verga, the modifications to his artistic theory which such a discovery brought, and with his own regional tales. The period from about 1883 to 1890 which is the subject of the third chapter produces problematic and disparate material. The chapter argues for the fundamental continuity of Capuana's artistic theory and practice, not for the beginning of a clear 'involution' therefore, but for deliberate and superficial concessions to a climate of feeling that was growing increasingly hostile to positivism and to its attendant literary realism. It demonstrates that these concessions are belied by his best artistic performance and his sharpest critical responses which remain anchored to the artistic ideal of realism. Chapter IV investigates work now clearly written under the impact of the new 'correnti spiritualistiche e idealistiche'. Acknowledging their considerable influence on the matter of Capuana's creative work, the chapter shows that the realist techniques of Capuana's narrative remain substantially unchanged, and that the criticism of the late nineties rather than diminishing its calls for the impersonality which had long been the core of Capuana's realism makes them with renewed energy. The final chapter examines *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in its cultural setting and argues through a close analysis of the text that it was the most extreme explication of Capuana's realist techniques. The Conclusion indicates some developments in Capuana's narrative after the turn of the century and briefly recapitulates the main findings of this work.

A final word remains to be said on the terminology used in the text, and on the criteria which governed my selection of works for close analysis. It may perhaps be argued that naturalism is a term which properly belonged to France alone, and defined works informed by scientific materialism, whereas *verismo* was an exclusively Italian (and regional) phenomenon virtually independent of a scientific substructure; and that naturalism and *verismo* may be regarded as parallel species of the same genus, which is realism (it is indeed for this reason that 'realism' was preferred to other terms for the title of this work). I have none the less made no attempt to distinguish rigorously between these terms in the text, for the period which found a need for them gave them overlapping meanings, and Capuana himself tended to use them interchangeably or at all events with considerable flexibility. The purposes of clear exposition would not have been served by using the terms rigidly, as excogitated by hindsight and the literary historian, for the usage of the text would have been at variance with that occurring in passages of citation. Moreover, the interchangeability of the terms corresponded to a *real* overlapping of aims. Without becoming meaningless, any more than it did at the time, the terminology employed is pliant in its connotations to the concrete situation.

My decision to concentrate on Capuana's novels, with the use of short stories confined to supplying missing links in the argument or to completing the literary picture, was determined by considerations of different orders. It seemed reasonable to suppose that lengthier compositions might have been less susceptible than short stories of exploitation for those pressing financial needs which often goaded Capuana into a weary over-production. There was also the consideration that three of Capuana's five novels (if we include *La Sfinge* which Capuana alternately referred to as a novel and a *racconto*), among them *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, had received, in my view, entirely inadequate and impressionistic attention. In practice my selection of material for detailed study was not of course an *a priori* operation, but was conditioned in the act of reading. No doubt it cannot be entirely immune from charges of arbitrariness, but it may be pointed out that close examination of other works would not have altered but rather supported the conclusions reached, to which indeed they tacitly contribute.

I would like to express my thanks to Professor U. Limentani of Cambridge University and Professor C.P. Brand of Edinburgh University for their advice and encouragement during the preparation of this work.

CHAPTER I

FROM DRAMA TO NARRATIVE

1. *The Problem of a National Theatre*

In April 1864 the Capuana family learnt that Luigi's departure from Mineo had taken him not, as its members believed, to Acireale and the home of Leonardo Vigo, fellow-collector of *canti popolari*, but to Florence. 1864 was also the year when, following the September Convention, Italy transferred her capital to Florence, giving the city an unprecedented period of expansion and intellectual vitality. Luigi Capuana's subterfuge, rendered necessary by *zio* Antonio's veto on cultural visits to the 'continent', was the beginning of a prestigious literary career. During his years in Florence he was to become known as an outspoken and outstanding journalist, as drama critic first for Guido Corsini's *Rivista italica* in 1865 and then, more influentially, for *La Nazione* from 1866 to 1868.

Now that Italy formed a political unity, the task of creating a national spirit and identity fell to her politicians and intellectuals. It was natural that the theatre, a genre which could conveniently be used for propagating civil and moral values, should be at the centre of cultural debate in the sixties. It was natural too that in Florence, capital and also linguistic pivot of the nation, the debate should be at its liveliest. Testimony of the potential importance of Florence in this respect were the eight theatres she possessed in 1865 (and more were to be built or created), staging all kinds of spectacle from opera to farce. The Niccolini in particular ('il primo teatro di prosa, frequentato da un pubblico sceltissimo'[1]) extended a welcome to the most successful playwrights and actors of the day; it also presented a repertoire of theatrical classics and staged the newest works from France. There were incentives for writers in the form of prizes. From 1860 a prize fund set up by Bettino Ricasoli awarded L.4,000 for the best play produced in Florence during the year. The prize however failed to promote new talent: between 1861 and 1868 it was won by such established playwrights as Gherardi del Testa, Luigi Suñer, Ferdinando Martini, Achille Torelli and Paolo Ferrari. 1865 finds Capuana himself the *segretario relatore* of a commission for another drama competition, the Concorso Ristori. But the prize that year was not awarded.

Though the secretary noted with satisfaction that all about him there was 'una pressa grande di scrittori, un brulichio di commedie, di drammi e di tragedie non mai visto finora tra noi', he felt obliged to register a lack of 'studio' in relation not

only to the simple rules of theatrical composition, but also to grammar and style. His hopes for the birth of a National Theatre, anxiously awaited since the times of Alfieri and Manzoni, depended therefore mainly on the conviction that theatre was the genre 'che meglio corrisponde ai bisogni della presente civiltà'.[2] Some years later, in 1888, Ferdinando Martini commented ironically on the easy optimism of the sixties' *letterati:*

Fatta l'Italia e scorsi due o tre anni, i Molière vaticinati e aspettati non si facevano vivi. Si guardarono in faccia stupefatti [. . .] Come? In tempo di tirannia sorgeva un Goldoni e non ne debbono essere almeno dieci in tempi di libertà? [. . .] Paiono favole; ma se leggete i giornali di quel tempo vedrete che ragionavano così.[3]

The idea of the National Theatre remained a myth, as Capuana admitted in 1872, but in the meantime patriotism and the search for a national identity gave it wide currency: 'L'aver teatro', Alfieri had said, 'nelle nazioni moderne [. . .] suppone [. . .] l'esser veramente nazione, e non dieci popoletti divisi, che messi insieme non si troverebbero simili in nessuna cosa.'[4]

The political state of Italy in the Risorgimento period had necessarily forged links between political awareness and literature. Historical dramas and novels had covertly made their patriotic points. With Unity, however, the link broke, leaving open to discussion questions of content, of technical and linguistic requirements in the theatre, as well as the problem of its new function in the nation. In discussing these matters, Capuana's theatrical reviews of the sixties shared the prejudices of a bourgeoisie confident of its moral and political viability, and anxious to disseminate its standards through the nation. Yet, progressively, they showed a personal slant which in due course placed Capuana in the forefront of militant criticism. He began his career in 1865 mistrustful of foreign influences on a culture struggling to reflect a sense of independent nationhood, yet by 1867 held up the realism of the French theatre as an important literary model for Italy. He abandoned his role as custodian of national morality and grew to emphasize the autonomy of art, and the value of what he called, after De Sanctis, 'forma'. Inclined at first to search out in works of art immutable, classical truths, he came to view modern scientific culture as a powerful instrument for understanding the concrete reality of life, to which, he believed, contemporary literature should address itself. He relinquished his hopes for the theatre and learnt to prefer the novel (returning to the theatre, like Verga, only when his primary role as novelist and short-story writer was established, and when the particular relationship he saw between 'verismo' and drama made the reversion not a *volte-face* but a simple alternative).

Capuana's progress by 1872 to this summarily described position was not without tergiversations and hesitancy. His newspaper articles like most of their kind were sometimes incautious and mutually contradictory. But there emerges gradually from them evidence of attitudes which will condition his narrative during the seventies, in the period leading up to the publication of his first novel, *Giacinta.*

Two main demands were made of the theatre at the time when Capuana took up his post at the *Rivista italica*. Plays were to be a force for creating those sound values in family and civic affairs which were necessary to the vitality of the new nations: they were to provide patterns of socially desirable behaviour. But as well as patterns, plays were to be mirrors, reflecting the reality of Italy's life, where her disparate subjects might recognize themselves.

There can be no doubt that Capuana subscribed to the idea of the theatre as an instrument for impressing a robust morality on a mass audience, or that this view was widespread. In 1867 Marchese Trevisani examined, under ministerial auspices, the progress of the Italian theatre in the preceding twenty years and hoped that the government

pensando seriamente ormai alla smisurata importanza del teatro nella nuova società e agli effetti, in bene o in male incalcolabili che da esso possono risultare, voglia mettere ogni suo sforzo a incoraggiarlo nella via civilizzatrice in cui solo deve mostrarsi;

he reminded the government of its duty to

dirigere questa imponente forza intellettuale verso il suo retto sentiero adoperando tutti i legittimi mezzi, perchè la civiltà, la libertà, la coscienza, la famiglia e la patria non vi ricevano la minima scossa, il bello si riannodi col vero e col buono in un amplesso finale.[5]

Francesco Dall'Ongaro, whom Capuana met early in his stay in Florence, expressed similar views;[6] and Massimo D'Azeglio, writing in 1862, informed Ferdinando Martini that Tuscany might contribute to the unity of Italy 'non solo con la lingua, ma istituendo un teatro, che [. . .] elevi i caratteri, insegni la fortezza, la generosità, il sacrificio, e tutto quanto è compreso nel bello morale'.[7]

As for Capuana, he is as ready to censure an 'eccesso di morale posta in bocca ai personaggi' (in Giacometti) as to deplore mere jollification (in Bersezio's *Una bolla di sapone*).[8] But though an enemy equally of sententiousness and frivolity, he considers the theatre able to offer every individual 'un tesoro immenso di esperienza nei vari casi della vita che gli potranno essere guida e norma di condotta, prima che prove dure e talora senza rimedio non glielo accumulassero innanzi con poco o niun giovamento'.[9] For the whole of 1865 this unobtrusive moral and practical function of the theatre occupies the critic; and even later, when in 1867 Torelli's *I Mariti* gives him much else to celebrate, he still rejoices at the edifying spectacle of the admirable duchessa Matilde showing her son's impudent mistress the door, of the aristocratic Emma learning to value her self-made bourgeois husband.[10]

In the meantime Capuana's Giobertian aesthetic notions lead him in search of the Beautiful and the True: 'norme che costituiscono un'immutabile essenza; tutte le opere della natura, e quindi i prodotti dell'intelletto, avendo regole semplici, generali, invariabili'.[11] Such a search tended inevitably to preclude or postpone

discussion of that other question of the relationship between a specific society and its literature, even though unification had made it an urgent one. *Italianità* in the theatre for the moment lay merely in efforts to revitalize an indigenous tradition (it was no accident that Ferrari's *Goldoni e le sue sedici commedie nuove* was for many, as for Capuana, the most significant and promising work of the period), or in avoiding the 'corruption of heart and intellect' at present stalking the boards in neighbouring France. And if Capuana was convinced that

> l'artista vero non coglie, nella rappresentazione della natura, le parti esteriori e caduche, nè si arresta nella storia al lato meramente anedottico, o descrittivo, o cronologico; ma penetra ardito, col cuore e colla fantasia, nella parte chiusa, vitale e perpetua delle cose,[12]

this conviction dovetailed neatly with the idea of the theatre as a moral regenerator. The play became a conflict of 'eternal' passions from which Good emerged triumphant: morality was built into plot and characterization.

It was a conservative formula which seemed to leave aesthetic considerations at a standstill. Indeed, to state the matter simply, the difficulty for all those involved lay in reconciling aesthetic and moral values in the theatre. Though the desire for respectable literariness was strong (and Capuana himself dealt severely with offenders against literary propriety), the urge to educate was stronger. Proposing that of three annual prizes for drama one might go 'a quell'opera drammatica che meglio risponda alle ragioni della letteratura e dell'arte; gli altri a quei due lavori che offrano un più efficace e nobile insegnamento alle classi meno culte del popolo,'[13] Ricasoli reflected the division in its most acute form.

A further difficulty attached to the question of how literature might mirror society, especially in a country like Italy where the author who perfectly described 'l'aspetto d'una data provincia' ran the risk, according to Capuana, of being misunderstood in another.[14] In France Italy's intellectuals saw an enviable example of how a whole nation could identify itself with the life of a capital city. But for Capuana it was not patriotism alone that made the question vital. The survival of great quantities of literature was at stake, for the history of the *commedia* in the first half of the nineteenth century told him that its efforts to 'farsi universale' had been fatal. Willingly divesting itself of all that 'non poteva essere universalmente inteso ed apprezzato', it created an abstract reality, and became a genre which 'senza la scintilla del genio, dovea riuscire prima a convenzione, poi a freddura, a declamazione, e riuscì difatti'.[15] Italy however remained an amalgam of provinces, and the theatre an educator which needed to find a way to speak to all from Piedmont to Sicily. This same sense of the theatre's national mission was responsible for Capuana's impatience in this period with literature in dialect, accessible only to small groupings of the population. In the meantime those incompatible claims for *italianità* and universal moral relevance in the theatre persisted, and all Capuana could do in 1866 was to note the impasse:

Onde non restringersi in una cerchia troppo angusta, lo scrittore italiano quindi è costretto a crearsi una società ideale, o meglio, eclettica che abbia un poco della fisionomia di tutte e non rassomigli particolarmente a nessuna; è costretto a vagare nell'indeterminato, a rassegnarsi ad un colorito senza toni precisi, sacrificando insomma, per così dire, l'arte all'arte, nell'attesa di poter ritrarre una società unicamente italiana, che intanto è ancora di là da venire.[16]

2. *The 'dramma storico' and the 'commedia contemporanea': Manzoni and De Sanctis*

Six years later Capuana was boldly declaring not only the futility of any attempt at creating a National Theatre but the obsolescence of the theatrical genre itself. But the aesthetic view-points he had arrived at in the intervening years and which determined the nature of his narrative were born of close contact with the theatre. The productions he saw fell mainly into the categories of the *dramma storico* and the *commedia contemporanea*. In Sicily Capuana himself had dreamed of creating verse-drama from episodes of Italian history and of becoming 'niente meno che lo Shakespeare d'Italia'.[17] The continued popularity of historical plays, even after political allusiveness was no longer warranted, depended on the impulse to bond past and present, to continue a literary tradition to which writers like Alfieri, Manzoni, and Niccolini had belonged. Such plays were also able to issue invigorating reminders of Italian heroism and moral vigour. Ferrari's *Una poltrona storica*, for instance, dealt with the early life of Alfieri

perchè dal confronto tra Alfieri ignorante a 25 anni e Alfieri sommo, come tutti lo conoscono, risultasse in via di storia, quanto quel grande potesse e tenacemente volesse, e in via di morale apparisse, a conforto e documento dei giovani, l'importanza d'una tenace volontà;[18]

and plays like Giacometti's *Torquato Tasso*, Vitaliani's *Alfieri a Roma*, Castelvecchio's *Ugo Foscolo* and Martelli's *Dante in patria* inevitably stressed the common heritage of letters as a civilizing force. In the *commedia* instead Italians were able to examine their social institutions, and to meditate on their functioning and their underlying moral assumptions. The urge towards honest and realistic self-appraisal was strong at the time. In Pasquale Villari's words 'Il primo passo [. . .] è quello di mettere, noi stessi, a nudo le nostre piaghe, di distruggere le illusioni o i pregiudizi nazionali'.[19]

If lessons were to be learnt from history and from contemporary society without playwrights being unaesthetically and overtly moralistic, it was necessary that the spectator should identify himself with the character in his situation. Capuana accordingly frowned on the sort of overcharged character-drawing that would hinder the spectator's declaring 'è quello il mio ritratto';[20] and tended to evaluate plays in terms of their ability to elicit a sympathetic emotional response. His discussions of characterization, as in the case of Eugenia from Torelli's *La missione della donna*, could become unpleasantly effusive: 'Dolce e simpatica creatura, la

mente che son pochi tratti di pennello potè dar vita alla ideale sembianza che ti investe, è mente profonda di artista! Come saremmo lieti di scontrarti un giorno sul duro cammino della realtà';[21] but from the point of view of his development towards realism there was a significant side to this approval of sentimental participation: if involvement were to take place, both character and action had to be life-like and convincing. 'L'intima essenza di quanto costituisce in estetica il vero dramma', he declares, is the accurate 'scultura delle passioni e dei carratteri'.[22] Although initially this attitude was merely the logical extension of Capuana's view that nation and historical moment are simply man's superficial trappings, and his eternal soul the proper target of literature, the stress he laid on characterization was at least as likely to point out a route away from convention to a closer examination of 'real' men as to enhance the likelihood of an emotional response in the spectator which left him passively assimilating whatever assumptions underpinned the play. At all events psychological verisimilitude soon becomes all-important for Capuana, and it will be, eventually, the very core of his realism.

His examination of historical plays caused Capuana to reflect on the psychological reasons for certain actions, of which history gives so little indication. Meditating on the relation of historical fact to poetic invention in these plays, his curiosity centres increasingly on the mental prerequisites of action, and the intrigues offered by the pages of history become the mere signposts of a more fascinating psychological reality ready for the writer to discover. Glancing sidelong at France, Capuana remarked that 'in Italia invece la questione estetica (chiamiamola così si arrestò quasi alla sola lettera di Alessandro Manzoni sull'unità di tempo e di luogo nella tragedia';[23] and the *Lettre* (perhaps surprisingly, and at all events unnoticed by his critics) was to be his guide in discussion of the historical genre.

His response to Manzoni the critic was, however, by no means passive. At least in theory he refused to delimit the area of poetic invention as sharply as Manzoni in the *Lettre*; nor did he finally reject the historical genre until other factors induced him to do so, though he had little liking for Alfieri or Niccolini and referred (in terms Manzoni would have approved) to the wallowing of early nineteenth-century tragedians in a 'brago di passioni colpevoli e ferocissime (per buona sorte quasi non mai passate nella realtà)'.[24] Manzoni's influence was nevertheless important in two main ways. His discussion of how the artist should utilize a set of pre-established facts led Capuana to ponder closely the nature of poetic truth, and prepared him by way of analogy for the polemics which would take place when not history but 'human documents' came to provide the facts in fiction. Further, in his restless worrying over potentially contradictory species of truth, Manzoni showed how much he valued a 'vero positivo' and in so doing as we shall see later gave Capuana additional support for a 'scientifically' based assessment of the age which decreed the jettisoning of historical literature.

At first Capuana's view of art as purveyor of universal truths and praiseworthy

moral values made him hesitate over historical works: the 'dominante individualità' of great men hindered the creation of eternal types; and the past with its 'usi e costumi che discordano affatto dai presenti' could place obstacles in the path of the audience's response and thus limit the 'efficacia morale' of the piece.[25] This diffidence disposed Capuana to allow authors, at least in theory, a free rein with their historical material: no 'malintesa scrupolosità di attenersi strettamente alla verità storica dei fatti' was to deflect art from its course. But gradually, in practice, he limits this freedom. Only those invented characters who embody 'intierissime le caratteristiche dell'epoca che vogliono rappresentare' secure his approval;[26] and in them, at all events, invention supplements reality and does not betray it. Capuana was moreover apt to point out, not how the recalcitrant facts might have been abandoned or modified in the interests of art, but how a more thorough and imaginative understanding of them might have produced superior works. One author failed to 'raggruppare certe fila magnifiche che la storia stessa gli porgeva';[27] another provoked the comment: 'Valeva meglio dire alla storia: dammi il segreto della tua verità, i nomi l'inventerò io, che tôrre in imprestito i nomi per sfigurare la verità.'[28] Such remarks cannot be imputed simply to Capuana's impatience at the muddle-headedness of authors who chose to be historical and proved so unresponsive to history. For (calling to mind what Manzoni had said of the 'partie perdue' of history) he stressed that poetic invention lay in an 'ostinata ricerca dell'incognita storica di cui la storia ci ha lasciato soltanto gli inerti frantumi'.[29] History was no longer for Capuana simply a decorative and possibly distracting backdrop to action, but a rich source of real, psychological events which could be reconstructed. This attitude was important, for when contemporary society supplanted the historical past as the preferred subject-matter of writers, Manzoni still furnished the lesson of art's rootedness in documented fact.

Influenced by Manzoni, Capuana felt that creativity lay in understanding the psychological and moral forces that precipitated events. Echoing Manzonian phraseology as well as Manzonian sentiments, he wrote:

> Per quanto ricche sieno le particolarità che ci serba la storia, esse riguardano sempre il fatto esteriore e compiuto. Che avvenne nel cuore e nella mente di quei personaggi prima che si decidessero ad una buona azione o ad un delitto?[30]

'Tout cela', he might have added, 'est passé sous silence par l'histoire; et tout cela est le domaine de la poésie'. To determine causality alone, however, never seemed sufficient to Capuana: poetic truth was more complex than this. Thus he could condemn a play such as Ponsard's *Galilée* as 'falso come storia'; and not because he explicitly revised his opinion that art has licence to manipulate historical facts, but because in this case the playwright's modifications detracted from the density of moral implication which resided in the historical facts and which was crucial to the play's artistic success.[31] In motivating Galileo's abjuration by a regard for his daughter's domestic happiness, Ponsard was not merely inaccurate, but he was

trivial. Among other plays Bacchini's *Giulio Orsini*, Pollani's *Aspasia*, and Morgigni's *Pier Capponi*[32] are guilty, according to Capuana, of frivolous inventiveness of the same kind, and his criticism of them is a practical application of the contention that

> les causes historiques d'une action sont essentiellement les plus dramatiques et les plus intéressantes. Les faits par cela même qu'ils sont conformes à la vérité pour ainsi dire materielle, ont au plus haut degré le caractère de vérité poétique que l'on cherche dans la tragédie.[33]

Nor was the artist's particular choice of events a matter of indifference. There lay behind certain historical happenings, Capuana felt, moral conflicts which the writer might perceive and yet which remained so subtle and spiritual as to defy dramatic representation (unless of course the playwright resorted–self-defeatingly–to the kind of expedient Manzoni had condemned in Voltaire's *Zaire* as 'ni naturel, ni instructif, ni touchant, ni même serieux').[34]

From Manzoni Capuana learnt that the writer's 'vero' was concerned with human motivation which could be evinced neither arbitrarily nor slavishly but in accord with a purified and quintessential view of reality; and this view was to remain axiomatic in his critical theory. The fact that certain subjects seemed ill-suited to dramatic treatment stimulated Capuana's sense of the historical drama's limitations. And it promoted in him the opinion, which was becoming general as the seventies approached, that the *novel* was a superior form of art.

During this same period Capuana was coming to grips with plays of contemporary subject, and particularly those of France which were enormously popular in the absence of comparable Italian achievement. The *commedia contemporanea*, with its familiar points of reference, had a more direct educative potential than the historical genre. For the same reason it could also be more morally subversive. It became therefore the temporary focus of a widespread debate on morality in art which continued into the seventies and eighties by which time Zola and his disciples gave it fresh fuel. But for Capuana the sixties settled the moral issue, at least as far as his theory was concerned. And contact with these plays was also responsible for several other forms of critical emancipation or development.

While he wrote for the *Rivista italica* Capuana still bewailed the 'festivo e spigliato genio francese costretto da mille circostanze sociali e morali a compiacersi di trascinare l'arte gentile nel brago della più fetida belletta'.[35] For some time subsequently he worried over plays that were socially realistic without being morally committed. Even *La Dame aux camélias* seemed an ambiguous and irresponsible work; and Marguerite Gautier had left in her wake a trail of misguidedly rehabilitated *demi-mondaines* who conspired to destroy 'i più sacri legami della società, la famiglia e l'amore'.[36] When authors did take what seemed to Capuana a clear stand, he was patently relieved. Even if Sardou lacked discipline and mixed farce with tragedy, he was capable of revealing with admirable courage

'il cancro più schifoso che roda il vivere sociale dei nostri tempi, il lusso e la dissoluzione della famiglia'.[37] Yet France's genius was 'festivo e spigliato' and Capuana was caught between admiration and dismay.

In an early article written for the *Nazione* and entitled 'Il teatro francese nel 1886' he deplored the 'baccanale del realismo' in France and the 'riguardi fallaci d'imparzialità' of even her best authors. Yet, attempting to resolve the tension within himself, he continued:

> Noi non siamo campioni a tutt'oltranza dell'antico, nè quindi nemici irragionevoli d'ogni novità. Per quanto ci paia più secondo l'arte il cercare il tipo che facevano i vecchi, non ci disgustano le cure dei moderni per accostarsi sempre più al reale possibile,

and noted: 'quello che a noi sembra stranezza e oscenità è presso i nostri vicini una realtà non bella nè buona sì, ma realtà'.[38] These were notable though uneasy concessions. Uneasy because they invoked a more flexible attitude to the problem of morality and art, and because they seemed to advance the here and now at the expense of the timeless and universally relevant.

This latter problem need not, of course, have existed: the art of a Balzac does not lose its relevance for being rooted in a sharp observation of contemporary, historical detail. But Capuana still found it difficult to reconcile the perennial message of art with realism's commitment to what was pinned down in time and space. Nor was this a problem he was able to resolve in the near future. Intellectual fashions and particularly the 'exceptional case' of naturalism soon suggested to him that the question was simply outmoded, overtaken by events. He was content to assert repeatedly that contemporary literature had abandoned the type in favour of the individual, and it did not occur to him to investigate in depth what it was about certain characters in literature that made them unforgettable and unrepeatable and yet nationless and timeless. It is a matter of conjecture whether, had he pondered further, he would have been less inclined as a narrator to produce psychological vignettes in which the animating detail of the background shaded away into insignificance, leaving the subject sharply etched but detached and floating. On the other hand he was able eventually, with the aid of De Sanctis, to resolve the question of morality.

Since Croce's essay, De Sanctis's influence on Capuana has been widely acknowledged.[39] And the difference between those passionate ethical and political impulses which led De Sanctis to welcome the new realism and Capuana's more purely aesthetic approach have been rightly stressed.[40] But Capuana's relationship with De Sanctis in any case involved not emulation but exploitation (and Capuana even expressed reserves about De Sanctis's criticism to his friend, Mario Rapisardi).[41] Like Manzoni, De Sanctis provided not a total critical schema, but a series of stimuli which Capuana applied to the aesthetic problems raised in his encounters with individual plays. This explains why the *Nazione* articles are so

disconcertingly fickle in their allegiance to De Sanctis, and, more importantly, how he involuntarily fathered not only a new attitude to art's morality and the cult of 'form', but also the germs of Capuana's fabled impersonality.

Perusing those articles one can be certain that Capuana read the first collection of the *Saggi critici* in its year of publication, towards the end of 1866. In his theatrical reviews Capuana habitually commented in order and separately on plot, characterization, authorial intentions ('concezione') and expression. But as Ferrari's *Marianna* came up for comment, and with it a literary reputation Capuana had come to question, he adopted a new procedure. The article, with its telling subtitle, 'Del concetto e della forma nelle opere d'arte', refused to applaud the play for its guiding idea: 'non sapremo mai risolverci a lodare un'opera d'arte pel solo merito dell'idea che vi si vorrebbe incarnare'. By way of illustration Capuana went on to postulate a competition of statuary, and ignoring pompous tributes to Humanity and Reason in solid gold awarded his hypothetical prize to a humble clay group which showed working girls eating bread. 'Quantunque di così futile soggetto, e di materia così vile', this work seemed to him 'vital' and 'truthful'.[42] This was the beginning of a less rigid approach to the raw materials of the work of art, and De Sanctis's discussion on the absorption of content into a living, autonomous form had much to do with it.

Henceforward Capuana directly or indirectly assimilated a variety of DeSanctisian criteria, and used them to establish a relationship with realistic literature which neither betrayed his sense of moral responsibility nor left aesthetic discussion stranded in right-mindedness. The campaign which De Sanctis led against a rhetorical literary tradition lacking in 'quel senso del concreto e del reale, senza di cui non è vero ideale' [43] found Capuana prepared. The reconciliation of the ideal with the real which Capuana contemplated in the wake of De Sanctis no doubt lost some of its original ethical implications, but it was none the less the occasion for a cautious reappraisal of the past: 'Quando la *Dame aux camélias* comparve sulle scene, gli artisti e il pubblico si perdevano dietro un idealismo arido e ingannevole che isteriliva le menti e i cuori, perchè rinnegava con isdegno la natura e il vero.' To this empty idealism Marguerite was a healthy reaction; she was 'il reale che prendeva il posto del falso ideale [. . .] la carne che rivendicava i suoi diritti a gran torto obliati'. It was De Sanctis too who authorized a dialectic view of literary history, suggesting to Capuana that the excesses embodied in Marguerite were transitional ones susceptible of incorporation into a more satisfactory, balanced synthesis. That synthesis, Capuana believed, had been achieved by Dumas himself in a later play, *Les Idées de Mme Aubray*. There he found at last 'in atto l'armonica unità dello spirito e della carne, del pensiero e del senso'.[44] Mme Aubray, generous without being lax, reconciled to the penitent Janine. Capuana had not quite forgotten that drama should set forth models of behaviour for general imitation. *Mme Aubray* did indeed involve 'un principio ardito, non applicabile con larghezza sconfinata', but it was also aesthetically satisfying.[45] This approval showed how the

old moral prejudices had been scattered.

It was not only De Sanctis but also his friendship with Telemaco Signorini, the painter, which armed Capuana for battle against so much vaporous and moralistic literature which flew in the face of Nature and Truth. The painter's expression, *studio dal vero*, became a banner to be waved whenever Capuana's increasingly sensitive ear detected the stultifying cadences of literary reminiscence in contemporary works or when imagination seemed to function arbitrarily. Thus of the popular work, *Celeste*, he wrote:

Ci sembra che il Marenco non abbia studiato i suoi personaggi dal vero, ma foggiati di fantasia, forse con la vaga lusinga di renderli più artistici. Questo modo di fare però gli ha impedito di dar loro quell'aria di verità e, diciamolo anche, quella consistenza che sono le condizioni di vitalità di qualunque carattere drammatico.[46]

It seemed to Capuana that Italian writers lived 'troppo appartati, troppo divisi della società a cui [pretendevano] rivolgere la parola';[47] close observation of society was the prescribed antidote, and the guarantee of De Sanctisian 'vitality'. So it was that the issue of morality was gradually shouldered aside in a search for a more vital and less conventionalized art.

Perhaps too the young Sicilian was anxious to relax any critical attitudes that could be associated with provincial narrow-mindedness. At all events the erstwhile champion of the family confessed to a new weakness:

la donna è libera e padrona di se stessa, mescolata in guisa molto attiva a tutto il movimento della società. Quindi sulla donna d'un secolo fa ha il vantaggio di una più squisita pulitezza di maniere, d'una maggiore larghezza d'istruzione, d'una sfera più vasta entro cui esercitarsi. Così non più sdegnuzzi, non più pettegolezzi, ma qualcosa di più serio, se non di più onesto. [. . .] osiamo confessare la nostra debolezza; la donna moderna ci sembra più donna quantunque meno ingenua.[48]

And when he came face to face with the last of the fallen women he would meet as drama critic for the *Nazione*, he championed her. In *Paul Forestier* Augier might well pursue his 'intento di morale pratica'. But what if the rejected mistress was more moving than the insipid convent girl chosen by Augier to be Forestier's legitimate wife? The play 'rebelled' against its author and provided a lesson for those who seek out 'nella falsità dei caratteri, nell'esagerazione degli affetti, nell'impossibilità degli avvenimenti quegli effetti che l'arte può avere solamente dal vero'.[49] If 'il vero' was in conflict with conventional moral values, Capuana preferred the former.

Capuana had learnt to value the immediacy of a simple true-to-life subject more highly than the soulless abstraction of one that preached at him. Under the aegis of De Sanctis, he began to examine the sense of aesthetic disappointment he experienced when a work seemed to thrust its intentions upon him. He concluded that in such a case the writer remained merely a critic and a thinker: the intellectual calculations (and these included any 'intento di morale pratica') which preceded

and accompanied composition were not confined to giving the work its underlying shape and meaning, but emerged in an insistent surface patterning which all was wrenched to fit. Yet there was no turning back to times when art had seemed the product of an unthinking rapture. The practical and self-critical spirit of the new nation and the rationalistic outlook on life that followed in the wake of anti-clerical Risorgimento liberalism on the one hand and positivist science on the other posed problems for literature not so easily circumvented. It was no accident that De Sanctis wrote:

È inutile mover lamenti sullo stato dell'arte e voler questo o quello; la scienza si è infiltrata nella poesia, nè la si può discacciare, perchè ciò risponde alle presenti condizioni dello spirito umano. Noi non possiamo volger lo sguardo a nessuna cosa sì bella, che tosto fra la nostra ammirazione non s'introduca di soppiatto un:—È ragionevole?—, ed eccoci a vele gonfie in mezzo alla critica ed alla scienza.[50]

Moreover, if De Sanctis acknowledged regret for the passing of an age when knowledge had been a passion and a spur to action ('il pensiero non è più la parola, la parola non è più l'azione. Oh! noi abbiamo bisogno di fede che tolga l'aridità al nostro cuore, il vacuo alla nostra ragione, l'ipocrisia ai nostri atti'[51]), Capuana did not. He belonged to a later generation with a less impetuous social mission and a respect for knowledge—particularly scientific knowledge—in its unalloyed state. He therefore welcomed the critical spirit of his age, and aimed only to see how it might emerge in the art of his contemporaries without destroying it. Here De Sanctis was instructive. For the *Saggi* criticized not only rhetorical and preceptive works of art (and here one may recall their treatment of Guerrazzi and Bresciani) but any instance of an intellectual concept, however elevated, failing to find concrete, 'vital' expression: 'non il concetto, ma la concezione, il concetto corporale visibile e accessibile ai sensi' was what De Sanctis sought.[52] Capuana marvelled similarly that 'si possa fare un'*opera di letteratura* senza fare un'*opera letteraria*, e ciò in grazia del'alto concetto che potrà esservi dentro'.[53] He concluded that 'il giorno che la riflessione si mescola al lavoro della spontaneità l'opera artistica perde metà del suo pregio. Il giorno che la riflessione vuol sostituirsi alla spontaneità l'arte è perduta e rimane il mestiero.'[54] Because of the nature of his age, however, the relationship between thought and spontaneous creation seemed to Capuana balanced on a veritable knife-edge; and it was in part because narrative structures afforded opportunities for analytical discussion that he eventually saw in the novel the appropriate genre for his times.

In the meantime two further facets of his criticism emerged: they too were inseparable from his evolving outlook upon morality in art, and from his opinion that contemporary intellectualism threatened art's integrity. Both were traceable in the end to his reading of De Sanctis. He began to stress the importance of 'forma'. This was no longer a neutral term designating style or expression, but a term which in itself could carry connotations of approval as in De Sanctis's aphorism: 'Il poeta

non rappresenta l'idea se non quando con amorosa intuizione la coglie in una forma'.[55] 'Forma' was the expressed totality of the work of art; the labours of composition and expression, the persuasions of the writer as individual, did not disappear but were transformed and fused together in a new reality. Once Capuana's moral scruples abated, his aesthetic responses were freed and the idea of 'forma' became predominant. And so, reviewing Marchese Trevisani's account of recent Italian theatre, he took the opportunity to protest at the critic's 'patria carità' in linking Italy's failures with her exploitation of the theatre as an agent of morality. Italy was ready to accept that such excuses were untenable; it was time, Capuana felt, for a more mature, exact view of art:

il concetto non costituisce per sè medesimo il punto più rilevante in un'opera d'arte, perchè rientra nel dominio della speculazione politica, filosofica, sociale, ecc., mentre invece è la forma, esclusivamente la forma, quella che ne determina sempre il carattere, e l'assicura l'esistenza. [. . .] non cesseremo di ripeterlo, il problema della forma è la questione più urgente del nostro teatro.[56]

It was logical that having come this far, Capuana should take a further step. 'Concepts' properly existed in art only when they were 'lost' in the concrete representations of form. The consciousness of the writer was not identical with the consciousness of his creation; and the totality of a work of art had meanings of which its constituent parts were unaware. With increasing urgency Capuana demanded that this separation be preserved, lest authors produce an 'automa che lascia intravedere il macchinismo che lo muove'.[57] What he urged upon playwrights was impersonality, in fact if not in name. Contemporary German theatre, he wrote,

non si trasfonde abbastanza nei suoi personaggi fino a celarsi allo sguardo degli spettatori: non oblìa tanto se stesso e le sue preoccupazioni filosofiche, politiche, e religiose sino a indovinare il pensiero dei personaggi che vuol mettere in iscena;[58]

while *I Mariti* gained praise for Torelli on this count too:

Quelle figure hanno un'espressione così profonda di verità; quegli avvenimenti scorrono e s'intrecciano con tanta naturalezza e con semplicità sì stupenda, che tu sperimenti subito *il più grande effetto dell'arte, quello di dimenticare perfettamente l'artista*.[59]

Thus in Capuana's thinking impersonality or objectivity was not dependent, as may be supposed, on the 'scientific' impassivity of naturalism (though it could and did gain additional impetus from it), but devolved naturally from a De Sanctisian conception of form.

3. *Hegelianism and Positivism: the Discovery of the Novel*

'Stanco per gli assidui studi e per la lunga assenza dal paese natìo',[60] Capuana returned to Mineo in June 1868, and there he remained almost without interruption until 1877, following his father's death as head of a large family, and

as mayor and school inspector. Colleagues and friends (including Verga and Angelo Camillo De Meis who soon exerted pressures of a different order) unavailingly deplored his isolation. But it was not a period of stagnation, for the aspiring dramatist was transformed during it into a narrator. The process was not casual or sudden but had been quietly initiated in Florence.

One phenomenon which Capuana had noted in contemporary works was 'l'*umanizzarsi* dell'arte'.[61] The literature of his day had become more human and precise, more firmly anchored in prosaic reality. Capuana had noticed too, with some regret, that the modern formula for art was 'l'*individualità*'.[62] Patently these tendencies were difficult to reconcile with the idea of a national theatre as it had been conceived—the nation's unifier and propagator of solid, middle-class values. Furthermore, while Capuana held fast to his own more finely shaded versions of this conception (art was to mirror contemporary society and at the same time delve into complex psychological states), he was still unable to see them in any unified perspective. Thus the formula of approval he applied to the great theatrical success of those years, *I Mariti*, ('ha letto nel gran libro della società; ha scrutato le pieghe nascoste del cuore')[63] separated the two issues.

The novel, however, increasingly seemed to writers an instrument of infinite flexibility in which all otherwise irreconcilable desiderata could be accommodated. The capitulation in its favour which began in the sixties accelerated. The theatre at the time when Capuana wrote still gave pride of place to the drawing-rooms of the privileged classes and did not despise dramatized proverbs in the manner of Musset: the sort of reality it purveyed was circumscribed by the need to be generally representative and ideologically sound. In contrast the novel was a long *tête à tête* with the reader. It could venture into territories both geographical and psychological which were uncharted in the theatre (thus completing the partial portrait of society provided by playwrights) precisely because in the novelist the reader had a guide ready if necessary to calm his fears and explain the unfamiliar. In comparison with France and England, Italian narrative had a tenuous tradition, and its form and function consequently invited free experimentation. There was at the time a general feeling that Italy was passing through a politically prosaic period determined by the need to know and unify her separate regions. The novel now seemed the genre most suited for the work of unification and investigation: functioning on a relatively modest technical level it was accessible to the anonymous mass of middle-brow readers who lived outside the great centres of culture and beyond the reach of the theatre; and it could move freely between social reportage—Renato Fucini's *Napoli a occhio nudo*—and the psychological study with a regional setting—Giovanni Verga's *Storia di una capinera*. Rovani had seen it as a 'democratic' genre and one of limitless malleability:

Tutte le verità e della religione e della filosofia e della storia, se hanno voluto uscire dall'angusta oligarchia dei savi, per travasarsi al popolo, hanno dovuto attraversare

la forma del romanzo che tutto assume: la prosa, la poesia, le infinite gradazioni dello stile; ei si innalza, in un bisogno, nelle più alte regioni dell'idea, s'abbassa tra le realtà del mondo pratico; è elegia, è lirica, è epica, è commedia, è critica, è satira, è discussione, al pari dell'iride ha tutti i colori, ed è per questo che si diffonde nel popolo.[64]

The next generation did not subordinate the pleasing variousness of the novel to its capacity to propagate the wisdom of the 'savi', but took note of it and concurred particularly with Rovani in associating the genre with 'critica' and 'discussione'. For theirs was an age of positivism. Easily assimilated in its essentials by non-scientists, positivism had engaged support for its patient objective researches outside the university as well as within that bastion of tradition; and its methods seemed extensible to all branches of knowledge. To Italy's intellectuals the whole world seemed ready to be rediscovered and discussed in this new practical spirit. While positivism reimmersed men in nature, it gave them confidence in their ability to understand all aspects of their existence. The *mediocritas* of the novel corresponded to this moderate optimism and to the desire to describe, and take cognizance of, the multiform aspects of the nation. In 1872 the young Fogazzaro referred to the 'passione di ritrarsi e di vedersi ritratto' of that time, and saw the novel as 'l'espressione prevalente del sentimento poetico del nostro tempo', a uniquely modern genre where 'l'epica, la lirica, la satira si trovano intrecciate'.[65]

Some evidence of Capuana's own attitudes to the novel can be gleaned from the pages of the *Nazione*. It was for him initially a convenient yardstick against which to measure dramatic achievement. It was, he felt, an analytical genre, capturing the unusual, the complex and the fleeting in everyday existence; as such its nature was alien to that of the theatre with its exemplary reality and timeless truths. Yet, even as he condemned any confusion of the two, he indicated what for him were the inviting possibilities of the novelistic genre. He criticized one French play, *Le Maître de la maison*, for failing to investigate the psychological basis of an improvable adulterous relationship:

In questo lavor ogli autori (colpa del metodo abbracciato) hanno voluto improvvidamente trasportare sul teatro le avviluppate e molteplici peripezie del romanzo contemporaneo, disprezzando tutte le leggi che presiedono alla creazione de' due generi, leggi di proporzione, di spazio, di ottica, di convenzione ecc. di molte delle quali il romanzo o non ha bisogno o si disfà con poco danno.

A novel, he continued, might have put the reader in the confidence of the adultress, allowing him to follow and understand the 'tanti piccoli *nulla*' that abutted on her 'fatale passione'.[66] For some time in Florence Capuana regretted the demise of that 'semplicità primitiva d'azione' which belonged to plays cast in a classical mould. But his own fascination for the *inediti* and the nuances of the psyche, which contemporary research in the moral sciences intensified, and his belief that art should examine human motivation prepared him to acquiesce in the general opinion that the novel was the genre appropriate to the age. What he had said of *Le Maître*

de la maison hinted that he would eventually consider the theatre conventional and hidebound–limited by formal and social considerations–and thus incapable of conducting any truly incisive and unbiassed examination of society. A decade later Zola contrasted the two genres:

le lecteur isolé tolère tout, va où l'on veut le mener, même lorsqu'il se fâche, tandis que les spectateurs pris en masse ont des pudeurs, des effarements, des sensibilités dont il faut tenir compte, sous peine de chute certaine. Tout cela est vrai, c'est precisément pour cela que le théâtre est la dernière citadelle de la convention.[67]

Capuana was seldom so openly provocative, but he was soon expressing his sense of the arbitrariness of failures that depended on mass 'pudeur' or on local reaction. It came to seem that it was a more serious business to address the educable 'lecteur isolé'.

Other cultural factors helped to determine a new artistic orientation in Capuana. Towards the end of his stay in Florence a generic Hegelianism had begun to infiltrate his criticism, suggesting that literature was one among many forms of thought which was governed by a law of perfectibility. He spoke of his belief that

cotesto modo d'essere dell'Idea [l'arte] avesse subìto e subisse ancora un continuo svolgimento; e che ora per ispirazioni spontanee, ora per mezzi riflessi, tendesse sempre a dilatarsi, a perfezionarsi, a correggersi con costante e non interrotta assiduità.[68]

This Hegelianism involved a view of literature which so far from being at war with the then forceful influences of positivist criticism stressing connexions between historical periods and their intellectual products, seemed rather to reinforce them. This new approach, combining with Capuana's opinion that substantial intellectual and scientific advances were currently being made, made the epic genre, for instance, seem outmoded, and primitive. It no longer corresponded to the disingenuous, reflective nature of the times. The spontaneous, collective imagination which once furnished the legend essential to the epic was impotent in an age whose self-critical nature and whose universally available culture was symbolized by the newspaper: 'il giornale', he wrote, 'ha già reso inetta la tradizione'.[69] Such was the persuasiveness of this view of modern society which both Hegelianism and positivism appeared to substantiate that Capuana saw fit to draw Manzoni into the debate on genres. In May 1867 at the end of a review of a historical drama Capuana quoted in translation Manzoni's comment that 'le goût toujours croissant des études historiques finira par modifier aussi les idées des spectateurs, et par rendre rares et difficiles les succès de théâtre qui ne sont fondés que sur l'ignorance du parterre.'[70] Limited in its implications as this comment was in context, to Capuana it appeared prophetic: Manzoni too had seen that the existence of an informed and critical audience affected the nature of art. Capuana himself took particular note of the 'progresso meraviglioso delle ricerche storiche',[71] and was soon paraphrasing the same Manzonian passage in

condemnation of the whole historical genre,[72] and declaring: 'la letteratura storica deve svanire e trasformarsi in critica ed in istoria, cioè in esposizioni e commentarii dei documenti.'[73] It seemed clear to him that the nineteenth century had no more use for primitive amalgamations of fact and fancy. That particular combination which was the epic he relegated to the remote past (employing a parallel with extinct animal species which speaks clearly of the current application of evolutionary theories to man's spiritual pursuits). He concluded: 'noi possediamo al giorno d'oggi un'opera d'arte non meno difficile dell'epopea e popolare quant'essa al suo tempo, ma più seria, più variata, più efficace, diremmo quasi più eccellente, e giusta è il romanzo'. It was naturally not the historical novel ('parto ibrido e falso') that Capuana had in mind, but the novel which dealt with contemporary 'costumi e caratteri'.[74] Nor was his definition of the novel as 'difficult' and 'serious' a defence of the genre that had been so lately despised. It was an invitation to see in the novel an ideal repository of that critical self-consciousness that characterized the age.

Capuana's conclusions in favour of the novel were soon buttressed by Angelo Camillo De Meis's recent philosophical novel, *Dopo la laurea*. The volume was sent to him in Mineo not later than June 1869 by Cesira Pozzolini (a Florentine acquaintance) and her husband Professor Pietro Siciliani who taught at the University of Bologna where De Meis since 1863 had held a chair in the History of Medicine. Since Capuana was never more than an amateur in philosophical matters, the objective strength of his buttress is not in question: certainly as far as he was concerned it produced nothing less than total intellectual renewal.

Dopo la laurea consists of an exchange of letters between Giorgio, a newly qualified doctor in medicine, and his older, wiser friend, Filalete, interspersed with 'intermezzi' by the 'editor'. The letters purport to trace a philosophical debate which culminates in Giorgio's conversion to the Hegelian truths expounded by Filalete. But in reality both Giorgio (who plays the token sceptic and positivist) and Filalete are a single personality—the Hegelian enthusiast who is their creator. At most they portray successive stages in De Meis's intellectual autobiography. The book is repetitive, and fulsome in expression. Croce justifiably cited it as an example of how at the hands of certain of Spaventa's disciples Italian Hegelianism 'si solidificò in domma, incapace di autocritica, sterile di svolgimenti'.[75] Nevertheless it was calculated in those years to provoke interest, for it subjected the question of the historical development of religion and the arts to a philosophical scrutiny which De Meis's status as a scientist rendered the more worthy of credence.

The main burden of *Dopo la laurea* is that the various manifestations of the Human Spirit, artistic, religious and scientific, tend inexorably in the course of time towards absorption into pure Thought. The Spirit reveals itself ever more directly, casting gradually aside the 'primitive' images which veil and embody it, and finally thinks itself without mediation. Religion, for instance, abandons its primal anthropomorphism and the ritual and symbolism which are the images of its underlying

truth and becomes an act of pure meditation. Literature, in approximating ever more closely to the Idea, is less and less able to achieve a perfect balance of concept and image:

É invece una serie di forme estetiche l'una men perfetta dell'altra, come quelle che sempre meno adempiono alle assolute condizioni dell'arte; e sono sempre meno naturali e spontanee, meno epiche e fantastiche, sempre più spirituali, liriche, filosofiche, e vie più reali; e sì l'intenzione dell'arte è sempre men lieta e bella, e vie più trasparente ed immediata all'ideale.

Thus, unlike religion which becomes purified and more true *qua* religion as it approaches philosophical status, art becomes less and less true as art but more and more perfect as philosophy: each genre or 'forma estetica' assumed by the artistic spirit comes to perfection before it perishes, but each form is less perfect in terms of art than its predecessor because more thoughtful and philosophical and less imaginative. The epic therefore, in presenting knowledge in a form which is 'principalmente intuitiva e fantastica', precedes drama which 'apre l'adito alla riflessione'; just as drama precedes the modern lyric which is thoughtful and 'scava più addentro nell'anima umana'.[76]

This schema provided an appealingly non-rhetorical, 'scientific' theory of genres. It confirmed Capuana's view of the epic, and it also gave striking corroboration for that widespread approval of the novel, even extending a welcome to its 'realism'. For De Meis the only possible form of literature in a modern scientific age was the novel:

è il romanzo, ed è la vera epica, la sola possibile epopea del tempo moderno, una epopea tutta naturale e umana, senza soprannaturale, e tutta infiltrata, ma non compenetrata di realtà e di riflessione. [. . .]

Il romanzo corrisponde perfettamente, ed esattamente rappresenta e riproduce lo stato dello spirito diviso fra l'arte e la scienza, fra la poesia e la prosa, e che non potendo ancora creare una scienza poetica, crea per ora una poesia prosaica.[77]

Capuana spoke of having tackled Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind* in about 1870. But as he disarmingly confessed 'ci voleva ben altro che i [suoi] denti!'.[78] *Dopo la laurea*, despite or because of its simplifications, was the real means through which Capuana experienced at first-hand and clearly a 'scientific' approach to the history of literature. Moreover De Meis, unlike his German master, was in a position to confront a problem that pressed for attention at that time—the relationship between positivistic thinking and the Hegelian system.

As far as De Meis was concerned the empirical discovery of an 'infinità di amminicoli e d'accidenti' merely led up the blind alley of interminable classification. The significance of such scientific findings needed to be understood in the context of the progressive self-explication of Spirit. In this process empirical science represented a median stage, neither encumbered by superstition nor yet aspiring to 'la grande ragione intuitiva' or Philosophy,[79] but rational, orderly,

detail-obsessed. Scornful as the terminology he habitually applied to positivism was, De Meis none the less integrated it into his system: it was if nothing else an indispensable rung in the ladder that mounted to Philosophy. As such Capuana interpreted it as he threw a bridge between materialism and metaphysics:

lo studio della filosofia egheliana ha avuto ed ha una grandissima importanza nella mia evoluzione critica e artistica. Il concetto delle forme artistiche e del loro svolgimento nella storia, è tutto egheliano, di quell'eghelianismo ritemprato con gli studi delle scienze naturali moderne. Questo concetto mi ha fatto studiare in modo proficuo la storia dell'arte, dandomi la convinzione che le forme artistiche sono quasi identiche alle forme naturali, e non capricciose, accidentali, ma svolgonsi con un logico processo, arrivano alla loro perfetta applicazione, decadono e muoiono. Una delle vere gioie della mia vita è stata il trovare questo concetto con una potenza straordinaria in un libro del De Meis che ritengo dovrebbe essere il vademecum di tutti quelli che si occupano d'arte e di critica.[80]

Positivist literary criticism showed that art assumes changing forms adapted to the prevailing social, cultural and political conditions, like a plant in given conditions of soil and climate. This variability seemed merely to confirm the Hegelian succession of genres. Experience too suggested that certain forms of literature once they were incarnated in masterpieces survived thereafter in pallid imitations. It seemed to Capuana, for instance, that tragedy had reached its culmination with Shakespeare and after him merely clung to life: 'dopo Shakespeare delle vere tragedie non se ne sono viste quantunque ne siano state scritte delle belle migliaia.'[81] This was perhaps not a fastidious judgement as to its detail, but it was not easily controverted in substance (pending, at all events, the advent of a second Shakespeare). Thus it had all the appearance of a literary *fact* which confirmed the Hegelian theory of the mortality of genres. In this way Capuana placed a foot in both camps. He failed to perceive that they housed natural enemies, the positivist approach being applied disinterestedly to a series of events (or intellectual notions or forms of literature) which itself formed the subject of the research, while Hegelian idealism, acknowledging an optimising tendency in the historical series, saw behind an observed succession of changes the workings of some basic substance (the Spirit), this substance being the subject of the historical enquiry.

The misunderstanding might be dismissed with the airiness Capuana revealed when, explaining away the 'strano connubio', he described himself as 'un curioso e nient'altro, un dilettante e nient'altro',[82] were it not for the fact that (despite the 'scientific' course of his immediate career), Capuana's 'connubio' presaged the reappearance of spiritual values in his narrative towards the end of the century when a quantitive and morally indifferent appraisal of human affairs no longer seemed adequate. The shift from positivism to 'spiritualism' and idealism which affected in various ways writers like Matilde Serao and D'Annunzio as well as Capuana can be said to depend on the compromised beginnings of positivism itself Marina Musitelli Paladini has shown recently how Bertrando Spaventa extended a

welcome to positivism, seeing in it an impulse to concrete analysis strictly compatible with his own historicism;[83] and Eugenio Garin writes significantly of Pasquale Villari: 'Ancora nel '54 esalta Hegel, pur riconoscendo i nessi fra filosofia della storia e scienze positive'.[84] Indeed Villari's case is instructive. His essay, 'La filosofia positiva ed il metodo storico', published by the Milanese *Politecnico* in 1866, asserts that positivism provides a new method, not a new philosophical system: 'si riduce all'applicazione del metodo storico alle scienze morali, dando ad esso l'importanza medesima, che ha il metodo sperimentale nelle scienze naturali'. As far as Villari was concerned the new method divided questions into those that could and could not hope to be answered definitively, confining itself to the former 'senza però negare l'esistenza di ciò che ignora'.[85] In this way positivism was made to occupy a neutral territory, no more concerned with materialism than with any metaphysical system. Pietro Siciliani himself provides a final illustration of the confluence of the two schools of thought. 'A chi ben consideri', he wrote in *Sul rinnovamento della filosofia positiva in Italia*,

> l'*Idea* degli hegeliani è il *Fatto* stesso dei positivisti; ma il *Fatto* guardato in sè, il fatto considerato fuori le condizioni del tempo e dello spazio, cioè come legge. Al contrario, il *Fatto* de' positivisti è l'*Idea* hegeliana, ma l'*Idea* considerata fuori di sè, l'*Idea* come tempo e come spazio, come natura e come storia, come fenomeno. [. . .] La formula del Positivismo (*fatto e legge del fatto*) [. . .] non è se non l'Idea guardata nella sua superficie sensata.[86]

Such equations must have struck the non-specialist as comfortably non-controversial. And if Capuana saw Hegelianism beginning where positivism left off, this was hardly surprising. Confiding his impressions of Siciliani's work with due diffidence to its author, he associated himself with its message of conciliation: 'il fatto senza l'idea è nulla'; approved Siciliani's position, equidistant from positivists 'che negano recisamente la scienza' and from Hegelians 'i quali considerano che la scienza è bella e fatta'; and suggested in addition that since man by nature strove towards all-knowledge it was inevitable that he should seek to illumine the 'sacra, infinita ombra del di là'.[87]

Capuana's was a positivism with metaphysical appendages, a *juste milieu* stance with room for manoeuvre. One may wonder at the ideological flexibility of Capuana and some of his contemporaries. Carlo Madrignani explains it in terms of cultural politics: 'quello che interessava alla classe dominante del secondo Ottocento era 'nobilitare' la propria funzione storica ed economica coll'aiuto di una 'scienza' o di una 'filosofia' che presentasse i crismi dell' 'eternità' e dell' 'universalità'.' Following the critic's lead, it is perhaps legitimate to see what he calls 'la precoce commistione di elementi filosofici idealistici e materialistici'[88] as calculated to deprive both systems of any power they might have had separately to offer a radical reinterpretation of reality. Certainly in Capuana the 'connubio' has a conservative air, as of one unwilling to discard any available options. And this conservatism has its relevance to his narrative, where, as we shall see, it constantly

undermines his impact.

De Meis's influence on Capuana was on the whole spasmodic and superficial, though Capuana continued throughout his life to consider him one of the great shaping intellects of the period. He certainly served to align Capuana with the nascent idealism of the nineties. The idea of the mortality of genres (and even of art itself) made an occasional, conjectural appearance in Capuana's criticism; and the De Meisan system lent tacit support from time to time for his highly speculative intellectual sorties on the subject of the future of religion or the arts. But in the early seventies De Meis was undeniably persuasive and important. He crystallized all of the drama critic's dissatisfactions into a conclusion which was both positive and, given all the other pointers in its direction, apparently irrefutable: narrative must succeed to drama.

The preface to *Il Teatro italiano contemporaneo*, balanced between De Sanctisian aesthetics and De Meis's theory of genres, takes its leave of the theatre. It pronounces a death sentence over the historical genre in the name of 'una legge necessaria, ineluttabile che trovasi racchiusa nell'intima essenza del pensiero umano agente come Arte'; and finds that in France the *commedia contemporanea* has already reached such a pitch of critical self-consciousness that it cannot survive without resolving into pure thought. Returning to *Les Idées de Mme Aubray*, Capuana comments:

sono l'arte che si piace di camminare sul filo d'un rasoio, benchè senta di già montarsi la vertigine alla testa. Ci manca poco perchè qui il personaggio, la creatura, abbia tutta la coscienza di se stessa quanto il poeta, suo creatore, ed è l'inizio dell'ultima fase in cui l'arte si risolve nel suo puro principio, il pensiero.[89]

(And here, in this preoccupation with the balance of thinker and creator in the work of art, lies what Capuana saw as the common ground that united De Sanctis and De Meis.) There is no mention of the novel, but the preface is as much a welcome to the 'scientific', reflective novel as a farewell to the theatre.

Even if scientific research had been more specialised and inaccessible than it was, the 'positive', rationalistic character of the times would have served to awaken widespread interest in its achievements. The sixties saw the publication or translation of work—from Darwin's *Origin of Species* to Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*—whose influence would rapidly spill over into disciplines that were traditionally non-scientific. This spillage was a characterizing feature of the age. Biological evolutionism affected the way man's spiritual development was considered. What had been mere analogy became identity: man in all his dimensions was now viewed as subject to a single evolutionary process. The monism of the positivistic creed fused physiological and moral man, and Comte's disciple, Hippolyte Taine, could write the notorious words:

Que les faits soient physiques ou moraux, il n'importe, ils ont toujours des causes; il

y en a pour l'ambition, pour le courage, pour la véracité, comme pour la digestion, pour le mouvement musculaire, pour la chaleur animale. Le vice et la vertu sont des produits comme le vitriol et le sucre, et toute donnée complexe, naît par la rencontre d'autres données plus simples dont elle dépend.[90]

The positivist method was to extend from science and philosophy to other fields, from psychology, anthropology to literary historiography, everywhere suggesting that behind each observed phenomenon lay a material causality. In such a climate Cesare Lombroso, founder of criminology, worked out his theories on the hereditary nature of criminality, and produced a series of studies on artistic genius, seeing in it an excessive sensitivity of the nervous system. And Paolo Mantegazza's numerous works on sexual love, though ultimately concerned to offer practical advice of a totally conventional kind, were not afraid to see love as a basic self-reproductive instinct or romantic feelings as nerve impulses.

Lombroso and Mantegazza were working on the fringes of areas occupied by creative artists, and writers including Capuana gradually took stock of the closing gap between science and art—of a new, scientific interpretation of moral man.

In his early days Capuana considered that science ('il reale') had temporarily contaminated the pure sphere of art ('l'ideale'). At a time when the word 'realism' as applied to literature still denoted vulgarity and immorality, he indeed attributed its spread to scientific values. But it is difficult to resist the impression that in those same days the young critic felt himself on trial and responded by displaying an ultra-conservative façade (and a stately prose-style) to suit the occasion. At all events by 1867 the scientist was Capuana's ideal man. In October of that year he published a short story entitled 'Dr Cymbalus', the only imaginative work of the Florentine period to reach an audience, and the beginning of a life-long interest in science fiction.[91]

At first sight 'Dr Cymbalus' seems to pass negative judgement on science: William Usinger, crossed in love and determined on suicide, is persuaded by his philosopher-friend, Strauss, to undergo an irreversible surgical operation (a sort of leucotomy which will numb his emotions) at the hands of Dr Cymbalus; the operation is successful but eventually the patient, despairing of his insensibility, resorts to shooting himself. The end is a piece of deliberate irony and no blame attaches to Cymbalus. The story indeed is not an indictment of meddling, over-confident science, but a demonstration that true science knows the hazards of interfering with nature. It is not Strauss, author of a *Nuovo sistema della Natura*, who holds this 'philosophic' view, but the reluctant surgeon himself, Dr Cymbalus. On him Capuana expends all the modest care for characterization contained in the story. Cymbalus represents the ideal type of the modern scientist, deeply respectful of Nature's laws, yet awesomely powerful in his understanding of them; modest, compassionate and human (Capuana cannot resist showing him as he unaffectedly plays with two small children) yet fiercely dedicated to his work. His 'veglie sostenute in pro della scienza e della umanità' contrast eloquently with the

somnolence a 'problema di alta metafisica' provokes in Strauss. The potential which Capuana attributed to modern science is summed up in the following lines of dialogue between Strauss and Usinger:

'Il dottor Cymbalus ti salverà.'
É dunque un dio cotest'uomo?'
'Uno scienziato; val quasi lo stesso.'[92]

One critic has seen in Capuana 'non la convinzione del valore della scienza, ma proprio all'incontrario, la fede che la scienza non potrà mai cogliere il segreto processo della vita',[93] a tempting conclusion in view of Cymbalus's modesty and the consequences of the operation; but nevertheless a mistaken one, for Capuana always saw open-mindedness and self-doubt as the hallmark of the truly scientific mentality; and through Cymbalus he apologised only for the 'miseria attuale' of science,[94] believing that in time it would overcome every obstacle.

A final article written for the *Nazione*, and published when he was already in Mineo, shows that science was impinging on Capuana's critical values. The work under examination is Prati's *Armando*, and the significant portion of Capuana's article concerns the vision experienced by Armando in a state of hallucination. Capuana criticizes it for being so carefully structured as to betray the author's guiding hand. Such a criticism comes within the ambit of Capuana's realism: he looks for verisimilitude through objectivity. But there is more and it is startling. The newspaper version of the article contains a passage (excised in the later version for the book, and thus unnoticed by Capuana's critics) which displays what must be called a proto-naturalism; and does so at a time when little more than the preface of 1868 to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* was available to establish the scientific character of the new realism. But to Capuana, regretting that the conduct of the hallucination episode was *scientifically* unsound, the transition from the mere 'studio del vero' of realism to the scientific fidelity of naturalism clearly seems logical, and could be achieved independently. We may easily reconstruct his thinking. Capuana expresses the opinion that the 'creazioni ideali' of art must retain intact 'i caratteri più strettamente essenziali delle cose reali a cui corrispondono': a 'verità reale' is rarely a 'verità artistica', for art is essential reality, a reality purified of all that does not illuminate its fundamental nature. But what is the scientific method if not the most sophisticated observing of reality? It takes account of the variables that may affect its observations, and distills from them an exemplary pattern of events, a quintessential truth. This is the reasoning behind the following comments on Prati:

Noi non abbiamo avuto affatto l'intenzione di domandargli: dov'è la diagnosi del tuo ammalato? Dov'è l'etiologia del suo male? [. . .] Abbiamo notato invece, che due o tre punti presentati dall'osservazione scientifica sarebbero stati di gran lunga più poetici della sua creazione, nè solamente perchè più veri, ma perchè rivestiti d'un carattere speciale che li rende naturalmente artistici in sommo grado. È innegabile che quello stato della natura da noi chiamato morboso presenta

spessissimo gli elementi della più elevata idealità.[95]

In the light of what follows the opening words of the passage are somewhat rhetorical: clearly Capuana views the 'stato morboso' as artistically significant: it intensifies normal reality—reveals it, as it were, in paroxysm—and thus endows it with the 'idealità' which art seeks after. It is clear too that Capuana is already disposed to welcome the 'caso patologico' of naturalism, though it seems unlikely that he was aware of the full implications of what he had written. In what frame of mind he removed from his later version of the article all suggestion that he was laying down artistic procedures that applied to more than *Armando* it is hard to say. But there is an enthusiasm for science in what he says which would in itself engender certain expectations of his narrative. The scientists he names (with evident relish and no real necessity) are Esquirol, Leuret, Mitivié, and Georget: all Frenchmen who had worked, chiefly between 1820 and 1840, on aspects of mental disease, heredity or the nervous system, in fields, that is, which were calculated to attract the literary naturalist at a period when moral action and human psychology seemed susceptible of physiological explanation.

4. *The Psychological Analysis of 'Profili di donne'*

While deploring the difficulties that experimental physiology had encountered before being recognized and financed, Paolo Mantegazza also regrets that 'troppo fitta è l'ignoranza degli studi fisiologici in quelle classi che sogliamo chiamare colte'. If only, he continues, writers were also physiologists, 'quante immagini svariate, ricche di colorito e di forza; quanti contrasti di luce potrebbe trovare il poeta nella storia della vita! Come lo scrittore approfondirebbe sicuro lo scalpello nel cuore umano, s'egli fosse fisiologo!'[96] His enthusiasm was the enthusiasm of an age, and the stories of *Profili di donne*, written in the seventies,[97] were conceived in part as the anatomy of the 'cuore umano' Mantegazza envisages. Their attempt to register subtleties of thought and emotion with unprecedented accuracy was their claim to modernity. Since he viewed literature as a progression, this modernity was vital to Capuana. De Meis had given him the confidence that he knew the course literature was currently steering and could intercept it on its path. As he confided to Cesareo: 'La mia intenzione, naturalmente, è stata quella di far progredire lo sviluppo della forma da me presa, [. . .] assimilandomi tutti i risultati degli sforzi altrui.'[98] But it was the assimilation of those 'sforzi altrui' that gave *Profili di donne* an old-fashioned air. The plays and short stories of Dumas *fils* are Capuana's chief inspiration. He greatly admired Dumas's handling of female psychology, his acumen as an 'anatomista dell'amore'. The words, 'Che meraviglioso problema è la donna! Ieri femmina perduta, oggi vergine pura!'[99] which Capuana quoted appreciatively from *Ce qu'on ne sait pas* 'potrebbero sintetizzare l'ispirazione di queste novelle', as a critic remarks.[100] Constant's *Adolphe* too was not far from Capuana's mind. In 1872 when he reviewed Verga's *Storia di una capinera*, insisting significantly on the

author's capacity for psychological analysis, he saw in *Adolphe* 'una crudele e straordinaria potenza d'analisi che ricerca i più oscuri, i più impenetrabili, i più ignorati angoli del cuore': an archetypal *roman d'analyse* ('sarà ripetuto all'infinito').[101] It is as though Capuana intended to modernize an amatory material borrowed from France by investigating it with the precision that contemporary thinking demanded of science.

Admiring as he was of modern, emancipated woman, Capuana believed no doubt that he treated his six heroines with sympathy. But it was impossible to anticipate true feminist feeling by fifty years, and *Profili di donne* is informed throughout by Capuana's protective gallantry. It is an attitude that belongs to Dumas (always ready to 'rehabilitate' his women, but never to challenge the society that makes them what they are) as well as to Capuana. And science itself merely analysed the current mythology of womanhood, but did not question it. Thus the anthropologist, Mantegazza himself, congratulated men on the improved education of women:

fatela sapiente, e la sapienza trasformerà in carezza; fatela forte, e della forza userà per farvi ricco; fatela grande, ed essa deporrà ai vostri piedi la sua grandezza in cambio di un bacio.[102]

Or, less lyrically, he drew 'scientific' distinctions:

La donna può godere più dell'uomo delle delizie sensitive, ma essa rimane assai al disotto dell'uomo nel godimento dei tesori intellettuali.[103]

It is not surprising therefore that the 'modernity' of Capuana's woman is confined to her capriciousness, her nervousness, her emotional volatility: the narrator of the story entitled 'Fasma' declares that his sympathetic curiosity is engaged not by a healthy, peasant 'massaia'—'la donna all'antica'—but by the 'nervosa', the 'agitata', the 'tormentatissima' Fasma.[104] The elegance of her dress, the refined simplicity of her *salotto*, the lingering melancholy of a failed love-affair, her unprotected, solitary existence—such are the spiritual and physical accessories of the heroine which in *Profili di donne* entice the sophisticated contemplator. This sadistic connoisseurship would be less intrusive were it not for Capuana's constant use of the first person—'quel petulantissimo fra i pronomi' as an exasperated reviewer noted: whether the character-narrator calls himself Carlo or Oreste or Eugenio he is always the same 'amante fortunatissimo', the 'sultano di un harèm'.[105]

Capuana however had reasons for his choice. Realism, as he conceived it, eliminated the author, tried to give the reader 'un'impressione non di seconda mano, ma immediata' (p.v.). This office the first person had long fulfilled. It facilitated too the reader's emotional identification with the material; and Capuana's realism, despite all that has been written of the detachment of realism's adherents, aspired to communicate an emotional experience through verisimilitude itself. If four or five readers, Capuana wrote, felt 'la metà delle emozioni' he had

experienced in writing, 'il suo amor proprio di autore' would be well satisfied (p. vii). And it is worth remembering at this point the terms in which the 'impersonal' Verga expressed his disapproval of *Mme Bovary* and Flaubert: 'non ti fa affezionare ai personaggi del dramma [. . .] il libro è scritto da scettico, anche riguardo alle passioni che descrive.'[106]

Capuana agreed: he persisted in seeing Flaubert as 'indifferente, freddo o ironico e canzonatore [. . .] innanzi al soggetto del suo studio'.[107]

The first person set in motion the fiction of the literal veracity of the stories. Even the preface insists that these are 'sincere confidenze', 'sensazioni vere' written only for the author's satisfaction (pp. vii, v). Apostrophes to a hypothetical listener ('sii giudice tu stesso' (p. 60), 'Figurati!' (p. 78), 'Avessi tu visto che incanto!' (p. 81), 'Tu sai bene' (p. 167) etc.) which are somewhat clumsy in context are clearly intended to foster the impression that the stories are 'overheard' by the reader or confided to him. Both Capuana and Verga (in *Eva*, for example, or in the epistolary outpourings of *Storia di una capinera*) re-utilize the traditional device of the first-person confession; but they do so in deference to a literal-minded age and the 'studio dal vero'.

Profili di donne is disdainful of plot. Its six stories, each bearing the name of a woman for title, relate a fleeting encounter between narrator and heroine. There is Delfina who confesses her long-concealed passion on the eve of her departure to Constantinople; Giulia whose disarming honesty dissuades the hero from pressing home the advantages he has gained by rescuing her from a situation compromising to her reputation; there is the mysterious Fasma, reluctantly enamoured, who deserts the narrator as unexpectedly as she struck up acquaintance with him; there is the fickle Ebe redeemed at last by a literally mortal passion; Emilia (in 'Iela') who briefly attracts Carlo through her resemblance to a platonic love of his adolescence; and Cecilia who with unerring intuition senses the coolness of her lover before he himself is aware of it. Some of the amorous situations contained in the book are sheer unlikelihood and wishful thinking. What for instance can possess Emilia's lover to leave her so conveniently and for days on end alone with Carlo, or Fasma to take up residence in the house of a man met casually on a train? But this wishful thinking itself emphasizes that Capuana is concerned not with what happens but with how it happens. *Profili di donne* uses event merely as a springboard for analysis, and in this way precociously foreshadows the tendency of Capuana's mature realism to devalue plot and to concentrate on interpretation and explanation.

Capuana's narrator is fascinated by thought-processes and feelings normally half-noted but instantly recognizable when pinned down and held in words: the bulk of the narrative wrestles with psychological idiosyncrasies and tabulates them. The resurgence of the date of unconscious memory forms a strong opening motif in 'Delfina' where meetings with the heroine, long-forgotten by the hero, are gradually restored to conscious recollection—a 'fenomeno', comments the narrator, 'molto

fuor del comune' (p. 5). In 'Iela' there is another instance of retarded recognition: the narrator realizes only after the concentrated effort of several days that his sense of familiarity with a stranger depends on her resemblance to a figure from his past. Not infrequently, scrutinizing these mechanisms of mind and heart, Capuana becomes abruptly scientific: the strange affinity sometimes felt by strangers 'vuol dire (è la fisiologia che l'attesta) che tra i due organismi vi sian rapporti di più intima natura, rapporti d'identità' (p. 63). Or the scientific and the sentimental mingle (in a manner generally characteristic of the work)[108] as Capuana wonders why 'l'amore si compiaccia volentieri di ombre e di mistero', and explains: 'La luce irrita, mette in attività, distrae le cento forze dell'organismo, e l'amore, questo terribile autocrate, non può tollerare che una menoma parte dell'attività vitale sia impiegata altrimenti' (pp. 103-4).

In *Profili di donne* physiology positivistically determines morality. Capuana presents personality in terms of the functioning of the 'organismo'; feelings in terms of the nervous system. Hence the expressions 'sentimento fisiologico' (p. 69), 'commozione nervosa' (p. 68), 'ginnastica morale' (p. 219) and the speculation as to whether 'un malessere fisico ne produca [. . .] uno morale, o se un patema d'animo agisca sui centri nervosi, li contragga e li faccia soffrire' (pp. 159-60). Hence too the narrator's declaration in 'Cecilia' that he is 'un po' materialista':

> Credo vi abbia una profonda ragione fisica in questi turbamenti che l'influenza di un organismo fa risentire ad un altro [. . .] Senza credere a delle segrete ed intime affinità, non si arriva a spiegar nulla; affinità della materia, che si risolvono nelle affinità dello spirito. (p. 217).

But these same scientific attitudes and vocabulary stand shoulder to shoulder with Capuana's condescending chivalry and the ripe idiom of the *roman rose*—with phrases like 'sensazione ineffabile' (p. 13), 'ebbrezza voluttuosa' (p. 38), 'languore delizioso' (p. 43), 'tremenda voluttà' (p. 181) and 'terribile fascino' (p. 192). The volume constantly reflects a taste uncomfortably divided between the promptings of the contemporary scientific world and memories of a literature which brought the piquancy of vicarious emotion to bourgeois drawing-rooms.

The Sicilian's sense of linguistic inferiority (which he shares with the Verga of this period) betrays him into a conscious, mannered 'Florentinism'. There are endless diminutives ('vocina', 'figurina', 'lezioncina', 'donnina', 'manina', 'personcina', 'testina', 'piedino' etc.) and colloquialisms designed presumably to give an authentic Tuscan flavour: 'grullo', 'dare la berta', 'zinzino', 'la si sentiva', 'la mi perdoni'; and Capuana persistently uses the definite article before Christian names. His narrator proves particularly susceptible to a 'vocina dolce, insinuante, come se ne odono soltanto in Toscana' (p. 32). This linguistic self-consciousness together with the knots of scientific or passionate phraseology makes for an uneven stylistic texture; for a language which, though it is relaxed in general tenor, relies heavily on dialogue, and strives after the simplicity of the 'spontaneous', is

constantly calling attention to itself.

Where Capuana is moderately successful is not in the creation of a modern narrative style agile enough to grasp the nuances of the complex female psyche–his womenfolk are too apt to define themselves in Mantegazzian manner, beginning sentences with the tell-tale words, 'Noi donne . . .'–but in the introspective analysis of the hero himself. The hero of 'Cecilia' refers to a 'sdoppiamento dello spirito', to the contemporaneous existence, that is, of two selves, one subject to the 'incanti della passione', the other observant and detached, a 'spettatrice tranquilla' (p. 229). It is a duality characteristic of all Capuana's narrators, undifferentiated as they are from story to story. The act of narration itself, with its double dimension of reportage and commentary, aids the exposure of the conflicting impulses within the self. In 'Giulia', for instance, the narrator's determination to act out the role of seducer conflicts with the compassion aroused in him by Giulia's tale, and he confesses: 'Mi era uopo di credere ch'ella avesse fatto a quel caso un pochino di frangia' (p. 51). In 'Ebe' it is the wounded vanity of the discarded lover which makes him deaf to the 'intima voce del cuore' assuring him that the fickle Ebe is genuinely repentant (p. 126). The most suggestive psychological commentary turns on the distorted motivation of the calculating narrator, and his capacity to will his own self-delusion. Capuana tends to give this commentary aphoristic form, as though fleeting observations were now encapsulated as laws of human behaviour. Some of his aphorisms are far from banal, as when the narrator generalizes on bad faith: 'L'uomo è così: quando non può trovare scusa nella realtà delle cose, fa di tutto per persuadersi che le cose stiano precise come giovano a lui' (p. 51). The analytical inspiration which provokes such a comment, and the spirit of the comment (if not its penetration and elegance), bear comparison with *Adolphe*, where Constant remarks for instance: 'Presque toujours, pour vivre en repos avec nous-mêmes, nous travestissons en calculs et en systèmes nos impuissances ou nos faiblesses: cela satisfait cette portion de nous qui est, pour ainsi dire, spectatrice de l'autre.'[109]

Adolphe makes skilful use of the dual plane of the narration–the events of the story as they happened and their reflection in the recollecting mind–to suggest the deceptiveness of immediate experience ('je *me sentais*, de la *meilleure foi* du monde, veritablement amoureux'; 'l'amour [. . .] je *crus* tout à coup l'éprouver avec fureur'; '*Pendant que je lui parlais*, je n'envisageais rien au delà de ce but et *j'étais sincère* dans mes promesses' etc.).[110] This technique Capuana uses often exposing particularly the intrusion of volition into spontaneous thought or emotion ('Mi era uopo di credere', 'avevo bisogno di persuadermi' (p. 51); 'Forse vi era un che di artificiale in tutto cotesto rimescolarsi di sentimenti' (p. 229); 'capivo forse', 'm'illudevo volentieri', 'mi ostinavo a credere' (p. 247) etc.). Its most concentrated use is in 'Cecilia', a story which is indeed thematically close to *Adolphe* (and has the same title as Constant's unfinished novel, *Cécile*). Though Capuana's hero, unlike Constant's, is not faced with the painful consequences of his inability to

terminate a relationship which has grown burdensome (for Cecilia obligingly deserts him) his story revolves about the same central irony as *Adolphe*: the ceaselessly analytical hero proves less lucid than the emotional woman.

An 'anatomist' of passion sometimes stands alongside the introspective hero, hypothesizing about personality on the basis of gesture or external appearance. The process is significantly termed 'un lavoro di ricostruzione simile a quello dei naturalisti' (p. 154). And when the 'anatomist' gives way to an 'artista' the tone is unchanged, for this is an 'artista' of the seventies who stands back to contemplate his subject with rational detachment. Whenever he appears (to describe the elegance of a drawing-room as the work of an 'abile artista' (p. 120), for instance, or to meditatively assess the liaison he is contemplating 'come poesia, come arte in azione' (p. 219)) it is to suggest that the real world is unfelt until permeated through the images of literature or art. The 'scientist' and the 'artist' resemble each other in their detachment, and their oneness is of course symptomatic of the times: the resolute, 'scientific', non-involvement of large sections of *Profili di donne* is an attempt to adjust the introspective analysis learnt from Constant to a modern context.

It was perhaps the spirit of those times too which allowed the stories relative freedom with the theme of sexual passion. Rapisardi referred jocularly to their 'onesta scollacciatura',[111] and indeed Capuana's heroines are not always above taking the initiative or displaying their sensuality. But as is so often the case with *Profili di donne* each advance is accompanied by a retreat. The narrator, for all his positivistic turn of mind, still thinks in terms dictated by conventional morality. Can Fasma, he wonders, so swift in deciding to rent part of his villa, be an 'avventuriera' (p. 70)? Could Cecilia be 'una delle solite *femmes de proie*' expert in simulating 'le più squisite, le più pudiche ritrosie della virtù' (p. 228)? As long as such questions seem relevant to the narrator, all his approval of spirited independence in a woman can seem only egotistical and vulgar. Capuana's stories often end with a sharp, clinching comment no doubt designed to be elegant and pithily memorable. Thus after Ebe's death, we read:

E già parlo tranquillamente, e già sorrido pensando che obliare è una profonda, una divina necessità della vita; (p. 142)

after Cecilia has left:

Povera Cecilia! Tu non avresti mai creduto che perfino il mio rimpianto di amore sarebbe un giorno sfumato perdendosi fra le nebbie di un problema di metafisica!; (p. 265)

and when the narrator has abandoned his assault on Giulia:

abbottonai con grande soddisfazione il mio soprabito; poi mi posi a camminare colla testa alta e col cuore in festa, come chi ha fatto il suo dovere. (p. 55)

There is an unpleasant touch of self-congratulation or vanity in each of these endings. But, more than this, there is the ironic distance of the classic moral conclusion. Capuana's realism is as yet not mature enough to allow his message to emerge spontaneously, and in this respect the critic has stolen a march on the writer.

In the course of *Profili di donne* Capuana had plenty of opportunity to examine the position of woman in society even if the scope of the work confined him to her sexual relationships. Giulia, after all, has been abandoned by a lover and now struggles to preserve her self-respect and her reputation. Delfina and Cecilia are the victims of arranged marriages, and Emilia absconds from home to join her lover. There was material enough for the author who had professed a warm interest in 'la donna moderna', 'libera e padrona di se stessa, mescolata in guisa molto attiva a tutto il movimento della società'. When he reviewed *Storia di una capinera*, Capuana had been sensitive to its specific 'Sicilianness' and the presence of a social system ready to swallow up defenceless Marias. Unlike other critics at the time, he refused to see the work as a new version of Diderot's *La religieuse* or as a 'diatriba contro le monache e i conventi': it was, he said, the story of 'la ragazza della borghesia siciliana della prima metà di questo secolo'.[112] And yet, in *Profili di donne*, he shows no interest in the way his women mesh into the general fabric of society, and little interest in the specific localities they inhabit. The misfortunes past and present of his women merely create in them an emotional tension on which his own narrator thrives, and it scarcely matters that the stories' settings vary from Milan and Florence to Siciliy.

Exceptions to the rule are only apparent. In 'Iela' Capuana may hazard a precise evocation of Sicily, its country lanes coming alive in early morning with carts bound for market, drivers sprawled across their load, listlessly smoking, the view of Spaccaforno from 'l'isoletta de Porri', and the sand dunes of Marza; equally he may include an italicized '*Bedda matri*' or '*Voscenza*' (p. 158). But these details, though refreshing after the anonymous, tasteful drawing-rooms and public parks of preceding stories, remain mere scenic backdrop and shed no light on the thoughts or actions of the characters. In the same story Capuana's description of the oppressive mid-day heat, the isolation of a cove, and the murmuring swell of the sea creates a languid atmosphere which hastens the moment of Emilia's sexual capitulation—a single instance in *Profili di donne* of a *milieu* precipitating events. But in its isolation it is more the illustration of a psychological *aperçu*—behaviour is conditioned by time and opportunity—than a promise of real interest in the way individuals may function in a given environment. The same is true of 'Cecilia' in which a Milanese park where the lovers habitually meet becomes an enchanted garden and an integral part of their relationship. When the relationship is transplanted and perishes, the park, to which Maurizio returns in search of the past, seems charmless too. The park, the background, merely provides an opportunity to stress the psychological insight that perception is subjective. *Profili di donne* is a

catalogue of psychological observations abstracted from the conditions which generate them in life; the volume seems light-weight not only because of its sentimentality, its male condescension and its stylistic defects, but because its psychological realism is partial and rootless.

It is as though his scientific reading had made Capuana feel that his characters could best be studied in the aseptic conditions of a laboratory, their psychological functioning better evinced without the intrusion of a chaotic, too-specific reality. Just as his criticism moved by choice within the ambit of purely aesthetic values and ignored literature's political or social implications whenever it could, so his narrative, even when naturalism had taught him the importance of environment, tended to skimp the social dimension in which his characters moved. The old preference for the literary 'type' perhaps lingered on, suggesting that the more contingent detail he included, the more limited the general value of his work.

This consideration was particularly relevant at the time of *Profili di donne*. Capuana's experience as a critic of French literature and his recently acquired view of literature as a series of evolving forms convinced him that, if Italy was to find a place within the mainstream of European literature, he must strive on her behalf to shape any work of art according to art's 'ultima forma'; and he looked to France, which by common consent bore the palm of modernity, for his inspiration, and wrote a work which aimed deliberately at general accessibility in the belief that the viability of Italian literature lay not in its regions but in areas where its spiritual proximity to the rest of Europe was most palpable. It was for this reason that *Profili di donne* sought a text-book reality as 'true' in Milan and Catania as in Paris, and was oblivious of those regional demarcations that had seemed responsible in part for the failure of the national theatre. Capuana's narrator in *Profili di donne* was moreover a man anxious to prove his sophistication. And if Capuana had anything in common with his narrator, how intolerable it would have seemed to him to 'return' to the provinces he had struggled to leave behind: *verismo's* regionalism was still unthinkable, and *Nedda* merely a taste for the exotic.

CHAPTER II

FROM NATURALISM TO 'VERISMO'

1. *The Impact of French Naturalism*

In *Profili di donne* contemporary scientific thinking persuaded Capuana to look very concretely at human emotions and suggested materialistic interpretations for them. But the volume also made ample concessions to the concept of 'drawing-room literature' (*letteratura amena*), and the scientific approach was therefore somewhat coy and apologetic. Capuana was still a 'curioso' for whom science was merely an interesting additional instrument of psychological analysis, not a total approach to reality. The second half of the seventies, during which he was profoundly influenced by French naturalism, was to change all this. His novel, *Giacinta*, which appeared only two years after *Profili di donne*, in 1879, seems to thrust the stories into a remote past. It is the most 'naturalist' of Capuana's fiction, the most consistently inspired by the kind of scientific determinism favoured by the Goncourt brothers and Zola.

Between 1877 and 1880 Capuana stayed for long periods in Milan, sometimes in the company of Verga. From December 1876 he wrote regular reviews for the *Corriere della sera*. A first collection of some of these articles, entitled *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: prima serie*,[1] reveals an avant-garde Capuana seeking to elaborate the theory of a 'scientific' art which will condition the narrative techniques and aims of *Giacinta*.

'Ho trovato molte e molte persone', Capuana wrote home during a brief visit to Rome in the late autumn of 1875, 'che ricordano ancora le appendici della Nazione'.[2] It was natural that after a seven-year parenthesis he should return to journalism as the drama critic so many people remembered. But he did so only briefly and only to reassert the negative verdict on the theatre of the preface to *Il Teatro italiano contemporaneo*, earning from fellow journalists the title of 'Geremia'. Once again he contrasted drama and narrative to the disadvantage of the former: 'si scorge sul palcoscenico la mancanza di quei passaggi e di quelle gradazioni che rendon piani, naturali, commoventi i casi più arrischiati del romanzo.'[3] The significant emphasis falls on the way narrative opens up a new dimension in subject-matter, a reality hitherto unexamined because 'arrischiata'. Other critics, Giorgio Arcoleo for instance, were conscious that not all material lent itself conveniently to 'l'ottica del teatro' and stood in need of 'analisi' and

'svolgimento'.[4] But Capuana's particular stress recals the relatively uninhibited treatment of sexuality in 'Iela' and even more the future author of *Giacinta*.

Capuana dismissed the theatre, he claimed, in the name of 'i più indiscutibili principi di arte che la scienza moderna abbia fissati'.[5] These principles are, of course, the evolutionary ones he drives jointly from Hegelianism and positivism. Literary form, he writes, using the word in De Meis's sense 'non è un accidente, è una necessità creativa. La sua evoluzione somiglia su per giù a quella che si riscontra nella creazione delle forme naturali, [. . .] Le forme si seguono ma non si rassomigliano, e sopratutto non si ripetono' (p. 303).

It seemed to Capuana and his contemporaries that all branches of knowledge were united under the banner of evolutionism; and while scientific research now had the patient task of elucidating individual evolutionary patterns and studying those crucial areas where the physical became spiritual, where biological life became mental life, it could be sure that behind each observed phenomenon there lay the great unity of a material universe. If science crushed the pride of metaphysical man by reducing him to matter, it compensated him, as Claude Bernard had said, with the power of understanding his universe. This sense of power gave the period its scientific optimism, and Capuana shared it throughout his life, but never so enthusiastically as in this period when he first 'discovered' science and could not yet know that its progress would be slow and undramatic.

One of its immediate effects is to suggest to him that literary scholarship may be undertaken with 'una precisione di metodo da non invidiar nulla a quello delle scienze naturali':

> Portare nella storia della letteratura il metodo di osservazione positiva già adoperato per le scienze naturali ed ora anche per lo studio delle religioni, non è un tentativo pericoloso e di semplice analogia. I tre mondi umani della sensazione, del sentimento e della ragione corrispondono ai tre mondi minerale, vegetale ed animale della natura. (p. 305)

Following the work of Taine such an achievement seemed far from impossible; and it occurs to Capuana that Gaetano Trezza's *Critica moderna* has in part fulfilled his desire. Trezza, professor of Latin at the Istituto Superiore of Florence, had indeed brought evolutionary criteria to bear on literary studies. 'E' a punto', he wrote:

> questa relazione dell'antichità colla modernità, questo considerare non come parti che stiano ciascuno per sè, ma come gradi diversi di una evoluzione medesima, che ha fatto della critica una scienza, della scienza una storia. E' l'organismo che ora si cerca, non il frammento.[6]

And the articles of this period constantly acknowledge the concept of literature as a developing 'organismo'. Such a concept almost predestines Rapisardi's poem *Lucifero* to oblivion as an example of the epic form which 'la riflessione scientifica ha già distrutto' (p. 156); or it rescues the modern lyric, as created by Fontana, from extinction because it bodies forth a sense of the infinite, and approximates to

the pure abstraction of music, the most contemplative and 'advanced' of the arts. It ensures too that Capuana's perspective is European. For any nation may at some time produce the definitive example of a given form of literature and so point out the way for writers of other nations. Thus it was not only his passionate interest in science but his desire to surpass by emulation that made Capuana so responsive to the naturalist avant-garde of France.

Both before and after March 1877, when Capuana reviewed *L'Assommoir*, Italians had given Zola a chilly reception. There were exceptions, prominent among them Felice Cameroni. But Treves's *Illustrazione italiana* attacked Zola on moral grounds (though the editor, as Cameroni indignantly informed Zola, 'ne croyait pas s'encanailler faisant de l'argent avec les traductions');[7] and Pasquale Villari reminded him that to ignore 'la parte più nobile dell'uomo' was to betray that same total 'verità' he was concerned to purvey.[8] De Sanctis had not yet written his *Studio sopra Emilio Zola*, so that it was with considerable courage that Capuana spoke of the 'poesia', the 'sentimento elevato' of *L'Assommoir* (p. 64).

The chief appeal of the novel was for Capuana its directness of impact, the impression of a 'diretta realtà' emerging from Zola's exuberant description (p. 51). Capuana notes that in *Le ventre de Paris* and *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* Zola's descriptions sometimes run riot; but in *L'Assommoir* there is none of that gratuitous dwelling on externals which had clearly given 'realism' as popularly understood the reputation of pandering to debased appetites:

> Giacchè il *realismo* dello Zola (diciamo pure questa brutta parola) non è precisamente quale l'intendono i *realisti* di progetto. Del particolare, del colore, delle minuzie egli non si serve per uno scopo puramente esteriore, ma soltanto perchè gli giovano a far penetrare il lettore nell'intimo spirito dei suoi personaggi. (p. 63)

It is interesting that Capuana should choose to emphasize the psychological dimension of the novel, the 'intimo spirito' of creatures such as Gervaise and Coupeau. Remarkable too—for Capuana must have known the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon* of 1871, where Zola spoke of the overall plan of the *Rougon-Macquart*—is the absence of any comment on how *L'Assommoir* fitted into the general scheme of an 'Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire'.[9] The significance of both the emphasis and the omission will become clear as we examine the nature of Capuana's own 'realism'.

By the time Capuana reviewed Zola again in June 1879 (*Une page d'amour*) De Sanctis's long study of Zola had been published.[10] It provides a useful yardstick against which to explore Capuana's own response to naturalism.

In Zola's cycle of novels De Sanctis sees nothing less than a society on trial, accused of corruption and materialism:

> Qui è una nazione che comincia a riflettere e a impensierirsi, e fa la faccia scura. Zola è l'anima di questa nazione. [. . .] Mentre gli uomini imbestiati gavazzano, ci è

intorno a loro non so che di glaciale che li accusa. E' il tono di Zola, la sua idealità.

He acclaims Zola's realism as evidence of a severe moral energy that can regenerate society; but he also stresses its limitations. Zola's work, with its deliberate stress on 'animalità', has the character of a moral reaction to 'uno spiritualismo esagerato e a un ideale diventato rettorico'.[11] This reaction is salutary but necessarily transitional—two years later in fact De Sanctis calls Zola not a 'precursore del nuovo' but a 'becchino dell'antico'.[12] Nor can the scientific framework of *Les Rougon-Macquart* have any artistic significance for De Sanctis, the champion of art's autonomy. He considers Zola's discovery of the laws of heredity valuable only as a creative stimulus: 'gli ha aguzzato l'invenzione e gli ha aperto le piaghe più occulte delle azioni umane.'[13] Throughout the essay runs that tone of moral elevation which in De Sanctis always makes literature a force of ethical awareness, not an act of gratuitous aestheticism.

Capuana's Zola is by contrast much less a propagandist or a moralist, more a scientist striving after 'pure' truth. 'I *Rougon-Macquart* sono un trattato di fisiologia in azione', its key 'l'influenza ereditaria', the 'infiltrarsi dell'elemento scientifico' is 'un vero *segno del tempo*' writes the enthusiastic Capuana (pp. 66-7). But he does not entirely forget De Sanctis and 'la libera natura dell'arte': È ridicolo il credere che lo Zola voglia dare al carattere scientifico del suo lavoro un'importanza maggiore di quella che gli se ne può accordare in un'opera d'arte' (p.73). Nevertheless there are moments when the autonomy of art is at least threatened. In the following passage for instance Capuana sees art and science functioning in fundamentally similar ways:

Nella vita reale la legge ereditaria spesso vien attraversata dall'accidente; o vi si attua a sbalzi; o non compie sempre il suo processo. In questo caso è innegabile la superiorità dell'arte. Raccogliendo attorno ad un individuo tutte le possibili circostanze per produrre inesorabilmente lo scoppio della forza fatale dell'eredità, l'arte non mentisce rimpetto alla scienza. La sua possibilità diventa quasi più vera della stessa *realtà*. Eliminando il cieco accidente, creando una serie di circostanze simili a quelle che in altri *casi reali* hanno prodotto questo o quel risultato, l'arte raddoppia di valore, acquista un valore scientifico. (p. 71)

Indeed the work of art, conceived in this rigorously demonstrative way, *is* a form of 'scienza'. And Capuana clearly feels, unlike De Sanctis, that Zola's scientific inspiration has helped him to shape a truer, less arbitrary reality, a reality having 'valore scientifico'. The aesthetic respectability of this argument lies entirely in the implication that scientific knowledge merely makes conscious and deliberate what are normally more or less instinctive processes of artistic selection; in the implication that science, in short, provides a superior artistic *method* without demanding that literature be substantially based in its discoveries. But this was an aspect of the discussion to which Capuana returned only when the whole conception of the experimental novel was under attack. In the meantime it is

difficult to distinguish between scientific and artistic truth, and science and literature seem to pursue the same cognitive ends. Their alliance is symptomatic of the times, but also, in Capuana, limiting.

These limits we can see in an article on Edmond de Goncourt and Jean de la Rue, where Capuana pursues the discussion of scientific realism. He responds readily to the programmatic statements of the preface to *Les Frères Zemganno* which anticipate a progress from the realism of the 'canaille' to the realism of the refined Parisian salon. This progression Capuana finds written into the natural order of things. It is natural that 'si va dal più materiale al più spirituale, allo stesso modo che da una forma più semplice e inferiore ad una forma più ricca e superiore' (p. 86). Capuana explains the preference of modern authors for the 'parte più animalesca' of man exclusively in terms of a necessary scientific and technical apprenticeship (p. 85). A man of the lower classes, he writes, 'ha dell'animale':

L'organismo del suo sentimento, l'embrione dell'organismo del suo spirito sono di un'estrema semplicità e *possono afferrarsi facilmente*. (Underlining mine.)

But meanwhile:

In cima alla scala sociale le differenze dall'uomo del popolo sono così enormi che può dirsi addirittura si tratti non di un'altra razza, ma di un'altra umanità. (p. 85)

This was not the first time a writer had looked at society in terms of an aesthetic hierarchy—Francesco Dall'Ongaro thought that fellow writers would find more that was 'poetic' and 'picturesque' in the provinces than in sophisticated cities[14]—but it can seldom have been done with such startling social insensitivity. The fact is that Capuana's vision of society is *abstractly* mechanistic. He partitions society in conformity with what his science has taught him of the psycho-physical nature of man, but there is little social awareness, only an aesthetic-scientific attraction to his human material. The appeal of the pathological character is of the same order:

quello che pel volgo è unicamente una stranezza o una mattezza, per l'artista, per lo scienziato (che oggi sono sul punto di confondersi in uno) diventa un *caso* artistico o scientifico di grande importanza. C'è in esso del rigoglio, dell'esuberanza di forze e di vitalità [. . .] errori, colpe, illogicità di sentimenti e di passioni che per l'arte e per la scienza hanno un immenso valore. (p. 88)

The scientific vision, the pathological character, give back to chaotic reality its true shape, they reveal its fundamentally organic nature, its hidden links of cause and effect. But in Capuana they also impoverish it, for it becomes the object of a neutral gaze, concerned only with the 'purity' of a truth which in fact is never pure. This attitude explains why Capuana pays no attention to the social dimension of *L'Assommoir* and stresses its internal, psychological aspect; he may be compared to the scientist, who, with microscope in hand, conducts his analysis without thought for the impact of his work outside the laboratory; and the abstractly scientific quality of his realism is one of the weaknesses of *Giacinta*.

2. *The Practice of Naturalism: 'Giacinta'*

It was during his visit to Rome in 1875 that Capuana conceived the idea of *Giacinta*. In the course of an evening's stroll with Senator Lorenzo De Luca Capuana learnt the story of Marchesa Maria Cesare Di Bourbon Del Monte, which was to become, with modifications and additions, the story of Contessa Giacinta Grippa Di San Celso. Describing the genesis of the novel in the preface to its third edition (1889), Capuana also tells how in fear of public outcry he abandoned a work called *Adriana*, the story of a woman whom 'un difetto fisico impedì di amare interamente'.[15] Clearly the Senator's 'human document' produced a shock of recognition in Capuana: Adrianna's 'difetto fisico' which was to have been the 'perno dell'azione' became the episode, half rape, half seduction, involving the child, Giacinta, and the young manservant, Beppe. The early trauma was to determine the rest of Giacinta's behaviour, was to become another 'pernio d'azione'.

The comments of the preface, though written a decade after the first appearance of *Giacinta* and overlaid with a faint air of apologia, harmonize with the views on art and the evolution of Form expounded in the seventies. To Capuana the France of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola seemed the terrain where the most modern form of literature, the novel, was best developed. But to have identified the 'addentellato' from which Italians must start out only resolved Capuana's problems in part. In Italy the modern novel seemed to Capuana to have no tradition. Manzoni no longer served in a world of 'idee nuove, complicatissime, da esigere sfumature d'ogni sorta'. Tommaseo (whose cultural *formazione* was, significantly, French) had gone some way in *Fede e Bellezza* to assimilating the 'forma narrativa francese', but his achievement was isolated and went unrecognized. In Italy there were only 'imitazioni feuilletane'. Thus *Giacinta* was a tentative effort to transplant a form of literature and to found a modern tradition. It was a 'primo saggio di romanzo contemporaneo italiano, dove si tentava l'analisi d'un carattere, lo studio d'una passione vera, benchè strana, anzi patologica'. This is a large claim and Capuana, as an author, doubtless has an interest in stressing Italy's narrative barrenness and his own literary pioneering. But the clear supremacy of the French novel must have created genuine problems. Many other writers, along with Capuana, complain that the Italian novel has a French flavour (Luigi Gualdo even took to publishing in French), and that Italian writers, lacking a malleable, analytical style capable of representing 'un mondo esteriore e interiore molto particolare, molto individuale, come prima non usava', pepper their prose with gallicisms. Capuana mentions his own failure to escape from the precedent of Balzac 'dove l'autore interviene e giudica e riflette', even though he preferred a narrative form where 'l'autore si sforza di nascondersi'.[16]

Giacinta, as one of Capuana's characters comments, is 'un caso di patologia morale',[17] and the novel is an attempt to explain the genesis and the consequences of her 'neurosis'. Writing this time several months after the completion of *Giacinta*,

Capuana approvingly quoted Dumas *fils*: 'Una situazione non è un'idea. Un'idea ha un principio, uno sviluppo e una conclusione. Tutti possono trovare una situazione drammatica, ma convien prepararla, farla accettare, renderla possibile, sopratutto, scioglierla'.[18] In *Giacinta* Capuana deliberately set himself a hard task: for his heroine, because of the childhood scandal and the persistent gossip it arouses, refuses the redemption of marriage to the man she loves, preferring instead to give herself freely outside the bounds of legal constraint. For form's sake she marries an aristocratic non-entity, and in the same day becomes Andrea's mistress. This is the central aberrant choice which Capuana must make 'possible' and 'acceptable' The rest of the narrative traces the history of the extra-legal 'marriage', through its development, fulfilment, and decline, sealed by Giacinta's suicide. The challenge of *Giacinta* lies not in emphasizing the pathological, but in presenting the heroine's abnormal reactions as comprehensible and inevitable reactions to the difficulties of her situation. Following Zola's example, and in the light of contemporary scientific thinking, the novel presents a highly organized world-view, a rigorous interlocking of cause and effect, and the confident assumption that the impulses behind human behaviour can be accurately analysed and quantified, as in this exemplary passage, describing the growing discontent of Andrea, who is maintained by Giacinta:

In fondo a quell'apatria morale, che le passione aveva ricoperto di un involucro nuovo, erasi prodotta una *lenta fermentazione* per via di *tante circostanze* che, *sebbene disgregate*, erano all'ultimo riuscite ad un *effetto quasi per ragion di meccanismo. Picchia oggi, picchia domani*, le cento umiliazioni dovute ingollare avevano scosso quel po' di generosità spontanea, innata. [. . .] L'uso, la monotonia *bastarono* quindi per resto. (pp. 185-6). (Italics mine.)

Multiple but specifiable circumstances aggravate the genetic datum of 'apatia morale' to produce a given result. A work of art, Capuana had repeatedly said, is a model reality with no room for accidents, and in *Giacinta* his long and conscientious psychological analyses show gradual mutations of feeling and are slanted to stress that the events they provoke are inevitable. Giacinta's decision not to marry Andrea elicits the following 'Balzacian' gloss which is also a key to Capuana's inspiration:

Le conseguenze di una falsa premessa non si sfuggono mai; nemmeno quando ci si è accorti di aver commesso uno sbaglio. La violenza dei fatti s'impone alla umana volontà come il Fato degli antichi, e la commedia o la tragedia della vita, spesso tutte e due intrecciate insieme, precipitano ruinose alla loro trista catastrofe. (p. 96)

The book undoubtedly owes much to the literary models of France, and recalls Capuana's admission that 'la ricerca critica di quello che prima è stato fatto dagli altri'[19] has always stimulated his own creativity. Capuana has not entirely forgotten Dumas *fils*. His influence appears where Capuana, succumbing to his old, cherished notion that the fair sex is inexplicable, sees in Giacinta 'un misto [. . .] di semplicità, d'ingenuità, di pudore di vergine con qualcosa di esperto, di maturo, di

crudo, di quasi nudo proprio di chi abbia molto bevuto alla gran tazza della vita' (p. 14)—an example of that modern womanhood which so fascinated the author of *Profili di donne*. There are Dumasian generalizations, again reminiscent of the stories, on the 'pudori, le castità della donna' (p. 145).[20] And Giacinta like her predecessors is given to bewailing the universal gullibility of women in affairs of the heart. A poignantly cheerful consumptive named Elvira, who appears towards the end of the novel to distract Andrea from Giacinta, may be modelled, as Capuana claims, on the *'Dea loci'* of his Milanese lodgings in Via Dogana.[21] But she seems to spring less from the 'human document' than from the tradition of Marguerite Gautier. Though the 'curioso del cuore umano' is no longer the 'sultan of a harem' but a scientific anatomist of feminine psychology, the links with a literary past are obvious.

One of the fundamental themes of the novel—a fact which has escaped even those critics who question the innovatory value of *Giacinta*—is the dissolution of the romantic myth of Eternal Love. It was a theme explored by both Verga and Constant. In *Una peccatrice, Eva* and *Adolphe* Capuana would have found a discussion of how passion may isolate its 'victim' and preclude any possibility of normal self-realization in society.[22] Similarly in *Giacinta* Andrea agrees to resign his post in order to stay with Giacinta, though conscious that his resignation 'distruggeva il suo avvenire' (p. 162); and in moments when he feels 'proprio uomo' he will dream of the broader commitments which romantic passion denies him: 'perchè non andarsene in Francia a cercar la morte fra i volontari di Garibaldi che combattevano i Prussiani?' (p. 196). The motif is more peripheral than in Capuana's models. Nevertheless Giacinta's own realization that 'la loro passione non sarebbe durata eterna nel medesimo grado d'intensità' (p. 173) is one cause of her mental derangement. And the parabola of the book, from passion indulged in defiance of social law, to emotional satiety, and the choice of death, has a backward-looking air. Capuana himself referred to the suicide as 'una concessione allora fatta alla pretesa idealizzazione ritenuta necessaria in un'opera d'arte', and intended to excise it (though he never did) in future editions.[23]

One critic traces Giacinta's wedding and suicide to Emma Bovary and remarks on the recurrence of a *fiacre* episode.[24] A generic derivation is undeniable and there are other possible reminiscences of *Madame Bovary*. In both novels there are stolid husbands who do nothing to impede their wives' adultery and sometimes facilitate it; and prosaic lovers secretly exasperated at the indiscrete behaviour of their excitable mistresses. A less superficial similarity is the period of religious exaltation, with all its false emotion, which affects Giacinta and Emma after a debilitating illness. And something of Emma and her attitudes to her child, neglectful and sentimental by turns, may have filtered into the treatment of Giacinta's mother, Teresa Marulli. The connexion is oblique since Capuana is interested not in the mother but in the effects of emotional deprivation in the child. Yet the visits of Teresa, accompanied by a 'cousin', to the wet-nurse in charge of her unwanted

daughter recall strongly Emma's and Léon's country walk to the 'nourrice'. Léon's presence at the cradle strikes a faint note of depravity which Capuana, pledged in the name of science to face the morally reprehensible ('è il suo concetto scientifico che gl'impedisce di esser *prude*', he wrote of Zola),[25] may have found worth remembering. Giacinta, like Emma, wants a male child, but gives birth to a girl.

By far the greatest influence was Zola. The novel was dedicated to him, and bore as epigraph Capuana's statement of good faith:

> Ho la coscienza di avere scritto un libro nè ipocrita nè immorale.
> Così fossi egualmente sicuro di aver fatto, com'era mia intenzione, una vera opera d'arte!

This defensive statement together with the name of the 'immoral' Zola invited the conclusion that 'chi si scusa si accusa'.[26] *Giacinta* was consistently reviewed against the background of *L'Assommoir* and moralists had a field-day. The bookseller Casanova, in Turin, removed the novel from display, and Emilio Treves lashed out at Capuana as a 'sotto-Stecchetti', a 'vice-Tronconi', a 'quarto di Zola'.[27] On the other hand Felice Cameroni defended *Giacinta* as 'un défi aux adversaires du naturalisme'.[28] The rationalistic, analytical texture of the writing is the product of an age of materialism. The emphasis on heredity derives more particularly from Zola.

Teresa Marulli is a domineering, cold woman who by dint of carefully calculated adulteries (the last with the director of a bank) has raised her family to a position of power and financial pre-eminence in the provincial town where it lives. Giacinta's elderly father is dull-witted and affectionate. He is a man 'con la barba nerissima, cogli occhi prominenti, iniettati di sangue' (p. 24); all suggestive of a violent temperament, Capuana tells us, which however never manifests itself. The independent spirit of the mother and the latent violence of the father combine in Giacinta to give her capacity for devotion a ruthless and obsessive quality. Conte Giulio, Giacinta's husband, is the degenerate product of generations of aristocratic inbreeding. Intellectually befuddled by this process as he is, he none the less reveals from time to time traces of the 'squisita gentilezza che deriva dal sangue, la legge dell'eredità naturale', Capuana interpolates, 'non valendo soltanto per le malattie' (p. 103).

The author of *Profili di donne*, in the era of the 'studio fisiologico dell'uomo morale', was already fascinated by the idea of the nervous system as a storehouse of memories and sensations. The rape in *Giacinta* is nicely situated in an area where the physical and the psychological mingle. Given Capuana's interest in these areas of ambiguity, it is natural that the novel should show some response to Zola's view that the first sexual experiences are crucial (Gervaise, in *L'Assommoir*, remains an easy prey to Lantier even after thirteen years of separation because it is as though 'cet homme eût laissé là, sous la peau, quelque chose de lui').[29] At puberty Giacinta's faded memories of Beppe emerge with a new precision, as though 'i

nervi, il sangue, le fibre' (p. 47) had received an indelible imprint. Similarly Giacinta feels that even when she no longer cares deeply for Andrea she still belongs permanently and exclusively to him ('rimarrebbe sempre nel mio organismo un'impronta di lui che non si può scancellare' (p. 185)); and Andrea in his turn regards the long relationship as having left 'in tutto il suo organismo come un marchio indelebile'. And this, runs Capuana's gloss, is an 'attaccamento animale dove la riflessione non entrava punto' (p. 201). Zolian too, though often over-written in Capuana, are the portraits of the characters, conceived in rigid conformity to the laws of race and environment. Thus Beppe, who has undertaken every 'basso mestiere', is a 'ragazzaccio dall'aria quasi minchiona, un po' tarchiato, con la testa grossa, gli occhi pieni di malizia e di voglie animali' (p. 33), and represents the corruption and the bestiality of the 'canaille'. At each presentation of a character there is a similar resumé of his or her past experience, stressing its impact on personality; and a similar, 'categorizing' physical portrait. Capuana clearly intends to establish a Zolian chain of causality which will impinge on the way events are understood and evaluated by the reader. But he is sometimes over-eager. Thus Andrea's weakness and superficiality is so firmly and frequently stressed that the reader not only foresees their consequences, but has difficulty in remembering that Andrea is, after all, supposed to be faced with a moral dilemma. Capuana's analysis, Verga said tactfully, was 'too conscientious': 'se avessi sacrificato qualche volta la verità dell'analisi all'effetto drammatico, avresti forse avuto più largo consenso di pubblico grosso'.[30]

Capuana had been particularly interested in the 'intimo spirito' of Zola's characters from *L'Assommoir*. In *Giacinta* he aims to show the *necessità* of his chosen series of events by analysing their psychological causation: the novel has a strictly linear plot whose movement depends exclusively on the reactions of Giacinta and Andrea. Secondary characters could be allowed to live only in the shadow of the couple. But the naturalist canon meant that Capuana had to show the influence of 'milieu', the decisive pressure exerted on Giacinta by the opinion of other characters, however minor. Here were two imperatives, one concerned with the allocation of narrative space, the other with naturalist ideology, which tended to be mutually contradictory. Capuana seems to have decided that if he was obliged to be brief, he would at least be forceful. The result is caricature (to which no doubt the unflinching, demystifying stance of the naturalist made its contribution). Giacinta's husband, who declines into veritable dementia, becomes a grotesque, sub-human creature (the centre of a single touching scene in which Giacinta, on the verge of suicide, begs his forgiveness and elicits only an automatic 'Va bene, va bene' (p. 228)—a scene which presages the last encounter of Agrippina and the demented Marchese di Roccaverdina). Brevity has made the *habitués* of the Marulli drawing-room mere gesticulating symbols of small-town hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. Caricature is particularly evident in the opening chapter where Giacinta is set in her social context:

La moglie del procuratore del re, una bionda grassona, che sembrava volesse far scoppiare il busto del vestito e sudava come una spugna; la sorella del ricevitore del registro, magra, stecchita, capelli grigi sur un faccione da mula e l'occhio destro di traverso [. . .] La stridula sorella del ricevitore, zitellona sarcastica e maldicente, rompeva spesso la conversazione come una stonatura di violino. Rimpetto a lei, ritto in piedi, col piglio vivace e canzonatore di uno scimmiotto, l'avvocato Ratti si dimenava e gesticolava raccontava una storiella, che interrotta a ripresa più volte, provocava un'ilarità chiassona. (p. 11).

The presence of such a grotesque and trivial humanity may highlight Giacinta's own integrity and refinement (which is what Capuana is bent on proving), but it cannot at the same time convincingly weigh upon her actions. On one occasion Capuana strives to dramatize the conflict between Giacinta and her social 'milieu'. After illness, when Giacinta is still confined to her sick-room, she begins to receive regular visits from a decrepit gallant named Mochi. Soon it is revealed that in view of her past he is aiming to secure a mistress and not a wife. The episode is intended to be representative, and to mark a stage in Giacinta's increasingly defiant attitude towards society. But we have heard too much of the mystery of Mochi's age, his suspiciously raven hair and youthful figure for his advances to be anything more than absurd. Giacinta's 'revenge' on society, the 'victories' and 'truces' of her struggle, exist only on the level of verbal assertion; and when society and parents have done their worst, they fade from Capuana's purview or are allowed to die.

Capuana is by temperament a psychological novelist and not a novelist of *ambiente*. It is arguable that some of his best work is to be found in psychological short stories, and the reader of even his most successful novel, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, will sense occasionally that the peripheral characters who represent society at large have become cyphers whose only role is to impart motion to the central psychological drama. In Zola society conditions the individual, but also reflects him: theirs is a reciprocal and developing relationship. Its exclusive office in *Giacinta* is to perpetuate the trauma of the rape at an identical pitch of intensity. In so doing it becomes merely one more datum in a psychological or pathological 'problem', with the same value as Giacinta's genetic make-up and physiology. Hence society as Capuana depicts it through minor characters is *uniformly* grasping and hypocritical (Mochi, Teresa). And where it might be expected to modulate Giacinta's existence differently (in a husband or in a kindly father) there is the *trouvaille* of Giulio's imbecility and the perfect ineffectuality of Signor Paulo. Events of social magnitude are almost absent from the book. The lively scene of the failure of the Banca Agricola which opens Chapter VII peters out into an oblique comment on the financial astuteness of Teresa; Giacinta's visit to the 'veglione' is no more than an 'illustration' of her masochistic desire for self-abasement.

In view of Capuana's predominantly psychological interests it is not surprising that he shows to best advantage when he is 'setting-up' the problem from which the rest of the action will evolve. The opening chapter of the novel describes an evening

in the Marulli drawing-room, and comes to a climax with Giacinta's mysterious refusal to marry Andrea. We have been warned that Giacinta is a woman 'un po' diversa dalle altre' (p. 21). The following four chapters are a long 'flash-back' intended to elucidate this, and to demonstrate the rationale behind the refusal. Capuana describes Giacinta's lonely childhood, her disgrace at the hands of Beppe followed by her banishment to a boarding-school, the disillusionment of her social *début*. Chapter V describes the early history of her relationship with Andrea, and brings us in time to the point of her announcement in Chapter I. The *antefatto* is over.[31] In the closing lines of the chapter the name of Conte Giulio points to the future course of the novel.

With an unloving mother, a father who believes that daughters are best left to the womenfolk, abandoned to the care of indifferent servants, Giacinta grows up 'come una povera pianticina spuntata per cattiva sorte in luogo umido e ombrato' (p. 31). Capuana describes with delicacy and perception the long hours of solitude, the private fantasies and games, the periods of 'tristezza precoce' of the child (p. 31). While Giacinta is still too young for introspection she can draw none of the psychological conclusions which proliferate in later sections of the novel, and make Capuana's intentions over-explicit. Capuana's method here is cumulative and descriptive. The garden, for instance, with its ornamental stream, its great, shady trees, and the hidden plot with its canopy of perfumed convolvulus behind the covered walk, is not merely backdrop, but a unique, indispensable condition of Giacinta's disastrous friendship with Beppe. Capuana perhaps recalled the luxuriant vegetation of le Paradou from *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* where Serge and Albine make love in primaeval innocence, but Giacinta's garden with its secret recesses and rank growths hints at a lurking corruption. The Capuana of these descriptions reminds us of the critic who noticed how the unique 'passaggi' and 'gradazioni' of the novel could pave the way for scenes which would be unacceptable in other genres.

Giacinta is lonely enough to tolerate Beppe's whims for the sake of the only friendship she has. The gradual degeneration of their games is skilfully set against the psychological background of Giacinta's emotional needs and the physical background of the secluded garden where the two are left to their own devices. The combination of innocence and curiosity in Giacinta, and her friendless dependence on Beppe, are handled so convincingly that the intermittent reminders of Beppe's innate corruption seem superfluous. More courageous and more effective than Capuana's Zolian annotations is his refusal to ignore Giacinta's 'compiacimento malsano' experienced in 'quel nuovo genere di chiasso a cui Beppe l'invitava' (p. 41). In the whole of the episode the spirit of realism has the dignity of accuracy (though this will not always be so: the maid's comment on the rape, 'Accidenti! [. . .] La comincia anche prestino' (p. 43), or Giacinta's on the consummation of her marriage, 'Oh! . . . credevo peggio!' (p. 134), show how the shock effects of realism can be tastelessly abused). The culminating scene is not represented

directly, but through the intuitions of a servant girl who sees Giacinta emerge, bewildered and crying, from the covered walk, followed by Beppe who, 'confuso, pieno di rabbia, la scuoteva brutalmente pel braccio dicendole sottovoce: 'Stai zitta!' (p. 42).

The combination of audacious subject-matter and restraint of treatment produces a uniquely satisfying passage. The role of Beppe in the rest of the novel, however, is worth examining for the light it sheds on an originality of psychological intuition for which Capuana has not had full credit. Faithful to his mechanistic view of society, Capuana seldom lets us forget that Beppe's is fundamentally a 'natura bestiale' (p. 42). Yet, alongside the Zolian Beppe, there is the Beppe who is ingenious, humorous and entertaining, a willing servant and a precursor of Capuana's attractive orphans, Scurpiddu and Cardello. And perhaps the boldest and most persuasive psychological *aperçu* of the book occurs when, at boarding-school before Giacinta has absorbed society's view of sexual sin, she remembers Beppe with 'un sentimento di postuma gratitudine', for having loved her 'a modo suo'. The garden, in this awakening of memories assumes 'proporzioni grandiose e splendori abbaglianti' (p. 48). Four years later, when she returns home, Giacinta finds the garden, recently furbished with wrought iron work and terracotta statues, pretentious and artificial. At the same time the innuendo of servants and the knowing glances of Teresa's friends corrupt and coarsen the image of Beppe: 'La figura di Beppe [. . .] non le si presentava più quella di prima. La irrideva sguaiata' (pp. 58-9). Henceforward Capuana adheres to a view of Beppe as the first link in a fatal chain that will bring Giacinta to suicide. Beppe's last appearance, as the coachman who drives her to the 'veglione', coincides with the moment of Giacinta's maximum self-degradation to stress the chain of causality initiated by him. Yet more eloquent than all Giacinta's explicit reactions of disgust, is her final unadorned vision of him: 'In tredici anni aveva cambiato poco o nulla nell'aspetto. Solamente era più muscoloso e più aitante e la sua divisa di cocchiere gli stava bene' (p. 208). In the novel Beppe is a minor character, introduced to serve a purpose. Thus it is almost in spite of Capuana that he emerges more appealingly sane and vigorous than any other character, possessed of a kind of animal innocence which jauntily ignores the plans made for him.

But if Beppe seems to defy Capuana's own conscious intentions, the sense of his 'innocence' is insidiously supported by Capuana's treatment of the relationship between mother and daughter. It is curious that images of violation are associated with Teresa ('Giacinta alla presenza della propria mamma sentivasi violentare, snaturare, spogliare di qualcosa di intimo e di essenziale alla sua vita che, tolta una volta, capiva che non le si sarebbe potuto restituire mai più' (p. 48)), and not with Beppe. Though Beppe is the ostensible source of all Giacinta's evils, Capuana seems to suggest that emotional deprivation is much more responsible for her subsequent eccentricities than any single action by Beppe. There is the hint of a psychological scheme far more modern than anything Zola cared to offer. The misery of

Giacinta's tortured relationship with her mother is well brought out, making it intermittently much more than a mere illustration of her unhappy involvement with the outside world. There is Giacinta's guilt at her own inability to feel affection for her mother ('provava orrore di sè stessa accorgendosi che [. . .] arrivava alla enormità di odiare la sua mamma' (p. 49)), her emotional exhaustion after each confrontation with Teresa, and her remorse (and Teresa's rejection) when at last her long-repressed anger is released and momentarily silences her mother: ' "Mamma! Mamma! " esclamò, accorrendo e prendendole la mano. La Signora Marulli, muta, abbattuta, respingendo da sè la figliola, torceva il volto dall'altro lato' (p. 156). In the rest of the novel there is a good deal of sophisticated psychological patterning: Capuana makes Teresa a continuing source of emotional frustration, for it is she who attempts to have Andrea posted to Sicily; Capuana sees the exaggerated emotional needs and the possessiveness of the adult Giacinta as proportional to the deprivation of her feelings in childhood; he shows her reproducing the parental pattern of dominator and dominated in the relationship with Andrea; and he convincingly demonstrates the principles of emotional self-compensation which are at work when Giacinta turns first to Mochi as a consolatory father-figure, and then, deluded, to religion. It is interesting that Giacinta's only friendships are with servants, with Beppe and later with the sharp-tongued Marietta. She is *declassée* as well as rejected. To be 'rehabilitated' she must not only dominate socially (marry a nobleman, give successful *soirées*), but 'reject' society in her turn (become openly Andrea's mistress, defy her mother).

Many of Capuana's intuitions in *Giacinta* (and later, conspicuously, the Oedipal relationship in *Profumo*) presage developments in psychological theory. Unfortunately their illumination is usually brief. They are not pursued beyond a single episode, and the episodes themselves, which correspond all too clearly to well-marked stages in Giacinta's mental development, stand side by side but not, as it were, in direct communication. True to his materialistic inspiration, Capuana tends to evaluate the events of his heroine's life *quantitatively*, as fractions of a final total, rather than as moments which may condition and modify each other. There is little sense of *durée*.[32] Yet there are a few exceptions as in Giacinta's school-girl recollections of Beppe, or when in the course of a bitter argument with Teresa the misery of the past permeates the present ('tutti i dolori, tutti i rancori, tutti gli sdegni della sua giovinezza le irruppero nella memoria come una banda sfrenata' (p. 156)), or after the 'veglione', when her mind is involuntarily filled with memories of a lonely but innocent childhood ('le ore solitarie della sua fanciullezza trascorse in un monotono, interminabile soliloquio' (p. 212)). In these rare moments there is imaginative participation, not programmatic intent, on Capuana's part, and Giacinta's story briefly acquires emotional density and conviction.

Capuana conceived *Giacinta* as the analysis of a personality in the processes of formation, development and disintegration. The structure of the book corresponds to this tripartite movement. After five chapters of preparation, there follow four

more in which Giacinta succeeds in imposing her irregular *ménage* on society and attains a measure of happiness. She buys a house, sets Andrea up as her 'amministratore', bears his child. The events reflect a phase of psychological ascent, at the end of which Capuana says that the lovers have reached 'il colmo della loro felicità: non potevano andare più oltre' (p. 168). The final three chapters of decline show the death of Giacinta's child (previously a 'chain' uniting the couple), Andrea's dawning interest in the consumptive daughter of his landlord, Elvira, Giacinta's growing mental unbalance and suicide. Capuana's realism, but even more his concern with internal values, makes for a choice of deliberately commonplace, undistracting events related closely to the stages through which Giacinta passes on the path to suicide.

In terms of narrative procedure Capuana's desire to assert the logical progression from one stage to another means that passages of action and dialogue alternate regularly, and rather monotonously, with lengthy analyses of their psychological repercussions. The narrative tends to break down into scene and commentary, and the effect of a fragmented, congested movement is increased by other elements in the narrative. In the whole of *Giacinta* the model for descriptive passages is Zola. Capuana aims to exhaust the possibilities of the observed object through a super-abundance of detail. But he never again achieves the density of the opening chapters where dominant notes, motifs with a bearing on action, emerged from the description. Giacinta lives out most of the rest of her drama in an anonymous interior, and when Capuana pauses, rarely and abruptly, to describe places where the lovers find refuge (the port at night in Chapter VII, or the countryside just beyond the town in Chapter VIII), the description is merely backdrop, a decorative, 'literary' interlude which interrupts the flow of the narrative. There are still traces of the linguistic stratification which marred *Profili di donne*. Manzoni, as the preface attests, was no longer an adequate prose-model (though Capuana's 'fiorentinismo' persists: the definite article before Christian names, words and phrases such as 'grullo', 'vo' for 'voglio', 'la comincia anche prestino', 'O che quelle eran stanze?' (pp. 99, 96, 43, 148)); and the search for a 'new' language, flexible, detached and precise enough to capture infinite modulations of feeling is not always successful. Capuana is capable of being flabbily approximate: 'La Giacinta infatti resisteva fino a un certo punto, insomma esteriormente. In fondo in fondo, ripagava l'Andrea di un affetto uguale se non più forte del suo' (p. 89), and his prose tends to oscillate between several stylistic registers. As in *Profili di donne* (but now less dissonant because of the naturalist conception of the novel), there is at one extreme the jargon of positivist science ('cellule intormentite del cervello', 'delicato organismo', 'rassegnazione animale' (pp. 84, 41, 53) etc.), at the other what is essentially the ripe idiom of sentimental literature (though Capuana has made efforts to revitalize it with an admixture of deliberately 'original' imagery and precise or 'realistic' touches). Giacinta, seated in an armchair, recalls 'l'idea di un gioiello, del suo scatolino di raso azzurro e della fine bambagia color di rosa' (p.

10), or her voice 'un gorgheggio intessuto di frammenti di melodie' (p. 61). Andrea at one point is cast—but with naturalistic elements—as the darkly brooding romantic hero: 'bruno, un po' magro, dagli occhi alquanto infossati, ma pieni di fuoco, dalle labbra grandi, sensuali [. . .] dalla testa intelligente stupendamente pettinata, dall'aria signorile che l'eleganza dei vestiti faceva meglio spiccare' (p. 12). But Giacinta is normally the beneficiary of Capuana's lyricism and the reason is plain. Such language invokes a tradition of sentimental literature (*letteratura amena, per donne*) which invited the reader's total emotional collusion. In doing so it signifies to the reader that he is intended to sympathize with Giacinta, despite her failure to embody the values of the traditional heroine. There are passages, too, which seek to reanimate or vary the narrative with an increased intensity of linguistic tone. Zola is the model in the following attempt to capture the collective frenzy of the crowd, the Bank's creditors:

Visi pallidi di terrore, occhi rossi dal pianto, bocche urlanti bestemmie e minacce; mani e braccia che si alzavano in mezzo a quel fiume di gente scuotendo rabbiose cartelle e libretti [. . .] facce pensose e tuttavia incredule del disastro che le colpiva; teste di indifferenti e di curiosi che stavano a guardare a bocca aperta [. . .] per lungo tratto della via, di qua e di là del portone, non scorgevasi altro. (p. 135)

Zolian too are the animistic notations in Capuana's description of the countryside where the lovers meet:

La campagna sorrideva, beata dei primi tepori dell'aprile, sotto un cielo filettato qua e là di nuvolette bianche e diafane dagli orli color di rosa. Dietro i muricciuoli e dietro le siepi dei campi, gli alberi affacciavano le loro teste inghirlandate dalle frondi novelle; e l'onda d'oro versato dal sole sui mille toni di verde, diventava, a un alitare del vento, un brulichio, un sorriso delle foglie prese da fremiti di amore. [. . .]. (p. 139)

We have already noticed the caricatural, sarcastic language of Capuana's social portraiture. The juxtaposition of these various registers makes *Giacinta* somewhat stylistically heterogeneous. By far the most important problem for the novel was its visual angle; and here it becomes impossible to separate Capuana's style from his ideology.

Capuana rightly says in the preface that he wanted, but failed, to make his narrative impersonal: the novel shows that he is uncertain of his means and of the degree to which he can rely on the responses of the reader. The first chapter demonstrates a remarkable but not entirely successful attempt at total dissociation from the narrative material. Capuana places himself in the same relation to the characters as the reader, a procedure which in the end merely calls attention to itself. He is patently reluctant to probe beneath the surface appearances of his characters (but was perhaps insufficiently aware of how obtrusively his choice of adjectives betrayed his attitudes) and so is forced into elaborate conjecture about their emotions on the basis of facial expression and gesture. He entrusts intuitions

on Giacinta's perplexing character to Colonnello Ranzelli in a clear attempt to deny his own omniscience, and is even unwilling to 'overhear' all the conversations taking place in various corners of the Marulli drawing-room. Standing 'among' his characters, Capuana reduces some sections of this chapter to a species of mime:

> La Giacinta ora accennava di sì o di non con un movimento del capo [. . .] ora aggrottando le sopraciglia atteggiava le labbra ad una espressione di corruccio [. . .] Il sorriso [. . .] della Giacinta, accompagnato da un lungo abbassarsi delle palpebre e da un lieve dondolare del capo, dava benissimo a capire come spesso il colonnello avesse o modificato, o spiegato meglio il suo concetto. (p. 10)

Tell-tale phrases of the kind: 'sembrava', 's'indovinava', 'si vedeva', 'le si leggeva in viso', 'il suo aspetto mostrava' (pp. 11, 13, 14, 19), abound in this chapter. Clearly, these techniques were too unwieldy and contrived to be sustained. Capuana soon assumes a more normal stance, and the signs of his intervention in the text will range from the frequent underlining of intentions ('Questa donna [. . .] che le cirostanze della vita avevano reso un'adultera' (p. 206)) to irony (Mochi, truthfully denying that he has been Giacinta's lover, 'ebbe un sublime movimento di nobilissima indegnazione; così sublime che passò il segno, e volendo provar troppo, non provò nulla' (p. 100)) and the kind of generalization made familiar by *Profili di donne* ('Noi non sogliamo ostinarci tanto a voler fatta ragione come nel punto che abbiamo la coscienza di trovarci dalla parte del torto' (p. 195)). But Capuana's major intervention is in the figure of dottor Follini. Follini is both a projection of himself and a portrait of Capuana's ideal scientist, a 'medico filosofo' (p. 174) on the pattern of De Meis, for whom the practice of medicine consists not only in diagnosing and curing illness but is also a philosophical activity. Indeed Follini's observations of 'fatti individuali provati' are merely the raw ingredients of a 'gran lavoro sull'uomo' (p. 175). Like Capuana and De Meis himself as Capuana understood him Follini is an idealist only in the measure permitted by a positivist age: 'Non credeva all'anima immortale; però credeva all'anima ed anche allo spirito' (p. 174). Follini keeps his options open, as this ingenuous homage to the men whom Capuana saw as the luminaries of the period proves: 'combinava Claudio Bernard, Wirchoff e Moleschott con Hegel e Spencer; ma il suo Dio era il De Meis della Università di Bologna' (p. 174).[33] This abstract, composite figure enters the story at a point when Giacinta's reactions to the languishing relationship with Andrea are becoming truly pathological. In the final three chapters Capuana's success in describing the alterations in Giacinta between self-induced hope and despair, nervous exaltation and miserable apathy, is considerable. Yet the 'objectivity' of the novel at this stage seems undermined by two related misgivings, first that Giacinta's nervous reactions may seem highly improbable to the uninitiated, non-'scientific' reader, and second that her behaviour (especially her hankering after 'emozioni eccessive' and her use of sexual 'espedienti' (p. 204) to retain Andrea's

interest) may seem repulsive and immoral. Follini exists to rectify these interpretations, and his attitude to Giacinta exactly reproduces Capuana's. If Giacinta is to be studied with the 'fredda curiosità dello scienziato' (p. 187), she is also to be regarded with compassion ('la compativa come una vera ammalata (p. 185)) and respect. It is now Follini who notes the 'phases' in Giacinta's degenerating mental state, and who, reinforcing the central idea of an inevitable sequence of events, notices the 'sintomi precursori di una catastrofe [. . .] infallibile e vicina' (p. 184). When Giacinta exclaims that she was born to be a virtuous wife and mother, the fact that Follini has arrived at the 'stessissima conchiusione' (p. 185) reminds the reader that Giacinta's perverseness is not fundamental to her nature.

It is clear that though the novel breaks new ground in sexual outspokenness and the extent to which it reflects the prevailing positivist ideology, it is nevertheless respectful of an existing moral code. The remark, for instance, that Giacinta's adulterous relationship retains an 'indefinibile castità' (p. 174), derives not from a taste for moral paradox but from moral scruples. Similarly, the 'tanta abnegazione e tanto coraggio' (p. 204) shown by Giacinta, the 'buone qualità del suo cuore e del suo spirito sviate in un'attività affatto contraria alla loro natura' (p. 203) are far from being objective notations. It is in the light of Capuana's moral caution that we must interpret the platonic attraction that develops between Giacinta and Follini. The characteristic of this relationship is its 'idealità'. Follini represents something that Giacinta 'avrebbe potuto scoprire nel suo passato [. . .] l'ideale' (p. 203). He proves the survival of her moral sense, and his own disinterested love is a further guarantor of her fundamental worth. The episode was perhaps too a concession to the kind of criticism that found realism tendentious if it did not deal with noble aspirations as well as instincts and passions.

The dualism between objective enquiry and moralistic reserve which is *Giacinta's* chief defect is not merely a problem of 'forma', of impersonality or not, as Capuana suggests in the preface. Nor is this dualism ascribable merely to Capuana's consciousness that his public was unprepared for the audacities of scientific realism. Its roots lie much deeper in his whole conception of the scientific novel.

Giacinta, as we have remarked before, displays little interest in the complexities of social living. Capuana, for instance, waves away the potential hindrance of the lovers' modest economic standing with a bequest to Giacinta from an unknown Parisian relative, and he subscribes in perfunctory style to the idea that society affects Giacinta: 'L'onta di cui sapevasi macchiata era un'onta incancellabile. Il pregiudizio della società voleva così; nè sarebbe stata lei che sarebbe riuscita ad abolirlo' (p. 82). The idea is simply a convenience of the plot, and Capuana is content to re-assert it at intervals in revealingly similar terms.[34] Society in its multiformity fires his imagination so little that its representatives, as we saw, are enveloped in a universal blanket of scorn, and provincial behaviour is the butt of satirical 'asides': 'in provincia la maldicenza è innalzata alla dignità di pubblica

istituzione (non vi si ammazza il tempo altrimenti)' (p. 100). In effect *Giacinta* 'isolates' an abnormal psyche from the outside world. It also constantly measures the heroine's 'pathological' behaviour against an implied norm:

ella volava ai convegni [. . .] con una leggerezza di cuore, che *in altra persona* sarebbe stata sfacciataggine; (p. 145)

il suo carattere *profondamente* sincero ribellavasi spesso contro l'*equivoca* situazione; (p. 158)

questa donna che *la natura aveva fatta casta*, che le circostanze della vita avevano reso un'adultera nella quale l'idea di un secondo amante produceva delle *insormontabili ripugnanze.* (p. 206)

The impulse behind such a procedure is a defensive, moralistic one, and it indicates that we are to accord Giacinta not approbation, but compassion and above all understanding. Capuana identifies himself not with Giacinta nor with her grotesque, provincial environment, but with an all-comprehending, 'scientific' stratum of humanity—an intelligent, superior society represented by Follini. But this same society preserves intact entirely conventional standards of behaviour. Capuana examines his 'caso patologico' within the framework of established values which he has no intention of subverting or questioning: Giacinta remains a 'vera ammalata', and she lives out her drama in the vacuum of her own obsessions, leaving society unchanged by her passing.

Thus the novel offers little radical protest at the way life is arranged, but primarily an opportunity to observe the interesting 'logic' of pathological behaviour. Scientific awareness, as the articles on Zola and Edmond de Goncourt indicated, is for Capuana a pure intellectual acquisition which does not alter (and here the departure from Zola is crucial) his existing views on society. It is not, as for Zola, the means of understanding society so that its functioning may be modified. This limited view of the implications of science accounts for a sense of fundamental conservatism in *Giacinta*. Capuana believed that the 'caso patologico' was artistically valuable for being, as it were, a concentration of life, reality functioning at a pitch of frenzy. As it turned out, the devaluing in *Giacinta* of those factors which lay beyond the mental realm (social, economic, local factors: the name and whereabouts of Giacinta's home town remain deliberately shrouded in mystery)[35] made the 'caso patologico' a partial, abstract conception. At the same time it is Capuana's close psychological analysis and his sense of a 'necessità' in events which give *Giacinta* claims to being a new departure, a reaction against the 'arbitrariness', the *romanzesco*, of earlier imaginative works. The first edition of *Giacinta* was sold out within six months of publication, and Capuana was long to be known as the 'autore di *Giacinta*'. But the book had something of a *succès de scandale*, and it never became, as Capuana had hoped, a point of reference for future writers. The cause lies in his vacillating attitude to the material of the narrative: on the one hand the desire to let the facts speak for themselves, on the

other the urge to build into the novel the criteria which he felt were needful for its proper understanding.

3. *A Changed Allegiance: Verga v. Zola*

Capuana's second series of *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea*, consisting of articles written between October 1879 and May 1881, was published in 1882.[36] The courageous but sometimes problematical attempts of the earlier volume to elaborate the theory of a scientific art are over. The second series of *Studi* is a more confident work, and a coherent one. It shows the same belief in what Capuana now calls after Trezza 'la critica moderna', in a scientific approach to all branches of knowledge, and demonstrates clearly the limiting character of Capuana's scientific faith as we have seen it in *Giacinta*. But it also shows a greater spirit of independence in relation to the literary avant-garde of France, determined in part by the impact of Verga.

Capuana's own brand of evolutionism, his Hegelian positivism, is by now all-pervasive, and the term 'organismo' which suggests to him not only growth over a period of time, but the idea of a collection of parts making a functioning whole, applies not simply to the forms assumed by literature, but to the lives of nations, 'organismi che nascono, crescono, muoiono seguendo, al pari di qualunque essere vivente, le leggi supreme della natura' (p. 331), and to philosophy itself: 'la speculazione filosofica ha la sua legge, il suo organismo, e i sistemi non si ricostruiscono a piacere, nè si rimettono in onore dopo la loro temporanea funzione nel mondo della scienza' (p. 349). Nor can what Capuana calls, with the lofty impartiality of the modern researcher, 'il *fatto religioso*' escape the same scientific scrutiny: 'anche nelle religioni la teoria positiva e naturalistica delle forme ha trovato la giusta applicazione. Per la scienza, le religioni si sieguono ma non si somigliano. La loro vita, la loro successione è un elevarsi di forma, un perfezionarsi di organismi' (p. 367-8). Through all these pronouncements there echoes a sense of Hegelian morality, and Capuana never quite forgets that De Meis considered the future of art highly problematic: 'se il sentimento artistico vivrà eterno, la forma . . .', writes this modern 'Geremia', leaving suspension dots to hint at bleak expectations (p. 157). And it is clear that poetry seems to Capuana a cultural activity even more peripheral and threatened, perhaps, than it seemed to De Meis. Though Capuana reviews poems by Betteloni and Cannizzaro with generosity, their achievement is insidiously undermined by the image, which Capuana skilfully extends through the whole article, of a poetic muse once divinely and naturally beautiful, but now 'una vecchia dama galante' (p. 227), skilled in cosmetic arts, and inspiring not 'un vero inno della giovinezza e dell'amore' (p. 224), but the minor pleasure of 'interminabili *bavardages*' (p. 228).

It is important to bear in mind this Hegelian aspect of Capuana's positivism for it engenders in him a species of fatalism which has repercussions on his conception of art. It was Hegelianism with its belief in the upward curve of History towards pure

philosophical Truth, rather than Darwinism or positivist materialism, which authorized the view that the historical series of artistic forms was irreversible (Darwin indeed 'explicitly rejected the view that the phenomena of life were to be explained by a law of progressive development'[37]). And it is the law of irreversibility that invests Capuana's calls for modernity in art with authority, and allows him to condemn all those literary forms which do not correspond to the 'positive' nature of the age. In an article entitled 'A proposito del dramma storico', a final elimination of the genre, Capuana argues that to attribute to men in togas or doublets a sensibility which cannot be other than modern is to be inadmissibly untruthful since: 'Il positivismo, l'esigenza della verità storica nell'esterno e nell'interno del personaggio sono un modo di vedere e direi quasi un modo d'essere dello spirito moderno' (p. 263). Of the writer only 'la realtà presente, la realtà del suo spirito, la realtà vivente del suo tempo' should be asked (p. 265). The same sense of an inexorable development justifies a somewhat cerebral quest for modernity on the part of the artist: 'che volete si pensi' Capuana asks 'd'un artista il quale ignora la storia della propria arte e non sa fin dove sia arrivata, e da qual punto spetti a lui d'incamminarsi per proceder innanzi?' (p. 267). This is the theoretical vindication of Capuana's attempt in *Giacinta* to create a modern, scientific work of art.

Capuana's Hegelian 'fatalism' allows him, despite all De Sanctis had to say on the 'indifferenza del contenuto',[38] to prefer a contemporary subject-matter and a realistic treatment (in Neera he finds too much reverie: 'si vorrà vederle aprir la finestra perchè in quel suo studiuolo entrasse la *luce sfacciata* delle vie [. . .] e il rumore assordante della vita' (p. 156)); it also insinuates itself into a variety of observations on politics, religion and science. These observations help us to discover a more complete rationale for Capuana's attitudes to realism, and in particular for the limited, purely aesthetic value he attributes to it, than has been possible earlier.

The conclusion reached through reading *Giacinta*, that Capuana is anxious to understand abnormality but only in the context of a broader, established normality, is confirmed by these *Studi*. Here we shall find the boundaries of his view of 'scienza' clearly laid out. The study of history, for instance, has in his opinion no practical application, no message for the present:

> La critica moderna non domanda alla storia insegnamenti di sorta. Sa che la esperienza di questa non serve a nulla; e, convinta di non esserci al mondo cosa che si ripeta, ha già scancellato dalla sua mente il vecchio detto *historia magistra vitae*. Vuol sapere soltanto per sapere, per un elevato bisogno della ragione, non già, come prima, per un secondo fine di pratica utilità che un'accurata osservazione ha dimostrato illusorio. (p. 332)

'La critica moderna' is an end unto itself, a pure activity of the mind which observes but does not, because it cannot, seek to interfere with the development of mankind in history. Precisely because this development is 'fatal', Capuana can hold himself aloof from society and yet be concerned with all that is most advanced in

scientific discovery. In practice his aloofness amounts to conservatism and his concern for science is elitist.

These pages distinguish at many points, tacitly or explicitly, between the cultured few, the practitioners of 'la critica moderna', and the 'grosso pubblico'. Capuana's fear is that positivist science, materialism, scepticism–valuable stimulants of reason where his peers are concerned–may produce dangerous results when they leave responsible hands. He sees the misappropriation of the new intellectual freedom into the realms of mass politics as responsible for the 'orgia comunarda di Parigi' (p. 351). By constitution and education incapable of sympathizing with 'il popolo' ('la parte che mette più paura e dà più a pensare nelle presenti condizioni sociali' (p. 354)), and insensitive to the socio-economic impulse behind what he sees as the socialist threat, Capuana is inclined to view it as an unfortunate by-product of a positivist climate, and wonders: 'col problema sociale che si rizza terribile in mezzo alla società moderna, il materialismo, lo scetticismo, il pessimismo dove ci faranno approdare?' (p. 351). Forced to confront the fact that the science to which he himself ardently subscribes may subvert religious and moral thinking–and therefore the social order–Capuana is somewhat reassured, at least where Italy is concerned, by thoughts of the divide between intellectual elite and uneducated masses. If he himself is liberated from religious needs by science, the populace, he is confident, will never embrace its 'concetti nudi di ogni ornamento fantastico' (p. 355); it will always be better persuaded by the 'concetto semi-materiale del paradiso cattolico' (p. 356), or perhaps, in time, by the less ritualistic religion of spiritualism. At all events it will tend to create its own system of restraints. It is De Meis's Hegelianism, which orders phenomena in relation to Philosophy, setting sentiment and imagination 'lower' than reflection, art and religion lower than philosophical speculation, 'female' practicality lower than 'masculine' cerebration, which sanctions this conservative, hierarchical view of society. And it is De Meis who gives Capuana the equanimity of the fatalist as he contemplates the worst that the future may bring: 'la storia [. . .] quando sarà passata oltre, non si ricorderà dei nostri terrori e dei nostri guai; anzi si rallegrerà d'aver acquistato un qualche bene a prezzo degli orridi incendii delle stragi comunarde e di quello che vi potrà essere di peggio nelle future rivoluzioni sociali' (p. 360). That 'qualche bene' will be a more 'philosophic' society, a society which has progressed.

Capuana 'scienza' is able only to analyse society, not to be operative in it. The scientist's consolation in his clairvoyance and the superior intellectual joy of seeing society move inexorably forward. Thus Capuana salutes as a 'colpo di genio' the Law of Guarantees which allows religion to flourish freely and no longer in opposition to the State as in the later years of the struggle for unity (p. 374). The Law seems to him 'tutto altro che un accommodamento empirico' because it actuates, consciously or not, a philosophy which divides a superior 'attività dello spirito umano' from practical, political concerns (p. 365). And the conservative in Capuana who believed so strongly in the mission of the new ruling classes has

reason to be satisfied now that the Church is 'impotente a turbare la libera funzione del nostro Stato' (p. 364).

The inevitability of the evolutions prognosticated by De Meis's system were, then, an additional reason for the ostensibly neutral, but in reality conservative, connotations of Capuana's 'scienza'. It was natural that Capuana, for whom Italy's unity had been a high youthful ideal, and who had since worried over her internal fragmentation, should identify with the symbol of unity which was Italy's constituted government, and should wish to see Italy continue on its path undisturbed and undisrupted. This clinging to a reassuring idea of normality had been evident in *Giacinta*; it now becomes evident in his response to a polemical Zola.

In the late seventies the *Bien Public*, the *Voltaire*, and the *Messager de l'Europe* of Saint-Petersburg published articles of Zola's (reprinted subsequently in such works as *Le Roman expérimental* and *Le Naturalisme au théâtre* of 1800 and 1881) which established clearly the theoretical, scientific bases of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Zola's republican sympathies, and ambitions for the experimental novel: 'être maître du bien et du mal, régler la vie, régler la société, résoudre à la longue tous les problèmes du socialisme'.[39] The emergence of Zola the campaigner, the man with a reputation for being a socialist, would perhaps have been sufficient to put Capuana on his guard. There were, however, additional reasons for Capuana's detachment from the theoretical Zola. De Amicis had interviewed him in Paris during the summer of 1878, and published his impressions in a volume entitled *Ricordi di Parigi* (1879). There he reveals Zola's confession that the theory of the experimental novel (in Capuana's words) was nothing more than a 'bandiera che lo Zola inalbera arditamente, a suoni di grancassa, per attirar la folla che altrimenti passerebbe via' (p. 140).[40] An entry for February 1877 in the Goncourts' diary makes a similar revelation.[41] No doubt De Amicis and the Goncourt brothers had simply caught Zola in moments when his artistic pride rebelled against the perpetual self-justification and explanation to which his controversial novels condemned him. But the aristocratically detached Goncourts, like Capuana, had an interest in minimizing the importance of the theoretical, political Zola. Capuana had reminded himself, even in the midst of his enthusiasm for the 'scientific' Zola, that his work must be judged by the criteria of art alone. And now, just as Zola himself seemed to encourage his critics to discount the importance of his theoretical premisses, came the publication of *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia*, causing Capuana to re-think his attitudes to the novel in general.

The period of the *Studi* was one of particularly close contact with Verga. When Capuana and Verga were not together in Milan, letters flowed to and fro between Catania and Mineo showing how close was the harmony of literary aspiration between the two Sicilians. Capuana was able to claim, in his review of *Vita dei campi*, that he had pointed out to Verga the original of *La Lupa*, a peasant woman who lived at Santa Margherita where the Capuana family spent its summers.[42]

Later, in 1894, he claims to have provided the 'spunto' for 'L'Amante di Gramigna' too, and even more particularly for its obsessive motif of thirst.[43] But the influence functioned in both directions, and Capuana, perhaps surprisingly in view of the widespread opinion that Capuana 'aiutò il Verga a ritrovarsi',[44] absorbed much from Verga. Only a month after Verga had expressed his bitter disappointment at the cool public reception of *I Malavoglia*, and had confided to Capuana that it needed all the strength of his artistic convictions not to 'ammannire i manicaretti che piacciono al pubblico per poi ridergli in faccia',[45] Capuana in his review of the novel echoed disapproval of a public 'assuefatto a manicaretti pepati di rettorica e di romanticismo', unable to savour the 'semplicità quasi nuda' of Verga's prose-style (p. 134). His review of *Vita dei campi* paraphrased a section of Verga's theoretical statement addressed to Farina at the beginning of 'L'Amante di Gramigna' and. called it, with the simplicity of total conviction, 'la teoria dell'arte moderna' (p. 123). In view of the intensity of their literary exchanges (of which the letters of the period can only give a dim idea), it is perhaps not surprising that Capuana was the first to acknowledge Verga's genius. What is more surprising is that, given the opportunity to discuss *I Malavoglia*, Capuana devotes most of his energy to a general discussion of the tradition of the novel and Verga's place in it. One reason for this is that 'l'accoglienza freddina' given the novel seemed to Capuana attributable to the lack of a narrative tradition in Italy (p. 135). The achievement of *I Promessi sposi* was isolated and linked to the present only through the execution of certain 'parti secondarie' (p. 136). Thus Italians were ill-prepared to understand Verga's work. But Capuana was also obliged, following the emergence of this new and perplexing Zola, to re-define his attitudes to the novel and at the same time to accommodate the greatness of Verga within them. Though he himself resisted such classifications, we may speak, for convenience, of a *poetica del verismo* in connexion with this second series of *Studi*, not simply because they coincide chronologically and occupy themselves with two great works of *verismo*, *Vita dei campi*, and *I Malavoglia*, but because their aesthetic arguments are now different from those associated with French naturalism, and correspond to a cultural situation which is purely Italian.

The Capuana who emerges from the reading of Verga's masterpieces is involved in some specific re-interpretations. Only recently, in the first series of *Studi*, it has seemed to him that the 'metodo scientifico' outlined in the Preface to the *Comédie humaine* of 1842 'avvertivasi appena' in Balzac's novels themselves.[46] All the more credit had therefore been due to Zola for actuating the mere intuitions of his predecessor. Now, in contrast, Capuana declares his opinion that 'tutto il romanzo moderno sia già nel Balzac, anche il *naturalista*, anche lo *sperimentale*' (p. 76). Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and Zola become simply his continuers. And if the 'elemento scientifico' has become increasingly important for these descendants of Balzac, this is inevitable since art always reflects the climate in which it flourishes. 'Ma', Capuana continues, in accord with a change of emphasis in his attitude to

science, 'la vera novità non istà in questo. Nè sta nella pretesa di un *romanzo sperimentale*'. For 'un'opera d'arte non può assimilarsi un concetto scientifico che alla propria maniera, secondo la sua natura d'opera d'arte' (p. 140). Though Capuana admires *Nana*, his former ardour for the scientific novel has disappeared, and he comes to a crucial aesthetic turning-point. He had written once that scientific realism was a process; now, developing this idea, he contends that 'il positivismo, il naturalismo esercitano una vera influenza nel romanzo contemporaneo ma *soltanto nella forma*, e tal influenza si traduce nella *perfetta impersonalità* di quest'opera d'arte' (p. 140). Impersonality becomes the corner-stone of Capuana's post-naturalistic realism. In the light of it he re-assesses the tradition that links Balzac to Zola, and now culminates in Verga, and it is perhaps not surprising that the exuberant (and politically vocal) Zola strikes Capuana as less impersonal than the Sicilian:

> Nei romanzi del Balzac [. . .] egli si mescola ogni po' all'azione, spiega, descrive, torna addietro, fa delle lunghe divagazioni prima di lasciar i suoi personaggi a dibattersi soli soli colle loro passioni [. . .] e l'onnipotenza del suo genio non si mostra mai così intera come quando le sue creature rimangono libere, abbandonate ai loro istinti, alla loro tragica fatalità. I suoi successori intervengono assai meno di lui nell'azione o non intervengono affatto. Si può dire che la loro opera d'arte si faccia da sè, piuttosto che la facciano loro [. . .] *I Malavoglia* si riannodano agli ultimissimi anelli di questa catena dell'arte [. . .] e conteranno per qualcosa nella storia generale dell'arte. Giacchè finora nemmeno lo Zola ha toccato una cima così alta in quell'*impersonalità* ch'è l'ideale dell'opera d'arte moderna. (p. 141-2)

The uncongenial knowledge that Zola's theoretical pronouncements had associated his novels with practical and social (if not socialist) aims, and at the same time the confusing news that the scientific, political Zola had merely been questing after publicity, and perhaps even a chastening memory of De Sanctis, were sufficient to make Capuana view his recent sympathy with the idea of a scientific art in a critical manner. The contacts with Verga described earlier had prepared him to give importance to the concept of impersonality once his gaze had turned back from novels with scientific ambitions to the problem of 'forma'. But there were other less external reasons for his emphasis. Capuana had long since felt that artistic 'vitality' could be achieved only where authors allowed their characters to function autonomously. More recently he had applied the terms 'organismo' to the work of art. In the 'organismo' each separate, inter-related component was necessary to the whole, and the whole unfolded with its own special logic, the logic of an artistic reality purged of the accidents of ordinary existence. Where the author intervened the sense of an autonomous whole was compromised. If there was any parallel between the scientific and the impersonal stance, it lay not as may be expected in the fabled detachment of both, but in their common concern with an 'organismo' and in their common resolution to register a course of events which is logical and necessary. Thus, referring to the playwright, Marenco, Capuana wrote that he

dovrebbe restar spettatore, lasciar che i personaggi operino da per loro, e che la commedia si faccia quasi da sè. Non dovrebbe far altro che seguirla, come il chimico segue il processo d'una cristallizzazione, come il fisiologo l'esercizio di una funzione messa in esperimento. Quando l'autore interviene col suo capriccio, colle sue idee, coi suoi sentimenti non può che guastare. E' un elemento estraneo, un elemento accidentale, una cosa assolutamente contraria all'arte che s'infiltra, s'insinua, ed altera le proporzioni, mette lo squilibrio nelle varie forze, sovverte la logica della natura umana in questi individui così diversi da lui, toglie loro la libera personalità, li fa diventare dei burattini. (p. 280-1)

When Capuana finds space to speak directly of *I Malavoglia*, it is to see the novel as a self-contained, self-generating reality, 'un congegno di piccoli particolari, allo stesso modo della vita, organicamente innestati insieme' (p. 143).

The predominant reason for Capuana's approval of *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia* appears at first sight to be the sheer enjoyment of their fidelity to a Sicilian original. The peasants of *Vita dei campi* are indeed not merely Sicilian 'ma più particolarmente di quella piccola regione che sta [. . .] fra Monte Lauro e Mineo' (p. 123). Their lives, their modes of speech and thought are recorded with a supreme care for accuracy and a total effacement of the author's own personality:

L'artista gli ha presi nella loro piena concretezza, nella loro più minuta determinatezza, facendosi piccino con loro, sentendo e pensando a modo loro, usando il loro linguaggio semplice, schietto, e nello stesso tempo immaginoso ed efficace, fondendo apposta per essi, con felice arditezza, il bronzo della lingua letteraria entro la forma sempre fresca del loro dialetto, affrontando bravamente anche un imbroglio di sintassi, se questo riusciva a dare una più sincera espressione ai loro concetti. (p. 123-4)

Yet clearly Capuana is not as preoccupied with the documentary veracity of these tales as with the integrity of Verga's artistic 'organismo'. The reality of the 'organismo' indeed is not the reality of ordinary existence, and Verga's *Lupa* is 'più vera della vera quand'era viva'. Verga's imagination may not have been involved in creating adventurous intrigues—'non ha inventato nulla'—but it has intuited and turned to account the only proper manner in which to express the subject: 'ha trovato, ha indovinato la forma, che è quanto dire: ha fatto tutto' (p. 139). The 'linguaggio semplice' or 'forma' employed by Verga is generated by his subject, and is at the same time the unique, the only adequate vehicle of that subject. Capuana's 'forma' now has different connotations from De Sanctis's: 'quando dico forma, non intendo soltanto la frase, lo stile, ma qualche cosa di più elevato: la concezione, tutto l'organismo dell'opera d'arte, che funziona colla pienezza della vita, libero e indipendente dalla personalità che lo creò' (p. 132). The discovery of this 'organismo-forma' as the indispensable prerequisite of aesthetic excellence has consequences for Capuana's artistic theory and practice. As a young critic his artistic ideal had been the classical type. In *Profili di donne* and even in *Giacinta* he had been wary of giving his background too much specific detail in case it rose up to form barriers beyond which his message could not pass. The generalizations on

human psychology which punctuated both works were perhaps designed to build a general relevance into the particular situation Capuana was analysing. The 'organismo', however, demands the precision of life itself, for where it is lost and the illusion of reality fails, there stands the author, his personality and his intentions exposed. 'Per retorica alterigia', Capuana writes of his compatriots 'preferiamo *inventare* un sentimento, invece di esprimerne uno *realmente* sentito: preferiamo annegarci entro vaste generalità, piuttosto che circoscriverci fra i limiti d'un piccolo *fatto*' (pp. 30-31). Henceforward he would not be afraid to present to his readers the 'piccoli fatti' of his native Sicily.

It is clear from the preceding remarks that Capuana's *verismo* depended on the triple, inter-related, and overlapping considerations of 'organismo', 'impersonalità', 'linguaggio', and that each of these was calculated to potentiate the sense of an immediate reality. Capuana lays much stress on the literal veracity of Verga's subjects, yet accuracy of observation was not the final aim of the writer; and though the climate of the times suggested to Capuana that the novelist could not do other than proceed realistically and impersonally, it is obvious that his *verismo* aspired to transcend the limits of the age in which he lived. He clung to his *verismo* long after its hour of triumph was past, and what he wrote of it even in the early days of these *Studi* proves that for him it was not a transient set of concepts or a reaction to the literature of the first half of the century which he came to dismiss, somewhat simplistically, as conventionally Arcadian or motivated solely by politics: the tenets of *verismo*, he felt, were permanently capable of enhancing the probabilities of aesthetic success.

What is now known as the *verista* movement has come to be associated with a regional subject-matter (and this is another feature which differentiates *verismo* from French naturalism) and with the agricultural classes more than with the urban proletariat. Writers such as Matilde Serao and Remigio Zena (in *La Bocca del lupo*) deal with the poorest sector of the population scraping a living in the slums of large cities like Naples and Genoa. But in the historical balance Verga's and Capuana's Sicilian peasantry, Fucini's Tuscan *mezzadri* and countryfolk, weigh more heavily than these. Yet, in view of the durable validity of *verismo* in Capuana's eyes, it is interesting to note that he himself envisaged no such limitations for his method. He did not ignore the manifest originality of Verga's subject-matter (*Nedda* opened up a 'nuovo filone nella miniera quasi intatta del romanzo italiano' (p. 117)) but he assumed, mindful probably of what Edmond de Goncourt had revealed about his eventual aspirations for realism, and justified by the Preface to *I Malavoglia* itself, that Verga would proceed from Aci Trezza to 'la borghesia e le alte classi delle grandi città' (p. 144). To frequent the world of the peasant constituted for Capuana, as we have already remarked, something of a technical apprenticeship. It was perhaps not only because by temperament he was attracted to the most complex manifestations of the human psyche, but also because he contemplated a natural extension of the narrative techniques he prescribed to a higher order of

reality, that his own novels preferred to focus on characters from the upper echelons of society.

Capuana never said, and perhaps never felt, that there was a hierarchy of artistic difficulty and therefore of excellence which attached to a particular subject-matter. He did, however, warn his readers that Verga might seem less original and less colourful (because of the levelling effects of education described in the *Malavoglia* preface) when he left Aci-Trezza for the 'grandi città', and in years to come he continued to await eagerly Verga's promised migration from country to town, from *contadino* to bourgeois. This eager expectation is a valuable pointer to a particular quality of Capuana's own theoretical and creative approach to regional *verismo.*

Nedda opened up a new 'seam' in the novelist's 'mine', but the 'seam' was only one among many which invited exploitation, though for the moment it had the additional appeal of novelty. Capuana had, in short, no decided preference for a particular subject-matter. The Sicily he depicted in imitation of Verga imposed itself upon him not with the force of an imperative, but as an interesting, even piquantly exotic, option. Just as the 'connubio' of Hegelianism and positivism allowed for radical shifts in the ideology which supported his creative work, so his *verista* aesthetics and the definition he gave to 'forma' ('vuol dire in gran parte processo, tecnicismo', he wrote at this time)[47] left the way open to multiple choices of subject in his future career as narrator.

Capuana later rejected any application to himself of what he felt was the barren formula of 'art for art's sake', and he was fiercely opposed to the aestheticism of D'Annunzio and his followers. In a sense his repudiation was justified. He had commended Verga not only for creating an autonomous reality, but for provoking the reader into feeling and thought ('un sentimento d'immensa tristezza si diffonde da ogni pagina e penetra il cuore e fa pensare' (p. 124)). And as Gaetano Trombatore has seen, a 'profonda esigenza morale' lay at the roots of verismo,[48] with its serious-minded *studio dal vero*, its curbing of the imagination, and its denying the reader his 'manicaretti pepati di rettorica'. In Verga the 'esigenza morale' is translated besides into a bitter denunciation of man's egoism as it manifests itself in the struggle for economic survival. In the more easy-going Capuana, determined to believe in and to promote the 'magnifiche sorti' of modern Italy, the artist's protest is diverted exclusively into aesthetic channels, becoming the discipline of 'forma', the repudiation of literary 'rhetoric' and subjectivism, a life-long search for a prose that was not only precise and correct, but simple and accessible. So it is that his creative work (and particularly, as we shall now see, his regional short stories), while the product of undoubted aesthetic seriousness, still seems, in the broadest sense, a gratuitous activity. Nor should one be misled by the fact that Capuana was again becoming concerned over Italy's apparent inability to produce works which did not seem imitative of France, works which captured 'il punto di colore italiano'. The old undercurrents of chauvinism are by now of course dissipated, and it is vital that Italy absorb the artistic achievements of other

nations:

finchè non studieremo in che modo l'organismo della forma del romanzo sia giunta a perfezionarsi fuori d'Italia, finchè non sapremo assimilarci tutto il processo tecnico che è una buona parte di ogni lavoro artistico, non sarà facile vedere un romanzo italiano contemporaneo che sia vero specchio della nostra vita in ogni condizione sociale.[49]

But here the order of priorities is important. It so happens that once art is conceived as 'organismo', as a 'congegno' with the autonomy of real life, a local specificity is implied as a matter of course, and is itself, as we have seen, the indispensable guarantee of the 'organismo's' existence. Thus the argument never really leaves the circle of purely artistic considerations. Capuana's regional *verismo* is a gratuitous aesthetic act, not, as Verga's, the vehicle of a protest, nor an invitation to the readers of Italy, as Vittorio Spinazzola writes, to 'prendere atto delle sue contraddizioni interne'.[50] 'I nostri costumi, i nostri sentimenti, i nostri vizii, le nostre virtù son lì che aspettano ancora il loro storico', writes Capuana; and we have seen that Capuana's *storico* 'vuol sapere soltanto per sapere'.

4. *Capuana's 'novelle rusticane'*

If *Giacinta* had been purposely vague in location in order to be more easily universal, *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia* in teaching Capuana that narrative 'progressed' only in terms of 'forma' also taught him not to despise the specific. Verga's work disclosed a vast new area ready for artistic exploration, and it was one which Capuana had in fact been contemplating unsuspectingly for years. He had collected *canti popolari* for Vigo since 1857, and more recently the two editions of poems by the seventeenth-century dialect poet, Paulo Maura, proved the continuity of his concern with regional, Sicilian culture.[51] As mayor, his *Comune di Mineo*, a history of the town from the point of view of its finances, and an account of his own labours in putting them to rights, revealed the extent of his commitment to local affairs, and his impulse to delineate the inhabitants of Mineo collectively:

ingegni fini, arguti con una dose di ironia che non rispetta proprio nulla, più che gli agi e le ricchezze amiamo la tranquillità spensierata e fannullona, e in mancanza di oppio ci stordiamo cogli sbadigli, pur di sognare ad occhi aperti, immersi in una prostrante apatia che intacca il corpo e lo spirito e ci rende quasi inetti all'azione.[52]

Following Verga's two masterpieces Capuana's *Mineoli* were to become the subjects of a series of short stories. They have much the same characteristics as here, and Capuana treats them with much the same affectionate indulgence.

Even before 1880 Capuana was apparently experimenting with regional short stories. Among papers in the Biblioteca comunale of Mineo Croce Zimbone has recently discovered a story entitled 'La figlia del sindaco', written out seemingly in Capuana's own hand about 1875.[53] But portions of the story, which tells of Lazzaro's absurd and tragic passion for a woman who is socially unattainable, is

related with a sobriety, a suggestive reticence, less characteristic of Capuana than of Verga; Zimbone himself supposes that the two authors worked in collaboration on the story. Two further stories, 'L'ideale di Piula' and 'Storia fosca' (both included in the volume of short stories, *Un bacio*, of 1881) are set in Sicily and were written before the publication of *Vita dei campi*. Yet neither is essentially Sicilian. 'L'ideale di Piula' tells of a young man whose regular, yearly projects for matrimony are repeatedly thwarted by the chilling financial calculations of his future wives' relations. Piula, perpetually convinced that he has discovered his ideal mate, finally admits that his ideal would be to marry the dowry without the wife. Later, without directly figuring in his stories, Capuana will assume a similar stance to that of the interlocutor in 'L'ideale di Piula', an anonymous first-person whose wry vision of Piula, and capacity to channel the story towards a final *battuta* are essential to the reader's perception of its comedy. Capuana will always, as in *Profili di donne* and even in *Giacinta*, find it difficult to resist a clinching, ironic close. Though not essentially Sicilian, 'L'ideale di Piula' is a model for the humorous, caricatural vein of many of Capuana's rustic tales. 'Storia fosca', the best of the stories in *Un bacio* (and consequently to provide the title for a republication of all but one of the stories in 1883), may similarly be seen as the model for stories where the logic of passion is worked out with primitive, 'Sicilian' violence. Yet equally it continues the line of inspiration which produced *Giacinta*. As in the novel, Capuana makes use of a human document, a 'memoria legale' in this instance, and the story, which tells of the incestuous relationship between a young stepmother and the son of a Sicilian baron, betrays Capuana's familiar interest in socially abnormal sexuality. Accused of imitating Zola's *La Curée*, Capuana was moved to comment on the nature of modern narrative:

Oggi che il romanzo e la novella son diventati un vero studio psicologico, i caratteri dei personaggi, l'ambiente dov'essi vivono, le circostanze che li fanno agire occupano talmente il posto del *fatto*, prima creduto l'essenziale, che lo stesso fatto può esser ripreso e studiato con varietà indefinita. Da essi, trasposto in altro ambiente, come da invisibile nucleo, si svolge e si forma un nuovo organismo di caratteri e di sentimenti non più vaghi e indeterminati, ma concreti, determinatissimi, del tal posto, del tale anno; ed è il completo trionfo dell'individuo vivo sull'individuo astratto, sul *tipo* classico, insomma una cosa perfettamente moderna.[54]

For all this emphasis on the concrete and the individual the background of Sicily is not vital to the drama of 'Storia fosca'; and while, as Enrico Ghidetti remarks, the incest in *La Curée* 'è uno dei sintomi della decadenza del costume e della degradazione morale della società borghese del secondo Impero',[55] in 'Storia fosca' as in *Giacinta* Capuana aims primarily at demonstrating the inevitability of the event. The gradual transformation of the baronessa's sisterly feelings is tactfully and believably handled, and 'Storia fosca' also improves on *Giacinta* by suppressing all moralistic comment. The story becomes spontaneously a celebration of natural

instincts: 'E avean continuato, insaziabili, come due esseri senza coscienza, come due bruti belli e giovani che tracannavano la coppa della vita, per esaurirla. Nulla era venuto a turbarli: nè cura del presente, nè pensiero dell'avvenire.'[56] The dark shadow of the Baron, glimpsed at the beginning of the story as he makes his discovery, falls across their innocent sensuality, but there is no Sicilian crime of passion to end the story, merely the stealthy entry into the bedchamber of 'il pretore' and 'il brigadiere dei carabinieri', accompanied by the law-abiding husband, to catch the pair *in flagrante*.

Thus the truly Sicilian stories come only after 1880. Five of ten stories in the collection entitled *Homo!* of 1883 are Sicilian, and reminiscent of Verga in style (Capuana uses proverbs, a colloquial narrative tone, is occasionally ungrammatical) and in the exploitation of the 'Sicilian' themes of home, honour, and possessions. As in Verga there is a 'choral' village presence. But similarities in content and style are less important than the divergencies of inspiration. While Verga's work is concerned with the harsh laws of survival which govern the lives of his peasants, Capuana looks rather to the end result of the Sicilian condition, to the characteristic Sicilian personality. Indeed, he is just as inclined to describe the whole course of a character's existence with its succession of minor, typifying incidents, as to isolate a single dramatic event. A vital pointer to Capuana's attitude, and one that distinguishes him from Verga, is that though each of his stories ends with a death (even if it is only the death of a valuable mule) the predominant tone is not tragic but ironic or humorous.

Where Capuana, following Verga's example, takes a subject that might well illustrate how cruel economic exigencies dominate and crush natural affections, he succeeds only in delineating a stereotype of peasant avarice. In 'La mula' the expendability of a wife (especially when her death brings with it a bequest to her husband) is contrasted with the 'real' disaster of losing a mule worth 'quarant'onze'. Capuana plays with a reversal of values—the sick wife is left to die like a 'cagna' while the husband, Don Michele, whispers encouragement to his dying mule 'come a una cristiana'—and ends with a deliberate and simplistic harshness. The wife survives and Don Michele gives vent to his exasperation: 'Sua moglie, che avea avuto tutte le cose della Santa Chiesa, campava! E la mula che pareva dovesse guarire, se la mangiavano i cani dietro il Castello.'[57]

Don Peppantonio (in a story of the same name) continually defers unspecified but ambitious matrimonial projects for his cherished adopted daughter until she impatiently elopes and he dies of the shock. Despite this (tenuous) story-line, Capuana is much less concerned with Peppantonio's unreasoning protectiveness or with the economic objections he may have to the shoemaker's son than with his habitual state of 'comic', blustering anger. When Verga's characters rail at forces they cannot understand or control there is a sense of their shared destiny of tragic impotence; when Don Peppantonio 'manda accidenti al sindaco, agli assessori, all'esattore, al ricevitore, a tutti! . . . Anche a Vittorio Emanuele', the whole village

delights in his indiscriminate irascibility and treats him, as Capuana does, as a comical eccentric to be taunted for amusement's sake. Capuana tends also to present his characters as examples of a quaintly primitive mentality. After a day of blaspheming, at the hour of the Angelus Peppantonio reverts to superstitious piety. In 'Lo sciancato' the town-crier has a proud (but also, in the author's intention, touchingly absurd) sense of vocation for his humble profession. The comic possibilities of sheer physical appearance are exploited too. Peppantonio is scarcely ever presented without a grotesque 'tuba di felpa cinericcia, della foggia di cinquant'anni fa';[58] and there is a carefully constructed contrast between the 'vocione' of the town-crier and his frail, jaundiced physique ('Donde lo cavava quel vocione? Se lo sapeva lui!').[59]

'Comparatico' is the most successful of these Sicilian stories. It was adapted from the false *canto popolare* which Capuana gave Vigo for his *Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani*.[60] The tale of Janu, betrayed by his wife and the godfather of the child he once believed his own, moves quickly to its violent conclusion without descriptive or analytical pauses. The simple psychology of the characters is fully realized in dialogue and action. Janu kills the 'compare's' child and, returning home from the fields, feigns drunkenness in order to catch the lovers off their guard. The final brief chapter opens with the news that Janu has 'scannato moglie e compare, e poi era andato a presentarsi al brigadiere'. It is here that Capuana concedes something to the convention of the meridional *delitto d'onore*. The population of the village is 'tutta a favore di compare Janu, poverino, che aveva fatto benissimo', and Janu himself is handcuffed but 'sorridente e a testa alta'. And the final exchange between Peppe Nasca, 'un po' parente del morto' and Janu–

'Assassino! Vi punsero ora le corna, dopo quattr'anni?' 'Meglio di te', rispose Janu guardandolo in faccia, 'che quelle di tua sorella col pastaio non ti pungono ancora!'[61]

–sacrifices all sense of Janu's grief, and trivially exploits the cliché view of southern honour in order to provide an arresting close. Capuana must have become aware of the damaging effects of this facile and unfeeling humour, for in republishing the story he added a few clumsy words of attenuation: 'E passò via con un sorriso di sfida su le labbra. Avea però la morte nell'anima, pensando al povero bambino, morto innocente come Cristo in croce!'[62]

The horns of the cuckold and the blasphemies of Capuana's peppery village eccentrics are sufficiently prominent in these stories (and one cannot fail to note the contrast provided by Verga's restrained treatment of religious and sexual themes) to suggest that Capuana views his Sicilians from the vantage-point of an 'ex'-Sicilian intent on encapsulating the distinguishing features of a people for the benefit of a 'continental' reading-public. This conclusion finds support in 'Bagni di sole', a story in the form of a letter addressed to a Milanese lady-friend by a 'continentalized' Sicilian, which characterizes the island as hopelessly cut off from

the rest of civilization, immobile in its superstitious ignorance. Capuana views his characters with affectionate humour, but the affection is tinged with indulgent condescension and the humour derives from detachment. It is a detachment which allows him, for example, to see the worldliness of the priesthood as a potential source of comedy. His priests are no better and no worse than the rest of humanity, men of worldly passions and appetites, differentiated from the members of their flock by a veneer of piety which deceives no-one and is expected of them by all. This is how Capuana has a priest react to a particularly sacrilegious outburst from Peppantonio:

'State zitto! Non bestemmiate più, se no vi si profonda il terreno sotto i piedi!', gli diceva il canonico che intanto rideva con tutti gli altri.[63]

This mixture of the sacred and the profane (represented here in 'Don Peppantonio' and 'Mastro Cosimo') continues to furnish Capuana with comic material. 'Il prevosto Montoro' which replaces 'Bagni di sole' in a new edition of *Homo* (now deprived of its exclamation mark) in 1888, transports the language of the altar to the card-table, deliberately stressing the incongruity of the cleric's dominating passion with its attendant superstitions:

Un'altra fisima del prevosto la *cabala*; a cui *prestava fede* come al cattivo influsso di don Filippo e al buon influsso del piccolo Nino [. . .] che pareva un *angioletto* [. . .], il suo Nino che avea ordine segreto di stargli dietro [. . .] a *pregare* pel *nonno* prevosto, il quale, ad ogni vincita, gli avrebbe regalato uno scudo.[64] (Italics mine.)

Canonico Salamanca, in a story of the same name from *Le Appassionate* of 1893, is equally taken with hunting (and with the material comforts provided by a certain Donna Totò besides), and this passion gives rise to a *bravura* comic passage where whispered asides to a fellow enthusiast on the indisposition of a favorite gun-dog and the excellence of English rifle-powder alternate irreverently with the responses of the mass.

The attitude assumed by Capuana in these stories (where the last residue of liberal anti-clericalism dissolves in bland good humour) is worth comparing with the sense of repulsion and outrage he once felt when contemplating the superstitiousness of Sicily's religious customs. Under the pseudonym of Aloy Cefalenus, Capuana had provided the readers of the *Nazione* with a spine-chilling catalogue of sanguinary and simoniacal practices, and had concluded indignantly:

Una religione che non ha per effetto la morale è un arnese inutile e pericoloso alla società che la possiede. Quali sieno in Sicilia gli effetti morali della religione (e dovrei dire della superstizione) fra le classi inferiori del popolo lo mostrano le stragi e i furti di Palermo commessi in nome di Gesù e di S. Rosalia.[65]

Similarly, the current view of Sicilians as drolly and incorrigibly uncivilized contrasts with the progressive campaign for improved education which Capuana

waged in the seventies as inspector of schools and which emerges in a speech, *Il bucato in famiglia*, delivered at a prize-giving ceremony.[66] Here are two opposed images of Sicily—the writer and the citizen caught in contradiction. But the Capuana who strongly identified with all that was progressive in the new, united Italy was always tempted to regard his island with superior bemusement. He wrote again of Sicily for the *Nazione*, but this time it had become Arcadian. The future writer of *fiabe* for children is absorbed by the folklore, the myths of his native soil: 'i più volgari fenomeni fisici vi pigliano aspetto di arcane rivelazioni provenienti dagli esseri supernaturali che ivi governano'; a belief in witches, spirits, 'mercanti'—guardians of the treasure of 'la Grotta dalle sette porte'—fascinatingly permeates the ordinary consciousness of the peasant. No doubt an element of self-defensiveness, a sense of Sicily's inferiority to the mainland, insinuated itself into Capuana's intellectual excitement and coloured his idyllic descriptions of 'graziose villanelle che canterellando filano il lino', or of the 'intera e schietta allegria' of peasant festivities.[67] At all events the nation was to become acquainted through Capuana with a picturesque, 'literary' Sicily alone; and Capuana resented and resisted the suggestion that there was a darker side to the picture, which was moreover peculiarly Sicilian. When he had occasion to comment on the Franchetti-Sonnino report of 1876 he was more stirred by the insulting implication that Sicily stood in need of special attention than by the thought of the objective benefits that might accrue to her from an awakening of governmental interest. He reminded his readers that besides Sicily's mafia, there was the 'teppa' of Milan, the 'camorra' of Naples, and the 'bagherinaggio' of Rome.[68]

His resentment probably had a bearing on the way Sicily filtered through his fiction to his readers. There were also elements in his artistic theory that encouraged the selection of what was, in the popular mind, most characteristic of Sicilians—their superstition, violent passions, sense of honour, attachment to hearth and home. As we have seen, Capuana was concerned that his country should have works of art that were unmistakably Italian, and he believed that art became a 'living organism', an 'ideal' mimesis of nature, only through accuracy of detail. He believed too that the artistic was the involuntary historian of his times. All these motifs flow together in a passage from his essay, 'La Sicilia e il brigantaggio', where he explores the rationale of his own Sicilian tales:

Per trovare un filone nuovo, inesplorato, noi avevamo dovuto inoltrarci nella grande miniera del basso popolo delle cittaduzze, dei paesetti, dei villaggi, interrogando creature rozze, quasi primitive, non ancora intaccate dalla tabe livellatrice della civilità, talvolta afferrando qualche fatto eccezionale, residuo di un passato non lontano, ma sparito per sempre, lieti di fissarlo, per la storia, prima che se ne perdesse ogni significato e ogni ricordo; talvolta curiosi di rendere, più che analizzare, la sfumatura di un sentimento, la bizzarra modalità di una passione, l'atteggiamento di un carattere eccentrico che prendeva maggiore risalto per l'ambiente, pel paesaggio, per una rara combinazione di luce e d'ombra.[69]

As far as Capuana is concerned the selection of a particular subject-matter is absolutely devoid of personal or ideological significance. It involves a purely artistic quest for originality, a disinterested impulse to record 'for history' what is on the point of extinction. Verga, though preoccupied with much the same themes as Capuana, seldom provides merely picturesque documentation. But Capuana's attitude at the outset is one of faintly amused curiosity, his aim to produce an aesthetic entertainment. He is interested not, like Verga, in Sicily's becoming, but in her being, and his art encapsulates the characteristic finished product of a process which itself is not communicated. The phrase in the passage just cited beginning 'curiosi di rendere, più che analizzare' and the *penchant* for the 'fatto eccezionale' and the 'carattere eccentrico', are particularly revealing. Just as the 'caso patologico' is deemed to cast light on the normal functioning of the psyche, so the exaggerated personalities of a Don Peppantonio or a Don Michele are held to epitomize the Sicilian condition. Motivated in part by Capuana's awareness that he is initiating his public into an unfamiliar environment, the impulse towards generalization, rather than being revealed through the work itself, is already written into the author's plan before he sets pen to paper, and the stories that emerge are in the main caricatural and conventional.

The sense of Capuana's detachment in these stories, however, was not only 'scientific', nor entirely due to a self-identification with the 'continental' ruling classes which precluded Sicily's 'barbarous' inhabitants from eliciting the author's intimate sympathies: it was also the element of Hegelian fatalism in his thinking which, curtailing the power of 'scienza' to act upon society, caused Capuana to gaze on his island with such a superficial eye.

CHAPTER III

A PERIOD OF PERPLEXITIES (1882-1892)

1. *Beyond the Ideology of Naturalism*

Most of Capuana's critics agree that after the second series of *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea*, his criticism shows increasing detachment, in Carlo Madrignani's words, 'dalle teorie positivistiche e dal suo zolismo anche teorico'.[1] He is, by common consent, now upon the road to idealism; and undoubtedly the attitudes of this period, after the Zolian, scientific parenthesis evoke memories of the old 'connubio' of Hegelianism and positivism. To Walter Mauro 'il triennio '81-'84' (which produced articles for a collection of criticism entitled *Per l'arte*, published in 1885) seems 'estremamente importante per il processo involutivo dell'ideologia e della metodologia critica del Capuana'.[2] But Capuana's position is not a simple one. Questions which science seemed to have answered or which had become irrelevant in the context of a triumphal positivism now reappear, and yet are not in themselves proof of an 'idealist' Capuana, for he approaches his renewed 'metaphysical' interests in what to him, as we shall see, was still an unequivocally positivist spirit. We shall see too that despite his ability to respond sensitively to new departures in literature, he continues to prefer works which give pride of place to 'il vero' and to objectivity. The period is marked not by a radical revision of views but by an uneasy blending of old and new. It is the beginning of a long conflict between the Capuana whose aesthetic attitudes remain anchored to realism, and the Capuana striving to come to terms with new artistic ideals because he senses that the realism of the Goncourts or Zola is fast slipping into the past. *Per l'arte* is a curiously ambiguous volume in which Capuana jettisons certain aspects of realism (and emphasizes others), but only in order to save it from perishing entirely. His attack is a form of defence, but also a sign of waning self-confidence.

In 1882 Capuana replaced Ferdinando Martini as editor of the *Fanfulla della domenica*. In Sommaruga's Rome, where the *Fanfulla* was only one of several flourishing literary enterprises, Capuana witnessed the birth of a new, more 'spiritual' literature. 1881 saw the publication of *Malombra* as well as of *I Malavoglia*, and in Rome the early ferments of a decadent sensibility were epitomised in the presence of the youthful D'Annunzio. 'Nell'inverno e nella primavera dell'82', wrote Scarfoglio of the *Cronaca bizantina*, 'Gabriele fu per tutti noi argomento d'una predilezione e quasi di un culto non credibile'.[3] It was not

surprising therefore that Capuana, now approaching middle-age, should feel that 'his' art and the art of Verga were under threat. He was always sensitive to the winds of change, and some aspects of *Per l'arte* and other works written in the eighties suggest that he was blown along in its course.

'Per l'arte', which gives its name to the volume, was written in 1885, and incorporates an article of 1884 which in the *Fanfulla* bore the significant title of 'Fantasia e immaginazione'.[4] In essence 'Per l'arte' is a rebuttal of the most banal criticism levelled at the naturalist (or *verista*, or realist, for Capuana still uses the terms interchangeably), the charge that it was vulgarly photographic, and lacking in imagination since it relied on the 'human document'. Capuana is manifestly still convinced of the seriousness of the modern novel and of its superiority over its romantic counterparts ('Dal latte e miele del Carcano al *pane nero* del Verga la distanza è incredibile' (p. xxvi)), and a trifle scornful of those 'persone colte' who 'rimpiangono il nodo, l'imbroglio, la favola, la *machine* [. . .] dei romanzi di trenta anni fa' (p. xl). And if the novelist, he says, 'ruba il mestiere al psicologo, al fisiologo, al professore di scienze sociali' (p. xliii), this is the inevitable result of the 'smania di positivismo, di studi, di osservazioni, di collezioni di fatti' (p. xliv). But then, in an effort to disarm his critics, Capuana presents the familiar parallel between the novelist and the scientist in a new guise, now emphasizing not the 'scientific' qualities of the writer, but the imaginative powers of the scientist:

> Questo è poeta, è creatore, è romanziere anche lui. La natura gli porge dei fatti; ma egli non saprebbe chè farsene se non sapesse anche di poter arrivare a cavarle di mano la cosa più importante, il vivo processo di quei fatti. Allora lo scienziato cerca, tenta di compenetrarsi con quei fatti, si sforza, sto per dire, di diventare natura; e a furia di immaginazione—domandatelo ai grandi fisiologi—combina, rifà un processo che la natura, gelosa dei suoi segreti, vorrebbe tenergli nascosto, e quando riesce—non vi paia una bestemmia—si mette quasi pari con Dio. (pp. xlvii-xlviii)

If this passage does not argue for disenchantment with science, it certainly underlines the decisive role of imagination (or the '*spiraculum vitae*'), and has thus invited the view that Capuana is in the process of invalidating his earlier campaign for an art based firmly in the observation of real life. 'Se a far l'arte era proprio lui, lo *spiraculum vitae*', writes Gaetano Trombatore, 'che bisogno c'era più del documento umano e di tutto il resto? Se quel che contava era solo il punto d'arrivo, l'opera d'arte in senso assoluto, in tal caso tutte le provenienze, tutte le vie, diventavano indifferentemente buone.'[5] He is correct in seeing Capuana ready to welcome art from 'tutte le provenienze'—Capuana reiterates in this same article the idea that *verismo* turned its attention to the 'strati più bassi della società', only 'per ripiego', 'per far[si] la mano' (p. x). But if in Capuana's view the writer, like the scientist, must try to 'compenetrarsi' with the object of his observation, then 'tutte le vie' cannot be called 'buone'. Capuana still opines for a work that seems '*fatta da sè*', for an artistic collaboration with nature and the willing eclipse of the author in

his work. He may stress imagination now under pressure of attack, but then he had always taken it for granted. 'Che miseria critica!', he wrote in irritation to Verga when certain Italian critics, among them De Amicis and Torelli, inferred 'da certe parole del Zola [. . .] che egli *manchi di fantasia* e *d'immaginazione*'.[6] If anything it must have seemed to him that naturalism schooled and dignified imagination. None the less his new emphasis on it at this point looked like an attempt to vindicate his own artistic ideals in the terms dictated by a new literary climate which was beginning to show itself weary of 'scientific' detachment and eager for more subjective and 'spiritual' experiences. And there are other facets of 'Per l'arte' which invite the views expressed by his recent critics. Much as in the 1889 preface to *Giacinta*, Capuana describes the difficulties he and his fellow-writers had had to overcome in the absence of an Italian narrative tradition, and their need of 'una prosa viva, efficace, adatta a rendere tutte le quasi impercettibili sfumature del pensiero moderno' (p. vi). Acknowledging the inadequacies of the language 'imbastita' to meet these requirements—'mezza francese, mezza regionale, mezza *confusionale*'—he none the less asserts: 'gli scrittori che verranno dietro a noi ci accenderanno qualche cero, se non per altro, per l'esempio di *aver parlato* scrivendo' (p. vii). The 'grande insegnamento' of realism will have been 'l'amore, il rispetto, il culto disinteressato dell'arte' (p. iv). What is striking about these claims is the fact that they are made in the name of an essential, non-partisan art, and that Capuana's perspective is already historical.

An article on *I Promessi Sposi* is possibly even more startlingly detached and carefully non-controversial. Excluding only 'una meravigliosa esecuzione delle parti secondarie', Capuana had recently abandoned Manzoni to the past and to the company of an antiquated Walter Scott.[7] It is surprising therefore to find him asking himself: 'Perchè questo libro, invece di invecchiare, ringiovanisce?' (p. 2). An imaginary interlocutor reminds him that '*I Promessi Sposi* è il libro della reazione religiosa' and Capuana retorts that the only pertinent question to ask of a work of art is whether 'quel contenuto, qualunque esso sia, è riuscito a organizzarsi, a prender forma, a diventare qualcosa d'indipendente, di vivo nelle creature che l'artista vi ha posto sotto gli occhi' (pp. 3-4). We are confronted in the whole of this article with a Capuana anxious to dissociate himself from any line of aesthetic argument which seems to carry with it a particular ideology and a preference for a particular content. He pointedly invokes the name of De Sanctis and the 'libera personalità' of the work of art, and as though to clinch the matter of his unexceptionable aesthetic stance sets Zola alongside Manzoni, treating the two with rigorous impartiality. It is a juxtaposition that would have been unthinkable at the time of the *Studi* and is still astonishing in the present context. Again the interlocutor speaks: 'I Rougon-Macquart sono il manuale del materialismo, del pessimismo contemporaneo.' And the new Capuana replies: 'Ma è l'identica cosa! Il contenuto, le intenzioni o le pretensioni scientifiche (dite come vi pare) dello Zola sono diventate carne ed ossa, organismi viventi in Silverio, in Renata, in Massimo, in

Gervasia, in Coupeau, in Nanà, in Mouret? Sì o no; la risposta dovrebbe essere questa' (p. 4).

Another curious feature of the article is the link that Capuana establishes between Verga, the author whom he unfailingly cites when he wishes to prove Italy's achievement in modern narrative, and the author of *I Promessi Sposi*. This link he sees operating not only on the level of Verga's development of aspects of Manzoni's 'forma' (and here the revised conclusion that 'fra Walter Scott e il Manzoni c'è di mezzo un abisso' (p. 10) is significant), but more superficially on the level of a shared compassion for the humble and the impotent. Thus *I Malavoglia*, 'scientemente o inconsciamente', owes as much to Manzoni as to 'Zola e i suoi grandi predecessori' (p. 13). Even as he increases the distance between himself and Zola, Capuana conjures up a semi-autonomous Italian tradition. It is a retrospective manoeuvre designed to rescue what Capuana views as Italy's original contribution to modern narrative from the tendentiousness of the battle that surrounded naturalism.

These re-evaluations were undoubtedly critically sound, but they were motivated by a self-defensiveness that elsewhere in *Per l'arte* modulates into self-doubt. In an imaginary conversation with the playwright whose repeated triumphs had left Capuana, in his reviews for the *Nazione*, half-admiring and half-suspicious, Capuana mercilessly exposes Sardou's *'ricetta'* for theatrical success. Capuana's 'Sardou' is the antagonist of the naturalist theatre as expressed by Zola in *Nos auteurs dramatiques*, a wily manipulator of his public, ready to exploit its transient passions, its thirst for scandal, to lull its critical faculties with strong emotion. 'Tiens! Tiens! Voilà mon affaire!' is the repeated exclamation of this Sardou, perpetually sniffing the wind to discover sensational 'attualità' which will fill the stalls (pp. 181-89). Capuana himself was to revert to his old theatrical ambitions in this decade; and when he did so with a version of *Giacinta* (first performed with considerable success on 16 May 1888 in Naples) it was with a seriousness of intent and a desire to renew the antiquated conventions of the theatre that was, if not Zolian, at least far removed from the opportunistic handling of the genre which belonged to his Sardou. *Giacinta* was not a play, according to Capuana, which made concessions. It offered the spectator none of the usual titillations of emotion by proxy, no *colpi di scena*, nor did it prudently calculate the depth and the time-span of his concentration:

> Io ero convinto di metterlo a dura prova col contenuto e con la forma del mio lavoro, dove nessuno dei personnaggi riesce simpatico [. . .], dove l'azione si svolge rapida, di scorcio in molti punti, in accenni qua e là che richiedono uno sforzo d'attenzione poco ordinario in teatro: dove il dialogo è spoglio di quelle fioriture, di quelle brillanti tirate, atte anche a svagare e a far riposare la mente; dove non sospensioni, non artifizi di sorpresa per ottenere il volgare interesse del 'come finirà?'[8]

What then is the reader to make of the shoulder-shrugging conclusion to the article

on Sardou where a Roman audience, spell-bound by his *Fedora*, induces Capuana to concede that perhaps Sardou's calculations are not, after all, entirely misguided: 'fino a un certo punto io non credo che abbia torto' (p. 189)?

The reader may recall that Capuana had in any case long considered the theatre a moribund genre. He indeed republished the iconoclastic preface to *Il Teatro italiano contemporaneo* in *Libri e teatro* (the critical volume which follows *Per l'arte*), asserting his belief that it had not entirely lost 'il pregio dell'opportunità' for all that it dated from 1872.[9] But one may conjecture that (like so many short stories republished, retouched and rebaptized) this preface served chiefly to plump out a volume which could provide Capuana with his ever more urgently needed author's advance. At all events, in contrast to the second series of the *Studi, Per l'arte* is silent on the luminous prospects disclosed to the intellect by the universal law of evolution, silent on the power of 'la critica moderna' to account scientifically for the successive forms of art. Capuana's evolutionism has become shy and retiring. In the second series of *Studi*, the article on Betteloni and Cannizzaro, 'Elzeviri e non elzeviri', had urbanely proclaimed, via that image of the Poetic Muse turned coquette of uncertain age, Capuana's view that lyrical versification was not at all the robust, male activity required of a realistic, scientific age. But he had now to face the fact that Carducci's achievement in the *Odi barbare* had been followed by *Primo vere* and *Canto novo*. Poetry, which Capuana had condemned to impotence, refused to languish and showed instead a certain vigour. He acknowledged D'Annunzio's outstanding poetic gifts, and called *Canto novo* a 'foga sinfonica, tormentata alla Wagner, dove i *rossi* e i *gialli* mandan fuori rantoli profondi ed urli da ottoni, dove il *verde* e l'*azzurro* cantano' (p. 28); but at the same time he was reluctant to consider that the pronounced visual sense, the attentiveness to verbal sonority, the 'mescolanza di arti diverse' (p. 29), displayed by D'Annunzio might genuinely be a sign of new life in Italy's poetry. He preferred to suggest that *Canto novo*, for all the originality he recognized in it, marked a decline in the realist tradition. He believed that man's psycho-physiological make-up had grown in the course of time 'molto più sensibile e più vibrante che non fosse una volta' (p. 31). It followed that D'Annunzio, like other modern writers, was drawn to 'cose troppo elaborate, raffinate; cioè sensazioni aggruppate, fantasmi che si aggrovigliano e si divincolano agitati da nevrosi', and to an artistic form correspondingly 'analitica, eccessivamente cesellata, spesso contorta' (p. 32). He was torn between admiration for D'Annunzio and the old prejudice against poetry in general. Thus the article concluded on a bizarre note, with an admonition to D'Annunzio to realize that 'il far dei versi, anche stupendi, non sia il meglio che egli possa fare!' (p. 39).

In this period his attitude to poetry is consistently ambiguous. In 1882 the *Fanfulla* published his parody article 'Un poeta danese' in which Capuana's fictitious Wil'hem Getziier was equipped with a biography, scholarly commentators, and poems 'translated' by 'G.B.'.[10] As he reveals with obvious relish, in a note

appended to the article when it was republished in *Per l'arte*, the *Fanfulla*'s readers were deceived into sending 'G.B.' letters of encouragement. Capuana's critics have been in the habit of celebrating his literary deceptions, from the faked *canti popolari* to the Rapisardian parodies, merely for their exceptional powers of mimicry, occasionally for their mordant humour. 'Chi vuol riconoscere il Rapisardi vero', wrote Giulio Salvadori, 'lo deve cercare in queste falsificazioni del suo compaesano';[11] recently Giuseppe Marchese has expressed the view that they show an 'aspetto notevole dell'intima natura del Capuana, un ironia sottile [. . .] un'originale *vis comica*'.[12] Rapisardi had responded to Capuana's criticism of his epic poem, *Lucifero*,[13] with haughty irritation (his verse epistle, 'Perchè non rispondo ai miei critici', contained an unflattering reference to the 'Zolian' Capuana: 'Ghigna beato, e col ditin paffuto/m'indica, in carità, la via più corta/del lupanar, tempio dell'Arte'),[14] and no doubt Capuana's main aim was to chastise by laughter, as in this passage where the *vate* of his own infernal court prepares to unleash his song:

> [. . .] Tormentosa
> Correa la destra intanto all'arcuato
> Onor del labbro e le affilate punte
> N'attorcigliava con solenne gesto.
> Poi, come al varco delle labbra imposti
> Furon gli estremi delle dita e il breve
> Triplice scoppio di sua tosse uscì,
> Dal picciol petto ch'il febeo consunse
> Terribil foco gorgogliante l'onda
> Dell'epico suo carme si devolse.[15]

Recently, however, Enrico Ghidetti has argued that behind the apparent playfulness of Capuana's literary vendettas and his poetic counterfeiting lies a serious critical purpose. The free-verse poems published under the title of *Semiritmi* in 1888, and which include the seven 'translated' in the Getziier article, are 'la rivelazione, in chiave ludica, del meccanismo di questo fare poesie per dimostrarne, una volta accertata la sua riproducibilità all'infinito, l'assoluta inutilità'.[16] There is certainly more profundity in this opinion of Ghidetti's than in that of critics disposed to see *Semiritmi* merely as an exercise in humour. Supporting Ghidetti's interpretation are both the close to the final poem, *Finis*:

> Quello che più mi tormenta,
> o Muse, è il profondo terrore
> di far produrre altre serque
> di semiritmi.
>
> Perchè gli scimmiottini dell'arte
> non san distinguere il ben dal male
> e vorran, forse, ora svagolarsi
> semiritmicamente![17]

and the warning note attached to 'Un poeta danese' in *Per l'arte*: 'Se qualcuno dei tanti nostri traduttori di traduttori di poeti stranieri ha già, per caso, versificata la mia prosa, ora è pietosamente avvertito' (p. 167). In both cases Capuana envisages a nightmarish and meaningless proliferation of verse. If, however, *Semiritmi* simply made the point that to write poetry was by now a futile, rhetorical activity, it did so in an uncharacteristically laboured and oblique manner. This may have been part of the volume's message, but Capuana's experiments in free verse were also vehicles of the self-doubt, the new questioning that characterizes this period. The attentive reading of poets from Gautier and Verlaine to Carducci and D'Annunzio may not in itself signify a capitulation in favour of poetry, but certainly Capuana's verses allow him to explore themes and ideas which positivism had decreed irrelevant. Precisely because they were undertaken in a mood of less than high seriousness, they left Capuana free to toy with prohibited notions. In *Intus*, for instance, he describes the re-emergence of a religious sensibility:

> Assorgo ai patenti cieli sgombri d'orrore,
> e canto nel tempio della liberata Natura
> l'inno della Legge, e respiro il vivente
> aere delle forme via via tramutantisi.
>
> Ma, tosto celebrato gl'infranti lacci,
> la mia ragione non rivacilla com'ebbra?
> È? Non è? La spaura il profondo mistero
> delle cose, l'Iside che non vuole svelarsi.[18]

While few would argue for a return to orthodoxy on Capuana's part,[19] by the time *Alla ricerca dei letterati*, Ugo Ojetti's Italian equivalent of Huret's *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, appeared in 1895, Capuana was professing himself 'credente'.[20] And *Profumo*, the novel which closes this decade, is anti-determinist, while its Doctor Mola, the equivalent of *Giacinta*'s Follini, is a pious man. Another 'semiritmo', *Poesia musicale*, contains an undoubtedly ambivalent tribute to D'Annunzio and other decadent poets. It is poised, much like the article on *Canto novo*, between admiration and the suspicion that the poet sets out deliberately to mystify:

> Suona nei tuoi versi, o biondo poeta,
> una musica troppo nuova pei duri orecchi
> del nostro volgo [. . .]
>
> Parole, parole! . . . Oh sì! Ma dietro l'ondeggiante
> parvenza, che il ritmo persegue ansioso,
> più largamente rivelasi l'Infinito.
>
> La sillaba dalla sillaba riceve dilucidazione;
> così delle tue canzoni che più sembra nulla dicano
> vena sgorga, o poeta, d'ineffabile poesia.[21]

Unlike the critic who wrote 'Elzeviri e non elzeviri', and for all his sly ambiguity,

the present Capuana seems willing to live in a world which still includes poetry. He is as sympathetic to the symbolist-decadent ideals as the vestiges of his belief in the evolution of literature towards the extinction of poetry allow. In *Libri e teatro* he states:

Al pari dei decadenti, io penso che spesse volte la sola musicalità del verso, il solo splendore di un'imaggine, fino l'eccesso d'una metafora e d'un aggettivo, potendo produrre effetti nuovi potenti in correlazione con la facile eccitabilità dei nostri nervi e con la rapida comprensibilità delle nostre intelligenze, siano preferibili alla esattezza e alla limpidità che, precisando il concetto, suggestionano niente.
E' una corruzione! esclamano.
Che importa, se naturale svolgimento di un fatto, logica necessità?[22]

Thus a question mark hangs suspended over Capuana's attitudes to poetry, to drama and to certain existential problems. The realist formula and the rigid materialism of positivist science seem no longer to provide full answers, and Capuana's 'scientific' polemicism has faded. But it is noteworthy that he is as yet prepared to make tentative sorties into the hinterland of positivism only when dealing with the genres that least involve him personally. It seems reasonable to assume that he was passing through no radical spiritual or intellectual crisis, but that the atmosphere of the times induced him to suspend his disbelief on a number of questions which had once appeared unanswerable, and therefore futile, or else satisfactorily resolved.

One poem from *Semiritmi* entitled simply *?*, wryly expresses Capuana's doubts about the spiritual understanding of the table-tapping defunct who have passed over to the 'other side':

> Nulla disimparato, nulla voi avete
> dunque appreso costì, se è mistero
> l'essenza delle cose sempre, o Spiriti, per voi?[23]

The 'spirits' leave him sceptical, and it is in his volume, *Spiritismo?* of 1884, with its emblematically interrogative title, which shows that while Capuana still associated himself with the ideology of positivism, he feared that the scientific philosophy that derived from it was becoming dogmatic. The volume retails his own spiritualistic experiences, from the alarming encounters he engineered between the Florentine Beppa Poggi and a peculiarly irascible 'Foscolo' in the summer of 1864 (until Beppa's nerves and state of mind forced him to desist) to his more recent and less sensational impression of writing the children's *fiabe* of *C'era una volta* 'quasi sotto dettatura'. Capuana is interested in a possible relationship between ultra-physical perception and what he terms 'l'allucinazione artistica', the 'punto, nell'atto della produzione, in cui la facoltà artistica agisce con completa incoscienza'.[24] *Spiritismo?*, written by an enthusiastic amateur, walks a tightrope between 'scienza' and 'fantasia', but before concluding, as Walter Mauro seems to do, that Capuana has abandoned his positivism and is invincibly drawn to 'tutto

quanto di subconscienziale, magico, ignoto esiste nell'io',[25] we should examine the way in which Capuana envisages an investigation of extrasensory phenomena. He rejects on the one hand 'la cocciutaggine della scienza nel negare fatti evidentissimi che saltano agli occhi da ogni parte', on the other any persistence in attributing 'tali fatti a cause supernaturali, come se fossero già stati esauriti tutti i possibili mezzi di esame per annodarli alla gran catena dei fenomeni del mondo inorganico e dell'organico, dato che siano due mondi e non uno solo, solissimo.'[26] In this idea of an uninterrupted chain of being the monism of the positivist creed emerges, and Capuana indeed proclaims himself in agreement with Claude Bernard in seeing extraordinary events as mere exaggerations of the normal. He recommends the approach of Adolphe D'Assier in *Essai sur l'Humanité posthume et le spiritisme*. D'Assier's work, published in 1883, seeks to attribute 'post-sepulchral manifestations' to a 'fluidic' posthumous being whose 'constituent molecules' are of 'extreme tenuity' and represent the 'last term of organic matter'. Fantastical as this theory sounds, it was undeniably materialistic and D'Assier was a trained scientist and an avowed positivist whose aim was to 'bring within the compass of the laws of time and space the phenomena of the posthumous order, hitherto denied by science because it was unable to explain them, and to rescue the people of our epoch from the enervating hallucinations of spiritism'.[27] Capuana, then, rejects a positivist science grown pedestrian and unimaginative, but hopes that life's mysteries may eventually succumb to scientific research undertaken without dogmatism and in a spirit of adventure. He criticizes positivist science for its now settled and unquestioning ways (and reminds the reader that Lavoisier once refused to believe in the existence of meteorites), but not the methodology or the essential spirit of positivism itself.

This suspension of disbelief runs throughout the range of Capuana's intellectual activities. In the field of his literary criticism, as we have seen, he reaches out to understand new departures, and yet clings to an artistic methodology worked out in the period of the *Studi*, and which (for all the present rejection of the tendentious ideology of naturalism) is inseparable from a vision of life as decipherable by observation of cause and effect. Capuana resisted the tendency of art's focus to shift from the outside, observable world to the inscrutable self, exclaiming in connexion with the D'Annunzio of *Canto novo*, 'Ah! se la realtà per poco l'afferra' (p. 39), and continuing his campaign for a realist, impersonal art in the margins of *Libri e teatro*.

Though this volume, like the earlier *Per l'arte*, represents an effort to be scrupulously non-controversial, Capuana's abiding artistic preferences emerge clearly enough. He is anxious not to be accused of *contenutismo* because of his past literary affiliations: 'materialisti, scettici, spiritualisti, intuitivi possiamo egualmente riuscire con la nostra particolar materia d'arte a creare una bell'opera d'arte, se la nostra intenzione sarà di fare, prima di tutto, un'opera d'arte e nient'altro'.[28] But at the same time we find him pointing out that naturalism has been judged mainly by

its aberrations and excesses, by its inevitable propensity to reflect the current materialist philosophy. The implication is that once writers have seen fit to discard the 'brutalità di certi particolari', 'descrizioni ridotte a uno sfoggio di abilità tecnica', and the 'troppa loro cura di aggruppare figure malvage' (p. 124) (for all of which a materialistic doctrine was responsible), a form of naturalism or realism may survive. The nature of this 'neo-naturalism', purified of partisan ideologies and its obsession with animality, becomes clearer in a review of *Il Piacere*.

As with *Canto novo*, Capuana finds D'Annunzio's novel a remarkable but flawed work, its author too lyrical and 'troppo invadente' (p. 43), too much given to 'descrizione eccessiva e inutile' (p. 21), yet an 'apparizione veramente eccezionale nella nostra odierna produzione letteraria' (p. 7). In *Per l'arte* the improved control of narrative structure and style in *Numa Roumestan* by Daudet (whose language in the past was so often 'troppo straluccicante, troppo impennacchiata') seemed to Capuana the presage of a 'bella evoluzione artistica';[29] similarly with *Il Piacere* we find him tensely scrutinizing D'Annunzio's pages for signs—destined for disappointment—of a future artistic development along the lines of his own preferences: 'È ben chiaro che il mondo esteriore comincia ad attirarlo non unicamente come colore, come linea, e neppure come sola sensualità' (p. 18). And then again: 'Sembra che, più di tutto, lo attiri un vivo desiderio di accostarsi alla realtà e di renderla, come oggi si dice, oggettivamente' (p. 19). As far as Capuana is concerned the novel is still founded in the observation of reality, and produces a quintessential version of it. Impersonality remains axiomatic not arbitrarily, nor as the inert legacy of a scientific age, but because it is able to ward off the subjectivism which prevents art from becoming an autonomous 'organism'. Capuana is aware of course that this 'organism' is an invention but it does not occur to him that in the last analysis it is quite as much an invention as the work where, in Binni's words, 'il centro è dovunque, è in ogni punto della periferia',[30] and where that centre is the undisguised and unashamed consciousness of the author. The culture which shaped his view of the novel taught him that it was possible and desirable to understand the world beyond the self; it did not equip him to reflect that other forms of cognition were feasible and equally legitimate. Thus he might reject the naturalist label as applied to himself, defining it for these purposes in terms of a scientific ideology which had little to do with the fundamental nature of art, but he remained wedded to a form of naturalism which seemed to him timeless and free of prejudices, a question merely of approach or method.

Yet certain prejudices remained, for from his ideal work of art he debarred the 'literary' self-indulgences of subjectivism and lyricism, and the only novel he could envisage dealt with personalities and passions. Thus he was disappointed with the psychological handling of the central character, Sperelli, and with the tendency of D'Annunzio's language not merely to mediate passively between the object and its perception, but to clamour for attention on its own behalf: what he allowed the poet in terms of formal experimentation, he apparently could not bring himself to

allow the novelist. 'Il prosatore', he writes of D'Annunzio 'nel nuovo libro, è tuttavia sopraffatto dal poeta: l'osservatore vi si lascia prender la mano dal colorista e dallo stilista' (p. 4). Proof of his abidingly and exclusively realist outlook in relation to narrative is an aside on the modern novel, which, he says, 'bisogna tuttavia chiamare *naturalista*, finchè non ci saremo accordati a dirlo semplicemente romanzo' (p. 121).

Despite his habitually shifting terminology, it may be surprising to find him using the word 'naturalista', which he himself has made pregnant with ideological connotations. But it is an act of calculated provocation, ready as he is to counter with the remainder that *his* naturalism (or *verismo*) is not an ideology, has no preferences for content, but is a universal method. *Libri e teatro* in effect uses the term in two distinct ways: negatively, to designate a body of ideas unrelated to the essential nature of the work of art, but inevitably reflected by it in the period of their philosophical ascendancy; positively, as an artistic method particularly conducive to the creating of the autonomous 'organism' which in his view uniquely constitutes aesthetic activity.

This dual definition allows Capuana to preserve an appearance of critical consistency over the years; and with more justification than many critics have allowed, if we remember the stricture of the second series of *Studi* that the scientific character of the age affects only the 'forma' of literature. None the less there are small, revealing shifts of emphasis. If the touchstone of aesthetic excellence, the 'organismo', and the methods Capuana prescribes, observation of reality and impersonality, themselves imply a specific philosophy of life, a number of marginal concessions to the new 'spirituality' are perceptible. It is true that Capuana's theoretical *verismo* was not indissolubly linked to the regional, agricultural classes, but his present view of them as constituting 'un filone di metallo prezioso ma molto povero e già quasi esaurito' (p. xxviii) was perhaps conditioned by his first-hand experience of a new avant-garde indifferent to such material and concerned instead with scrutinizing its own internal, spiritual dilemmas. Having pared away the transient, ideological *parti pris* of naturalism, he felt free to write that the 'alta genialità d'un artista consiste appunto nel fare un'equa parte all'osservazione interna e alla esterna' (p. 123). But was this not to extend his 'neutral' method in the direction which writers like Fogazzaro and D'Annunzio were making fashionable? How far this method could be divorced from attitudes which had matured during the hey-day of positivism, and to what extent Capuana's new, carefully undoctrinaire stance produced a genuine artistic inspiration, it will be our task to examine in *Profumo*.

2. *'Profumo': On the Brink of Idealism?*

In the essay 'Per l'arte' Capuana deprecated the intricacies of plot and the sensational vicissitudes which had accounted for the popular success of novels belonging to an earlier generation. The realist writers of France, whatever their

practice (and one thinks of the momentous, symbolic animation of Zola's industrial machinery, or of the zestful, larger-than-life parody of the *petite bourgeoisie* in Flaubert's Homais), reacted against sentimental, noble, and adventurous subjects and deliberately sought out anti-heroic material and the textures of everyday life. Flaubert's contemplation of a novel which was to tell the story of 'une jeune fille qui meurt vierge et mystique, entre son père et sa mère, dans une petite ville de province, au fond d'un jardin planté de choux et quenouilles' was an extreme manifestation of this reaction;[31] and in 1887 we find Capuana too, seduced by the idea of writing 'tre atti *con nulla*'.[32] In *Giacinta* the story-line had already been slender, an undeviating impulse which propelled the heroine through a series of psychological 'phases' to a 'logical' catastrophe. But on closer inspection the sham marriage, the tribulations of adultery, the suicide, had revealed their fair share of melodramatic extravagance. *Profumo*, by contrast, seems deliberately to erode the role of plot into insignificance, and it perturbed Capuana's colleague, De Roberto, in the process. 'È una cosa *voluta*', Capuana reassured him.[33] But it was 'voluta' not perhaps so much in order to explore the extreme possibilities of plotless realism, as to tone down the darker, more dramatic conduct of Capuana's earlier naturalist works, from *Giacinta* itself to stories like 'Povero dottore!' and 'Mostruosità' (from *Homo!*), in which pathological characters moved convulsively towards death or the silence of desperation. Carlo Madrignani comments on the significance of *Profumo* having been first published in such a respectable journal as the *Nuovo Antologia*.[34] It was not simply that in the course of time naturalism had lost its power to shock. *Profumo* is the product of Capuana's new naturalism as he defined it in *Libri e teatro*. Neither obtrusively materialistic or scientific, it sets matter alongside spirit, balances 'internal' and 'external' observation, and shows in short—as Capuana himself said—that 'si può essere naturalisti, senza dover mostrarsi ineducati'.[35]

Looking back on *Profumo* in a preface to its fourth edition of 1900, Capuana notes with satisfaction: 'Immaginario paladino a ogni costo delle teoriche naturaliste o veriste, io smentivo col fatto la leggenda creata attorno al mio nome, trattando un soggetto che un critico autorevole ebbe a chiamare *puro come un'ostia*.'[36] He was understandably anxious to seize on any available means of wriggling free of his naturalist or *verista* label. During the nineties, as naturalism faded definitively into the past, critics drew up their literary balance sheets, and Capuana, who would continue to write prolifically until his death in 1915, resisted their impulse to consign him along with naturalism to the pages of history. In the same preface he claims that *Profumo* 'accennava a un'evoluzione dell'arte contemporanea, manifestatasi apertamente alcuni anni dopo' (p. vii). Writing to Cesareo in 1914 he was more specific: 'con *Profumo*, io preannunciai l'evoluzione del romanzo moderno verso quell'Arte spirituale che ha sostituito il così detto naturalismo'.[37] It is noticeable, as in *Libri e teatro*, that Capuana facilitates his renunciation of naturalism by choosing to see in it simply a tendentious preference

for 'brutal' subject-matter. A subject that was 'puro come un'ostia', according to this simplistic definition (one which ironically places Capuana in the same position as the moralists whom he deplored), could never be considered the product of naturalism. The defence of *Profumo* however is retrospective; and Capuana's interpretation of it is clearly permeated through more recent experiences, and specifically the writing of *Rassegnazione* (which, though it did not appear finally until 1907, was conceived and partly published, in serial form, by 1900). Thus *Profumo* in Capuana's eyes assumed the melancholy philosophy of life and the consoling moralism of the later novel:

> Senza intenderlo nell'atto della creazione e dell'esecuzione, io venivo imbastendo un simbolo di me stesso e di parecchi altri che, al pari di me, hanno sbagliato la loro via, chiedendo alla vita più che essa non sia in grado di dare; non comprendendo, smarriti dietro un falso ideale, che il vero ideale è la realtà che si attua e si trasforma; la quale non è poi tanto disprezzabile, come io e parecchi altri abbiamo ingenuamente creduto. (p. viii)

While all this fits *Rassegnazione* better than *Profumo*, in anticipating a future development in Capuana's narrative it usefully alerts the reader to the traces of moralism undoubtedly present in *Profumo*, and also to Capuana's desire to create a novel of half-tones and graded subtleties, a novel of 'polite' naturalism.

That naturalism or *verismo* of method, which, as we saw in *Libri e teatro*, Capuana believed was ideologically neutral, he did not however relinquish even in 1900. 'Non intendevo affatto rinnegare', he wrote, 'quei principi che vogliono per fondamento della creazione l'osservazione della vita reale.' He intended indeed to show that they could 'benissimo applicarsi a soggetti di qualunque natura, perchè nel mondo, per fortuna, accanto al male c'è il bene, accanto al senso il sentimento, accanto all'istinto la elevazione spirituale dell'umana coscienza' (p. vii).

For all the purity discovered by the 'autorevole critico', Capuana is concerned in *Profumo*, as so often, with the psychology of sex. The perfume of the title refers to the scent of orange-blossom which Capuana's heroine emits during attacks of nervous hysteria, so that the title itself loudly advertises the book in terms, as it were, of boudoir medicine. None the less the psychological conduct and the insights of the work are subtle and even strikingly original. This time the novel depends much less on an inert, preliminary premiss, like the antagonism between the pathological character and a 'guilty' society of *Giacinta*: it distributes psychological abnormality among three related individuals able to condition each other's outlook, and thus to invest the psychological dimension of the novel with a complexity and an autonomous dynamism absent in the earlier novel. There is no decisive trauma which subsequently determines the whole movement of the story, but rather three sets of attitudes, variously motivated, which harden in contact with each other. And the context of Capuana's 'problem' is not the adulterous triangle so favoured by nineteenth-century writers as a representation in miniature of society's moral structure, but a marriage which must meet the threat of a jealous mother.

Eugenia's hysteria is, in fact, not the centre of the novel at all, but rather a peripheral symptom of the graver neurosis of her husband. The nature of his abnormality begins to emerge as the book opens. The newly-married couple, accompanied by Patrizio's mother, Geltrude, is discovered travelling by carriage to the Sicilian town of Marzallo (modelled on Spaccaforno, the modern Ispica), where Patrizio is to take up his duties as an inspector of taxes. The travellers are disgruntled and silent, Patrizio in particular full of vague foreboding. Turning first (and the order of his priorities is important) to his mother to ask how she is, he receives in reply 'un breve cenno degli occhi socchiusi' which hardens 'la espressione di quella ruga della fronte che la inesplicabile diffidenza di lei verso la nuora pareva segnasse, da qualche settimana, con maggiore energia' (p. 2); only secondly he addresses his wife; and a little later, tempted to kiss her, he none the less refrains: 'Il pudore della sua casta giovinezza e il pensiero che gli occhi severamente socchiusi della madre stessero lì a sorvegliarlo con la gelosa diffidenza contro la nuora, lo avevano trattenuto' (p. 4). It is the shadow of his possessive, censorious mother which darkens Patrizio's horizon. And he, passive, immature, excessively dutiful to the widow who has lived a joyless, penniless, solitary existence seemingly for his sole benefit, cannot cope with the aura of aggrieved resentment which surrounds her. The result is an inhibited sexual response to Eugenia, even a fear of her physical demonstrativeness which may lead him into further 'betrayals' of his mother. Though for a long time he rationalizes her unreasonable behaviour (reflecting that he is after all the only son of a woman who has been perpetually afflicted in life), and remains for ever too loyal to condemn it explicitly, he comes at last to realize that the estrangement between him and his wife depends largely on his own subjugation to the strong-willed Geltrude. But in the meantime the frustrated Eugenia, piqued by her mother-in-law's ill-concealed animosity and importunate omnipresence, has succumbed to bouts of hysteria, accompanied by the strange symptom of the orange-blossom perfume. She begins to doubt Patrizio's feelings for her, and then, when the acute phase of her illness passes, sinks into an apathetic disillusion with marriage and an indifference to Patrizio which finally borders on contempt. Even Geltrude's death before half the novel is over does not halt the gathering momentum of the couple's estrangement, for her emotional blackmailing ('Io non conto più niente per te! [. . .] Dovrete sopportarmi ancora un po'. Poi sarete liberi; sarete pur liberati di questa incresciosa!' (pp. 44,45)) survives the tomb, and sends her 'guilty' son on his ritual, daily visit to the cemetery or propels him into the jealously preserved sanctuary that was her room, where he plunges into remorseful, morbid meditation. The 'problem' seems insoluble, and indeed Eugenia's interest is turning elsewhere, towards Ruggiero, the son of Marzallo's mayor. Just in time, however, and with the help of a local doctor, Patrizio's inhibitions fall away. Against the background of rolling thunder (which elicits from Patrizio a 'male' protectiveness towards his nervous wife) and rainclouds shrouding the room in intimate obscurity, comes the long confession

which miraculously resolves all misunderstandings. The storm ends, the sun reappears, and Patrizio and Eugenia are left framed in the window, gazing out onto a garden newly washed by the rain: 'E guardavano, guardavano, e si stringevano amorosamente le mani' (p. 252).

The optimism of this ending is obviously significant, and we shall see in due course how much of Capuana's narrative strategy is geared towards it. At the same time it is the least convincing element in the book. In the preparation for this denouement, Doctor Mola has had too great a hand, and thus Patrizio's effusive directness in the final chapter seems something of a feverish masquerade constantly on the point of revealing the same passive character only momentarily galvanized into action by a stronger personality, Mola's. Nor is the reader given the benefit of his full confession (for over most of it Capuana draws a veil, presumably of modesty), and Patrizio's reconquest of Eugenia therefore seems too precipitate. Yet consultation of the *Nuova Antologia* version of the novel reveals that Capuana was aware of these deficiencies. In the volume of 1892 he made strenuous efforts to improve on his original version of the denouement. In the *Nuova Antologia* an impossibly dense, short chapter includes Ruggiero's declaration of love and Eugenia's far from convinced rejection of his advances, her reconciliation with Patrizio, and finally even (by way of a brisk 'coda') the report that Ruggiero is already contemplating a return to the arms of a local belle—an inappropriate piece of 'realist' cynicism.[38] In the volume this one chapter expands into four. The graveyard conversation with Mola, improbably decisive for Patrizio in the original version, is followed by a second, longer discussion, and Patrizio is accorded space in which to meditate on the damage done him by an over-protected childhood. In addition Capuana strengthens the once barely perceptible motif of Patrizio's jealousy. Though the allusions to marital infidelity which crystallize his vague suspicions are hopelessly misallocated, being placed in the mouth of the simple sacristan known as Padreterno, a humble, slightly comical figure who in the rest of the novel is concerned with nothing more emotionally charged than the care of the convent garden and the vestments belonging to its chapel, they are witnesses of Capuana's attempt to motivate Patrizio more persuasively. From the episodes concerning Ruggiero Capuana removes all the abruptness and vulgarity, accommodating them better to the prevailing tone of the novel. And yet the novel's solution remains its least satisfactory aspect, seeming to indicate that while Capuana was determined to have his happy (non-naturalist) ending, it scarcely engaged his imagination.

As in *Giacinta* his strengths emerge where he ties the psychological knots eventually to be unravelled. The sense of guilt which he attributed to Giacinta in her relations with her mother now moves from its peripheral position in that early novel to constitute the central psychological focus of *Profumo*; and ten years before Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* touched incidentally on the Oedipus theory, Capuana seems to have intuited something of the hostile, erotic response of

child to parent. *Giacinta* had shown that Capuana was sensitive to the importance of childhood experience in shaping adult personality, and aware in particular of what is now known as infantile sexuality. This subject he had treated in a short story called 'Precocità' (published in *La Tribuna* in 1885), which deals with a child's passion for her 'uncle' Carlo;[39] and the first chapter of his own 'Ricordi d'infanzia' describing his childhood to the age of seven years focuses particularly (though presumably this time 'unconsciously') on experiences of an erotic nature, from the nightly dream visitation of 'Facciabella' ('mi prese ignudo su le braccia e mi portò via, con sè, facendomi passare a traverso l'uscio chiuso, come era passata lei') to the 'primo amore' for a pretty, painted Madonna which hung over his bed.[40] This particular area of Capuana's sensitivity is now ably exploited for the benefit of Patrizio.

Patrizio himself is half-aware of the sources of his sexual inhibitions. In Chapter II, amid recollections of his mother, grief-stricken and condemned to poverty by his father's death, comes the evocation (retailed to Eugenia) of his friendship with a child named Giulietta, a friendship with erotic connotations disapproved of by Signora Geltrude, who stumbles upon the two children affectionately embraced:

> La mamma, trovatici così, domandò brusca: 'Che fate?'
> Ci sciogliemmo dall'abbraccio, quasi vergognosi di esserci lasciati sorprendere in un atto che avevamo dovuto fare di nascosto [. . .]
> Ci nascondevamo, per baciarci e abbracciarci senza che la mamma potesse coglierci all'improvviso e domandarci: 'Che fate?' Io mi sentivo scotere tutto, quando Giulietta mi abbracciava. (p. 24)

The future pattern of Patrizio's emotional life is already determined, from his passivity (Giulietta takes the initiative, as Eugenia will) to the guilt he associates with emotional ties bonding him to persons other than his mother. Signora Geltrude is already the stern, jealous, inhibiting figure who greets the news that Giulietta has fallen from a window and is dying with the words: 'Hai sentito? . . . Quando si è scapati! . . .' (p. 26), in the same way as she responds to Eugenia's first attack of nerves: 'Lo vedi? E' un'isterica! E non volevi credermi!' (p. 38). Capuana is not afraid of exposing the morbid quality of her possessiveness. In an ugly and irrational outburst on the subject of Eugenia, she sees herself not only as Patrizio's guardian but as a 'rival' for his affections:

> Tu non ti guardi allo specchio, o ti guardi così di sfuggita da non poterti accorgere quanto sei mutato e invecchiato da sei mesi! Non ti potresti riconoscere. Lei se lo beve il tuo sangue! [. . .] Io sono impotente a lottare con lei' E' giovane, è bella, è amata. Ti ha stregato! Che posso più fare io? Ti avvertii in tempo; ti ho avvertito dopo; ti ho sempre ripetuto: 'Bada! Bada!'. (p. 45)

As his 'first love', invested with the privileges of that position, Patrizio too sees his mother. Thus Eugenia, who has instinctively understood the implications for herself in Patrizio's account of Giulietta (' "Basta, non ti commovere troppo", disse

Eugenia con durezza gelosa nella voce, levandosi da sedere' (p. 27)), is justified in feeling less than satisfied when Patrizio tells her: 'Nel mio cuore non c'è lievito di altri amori . . . Tu sei stata l'unica donna, *dopo mia madre*, che n'abbia preso possesso e per sempre' (p. 153). (Italics mine). At times Capuana is tempted to categorize Patrizio as he did Andrea Gerace, to see in him the end product of a total of quantifiable experiences. The outcome of a lonely childhood, passed in the dreary atmosphere of his mother's self-martyring poverty, burdened with her adult sorrows, and isolated from other children, is Patrizio's vague pessimism and timidity. But it is always around the motif of his inhibited sexuality that Capuana groups his lightest and most penetrating psychological touches. Thus, for instance, Patrizio persuades himself that sexual abstention is vital to the recovery of Eugenia's nerves (and indeed hints at his own 'altruism' to her); makes her feel faintly immodest with the enigmatic phrase, 'Se tu comprendessi, non lo diresti' (p. 150), when she openly begs for a more normal relationship; or, on the road to recovery, watching village boys scrapping as they search for birds' eggs, intuits the contribution of his repressed childhood to his inadequate, 'infantile' manhood: 'Ah, se da ragazzo si fosse azzuffato anche lui, come quelli là! Se avesse dato anche lui pugni e schiaffi [. . .]. Tutti costoro imparavano così a vivere nella società, provando la loro forza, esercitando le proprie passioni, uomini in miniatura sin da ora' (pp. 210-11).

Capuana was clearly fascinated by the psychological enormities which quite ordinary existence disclosed to him. Earlier he might have treated Patrizio's 'monstrous' feelings as he treated the perverted passions of the short story 'Mostruosità' in which an abject husband, subjugated by his beautiful, meretricious wife comes to loathe her only when she has learnt to respect *him* and renounced her lovers.[41] This was a story which allowed a zestful play on dramatic, ironic symmetries. But in *Profumo* Capuana eschews the violent contrasts, strong colours, and stress on the instinctive basis of behaviour which he now chose to associate with naturalism. Heredity plays no part in *Profumo*. The kind of positivistic thinking which produced Lombroso's 'born' criminal and the innate bestiality of a Beppe may at times still hint that Eugenia is predisposed to nervous disorders, but the impossible conditions of her life are sufficient to warrant her reactions. And the 'pathology' of the couple, their moments of melancholy introspection, and intermittent, inconclusive confrontations are only half the novel. The 'medical' framework is interspersed with documentation on the everyday course of Sicilian life, with its customs, superstitions, small-town gossip and characteristic personalities.

Capuana is no longer chary of giving his fiction a precise setting: the cheerily eccentric or characteristic world of his regional stories now erupts into the closed abode of bourgeois suffering, counterpoising and diluting its torments with common sense. There is the mayor of Marzallo, a bustling, verbose man unperturbed by local political wrangles and those unpaid taxes which Capuana

himself had confronted; his three daughters, the eldest burdened with the responsibility of quelling her irrepressible sister, Giulia, and the middle daughter, Benedetta, already destined to be the family's prim *zitellona*; their student brother, Ruggiero, to whom Capuana attributes the youthful intolerance for Sicily's backwardness of his own *Nazione* articles on the religious practices of the island. There is the comical servant of the mayor's family, and their comical aunt; and there is Padreterno, raiser of goldfinches (a 'Sicilian' pastime of Capuana's soon to be recorded in a book for children, *Il Drago*),[42] and nostalgic custodian of the lugubrious masks once used for the festivities of Holy Week. These are the figures who regularly distract Patrizio and Eugenia from their problems with social calls, attendances at picturesque religious ceremonies, and excursions into the countryside. They are still conspicuously 'characteristic', but because portraiture is not their author's sole aim, they are less heavily burdened with his 'ex'-Sicilian condescension and remorseless quest for the quaintly humorous. In the total plan of the novel they may occasionally serve the purpose of comic relief, or momentarily relax its central, psychological tensions; but, in a more fundamental way, they are indices of a new outlook in Capuana.

The narrative space devoted to Eugenia's and Patrizio's aberrations is carefully dosed, alternating regularly with the normality represented by Capuana's provincial figures. No longer, as happened with *Giacinta*, does abnormality stand out in relief against a one-dimensional social background. Capuana advances a little further towards creating a continuum between the normal and the abnormal, between the world of Marzallo and the tortured emotions of the convent's inhabitants. Thus the increasingly frequent excursions made by Eugenia with the mayor's family seem to Patrizio to 'come between' him and his wife; and Ruggiero, in particular, steps into the foreground to woo Eugenia and to inspire erotic fantasies in which Patrizio has no place. Waking her from a dream of 'stretti, lunghissimi corridoi dove Ruggiero la inseguiva', shattering her private world of self-compensation, Patrizio sees in her eyes the 'corruccio di essere stata svegliata in quel momento da lui' (p. 217). Though it is not in any way the cause of the couple's difficulties (and here again is evidence of a limited response to the naturalists' notion of *milieu*), the outside world nevertheless becomes involved in them, just as Eugenia and Patrizio become involved in the episode of Giulia's elopement. Even in this partial interchange abnormality becomes simply a moment in the functioning of life as a whole. Moments of tension are balanced by moments of repose, and the potential drama of *Profumo* is softened and neutralized.

It is noticeable that Capuana, so prone, from the time of *Profili di donne* onwards, to plunging his reader *in medias res* and presenting him with arresting conclusions, adopts a different technique here. The novel begins with a long meditative sentence on Patrizio's present happiness and fears for its duration; it closes, as we saw, on the tranquil prospect of the couple's new-found harmony which seems to stretch away into the distant future. In between, Capuana maintains

the calm tenor of his prose, only rarely interrupting it with Eugenia's staccato bursts of misery or with a scene of confrontation, destined anyway to peter out in reticence and resigned perplexity, refusing to pause overlong in the passages of free indirect speech which chart the desolate thoughts of his characters, and keeping them as near to the lightness and liveliness of direct speech as possible:

Perchè dunque si sentiva preso da malessere, osservando che, col decrescere della malattia di Eugenia, il carattere di lei veniva appunto conformandosi all'idea che egli s'era fatta di un'inalterabile felicità domestica, di un'esistenza isolata e quasi fuori del mondo?

'È cambiata? Che accade nel suo cuore?'

Non aveva proprio desiderato questo, no, mai! (p. 90)

Capuana mistrusted descriptive writing, seeing in it the most insidiously convenient receptacle of 'subjective' phrase-making. Yet in *Profumo*, descriptions of nature abound. Many of them are 'literary'—correlatives of states of mind, or reposeful word pictures offering relief from the novel's main subject. But they are also the means by which this subject is set in proper perspective. Their conspicuous place in Capuana's narrative economy balances psychological tensions, and absorbs them into a total reality which is, on the whole, benevolent. Though Capuana may entrust his description with dismal intimations on the couple's future, his Nature is not fearful or sinister. The precipitous slope below the convent terrace, in Chapter I, is only mysterious, palpitating with unseen life, and a trifle melancholy:

Attorno, vicino, lontano, gran silenzio, interrotto soltanto dal malinconico stornello di un contadino dalla melodia monotona e strascicante. Sotto il parapetto della terrazza, l'abisso nero gorgogliava di sordi rumori: stormìo di fronde, scroscio di acque scorrenti, stridi di uccelli notturni. A intervalli, calma profonda. (p. 13)

Even in the would-be desolation of a neglected cemetery, Nature seems animated, the trees protective and the gravestones bright among the foliage:

In quel lato le croci erano più fitte; rozze pietre, meschini tumoletti di sassi e gessi biancheggiavano tra il verde, sgretolati, immiseriti, sormontati da croci di ferro munite di cartellini col nome della persona sepolta. Un ulivo dai larghi rami proteggeva una tomba; brevi siepi di alloro si allargavano di qua e di là tra i mandorli e i fichi dalle braccia contorte e biancastre. (p. 202)

It was no doubt in part the realist's passion for naming the objects he observed which made nature seem so healthily industrious; but it is clear that a landscape which had no darker tones than these, and contained reassuring figures like the gardener, Padreterno, and nothing more destructive than small boys in search of birds' eggs, was intended to preserve the atmosphere of calm moderation which prevails in the rest of *Profumo*.

The narrative texture of the novel, the constant shifting of its focus from a troubled inner world to a serene, sometimes comic, outer one, its modest dramas which turn out well (Eugenia able to resist Ruggiero, Giulia married to the man of

her choice in a general atmosphere of reconciliation), converge at last on the optimistic ending. This ending is the major pointer to Capuana's break with the ideologies of scientific naturalism. The inspiration of *Giacinta* was optimistic only in as far as it bespoke the confidence of positivist science to understand the causes and the ways of abnormality; in its rigid determinism it offered the afflicted no escape–Follini foresaw disaster but was powerless to prevent it. In *Profumo* Patrizio realizes that his task is to over-ride the psycho-physiological determinants of his nature, to 'ritessere tutta la tela della sua vita, tentare l'impossibile' (p. 207), and he succeeds: *Giacinta* had deliberately set out to prove the impossibility of such an undertaking. While the earlier novel had shown that beneath a surface abnormality there lay a special, deviant normality (Giacinta's adulterous 'marriage' with Andrea for example) discernible to the all-comprehending eye of positivist science, *Profumo* shows that an apparently blameless normality may conceal grave psychological aberrations. This was potentially the more radical notion, and yet *Profumo* turns out a work of rather consoling, facile optimism. The vigour and the originality of the book lay in Capuana's straining, without either moral scruples or sensationalism, after insights into the psyche. But as an effort of cognition, its impact is deadened when Capuana clumsily and casually reinstates 'metaphysical' man; the traces of idealism which he had seen fit never to eliminate thoroughly from his world-view now re-emerge to emasculate his realism.

He did not appear to jib at De Roberto's comment (which he quoted back at him) that with Eugenia he had intended to show 'la lotta della sensazione con la volontà e il trionfo di questa aiutata dal sentimento morale del proprio dovere'.[43] The instinctive life of the creatures of naturalism was now integrated with long-neglected moral absolutes, with 'volontà', and 'dovere'; as the preface said in 1900: 'accanto al male c'è il bene, accanto al senso il sentimento, accanto all'istinto la elevazione spirituale dell'umana coscienza.' And there was nothing to object to in Capuana's thus dissociating himself from the 'pessimism' of naturalism's philosophy, or in his evident responsiveness to the new, spiritual values of the age. But in the act of creation what seemed to catch his imagination was precisely the 'medical', pathological aspect of his characters, not the acts of volition, for instance, through which they secured their own recovery. For Eugenia in the moment of her triumph over Ruggiero and desire, Capuana can find only a stream of commonplaces: 'Sia bono! Gli voglio bene, ma non come crede lei. A che scopo? Non me ne riparli più. Sono d'altri. Sarei imperdonabile. [. . .] Se mi vuol bene, mi lasci in pace, si scordi di me. Non posso amarlo. Non devo amarlo' (pp. 228-9). And if it be objected, as perhaps it may, that this is precisely the hypocritical, trite language that best conveys a fundamental lack of conviction, the mindless babbling of clichés that reveals Eugenia's real desire, then one may remember at least that all the re-writing of the last section of the novel could not make Patrizio's change of heart convincing.

It is significant that there Capuana leant heavily on Doctor Mola, for once again

it is the figure of a doctor who is invested with the authority to make explicit something of the author's current views on life.

That Mola should be capable of influencing the action of the novel is, of course, a pointer to the new conception of *Profumo*, to its polemical, anti-naturalist optimism. Mola, the country practitioner, has lost something of the laboratory perfection of a Follini. In him there is none of the aristocratic intellectualism of the infallible positivist scientist, but a lively sense of his practical mission among men, and a modest scepticism about the scientific trustworthiness of his calling. Where medical science gives no answers he is content to allay his patient's fears with a 'pietosa bugia' (p. 231), even if this strategy, as when he leads Eugenia to believe she is pregnant, may prove less than useful in the long run. Yet Mola contemplates the strange phenomenon of the orange-blossom perfume with all the detached intellectual appetite of accredited positivism: 'Fenomeno raro. Sono contento di poterlo osservare', and pronouncing it an 'indizio di grande delicatezza dell'apparecchio nervoso' (p. 63) he speaks the accepted language of positivist physiology, while his scientific reading is up-to-date; Doctors Hammond and Ochorowicz have already prepared him to meet such a case as Eugenia's.[44] It is precisely because his scientific credentials are in order, that Capuana may venture to make him the vehicle of attitudes which, in his view, have overtaken the rigorous materialism of the seventies' positivism. Mola's outlook, like Capuana's in this period, is carefully undogmatic. While we have no reason to believe that Capuana is to be identified with Mola on the question of religious faith, it is noteworthy that Mola's belief is in any case that of a man convinced that science is unable to explain all life's strange occurrences, or rather, too much in its infancy to provide full explanations of them; in the meantime, until science can account for phenomena (whose existence it at least no longer denies), he might just as well call them 'miracles' as the Church does (p. 64). We may conjecture that the spirit of Mola's attitudes struck Capuana as more 'scientific', because less dogmatic and more open to correction, than that of the blinkered positivists criticized in *Spiritismo?*.

Mola is the partisan of the *juste milieu*. Not unlike his distant antecedent, Cymbalus, he believes that all aspects of existence contribute to a total beneficent pattern. Between spirit and flesh, as he tells the too 'idealistic' Patrizio, there is a balance which, if respected, renders life 'molto più facile che non paia' (p. 235). On one occasion however the latent connotations of extreme conservatism emerge from behind the cheerful façade of Mola's easy-going tolerance. His reactions to the Good Friday 'flagellanti' procession explicitly offer a challenge to the 'doctrinaire', progressionist views of Ruggiero (whom Mola himself defines 'di scuola moderna', 'libero pensatore' (pp. 106, 107)). 'Lasciateli fare!', the doctor tells the outraged young man:

Qualcuno ne muore, parecchi si ammalano, tutti rimangono spossati per parecchie settimane . . . È un guadagno. Si pongono in circostanze di non poter commettere,

per un certo tempo, nessuna cattiva azione . . . Te ne persuadi? La religione, anche quando diventa un po' superstiziosa, dà sempre buoni frutti. Sono poveri ignoranti; bisogna compatirli! (p. 107)

When put to the test, Mola's equanimity is transformed into an irritating paternalism. The well-read doctor who criticizes the 'paroloni di moda' (p. 39) employed by his scientific colleagues is, in fact, a moralist. His paternalistic attitudes are, moreover, echoed by the mayor, who thus described the functioning of municipal affairs and his unsought role in them: 'Cento teste, cento pareri. Il Parlamento mi par tal quale il nostro Consiglio comunale, dove si chiacchiera, si chiacchiera, ci si appiglia per gare di partito, e non si conchiude niente di buono . . . Io mi ci trovo in mezzo per caso, perchè hanno voluto così' (pp.29-30); or accounts for his taking part in the barbaric 'flagellanti' procession to Geltrude: 'Sono di servizio, come vede. Festa popolare. Il sindaco deve suonare la tràccola, per dirigere la processione. Usi di paesetti, signora mia; bisogna uniformarvisi, per politica' (p. 104). The narrative structure and the style of *Profumo* must have seemed to Capuana inadequate to body forth his new hopefulness; Mola and the mayor together carry an explicit message of consolation, the message that life is good and that happiness consists in cheerfully adapting to it. It is no accident that Mola's whimsical humour provides a foretaste of Capuana's Doctor Maggioli, narrator of the fantastical, ironic tales of *Il Decameroncino* (1901) and *Voluttà di creare* (1911), in which science, now definitively dethroned, generates grotesque machines, abortive experiments, and bizarre situations, and serves only to set Maggioli's comic verve in motion. And it is no accident that Mola and the mayor find counterparts in the comforting figures of a country priest and a country doctor in *Rassegnazione*, the most exhortative of Capuana's narrative works.

Thus *Profumo* revives the moral world which had slumbered during the hey-day of positivism. But Capuana engineers this rebirth in a superficial, almost sentimental way, with none of the original thinking that went into the measured deciphering of the novel's psychological problems, or the sober respect for truth which attached to them, making his scabrous subject seem 'puro come un'ostia'. And the ambiguities and the metaphysical doubts of the eighties persisted. In *Mondo occulto* of 1896, which Capuana saw as an appendix to *Spiritismo?*, we find him still conceiving of intellectual advance only in terms of the positivist method, with its constant willingness to adapt and modify existing scientific laws, and conjecturing that it may eventually explain extrasensory phenomena, causing the natural and the supernatural worlds to 'confondersi insieme', to form 'una cosa sola, il mondo della realtà'.[45] And yet he clings, contradictorily and with unashamed superficiality, to the concept of the supernatural, as is shown in a passage of imagined dialogue in which he wonders whether unexplained psychic phenomena 'non possono esser effetto di una legge semplicissima, fenomeno tanto naturale quanto l'emissione della voce', and continues:

'Allora lo spiritismo va per aria! Il supernaturale fa un tonfo!'
'E chi parla di supernaturale? Dove finisce il naturale e dove comincia quell'altro? Chi ne ha segnato il confine?'[46]

The truly negative effects of this intellectual floundering are to be felt only in the experimental narrative and the criticism of the nineties. For the present *Profumo* stands on the edge of Capuana's ideological uncertainties and survives, one of his best works of psychological realism despite the superficial consolation of local colour and moralizing optimism.

CHAPTER IV

THE NINETIES: REACTIONS TO THE CONTEMPORARY 'ISMI' IN NARRATIVE AND CRITICISM

1. *The 'Idealist' Experiments of 'La Sfinge' and 'Rassegnazione'*

In 1899 E. Troilo, a positivist of Ardigò's school, looked back over the preceding decade and was forced to admit that his own philosophy struck a discordant note amid the brooding mysticism of the closing years of the century:

> Sorto nell'aurora luminosa d'un grande rinnovamento umano, allorchè [. . .] sulle rovine salivano la scienza positiva e la libertà, il nostro secolo scende ora alla fine tutt'avvolto di nebbie cineree. E tra le nebbie delle coscienze infiacchite ed invecchiate prima che la forza rigeneratrice dei nuovi tempi le ritemprasse per l'avvenire, si affacciano i fantasmi che parevano svaniti per sempre, ritornano le vecchie credenze, si sente il soffio della fede ridestare pensieri e forze spezzati: il mondo, che appare come pentito, impaurito e deluso va brancolando dietro qualchè di fantastico che non si sa definire e dietro ideali inafferrabili.[1]

Those 'fantasmi' and those 'ideali inafferrabili' as far as Capuana was concerned had been stirring even in the eighties. As they become more insistent it was no longer possible simply to acknowledge the fact of their existence with the circumspect question mark which had characterized that period. Capuana now felt obliged to test his artistic method, salvaged from the ruins of naturalism in *Per l'arte*, against new, more 'idealistic' contents. That aspects of his method, for example his particular kind of literary language (and here one remembers the example *verismo* gave 'di *aver parlato* scrivendo' and its general suspiciousness of formal virtuosity), were likely to prove inadequate instruments for rendering feelings and ideals that were 'inafferrabili', infinitely shaded and contorted, did not seem to strike him. Or if it did, the desire to be *à la page* was stronger. As we have noted before, Capuana did not seem to see that his 'metodo' could be divorced only with difficulty from specific ideological attitudes. Of the *verista* triad from Sicily it was only De Roberto who clearly perceived the necessity of this linkage. Born some twenty years after Verga and Capuana he came to maturity in a period that may be called post-Zolian (but even his early criticism, when dealing with the theoretical Capuana, minimized the importance of the Zolian first series of *Studi* in relation to the second with its substantial scepticism about the theory of the experimental novel[2]). The ardour of personal commitment which had informed the early debates

on naturalism (and which in part motivated Capuana's and Verga's anxious attempts to update their literary credos in accordance with a changed, anti-naturalist environment) was unknown to the younger writer. Capuana, with his De Sanctisian cult of form, should have realized that the would-be neutrality of his method was an impossibility, but it was De Roberto who wrote: 'ogni metodo d'arte porta con sè la propria filosofia [. . .] Realismo e idealismo sono al tempo stesso dottrine morali e metodi tecnici, sistemi filosofici e partiti artistici. Un romanzo idealista nell'ispirazione e naturalista nell'esecuzione—o viceversa—non è possible.'[3] How far the 'idealism' of works like *La Sfinge* and *Rassegnazione* (which Capuana repeatedly adduced as proof of his independence of any literary school) was compatible with an artistic method which had evolved from naturalism itself is the problem which confronts the reader of Capuana's narrative of the nineties.

If the new cultural and spiritual needs of the period had reactivated in Capuana that propensity to suspend judgement which had been present from the first, notably in the 'connubio' of Hegelianism and positivism, they also led him to reject in part the sort of rationality which had been connected historically with a moment of confident and fervid activity in the sciences. Reason or 'scienza' (or 'la vera scienza' as he was to call it in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*[4]) as he now saw it had lost some of its hard-headed self-assurance and had abandoned its claims to be able to solve humanity's problems immediately. In learning patience and a sense of its own limitations, it became, in Capuana's view, truer to its own essential spirit. And while Capuana was losing his scientific optimism, the powers of determinism, in *Profumo*, yielded to moral categories such as 'volontà' and 'dovere' which defied the sort of analysis naturalism had made available to its adherents.

The pattern of reversal in Patrizio hinted at a fundamental revision of attitudes in regard to the nature of human action, and in his long *racconto, La Sfinge*, Capuana goes much further.[5] The actions of its characters, as the title self-consciously suggests, are now deliberately viewed as enigmatic and indecipherable in terms of the naturalistic canon.

According to Enrico Ghidetti, in stories like 'Anime in pena' and 'Ribrezzo' (both published in *Ribrezzo* of 1885) already 'l'impalcatura scientifica di sostegno comincia a vacillare [. . .] e il quadro della malattia si restringe alla "coscienza", ma per rivelarne tutta l'insondabile profondità'.[6] Yet for the young Lucini, opting himself for the symbolist 'synthesis' which 'assurgendo dal singolo alla universalità, ci ridona [. . .] la fede negli uomini e la sicura nozione del mondo astante', *La Sfinge* was unquestionably a 'volume naturalistico'. He felt that its message, which emerges from an analysis of the particular, was not only non-universal, but wilfully negative as only naturalism with its pessimistic 'apriorismo scientifico' could be.[7] The fact is that *La Sfinge* is the confluence of two currents of thought, the meeting-point of naturalism and 'spiritualism'. Artistically unsatisfactory as the work undoubtedly is, it has attracted little critical attention and yet remains a significant pointer to the ideological volatility to which not only Capuana but his

contemporaries were subject.

As in so many stories of the past, the main impulse of *La Sfinge* is psycho-sexual and its action rigorously linear. Its subject is the love-affair of Giorgio Montani, a once successful playwright, and a young widow named Fulvia. The relationship is quickly tainted by the presence of a second suitor, an old family friend and moreover the medical attendant of Fulvia's ailing child, a man she cannot dismiss without arousing suspicion about her affair. No proof of Fulvia's 'guilt' exists, yet Dr Butironi's faintly equivocal presence is enough to turn the idyll into a joyless torment, and Montani, obsessed by jealousy, finally commits suicide. The theme of sexual jealousy, so congenial to the naturalist's 'instinctual' view of life, no longer however carries the whole burden of the tenuous action. For Giorgio is also the artist-hero who spurns an imperfect existence, and maintains a man's right to cut it off at a point of maximum fulfilment.

Certainly Capuana is sometimes to be discovered in his familiar role as the arithmetician of the psyche: Giorgio's pessimism is 'prodotto dagli studi e più, dai casi della sua famiglia, specialmente dal suicidio del fratello e dalla morte della sua amatissima mamma'. But in this case the deterministic formula is immediately superseded by an insistent, triple reference to 'la fatalità delle cose', 'la misteriosa legge dei fatti', to 'un'insidia della sorte' (p. 63), which promptly shifts attention from the conditionable nature of the self to the 'mystery' of obscure outward forces impinging upon it. And this tautological form of interpretation, with one set of motivations superimposed on the other, invests the central theme of Giorgio's jealousy. Capuana stresses that the intensity of his feelings is pathological:

> cominciava a capire che dentro di lui c'era stato qualcosa di eccessivo, di morboso. Egli aveva contrariato, represso il naturale svolgimento delle sue facoltà, e l'organismo si era ribellato, tanto più violentemente quanto più tardi. Foggiatosi un ideale assurdo, campato in aria, senza nessuna base di realtà, aveva conformato ad esso ogni suo atto, col superbo concetto che il pensiero sia quel che più importa nella vita. (p. 485)

Giorgio's troubles, like Patrizio's, are attributed to the repression of instinctive material which now explodes uncontrollably in neurosis; and Capuana calls him 'mad' ('Forti ondate di pazzia gli assalivano violentemente il cervello' (p. 75); ' "Ammattisco!", aveva esclamato, rabbrividendo di orrore' (p. 76) etc.). But this naturalistic diagnosis is offered not only in a perfunctory manner, but with a deliberate disregard for the normal process of the disorder. There is no 'logic', no progressive intensification in Giorgio's morbid feelings, but an alternation of lucidity and unbalance in him which transforms his 'madness' into an enigmatic visitation from outside. Capuana's psychological naturalism begins to break down, taking on the quality of a nervous tic, a habitual and intermittent grimace devoid of meaning. The emotion of jealousy, nominally excited by Butironi (for all his physical repulsiveness) and exacerbated by Giorgio's 'idealism' is in reality treated according to the dictates of a new literary climate which no longer cherished exasperated

feelings as examples of 'interesting' abnormality, but as evidence of a superior humanity in the sufferer. The question of suicide in particular shows Capuana alert to the stirring of decadentism. While in *Giacinta* suicide had been the extreme explication of the 'rationality' of frustrated emotions, in *La Sfinge*, it is the supreme expression of individual will. Capuana was probably conversant with Schopenhauer. In 1892 D'Annunzio wrote that 'gli spiriti più complessi e più inquieti', feeling the limitations of naturalism, 'si protesero con avidità verso le correnti spirituali che attraversavano la vita europea e la conturbavano fecondandola', and those currents were represented on the one hand by the Russian novel and on the other by 'il pessimismo occidentale, formulato da Arturo Schopenhauer con elegante rigore e quindi dai romanzieri di Francia inoculato ad altissime dosi in creature letterarie o deboli o mediocri o estremamente complicate, e sottili'.[8] It is probably what often was interpreted in the nineteenth century as Schopenhauer's apologia for suicide, combining with some knowledge of the fashionable Nietzsche, that provides the key to *La Sfinge*'s treatment of the topic. It is at all events difficult to accept the naturalist and psychological reading offered by one of the work's few critics, Giuseppe Marchese, who considers the suicide of Giorgio's brother an indication of congenital predispositions also inherited by Giorgio. The sheer baldness of such a supposed tribute to determinism does not escape Marchese himself ('non ha certamente un adeguato approfondimento'), but he offers no alternative explanation.[9] The fact is that Ernesto's suicide is as inexplicable to Giorgio as it is acceptable—a sublime assertion of free will over the lowly instinct of self-preservation:

La ragione del suo suicidio era rimasta ignorata. Nessuno aveva potuto sospettare il tetro proposito. Era stato visto allegro fino a pochi minuti avanti. E non un rigo di addio alla madre e al fratello! Se n'era andato fieramente altero, senza scusarsi, senza chieder perdono neppure ai suoi cari del dolore che lor cagionava. Era un diritto! Aveva fatto bene, se la vita gli era diventata insopportabile. (p. 673)

Capuana's repudiation of the naturalist's concept of man could hardly be more decided. The real function of Ernesto's suicide is to introduce the idea—and even more the 'ideology'—of suicide which will justify the story's conclusion. But a certain perplexity remains: is *La Sfinge* concerned with pathology or with a 'glorious' excess of feeling?

The same duality of inspiration attaches to the figure of Fulvia. Is she truly the 'donna alla buona', the 'borghesuccia amante del quieto vivere' (p. 678) she claims at one point to be, or has Giorgio good reason to recollect with terror her confession that she embarked on the relationship in a spirit of curiosity, attracted by the lustre of his name (p. 281)? Certainly Fulvia seems a commonsensical, if conventional, creature, and is no more given to telling white lies than Giorgio's inordinate suspiciousness warrants. But Capuana intends that the question Giorgio asks, 'Era dunque proprio innocente o affatto impenetrabile colei?' (p. 279), should

remain unanswered. For (despite the distaste he would soon show for symbolist art, and his warning that the fictional character, if he becomes a symbol, should do so 'senza volerlo a senza saperlo'[10]) Fulvia is deliberately associated with the sphinx of the title. In Giorgio's study there hangs a picture of this enigmatic and unattainable creature seated on the summit of a barren mountain, indifferent to her 'victims' perishing in their ascent on the slopes below. The link with Fulvia, and with mysterious womanhood in general, is unmistakable. 'È la sfinge mitologica; sei tu, siete tutte, è la donna, l'enimma insolubile! ' (p. 478), Giorgio exclaims, showing Fulvia the picture.

If *La Sfinge* had exclusively adopted the view-point of the frenzied hero (giving full value to the passing suggestion that the Fulvia Giorgio contemplates exists only in his own mind—'gli sembrava che Fulvia fosse attinta dallo stesso male di lui, la smania del nuovo, del raro' (p. 488)), the symbolic superstructure might have seemed less contrived. But the narrative belongs to Capuana as well as to Giorgio (who is indeed 'diagnosed' in a detached spirit), so that the symbol rises awkwardly from a fundamentally realist matrix, an ingenuous homage to current literary fashions. And *La Sfinge* is in general vitiated by Capuana's effort to marry his own narrative procedures, his 'spoken' prose and impersonal method, with a new sensibility and new themes.

The signs of his attempted *aggiornamento* range from his deliberate psychological inconclusiveness to certain features of content and style. It is no accident that the story unfolds in Rome, the decadent, feverish Rome of *Il Piacere*, whose 'malefico fascino' leaves Giorgio 'sfibrato' and incapable of work (p. 61), the city where Fulvia's husband became embroiled in 'ardite speculazioni' and 'arricchendosi vertiginosamente, e perdendo tutto, vertiginosamente' died of grief (p. 70). Choosing the D'Annunzian city, Capuana chose an atmosphere of sophistication and paid, as best he could, his dues to its fads and fashions. Thus Giorgio symbolically anticipates the end of his affair with a ritual broadcasting of dead rose-petals, or gazes at a photograph of Fulvia, 'strana, misteriosa' in an exotic Eastern costume (p. 663). The calculated negligence of his study with its Oriental statuettes and scattered 'ninnoli artistici' (p. 485) is a model of *fin de siècle* elegance. Fulvia in her turn provides allusions to the current, slightly *outré* vogue for bicycling—a faint, naive presage of D'Annunzio's *engouement* with the heroics of the automobile and the aeroplane after the turn of the century. Finally there is the telepathic hallucination which reveals Giorgio's suicide to Fulvia and brings the *racconto* to its melodramatic close. This ending prompted Croce to remark: 'Persuaso com'è il Capuana che i fenomeni spiritici e telepatici appartengano al mondo della realtà e debbano formare oggetto di osservazione scientifica, non può dubitare di ammetterli nella cerchia della sua arte, che vuole per l'appunto coincidere con la cerchia delle sue convinzioni di naturalista.'[11] In any other work, perhaps, than *La Sfinge* it would be correct to draw Capuana's interest in extrasensory perception within the ambit of a fundamentally positivist outlook. But in *La Sfinge* there is no

real question of 'osservazione scientifica'—the work deliberately proclaims the inscrutability of the psyche. The episode is nothing more than a piece of esotericism designed to underscore the spiritual refinement of the characters.

This refinement seems to have suggested to Capuana that if Giorgio's exquisite suffering was no longer to be rooted in the humble, cause-and-effect psychology of positivism, but to move freely in a rarefied ether, it must at least be endowed with the intensity and the spirituality to keep it afloat. To this end *La Sfinge* intermittently adopts a heightened, rhetorical style, as though to create through language itself the rationale of the emotions it describes. Giorgio recollects the plenitude of his love in a passage replete with self-conscious *correspondances*: 'quelle paradisiache ore volate via senza ch'essi se n'accorgevano, quando pareva che dalle loro anime scaturisse un'onda di suoni fosforescenti, un'avvolgente nuvola di profumi, come se le parole, i sorrisi, la lietitudine spirituale del loro amore si traducessero in altrettanti simboli d'ineffabile comprensione' (p. 277). A plethora of exclamation marks and a phraseology reminiscent of *Profili di donne* appears ('terrible visione' (p. 74), 'orribile tortura' (p. 283), 'squisita ineffabile dolcezza' (p. 489), 'gioia selvaggia' (p. 673) etc.). This is not however the language of sentimental literature, but the coinage of the decadent hero with his superior capacity to feel (and his ability to restore to the most hard-worked of adjectives the full vibrancy of their meaning). It is clear that certain words and phrases used are no longer the passive signs of the reality they designate, but that they have acquired 'un valore di trasformazione, di idealizzazione', 'un valore quasi per sè stesse'—a tendency Capuana will soon condemn in D'Annunzio.[12] At moments in this experimental phase Capuana could hardly be further from that ideal of an anti-'literary' language after which he had so long striven, and which in his own work and Verga's so effectively contributed to releasing Italian letters from their earlier academic straitjacket.

All these aspects of content and style are tributes to a post-naturalist age when the arts seemed to merge into each other, tributes to the age of Wagnerianism, of the *poète-musicien*, of dream-like or stylised symbolism in painting, of refined subjectivism in prose and poetry. But *La Sfinge* mercilessly reveals the vanity of the exercise. Stylistically it oscillates between the studied intensity of its 'decadent' interludes and the more familiar, 'concrete' prose of Capuana's realism, exemplified in this passage of description with its vigorous urge to define and its emphasis on characterizing detail and gesture:

> Il commendatore capocomico si era alzato dalla poltrona, e prima di riprendere dalla seggiola accanto il lucidissimo cappello a staio, i guanti e la mazza sormontata da grosso e pretenzioso pomo di argento cesellato, si tirava in giù il panciotto bianco, quasi recitasse una delle sue famose parti di caratterista, così esageratamente scoteva la testa in segno di gran malcontento e torceva le labbra su la faccia rasa di fresco. (p. 60)

Conceptually *La Sfinge* is suspended between psychological realism and a vaporous

'idealism', and the ignoble passion of jealousy is at loggerheads with the 'noble' ideal of willing self-annihilation. The gratuitously neurotic Montani becomes unfit to carry the elitist message assigned him.

But for all the superficiality and above all the ingenuousness of Capuana's decadentism, it is perhaps significant that the most successful and subtle form of psychological analysis in *La Sfinge* is no longer that which excavates the inner dimension of the character, registering and accumulating modifications of feeling which will motivate some future action. Rather the character's psychology is projected onto the outer world. Objective description becomes vision, and the writing takes on a subjective, non-rational quality. In the following passage, which describes Giorgio bewilderedly walking the streets soon after conceiving his suspicions about Fulvia, the impressionistic transformation of reality is particularly effective:

In lunghe file, lungamente spaziati, brillavano ai fianchi della via i primi lampioni del gas. Una carrozza gli era passata accosto rapidamente, gettandogli addosso lo sprazzo dei suoi fanaletti: poco più in là, un uomo gli veniva incontro diffidente, e sfilava oltre squadrandolo. E la via si allungava, si allungava, con edifizii che si schiarivano un po' al suo accostarsi, e pareva s'immergessero nuovamente nel buio alle sue spalle, con chiome d'alberi che sovrastavano ai muri, ai cancelli, macchie nere nel cielo tempestato di stelle. (p. 279).

The technique is not always as suggestively handled and Capuana employs it so spasmodically as to indicate that he had not yet settled on the place such description was to have in his narrative. Even so, it implies the beginnings of a doubt as to whether the reality of consciousness could be fully encapsulated in the severely rationalistic and objective terms he had employed to this date. And it is perhaps not irrelevant to note that the cherished doctor-figure, key to the interpretation of *Giacinta* and *Profumo*, is not only removed to the periphery of the story but seen in a negative, sinister light.

Though *La Sfinge* reveals an interest in psychological awareness which owes nothing of substance to the scientific formulas of naturalism, its imperfect assimilation of alternative values is obvious. As much as ever in the past, sudden stylistic transitions betray the borrowed nature of Capuana's inspiration and his inability to abandon the habits of mind acquired in the era of positivism. *Rassegnazione*, following after *La Sfinge*, consciously takes stock of this failure and tries to make a merit of it, adopting D'Annunzian poses, for instance, only to expose from within their inhumanity and lack of a 'base di realtà'. If Capuana felt the attractions of 'spiritualism', with its critique of positivist rationality, its restoration of free will and the tragedy of the individual, it was nevertheless powerless to give a fundamentally new shape to his view of the world. He remained, as always, mistrustful of extremes and wedded to a common-sense realism which undermined the elitism of *La Sfinge* and accounted for the moralistic stance of *Rassegnazione*.

A spirit of moderation which balanced spirit and matter had emerged from *Profumo*, and *La Sfinge* implicitly subscribes to the same modest views. Giorgio's spiritual exaltation is repeatedly set at a distance by a demystifying realism which sees him as mentally unbalanced, and his mistake, echoing Patrizio's and foreshadowing Dario's in *Rassegnazione*, is to have denied his faculties their 'naturale svolgimento'. The 'natural' man whose instincts are to be respected as much as his mind is neither the 'brute' of naturalism nor the spiritual contorsionist of decadentism. Capuana's deepest response to decadentism, as we shall see in connexion with his criticism, was negative; his confidence in positivism had waned. To the weary vacuum which the aestheticism of *La Sfinge* had failed to fill he brought the consoling philosophy of *Rassegnazione*.

Though *Rassegnazione* was finally published only in 1907, it belongs not solely in terms of inspiration but also to a great extent in terms of chronology to the nineties.[13] The manuscript of the novel bears the following note in Capuana's hand:

Cominciato a scrivere il 30 gennaio 1894. Interrotta, all'undicesimo capitolo, la pubblicazione in *Flegrea* e scritti i capitoli XII e XIII. Ripreso a scrivere il 15 aprile 1906 e terminato il 5 luglio dello stesso anno. L. Capuana.[14]

A letter early in 1895 to De Roberto records the completion of 'most of the first half' of the novel, and reveals that the total plan was already established:

Rassegnazione è la storia di un uomo ricco, colto, con un grande ideale nella mente, e che per il suo debole organismo e per la natura del suo ingegno si vede condannato all'impotenza. Dispera; ma all'ultimo, per una serie di circostanze che formano la tela del romanzo, arriva a rassegnarsi, riconoscendo che nella vita anche gli umili e i mediocri hanno il loro valore. In questo romanzo non c'è *amore*, e sarà, in un certo senso, la sua originalità.[15]

The first thirteen chapters, published in the Neapolitan journal in 1900,[16] appear unchanged in the volume of 1907, and the second half, written in 1906, follows the plan described to De Roberto in 1895. The novel itself bears no trace of its interrupted composition.

Rassegnazione coincided with a period of Capuana's life that was marked by constant nervous depression and increasing financial strain. Like *La Sfinge* it was conceived at a time when the theories and the culture which had informed the bulk of his work were disappearing into the past. It is Capuana's second and last attempt to associate himself with the new avant-garde, and it is a work which betrays the intellectual weariness and the melancholy of the period. In recent years the novel's rare critics have judged it harshly. Marchese refers to the 'indifferenza' and the 'inerzia' which must afflict 'qualsiasi lettore';[17] Carlo Madrignani has dismissed it as 'il più pesante e immaturo' of Capuana's works.[18] In 1907 it was largely ignored, perhaps for reasons of tact. Capuana himself attributes the critical silence to the 'mille commemorazioni carducciane'.[19] But even when, in a private letter to him,

De Amicis defined the novel 'uno degli studii d'anima più profondo e più originali che siano stati fatti in Italia', the remark sounded more reverent than convinced, and it was followed by the expression of a fear: 'saremo in pochi a gustare tutte le bellezze [. . .] profuse in *Rassegnazione*'.[20] Edoard Rod wrote in similar terms: 'Questo vostro romanzo di idee, nuovo, acuto, sarà compreso da pochi', and Pirandello, in an incomplete and unpublished review, responded coolly though with the same admixture of respect.[21] Nevertheless it was reviewers and critics writing nearest the time of *Rassegnazione*'s publication who were most favourable. In 1922 Pietro Vetro pronounced it 'il migliore romanzo di Capuana e uno dei più forti e originali della letteratura contemporanea';[22] and seven years later a more reliable critic, Luigi Tonelli, treated it kindly.[23]

Reading between the lines of their comments, one senses that even the earlier critics found *Rassegnazione* indigestible, but they were clear on one matter: the novel was 'new' and corresponded to a modern climate of feeling. Many conspicuous novels in the closing years of the century, like *Rassegnazione*, showed a spiritual sickness in men. Grown over-refined and over-rational, they were incapable of spontaneity and without moral anchorage. Aspiring after some absolute of spiritual experience and attracted by high ideals, some by way of reaction became saints (like Antonio Fogazzaro's Piero Maironi from *Il piccolo mondo moderno* and *Il Santo*) or supermen (like D'Annunzio's Claudio Cantelmo from *Le vergini delle rocce*, his Stelio Èffrena from *Il Fuoco*); others, more sceptical and passive, dissipated their energies and aspirations amid the triviality of provincial life, contemplated suicide and sometimes committed it. (D'Annunzio's division of 'creature letterarie' into the 'deboli e mediocri' or the 'estremamente complicate e sottili' was not without justification.) These anti-heroes, from Butti's Attilio Valda (*L'Automa*) and Svevo's Alfonso Nitti (*Una Vita*) to Oriani's Adolfo Romani (*Vortice*), Onufrio's Luciano Rambaldi (*L'ultimo borghese*), and even D'Annunzio's Giuseppe Aurispa (*Trionfo della morte*), are the *inetti*, a breed that sprung up in the vacuum left by positivist materialism and which found successors in Borgese's *Rubè* and Moravia's *Gli indifferenti*. Capuana's Dario is one of them. 'Inetto all'azione', he suffers from 'impotenza creativa' and a Svevian 'anticipata vecchiezza' (pp. 11, 26, 12).

If *Rassegnazione* seemed to make a contribution to the spiritual problems raised by the 'idealism' of the period, this was no more than Capuana intended. In a preface dated 31 December 1906 he dedicated *Rassegnazione* to the diseased and failed aspirations of the age. If a single 'illuso', he continues

> ne ricevesse conforto e insegnamento a non chiedere alla vita più di quel che essa può dare e ad amarla anche pel poco che talvolta concede, sarei orgoglioso che la mia opera d'arte riuscisse qualcosa di più che lo studio coscienzioso di una crisi dello spirito di parecchi nostri contemporanei. (p. ii)

The familiar note sounded by the 'studio coscienzioso' contrasts strangely with

Capuana's determination to offer some spiritual consolation. The words are none the less an accurate representation of the text. *La Sfinge* had been an involuntary declaration that Capuana was fundamentally unable to sympathize with either the literary or ideological manifestations of the new spiritualism. In the species of debate which he had initiated between himself and the new culture of the nineties *Rassegnazione* represents a more articulate phase. Through Dario Capuana attempts to demonstrate his intimate participation in the 'spiritual crisis' and the exacerbated idealism of the period while at the same time exposing the self-absorption and egoism to which its protagonists are prone, and offering an alternative and more balanced philosophy of life.

In Dario Capuana has created a victim of exasperated idealism, a man tormented by a dream of artistic and intellectual fulfilment which his personality and his lack of true creative ability place forever beyond his reach. Studying aimlessly, Dario watches his literary abilities burn themselves out in self-criticism, and his moods alternate between self-pity and a sense of pride in his superior vision of life's goals. While the three companions of his student days embark on their careers, accept the compromises involved, and achieve recognition, he stands aloof, paralysed by his soaring ambition and half envious, half contemptuous of their easy adjustment to the mediocrity of existence. The disproportion between Dario's ideals and the 'forze fisiche e intellettuali che avrebbero dovuto metterli in atto' (p. 23) is the premiss of the work; the chief manner in which Capuana chooses to see these ideals struggling vainly towards fulfilment is undisguisedly D'Annunzian. When Dario's homely mother reminds him of the satisfactions of marriage and family, the idea of procreation assumes in Dario's mind the value he attributed to artistic creativity. Having found and married his 'collaboratrice' Dario intends to 'dare la vita a colui che avrebbe creato il capolavoro d'arte a [lui] negato di produrre, o rivelato alla società l'idea nuova e feconda che avrebbe allargato i confini dell'intelligenza, dominato le menti e creato l'avvenire' (p. 70). But he makes the bitter discovery that genetic laws are less than subservient to the power of an idea, and the male of genius whom Fausta was supposed to bear turns out to be a short-lived female. Fausta does not survive her second pregnancy. The soured idealist then leaves for Milan, there to vent his disappointments on a sophisticated city which can at least offer some absolute of willed depravity. But Dario is a bourgeois at heart. Despite the cool expertise in corruption of his mistress, her 'inconsapevolezza da bellissimo animale' (p. 187), he is on the point of falling in love when his mother calls him home to commemorate the anniversary of Fausta's death. Chance and impulse finally play their part in deflecting Dario from his intended suicide when he rescues a peasant child from the window of a burning cottage. Brought up in Dario's household, the orphaned 'contadina' becomes 'signorina' and provides at last that humble sense of purpose towards which the book has all along been straining.

In 1895, *Il Convito* had published *Le vergini delle rocce* in serial form, and the volume appeared the same year (though with the date of 1896) in time to influence

the central part of the novel which concerned Dario's selection of a wife and his plans as progenitor of a superior breed. Without Claudio Cantelmo Dario would have been unthinkable. Cantelmo wonders whether life might become 'un esercizio diverso da quello consueto delle facoltà accomodative nel variar continuo dei casi; ciò è: se la [sua] volontà potesse per via di elezioni e di esclusioni trarre una sua nuova e decorosa opera dagli elementi che la vita aveva in [sè] accumulati';[24] similarly Dario aspires to 'realizzare un ideale di vita con mezzi e intenti forse non mai adoperati riflessivamente fin allora' (p. 64), and his 'miracle' of creation is to result not 'dalla sospensione di certe leggi della Natura, ma dalla intelligente coordinazione di queste a uno scopo determinato' (p. 115). As Cantelmo sets about choosing one of his three princesses to 'preparare il destino di Colui che doveva venire', the King of Rome,[25] so Dario selects 'Colei che doveva essere la sua collaboratrice nella sovrana opera di creazione' (p. 69) of 'il Sospirato, l'Atteso', 'il principino imperiale' (pp. 164, 110). Thus the first of D'Annunzio's supermen has passed on to Dario much more than the ideal of a sublime form of existence dominated and regulated by force of will. It is true that the Cantelmo-inspired episodes of *Rassegnazione* do not exhaust all Capuana has to say on the subject of Dario's idealism, but they form a weighty, central section of the novel (Chapters IX to XX), and as borrowed material were not perhaps the most convincing proof of Capuana's independent grasp on the spirituality which had eclipsed his own naturalism. *Rassegnazione*, however, is a work of thinly veiled polemicism, a negative response to the dream-mongers of the period; it is not the D'Annunzian parody Capuana was capable of writing but an earnest attempt to combat the ethic of the superman using D'Annunzio's own weapons (including capital letters).

Giuseppe Marchese has referred to 'l'anormalità di tutta la vicenda spirituale, che rasenta l'assurdo',[26] a remark which remains inert until one examines the reason why *Le vergini delle rocce*, let us say, is less 'absurd' than *Rassegnazione*, though far more seriously in contravention of good sense. The polemicism of *Rassegnazione* must be blamed. The sense of a learning process equipped with a fore-ordained conclusion is constantly reinforced by the presence of secondary characters who stand in a demonstrative relationship to Dario. From his mother, deluded in her dreams of emotional fulfilment and yet resigned, to Dario's school-fellows, all aspiring in their youth to the poet's laurels and later achieving success in a more mundane fashion, these secondary characters are—without more than mechanical differentiation—examples of the adaptability which Dario so patiently lacks. The real philosophy of the novel emerges finally through two characters who are the spiritual heirs of Dr Mola and the mayor from *Profumo*. A 'medico condotto' and a country priest, the two make their appearance together, potential representatives of opposing religious and scientific view-points. But Capuana's purpose is to point out the follies of ideological dogmatism. ' "Tutto è miracolo" ', exclaims the priest on learning how Dario's mother has had a presentiment of danger at the moment when Dario gazed with suicidal intentions at his revolver: ' "Allora! . . . tutto è naturale, è

lo stesso" ' (pp. 218-19), rejoins the doctor. Intellectual partisanship has become superfluous in the face of the humour, the active usefulness, and the sense of human limitations, which are the attributes of these two characters. The gap between the aristocratic aestheticism of Dario and the sentimental and faintly moralistic good sense of the finale is enormous; and the debate between idealism and positivism which had occupied Capuana more seriously elsewhere peters out in a vapid admission of intellectual exhaustion.

Capuana was careful not to conclude *Rassegnazione* merely with a facile affirmation of life's value. Dario, who is narrator and thus the centre of the novel's intellectual focus, achieves a resignation which is not free of residual bitterness and doubt; and the book ends with a double 'desolatissimo punto interrogativo' (p. 239) (with the emblematic question mark). He doubts his power to shape the orphan girl's personality since it is already conditioned by heredity; and he asks himself whether the refined and educated creature he has produced would not have been happier leading the semi-instinctive existence of her origins. Such thinking hardly bears scrutiny for its underlying assumptions (though it is an interesting reminder of the conservative connotations of Capuana's positivism), but it is evidence of his care to avoid too radical a change of heart in his hero. Nevertheless within *Rassegnazione* itself, as in *La Sfinge*, lie the elements which subvert its artistic success and they are no less harmful for being, this time, conscious.

For the first time since *Profili di donne* Capuana has chosen a first-person narrative. It enabled him to investigate an individual psyche in depth without betraying the doctrine of impersonality. He was, as we shall see in greater detail in connexion with *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, worried by the tonal unevenness and the implications for impersonality created in the course of a narrative by transitions from objective description to psychological analysis, from the external to the internal planes. *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* and *Rassegnazione*, composed largely in the same period, in interwoven blocks of time, adopt apparently radically different solutions to the problem, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* avoiding all psychological analysis which cannot be in some way 'externalized', and *Rassegnazione* being resolved entirely on the internal plane created by the first-person narration. The limited insights into other personalities which depended on Dario's being the novel's exclusive centre of consciousness did not matter as long as Dario was also the vehicle of its intentions. But though Capuana's first person seems to translate a desire to match the delicate, 'spiritual' examination of modern man now being undertaken by writers from Bourget to Fogazzaro and Matilde Serao (the Serao not of *Paese di cuccagna* but of *Cuore infermo* or *Castigo*), a closer inspection of *Rassegnazione* reveals that its narrative techniques are akin to those of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, and that the first person is not much more than a device which allows Capuana to weld criticism of events to their narration. Dario gives his account from the standpoint of the philosophy of resignation, and the dual time scheme produces a multiplicity of phrases of the type: 'Il mio orgoglio

divergeva per altra via, e non m'accorgevo' (p. 70), 'Lo riconosco ora, dopo molti anni. Allora però [. . .]' (p. 115), 'Inconsapevolmente proseguivo la mia idea di un tempo' (p. 183). There is enough masochism in the text (and it reaches absurdity, as when Dario enviously compares his own inertia with the liveliness of an aggressive little boy playing at soldiers and dreaming of killing 'tutti gli abissini che hanno scannato a Dogali i nostri soldati' (p. 31)) without constant reminders of the wrongmindedness of Dario's D'Annunzian ambitions; and it is this integral, critical, and polemical dimension in the narrative that accounts in great part for Marchese's impression of absurdity. The reader cannot seriously participate in Dario's idealism while it is being evaluated retrospectively in the light of common sense.

D'Annunzio's first-person narrative in *Le Vergini delle rocce* was one of the means he chose 'per comunicare la sfiducia nella realtà normale e progettare, nello stesso tempo, l'avverarsi della realtà promessa al Superuomo'.[27] Capuana's first person certainly emphasized the fashionably introspective movement of his novel, but it offered nothing substantially different from his 'realist' third-person narrative. The narrator superimposes a 'correct' reading of events on their narration (in what is essentially a polemical exercise), but the past seldom conditions the present, creating that sense of *durée*, of psychological complexity which might have marked a departure from the narrative schemes used hitherto by Capuana. An exception is the following brief passage: 'non posso prolungar molto questo sforzo dell'immaginazione per rivivere la mia fanciullezza e spiegarmela. Soffro ora quel che non soffrivo allora; mi sento mancar l'aria, mi sento imprigionato dentro me stesso; e mi vengono le lacrime agli occhi' (p. 12); but this fleeting sense of stifling misery never recurs, and indeed the narrator repeatedly stresses the total accuracy of his recall, an accuracy which means that the past is not relived but reproduced ('mio padre, lo *rivedo come in quel giorno*', 'mi par di sentirne *risonare* la parola' (p. 1); 'principale occupazione colà è stata sempre quella di *ricostituire con tutti i particolari* la mia vegetazione di allora' (p. 13); '*Ricordo benissimo*; mi trovavo nel mio studio [. . .]' (p. 65); 'Mi è *rimasto indelebilmente impresso nella memoria* lo strano spettacolo' (p. 83); 'Ripensandoci *sento di nuovo* l'urlo bestiale' (p. 114); 'La *ho* davanti agli occhi, dopo tanti anni, *fissata nella memoria*' (p. 128) etc.). Despite the narrator, events exist not in the complex dimension of the recollecting mind but in the simple, historical dimension which belongs to Capuana's realist narrative.

Just as these events are retailed with all possible fidelity, the fiction of Dario's perfect recall leaving them unchanged by the passage of time, so they unfold chronologically, not recorded by a shaping consciousness, nor interrupted by the 'author' of the recollections–the Dario of the present tense (except in as far as he is constantly insinuating the wisdom of hindsight into the narrative). As in *Giacinta* and *Profumo*, the early chapters of *Rassegnazione* examine childhood, and the account then moves forward in strict sequence paying due attention to a likely distribution of events over the period of time in question. This procedure is an

indication of the degree to which the cause-and-effect psychology of positivism still coloured Capuana's perceptions. It means that Dario's sense of inferiority and uncompromising idealism required preliminary justification; and this was provided by an account of his frail health in childhood, accompanied by a sense of inadequacy in relation to his energetic father, and of his studious adolescence, shaped intellectually by the Hegelianism of a tutor.

Capuana continues to assume, in a characteristically realist manner, an identity between narration and reality, language and life. The tentative experimentation of *La Sfinge* which had fused description and analysis in a new, subjective reality is taken no further. Certainly Capuana rejected description for its own sake. 'Se non mi diffondo a descrivere il paesaggio', he wrote to Cesareo, 'faccio così perchè credo che esso, per sè stesso, non abbia valore se non in quanto ha rapporto con lo stato psicologico del mio personaggio.'[28] The following passage indisputably translates a state of mind:

La primavera era arrivata da parecchi giorni coi suoi tepori, coi suoi profumi, col suo vasto sorriso di verde e di sole, con la lieta gazzarra degli uccelli nidificanti tra i rami degli alberi, tra le siepi, con le farfalle che ci volteggiavano su la testa, d'attorno, mentre noi procedevamo per l'ampia strada, riandando con lieta spensieratezza i bei giorni della giovanile comunanza di studi. (p. 111)

But the landscape has not entirely lost its autonomy. This vision of springtime (in its sheer banality: warmth, perfume, green foliage, twittering birds, butterflies) is as much the vision of *any* onlooker as Dario's. And the natural description in *Rassegnazione* generally is not transformed by the gaze of the beholder (becoming, as in *La Sfinge*, a sensitive register of vibrations of feeling), but is utilized simply as a convenient way of recapitulating states of mind which can moveover be directly stated: in this instance 'la lieta gazzarra degli uccelli' and the rest is a mechanical reflection of 'lieta spensieratezza'.

We shall be noticing in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* Capuana's failure to exploit free indirect speech, that device which allows information to be filtered through the awareness of the author; he prefers to preserve what Herczeg calls 'l'autenticità dell'accaduto'.[29] *Rassegnazione* speaks exclusively of an inner reality (ignoring geographical location and giving no sense of the social dimension in which Dario presumably lives), yet no use is made of free indirect speech. To the end of his career his impersonality led Capuana to respect the 'objective' truth of words for which his characters took responsibility and which precluded his own action as author within the narrative (his rewriting of *Giacinta* as well as of many short stories consistently tended to abolish passages of free indirect speech and passages of connective or expository material in favour of the 'autenticità' of direct speech). Like *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina, Rassegnazione* abounds in dialogue, even where the exceptional readiness of its characters to philosophize aloud for Dario's benefit heavily underscores Capuana's intentions and borders on improbability. And on the

whole *Rassegnazione* retains the old, 'transparent' language of Capuana's realism. Faint D'Annunzian echoes attach themselves to Dario's D'Annunzian utterances, and dialogue occasionally aspires to a form of recitation as in this exchange between Dario and his mother:

'Io attendevo da te una parola, come tuo padre e forse assai diversa da quello che attendeva tuo padre. Non me l'hai detta. Perchè Dario?'

'Non so, mamma! C'è un gran buio nel mio spirito. L'orgoglio m'acceca tuttavia [. . .]. La scienza è dolore! Vorrei dimenticare, diventare tutt'a un tratto un ignorante, un povero di spirito . . . Ecco perchè non ho potuto dirti la parola da te attesa . . . C'è un gran buio nel mio spirito!'

'Io non oso suggerirti . . .'

'Parla, mamma! Le tue parole dell'altra volta mi avevano aperto uno spiraglio di luce' etc.. (pp. 48-9)

Despite the repetitions and the inversions, the level of this stylization is modest. Like aspects of the content it is much more in the nature of a deliberate 'proof' that Capuana understood and could adopt at will the stance of the decadent aesthete (from which strong position he could more convincingly express his dissent) than evidence of a real participation in the culture which had superseded his naturalism.

Rassegnazione makes the point that Capuana is no longer to be associated with scientific materialism: the prestige of positivist science has collapsed, and when, through the mouths of the several doctors Dario encounters, 'la povera scienza medica attuale' (p. 89) is not confessing its inability to fully understand the working of 'mysterious' Nature, it speaks the unvarnished language of physiology, distressing the fastidious Dario, but as far as Capuana is concerned betraying its inadequacy to deal with anything beyond the immediate phenomenon. The novel also rejects idealism, where idealism means foolish pride, suppression of 'natural' instincts, inability to adapt to ordinary existence. Yet Dario seems to voice a philosophy that appealed to certain facets at least of Capuana's personality when he speaks of a 'Forza Superiore, che guida e regola le nostre azioni, spingendole dove vuol essa anche quando noi crediamo di agire con la più capricciosa libertà', of a 'ragione elevata' which should make us 'meno vanitosi' when we reflect that 'lavoriamo inconsapevolmente a quel che il Montesquieu chiamava: "*Le grand œuvre*", e un nostro illustre pensatore semplicemente: "La storia" ' (p. 68). The thinker is undoubtedly De Meis. In this Hegelianism *sui generis* Capuana seems at last to see that Hegelians when they spoke of Reason were not speaking of the intellectual processes characteristic of individuals, nor of their powers of reasoning, but of a world-historical process in which individual reason had little part to play, and where indeed its function might be shown to contradict wholly its conscious aims. The 'scientific', Zolian Capuana had ignored De Meis's distinction between 'piccola' and 'grande ragione' (between positivistic reason and the Reason of the spirit), assuming that the one subsumed the other. Now in a new spirit of humility

and doubt, Capuana seems to confess the inadequacy of the scientific dream and to stand reverently in the shadow of the Spirit. Yet so predominantly polemical was the inspiration of *Rassegnazione* and so short of intellectual exploration its neo-idealism (embodied by those simple, countrified characters of its last chapters) that the familiar, realist procedures of Capuana's narrative remained untouched. This contradictory situation was to be mirrored in Capuana's criticism of the nineties, and only by reference to the polemical impulse behind the novel and to its deliberate thematic experimentation can the contemporary presence of a novel like *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* be included in a unitary vision of the author.

2. *Criticism: Beyond the 'ismi'*

Gli 'ismi' contemporanei is Capuana's final major statement of critical attitudes. *Cronache letterarie*, published a year later in 1899, enlarges on certain themes but has nothing radically new to offer (while the reviews of *Lettere alla assente* (1904), purporting to be addressed to a literary lady friend stranded in the country with nothing better to do than read, are mostly tired self-repetition—a fact which the contrived imaginary framework merely emphasizes). Consisting of articles written between 1892 and 1897, it is not surprising that *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* should contain traces of the anti-naturalism and even anti-materialism already evident in *La Sfinge* and *Rassegnazione* as well as a statement of artistic outlook which is particularly well articulated precisely because it was now required to stand up under pressure of new aesthetic credos. It is not surprising either that the volume in the complexity of its cultural and even psychological motivation should have provoked widely divergent evaluations and interpretations. One may even find a recent critic like Ermanno Scuderi peering at Capuana through a Crocean mist, and without reference to the precise cultural matrix which produced it, giving preferential treatment to Capuana's post-1890 criticism and tending to ignore all that preceded it.[30] *Gli 'ismi'* and *Cronache letterarie* undoubtedly reveal a 'pre-Crocean' Capuana, one who equates 'conception' and 'expression', flinches at biographical criticism, minimizes the role of the intellect in the production of a work of art, and comes to a negative conclusion on decadentism—Croce's 'grande industria del vuoto'.[31] It has, however, become still more common to contrast the period of the two series of *Studi* with that of *Gli 'ismi'*—the vanguard Capuana with the Capuana of a conservative, rearguard action, insensitive to the innovations of the period and battling for a 'ritorno ai sacri principi del "vero" '.[32] What has not been seen at all is the relationship of the volume with certain innovations and accentuations of past tendencies which become perceptible in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*.

The dissonant voices of commentators responding to this period of Capuana's criticism dissonances in the criticism itself partly explain: for as in *Rassegnazione*, Capuana is anxious to demonstrate his responsiveness to new ideals and new literary procedures (and his extraneousness to the question of naturalism), but all the while

he betrays his enduring faith in a realistic method. In the next chapter we shall see one consequence of this conflict: Capuana's efforts to show that the work of certain writers whom we now know as *veristi* had amply fulfilled the requirements of the younger literary generation. In the meantime we may note that *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* and *Cronache letterarie* give way in certain directions to the pressure exercised by that generation. On the relationship between science and religion which was then keenly debated, Capuana's tone is cautious and undoctrinaire. Reviewing *Le Ascensioni umane*, he agrees with Fogazzaro in qualifying as 'spesso premature' the conclusions drawn by Darwinian science to the detriment of the doctrine of creation;[33] and reading Butti's profession of atheism in the dedication of *L'Automa*, he benevolently ascribes to the author's youthfulness a dogmatism in the face of the problem of immortality 'davanti al quale la vera scienza, da lui qualificata fredda e essiccatrice, conferma non aver prove egualmente solide per affermare o per negare' (p. 78). Everywhere spiritual matters are handled with tactful respect. An examination by Ermete Rossi of the disciplines of self-denial practised by saints, mystics, and visionaries finds Capuana reluctant to subscribe to the author's simplistic (and therefore 'non esattamente scientifica') conclusion that self-mortification 'è nelle sue conseguenze immorale come ogni principio anti-biologico', and on the whole preferring by reason of its more edifying content the 'nevrosi religiosa' to that described in the 'terribili libri dello Charcot e del Richet' (pp. 175, 176, 168). Capuana defends Papal Rome ('la grande mole dell'organismo cattolico') against Zola's indictment of it in the person of the Abbé Froment from *Rome*.[34]

It was natural in the present context that De Meis, who had offered Capuana an intellectual scheme which encompassed and went beyond positivism, should again float to the surface of his mind. 'La storia', wrote Capuana in the essay 'Idealismo e cosmopolitismo', 'è il registro immortale degli immani sforzi, dei dolorosi travagli, delle gloriose vittorie dello Spirito lungo il corso dei secoli' (p. 36); and this Hegelian allusiveness becomes increasingly frequent as though to suggest in Capuana a broad, sweeping perspective strictly compatible with the most visionary 'idealist' or 'cosmopolitan' gaze. A page of *Dopo la laurea* on the eternal creative processes at work in the universe is called upon to show Fogazzaro the sublimity of a philosophic vision which 'compie ciò che la fede e la scienza e anche la poesia, sono, tutte unite insieme, incapaci di compiere'.[35] It is the sheer visionary sweep of De Meis's thought that attracts Capuana, and no doubt it sensitized him to the 'spiritual' atmosphere of the times, but in the concrete critical situation De Meis's influence weighs light in the balance. Furthermore in one significant respect his teaching as Capuana understood it in the seventies has been abandoned. Capuana no longer sees in the novel De Meis's composite genre which, in balancing thought and imagination, science and art, ideally suited the reflective nineteenth century. The prognosis for art, it is true, seems far from favourable if 'la storia letteraria ci dimostra come la riflessione e la scienza vadano di mano in mano falcidiando le

forme artistiche' (p. 38), but compromises between science and creative imagination are now unthinkable, and Capuana unhesitatingly condemns 'i romanzieri mezzi artisti e mezzi scienzati, esseri neutri che non appartengono per ciò nè alla scienza nè all'arte' (p. 46). This was perhaps only to substitute one idealism by another: it was undoubtedly to renege on the persuasions of the past, continuing what had been begun in *Per l'arte*. Capuana's most immediate polemical aim, however, was to attack from an unassailable position 'la baraonda dei concetti artistici' (p. 9)—the antipathetic contemporary 'ismi'—implicating them in the crime of nurturing preconceived opinions and systems of thought which impeded the free operations of creative imagination:

> c'è il chiaccherìo di non so che teoriche delle quali non voglio nemmeno parlare, perchè io, in tatto d'arte, alle teoriche bado poco; chiedo lavori, iavori, lavori! Le teoriche sono buone per la discussione tra critici, o per mettere, tutt'al pi` u, un'etichetta su la produzione; inutile, se la produzione è cattiva; inutilissima, se l'etichetta vien preparata anticipatamente. (p. 6)

It was only fair that naturalism should receive the same treatment as the other 'ismi', and indeed this suited Capuana's purpose: in 1894, during a visit of self-documentation for *Rome* Zola visited Capuana's home at number 88, Via Arcione, thereby reawakening memories of how *Giacinta* had been dedicated to him and how well the first *Studi* had served his cause. Capuana soon found himself the victim of a criticism (in general, one favourable to D'Annunzio) determined to see him merely as the leader of the Italian naturalist movement. It is understandable that the author of *La Sfinge* and the children's *fiabe* should be perplexed and irritated by the label. His sense of detachment from the movement had become a profound conviction, and many pages of criticism, notably the essays 'La Chimera' and 'Domando la parola' in *Cronache letterarie*, strenuously combat the definition, while 'La crisi del romanzo' in *Gli 'ismi'* had examined the fortunes of the modern novel in a historical perspective and treated its phases, including naturalism, with the detached humour of one persuaded he is now above the fray. Comparing the novel to a hospital patient, Capuana sees its feverish delirium of Romanticism calmed at first by 'una buona dose di *naturalismo* e di *sperimentalismo*'; the cure however soon begins to produce deleterious side-effects, and the novel 'da bravo figliuolo, onesto, morigerato [. . .] che era' becomes an 'assiduo frequentatore di bettole e di donnacce' (p. 40). Whereupon it is subjected to an antidote, 'inezioni sottocutanee di *psicologismo*', which temporarily remove the '*delirium tremens*' of naturalism, but in the long run produce the unnatural swelling of excessive introspection. The ailing novel is readmitted to hospital where doctors now argue the relative efficacy of various remedies, from '*idealismo*' and '*neocattolicismo*', to '*simbolismo*' and '*lirismo*' (p. 41).

If Capuana tranquilly historicized his own past this was because all theories, philosophies, and preordained concepts seemed to him equally irrelevant to the

creating of a work of art, and naturalism now represented to him only a programme. As long as this view is accepted, there is a good deal to be said for Capuana's claim that for him naturalism was merely a 'chimera' of the past. Several integral elements of his naturalism had disappeared. In times when modern literary sensibilities were deeply influenced, as he duly noted, by the tormented spirituality of writers like Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and Ibsen, it would have been insensitive to continue classifying humanity according to distinct socio-economic criteria, each category having its own level of psychological and linguistic complexity. The question of the novelist's ascent through the layers of society is broached on a single occasion in these years, and then only in the context of Capuana's calls for a more healthily concrete art (p. 111), in contrast with the vague internationality of contemporary literary movements; and in 1907 he would go so far as to state, in defiance of the preface to *I Malavoglia*, that since moments of passion and conflict, which should be the subject of art, deprive people of their powers of introspection, educated men enjoy no advantages over their brothers 'nell'espressione dei loro sentimenti'.[36] The pathological case of naturalism too had fallen from grace. Capuana's early response to the enormous popularity of Russian novels was clouded by the reflection that often their protagonists were 'allucinati scossi da nevrosi', creatures perfectly at home on the wild Russian steppe but dangerous models (as he now has occasion to discover in connexion with *Giovanni Episcopo* and *L'Innocente*) in more temperate, Latin climes.[37] Commemorating Daudet in *Cronache letterarie*, he rejoices on detecting that the writer's latest fictional characters 'non rappresentavano più un caso eccezionale, patologico ma la natura umana schietta, con le idealità, le miserie, le falsità della passione e del vizio che rendono bella e triste la vita'.[38] The philosophy of moderation in *Rassegnazione*, and the mediocrity of Dario, spoke clearly enough of Capuana's rejection of naturalist 'eccezionalità'. Moreover—to anticipate discussion of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*—it is noteworthy that when in that novel Capuana enlarges on the ancestry of his hero he is not offering information on his inherited predispositions.

Steadfastly indifferent to content as he now professes himself Capuana can serenely equate Verga and D'Annunzio on the level of concept: 'L'un concetto val l'altro. Sia la darwiniana lotta per la vita, sia la pessimistica e aristocratica filosofia del pensatore tedesco finito miseramente in un ospedale di matti' (p. 20). Though the gloss on Nietzsche is something of a *lapsus*, Capuana's attitude is carefully neutral and non-controversial, and he is as prepared to accept the current 'ricerca di un contenuto elevato per l'opera d'arte' (p. 85) as any other: 'tutto il contenuto possibile, a patto però che egli prenda forma vitale per via dell'immaginazione creatrice' (p. 18), he writes, in a recollection of De Sanctis. But the crucial factor which undermines all his impartiality and justifies in part the persistence of the naturalist label is his failure to envisage any change in the narrative procedures which were to support the new content. Here in fact there is a hardening of attitudes and an elaboration of certain points which are subsequently embodied in

Il Marchese di Roccaverdina.

Utilizing the distinction applied to naturalism in *Libri e teatro*, Capuana notes that naturalists themselves 'confondevano il concetto materialista col metodo positivo' (p. 45). But, he continues, 'in un certo paese di questo mondo, writers talked not of naturalism and experimentalism but instead 'inalberarono il vessillo del *verismo*, il quale accennava particolarmente più al metodo che non alla materia di cui l'arte loro si serviva' (p. 45). The theme, once so emphasized by De Amicis, of Zola as self-publicist emerges to justify the inevitable conclusion that Zola's true contribution to aesthetic debate was his having given writers

> la coscienza più chiara, più categorica, del dovere dell'artista di dare al suo lavoro un fondamento di osservazione diretta e nel lasciare ai fatti, ai caratteri, alle passioni la loro piena libertà d'azione, senza mescolarvi i suoi particolari criteri; insomma nell'imitare proprio la natura, che mette al mondo le creature e le abbandona a sè stesse e al giudizio della società. (p. 44)

Impersonality survives once again because it alone guarantees that the intellectual content of a work should be harmoniously absorbed without residue into form; indeed, one may say that it flourished now that the thinker-artist had been finally banished, and the imagination ruled supreme. Reality itself was to speak in the work of art, and imagination meant the total availability of the writer to absorb and body forth that reality. Impersonality, we may say, was the proof contained in the work itself of the multiform, opinionless functioning of the imagination. So it was that for Capuana there was no such thing as a programmatically mystical or idealist novel, but only mystical or idealistic characters:

> un romanziere ha l'obbligo di dimenticare, di obliterare se stesso, di vivere la vita dei suoi personaggi. E se tra essi c'è un mistico, il romanziere deve sentire e pensare come lui, non ironicamente, non criticamente, ma con perfetta obbiettività, lasciando responsabile il personaggio di tutto quello che sente e pensa'. (p. 49)

That Capuana views impersonality as a universal criterion of excellence is strongly suggested first by his recourse to the incontestable greatness of Shakespeare who, he avers, 'aveva praticato quel metodo in modo supremo' (p. 44), and secondly by his singular assertion that the 'clamoroso successo' of the best Russian novels is due to the way they have developed 'il germe dell'impersonalità artistica', following a 'rigoroso metodo di osservazione' (p. 48).

As the triumphs of positivistic science came to be indefinitely postponed ('Nos petits enfants verront des belles choses' was a phrase of Richet's Capuana quoted appreciatively in this period[39]), leaving the way clear for idealism to display its seductions and to tempt a weary Capuana into confessions of nescience and semi-religiosity—but *still* he could not tell whether the Spirit was 'umano o divino' (p. 36)—the scientific framework of naturalism crumbled and disappeared. *Rassegnazione* had been called, as Capuana noted with satisfaction later, 'fin troppo *idealistica*'.[40] But its narrative structures and procedures had been those of realism,

and Capuana had been tolerant of the label of *verismo*, where *verismo* meant simply a method which could be summed up in the word, 'impersonality'. Capuana quoted Verga's opinion that 'si *possa scrivere un romanzo mistico con una forma naturalistica*', adding, in the interests of clarity, that 'invece di *naturalistica* avrebbe dovuto dire meglio: *impersonale*' (p. 49).[41] But were the questions of method and subject so thoroughly divisible? Did the method not tend to have repercussions on the conception and the treatment of the subject (if not on the choice of subject itself) as well as on Capuana's responses as a critic?

We may begin to answer these questions by noting that in this period Capuana approaches the subject of expression with redoubled concern. This was a direct consequence of his 'indifference' to content, but it also stemmed from the need to confront the linguistic experimentation of contemporaries. Whether he is minutely singling out instances of careless composition in Butti, Neera, and Gualdo, or observing that where a noun is to be qualified it is easier to muster five or six adjectives than to discover 'il solo, l'unico che dovrebbe sinceramente e quindi efficacemente qualificarlo',[42] his unusual attentiveness to the technicalities of the *métier* is explained by the reflection that 'la esattezza dell'espressione implica uguale esattezza d'osservazione' (p. 82). And in connexion with this equivalence of expression and observation, he makes a revealing linguistic comparison between Verga and D'Annunzio (the positive and negative poles in his current thinking, despite admiration for the latter's gifts). Anticipating the Pirandellian distinction between 'stile di cose' and 'stile di parole', he notes that for Verga there must be a correspondence or better, a 'fusion', between the idea or object and the word that expresses it; for D'Annunzio on the other hand words have 'un valore quasi per sè stesse' (p. 11). In 'La Chimera' Capuana the parodist makes his own attitude plain: 'O sogno di bellezza estetica che dinanzi al vocabolo raro, al periodo armonioso e voluttuosamente snodantesi come collo di cigno o come corpo di serpe che rinnova la sua spoglia sotto i raggi canicolari, dimentichi che il vocabolo è segno e confondi l'essenza della musica con l'essenza della parola!' For Capuana a word is not *primarily* a sign, it is *only* a sign: it exists only in function of the object it designates. To this functional view of language we must attribute his approval of the stylistic qualities of 'trasparenza', 'lucidità', and 'semplicità', particularly stressed in *Cronache letterarie*. Language was to be so self-effacing, so *transparent* that its intermediacy between a reality and its expression was imperceptible. Homer's greatness is attributed to a 'meravigliosa transparenza della forma che rende la concezione talmente reale e viva sotto gli occhi, che la stessa realtà non potrebbe darci di più'. The implication is, of course, that only 'reality' has meaning and importance: there are 'altrettanti stili quanti sono i soggetti', but not vice versa.[43] Hence the condemnation of the '*stilista*', whose language rather than being subservient to a reality purveyed it only in as far as was consistent with experimentation, say, with rhythm and sonority. In D'Annunzio and likeminded writers Capuana found not the 'sincerity' engendered by the unique, unrepeatable

experience of reality, but often self-conscious literary or linguistic reminiscence, a communication of elites ('si regalano a vicenda gli epiteti di *puri,* d'*impeccabili*' (p. 10), he noted wryly), the lack of a strongly individual artistic voice; in short, literature as a self-referential superstructure.

On one occasion there is a hint that Capuana perceived a link between his own method and what might be called an ideology. It was of course his impersonality, his willing subservience to an observed reality, that produced the 'semplicità, la nudità del suo stile', and he confessed his fear that it might be 'attribuita al [suo] naturalismo e non sembri una prova lampante di esso'.[44] But with the unconvincing rejoinder that he too might have become a '*stilista*' had he so desired, the dawning *aperçu* faded. Capuana found it inconceivable that if the language of a D'Annunzio, as he said, transformed reality rather than translating it, this might in itself be in the nature of a communication, for as far as Capuana was concerned the meaning of a work always corresponded to a reality more or less 'outside' it. Though he knew that the reality embodied in a work of art was always somebody's and not simply anybody's, he assumed a consensus vision which conferred upon it a species of objective truth. Moreover, with the disappearance of naturalism, the consensus vision excluded the scientific view-point, and in becoming ever less specialized seemed to aim too at an ever more general acceptability. So it was that Capuana saw no objection to asking: 'È creatura umana Claudio Cantelmo? È almeno creatura equilibrata, sana, da poter dare l'ullusione che essa continui nelle pagine del libro le pagine della vita?' Only the perception, which he failed to discover, of an 'intenzione satirica' (p. 36) would have satisfied him that *Le Vergini delle rocce* was a meaningful enterprise; but he himself was in the process of writing that 'satirical' version: *Rassegnazione*.

That Capuana should deprecate an excess of cerebration as compared with action on the part of Claudio Cantelmo, or, commenting on Albertazzi's *Ave*, judge that the hero's love for a woman was 'un sentimento più naturale che non siano quelli già destatigli dai teoremi di Carlo Marx' (p. 89) was an indication not simply of the anti-intellectualism perceptible in *Rassegnazione*, nor was it only a result of what we may call the 'average' view of reality. If he preferred the Don Abbondios, the Baron Hulots, and the Père Goriots of the world of art (pp. 22-3), it was because they acted on and in society. Their reality did not remain in the sphere of psychological or intellectual disquisition but became perceptible in the conflicts they concretely provoked. In the course of a polemical interchange with D'Annunzio's admirer, Ugo Ojetti, Capuana confirms this interpretation of his fondness for characters like Don Abbondio:

> Vorrei credere che lei non arrivi fino al punto di negare che l'anima nostra possa rivelare quel che ha in sè di più profondo e di più umano altrimenti che con le azioni, col carattere, con le passioni; e non solitaria, ma in relazione con altre anime rivestite di corpo al pari di essa. (p. 35)

For Capuana our profoundest nature lies not in the private, subjective dimension but in the social, external one—it is hard to determine whether the doctrine of impersonality has given birth to a species of ideology or vice versa. There is, however, a significant, new emphasis on the character's moments of 'passion' and 'action', on those manifestations of his existence which can most easily be represented without betrayal of impersonality. *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* does not, as we might have expected, search out technical loop-holes which will give Capuana an unobtrusive area of operation within the text, rather the reverse: there is an attempt to translate all psychological data onto the plane of action, thereby eliminating any sense of the author's privileged knowledge. The average view-point and the doctrine of impersonality collaborate to produce a starker model for the realist work of art than ever before.

There are passages in *Gli 'ismi'* which give a precise indication of how this rigorous realism will function in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. In two reviews which deal with novels by Corradini and Gualdo, Capuana seems to view 'narration', the connective tissue of the narrative, as something of a necessary evil: 'Il romanzo deve raccontare, è vero, ma deve anche rappresentare', he reminds a Gualdo given to 'narrating' 'fin là dove il dialogo drammatico vorrebbe sgorgare impetuoso' (p. 80). And in Corradini he finds moments of 'representation' when the characters 'entrano decisamente in iscena e si abbandonano ai moti di passione' (p. 94) far superior in their hold on reality to those 'parti dove i personaggi [. . .] son costretti a digrumare il passato, a far l'esame di coscienza per comodo dell'autore' (p. 94). 'Drammatizzare la scena' (p. 80) is the advisory slogan Capuana brandishes before Gualdo, but by implication before all other novelists. The theatrical vocabulary and frame of reference are no accident. Their dual activity as narrators and playwrights, their multiple experiments in transcribing prose-works for the stage (from *Cavalleria rusticana* to *Giacinta*) attest the special relationship of the 'impersonal' novelists, Capuana and Verga, with the theatre. A few years hence, reviewing Verga's narrative adaptation of *Dal tuo al mio*, Capuana will declare that in the world of the novel 'l'evoluzione è dalla forma narrativa verso la drammatica: non già che quella debba confondersi o perdersi in questa: ma assimilare quanto più può delle virtù di essa'.[45] The present stress on the direct intervention and the *viva voce* of the character is a pointer to Capuana's attempt in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* to push the canon of impersonality to its uttermost limits. The novel becomes 'theatrical' because drama, in being devoid of narration, represents a situation of maximum impersonality.

Capuana's determination to see the inner truth of the character translated into speech, action and gesture is undoubtedly awkward, given the fact that the subject of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*—and to this extent it betrays the impact of Capuana's cultural environment—is the drama of a conscience. But certainly the idea of an implied, non-explicit psychological depth in works of realism was stressed by its post-Zolian adherents. Chief among them was Maupassant who wrote:

au lieu d'expliquer longuement l'état d'esprit d'un personnage, les écrivains objectifs cherchent l'action ou le geste que cet état d'âme doit faire accomplir fatalement à cet homme dans une situation déterminée. [. . .] Ils cachent donc la psychologie au lieu de l'étaler, ils en font la carcasse de l'œuvre, comme l'ossature invisible est la carcasse du corps humain.[46]

And Capuana and Verga were not the only writers to justify their aesthetic allegiances by emphasizing such implications as best harmonized with current psychological and spiritual preoccupations. The impulse to make a revolution into an evolution was general. Thus J-K. Huysmans, whose rupture with naturalism dated from *A Rebours* of 1884, underlined the coherence of his own artistic operations within the changed context of *Là-Bas* (1891):

Il fallait [. . .] garder la veracité du document, la précision du détail, la langue étoufée et nerveuse du réalisme, mais il faut aussi se faire puisatier d'âme [. . .] Il faudrait, en un mot, suivre la grande voie si profondément creusée par Zola, mais il serait nécessaire aussi de tracer en l'air un chemin parallèle, une autre route, d'atteindre les en deça et les après, de faire, en un mot, un naturalisme spiritualiste.[47]

Even Brunetière, so critical in *Le Roman naturaliste*[48] of naturalism as practised by the Goncourt brothers and Zola went on to admit that 'ses procédés ou ses moyens lui survivront', and mentioned naturalism's 'probité d'observation', 'l'obligation pour le romancier de situer ses personages dans un *milieu* qui les explique en partie', and 'celle de ne laisser passer de sa personne dans son œuvre que le moins qu'il pourra'.[49] Encouragement thus came from prestigious quarters. But Capuana was to take matters to extremes. The absolute value he placed on impersonality and, by extension, on observable reality, even while it produced the relative success of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, suggested how ill-adapted it might be to serve the intellectual or introspective hero.

One final aspect of *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* has a bearing on *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. As is well known Capuana came full circle on his assessment of dialect literature, producing plays in Sicilian dialect towards the end of his career, and asserting 'la necessità di passare pel teatro regionale prima di arrivare a quel teatro nazionale', if the latter was to be 'un'opera d'arte e non opera d'artifizio'.[50] It is noteworthy, especially in view of the vague geography of *Rassegnazione*, that *Gli 'ismi'* expresses the same attitude and in particular sees the regional work as the fit antidote to contemporary, centrifugal trends in literature. Indeed where Capuana finds a robustly Neapolitan novel (Lauria's *Povero Don Camillo*!) to contrast with the 'sfilata di gente travestita da russi, da norvegiani, da danesi, da decadenti francesi' of more modish works, his polemical impulses function at the expense of a well-articulated rationale of regionalism. His praise for Lauria turns exclusively and repeatedly on the sense of a 'diretta irradiazione della realtà' so sadly lacking in a literature which 'fa il verso ad altre creazioni dell'arte ammirate e rimaste impresse nella memoria' (p. 110). But perhaps his explanations were now

superfluous. He had come to feel that no amount of discussion produced a work of art, that the sick novel's medical attendants did it more harm than good. Concluding 'la crisi del romanzo', he left his own credo uncommented:

Il romanzo, probabilmente, se vorrà e potrà rimanere romanzo, non si metterà a servizio di questa o quell'idea, di questo o quel sistema; continuerà a sviluppare il suo organismo adoperando sempre meglio il metodo impersonale, divenendo sempre più nazionale, anzi sempre più regionale, per dare alle sue creazioni la stessa varietà e ricchezza delle creazioni della Natura. (pp. 52-3)

CHAPTER V

THE TRIUMPH OF IMPERSONALITY

1. *The Cultural Context of 'Il Marchese di Roccaverdina'*

In almost all Capuana's narrative we have been forced to note a discontinuity of inspiration which had formal repercussions. In its alteration of courage and conservatism his work was less the vehicle of a stimulating and new vision of society than a faithful reflection of its infatuations, contradictions and scruples. Well might Troilo note how before the 'rinnovamento umano' of positivism had tempered men's minds against all eventualities it was undermined by the resurgence of 'vecchie credenze'; and well might a modern reader, seeing in Capuana's neutral realism a bourgeois alibi, complain that once his characters were removed from their social and historical setting 'it becomes impossible to see what on earth they are supposed to document'.[1] On the whole, however, the kind of reading which makes Capuana's limits as a writer coincide with his ideological cautiousness is inadequate in the case of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. The novel presents a unity of stylistic tone and a constancy of intention seldom achieved in previous works. Its meanings, rather than being entrusted to a message-bearing character who substitutes the author, lie within the text itself, and the text, in its various aspects from style to story-line, generates an authentic, individual world. Though the novel lacks the originality of psychological insight that produced the best portions of *Giacinta* and *Profumo*, it has long been acknowledged as the most successful of Capuana's fictional works, a judgement which in essence remains valid.

Yet for Carlo Madrignani (as for Geno Pampaloni) *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is merely a 'frutto fuori stagione', 'un ritorno, non senza forzature, ai temi dell'ispirazione naturalistica'.[2] Capuana's own literary gaze ranging in the two volumes of criticism of the late nineties over the psychological, the 'intimist', novel, over the literature of European symbolism, and the devaluation of reality at the hands of the 'aesthetes', headed by D'Annunzio, seems a sufficient gauge of the 'anachronistic' nature of the coming novel. In those same pages had appeared the name of Bourget, author of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1882) in which Enrico Nencioni had already, in 1889, found a 'preoccupazione della vita morale [. . .] in un campo che pareva ormai tutto invaso trionfalmente dalla fisiologia';[3] and if Verga, unable to extend the cycle of his *Vinti* beyond its second episode, and now unmistakably sliding the arid slope into relative artistic

impotence, called the psychological Bourget a 'scocciatore'[4] (recalling Capuana's own 'iniezioni sottocutanee di psicologismo' and their fatal 'inflation' of the patient), he also allowed that the naturalistic and psychological 'methods' were 'ottimi tutti e due', and remarked, like Maupassant, that 'gli psicologi in fondo non fanno che ostentare un lavoro che per noi è solo preliminare'.[5] This was a measure of the temporizing discomfiture now experienced by the leaders of *verismo*, and it was echoed by Capuana in the desire that *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* should 'contemperare i due metodi del naturalismo fisiologico e psicologico'.[6] The new religious interests and the Utopian socialism of Zola's own trilogy, *Les Trois Villes*, and the conversion of the ex-naturalist, Huysmans, were other phenomena which Capuana was obliged to confront. From Russia, via France and the propagation of Vogüé, came examples of an evangelical moral commitment (in Tolstoy) and of a preference for introspection and spiritual struggle (in Dostoyevsky), already reflected (as Capuana noted) in *Giovanni Episcopo* and *L'innocente*.

In Italy Fogazzaro's Catholic modernism and the spiritual conflicts of his characters were indicative of a return to 'idealistic' values. Matilde Serao marshalled her 'Cavalieri dello spirito' and made a journey to the Holy Land out of which sprang *Nel paese di Gesù* (1899) (whose 'sentimento religioso' Capuana unstintingly admired[7]). Convinced like Capuana that 'la scienza non è bastata',[8] she abandoned the genuine inspiration of a novel like *Il paese di cuccagna* (1889) for unbearable, but fashionably psychological, works like *Castigo* (1893). In the Manzonian De Marchi pessimism and compassion for human miseries now erupt in the open, moralizing ironies of *Giacomo l'idealista* (1897), and especially in the sentimental humanitarianism of its conclusion. D'Annunzio, as we saw, with *Le Vergini delle rocce* has finally taken his leave of naturalism, opening up new autobiographical and expressive possibilities for the novel. Even Pirandello, whose criticism in the nineties owes much to Capuana's, admitted in an article entitled 'Il neo-idealismo' (1896) that 'il concetto materialistico del mondo e della vita non appaga più lo spirito moderno'.[9]

That there was mutual incomprehension between the 'neo-idealists' and the exponents of *verismo* is obvious. The publication of Verga's plays by Treves in 1896 was an opportunity for Ugo Ojetti to display highly symptomatic disapproval of an author who 'non si è mai curato di *pensare* che cosa è e che cosa debba essere la vita, che cosa ella valga oltre il fenomeno'. If the public applauded *La Lupa*, this Ojetti accounted for in terms of the 'curiosità malsana che spinge ogni più quieto burocratico a guardare da dietro gli occhiali su l'altro marciapiede la rissa forse mortale di due popolani nel mezzo della via, in attesa dei reali carabinieri'.[10] Here, clearly, the moralism is no longer that which informed so many discussions of drama at the time of Capuana's contributions to *La Nazione* (and which sprang from the patriotic and pedagogic notion of Italy's National Theatre), but a sign of aspirations to a life and a literature whose pattern and significance was anchored to something higher than and beyond the interplay of 'phenomenological' forces.

Capuana in his turn was capable of ignoring the sense of futility and spiritual void of which many thinking men gave evidence in the post-positivistic era—he was capable for instance of seeing in Butti's *L'Automa* merely the 'traditional' story of weak hero and *femme fatale.*[11]

Verismo became in addition the target of liberal socialism. In the eighties regional works had been acceptable to middle-class critics, readers and spectators alike: *Cavalleria rusticana*, for instance, first performed in January 1884, had been vigorously applauded. The spectator was in all likelihood indulging a taste for the exotic, finding comfort in the survival of certain moral absolutes often absent or disputed in works of bourgeois subject, as well as discovering the unknown regions that constituted the unified nation. By 1890, however, the situation had changed. The quiescent masses of the South whom Capuana had so often portrayed in humorous vein were beginning to stir into violence. The scientific optimism, the urge to document, the confidence of earlier decades in progress began to reveal themselves out of step with reality, incapable of providing a lasting ideology for Italy's intellectuals who now, indeed, went in search of other more 'spiritual' solutions. By now socialism was a significant force, agrarian strikes in the South were becoming more frequent and at the beginning of 1894 Crispi laid a determined hand on the 'Fasci siciliani' in the form of martial law and military tribunals, thereby unequivocally exposing the failed assimilation of remote territorial outposts into the unified fabric of the nation. It is under the impact of these 'tristi casi' that Edoardo Boutet, writing in the January of 1894, mounts his attack on the *verista* authors of Sicily. Contrasting the 'true' conditions of Sicily with a 'folklorismo amabile e sentimentale' (and singling out the by now notorious 'morsetti all'orecchio' of *Cavalleria rusticana*), he attacks *verista* literature for its consoling moral implications ('piccole sventure di persone, non tragedie di popolo, anzi gente di buon augurio in fondo'), and condemns the literary exploitation of a 'popolo che soffre tutti gli strazi e tutti i soprusi', calling it a 'giocarello arcadico' destined 'pe' salottini rococò'.[12] Capuana's reply, published two days later, hinges predictably on Boutet's ignorance of Sicily ('avete voluto parlare di cose che ignorate affatto') and on the absolute freedom of art (generated 'senza preoccuparsi dei Fasci e dell'onorevole De Felice') and the artist ('Chi vi ha detto che il Verga ed io, per esempio, abbiamo voluto dipingere la Sicilia sotto tutti i suoi aspetti?').[13] That Boutet should see in *verista* Sicily a species of timeless Arcadia frivolously neglectful of political realities is undoubtedly exaggerated, ignoring particularly Verga's 'discovery' of the economic law which governs the world of the Malavoglia and Mastro-Don Gesualdo, and his sensitivity to the ruthless assault of progress and nationhood on the agricultural communities of the South: Capuana justifiably counter-attacks with a long quotation from 'Libertà'. None the less Boutet's politically oriented attack and his complaint that Capuana and Verga live 'insensibili del loro tempo, senza vederne e senza sentirne le angoscie e le convulsioni' presents an aspect of contemporary thinking which now invades the

territory once occupied by naturalism and *verismo*.[14]

In *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* Capuana's lively rebuttal of the two lines of attack represented by Ojetti and Boutet is the familiar 'aesthetic' one originally derived from De Sanctis. Indeed more than ever in the context of the threatening 'ismi' Capuana insists that the writer is never at the service of a system. Replying to Boutet he even repudiates a recent 'political' reading of his *Paesane*, unashamedly declaring that 'appunto in tutto il volume delle *Paesane* è il lato comico della vita siciliana, o meglio il lato comico di certi carrettieri siciliani quello che vien messo in maggiore evidenza'. But he also insists that the concrete representation of character and passion, however detached, always assumed the pre-existence of a guiding thought: in Verga's case 'rappresentare così vivamente è pensare: è dare forma al pensiero però, cioè far opera d'arte. Shakespeare [. . .] fa forse altrimenti?'.[15] A few years later, writing in a Sicilian journal, Capuana can withstand the pressure of new cultural exigencies no longer, and we discover him coming to a species of compromise, and unusually preoccupied with the impact of the writer on his society. His remarks are deliberately replete with politico-moral implications. Taking the contemporary French novel as point of departure, he claims to discover in:

ogni volume una scaramuccia o una battaglia, qualcosa che trascende l'arte, o che riduce l'arte funzione elevata di pensiero e non passeggiero divertimento di sfaccendati. Colà non esce libro che non rinnovi un problema sociale, un problema morale.

He refers enthusiastically to the:

prove e riprove di giovani forze intellettuali che non si appartano dal popolo ma gli parlano a voce alta e lo scuotono e lo infiammano, aiutandosi con la bellezza della forma per uno scopo che redime fin gli eccessi dello stile e le esagerazioni e incongruenze della fantasia.[16]

The attempt to come to terms with what Capuana has long felt are excesses of style and 'fantasia' is a curiously political one (though a presage of this position in regard to the function of art and in particular to the 'estetisti' is contained in the preface, 'Nuovi ideali d'arte e di critica', to *Cronache letterarie* where, though he still resists the idea that art may contain a specific teaching, Capuana remarks that 'gli stessi esagerati partigiani della teorica Bellezza si fondano su l'influenza, vera o supposta, della bellezza nella educazione del cuore e dello spirito'[17]). The subordination of art to some 'scopo' is surprising, and presents us transiently (for the article ends on a Crispean note, with Capuana looking toward the 'alto destino preparatoci dalla Storia') with a 'socialist' Capuana.[18] The apologia which follows for authors like Verga, Serao, De Roberto, Deledda (and even, in non-partisan spirit, for Fogazzaro and D'Annunzio) turns no longer upon their efficacy of 'representation', upon their ability to fuse form and content, but upon the message for society contained in their work. Capuana defines Verga 'un formidabile socialista', considers Matilde

Serao's 'inchieste' into Neapolitan life 'più profonde che forse non saranno quelle di tutti i commissari governativi presenti e futuri', and refers to the 'problemi morali e religiosi' raised by Fogazzaro and the 'problemi morali ed economici' revealed in Grazia Deledda's Sardinia. It is obvious, however, that the political slant of the article is generic, and the extra-artistic effects of literature unspecified (the 'popolo' may be 'shaken' and 'inflamed' but to what end?). In fact the extremest aim of the article is only, once again, to prove that even the *verista* writer is, in his way, a thinker; but that aim is in itself a significant homage to an age where the existence of a novel like *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* needs justification.

That its regional subject-matter might seem anachronistic in the context we have described is probable (but an evaluation on such a basis risks condemnation for being narrowly concerned with content); and one may allow that the spiritual drama of the Marchese, especially in its resolution, harks back to the pathological case of naturalism. The novel was, however, an effort to inject new life into the narrative structures of *verismo*, and it offered, if nothing else, an instructive exemplification of their strengths and limitations; and the novel, unlike so many of Capuana's regional stories, seemed at last capable of distinguishing–to use Boutet's terminology–superficial 'folklore' from a deeper 'truth'. On this account it is one of the least 'gratuitous' of Capuana's narrative works.

2. *'Il Marchese di Roccaverdina': Towards a 'Theatrical' Mimesis of Reality*

In 1900 Palermo's *L'Ora* published twenty-two instalments of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* corresponding to twenty-two of the thirty-four chapters forming the volume, which appeared in the succeeding year. On 15 November an announcement in *L'Ora* 'listato di nero, ironico e pungente quanto mai' (according to A. Navarria) 'fa sapere ai lettori che il marchese di Roccaverdina è morto', and without much mincing matters accuses Capuana of 'leggerezza [. . .] per aver venduto al nuovo giornale palermitano il romanzo bell'e compiuto mentre era ancora da scrivere'. The anecdotal value of Capuana's misdeed is to present us once again with an aging figure, ever more financially embarrassed and constrained to keep up the rhythm of his production, responsible in addition (since 1896) for his *angelo di casa*, Adelaide Bernardini, whose meagre artistic talents he will from now on hawk on the literary market with a peevish assiduity suggesting material need as well as protective affection (and one of the saddest results of this situation was to be a vicious personal attack on the couple contained in Francesco Biondolillo's *Macellatio Capuanae Bernadinaeque* of 1913). The more pertinent aspect of Capuana's irresponsible dealings with Vincenzo Morello's publication is, in Navarria's view, to reveal the rapidity with which the concluding chapters were written: 'La data, 23 dicembre 1900, posta in fine dell'opera, fa sapere che l'ultima parte di essa, dal capitolo XXII al XXIV, fu scritta in poco più o poco meno di un mese', that is between the middle of November and Christmastime. But if these facts dispel any possible impression that Capuana always worked slowly they cannot, however,

cancel the existence of a 'meditazione a lungo'.[19] The novel, under the title of *Il Marchese di Donna Verdina*, was germinating in Capuana's mind as long before as 1881; and if, to judge by the information contained in letters to Verga at that period[20] and by Capuana's assurance to Ojetti in 1894,[21] the original conception had undergone considerable modification, in this, precisely, lies 'meditazione'. The novel contains strongly autobiographical material which would have been searingly recent in 1881, but time, passing over them, detached them from Capuana.

These biographical components are easily singled out. Most important of them was Capuana's relationship with a former household servant, Beppa Sansoni, 'married off' to a Mario Speranza in 1892, after having borne the author several children subsequently relegated (in accordance with the feudal practices of the Sicilian 'signorotto' of those times) to the orphanage at Caltagirone. This liaison is the source of the relationship between the Marchese and Agrippina Solmo (Agrippina, in comparison with her real-life model, 'aveva anche il gran pregio di non fare figliuoli!').[22] The jealousy and possessiveness which characterize the fictional relationship and motivate the murder of Agrippina's *pro forma* husband, Rocco Criscione, were part of Capuana's lot with Beppa. Except for one brief and bewildering period in Milan, she remained in Mineo, and from his literary base on the 'continent' Capuana addressed to her dialect letters of an anguished suspiciousness, threatening to extract the truth of certain worrying rumours (deliberately put about, in fact, by a member of his family which in general strongly disapproved of the affair) by subjecting her to hypnotism: 'haiu un mezzu simplicissimu di putiriti fari rivilari li cosi senza ca tu non putrai diri: su 'nfamitati, su calunii, pirchì sarà la to stissa vucca ca parrirà, comu quannu unu è 'mbriacu e rivela li so segreti.'[23] This dabbling in the affairs of 'lu diavulu', recalling Capuana's interest in spiritualism which began with the experiments on Beppa Poggi and continued as a source of both fiction and non-fiction throughout his life, now finds expression in the slightly sinister figure of Don Aquilante, the lawyer, whose seances threaten the superstitious Marchese's peace of mind. A contemporary witness of Capuana's insatiable appetite for the subject is an article on Dr Visani Scotti's *La medianità*.[24] Certain of the Marchese's forbears, particularly his father and grandfather in their passion for hunting, and his uncle, don Tindaro, an eccentric amateur archeologist, are images, placed under the magnifying lens of the novelist, of members of Capuana's own family.[25] The present Marchese's involvement in local politics clearly draws on Capuana's experiences as mayor of Mineo; and his interest in the modernization and industrialization of a primitive agricultural economy harks back to the days of *Il Bucato in famiglia* when improved farming methods seemed to Capuana of immeasurable importance ('non si tratta più semplicemente di migliorare la terra col mezzo dell'uomo, bisogna di più migliorare l'uomo col mezzo della terra!'),[26] and when he was capable of interrupting his literary pursuits in order to recommend to the readers of *Don Chisciotte* a newly invented and ingeniously simple seed-sower.[27]

The literary sources of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* are more problematical. *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and *I Vicerè* have been mentioned by critics, and among other superficial similarities with De Roberto's novel, the Marchese's aunt, the Baronessa di Lagomorto, with her strong sense of caste may pallidly recall the fearsome *zia* Ferdinanda. It has not been seen that, like De Roberto, Capuana is concerned with the decline of feudalism. References to Dostoyevsky, and particularly, for the obvious reasons of a generic resemblance in subject-matter (murder and remorse), to *Crime and Punishment*, have been plentiful, and despite Capuana's own opinions on D'Annunzio's Russian assimilations, the Russian novel in general may be responsible for Capuana's effort to widen the social bases of his narrative, to demonstrate the dynamic interaction of various social groupings. The achievement of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in this direction marks an advance on *Profumo* where in the last analysis the town-bred, 'neurotic' couple are 'intruders' in a rural normality, which is peopled by jovial, semi-caricatural figures and documented in its indigenous rituals (from the 'flagellanti' to the characteristic elopement). The ideological crises which afflict the Marchese, his religious doubts, his fear of spiritualism, his bewildered realization that Truth may lie beyond the traditional teaching of his Church, belong (rather than to the current 'idealist' debate) to a sphere of interest which is Capuana's own.

If to any significant model, it is to Verga's major novels that we must initially turn, and not so much for the content of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* (where De Roberto and Dostoyevsky may have their relevance), but for certain of its stylistic aims and its effort to create a meaningful continuum between the psychological data of the main character and his environment in all its connotations, ideological, geographical, of custom and belief. The psychological problems which Capuana has dealt with to this date, as we saw, tended to be isolated from their *milieu*, the significant revelation of a surrounding and contributing social reality being either effectively absent because of its over-deliberate connotations of hypocrisy and corruption (as in *Giacinta*), or still anchored to a 'folklorismo amabile' because exploited almost exclusively as a reassuring contrast to the central tensions of the work (as in *Profumo*). In preceding novels the protagonists' 'problems' derived from a negative and highly personal psychological *antefatto* (the rape of Giacinta and her lonely childhood, Patrizio's maternal fixation and obstructed affections, Giorgio Montani's depressing family life even, or Dario's timid subjection to a vigorous father) to which the reader is introduced by a series of more or less skilfully positioned 'flash-backs'. Here by contrast the Marchese is not dependent on Capuana's sombre psychological naturalism: his 'problem' is explained by his social (feudal) position with its fixed behavioural patterns, its traditionalism and assumptions of absolute privilege.

The minor characters constituting the social dimension have often been a weak point in Capuana's past work because the roles they played were confined to combining (in various ways and proportions) the polemical, the demonstrative and

the decorative. In *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, they are improved, not only through a maturing of the artist's skills, but through their relationship to the hierarchical structures from which the crime and its consequences essentially devolve. These characters, from the Marchese's servants and dependants to his peers, illuminate crucial facets of a social situation which conditions the Marchese's behaviour. Mamma Grazia, once his wet-nurse, now a senile family retainer, invariably refers to her master as 'il marchese figlio' (pp. 5, 42, 248 etc.) and illustrates the coexistence of devotion and total respect which is repeated with appropriate tonal variations in the peasant-mistress, Agrippina, and in her murdered 'husband', proud to be known as '*Rocco del marchese*' (p. 229). The dependence of the individual *contadino* on his feudal overlord is expressed in Santi Dimaura, the peasant persuaded to sell a treasured strip of land which lies in the centre of the Marchese's *tenuta*, Margitello. But in Dimaura's case the dangerous dependance, (which the Marchese exploits to his own ultimate disadvantage as indeed is the case with Rocco and Agrippina) exists only to be questioned and eliminated, for in hanging himself on that same patch of land Dimaura breaks the atavistic 'laws' of feudal submission and directly precipitates the Marchese's insanity. Representing the other extreme of the hierarchical scale is the Marchese's paternal aunt, relic of a declining nobility, who survives amid dusty portraits, tarnished mirrors, and the faded elegance of 'stile impero' furniture, mulling over the past grandeur of the house of Roccaverdina: she too reminds the Marchese of the privileged position he enjoys but which will prove disastrous. The noble but impoverished Mugnos family (into which the Marchese will marry rather as Gesualdo marries Bianca Trao) disguises its misfortunes with a ferocious pride of race which confirms the ostensibly unalterable structures of the feudal community. Between these two extremes are the professional men and the minor nobility, the *rami cadetti*, all members of the society of the Casino which in its political manoeuvring promotes not the man but the name of Roccaverdina.

Instead of fulfilling the 'decentralizing' function of *Profumo* these minor characters in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* tend to be subordinated to its major themes without in general forfeiting their autonomy. This subordination is not always achieved: there are discursive passages in Capuana's comic vein (the card-players at the Casino), and the procedure may impoverish the narrative: there is for instance a recurrent sense of Capuana's manipulating events which are intended to activate the internal conflict between the Marchese's assumption of illimitable inherited rights and his fear of discovery (Pergola and don Aquilante lose some of their autonomy in stimulating this conflict). The conscious choice of a single 'primo piano', that of the Marchese, occasionally suggests that Capuana's material should properly have produced only a *racconto*. But in comparison with Capuana's narrative past there is a skilful dove-tailing of leitmotifs which produces moments, if not of poetic density, at least of dramatic tension.

The distinct social demarcations outlined above revolve about a feudal situation

which also finds its expression in gesture and language. Here a distinction is to be made between the gesture which externalizes an internal emotion in the individual (through facial expression or physical action) and which, as we shall see, derives from Capuana's efforts to maintain a perfectly impersonal stance, and the gesture which has a public, ritualistic significance and thus purveys the spiritual values of a society; and, in so doing, helps to resolve the potential conflict between society and individual into a homogeneous unity. Examples of public gesture predominantly involve the kissing of hands, which becomes more than an indigenous figure of speech (the priest don Silvio with the Baronessa, Agrippina with the Marchese, Neli's widow with the new Marchesa di Roccaverdina, Zòsima); kissing the ground as a sign of exorcism (don Silvio faced with the religious heterodoxy of don Aquilante, Mamma Grazia upon the entry of the legitimate wife into the Roccaverdina household); and the kneeling position (the crowd in the alley which leads to the house where don Silvio is dying, Agrippina, repeatedly, before the insane Marchese). These gestures are devoid of a true individual (psychological) significance. Nor are they gratuitous touches of 'local colour', but symbols of a collective existence orientated towards superstitious piety and unquestioning respect for the social hierarchy. The environment displays the peaceful co-existence of these two sentiments and provides a bridge to the individual mentality of the Marchese, where, however, because of his crime, superstition and arrogance of race have come into conflict.

From the values expressed in gesture it is a short step to what may be called the language of *ambiente*. Again predominantly religious or superstitious, it includes the *folkloristico* (Agrippina who on the death of Rocco is compared to 'la Madonna Addolorata', or the repeated salutation, 'Santa notte' (pp. 10, 227, etc.)), but goes beyond it to reinforce the sense of those same social norms, or, more interestingly, departures from them, which have been noted already. The feudal quality of life is consistently underlined not only in the conventional religious terms of submission of a Santi Dimaura ('Voscenza mi benedica!' (p. 15)), but more pertinently and powerfully in the aristocratic appropriation of the Deity by the Baronessa di Lagomorto: 'Dio non può permettere certe enormità; non può volere che la figlia di una raccoglitrice di ulive diventi marchesa di Roccaverdina. *Pares cum paribus*, ha detto il Signore' (p. 27). The same appropriation is made by the Marchese. The invitation to participate in local politics presents a threat to the political indifference and immobility of the landlord (and by extension to his omnipotence), and is thus viewed by the Marchese as the work of the devil ('Venivano lassù, come il diavolo, per tentarlo' (p. 45)). Here we may note, in passing, how the perennial motif of political indifference which in the past had been an intrusive message emanating from the author, now becomes integrated within the text. In this quasi-metaphorical, conventionalized language, the Godhead becomes a reactionary force which preserves the established structures of society. Even in more literal contexts, he is indisputably the ally of the nobility. The Marchese, in his position of privilege,

persistently views the justice of God as less terrible than the justice of men, and has no doubt that Pope Pius IX, God's vicar, would readily absolve him of his crime (p. 93).

It is in the context of the cumulative suggestiveness of these patterns of social language that Agrippina's 'cult' of the Marchese ('L'ho adorato come si adora Gesù sacramentato! '; 'Dinanzi a lei, il marchese di Roccaverdina era Dio! ' (pp. 39, 186)) assumes its full contradictory relief. It is 'correct' in its feudal submission, 'incorrect' in its religious and human connotations, and Agrippina turns the sacrament of marriage into a mockery. In her relationship with the Marchese, she is both victim and culprit, and the sense of her culpability finds expression in the language of superstition, centring on the idea of 'malìa', in the repeated assertion that the Marchese is 'stregato' (pp. 36, 62, 92, etc.). But Agrippina and her husband as individuals deprived of the right of self-determination are also victims, objects to be possessed, used and discarded, and as such they ('correctly') see themselves. Rocco on a hypothetical order from the Marchese to throw himself off the church tower '[si sarebbe] buttato a chiusi occhi!', 'Rocco non poteva dirgli di no; si sarebbe fatto squartare pel suo padrone' (pp. 20, 266); Agrippina '[si sarebbe] fatta polvere per essere calpestata dai suoi piedi!', 'rimpetto a lui' she is 'un verme della terra' (pp. 40, 30). The masochistic view of self as object on the part of the peasant is amply justified by the social structures of Ràbbato (Mineo) where the upper classes unanimously view him as 'avaro', 'ladro', 'imbecille' (pp. 282, 283). But in another more crucial sense, as reflections of contradictory attitudes in the Marchese, Agrippina and Rocco are both guilty and innocent. In submitting to the pretence of their marriage, they prolong the association between Agrippina and the Marchese which society outlaws, but at the same time they are merely acquiescing in the wishes of their master. The Marchese himself lives at the centre of this contradiction. Intimately ambiguous about his feudal station, he both observes and transgresses its laws—he does not marry Agrippina, but neither does he treat her 'feudally' as a replaceable mistress. Thus Agrippina and Rocco are the twin centres of a language of depersonalization, but to them also, contradictorily, adheres the terminology of *padronanza*. The Marchese has treated his mistress 'meglio di una signora', for ten years she has been the 'vera padrona' in his house (pp. 20, 36), feared by his reactionary peers as the next Marchesa di Roccaverdina. Rocco is not only the Marchese's 'mano destra' (p. 19) (a person appropriated and instrumentalized) but the Marchese's equivalent. The privileges of the master devolve upon the inferior in his special situation: Rocco 'era un altro padrone' (p. 18). The Marchese's real infringement of the laws of his society lies not in the murder of Rocco, but in his inability to embody thoroughly the frequently evoked tenets of his race. The murder is mere consequence.

The interaction of society and individual, with the Marchese stationed at the critical point of their conjunction, also expresses itself historically. There are subtle pointers to the changing of the times, to the 'razza [che] si adattava ai tempi' (p.

173). The present Marchese, trembling at the prospect of Neli Casaccio's trial for the murder of Rocco, is contrasted with his grandfather, the 'marchese *grande*', whose feudal assertiveness knew no limits ('Occorrevano prove? E scriveva al suo agente, in paese: "Manda subito, subito, un'altra carrettata di testimoni!" [. . .] Falsi s'intende!' (p. 50)). The old race of Roccaverdina expressed itself in aggressive sexuality, in hunting, in the maintenance of a species of private army, 'campai armati fino ai denti e con certe facce da metter paura' (p. 245), whereas the present Marchese Antonio, though he acts generally with a harsh obstinacy which connects him firmly to his race and has regarded the appropriation of the young Agrippina as a birth-right, in essence 'è uscito di razza' (p. 266). The promiscuous sexuality has given way to a monogamous constancy, the aggressive destructiveness of the hunt to the creativity of the modern farmer. Pressured externally by the declining of the feudal system, it is no accident that the contemporary representatives of Ràbbato nobility assert themselves in harmless eccentricity (the Baronessa's devotion to her dogs, don Tindaro's archaeological interests) rather than in the brutalities of the past. If the murder of Rocco reflects an inner conflict, the Marchese's internal ambiguity is translated on a wider plane, with the social collapse which ends the book: the death of Mamma Grazia and the Baronessa, staunch partisans of the established social system, the incipient financial troubles of the agricultural association, and Zòsima's desertion of the Roccaverdina house, a symbolic (as well as individual and psychological) protest against the Marchese's contravention of the norms of behaviour still clinging to acceptability in that hierarchical society.

Giacinta and at least the core of *Profumo* are inspired by a naturalistic psycho-physiology where the analysis moves by preference on a 'vertical' plane. The present novel invites the same treatment, for Capuana is tracing the progressive *deepening*—with due remissions and relapses—of a spiritual conflict culminating in mental disorder; and he takes up his story at a point when the murder of Rocco belongs to the realms of *antefatto*, so that the substance of the work (in harmony with preferences already displayed in Capuana's narrative) involves the psychological repercussions of an event. But we discover instead a clear effort—corresponding to the 'horizontal' social extension of the novel—to avoid the 'in depth' block of psychological analysis. *Giacinta* alternated the narration of events with the examination of their inner significance for the character, and *Profumo* psychological analysis with blocks of provincial material: here Capuana has attempted to avoid this tendency to fragmentation and to achieve a tonal unity in which the expressive distance between the description of events, the relation of conversations, and the introspection of the characters is minimized. It was a task he undertook, as we shall see, in the name of that severe impersonality preached in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*. His problem, in fact, was made more acute by his choice of subject-matter. In *Giacinta* and *Profumo* (as in other works of a 'bourgeois', or 'urban' character) the setting itself diminished the stylistic divergence between the narrating 'voice' and the introspection or the speech of the characters. In the case

of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, following Verga's precedent, Capuana declines the role of the bourgeois author and entrusts his story to an anonymous representative of Ràbbato, and yet (and here was the difficulty) the guide-line of the narrative remains psychological and pertains to a character who is noble, and at least in theory educated and capable of introspection. It will perhaps not be a surprise to discover that Capuana's protagonist is very much a 'marchese contadino' (p. 311), a particularly rough-hewn representative of his class, little given to scrutinizing the secret recesses of his soul. The treatment given to him could not be extended, and *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is the *caso limite* of Capuana's particular 'naturalismo psicologico'.

The main expressive obstacle to be confronted, then, is the same as that which Verga encountered in *Mastro Don Gesualdo*, and which faced impersonal writers in general: a complex psychological reality was to be translated into gesture, action and speech, and narrative procedures aligned, according to Capuana, with those of the dramatist. The impasse which the strict impersonality of *verismo* tended to meet is already clear (even before the attempt to write *La Duchessa di Leyra*) in Verga's treatment of the relationship in *Mastro Don Gesualdo* between Corrado and Isabella which oscillates between destructive irony and romantic complicity. Only when Isabella has joined the mutely suffering ranks of the 'vinti' does Verga once again find his genuine voice for her. It is significant that what is probably the most dissonant passage in the general tone of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* hinges on the romanticizing introversion of Zòsima, the closest figure in the novel to Isabella. While Verga's sarcasm is missing, Capuana failed to avoid sentimental clichés and signs of authorial participation:

> Aveva pianto nella sua cameretta, si era chiusa nell'ombra discreta con nel cuore sempre vivissima l'immagine di colui che l'aveva fatto palpitare la prima volta; e si era votata a quel ricordo nell'isolamento, senza nessuna speranza, non osando neppure lamentarsi della sua cattiva sorte, sopportando con mirabile rassegnazione tutte le umiliazioni della miseria; consolata unicamente dal ricordo di quei giorni lontani. (p. 243)

In the novel passages such as this are rare: in the case of Zòsima Capuana found himself without alternatives, for she is too passive a character to reveal herself in action. Elsewhere his efforts to avoid such meditative pauses which betrayed him into omniscience are strenuous; but the divergence between what he called in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* 'representation' and 'narration' continued to constitute a problem.

The opening four chapters of the book, which appear to embody the concept of the 'theatrical' novel are worth particular consideration: they offer illustrations of the use of 'external' techniques ('narration' becomes 'representation') which are directly opposed to the procedures adopted in the passage concerning Zòsima. They also begin to suggest the inadequacy for the purposes of psychological enquiry of

the purely 'representational' mode, where inner realities may be evinced only in as far as they offer external signals: throughout the narrative Capuana will continue to have recourse to these 'external' techniques (and indeed to prefer them) but the fact that they are present in concentrated form only in the opening chapters is a significant indication of their lack of flexibility.

These first chapters involve several dramatic confrontations, their predominant mode is dialogue, and there is conspicuous use (declining progressively—and significantly—from one chapter to another) of characteristically theatrical devices. The opening chapter presents itself as a 'scene' with a servant (Mamma Grazia) introducing a visitor (don Aquilante) into a drawing-room which is already occupied by a character (the Marchese) who has been 'miming' his state of mind to the spectator. The room remains the chapter's constant setting and it is described (if we disregard verb tenses) in its essentials much as the dramatist gives bare instructions for a stage-set.[28] The 'stage directions' which indicate worried preoccupation in the Marchese are almost excessive: 'il Marchese non si voltò nè rispose', 'sembrava assorto', 'si riscosse', 'parve percepisse soltanto dopo alcuni instanti il suono della voce' (p. 5): they are followed by the signals of an inner tension: 'All'infoschirsi del viso, si sarebbe detto che quella visita [. . .] non riuscisse molto gradita', 'Rimasto in piedi, accigliato, mordendosi le labbra, affondando le dita tra i folti capelli neri' (p. 6). The 'scene' which follows between the Marchese and don Aquilante, bearer of the news that Neli is about to be arrested for Rocco's murder, is in effect a cunningly devised exposition of the *antefatto*, dramatized by continuous sound and lighting effects: the rolling of thunder and the spattering of rare drops of rain, flashes of lightning, the whistling of the wind, clouds (viewed from the balcony) scudding across the luminous disc of the moon, the room in semi-darkness, and the angular, black-clad figure of the lawyer 'ritagliata sul fondo dell'altra stanza rischiarata dal lume' (p. 7). This is the visual and aural context of a conversation whose content is intrinsically dramatic, and whose tension is increased by the mystery of the Marchese's laconic remarks. The sense of the room as stage-set, as a window on the world of Ràbbato (which includes the impression that Capuana is using, even abusing, one of those devices allowable to the playwright) emerges particularly at the end of the chapter. We hear 'off-stage' the mad *zia* Mariangela's curses on the noble houses of Ràbbato, followed by the broken-hearted cries of 'Figlio! . . . Figlio mio!' (p. 14) from Neli Casaccio's wife as the *carabinieri* in Piazzetta delle Orfanelle, which is visible to the occupants of the room, carry off the supposed murderer. This is a skilled chapter where the psychological dimension of fear and foreboding is fully translated into 'representational' devices, and where Capuana is able to introduce several motifs which he will build on or refer back to in the rest of the novel. The cry of Neli's wife is taken up by Agrippina, in a satisfying symmetry, before the mad Marchese at the end of the book; Mariangela's curses will be used as a sinister, haunting refrain throughout the novel; the theme of rain, or rather the lack of it (for the

storm in this chapter never breaks and precedes an eighteen-month period of drought) becomes intimately allied to the sense of an unpunished guilt which infects Ràbbato. Later in the novel processions of its starving population headed by don Silvio (sole recipient of the Marchese's guilty secret) regularly pass in front of the Roccaverdina *palazzo*, praying for rain. Zòsima, whom the Marchese sees as the bearer of a 'vita nuova' (p. 112), which will obliterate the errors of the past, piously vows not to marry until the drought has ended. At the end of Chapter XVII the news of Neli's death in prison is tellingly juxtaposed with comment on the famine, the drought, and the traditional eccentricities of the Roccaverdina family. This kind of achievement in a writer whose natural tendencies and acquired habits of mind (the cause-effect sequences of positivistic thinking) both lead him to over-explicitness is remarkable and attributable in the last analysis to Capuana's determination not to intervene in the text.

As the early chapters unfold, we find Capuana pursuing his theatrical course with a series of exits and entries and dramatic clashes which use, as in the first chapter, the convention of the character who introduces another (don Aquilante introduces Dimaura in Chapter II; don Carmine, the Baronessa's manservant, introduces Agrippina in Chapter III), and the closed interior or stage-set. The interior of Chapter II is identical to that of the preceding chapter, and the Marchese is to be heard 'off-stage' in an antechamber irritably arguing with his tenants, before once again appearing 'on-stage'. Chapter III is set in the Baronessa's 'salone' where she is first visited by don Silvio and then by Agrippina. It is in Chapter IV that the theatrical structure of the narrative begins to yield: the unifying function of a single interior is replaced by that of the 'personaggio' (Agrippina) who is followed through the streets, through a series of rooms in the Roccaverdina *palazzo*, until she finds the Marchese in the room that used to be hers. For the first time in the novel Capuana devotes appreciable space to the psychological and reflective dimension of the character, to that aspect of the novel which will demand all his ingenuity as an impersonal writer. The rest of the novel, from which these chapters tend to detach themselves because of their technique, proceeds less theatrically, though the dramatic appearances of Agrippina in the second chapter (standing unexpected and motionless in the doorway, dressed in her widow's black, disappearing soundlessly) and in almost identical manner in the fourth (though the scene is recollected by the Marchese only in Chapter XIII) are projected verbally through the length of the novel by constant reference to her as a 'fantasma' (pp. 21, 36, 255, etc.). It is worth noting before leaving the subject that there is one isolated return to the theatrical mode, and it re-utilizes the specific effects of Chapter I. This is the occasion of the Marchese's nocturnal visit to don Silvio (Chapter IX) where again Capuana exploits the dramatic resources of a howling wind which rises and falls in sinister accompaniment to his confession, and the atmospheric possibilities of lighting: the Marchese's shadow threateningly projected by the lamp 'si disegnava nera e ingrandita su la parete bianca', the confession is made in a mysterious 'penombra'

(p. 80). Capuana also plays on the visual contrast between the towering figure of the unrepentant Marchese and the 'magro corpicino del prete' (p. 79) (in an ironic, perhaps too obvious, underlining of the moral obtusity of the one and the spiritual authority of the other).

Capuana's subject, however, rotates about an inner conflict, and from Chapter V on, with the exception of this confession chapter (itself a species of *colpo di scena*), the author must fully confront the problem of integrating the two planes of action (dialogue, gesture) and psychological investigation. As in *Giacinta* his tendency is to alternate in a somewhat mechanical manner illustrative incident with its inner repercussions–*Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is still a novel which proceeds in psychological 'stages' though Capuana is of course anxious to avoid ostentation of the cause-effect succession of the type entrusted to Follini. Free indirect speech is the predictable vehicle of the internal dimension of the character and it aspires to form a unity with the voice of an anonymous narrator, while the narrator attempts to function as an attentive, but not privileged, spectator of events. From this attempt springs a set of typical locutions which contribute to a general climate of what we may call authorial *disimpegno*.

One such device, predominant in the early part of the novel, is the mediation of a collective awareness between the author's delivery of essential facts and the reader's reception of them: hence we find phrases of the type 'A Ràbbato, nessuno ignorava che Agrippina era stata fin a tre anni addietro la *femina* del marchese' (but here Capuana undermines his own aims by justifying the pseudo-dialect–'femina' instead of 'fimmina'–with the phrase, 'come colà si esprimono con vocabolo poco indulgente' (p. 20)), 'Nessuno ignorava [. . .]', 'sapevano quasi tutti [. . .]', 'A Ràbbato si era già saputo [. . .]', '(Così correva voce)', 'si sapeve [. . .]', '[. . .] lo vedevano tutti' (pp. 20, 45, 52, 111, 152, 190). A further indication of Capuana's aspiration to dissociate himself from psychological 'intimismo' is a plethora of clauses introduced by 'quasi' (with the rarer, but equivalent, variants of 'pareva', 'sembrava'): the Marchese 'stava lì, con gli occhi fissi, quasi il sogno che avrebbe dovuto presto avverarsi si allontanasse rapidamente' (p. 184); 'ogni sua sicurezza di coscienza svaniva, quasi si fosse potuto trovare daccapo col processo riaperto' (p. 188); 'parlava a voce alta quasi per stornarlo dal leggergli su la fronte il pensiero' (p. 212); 'Il Marchese non rispose, e continuò un bel pezzo ad andare su e giù per lo stanzone [. . .] quasi per trattenere le parole che gli si agitavano su la lingua' (p.280); Zòsima 'fu meravigliata di vedergli fare un gesto, quasi volesse scacciare con le mani qualche tristo pensiero' (p. 295); 'parlava basso, quasi avesse paura' (p. 315). Alongside this use of 'quasi'–clauses, which unfailingly invest the inner dimension of the character, seeking unobtrusively to trace the sources of gesture to their emotional sources, we may place 'quasi' adopted as a form of attenuation, rarely contributing to semantic precision, but rather deriving from the self-imposed 'ignorance' or reluctance to commit himself of the narrator. Thus: 'quasi smarrito', 'quasi sbadatamente', 'quasi diffidente', 'quasi sfiorito' (pp. 24, 61, 74, 244).

In this same 'dangerous' zone lie the Marchese's inner reactions to the succession of events which precipitate his madness; and here it is worth pointing out an abundant phraseology dependent on the idea of the reactor's surprise or lack of self-understanding, which allows the narrator to register psychological repercussions without, as it were, taking responsibility for them ('*strana* fiacchezza di volontà' (p.60), 'egli stesso si *maravigliava* di questo *strano* fenomeno della sua memoria' (p.99), 'si *meravigliava* di stare ad ascoltarlo' (p. 105), 'si *sbalordiva* di *sorprendersi* a pensare così' (p. 106), 'sentiva venirsi addosso un'*inesplicabile* tristezza' (p. 146)).[29]

The occasions when such mechanisms give way to authorial intrusion of a more direct nature are rare. They involve either 'disallowable' assumptions about an inner reality, and so call attention to the failed coincidence of the two planes of the narrative ('Ma, nel suo interno [. . .]' (p. 153), 'non era *davvero* nello stato normale' (p. 161)); or they embody an understanding of the character not shared by him ('In fondo in fondo il marchese era un po' borbonico' (p. 199)); or they underline the processes of cause and effect in an attempt to prepare the reader for future events ('stupiva [. . .] di quella sorda agitazione [. . .] presagio di sinistri avvenimenti' (p. 217)). Very occasionally a remark that belongs to the observer of local folklore escapes Capuana (ceremonial visits by relations and close friends on the occasion of a death are a 'costume forse orientale tuttora vivo in Sicilia' (p.283)).

Capuana's most constant concern is to confer upon passages containing introspective free indirect speech the characteristics of direct speech, first so that the disparity between the typical vehicle of the narration which is dialogue and the reflective passages should be less discernible; and secondly so that the free indirect speech begins to assume the quality of something overheard (and here one may legitimately perceive a parallel with the dramatic monologue) rather than something arbitrarily perceived by an impermissibly omniscient author. The techniques which Capuana uses are repetitive, so that two examples will serve to illustrate them. Here Agrippina reflects on the harshness of the Marchese towards her:

'Perchè? Perchè?'
Non sapeva spiegarselo. Sospettava dunque anche lui quel che dicevano le male genti?
Era impossible!
E affrettava più il passo.
Gli occhi le si velavano di lagrime, il cuore le batteva con violenza, come più ora rifletteva intorno allo strano contegno di lui.
Era cangiato dalla mattina alla sera, pochi giorni prima della disgrazia. Una volta, appena vistala entrare e mentre ella stava per togliersi la mantellina, le aveva gridato: 'Vattene! Vattene!'
L'aveva quasi scacciata. Poi, richiamàtala addietro, si era rabbonito tutt'a un tratto. E quante domande! 'A che ora Rocco è tornato da Margitello? Perchè è venuto ed andato via senza farsi vedere da me?' Quasi lo facesse spiare o lo spiasse.

Ripensando alcuni particolari a cui non aveva mai badato, sentiva un turbamento profondo, una specie di smarrimento. E affrettava ancora il passo.

'Perchè? Perchè?' tornava a domandarsi. 'È possible? Sospetta anche lui? Ah, Signore!'; (p. 35)

and the Marchese recalls a conversation with his cousin Pergola, an atheist:

'E se ha ragione lui? . . . Non è solo nel pensare così . . . E se ha ragione lui?' [. . .]

In quanto alla religione . . . No! No! Il cugino Pergola, con quei libri proibiti, aveva dato l'anima al diavolo. Era protestante, frammassone, ateo; bestemmiava peggio di un turco . . .

Bestemmiava anche lui, ne conveniva, ma per cattiva abitudine, perchè aveva da fare con gente che non capiva le ragioni, ma le parolacce. E poi, una cosa era il praticar poco la religione, un'altra negare l'esistenza di Dio, della Madonna, dei Santi!

Intanto, quando si era fortificato, per un poco, contro l'impressione dei discorsi del cugino, la pulce cominciava a ronzargli dentro l'orecchio:

'E se ha ragione lui? E se ha ragione lui?' (pp. 101-2)

In both passages the transition to free indirect speech is through a thought presented as direct speech, and the rest of the passage attempts to preserve the rhythms and characteristics of direct speech, utilizing (with a frequency that elsewhere amounts to abuse) exclamation marks, question marks, and suspension dots to render the pauses, the hesitations, and the immediacy of speech. Nowhere here do we find, and rarely in the rest of the novel, conditional clauses (of the type 'avrebbe voluto') which introduce an unactivated desire and so put the reader in possession of a hidden psychological reality. It is typical of Capuana's determination to avoid dense meditative passages that, as in the first example, the thinker should evoke some event not so much in terms of its impact upon himself at the time of recollecting, but as a 'scene' to be conveyed in direct speech. Capuana in fact creates a species of narration which is as near to the favoured medium of dialogue, and as far from abstracted meditation as possible, allowing the natural insertion of brief 'didascalie'—indications of gesture or action which reinforce thought-content by translating it into external terms. Thus Agrippina's eyes fill with tears, her inner agitation causes her to increase her pace. The typographical appearance of the page, with its half-lines and multiple *a capo*, is a reflection of his desire to break up, even to disguise, blocks of introspection, rendering them visually indistinguishable from the rest of the narration. Indeed the first passage is subordinated to a scene (which is as much 'about' the Marchese as Agrippina); and the second takes on the character of a dialogue with the self (or, in imagination, with cousin Pergola), whose logical advance is marked by 'ma' and 'E poi'. The importance of both passages is not ascribable to an 'in depth' revelation of personality, but to the obsessive and repetitive nature of the thought, thought which fails to progress. In the first passage we find the succession: "Perchè?", 'Non sapeva spiegarselo', 'Era impossibile', 'sentiva [. . .] una specie di smarrimento',

' "Perchè?" tornava a domandarsi'; in the second: 'E se ha ragione lui?', 'Intanto [. . .] la pulce cominciava a ronzargli dentro l'orecchio', 'E se ha ragione lui?', with this last phase echoed three pages later in the words: 'Se fosse così come diceva il cugino?' (p. 105). The repetition of the opening tag at the close of the passage renders the circular movement of perplexed thoughts in both characters, but only at the expense of an internal development; the purely verbal dynamics of thought-content may be rendered by the repetition of phrases (in the second passage: 'In quanto alla religione', 'il praticar poco la religione'; 'bestemmiava peggio di un turco . . .', 'Bestemmiava anche lui'), but there is in general an unwillingness to allow thought processes their head, or to sensibly deepen awareness of an inner, psychological reality.

It is noteworthy how often memory presents itself as spectacle, the past with its attributes intact surging into the present and replacing it ('gli sembrava che quegli occhi semispenti *continuassero a guardarlo* a traverso la spessezza del muro' (p. 76); 'qualcuna di quelle figure gli *si rizzava improvvisamente davanti* e lo faceva sobbalzare, *quasi apparizione reale*' (p. 99); 'gli sfilavano quasi *davanti agli occhi* [. . .] Rocco Criscione, Agrippina Solmo [. . .] Rocco [. . .] *in atto* di ripetergli le parole di quel giorno: "Come vuole *voscenza*" ' (p. 229); 'ebbe, lungo la strada, sempre *davanti agli occhi* la visione della cupa notte in cui la gelosia lo aveva spinto ad appostarsi dietro la siepe' (p. 212)). The tidy overlapping of incidents and experiences as they occurred in the past and the memory of them in the present leaves no intervening space for the subjective reaction of the Marchese: the past becomes the exact equivalent of the present, and time operates no change on the quality or intensity of the jealousy and the guilt. This coincidence of past and present is another aspect of Capuana's *disimpegno*, and while it affected negatively his capacity to convey an *intensification* of feelings that would justify the Marchese's madness, it created a powerful sense of a mind subject to a species of hallucination and compensated in part for the absence of a more delicate and detailed psychological analysis.

If by free indirect speech is meant 'quello in cui il colloquio fra lo scrittore e la sua creatura non si risolve a vantaggio esclusivo del primo e diventa veramente scambio costruttivo dei risultati di due esperienze umane', we may say that Capuana actually avoids it.[30] His own variety of free indirect speech serves simply on those occasions when direct speech would be an unnatural vehicle for the narrative, and even when he uses it (as we have seen) his free indirect speech strains towards direct speech. Capuana constantly impels his characters towards a form of soliloquy, towards total autonomy. The idea of the theatrical novel may perhaps be re-proposed along with the reflection that Capuana's most mature artistic statement, though conditioned in its aspiration towards a tonal unity by Verga, veers away from the solutions Verga found to the limits of impersonal *verismo* in the free indirect speech of *Mastro Don Gesualdo*, towards a prefiguring of 'theatrical' narrative as found in the novels and short stories of Pirandello, the author who was

to discover the path out of the impasse of objective realism.

To the use of punctuation in order to indicate the nature of *heard* speech, we may add the incoherent exclamations of *zia* Mariangela and the insane Marchese which, faintly absurd on the page, clearly need the collaboration of an 'actor'. We are dealing, it is true, with a timid rejection of the convention of an intelligible and orderly literary language simply because the utterances of the insane may properly be represented as meaningless and chaotic. Nevertheless it is part of a general impulse, appropriate to the stage, towards an aural and visual translation of written emotions and speech. Though the connexion which Capuana consciously and critically made between narrative and drama was confined to those remarks discussed earlier in the course of examining his criticism, there is much evidence to suggest that he was increasingly attracted to a form of art which could provide a *total* mimesis of life. The attraction emerges in unexpected places. The preface to *Cronache letterarie*, for instance, retails a 'friend"s somewhat fantastical 'improvvisazione' on the subject of the future of art, paying extraordinary attention to the persuasiveness of his gestures ('[. . .] e il mio amico entusiasmato dalla sua idea, mi stringeva forte il braccio') and to the sound and the flow of his words ('la magia della parola e dell'espressione')[31] which for the time being secured Capuana's assent. In the same year as *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* was published in volume, *Il Decameroncino* appeared. In the last of its stories, 'Conclusione', Capuana professes his reluctance to transcribe a tale told him by his narrator-figure, Dr Maggioli, because 'il maggior pregio di essa non consisteva tanto nel soggetto e nella forma, quanto, e sopratutto, nell'espressione del viso, nell'efficacia dell'accento, del gesto, che avevano trasformato il narratore in attore'.[32] In *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* facial expression frequently assumes the value of a 'stage-direction' and verb accumulations (perceptible actions) associated with the Marchese may serve as substitutes for an enquiry into a troubled psyche: 'si affacciava, rientrava, tornava ad affacciarsi'; 'rideva, si muoveva per la stanza, stirando le braccia, tendendo le gambe' (pp. 141, 162).

All Capuana's efforts in the direction of 'representation' are attributable to his continued search for impersonality. Two slightly cumbrous episodes will serve to show how impersonality for Capuana presupposes the 'scene', the dramatization of events. The first of these involves the engineer who describes an interchange between certain malevolent villagers who wish to provoke Agrippina by suggesting that the Marchese has treated her unfairly, and Agrippina herself who defends him for having done 'più di quel che doveva'. The 'scene' of this confrontation is rehearsed for the benefit of the Marchese and is rendered characteristically in direct speech in the form of a dialogue; and to justify such knowledge and such accuracy of recall in the engineer Capuana has him add: 'Me l'ha raccontato mia moglie, che l'ha sentito proprio con i suoi orecchi, senza esser vista. . .' (p. 186). This is an improbably contrived and 'theatrical' situation which once again displays Capuana's tendency to avoid the mediation of personality (the engineer's or his wife's) in order to preserve

'l'autenticità dell'accaduto'. The second episode relates to the *massaio*'s tale of Rospo *gessaio*, who stole consecrated silver, became his daughter's lover, and hanged himself. Again the account makes use of direct speech, and to retain the drama of these incidents and yet explain how the *massaio* has intimate knowledge of words spoken before his birth, Capuana invents for him a spectator-father ('Io non so *raccontarla bene* questa storia [. . .] ma la ho udita tante e tante volte da mio padre, che posso *ripeterla con le sue stesse parole*' (p. 275)). To the father's 'performance' the *massaio* is as faithful as to register its accompanying gestures– 'mio padre *qui* si faceva sempre il segno della santa croce. . .' (p. 277).

The same attitude of *disimpegno* explains why passages of relatively protracted description regularly present themselves as 'spectacle' and are 'attributed' to particular viewers, and why on occasion the measured scansion of the describing, ordering author disappears. In the following passage there is an attempt to transmit stylistically the visual simultaneity of the components in a religious scene:

> Uno spettacolo! Tutti a piedi scalzi, e con corone di spine in testa; una sfilata che non finiva più, a dispetto dei canonici di Sant'Isidoro!. . . E pianti e colpi di discipline!. . . E, mescolati insieme, preti, frati, confraternite, signori, maestranze, massai, contadini!. . . Tutta Ràbbato per le vie! E padre Anastasio che accorreva da un punto all'altro. (p. 140)

Apart from the phrase 'a dispetto dei canonici di Sant'Isidoro', there is a pure accumulation of visual images, correlated by 'e', in which the rhythm and the use of suspension dots communicates the variegation and the confused movement of the scene with an immediacy that precludes the mediating function of the author. The much-praised description of the coming of rain after the drought, where Capuana is unusually attentive to the melodic possibilities of his prose (the rain 'irrompeva con impeto, rumoreggiando su le tegole, riversandosi dai canali, formando rigagnoli e gore dove si sgonfiavano e scoppiavano mille bollicine, quasi l'acqua ribollisse' (p. 181)), is a uniquely sustained piece of writing. Here Capuana averts the danger of his own literary intrusiveness into the self-sufficient texture of the writing by turning the description into a spectacle viewed by the populace of Ràbbato. Throughout the passage there are phrases calling attention to the fact that the rain-clouds are not simply described but *watched* ('la gente [. . .] affluiva nei punti da dove avrebbe potuto *accertarsi coi propri occhi*', '*spettacolo* nuovo e inatteso', 'tutti erano intenti a seguire con *gli occhi ansiosi*', '*quegli occhi* che stavano a *spiar*', 'la gente si era riversata per inebriarsi dello *spettacolo*' etc. (pp. 179, 180, 181)); and the literariness of the passage is punctuated by generalized exclamations from the crowd and by snatches of 'local' phraseology ('Viva la divina Provvidenza!', 'quella *grazia di Dio*', 'le colline *non sapevano che farsi* dell'acqua' (p. 181)). This establishment of a relation between spectacle and spectator is a constant feature of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. The various pieces of faded, dusty furniture (indications of nobility in decline) in the Baronessa's 'salone' cannot, for instance,

be documented without the agency of don Silvio who casts a sweeping 'rapida occhiata' about him before the surrounding objects are itemized (p. 24). It is first the Marchese's and then the collective gaze of the villagers which transmits a view of the parched countryside and cloudless sky:

Guardàva un po' scoraggiato *anche lui* quelle campagne dove non *si scorgeva* un fil d'erba, quel cielo che, da mesi e mesi, non *mostrava agli occhi* ansiosi l'ombra di una nuvoletta all'orizzonte. Soltanto l'Etna fumava, quasi volesse ingannare *la gente* facendo scambiare per nuvole le dense ondate di fumo del suo cratere, che il vento disperdeva lontano. (p. 93)

And, prefacing a description of the landscape, finally in flower, by the Marchese's words to his cousin: 'Guardate. Le campagne sembrano un giardino', Capuana makes the Marchese 'responsible' for what follows:

Un'immensa distesa di verde, di mille toni di verde, dal tenero al cupo che sembrava quasi nero; un trionfo, una follìa di vegetazione fin nei terreni più ingrati, che non avevano mai prodotto un fil d'erba! [. . .] E i seminati! Un tappeto di velluto verde che non finiva più [. . .] E qua i papaveri dilagavano in larghe chiazze sanguigne; là, i fiori di lino coprivano liste e quadrati. (p. 208)

The prepositions ('qua' and 'là') belong not to the author but to the spectator; and even here Capuana has preserved elements characteristic of direct speech (exclamation marks, nominal style, the tendency to self-correction: 'verde, di mille toni di verde', 'un trionfo, una follìa') as though the vision had found a voice.

Capuana uses nominal style notably when memories of Rocco, Agrippina, and Neli well up involuntarily in the Marchese's mind ('Rocco che maneggiava un arnese rusticano', 'La Solmo, coi capelli disciolti, quando si pettinava' (p. 99), 'ecco Rocco, a cavallo della mula, nell'oscurità [. . .] E il tonfo del corpo! . . . E lo scàlpito della mula che fuggiva spaventata! . . . E il gran silenzio nell'oscurità', 'ecco Neli Casaccio che dal gabbione dell Assise [. . .] gridava: "Sono innocente!" ' (p. 135)). The immediacy thus achieved gives Rocco and Agrippina in particular a species of autonomous existence underlined by the repetitive phrases which invariably accompany their apparition. The motif, for instance, of the hedge of 'fichi d'India' from where Rocco was shot returns repeatedly, and while (as we have had occasion to observe) this contributes nothing new to the psychological examination of the Marchese, merely confirming the obsessiveness of his thoughts, it confers upon Rocco a feeling of sinister, independent existence, as though he is present at the place of the murder not only in the Marchese's guilty mind, but literally, and is visible to those (like the superstitious peasant who claims to have seen him) who pass on the road to Margitello. Similarly, as we have seen, Agrippina's untimely literal appearances, as well as those which take place in the recollecting minds of the Marchese, Zòsima, Mamma Grazia, and don Aquilante, have the character of apparitions. The recurrent references to her widow's dress, her dark 'mantellina', to her silence and stillness ('Vestita a *lutto*, avviluppata nell'ampia mantellina di panno

nero [. . .] la donna *non fece un passo nè un movimento*' (p. 19), '*senza un motto nè un gesto*, lentamente volse le spalle e *sparì* come se avesse avuto le suole delle scarpe foderate di ovatta', ' "Vestita di *nero*, col viso pallido, gli occhi intenti e le labbra scolorite, essa deve sembrargli una *fantasima* di mal augurio", pensava don Aquilante' (p. 21), 'al vedersela *improvvisamente* davanti, avvolta nella mantellina *nera* e vestita *a lutto*, nell' àndito del portoncino [. . .]' (p. 124) etc); the fact that she so consistently appears, unexpected, on the threshold of a room suggests that Agrippina, like Rocco, has become a ghost, free to come and go at will, tormenting the Marchese. The psychological depths of the two characters are not investigated (their individuality expressing itself almost exclusively in the public, social dimension discussed earlier), but they possess a suggestiveness in the novel which depends on the powerful visual images which attach to them, in their autonomous ability to 'haunt' the pages of the book. This ability of theirs, while it is ascribable like everything else to Capuana's impersonal method—the protagonist's obsessions must be externalized—confirms the conclusion that the final destination of the novel as Capuana conceived it is a visual medium.

This preoccupation with directly communicating the aural-visual components of an event (even at the expense of verisimilitude) explains why this novel, ostensibly psychological, fails to convince precisely in its inner unfolding. The story of a conscience, it none the less rejected the tools of psychological investigation, preferring to create a 'theatrical' autonomy in the characters. More than one contemporary reviewer found the Marchese's madness inadequately motivated and it is certainly arguable that this portion of the novel in particular lacks preparation (and as a solution may even owe something to De Marchi's *Il Cappello del prete*, whose vagaries of plot, and feudal assumptions about the 'right' to kill, are susceptible of as yet unexplored comparisons with Capuana's novel).[33] Ferdinando Giannessi, reviewing a modern republication of the novel, regrets that the drama of Rocco's murder which might have constituted a hypothetical first volume becomes mere *antefatto* in the novel;[34] unaware perhaps, he puts a finger on the central contradiction of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* where an 'intimate' subject is given external, theatrical treatment. Though the novel has won itself a place of honour in the narrative of the late nineteenth century, its failure to be any more than Capuana's personal masterpiece lies in the voluntary restricting of the novel's psychological dimension to what can be 'represented'. Capuana's methods undoubtedly had their strengths, but it is the choice of a predominantly external treatment of the subjects which accounts, for instance, for the mechanical succession of events in the novel. To purvey an inner reality only in terms of what is perceptible to the onlooker (which is Capuana's intention) is necessarily to forego a sense of psychological nuance which belongs exclusively to the meandering of private thoughts. In his efforts to make events translate a state of mind which is variable, Capuana managed to do no more than to choose incidents which were propitious and unpropitious to the Marchese in alternation, so that the reader might

at least see his hopes of fighting free of guilt raised and crushed by turns. It was not a flexible method and the pattern of events became predictable. Thus don Silvio fails to give absolution, but then dies with his secret; Pergola temporarily allays the Marchese's fears of divine retribution, but is converted on his death-bed; the lurid crucifix with its life-size, reproving figure of Christ the Marchese donates to a convent, but the mark left on the wall continues the terrifying offices of the original; the innocent Neli dies, but don Aquilante who has established spirit contact with Rocco begins to doubt his guilt; the Marchese envisages his marriage to Zòsima as a fresh departure, but it evokes comparisons with Agrippina and founders through jealousy and nostalgia; the Marchese becomes involved in politics and in an agricultural project but these enterprises soon reveal themselves as hollow distractions for a troubled mind or result in financial disaster. All this activity is merely repetition of the same data, and the characters in the novel, though efficiently individualized, are in essence psychologically static. The Marchese's insanity seems as much the product of an enduring and unbearable jealousy (Agrippina has remarried) as that of remorse. Capuana's impersonality, however, was valuable in compelling him to create the sense of a social reality through which individual but at the same time representative behaviour became intelligible. Though his 'method' was destined to betray its inadequacy in the psychological dimension, in forcing Capuana's characters to live in a species of eternal present and in propelling them towards soliloquy it pointed forward to the work of Pirandello.

This is not the place to discuss fully the relationship between the two Sicilian authors. It is worth, however, recalling that Capuana was responsible for Pirandello's conversion from poetry to prose ('Devo a Luigi Capuana la spinta a provarmi nell'arte narrativa in prosa'[35]); and that Marta Ajala's paradoxical position in *L'Esclusa* closely resembled that of Giustina Rosati in 'Ribrezzo'; while the short story, 'Conclusione', mentioned earlier, has a strangely Pirandellian theme. The story is less a narration than an account of the difficulties Dr Maggioli encountered in the course of its composition. The perverse failure of two living models chosen by him to provide a suitable drama for the fiction elicits gentle satire on the 'maledettissima teoria dell'osservazione diretta', but the core of the story concerns the half-created characters whom Maggioli has despairingly abandoned 'nè in cielo nè in terra'. Waking the narrator from his sleep, they bitterly complain: 'Una fine dobbiamo farla, non possiamo rimanere perpetuamente innamorati, e nelle circostanze in cui ha avuto la crudeltà di abbandonarci! '.[36] The fiction of the totally autonomous character which Pirandello was to use in stories like 'Colloquii coi personaggi' and 'La tragedia di un personaggio' and finally in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* found its first expression in Capuana. Aside from this theme, a logical fictional extension of the narrative strategies employed in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, there was also a remarkable harmony of artistic aspiration in the two writers: Capuana might well have been the author of Pirandello's reflection that the 'tendenza analitica è sana fin dove è preparazione all'opera d'arte; e viziosa

quando invece vi usurpa il posto della schietta rappresentazione', and the remark fits Capuana's novel well enough.[37] Leone de Castris has found in Pirandello's early stories 'una insopprimibile dimensione scenica e teatrale', a 'tendenza al dialogo, alla immobile misura della rappresentazione e dell'azione diretta, tutta esaurita nella concreta visività e immediatezza del gesto e della parola', and finally (an opinion confirmed by Marziano Guglielminetti in connexion with Pirandello's novels) 'la quasi assoluta assenza di discorso indiretto'.[38] Though these findings might well have been stimulated by *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* instead of Pirandello's stories (and though Capuana's influence on Pirandello as a critic is indisputable, if still in need of full investigation), we do not intend to imply a direct relationship between Capuana, discoverer of a 'theatrical' narrative which he himself was unable to bring to coherent artistic fruition, and the work of Pirandello; but rather to suggest that the urge towards a total (theatrical) mimesis of reality expressed in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* might lead to a modification of the verdict that it was an anachronistic work which *merely* reproduced outdated novelistic models. This view in essence contemplates the content of the novel only (its regional 'brutality') and its relationship to the then current 'ismi' (from Bourgetian 'psicologismo' to the stylistic and structural experimentation undertaken by D'Annunzio in the name of the 'superuomo') which are felt to have directly supplanted the declining tradition of naturalism and *verismo*. It fails to take account of Capuana's narrative techniques which in our opinion place *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in another, divergent, literary current which was to revitalize and supersede the naturalistic tradition, that of Pirandello.

CONCLUSION

The years between 1900 and 1915 saw no slackening of Capuana's creative rhythms. Aside from narrative for children, the period produced sixteen volumes of short stories, and though the financially necessary practice of recycling and renaming stories continued (so that only three stories of twenty-two were new in *Voluttà di creare*, for instance, and only one in *Passanti*) this was still a considerable output—especially since Capuana now faced the desolate fact that his volumes 'si seguono e passano quasi inosservati',[1] sinking with little trace beneath what to him was the dubious flood of irrationalism and mysticism unleashed by 'decadent' writers, from D'Annunzio and Pascoli to Nencioni, Graf, and De Bosis.

The stories cover the whole range of Capuana's interests: there are science fiction works, regional 'bozzetti', psychological studies in obsession, stories containing instances of telepathy or suggestion, conversational drawing-room pieces—showcases for society wits—and the outpourings of unrequited passion, these last two categories, in my view, representing the least acceptable strands in Capuana's production. There are signs of the anti-intellectualism and sentimental moralizing characteristic of *Rassegnazione*; traces of political didacticism (in 'L'Apostolo' from *Istinti e peccati*, for instance, a rich and naive socialist is exploited by those he seeks to liberate and manages only to 'destare cupidigie, a fomentare impazienze');[2] and evidence of that light-textured, seemingly facile composition—Capuana's 'transparent' style—which so often deprives his prose of strong individuality and density. But for all the diffuseness of his talent, its lack of a firm nucleus of inspiration, his stories were proof of a remarkable intellectual vitality. He remained capable of seizing quickly on topical themes—in their modernity the themes of Southern emigration and even the new American mafia, the 'Mano nera', do much to mitigate the pedagogic apologia for hard work, individual enterprise, and regional patriotism which Capuana addresses to the young readers of *Gli Americani di Rabbato*; 1910 found him at Marinetti's side defending *Mafarka il Futurista* on obscenity charges while Boccioni, Carrà, Buzzi, Cavacchioli, and Palazzeschi looked on.[3] Capuana had, in short, some justification for using on his personal postcards the motif of a tree, its trunk shattered but still bearing foliage, with the accompanying legend, 'sed non in corde senescens'.[4] Nor are his stories without some interesting new accentuations.

More and more the point of departure in Capuana's tales is a moral paradox, a scientific discovery explored in its extreme, often grotesque, consequences, a

case of bizarre human behaviour. The origin of the story in a concept may be more or less explicit. Maggioli in *Voluttà di creare* admits that his stories are 'ragionamenti che hanno preso carne ed ossa' but this rule extends beyond Capuana's fantasies on scientific subjects.[5] In this tendency to start out from an intellectual notion there would appear to be an attenuation of the idea (repeated nevertheless in the preface to *Coscienze*, the most important collection of stories of the period) that a work of art 'debba essere unicamente creazione di caratteri, di personaggi che vivono nell'opera d'arte come nella realtà, per conto loro [. . .] e che la forma debba essere così intimamente fusa col contenuto da non doversi distinguere affatto da esso'.[6] There was to be no advance on the methods devised in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* for creating a total autonomy in the *personaggio*. Instead Capuana gave prominence to two procedures implicit in that novel which, without betraying the canon of impersonality, allowed him room for manœuvre. The first of these was the creation of the temporary *alter ego*, the narrator-character. In the wake of Dr Maggioli came a host of narrators captured in the act of retailing their intimate secrets and paradoxical thoughts to a listener. This was narrative within narrative, a substantially first-person narration masquerading as third person, and it was to shift the responsibility for commentary, irony, humour from the author to the narrator. Many stories became dialogue; others, and this was Capuana's second device, became soliloquy; for Capuana made increased use of the first-person 'document'. In *Coscienze* alone there was the letter of protest to the *'Gazzetta Provinciale'* of 'Rettifica', the monologue of 'Sfogo', the letters of 'Risposta' and 'Lettera di uno scettico' and the soliloquy of 'Esitanze' set out as a play.

Though the erstwhile student of French amatory literature and Stendhal's *De l'amour* resurfaced in some of Capuana's fictional letters, insipid and fatally parochial epistles to stony-hearted enchantresses, and though world-weary noblemen and artists proved a hardy breed, the variety of Capuana's approaches to first-person narrative leads us to single out a second new characteristic of his story-telling. The first person of these tales carries with it not the predominantly historical tenses of *Rassegnazione* but the tenses of an eternal present: the narrative becomes the occasion of a meditation aloud, and a whimsical, lamenting or fantasizing voice formulates a bizarre philosophy of life, comments on its incongruities, expresses a protest or a perplexity. Capuana was increasingly interested in humorous writing. It was an aspect of his own work he had stressed earlier, and it is worth remembering how he discovered in *Novelle rusticane* a species of bitter tragi-comedy.[7] In the relatively few articles written after the turn of the century he returned repeatedly to the subject of humour, insisting that it 'consiste in un certo modo di vedere, di osservare', that it could not be 'superimposed' at will on reality for 'si nasce umoristi'.[8] The humour that he had once foisted on his own rustic subjects now spilled over into scientific and bourgeois-psychological tales, and invested a situation rather than a view-point. At last we find the figure of the marriageable young woman agreeably desecrated: no longer always a Fasma or a

Delfina, a victim of fatal disease, excessive sensibility of the nervous system, or of a tragic love-affair, she becomes the diminutive, obstinate, sweet-munching Giacomina of 'Perchè non prendo moglie?' or the shrewish Maria of 'Il villino' (both from *Delitto ideale*), part of a formidable family team whose clutches the *fidanzato* is eventually glad to escape; married, her counterpart becomes the pathetic, domineered *piccolo borghese*, Alfredo Rocca of 'Rettifica' (*Coscienze*). We may perhaps now speak of a reciprocal influence between Pirandello and Capuana, noting that Capuana singled out Pirandello's *umorismo*, his 'dolente sorriso', as the source of his great originality, and that Pirandello, like Capuana, insisted in 'L'Umorismo' that such a vision was innate, not deliberate, not superimposed on the material, but embodied in it. Much has been written of Capuana's 'discovery' of Verga; no one has noted that in 1901 Capuana speaks of his certainty that sooner or later Pirandello's 'bell'ora di gloria [. . .] scoccherà',[9] while the theme of his own *umorismo* lies untouched.

We have ourselves paused over the topic because humour, in producing both a gentle satire on the hallowed institutions of the bourgeoisie and the perplexed soliloquies of the victims of circumstance, was an element of renewal in his work, a faint presage of future developments in Italian narrative and drama. But the question of *umorismo* also has, in our view, an indirect bearing on the overall interpretation of Capuana's work on which we must now say a final word.

The easy-going, good-natured Capuana of tradition has been replaced of late by a more troubled, 'spiritual' Capuana whose voice towards the end of the century had grown faint and lost much of its autonomy. Enrico Ghidetti, the most attentive reader of Capuana's *novellistica* to date, has stressed, in connexion with Capuana's stories on scientific and parapsychological themes, the author's 'rifiuto dello scientismo materialista',[10] and his sense of the inadequacies of science; Ghidetti quotes an article by Roger Callois to the effect that 'il racconto avveniristico riflette l'angoscia di un'epoca che ha paura dei progressi della tecnica; di un'epoca che, cessando di rappresentarsi la scienza come una protezione contro l'imaginabile la vede sempre più come un abisso nel quale va precipitando'.[11] Science had indeed lost its place of absolute privilege in Capuana's work and indubitably he was a party to the sense of defeat, disappointment and moral uncertainty which was one of the key-notes of the *fin de siècle* period. One might even say that the all-pervasiveness of his humour, desecrating the idols of the past, was proof of his participation. But to miss, as Ghidetti does, both Capuana's humour and that dimension of it which consisted in Capuana's playfully confronting a positivistic science, which in his view had become solemn and entrenched over the years, with problems it could not solve, is to exaggerate the 'portata dello slittamento dello scrittore verso l' "irrazionale" '.[12] The extreme result of this tendency has been to create a religious Capuana, from *Profumo* onwards.[13] Capuana's personal beliefs are clearly not in question (though it is worth noting that in his 'Spiritual Testament' Capuana merely wrote: 'come accettiamo tante

ineluttibili leggi fisiche dobbiamo accettare anche [. . .] le spirituali', and in speaking of 'il fatto religioso' he treated it as a category of the Spirit on a level with 'il fatto scientifico e filosofico' and failed to mention the idea of a personal God[14]). But religion in Capuana's later works exists simply as one among other antidotes to excessive cerebration: it is the modest non-intellectual's convenient and temporary reply to unanswered questions, and an aid to a healthy, productive acceptance of life; but the unbelieving doctor in *Rassegnazione* has achieved this end as efficiently as the priest, while there is no question of Dario's conversion. And Capuana's interest in the irrational, rightly stressed by recent critics, was no more bound to lead him in the direction of religion than Freud's enquiries into the unconscious caused him to repent of his atheism.

Returning to the question of Capuana's attitudes to scientific culture which were so great a force in conditioning his narrative, we must come to two conclusions: first that he had by no means given up his faith in positivistic reason, and secondly that his attitudes remained constant over a long period. When he presented for public scrutiny phenomena which appeared to challenge the fundamentals of materialistic thinking, he did so with a mixture of self-irony at the daring of his own 'amateur' impulses and hopefulness that science would address itself seriously and without hasty dismissals to a subject which so fascinated him. In 'Un vampiro', written in 1904, Capuana indeed has his scientist perplexed and shaken, restoring to the exhumation and cremation prescribed by superstition. But the story satirizes not science but the unimaginativeness and the *partis pris* of contemporary scientists. When Maugeri writes up his 'Un preteso caso di Vampirismo' the narrator wryly tells us:

> Non ha detto: 'I fatti sono questi, e questo il risultato'. [. . .] Egli ha messo tanti *se*, tanti *ma* nella narrazione delle minime circostanze, ha sfoggiato tanta *allucinazione*, tanta *suggestione*, tanta *induzione nervosa* nel suo ragionamento scientifico, da confessare quel che aveva confessato l'altra volta, cioè: che anche la intelligenza è affare d'abitudine e che il mutar di parere lo avrebbe seccato.

Before reaching this ironic conclusion, the story (like many others) repeatedly expresses the view that everything, including superstitions, may be fruitful material for science: 'ne riceverà impulso a ricerche non tentate, a scoprire verità non sospettate';[15] and it is Maggioli who sums up Capuana's attitude: 'Tornare addietro, per prender un'altra strada non significa niente. Gli scienziati muoiono, ma la scienza ha la pelle dura: ha l'eternità davanti a sè. Quel che non è riuscita a fare oggi, l'oprerà domani, domani l'altro.'[16] None of Capuana's critics has noted the plain fact that from the vantage-point of his times, when interest in psychic forces was so diffuse, there was no absolute divide or antagonism between respectable science and enquiry into paranormal phenomena. Capuana himself, in citing the names of Wallace and Crookes, reminds us of how often the gulf was bridged by nineteenth-century researchers;[17] and, as in the case of D'Assier, demonstrates

how he turned for information not to spiritualists but to notable scientists who, in Crookes's words, 'endeavoured to trace the operation of natural laws and forces, where others have seen only the agency of supernatural beings',[18] or who, like Wallace, argued that 'if the disputed fact did happen, it could only be in accordance with the laws of nature, since the only complete definition of the "laws of nature" is that they are the laws which regulate all phenomena'.[19] Lombroso had experimented with the noted medium, Eusapia Palladini, reaching, it is true, psychiatric conclusions similar to Maugeri's but revealing an interest in such matters which made Capuana's dedication of 'Un vampiro' to him less an act of friendly provocation than a humorous invitation to open-minded collaboration.

The attitudes just described had been expressed both in *Spiritismo*? and *Mondo occulto*, and in 1901 Capuana was still hoping that one day the whole world might be viewed properly in a monistic light: 'il supernaturale è concetto arbitrario, convenzionale poichè noi ignoriamo i limiti della materia, nè sappiamo dove essa finisca per dar luogo a un'altra natura di essenza diversa. Perchè non credere, piuttosto, che l'universo sia *uno*, e che in esso non ci sia nè *sopra* nè *sotto*?'[20] The 'passaggio dallo spiritismo all'occultismo' which seems so significant to Carlo Madrignani (but the critic is forced to admit that *Mondo occulto* 'non sa abbandonare il metodo positivo') was not a turning point in Capuana's values,[21] but a continuation of that ambiguous positivism, with its Hegelian superstructure, to which Capuana had long subscribed and which re-emerged in the most wide-ranging essays of these last years: *La Scienza della letteratura* and 'L'Arte e la vita'. As inconsistently as before, in *La Scienza della letteratura*, Capuana unites elements of Hegelian philosophy and positivism under the banner of historicism, and identifies the gradual mutations of Darwinian adaptation with the directional life-force of the Spirit. As we have said before, for Darwinian science a succession of changes is determined by a particular environment and implies no assumption about a substantial entity to which a series of higher manifestations in nature are ultimately attributable. But it is easy to see why Capuana the 'dilettante' philosopher was confused. Positivists categorized phenomena in terms of relative 'simplicity' and 'complexity', a terminology which, along with the myth of Progress, tended to foster the old concept of a Chain of Being in which man was the apex of a hierarchical system, and the goal towards which Nature had striven. Thus, in this slightly grandiloquent inaugural lecture, delivered in 1902 on his assumption of the Chair of *Stilistica* at the University of Catania, Capuana once again called upon De Meis's system to integrate and elevate the findings of positivism, bringing to literary criticism and literary historiography the concept of art as a developing 'organism'. He felt that literary theorists could thus at last leave behind the 'mortifera gora delle quisquiglie retoriche, arbitrarie, convenzionali' in which art had been considered only an 'arbitrario prodotto del genio', and the study of literature was reduced to the mechanical, directionless comparison between the 'diversi generi dell'opera d'arte della parola apparsi presso le varie nazioni lungo il corso dei secoli'.[22]

Recent criticism has aspired to reanimate and give definition to the lifeless yet enduring image of Capuana as leader of the naturalist movement in Italy, Capuana as theorist of Verga's practice, pale imitator of Verga's art. It has discovered on the whole a convinced materialist who was, however, overwhelmed in due course by the mysticism and religiosity of the closing years of the century, and increasingly attracted as a writer to what was unknowable and lay beyond the realms of reason. In so doing, as we have seen, it has tended to divide Capuana's career into two portions, the watershed variously identified between 1885 and 1890. We have demonstrated that this division does not bear scrutiny. It fails on the one hand to take into consideration Capuana's persistent view of himself as a modest protagonist in contemporary scientific debate: he asserted the usefulness of the unprejudiced amateur's 'intuizione divinatrice' as a stimulus to the scientist in *Spiritismo?*, communicated his findings as a naturalist to Michele Lessona,[23] took issue with and claimed to have influenced Cesare Lombroso in *Mondo occulto*,[24] and continued to the end of his life to prod at modern science in the hope that it would discover the laws that governed whatever remained a mystery. On the other hand insufficient emphasis has been laid on the contradictory, philosophical dimension of Capuana's thought, on the Hegelian evolutionism which we have shown as coinciding chronologically with his discovery of science, and which, in justifying a fatalistic view of the historical development of mankind, was sufficient to limit the powers of his science, and to make his materialistically-derived realism impotent to offer a radically new vision of life. It will be remembered that his doctor-figures all showed signs of Capuana's ideological ambiguity: from Cymbalus with his deep respect for Nature, to Follini whose unbelief in immortality was matched by belief in 'anima' and 'spirito', and whose profoundly materialistic culture was balanced by a questioning whether 'i nervi, il sangue, le fibre, le cellule' could ever explain the whole individual,[25] to Doctor Mola whose scientific reading left room for moralizing piety. These insidious reservations on the strengths and the sphere of application of science must be acknowledged from the beginning of Capuana's career as responsible in part for the enervations of his narrative realism which we have had occasion to note repeatedly. Instead of a career which may be divided chronologically, one must speak of a career which involves a continuity and at the same time a persistent duality.

But if the 'idealist' dimension in Capuana's thinking was present from the first, and not simply after 1885 or 1890 when in a changed cultural atmosphere it seemed to assert itself more strongly than before, its presence was, in my view, a much more superficial one in Capuana's work than that represented by his positivistic rationalism. Only when Science or Reason were for the moment baffled or had led men into a state of dolorous uncertainty was the voice of 'idealism' allowed to speak. Capuana's 'idealism' or Hegelian fatalism resulted in the facile elements of sentimentalization in *Profumo* or *Rassegnazione*, in the naive pretentiousness of *La Sfinge*, and contributed to the sense of gratuitousness provided by

the 'historical records' which were Capuana's regional tales; and, as Chapters III and IV showed, such departures from Reason were never adequate to undermine the realist strategies of Capuana's narrative or to eclipse the rationalism which all along had produced his most courageous and dignified attempts at understanding human behaviour.

Capuana has been seen as a typical representative of the late-nineteenth-century intelligentsia which turned from materialism to 'spiritualism', from reason to the irrational. His work certainly reflects aspects of this transition, but his critical voice also retains its autonomy amid the 'baraonda' of new 'concetti artistici', continuing to demand that imagination be schooled by observation of reality and that the work of art form an organized whole fit to vie with the living creatures of Nature. His narrative, despite its superficial and transient concessions to literary fashion, was fundamentally realistic. When it showed potential for self-renewal in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* and in short stories written after the turn of the century, it found a place not within the idealistic current which reinstated neglected ethical and religious values in a spirit of opposition to positivism, but in that other current which refused to seek grand answers from without, and extended its ceaselessly ratiocinative enquiry deeper into the self to discover eventually its contradictions and grotesque inconsistencies.

In examining Capuana's narrative and criticism we have been led to modify conclusions drawn by earlier critics, discovering in particular a Capuana whose critical theory is more consistent than has been allowed. His impersonality pre-dated and outlasted the period (which was both briefer and less whole-hearted than normally acknowledged) of his unconditional approval of Zola and of the ideal of the scientific work of art. At that period, indeed, his impersonality was not to be identified, as is usually supposed, with the detachment of the scientist, but was rather the guarantee of the author's willingness to learn from reality and anxiety to understand its 'laws'. It was consequently the expression of Capuana's belief that reality and truth coincided, an ideology in itself to which Capuana permanently subscribed. In suggesting some of the limitations of the realism Capuana derived from France, and in insisting particularly on his failure to respond to that vital criterion of interpretation which for the naturalists was *milieu*, we came to several new conclusions. First, that the conservative nature of Capuana's 'scienza' was shared with contemporary scientists, with a Mantegazza or a Lombroso for whom criminality was inherited rather than socially determined; secondly, that the acknowledgement of these limitations also leads us to place in doubt the supposed primacy of Zola in Capuana's thinking during the late seventies: at least as important were the Goncourt brothers whose refined aspiration to a 'roman réaliste de l'élégance' Capuana immediately embraced, being less interested in social history as it affected individuals than in the 'pure' acquisition of literary and technical expertise and in complexities of human psychology; indeed he emphasized precisely the Goncourtian aspects of the theoretical Verga, eagerly

awaiting his compatriot's works on the urban bourgeoisie. There has been occasion also to stress that the traditional view of Capuana as providing the theory of *verismo* for his fellow Sicilian is inaccurate. The theoretical Verga of 'L'amante di Gramigna' and of the Ojetti interview in particular provided Capuana with crucial supports for his impersonality and for the dubious argument that the realism related to it was a neutral method capable of extension to all subjects. Through textual analyses of Capuana's apparently non-realist works we have shown the truth of De Roberto's contention that an artistic approach implies a philosophy, and that Capuana's was fundamentally rationalistic.

I have suggested, in my comments on *Giacinta* and *Profumo*, that recognition of Capuana's psychological acumen is overdue. It is a quality not normally associated with the exponents of *verismo*, and one which wrongly, in my view, has seemed to those recent critics who have been most sensitive to this aspect of Capuana's achievement a confirmation of Capuana's attraction to the mysteries and the 'magic' of the unconscious: rather it was Capuana's constant impulse to produce a rationale of the instinctive and irrational, to bring abnormal behaviour within the ambit of rational understanding. If the quality of the enigmatic attaches in any way to Capuana's treatment of psychological subjects, it is to be identified in his abiding sense of the inviolable isolation of individual experience. Even in *Giacinta*, side by side with the traditional story of failed romantic passion and the psycho-physiological examination of abnormality, there was the loneliness of Capuana's heroine, incapable of communicating to others the drama of her separateness; *Profumo* and *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* might be described as stories of misunderstanding and fateful reticence. In my view, therefore, Capuana's treatment of neurosis and obsession was not torn between the impulse to rationalize and the reluctant acknowledgement of vast areas of elusive irrationality, but between the confidence that even abnormality and seeming irrationality was reducible to logic and the perception that this logic was incommunicable to others. The sense of human tragedy (and later of tragi-comedy), much diminished during the age of reason amid the elucidation of material cause and effect, in as far as it survived at all in Capuana's work did so not *within* the individual but between one character and another, held apart in their separate, incommunicable compartments.

Capuana's criticism like his narrative spoke out for a robust art which gave pride of place to strongly individualized passions and characters, and asked the reader to recognize in them aspects of himself and of a familiar reality. His own creative work, it is true, contained conservative elements and his critical meditation tended to remain within the charmed circle of purely aesthetic concerns, so that for some critics he has become the representative *par excellence* of a ruling bourgeoisie whose democratic mission failed and abutted on the feverish, 'escapist' imperialism of the Crispean period. But 'democratic' principles also functioned within this representative consciousness: in Capuana there was an anti-'literary' impulse, where 'literary' meant style rather than 'form' and implied the existence

of a self-perpetuating élitist tradition rather than an 'organism' newly created in each work and born of contact with reality. His own work aimed at clarity and accessibility, and his criticism, with its dialogues and imaginary encounters, became, without sacrifice of dignity or urgency, a readable and skilfully-handled *causerie*. He remained to the end of his life finely attuned to the vicissitudes of current cultural debates. His responsiveness made him excessively prone to experimentation in his own creative work, but it also gave him the genuine character of a militant critic, constrained always, despite his own ambiguous attempts at impartiality, to state his own position courageously. Even his last stories contained a polemical message. As he reminded himself under the pseudonym of Renato in a prefatory letter to *Coscienze*:

Tu [. . .] sei testardo; non vuoi conceder nulla alla moda, al gusto passeggiero, alle esagerazioni e anche alle perversioni del gusto. Io non ho letto di te, fra tante centinaia di pagine, una bella pagina smagliante di metafore ardite, di immagini luminose, di aggettivi rari, di frasi *stile-Liberty*—non so come chiamarlo—una di quelle belle pagine che fanno rimanere a bocca aperta il lettore, anche perchè spesso egli non capisce niente e si figura che debbano significare qualcosa di nuovo e di grande.[26]

There remained perhaps a touch of provincialism in all Capuana's intellectual activities, and his realist credo, though it originated from France, limited his responses to 'aesthetes' and 'symbolists' from Mallarmé to Maeterlinck, as to D'Annunzio in his own country. But if he was the initiator, as Mario Pomilio has said, 'di tanta parte della critica successiva, che non [riuscì] mai nè a stroncare nè a convalidare in tutto D'Annunzio',[27] his work on the favourite of the age was an example of intellectual honesty and independence of mind. He was, both as writer and critic, a sharp-witted, common-sensical point of reference for a generation that stood perplexed amid the 'baraonda dei concetti artistici' as the nineteenth became the twentieth century.

NOTES

*NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. See L. Perroni, 'Lettere di Giovanni Verga a sua madre', pp.1-2.
2. See Giovanni Gentile, *Il Tramonto della cultura siciliana*, p.3.
3. See 'L'errore Capuana'.
4. Pietro Vetro, *Luigi Capuana*, pp.162-3; Mario Zangara, *Luigi Capuana*, pp.17-18; G.R. Ceriello, Introduction to *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, pp.ix-xv.
5. 'Luigi Capuana', in *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, III, 118.
6. Giorgio Luti, for example, writes: 'Citare il Capuana narratore come esempio probante del danno portato in Italia dall'applicazione dell'impersonalità è un controsenso, perchè il tono che caratterizza gran parte della sua produzione artistica non è determinato dall'aver frenato la propria ispirazione [. . .]. Capuana critico fu di certo in anticipo sul Capuana narratore.' (See 'Capuana moderno', p. 151.)
7. See 'La prima stampa del *Marchese di Roccaverdina*'.
8. 'Capuana critico', p.50.
9. 'La critica di Luigi Capuana', pp.308-24, 409-26.
10. 'Capuana critico', pp.74, 78, 80.
11. *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p. 248.
12. See Giorgio Luti, Introduction to *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p.vii; Walter Mauro, Introduction to *Antologia dagli scritti critici*, p.13.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. U. Pesci, *Firenze capitale*, p.411.
2. 'Rapporto della commissione guidicatrice del Concorso Ristori', *Nazione*, 27 August 1865.
3. 'La fisima del teatro nazionale', in *Al teatro*, p.133.
4. *Tragedie*, II, 492.
5. *Sulle condizioni della letteratura drammatica italiana nell'ultimo ventennio*, pp.190,191.
6. See S. Ferrone, *Il teatro di Verga*, p.24.
7. Ferdinando Martini, *Confessioni e ricordi (Firenze granducale)*, p.121.
8. '*Teatro scelto* di Paolo Giacometti', and 'Cronaca drammatica' (Bersezio, Suñer, Torelli etc.), *Rivista italica*, 1 (January 1865), 105-16 and 142-8 (pp.112,145).
9. '*Teatro scelto* di Paolo Giacometti', *Rivista italica*, p.111.
10. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Torelli), *Nazione*, 30 November 1867. See also Capuana's collection of theatrical reviews, published in 1872, *Il teatro italiano contemporaneo* (henceforward referred to in the notes as TIC), pp.93-112. Though quotations in the text are taken from the *Nazione*, in the case of reviews partly or wholly republished in TIC the reader will be referred, for ease of consultation, to the volume. He should however bear in mind that there are occasional discrepancies between the versions Capuana published in TIC and their originals in the *Nazione*. For *all* articles, including those republished, the *Nazione* references will be provided, since the date of the first publication is generally material to the argument. (The dates of publication in TIC are occasionally erroneous.)
11. '*Teatro scelto* di Paolo Giacometti', *Rivista italica*, p. 110.
12. '*Opere drammatiche* di Paolo Ferrari', *Rivista italica*, 4-5 (May 1865), 450-66 (p.460).
13. Cited by Ferdinando Martini, 'La fisima del teatro nazionale', in *Al teatro*, p.135.

*For publication details of books and articles (except those articles published in Capuana's lifetime) cited in the text the reader is referred to the Bibliography at the end of this volume. A single note will include references for all adjacent quotations taken from the same text.

Notes to Chapter I, continued

14. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Ferrari, Coletti), *Nazione*, 13 November 1866; TIC, pp.123-135 (p.123).
15. '*Teatro scelto* di Paolo Giacometti', *Rivista italica*, p.106.
16. See note 14 above.
17. 'Come io divenni novelliere', preface to *Homo*, second edition of *Homo*!, p.viii.
18. 'Prefazione', *Una poltrona storica*, p.vii.
19. 'Di chi è la colpa?', in *Saggi di storia, di critica e di politica*, 383-422 (p.411).
20. 'Cronaca drammatica' (Bersezio, Suñer, Torelli etc), *Rivista italica* p.146.
21. 'Cronaca drammatica' (Torelli, Suñer, Giotti etc), *Rivista italica*, 2 (February 1865), 251-61 (p.256).
22. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Bracci, Costetti), *Nazione*, 17 August 1866.
23. 'Il teatro francese nel 1866', *Nazione*, 5 March 1866.
24. 'Cronaca drammatica' (Montignani, Costetti, Martini etc), *Rivista italica*, 3 (March 1865), 364-70 (p.366).
25. See note 12 above.
26. 'Cronaca drammatica' (Barattani), *Rivista italica*, 7-8 (September 1865), 775-9 (pp.778, 775). Compare Manzoni: 'inventer au besoin des personnages pour représenter les mœurs connues d'une époque donnée, [. . .] mais de manière que l'invention s'accorde avec la réalité et ne soit qu'un moyen de plus de la faire ressortir, voilà ce que l'on peut raisonnablement dire créer.' (*Lettre à M. C****, in *Liriche e tragedie*, pp.241-317 (p.285).)
27. 'Cronaca drammatica' (Barattani), *Rivista italica*, p.776.
28. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Dumas *père*, Salmini, Dall'Ongaro etc), *Nazione*, 17 June 1866.
29. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Giotti, Moineaux), *Nazione*, 13 March 1867; TIC, pp.157-62 (p.158).
30. See note 27 above. Compare Manzoni: 'que nous donne l'histoire? des événements qui ne sont, pour ainsi dire, connus que par leurs dehors; [. . .] mais ce que les hommes ont pensé, les sentiments qui ont accompagné leurs déliberations et leurs projets, leurs succès et leurs infortunes: [. . .] tout cela, à peu de chose près est passé sous silence par l'histoire.' (*Lettre à M. C****, pp.281-2.)
31. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Ponsard), *Nazione*, 6 April 1867; TIC, pp.314-22 (p.318).
32. See 'Rassegna drammatica', *Nazione*, 30 May, 4 July, 23 October 1867; TIC, pp. 182-91, 173-81.
33. Manzoni, *Lettre à M. C****, in *Liriche e tragedie*, p.283.
34. *Lettre à M. C****, p. 260.
35. '*Teatro scelto* di Paolo Giacometti', *Rivista italica*, p.107.
36. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Barrière, Labiche and Choler, Carville and Gastineau etc), *Nazione*, 17 October 1866.
37. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Sardou), *Nazione*, 14 March 1866.
38. *Nazione*, 5 March 1866.
39. B. Croce, 'Luigi Capuana', in *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, III, 101-18.
40. See Carlo A. Madrignani, *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.43 and G. Trombatore, 'La critica di Luigi Capuana e la poetica del verismo', in *Riflessi letterari del Risorgimento in Sicilia*, 75-106 (p.79).
41. See Francesco Pavone, 'Inediti di Capuana', in *Da Boccaccio a Pierro*, 51-93 (pp.53-4, letter dated 12 August 1863, but probably 1869).
42. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Castelvecchio, Ferrari), *Nazione*, 26 November 1866.
43. '*Opere drammatiche* di Federico Schiller', in *Saggi critici*, II, 16.
44. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Ferrari, Dumas *fils*), *Nazione*, 6 November 1867; TIC, pp.252-9 (pp. 253, 254, 255).
45. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Dumas *fils*), *Nazione*, 23 April 1867; TIC, pp.243-52 (p.251).
46. 'Rassegna drammatica (Marenco), *Nazione*, 3 January 1868; TIC, pp.84-91 (p.89).
47. 'Rassegna drammatica' (P-A. Fiorentino), *Nazione*, 25 June 1867; TIC, pp.361-70 (p.367).
48. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Sardou), *Nazione*, 29 March 1867; TIC, pp.276-85 (pp.282-3).
49. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Augier), *Nazione*, 21 March 1868; TIC, pp.260-65 (p.265).
50. '*Alla sua donna*', in *Saggi critici*, I, 267.
51. '*Opere drammatiche* di Federico Schiller', in *Saggi critici*, I, 26.
52. 'Pier delle Vigne', in *Saggi critici*, I, 130.
53. See note 42 above.
54. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Vacquerie), *Nazione*, 19 March 1867; TIC, pp.286-93 (p.288).
55. 'Le *Contemplazioni* di Victor Hugo', in *Saggi critici*, II, 53.
56. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Trevisani), *Nazione*, 26 August 1867; TIC, pp.3-11 (pp.3,8-9).

Notes to Chapter I continued

57. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Giotti, Arrighi, Sabatini, etc), *Nazione*, 18 September 1867.
58. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Halm), *Nazione*, 20 May 1867; TIC, pp.342-50 (p.345).
59. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Torelli), *Nazione*, 30 November 1867; TIC, pp. 93-112 (p.96).
60. According to G. Gambinossi, Capuana's successor as drama critic. (See 'Rassegna drammatica', *Nazione*, 8 April 1868.)
61. See note 57 above.
62. 'Rassegna drammatica' (D'Ormeville and Tomei, Gambinossi, Giovagnoli), *Nazione*, 20 February 1867.
63. See note 59 above; TIC, p.97.
64. 'Preludio', *Cento anni*, I, 3.
65. *Dell'avvenire del romanzo in Italia*, pp.28,27.
66. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Foussier and Barbier), *Nazione*, 26 October 1866; TIC, pp.294-301 (pp.299-300).
67. *Le Roman expèrimental*, pp.144-5.
68. 'Rassegna drammatica' ('Ancora del *Duello*: lettera al sig. Direttore'), *Nazione*, 17 February 1868; TIC, pp. 145-56 (p. 148).
69. 'Eliodoro Lombardi: *Carlo Pisacane*', *Nazione*, 12 September 1867; TIC, pp. 382-93 (p. 388).
70. See Manzoni, *Lettre à M. C****, p.313.
71. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Bacchini), *Nazione*, 30 May 1867; TIC, pp.182-91, (pp.191,185).
72. See 'Rassegna drammatica' (Morgigni, Gaston), *Nazione*, 23 October 1867.
73. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Cabianca, Castelvecchio), *Nazione*, 23 November 1867: TIC, pp. 201-8 (p.205).
74. See note 69 above; TIC, pp.389-90.
75. 'A.C. De Meis, G. Trezza, V. Giordani-Zocchi, A. Tari', in *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, I, 392.
76. *Dopo la laurea*, II, 23; I, 199-200.
77. Ibid: I, 226-7.
78. *Spiritismo?*, p.130.
79. *Dopo la laurea*, I, 59; II, 92.
80. L. Sportelli, *Luigi Capuana a G.A. Cesareo: carteggio inedito*, p. 39.
81. 'Al lettore', in TIC, p.xx.
82. *Spiritismo?*, p.131.
83. *Nascita di una poetica: il Verismo*, p.12.
84. *La cultura italiana tra '800 e '900*, p.83.
85. 'La filosofia positiva e il metodo storico', in *Saggi di storia*, pp.28, 31.
86. *Sul rinnovamento della filosofia positiva in Italia*, pp.28-9.
87. See Carlo A. Madrignani, 'Appendix 1', in *Capuana e il naturalismo*, pp.299-300 (letter of 26 January 1871).
88. *Cultura, narrativa e teatro nell'età del positivismo*, p.24.
89. 'Al lettore', in TIC, pp.xi, xxii.
90. 'Introduction', *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, p.xv.
91. 'Dr Cymbalus', *Nazione*, 3, 5, 8, 9 October 1867. The quotations which follow are taken from a republication (in *Storia fosca*, pp.145-85). (The date, 1865, appended by Capuana to the several reprintings of this story is erroneous.) It is Capuana himself who indicates his source (see 'Come io divenni novelliere', in *Homo*, p.x) in Dumas's 'conte fantastique', 'La Boîte d'argent', where the Chevalier d'Ilo dies of excessive emotion after his heart, removed by an 'espèce de chimiste allemand', is restored to him (see *Contes et nouvelles*, pp.133-218 (p.155)).
92. *Storia fosca*, p.158,143,155.
93. Palmiro M. Pinagli, 'La critica di Luigi Capuana', p. 310.
94. *Storia fosca*, p.165.
95. 'Rassegna letteraria' (Giovanni Prati's *Armando*), *Nazione*, 20 July 1868. Compare TIC, pp.394-415.
96. 'La scienza e l'arte della vita in Francia', *Nuova Antologia* (December 1868), p.707.
97. *Profili di donne* (1877). 'Delfina' was first published under the title 'Un mese fa' in *Nuova Antologia* (May 1872), pp.86-99; 'Giulia' under the title 'Un'avventura' in *Rivista Minima*, 8 (April 1874), 117ff. (where the heroine is called Cesira, and there are minor stylistic differences); 'Iela' carries the date 25 March 1876; the unique Milanese setting of 'Cecilia', the final story in the volume, invites the supposition that it was written in the early months of 1877 when Capuana was first in Milan.
98. L. Sportelli, *Luigi Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p.31.

Notes to Chapter I, continued

99. See note 45 above: TIC, p.251.
100. Carlo A. Madrignani, *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.87.
101. See 'Appendix 2', *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.304.
102. *Fisiologia dell'amore*, p.157.
103. *Fisiologia del piacere*, pp.101-2.
104. *Profili di donne*, second edition (1877), p.83. All page references, henceforward included in the text, are to this edition.
105. G. Pozza, '*Profili di donne*', *Vita nuova*, 18 (September 1877), 273.
106. Giovanni Verga, *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, p.49 (14 January 1874).
107. *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: prima serie*, p.64.
108. The way in which Felice Cameroni, an early champion of Zola in Italy, expressed his enjoyment of this mixture sheds light on the divergent impulses which shaped the taste of the period: 'armonizzando tra loro la metafisica alla Hegel col materialismo alla Büchner, Capuana ha l'invidiabile fortuna di bearsi . . . e di torturarsi . . . lo spirito, colle più squisite sfumature del sentimento, nel tempo stesso in cui sorseggia a centellini, da vero Sibarita, le voluttà sensuali.' (See *Il sole*, 29 June 1877.)
109. *Journal intime, Cahier rouge, Adolphe*, p.76 (Chapter 2).
110. pp.77 (Chapter 2), 81 (Chapter 3), 93 (Chapter 4). Underlining mine.
111 See Stefano Sciuto, 'Lettere di M. Rapisardi', p.15 (10 July 1877).
112. Carlo A. Madrignani, *Capuana e il naturalismo*, pp.307, 310.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Published in 1880, and henceforward designated in notes SLC I. Comparison of those articles republished in SLC I with their originals in *Corriere della sera* reveals, with few, minor exceptions, only light stylistic retouching. Quotations are therefore taken from the published volume. In order to reduce the number of notes and because a detailed chronological awareness of Capuana's development is not as urgent as in his Florentine period, references to the volume only are given and are incorporated, for convenience, in the text.
2. See Corrado Di Blasi, 'Come nacque *Giacinta*'.
3. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Marenco, Belot, and Daudet), *Corriere della sera*, 24 December 1876.
4. *Letteratura contemporanea in Italia*, pp. 39-40.
5. 'Rassegna drammatica' (Salmini), *Corriere della sera*, 22 January 1867. The article (under the title 'Madama Roland') appears in part in SLC I, (pp.283-92), but omits the passage from which this quotation is taken.
6. *La critica moderna*, p.35.
7. Quoted by R. Ternois, *Zola et ses amis italiens*, p.43.
8. 'Emilio Zola e il suo romanzo sperimentale', *Rassegna settimanale*, 28 December 1879, pp.462-4 (p.463).
9. Émile Zola, Preface to *La Fortune des Rougon*, in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, I, 4.
10. 'Studio sopra Emilio Zola', published in eleven parts in *Roma* between 27 June and 20 December 1877. (See *Saggi critici*, III, 266-312.)
11. 'Le facoltà ideali di Zola', in *Saggi critici*, III, 302, and 'Reale e ideale in Zola', in *Saggi critici*, III, 293.
12. 'Zola e *L'Assommoir*', in *Saggi critici*, III, 313-37 (p.332).
13. 'L'ideale di Zola', in *Saggi critici*, III, 286.
14. See *Racconti*, p.33.
15. See Preface, *Giacinta*, reprint of third edition of 1889 (1930), p.ix.
16. See pp.xvi, vii, xiv, xvi, xii.
17. *Giacinta*, reprint of first edition of 1879 (1914), p.171. All references, henceforward given in the text, are to the reprint of 1914.
18. See *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: seconda serie*, p.269.
19. L. Sportelli, *Luigi Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p.31.
20. It may not be far-fetched to see a parallel between Giacinta's attitudes to marriage and those of Marguerite: 'Armand? Il a le droit de m'aimer, mais non de de m'épouser; je veux bien lui prendre son cœur, je ne lui prendrai jamais son nom. Il y a des choses qu'une femme n'efface pas de sa vie [. . .] et qu'elle ne doit pas donner à son mari le droit de lui reprocher.' (See *La Dame aux camélias*, in *Théâtre complet*, I, 125 (Act 3,

Notes to Chapter II, continued

scene 3).)
21. Preface, *Giacinta*, p.xii.
22. Romano Luperini observes how the heroes of *Una peccatrice* and *Eva* 'avvertono che il loro successo nella società può essere ritardato o, addirittura, impedito dalla fedeltà al loro ideale e quindi dalle conseguenze sociali ed economiche cui li costringe l'amore-passione'. (See *Pessimismo e verismo in Giovanni Verga*, p. 35). Adolphe is constantly tormented by the sense of purposeless isolation to which Ellénore condemns him: 'J'étais forcé de précipiter toutes mes démarches, de rompre avec la plupart de mes relations'; 'je me plaignis de ma vie contrainte, de ma jeunesse consumée dans l'inaction' etc. (See *Journal intime, Cahier rouge, Adolphe*, pp.87,91 (Chapter 4).)
23. See L. Sportelli, *Luigi Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p.41.
24. Vittorio Lugli, *Bovary italiane*, p.21.
25. SLC I, p.75.
26. See the anonymous review, '*Giacinta*', *Rassegna settimanale*, 3 August 1879, 92-3 (p.92).
27. '*Giacinta*', *Illustrazione italiana*, 29 June 1879.
28. Quoted by R. Ternois, *Zola et ses amis italiens*, p.41.
29. See *L'Assommoir*, in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, II, 553 (Chapter 6).
30. *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, pp.124-5 (18 June 1879).
31. Capuana's confession to Verga that he was afflicted by 'veri dolori di parto fino al sesto capitolo', after which 'tutto andò da sè' (it was simply a question, he wrote, of drawing 'la conseguenza dalle premesse dell'intiero lavoro'), provides an interesting side-light on the novel's conception and the effort which produced its best portion. (See L. and V. Perroni, 'Storia de *I Malavoglia*', p.116 (letter of 28 January 1879).)
32. See Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p.95 (Chapter 2): 'Au-dessous de la durée homogène, symbole extensif de la durée dont les moments hétérogènes se pénètrent; au-dessous de la multiplicité numérique des états conscients, une multiplicité qualitative; au-dessous du moi aux états bien définis, un moi où succession implique fusion et organisation.'
33. Wirchoff, a transliteration of Virchow (Rudolf). Capuana refers to the eminent German pathologist, anthropologist, and politician, Ordinary Professor of Pathological Anatomy at Berlin University from 1856, and best known for the four volumes of his *Vorlesungen über patologie* (1858-67). Moleschott (Jakob) is the Dutch scientist from Heidelberg University who, at the invitation of De Sanctis, took the Chair in Experimental Physiology at Turin University from 1861, bringing to Italy all that was most modern in German scientific methodology. From 1879 he transferred to Rome University. He published many works in his subject in both Italian and German.
34. Compare, for example, p.88.
35. Carlo A. Madrignani writes (referring to 'Storia fosca', set in Sicily): 'niente di "siciliano" in senso specifico, così come non si può dire una storia siciliana *Giacinta*'. (See *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p. 185.) Capuana is indeed evasive on the subject, but *Giacinta* is not even superficially 'Sicilian', as is revealed by Andrea's reaction to the news of his posting to Siracuse: 'Lo sbalzavano in capo al mondo. Mettevano il mare tra lei e lui!' (p.52). To judge by her Neapolitan lover's comment that Giacinta dances like a 'vera meridionale', and her response that she is happy to have reminded him of 'le signorine di *laggiù*' (p.70), one must assume that the story is not even 'meridionale'. Madrignani's error is repeated by, for example, W. Starkie (*Luigi Pirandello*, p.54) and P.M. Sipala (*Capuana e Pirandello*, p.19).
36. The volume consists of twenty-four articles originally published in *Corriere della sera* or *Fanfulla della domenica* (which Capuana was soon – from April 1882 to August 1883 – to edit). I have been unable to trace an earlier publication of the review of Zola's *Nana*. Page references to the volume are given in the text.
37. See Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason*, p.82.
38. The phrase is Croce's. (See 'Luigi Capuana', *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, III, 103).
39. *Le Roman expérimental*, p.24.
40. For the confession to which Capuana alludes see *Ricordi di Parigi*, pp.273-5.
41. 'Flaubert attaque, – toutefois avec des coups de chapeau donnés à son génie, – attaque les préfaces, les doctrines, les professions de foi naturaliste, enfin *toute cette blague* un peu Mangin, *avec laquelle Zola aide le succès de ses livres*. Zola répond à peu près ceci: [. . .] Oui, c'est vrai que je me moque comme vous de ce mot Naturalisme: et cependant, je le répéterai sans cesse, parce qu'il faut un baptême aux choses, pour que le public les croie neuves.' (Italics mine.) See *Journal*, II, 1172 (19 February 1877).

Notes to Chapter II, continued

42. Much later, in an obituary article on Capuana, Verga acknowledged the debt: 'egli mi fece vedere la capanna della *'gna* Pina, la sciagurata madre adultera.' (See *Giornale dell'isola*, 30 November 1915.)
43. 'Col Verga avevo discorso d'una persona di servizio in casa mia [Beppa Sansoni, Capuana's mistress?], quando Gramigna errava per la campagna inseguito dalla forza pubblica. [. . .] la poverina udiva parlare della sete, della fame che il latitante, inseguito come una bestia feroce, dicevasi patisse spesso per più giornate; e il pensiero di quell'uomo affamato e assetato la invasava; la tormentava sveglia, le agitava i sonni la notte, la faceva deperire, diventava fissazione, fantasma, che le pareva le chiedesse, in grazia, una goccia di quell'acqua ch'ella cavava dal pozzo.' See 'La Sicilia nei canti popolari e nella novellistica contemporanea' (Lecture read in 1894), in *L'Isola del sole*, pp.196-7.
44. See Luigi Russo, *I Narratori*, p.89. Alfred Alexander, Corrado Di Blasi and others have made too much of Capuana's role in the shaping of Verga's so-called second manner on the basis of Verga's comments to Capuana on his *Comparatico*, a *canto popolare* pastiche which Vigo unsuspectingly included in his *Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani* (pp.651-3): 'Quello è un piccolo capolavoro, e devo confessarti che la prima ispirazione della forma schiettamente popolare che ho cerato di dare alle mie novelle la devo a te.' (See *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, p.200 (24 September 1882), and Alfred Alexander, *Luigi Capuana's 'Comparatico'*, p.4, Corrado Di Blasi, 'L'avvio della lingua di Verga tra storia e leggenda', pp.11-15.)
45. *Lettere a Luigi Capuana*, p.168 (11 April 1881).
46. SCL I, p.68.
47. 'Rassegna letteraria: libri nuovi' (Petruccelli della Gattina, Sperani, Colucci), *Corriere della sera*, 5-6 January 1880.
48. Gaetano Trombatore, 'La critica di Luigi Capuana e la poetica del verismo', in *Riflessi letterari del Risorgimento*, pp.75-106 (p.83).
49. See note 47 above.
50. 'Verismo e positivismo artistico', p.253.
51. Paulu Mauru, *La pigghiata e li canzuni*, edited by Capuana (1871), and Paolo Maura, *Poesie in dialetto siciliano con alcune di altri poeti mineoli*, edited by Capuana with Preface (1879).
52. *Il comune di Mineo: relazione del sindaco*, p.74.
53. The story has been published. (See 'Una storia d'amore per cent'anni nel cassetto', *Supplemento del Corriere della sera*, 21 December 1975, p.13.)
54. Preface to *Storia fosca* (1883), pp.11-12.
55. Introduction to *Racconti*, I, xxix.
56. *Storia fosca*, p.27.
57. *Homo*! pp.42, 50, 47, 56. Carlo A. Madrignani's comparison of 'La mula' with a similar story by Verga, 'Gli orfani', is instructive. (See *Capuana e il naturalismo*, pp.192-3.)
58. *Homo*! pp.102, 101.
59. p.172.
60. See note 44 above.
61. *Homo*!. pp.247, 248.
62. See 'Comparatico', renamed 'Il "San Giovanni" ', in *Nostra gente*, p.236.
63. *Homo*!, p.117.
64. *Homo*, pp.223-4.
65. 'Bozzetti di alcuni usi e credenze religiose della Sicilia', *Nazione*, 12, 14, 18, 23 October 1866. The quotation is from the final instalment.
66. *Il bucato in famiglia: discorso pronunciato il dì 24 novembre per la solenne premiazione delle scuole elementari maschili e femminili in Mineo* (1870).
67. 'Bozzetti siciliani: la valle di Santa Margherita', *Nazione*, 24 April 1867.
68. See 'La Sicilia e il brigantaggio' (1892), in *L'Isola del sole*, pp.82-91.
69. pp.10-11.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.229.
2. *Antologia dagli scritti critici*, p.89.
3. *Il Libro di Don Chisciotte*, II, 24.

Notes to Chapter III, continued

4. *Fanfulla della domenica*, 14 December 1884. All references, henceforward given in the text, are to the volume *Per l'arte*.
5. 'La critica di Luigi Capuana e la poetica del verismo', in *Riflessi letterari del Risorgimento in Sicilia*, pp.90-91.
6. L. and V. Perroni, 'Storia dei *Malavoglia*', p.116 (28 January 1879).
7. See *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: seconda serie*, p.136.
8. Preface to *Giacinta: commedia in cinque atti*, pp.xii-xiii.
9. *Libri e teatro*, p.239.
10. *Fanfulla della domenica*, 29 October 1882 and *Per l'arte*, pp.155-67.
11. Preface to *Parodie*, p.xii.
12. *Capuana poeta della vita*, p.39.
13. See SCL I, pp.146-57.
14. Quoted by C. Di Blasi, *Capuana: Vita. Amicizie. Relazioni letterarie*, p.245.
15. 'Paralipomeni al Lucifero', in *Parodie*, p.42.
16. Introduction to *Semiritmi*, p.25.
17. *Semiritmi*, p.128.
18. p.74.
19. But see for example, C. Di Blasi, 'L'autografo del "Testamento spirituale" del Capuana e la sua autenticità', in *Luigi Capuana originale e segreto*, pp.283-9.
20. *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p.237.
21. *Semiritmi*, pp.66-7.
22. *Libri e teatro*, p.134.
23. *Semiritmi*, p.85.
24. *Spiritismo?*, pp.243, 218, 216.
25. *Antologia dagli scritti critici*, p.90.
26. *Spiritismo?*, p.209.
27. I quote from the translation of D'Assier's *Essai* by Henry S. Olcott, *Posthumous Humanity* (1887). (See pp.69, xiv-xv.)
28. 'Intuitivismo', in *Libri e teatro*, p.127. The places of first publication of five of eleven new articles which form the volume are untraced. Six were written between 1889 and 1891 for *La Tribuna, Lettere e arti*, and *La Tavola rotonda*. (See G. Raya, *Bibliografia di Luigi Capuana*, pp.82, 84, 85.) All page references are to the volume and are henceforward included in the text.
29. *Per l'arte*, pp.75,76.
30. *Poetica del decadentismo*, p.41.
31. *Correspondance*, II, 253 (14 November 1850).
32. *Verga, De Roberto, Capuana*, p.164 (5 May 1887).
33. For Federico De Roberto's letter to Capuana of 14 December 1891 see C. Di Blasi, *Capuana: Vita. Amicizie. Relazioni letterarie*, p.370; for Capuana's reply of 20 December see *Verga, De Roberto, Capuana*, p.175.
34. See *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.283. The novel appeared between July and December, 1890.
35. *Libri e teatro*, p.76.
36. 'Al lettore', *Profumo*, reprint of first edition of 1892 (1922), p.vii. All references to the novel, henceforth included in the text, are to the 1922 reprint.
37. See L. Sportelli, *Luigi Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p.68.
38. For the chapter in question see *Nuova Antologia*, December 1890, pp.708-12.
39. 'Precocità' is included in the collections of short stories *Ribrezzo* (1885), *Le Appassionate* (1893), and (under the title 'Piccola sensitiva') *Ribrezzo e fascino* (1921). It may also be consulted in *Racconti*, edited by E. Ghidetti, I, 333-42.
40. 'Ricordi d'infanzia' (1893), in *Cardello e Ricordi d'infanzia*, pp.142,143.
41. 'Mostruosità' is included in the collections of short stories *Homo!* (1883), *Le Appassionate* (1893), and (under the title 'Miserabilmente') *Ribrezzo e fascino* (1921). It may be consulted in *Racconti*, edited by E. Ghidetti, pp.375-88.
42. 'Le mie capinere', in *Il Drago*, pp.184-91.
43. *Verga, De Roberto, Capuana*, p.175 (20 December 1891).
44. William Alexander Hammond, Surgeon-General in the United States Army, was best known for his *Treatise on Diseases of the Nervous System* (1871), translated into Italian by A. Rubino in 1887. Carlo Madrignani interestingly notes the existence of a *Manuale clinico terapeutico della impotenza sessuale nell'uomo* (1884) also translated by A. Rubino. (See *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.292.) Capuana probably read the French

Notes to Chapter III, continued

edition of *De la suggestion mentale* (prefaced by Charles Richet, whose work he knew (see *Mondo occulto*, p. 44)), by the Polish scientist, Julijan Ochorowicz.

45. *Mondo occulto*, p.3.
46. p.47.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. *Il Misticismo moderno*, pp.v-vi.
2. See *Arabeschi*, pp.91-2.
3. 'Prefazione', *Documenti umani*, pp.viii-ix.
4. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, reprint of the first edition of 1898, edited by Giorgio Luti (1973), p.78.
5. *La Sfinge* was published in *Nuova Antologia*, 1, 15 September, 1, 15 October 1895 (pp. 60-76, 274-87, 475-89, 661-82). All page references, given in the text, are to *Nuova Antologia*.
6. 'Introduzione', *Racconti*, I, xxxix.
7. Gian Pietro Lucini, 'La Sfinge', *Domenica letteraria*, 7 February 1897, and now in *Scritti critici*, pp.16-17.
8. See Renato Bertacchini, *Documenti e prefazioni del romanzo italiano dell'Ottocento*, p.313.
9. G. Marchese, *Capuana poeta della vita*, p.105.
10. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p.112.
11. 'Luigi Capuana', in *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, III, 108.
12. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p.11.
13. All page references, given henceforward in the text, are to a reprint of the first edition of 1907 (1932).
14. I owe my viewing of the manuscript to the late Corrado Di Blasi, founder of the Biblioteca 'Luigi Capuana' of Mineo which houses his extensive private collection of Capuana documents (none of which are normally accessible to the public).
15. *Verga, De Roberto, Capuana*, pp.179-80 (14 February 1895).
16. See *Flegrea*, 20 April, 20 May, 20 June, 5 September, 5 October 1900.
17. *Capuana poeta della vita*, p.143.
18. *Capuana e il naturalismo* p.249.
19. L. Sportelli, *Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p. 57 (8 February 1907).
20. The letter appears in a special number dedicated to Capuana of *Aprutium*, 12 (December 1915).
21. See A. Barbina, *Capuana inedito*, pp.33, 35-7.
22. *Luigi Capuana*, p.256.
23. *Alla ricerca della personalità: seconda serie*, p.17-19.
24. *Le Vergini delle rocce*, in *Prose di romanzi*, II, 405.
25. p.398.
26. *Capuana poeta della vita*, p.141.
27. See Marziano Guglielminetti, *Struttura e sintassi nel romanzo del primo Novecento*, p.43.
28. L. Sportelli, *Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p.68 (27 June 1914).
29. G. Herczeg, *Lo stile indiretto libero in italiano*, p.14.
30. See 'Capuana critico', pp.47-54; republished as an introduction to an anthology of Capuana's criticism, *Scritti critici*, pp.9-21.
31. 'Di un carattere della più recente letteratura italiana', in *Letteratura della nuova Italia*, IV, 186.
32. See Giorgio Luti, 'Introduzione', *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp.xiii-xiv. All page references, henceforward included in the text, are to this reprint of the work, edited by Luti.
33. *Cronache letterarie*, p.205.
34. *Cronache letterarie*, p.130.
35. *Cronache letterarie*, p.209.
36. 'Letteratura femminile', *Nuova Antologia*, January 1907, pp.103-21 (p.113).
37. See 'Arte morbosa', *Tribuna illustrata*, 4 (1890), 53.
38. *Cronache letterarie*, p. 71.
39. See *Mondo occulto*, p. 44.
40. L. Sportelli, *Capuana a G.A. Cesareo*, p. 67 (27 June 1914).

Notes to Chapter IV, continued

41. Capuana is quoting the Verga-Ojetti interview from memory. (Compare *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p.121.)
42. *Cronache letterarie*, p.242. Compare the satire on the *decadentisti*, particularly their fondness for adjective groups and lexical rarities, in the story 'L'aggettivo' from *Voluttà di creare*.
43. *Cronache letterarie*, pp.154-5, 241, 251.
44. *Cronache letterarie*, p.253.
45. 'Il nuovo romanzo di Giovanni Verga', *Illustrazione italiana*, 30 September 1906.
46. 'Le Roman' (Preface to *Pierre et Jean*), in *Romans*, p.837.
47. *Là-Bas*, p.6.
48. See 'Le faux naturalisme' and 'À propos de Pot-Bouille', in *Le Roman naturaliste* (pp. 323-46, 347-70).
49. 'Le Roman de l'avenir', in *Essais sur la littérature contemporaine*, pp.181-207 (p.189).
50. 'Prefazione', *Teatro dialettale siciliano*, I, xii.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. G. Carsaniga, 'Realism in Italy', in *The Age of Realism*, pp.323-55 (p.346).
2. Carlo A. Madrignani, *Capuana e il naturalismo*, p.249; and *'Giacinta' ed altri racconti*, edited and introduced by Geno Pampaloni, p.20.
3. 'I nuovi saggi di Paolo Bourget', *Nuova Antologia*, February 1889, pp.506-20 (p.508); republished in *Nuovi saggi di letterature straniere* (see p.95).
4. See *Verga, De Roberto, Capuana*, p.122 (14 September 1890).
5. See *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, pp. 118, 119.
6. See *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, pp. 235-6.
7. See *Lettere alla assente*, p.87.
8. See *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p.237 (Capuana) and p.279 (Serao).
9. 'Il neo-idealismo', in *Saggi, poesie, scritti varii*, pp.913-21 (p.916).
10. 'Il teatro di Verga', *Marzocco*, 13 December 1896. The article gave rise to an extended debate between Ojetti and Capuana (whose first response to it was published in *Roma di Roma*, 16 December 1896, and reproduced in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*) which was concluded in favour of Capuana by E. Corradini, editor of *Il Marzocco* (see 'Intorno a una polemica letteraria', *Marzocco*, 3 January 1897).
11. See *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p.72.
12. 'Sicilia verista e Sicilia vera', *Don Chisciotte* (Rome), 7 January 1894; reproduced in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* (see pp.199, 200, 201).
13. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp.202, 204.
14. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p.200.
15. *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp.205, 114.
16. 'Lasciamoli dire! . . .', *La Giostra*, 2 (September 1903).
17. *Cronache letterarie*, p.xi.
18. It is nevertheless difficult to share Walter Mauro's view of Capuana as 'schierato [. . .] su posizioni socialistiche e spesso anti-interventistiche e neutraliste'. (See *Antologia dagli scritti critici*. p.106.)
19. A. Navarria, 'La prima stampa del *Marchese di Roccaverdina*'.
20. See L. and V. Perroni, 'Storia dei *Malavoglia*', pp.224,245,246 (3 June, 4 July 1881).
21. *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p.235.
22. *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, third edition of reprint of 1960 (1964), p.108. All page references, henceforward given in the text, are to this edition of 1964.
23. Quoted by P. Vetro, *Luigi Capuana*, pp.49-50. The first-hand information Vetro includes in his history of Capuana's long affair (see *Luigi Capuana*, pp.37-54) provides a fascinating background to the fictional relationship. One may single out as of particular interest Beppa's enduring gratitude ('me ne ha parlato con grande trasporto, magnificando la sua bontà eccezionale', writes Vetro of Beppa (p.39)); her statement that 'non gli dava mai del tu; per lei era sempre il suo padrone di una volta' (p.41); and Capuana's rejection of the possibility of marriage with Beppa, confessed in a letter to his close friend Corrado Guzzanti ('il mio amore per essa non ha mai rotto quei confini, quei limiti che la nostra reciproca condizione ha posto fra noi' (p.43)).
24. *'La Medianità'*, *Marzocco, 24 March 1901.*
25. See *Cardello e Ricordi d'infanzia*, p.140; and P.Vetro, *Luigi Capuana*, p.10.

Notes to Chapter V, continued

26. *Il Bucato in famiglia*, p. 20.
27. 'L'agricoltura in Sicilia', *Don Chisciotte* (Catania), 30 (September 1881).
28. Compare the opening of a short story of this period, 'Il Barone di Fontane Asciute': 'Nell'anticamera, mezza dozzina di seggiole e un lumino, con tubo affumicato e riflessore di latta, alla parete. Nello studio, due scaffali zeppi di scritture e di memorie legali, tre seggiole compagne a quelle dell'anticamera e una a braccioli; un tavolino d'abete, tinto a uso mogano, ingombro di carte [. . .]'. (See *Le Nuove 'Paesane'*, p.1.)
29. The italics in these and following passages from the novel are mine.
30. See Marziano Guglielminetti, *Struttura e sintassi del romanzo italiano del primo Novecento*, p.71.
31. *Cronache letterarie*, pp.xxxi, xxxii.
32. See *Racconti*, edited by E. Ghidetti, II, 320.
33. E. Corradini, for instance, wrote that the Marchese's madness 'ha tutto l'aspetto di una catastrofe letteraria. Il carattere, i precedenti dell'uomo rude, solido, sano, chiuso a qualunque sentimento pur di comune umanità, come il rimorso, non giustificano, o almeno non spiegano abbastanza questa pazzia'. (See *'Il Marchese di Roccaverdina'*, *Marzocco*, 16 June 1901.)
34. Ferdinando Giannessi, *'Il Marchese di Roccaverdina'*, p. 551.
35. 'Lettera autobiografica', in *Saggi, poesie, scritti varii*, pp.1285-8 (p.1286).
36. See *Racconti*, edited by E. Ghidetti, II, 326.
37. 'Appunti', in *Saggi, poesie, scritti varii*, pp.1247-52 (p.1250).
38. Arcangelo Leone de Castris, *Storia di Pirandello*, pp. 105, 107; and Marziano Guglielminetti, *Struttura e sintassi del romanzo del noveccento*, pp. 67-120 (see pp. 7102, 75-6, 80-82, etc.).

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. 'Prefazione', *Coscienze*, p.x.
2. *Istinti e peccati*, p.25.
3. See 'La perizia di Luigi Capuana', in *I processi al Futurismo per oltraggio al pudore*, pp.13-20.
4. Several such postcards addressed in 1905 and 1906 to G.E. Nuccio, the writer for children, were kindly shown me, together with other unpublished letters from Capuana and his wife, by Signora Tilda Pecorella, Nuccio's daughter.
5. See 'La scimmia del Professor Schitz', *Voluttà di creare*, in *Racconti*, edited by Enrico Ghidetti, III, 268.
6. 'Prefazione', *Coscienze*, p.xii.
7. See *Per l'arte*, pp.173-4.
8. 'Umorismo nostrano', *Rassegna internazionale*, 3 (June 1900), pp.120-25 (pp.122-3). Also containing extensive commentary on the theme are 'Roberto Bracco novelliere', *Nuova Antologia*, November (1909), pp.48-56 and 'Novellistica d'oggi', *Nuova Antologia*, April (1912), pp.434-50.
9. 'Profili letterari: Luigi Pirandello', *L'Ora* (Palermo), 215 (1901).
10. 'Nota introduttiva' to *Il decameronicino*, in *Racconti*, II, 259.
11. 'Nota introduttiva' to *Voluttà di creare*, in *Racconti*, III, 239.
12. 'Introduzione', *Racconti*, I, li.
13. For a religious interpretation of *Profumo*, see Paola Predicatori Azzolini, 'Carlo A. Madrignani: *Capuana e il naturalismo*', p.133; of *Rassegnazione*, see Gianni Oliva, 'Luigi Capuana negli studi di un quindicennio (1960-1975)', p.39.
14. For documents on Capuana's faith, see Corrado di Blasi, *Capuana originale e segreto*, pp.283-9.
15. *Racconti*, III, 221, 216.
16. 'La scimmia del Professor Schitz', *Voluttà di creare*, in *Racconti*, III, 267.
17. Capuana first mentions these scientists in 'La evocatrice' from *Delitto ideale* (reproduced as 'La maga' in *Voluttà di creare*). See *Racconti*, II, 427-9. The naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) worked in collaboration with Darwin, publishing his *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* in 1870, but later diverged from him in seeing man as not exclusively produced by natural selection. He wrote several works on psychic themes, notably *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural* (1866), subtitled 'Indicating the desirableness of an experimental enquiry by men of science into the alleged powers of

Notes to Conclusion, continued

clairvoyants and mediums', and *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875). Sir William Crookes, F.R.S., a chemist and discoverer of thallium, in *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874) recorded the extraordinary results of four years experimentation with noted mediums.

18. *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, p.81.
19. *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism*, p.43.
20. *'La Medianità', Marzocco*, 24 March 1901.
21. *Capuana e il naturalismo*, pp.248, 291.
22. *La Scienza della letteratura*, pp.10, 14, 8.
23. *Spiritismo?*, pp.31-2, 33-6.
24. 'Al lettore', *Mondo occulto*, pp.i-xii.
25. *Giacinta*, p.174.
26. 'Prefazione', *Coscienze*, pp.xi-xii.
27. 'Introduzione', *Luigi Capuana: Verga e D'Annunzio*, p.48.

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INDEX