

V E R I S M O
F R O M L I T E R A T U R E T O O P E R A

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The present study is mainly concerned with a comparative analysis of the libretti and the literary sources of some Italian operas composed between 1890 and 1900, that is in the decade commonly identified as 'veristic', opened by Cavalleria Rusticana and closed by Tosca. It also attempts a reassessment of the connections between literary verismo and the musical theatre of the late nineteenth century in Italy.

The controversial evaluation of some 'veristic' operas has often led to wrong assumptions concerning the characteristics of literary verismo. While the positive contributions of the movement to the musical theatre have, on the whole, been overlooked, major shortcomings - such as excess and sensationalism - noticeable in operas of the 1890s, have been blamed on veristic literature. The essential features of literary verismo could not, and did not, pass into any operatic adaptation. A comparative analysis of the source and the libretto of Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana shows the limited extent to which Verga's innovative conception was preserved in the musical transposition.

The major figures of Italian literary verismo, Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana, happened to be personally involved in the adaptation of some works of their own for the musical theatre, namely La Lupa and Il Mistero by the former, Malia by the latter. The outcome of the experiment was altogether disappointing, partly because Verga and Capuana were not able, nor indeed willing, to challenge the established conventions of a versified operatic text, partly for the modest level of the composers who set their libretti (P. Tascia, D. Monleone, F.P. Frontini).

The prevailingly literary approach chosen in this study accounts for the exclusion of Leoncavallo's Pagliacci from a detailed textual analysis, though the opera is referred to in Chapter 1. Its libretto was written by the composer himself on the basis of recollections from his childhood. On the other hand, the inclusion of a totally neglected opera, Giordano's Mala Vita, is justified by the literary source of the libretto (a play by Salvatore Di Giacomo).

The analysis of a libretto would not be exhaustive if it did not take into account the musical treatment of the text. This has not been neglected in the examination of the operas selected for the present study. Musical illustrations from the vocal scores have been included along with excerpts from the literary sources and the libretti.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study is mainly concerned with a comparative analysis of the libretti and the literary sources of some Italian operas composed between 1890 and 1900, that is in the decade commonly identified as 'veristic', opened by Cavalleria Rusticana and closed by Tosca. It also attempts a reassessment of the connections between literary verismo and the musical theatre of the late nineteenth century in Italy.

The controversial evaluation of some operas, labelled as 'veristic', has often led to wrong assumptions concerning the characteristics of literary verismo. While the positive contributions of the movement to the musical theatre have, on the whole, been overlooked, major shortcomings - such as excess and sensationalism - noticeable in second-rate operas of the 1890s, have been blamed on veristic literature. The essential features of literary verismo could not, and did not, pass into any operatic adaptation of the 1890s. A comparative analysis of the source and the libretto of Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana shows the limited extent to which Verga's innovative conception was preserved in the musical transposition.

The major figures of Italian literary verismo, Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana, happened to be personally involved in the adaptation of some works of their own for the musical theatre, namely La Lupa and Il Mistero by the former, Malia by the latter. The outcome of the experiment was altogether disappointing, partly because Verga and Capuana were not able, nor indeed willing, to challenge the established conventions of a versified operatic text, partly because of the modest level of the composers who set their libretti (P. Tasca, D. Monleone, F.P. Frontini).

The prevailingly literary approach chosen in this study accounts for the exclusion of Ruggero Leoncavallo's Pagliacci from a detailed textual analysis, though the opera is often referred to in Chapter 1. Usually paired with Cavalleria Rusticana as the best-known operas of the 'veristic' trend, Pagliacci has a libretto written by the composer himself and based on recollections from his childhood. If a case were to be made of 'verismo from opera to literature', the libretto of Pagliacci should be classified as a sensational feuilleton with literary

pretensions (the prologue with a statement of the author's own aesthetics of verismo; the old device of the play within the play).

On the other hand, the inclusion of a totally neglected veristic opera, Umberto Giordano's Mala Vita, is justified by the literary source of the libretto (a play by Salvatore Di Giacomo) and the interesting comparison it makes with Cavalleria Rusticana as regards the faithfulness to the original text and the impact the opera had on contemporary audiences.

Some guidelines have been followed in setting the limits and objectives of this study.

The analysis of a libretto would not be exhaustive and critically reliable if it did not take into account the musical treatment of the text which is not only relevant for a comprehensive assessment of an opera but also instrumental in a comparative study of the literary sources of a libretto. The ultimate classification of an opera is actually a problem of musical dramaturgy in which the literary connections of the libretto are of secondary importance.

Linguistic registers, versification, dramatic shape, number and casting of vocal roles, function and frequency of choral sections, are all elements which first materialize in a literary text, the libretto; but the aesthetic and formal criteria determining their best arrangement belong to the conventions of the musical theatre. In the choice of subjects, different non-literary factors interfere: cultural trends, tastes and education of the public, the publisher's influence, sheer expediency.

The practical, business-like approach of the composers of the Young Italian School in the choice of their libretti is a sign of the times. Verdi claimed that a composer should look askance when writing an opera: the reasons of art and the demands of the public were to be equally considered. Puccini, more cynically, believed that: 'Il faut frapper le public'. Verdi lived and worked through the Risorgimento. Whatever the subjects of his operas, we detect a solid ethical code underlying his dramaturgy. A sneering court-jester could say to his daughter in the privacy of their home: 'Culto, famiglia, patria, / Il mio universo è in te!' Faith in God, the family and the fatherland pertained to Rigoletto no less than to Rolando about to fight Barbarossa at Legnano and entrusting his wife with the education of their child: 'Digli ch'è sangue mio, / ... / E dopo Dio la Patria/

Gli apprendi a rispettar.'

The composers of the Young Italian School grew up in the aftermath of the Risorgimento. They reached their artistic maturity in the years of the fin-de-siècle crisis of ethical and aesthetic values. In the new social reality which emerged from the political unification, the function of the nineteenth-century 'melodramma' as a unifying cultural and ideological medium had come to an end.

In literature, the iconoclastic and regenerating experience of the 'Scapigliatura' was followed by a number of contrasting tendencies providing cultural incentives to young composers. The occasional adherence to one or other of the trends - verismo, decadentism, symbolism, exoticism - which were rife in the last quarter of the century, did not imply a commitment to their aesthetics. As for the musical influences, they ranged from Wagner to the French grand-opéra, from Verdi to Massenet and down to the drawing-room song style. Such a wide spectrum of cultural and musical references had an impact on the production of the Young Italian School in variable and often contradictory ways.

Defining a 'verismo' composer or a 'veristic' opera is therefore no easy matter and may lead to arbitrary simplifications. An examination of the connections between literary verismo and late nineteenth-century Italian opera seems to be a step in the right direction.

Chapter 1

LITERARY VERISMO AND THE YOUNG ITALIAN SCHOOL

1. Towards a definition of verismo in late nineteenth-century Italian opera

The expression 'operatic verismo' originated from the association of a fundamental work of the short-lived veristic theatre - Verga's "Scene popolari siciliane" Cavalleria Rusticana (1884) - with Mascagni's 'melodramma' based on it. The year 1890, when the opera was first performed in Rome, was assumed as the official date of birth of a new tendency of which Cavalleria was supposed to be the archetype. In the 1890s there was a limited production of operas based on veristic subjects, such as Pagliacci and Mala Vita, and a large number of mediocre imitations. In the course of the decade, however, literary verismo ceased to be a source of subjects for any major opera. So, when works such as La Wally, La Bohème, Andrea Chénier, Iris, Tosca, had to be accounted for, the problem of defining a new compositional style on purely musico-dramatic grounds became crucial.

Alternative denominations to the misleading 'operatic verismo' were suggested: 'naturalistic', 'late-romantic', 'postverdian', 'Puccinian', 'of the Young School'. The last one proved the most comprehensive and the least compromising as it is mainly based on a historical criterion. The term 'School' should be understood as a conventional grouping of composers with different trainings and cultural backgrounds and, indeed, with distinct artistic personalities: Puccini, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Giordano, Franchetti, Cilea and others. They were all born round the decade 1855-65 and, in their formative years, were exposed to the same sort of national and foreign influences (Ponchielli, Verdi, Gounod, Massenet, Bizet, Wagner) which they assimilated in various degrees. A special case has been made for Puccini in terms of outstanding achievements and cultural inclinations, but his stylistic references are not all that far apart from the common ground of the group.

The established practice of categorizing the operas of the Young Italian School according to whether the libretti are derived

from veristic works or contain similar thematic, structural and linguistic elements, has led to laborious and largely unsatisfactory groupings. The term first used for Cavalleria has become so closely linked with the Young School that some critics are still at pains to assess variable degrees of 'verismo' in different composers or in different operas by the same composer. It is hardly necessary to stress that this exercise is a frustrating pursuit as it attempts to connect the evolution of new musical and vocal features in opera with a literary movement which, in the 1890s, had exhausted its innovative drive and was losing ground to other contrasting tendencies such as D'Annunzio's decadentism and Fogazzaro's spiritualism. Verga himself, in turning his short story "La Lupa" into a libretto for Puccini, in the years 1891-94, moved away from the verismo of the 1880s and created a hybrid which eventually Puccini refused to set. As Egon Voss states in his essay "Verismo in der Oper", 'Verismo composers were not immediately interested in veristic literature.'¹ It is ironical that the composers of the Young Italian School should be labelled with one term - verismo - which they all rejected by either refusing to set libretti derived from veristic works or pronouncing the uncongenial nature of that movement to their own art. Even when applied to Mascagni's Cavalleria, the definition 'operatic verismo' is not entirely satisfactory for two reasons: firstly, it overstates the impact of Verga's play on the musico-dramatic characteristics of the opera which was, on the whole, less innovative than the "Scene popolari siciliane"; secondly, it does not accommodate the notion that a realistic tendency pre-existed to Mascagni's Cavalleria and stemmed from the erosion of the ideological and musico-dramatic structures of the romantic 'melodramma', irrespectively of the veristic movement in literature. However, the real problem is not so much one of denominations as of contents and historical perspectives.

Although literary verismo is best represented by Southern Italians and Sicilians (Verga and Capuana), it was in Milan that the movement originated in the 1870s. It was partly the positive outcome of the non-conformist, subversive 'Scapigliatura' movement which involved painters, musicians, poets, critics and had its centre in Milan. The term 'Scapigliatura' was introduced as a translation of the French 'bohème' by Cletto Arrighi in his novel La Scapigliatura e il 6 feb-

braio (Milano, 1862), a sort of manifesto of the movement, illustrating the irregular, adventurous life of young 'scapigliati'. Leading members of the movement were the young poets Arrigo Boito and Emilio Praga, the painter Tranquillo Cremona, the musician Franco Faccio, the critic Felice Cameroni. Ponchielli and the young Catalani were also close to the 'Scapigliatura' circle.² A Piedmontese section was represented by the playwright Giuseppe Giacosa, the poet Giovanni Camerana and the novelist Iginio Ugo Tarchetti.

The aspiration to free themselves from cultural provincialism, an urgency to move beyond the extenuated romanticism of much second-rate literary production led the 'scapigliati' to look outside Italy towards France, in particular, and Germany. French naturalism and Zola became major cultural references and authoritative models introduced by the critical writings of Cameroni and made widely accessible by the open-minded publishing activity of Emilio Treves. Verga's arrival in Milan, in 1872, came at the right moment in his literary career. He made friends with Boito, Giacosa and Cameroni. In the stimulating environment of the most progressive cultural centre in Italy, Verga tried out his new style and began to deal with a different subject matter from his early novels set in fashionable high-society circles. His *verismo* was a rediscovery of the popular, ethical world of his rural Sicily which he contemplated and described with the detachment and nostalgia of a transplanted intellectual.

Restraint may be singled out as the dominant feature of Verga's stories and novels of the 1880s: restraint of passion and emotion in the portrayal of Sicilian peasants and fishermen; formal restraint in the elaboration of a terse, self-effacing, sapid prose style which almost lets the story tell itself and the characters speak their minds in their own way. Sensationalism and excess are banished on principle. Violence may occur in the form of murder and is set within the natural ethics of the community which endorses it. A good example is the short story "Cavalleria Rusticana" where Alfio has to challenge Turiddu in public and then kill him in a rustic duel. In the next story, "La Lupa", Nanni kills Pina and liberates the whole village from a sort of enchantress. But it is more often the case that violence manifests itself in the form of natural calamities, acts of God thwarting all efforts to improve material wellbeing and endured in a dignified way by the 'defeated'. In this fatal struggle with the elements of a hos-

tile nature and with the hardships of an unrewarding life, Verga's peasants and fishermen acquire a universal, epic dimension. Such is the moral world of I Malavoglia, Verga's masterpiece. A deep pessimism inspires the novelist's vision of this apparently inescapable condition. His conservatism prevents him from envisaging any possible or desirable change. His austere, unmitigated presentation fixes the tragic predicament of his people in a mythical stillness hardly stirred by the pounding pace of history.

As for verismo in the Italian theatre, most plays have a derivative character in the sense that Verga, Capuana, Di Giacomo usually dramatized their own narrative works. Such is the case of Cavalleria Rusticana, La Lupa and Di Giacomo's Malavita. That implied certain compromises with the original works, which were not simply due to the different artistic medium. In the case of Verga's first play, the Sicilian world being displayed for the first time to unfamiliar audiences had to be made intelligible and dramatically relevant; the relationship between the individuals and their own society had to be adequately focused if certain customs or patterns of behaviour were to be fully and correctly appreciated. Hence the denomination "Scene popolari" accompanying the title of Verga's Cavalleria and of most veristic plays. The adjective indicated the low-class environment and the choral structure of the scenes. The psychological and dramatic identity of the main characters was focused through the interaction between the individual and the social group (neighbours, fellow workmen).

This technique entailed: firstly, extreme liveliness and pithiness in the dialogues; secondly, a reduction of the plot to one basic situation containing in itself a logical dénouement; thirdly, a fast-moving action leaving no space for melodramatic claptrap but relying on unambiguous, striking signals to mark the progress towards the catastrophe (e.g. Santuzza's curse to Turridu: 'Mala Pasqua a te!', in Cavalleria).

The combination of these elements never reached a fully satisfactory balance in any veristic play, with the exception of Cavalleria Rusticana (though some reservations should be made about Santuzza's long speech in Scene 1 and a certain slackening in Scene 6). In minor authors, like Di Giacomo, the environment tended to outweigh the individuals. The overabundance of spectacular and folkloric details turned verismo into picturesqueness, dramatic build-up into a series of sensational jolts, three-dimensional characters into colourful vignet-

tes. It is also because of the emphasis on the environmental components in a large number of "Scene popolari" that the veristic theatre, more than the narrative works, evidences the characteristic regionalism of Italian verismo. The use of regional dialects instead of Italian further contributed to the marked localization of most veristic plays: e.g., Capuana's three volumes of Teatro dialettale siciliano, Di Giacomo's Neapolitan plays.

Although the Italian veristic theatre did not match up to the artistic achievements of the narrative works, it had a strong, positive effect on the stale national repertory of romantic and bourgeois subjects. The language also benefited from the new veristic models of a supple, full-blooded, straight medium. Lastly, a new acting style evolved in the theatre in order to render the unsophisticated low-class characters of the "Scene popolari". Away from the grand, heroic, high-flown postures, veristic interpreters tried to be simple, down-to-earth, natural. The greatest of them all was Eleonora Duse (1858-1924), the first Santuzza. Restraint and naturalness distinguished her approach to the interpretation of the Sicilian peasant character. Reporting on the successful Turin première of Verga's play (Corriere della Sera, 15-16 January 1884), Eugenio Torelli-Viollier wrote about Duse's acting:

Nella parte della fanciulla sedotta e che denuncia l'amante, restando sempre sobria, frenata, semplice, senza mai un grido, senza mai un gesto violento, produsse effetti di alta commozione e fece fremere e piangere gli spettatori.

Duse's new acting technique largely accounts for the veristic interpretative approach of great sopranos such as Gemma Bellincioni (1864-1950) and the French Emma Calvé (1858-1942). In her book of memoirs, Sous tous les ciels j'ai chanté (Paris, 1940), Calvé recalled the deep emotion she felt the first time she saw E. Duse act in La dame aux camélias in Florence: 'Quelle révélation! Voilà l'art auquel il faut aspirer.... Elle semble appartenir à une humanité plus vibrante que la nôtre. Quels accents! Quelle émotion communicative!' (p. 41). Calvé also saw Duse act in Verga's Cavalleria in Bologna.

Spontaneity, truthfulness, emotional restraint, were qualities Verga tried hard to retain in his plays. Cavalleria Rusticana was the closest to his great prose works of the early 1880s and retained those qualities in the highest degree.

In the 1890s, the operatic transposition of verismo could only be experimented at the artistically inferior level of the "Scene popolari". And it so happened that the transition from the prose theatre to the musical one resulted in a further impoverishment of the aesthetic premises of verismo. Verga's formal restraint and impersonality were incompatible with the essentially subjective nature of the vocal expression in the music drama. Moreover, the indispensable compression of the plot, the reduction or elimination of the minor roles providing the social background, or their aggregation to an operatic Chorus, increased the risk of lapsing into picturesqueness and sensationalism. The operatic transposition of Verga's Cavalleria, for a start, effaced the non-melodramatic, veristic peculiarities of the play and emphasized the easily apprehensible universal feelings of love, jealousy and revenge, capitalizing on the novelty of the low-class 'exotic' environment.

The casual encounter with literary verismo would be of no consequence in Mascagni's subsequent search for feasible texts. Four weeks before the première of Cavalleria Rusticana in Rome, the composer was already pressing his Livornese friends, G. Targioni Tozzetti and G. Menasci, for a new libretto. His letter to them, dated 19 April 1890, gives us an idea of his practical, uncommitted approach. Anything would do, provided it had a good dramatic potential:

Il genere? A piacere. Qualunque genere per me è buono, purchè ci sia verità, passione e soprattutto che ci sia il dramma, il dramma forte.³

Mascagni's production in the years following Cavalleria Rusticana proves his eclecticism in the choice of libretti. His operas include the light idyll L'Amico Fritz (1891) and the romantic tragedy Guglielmo Ratcliff (1895), the long-cherished project of his youthful years; the ludicrous 'dramma marinaresco' Silvano (1895), a carbon copy of Cavalleria arranged by the faithful Targioni Tozzetti, and the exotic Iris (1898), the first of Luigi Illica's three libretti for Mascagni. In 1901 there follows a revival of the commedia dell'arte tradition with Le Maschere (libretto by Illica). The opera was presented simultaneously in six Italian theatres (Genoa, Milan, Turin, Venice, Verona, Rome) thanks to an unprecedented publicity operation mounted by Edoardo Sonzogno. The third libretto by Illica is the 'leg-

genda drammatica' Isabeau (1911), an adaptation of the Lady Godiva legend. In 1910, during the composition of the opera, Mascagni was interviewed by Arnaldo Fraccaroli for the Corriere della Sera ("Sotto-voce", 18 October 1910). Being asked whether he had fallen back on romanticism, Mascagni made one of his memorable statements on the aesthetics of music:

Completamente; e pure ho cominciato col verismo! Ma il verismo ammazza la musica. E' nella poesia, nel romanticismo, che la ispirazione può trovare le ali.

Verismo kills music! If that is the case, one might wonder how much verismo managed to seep into the operatic Cavalleria; presumably not a lethal dose. With Isabeau, however, it was not romanticism but decadentism Mascagni subscribed to. It was a useful apprenticeship which prepared him for the gratifying collaboration with the very master and living symbol of the movement, Gabriele D'Annunzio, finally reconciled to the composer twenty years after an abusive article in Il Mattino (2-3 September 1892) had dubbed Mascagni "Il capobanda" (see below, Ch. 2, p. 66).

The 'tragedia lirica in quattro atti' Parisina (La Scala, 15 December 1913) was expressly written by D'Annunzio as a libretto for the composer. In one thousand four hundred ornate and musical lines the poet dramatized the tragic story of Ugo d'Este's love for his beautiful young stepmother Parisina Malatesta, and their execution at the command of Ugo's father, Niccolò III, in fifteenth-century Ferrara. Although Mascagni later cut the opera to three acts, it faded out like most of his production. Yet, in an essay on D'Annunzio's libretti, Guido Maria Gatti acknowledged Mascagni's serious endeavour to turn those long-winded verses into decent music.⁴

Such a wide range of subjects and styles shows how every literary movement or fashion which evolved in Italy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century left its mark on the libretti set by Mascagni. The same could be said, to a certain extent, for the production of other composers of the Young School. The Orientalism of Iris anticipates Madama Butterfly (1904); Il piccolo Marat, written by Mascagni as late as 1921, is in line with Giordano's Andrea Chénier (1896): both are French Revolution subjects treated in a 'veristic' style.

Unfortunately for Mascagni, only a few excerpts from these ope-

ras have escaped oblivion and are still included in recordings and concert programmes: e.g., the "Cherry Duet" and "Intermezzo" from L'Amico Fritz, Guglielmo Ratcliff's "Dream", the "Hymn to the Sun" from Iris. An attempt at 'editing' Mascagni's operas, forming ideal suites with its best parts, was first made by Giannotto Bastianelli in his Pietro Mascagni (Napoli, 1910), perhaps the earliest comprehensive study on the 'plebeian musician', as the critic called him. In more recent times, John W. Klein devoted an essay to "Pietro Mascagni: an Enigmatic Figure" (Musical Opinion, February 1937) in which he defended those lesser known operas and stated that: 'There can be little doubt that Mascagni's finest music is not to be found in the early one-act opera that made him world famous and that he himself regards as sentimental and distinctly inferior to some of his later operas'.

The major flaw in Mascagni's forgotten operas is an inadequately sustained inspiration throughout a three- or four-act dramatic structure which results in fatal lapses of tension and in stylistic patchiness. With all its musical 'primitivism', Cavalleria Rusticana has a fast pace which effectively leads to the veristic shout of the catastrophe and secures stylistic consistency.

When the whole of Mascagni's production is considered - fifteen operas from Cavalleria to Nerone (1935) - it becomes clear how misrepresented he is under the label of 'verismo' composer. That early and unrenewed choice cannot be assumed as a permanent aesthetic position as regards both the libretti and the musico-dramatic features of the composer's works.

Literary verismo recorded its highest achievements in the early 1880s, that is in the years which witnessed the renewal of Verdi's activity after the long pause following Aida (1871). Verga's first collection of veristic short stories Vita dei Campi appeared in Milan in the summer of 1880; his best novel, I Malavoglia, in 1881. In 1883 Verga turned one of those short stories into the successful play Cavalleria Rusticana (Turin, 14 January 1884). Towards the end of the decade, Verga published the second novel of the cycle of the 'Defeated', Mastro-don Gesualdo (1889) which coincided with the appearance of D'Annunzio's Il piacere. As for Verdi, in 1880 he planned the revision of Simon Boccanegra which was to bring together for the first time the ageing composer and the former 'scapigliato' Arrigo Boito. In the following years, they worked on Otello (La Scala, 5 February 1887).

There is a well-known letter by Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, dated 20 November 1880, with an interesting reference to the new veristic trend. Verdi is discussing the possible improvements to the second act of Boccanegra and, after mentioning the cabalettas of the old version, he makes sarcastic comments on the new fashions in harmony and orchestration and then launches into a digression on verismo:

Ah, il progresso, la scienza, il verismo...! Ahi, ah!
Verista finchè volete, ma...Shakespeare era un verista,
ma non lo sapeva. Era un verista d'ispirazione; noi si-
amo veristi per progetto, per calcolo. Allora tanto fa:
sistema per sistema, meglio ancora le cabalette. Il bel-
lo si è che, a furia di progresso, l'arte torna indietro.
L'arte che manca di spontaneità, di naturalezza e di sem-
plicità, non è più arte.⁵

In Charles Osborne's translation, 'verismo' is rendered with 'realism' which is not quite the same because Verdi must have had in mind the new literary trend and Verga, in particular, who was by then a well-known figure in the cultural circles of Milan.⁶ In his characteristic way, Verdi took a conservative stance whenever something seemed to challenge tradition or orthodoxy save that the next moment he would be pursuing innovation in his own way. For Verdi, 'vero' meant artistic truth, and he made that quite clear in an earlier letter to Clara Maffei about the subtle distinction between 'copying the truth' and 'inventing the truth'. Once more, his ideas on 'truth' were put forward in conjunction with expressions of admiration for Shakespeare, the 'Father'.⁷

The evolution of late nineteenth-century Italian opera is marked, among other events, by Verdi's realistic approach to Shakespeare tinged with 'Scapigliatura' elements contributed by Boito (the morbid and the evil in Otello, the grotesque in Falstaff). The musico-dramatic and vocal novelties of Otello were to become one of the stylistic references of the Young School.

The heyday of 'operatic verismo' - 1890-92, i.e. the period of Cavalleria, Mala Vita and Pagliacci - comes half way between the 'dramma lirico' Otello (1887) and the 'commedia lirica' Falstaff (1893). In the search for musical precedents, the widespread belief that the realistic character of an opera depends on the libretto rather than on its musical treatment, has led many writers to overlook the 'Shakespearean' Verdi in favour of the earlier Traviata (1853), often seen as a pre-

'veristic' work on the grounds of its contemporary subject and the risqué theme of the femme entretenue. René Leibowitz, for example, stated:

Il est clair que La traviata constitue, sinon le premier opéra veriste, du moins l'étape la plus radicale sur la voie qui devait y mener. Et si, de la sorte, le vérisme a contracté une dette ineffaçable envers la musique de Verdi, n'est-il pas étrange et paradoxal de voir, à un certain moment, cette musique condamnée si j'ose dire au nom de cette esthétique même?'⁸

In the rich repertoire of French derogatory comments on Italian 'operatic verismo', it is significant that Debussy's definition of it as 'l'usine du néant' should be coined in the context of an adverse review of La Traviata on its revival at the Opéra-Comique in 1903. Next to Verdi who had dared to use La Dame aux camélias, Puccini and Leoncavallo were blamed for having borrowed Murger's Scènes de la vie de Bohème. Both works, argued the fastidious Debussy, 'could certainly do without being tarted up in music.'⁹

The realism of the French source is certainly not enough to justify a 'veristic' reading of La Traviata. Verdi's musico-dramatic treatment of Dumas's play is consistently respectful of the formal structures of the romantic 'melodramma'. Some modern scholars have stressed this point.¹⁰ One of them, Giovanni Ugolini, in his essay "La traviata e i rapporti di Verdi con l'opera verista", has also pointed out similarities between the harmonic and vocal writing of Otello and the style of the Young School.¹¹

In a later contribution, "Umberto Giordano e il problema dell'opera verista", Ugolini discusses in detail the whole problem of defining a 'veristic' opera and concludes that it is a question of musical dramaturgy and vocal writing.¹² He also singles out the main characteristics of a 'veristic' style which could be taken as representative of the Young School and verifiable in most Italian operas composed in the late nineteenth century, whatever their subject matter. The characteristics can be summed up as follows:

- a) passionate tension alternating with sentimental languor;
- b) violent contrasts or extreme delicacy in the vocal line, the orchestra following and supporting;
- c) equal treatment of the various components of the operatic structure (recitative, solo pieces, ensembles, etc.);

- d) elimination of dramatic and vocal differentiation of parts in ensemble pieces;
- e) no bel canto coloratura.

These stylistic features should be considered within the evolution of new structures in late nineteenth-century Italian opera tending to dramatic continuity. That means: a) a gradual obliteration of set pieces, b) a flexibility of the duet form to accommodate musical discourse, c) a pervasive presence of the orchestra providing textural cohesion. In this respect, Otello and Falstaff are much more innovative than the modest products of the Young School, with the exceptions of Puccini's Manon Lescaut (1893) and La Bohème (1896). In the limited production of operas based on veristic subjects (Cavalleria Rusticana, Pagliacci, Mala Vita, and their imitations) the stylistic features mentioned above are emphasized by the small proportions (one or two acts) and the sensational events of the libretti.

In those fruitful years, another opera won success and critical esteem: Alfredo Catalani's La Wally (La Scala, 20 January 1892). The untimely death (1893) of the unfortunate Lucchese deprived the Young Italian School of a gifted musician who proceeded on his own artistic itinerary without heeding the noisy irruption of verismo on the operatic stage.¹³

In 1891, the music critic of the literary journal Nuova Antologia, Girolamo A. Biaggi, quoted Ricordi's Gazzetta Musicale for listing fifty-two new Italian operas premièred in 1890, each classified, according to the outcome, in one of four grades: 'buonissimo', 'buono', 'mediocre', 'cattivo'. Only two operas were entered under 'buonissimo', namely Catalani's Loreley and Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana. Biaggi commented with regret: 'Ma (vedi giuochi della fortuna!) a galoppo disteso la Cavalleria Rusticana ha già corsi i teatri di mezza Europa, e la povera Loreley, dagli applausi e dalle acclamazioni del teatro Regio di Torino, passò alla quiete dell'Archivio Ricordi e non si mosse più!'¹⁴ Mascagni could, at least, work on a valuable literary source which his imitators would not have. In the following years, the rise of 'operatic verismo' was marked by a progressive degeneration into excess, sensationalism, picturesqueness, starting with the one and only opera which has survived to our days, Leoncavallo's Pagliacci. A derogatory implication was attached to the expression and, in the process of time, it affected any consideration of the literary

movement in relation to the operas of the 1890s, the so-called 'veristic' decade.

Turning to the major figure of the Young Italian School, Giacomo Puccini, it must be emphasized that his contacts with literary verismo were totally unproductive. In the decade inaugurated by Mascagni's Cavalleria, two attempts were made to involve Puccini in the composition of veristic operas: one by Giulio Ricordi who wanted a Vergilian opera for his House to antagonize his rival Sonzogno, the owner of Cavalleria; the other by the Neapolitan playwright Roberto Bracco who was willing to adapt his veristic one-act play Don Pietro Caruso (1895). The first project actually led to a libretto derived from Verga's short story "La Lupa" but Puccini found it uncongenial and dropped it in favour of La Bohème. Bracco's play was a psychological study of contemporary Neapolitan life, set in a drab interior, with only three characters and no concessions to folklore or picturesqueness. It was certainly unsuitable for an operatic treatment in the fashionable 'veristic' style of the 1890s unless Puccini were to experiment with a Straussian conversation-piece technique. Don Pietro was refused after careful consideration, not so the idea of a possible collaboration with Bracco. In a letter to Carlo Clausetti, Ricordi's representative in Naples and middleman between Bracco and the composer, Puccini outlined his own requirements in terms which remind us of Mascagni's instructions to Targioni Tozzetti quoted above. Puccini wanted libretti containing sensation and drama:

(Torre del Lago, 10 November 1899)
...sensazioni forti e grandi, drammatiche, sensazionali, dove il sentimento si eleva e cozzandosi, urtandosi, produce attriti drammatici, quasi epici; insomma non desidero essere terra terra (non è questa una allusione nè censura ai lavori di Bracco). Mi esprimo male, ma tu mi avrai capito: "il faut frapper le public"! Ci vuole qualcosa di insolito, sempre, in teatro. Il pubblico ha sete di nuovo, ci vogliono trovate musicali, essenzialmente musicali.¹⁵

The subject matter of an opera did not have to be 'terra terra', that is to say simple, down-to-earth; we might say veristic. Puccini wanted dramatic tension and great passions; above all, something musically effective because, he continued in the letter, 'il teatro melodrammatico è ben altra cosa che il teatro di prosa'. The whole paragraph of the letter might be used to illustrate the characteristics of Tosca,

the opera which had just been finished by Puccini and was about to be premièred in Rome (Teatro Costanzi, 14 January 1900). Nothing in Tosca is 'terra terra'; it is sensational and full of dramatic confrontations; it has all the suitable ingredients to 'frapper le public'.

The case of Tosca exemplifies a false idea of verismo which has reflected negatively on the literary movement of that name. As late as 1985, in the Cambridge Opera Handbook on Tosca, Mosco Carner dedicated a chapter to "Naturalism in opera: verismo". After defining Puccini's opera as a 'milestone in the relatively short-lived history of verismo', he stated:

At the heart of verismo is excess - excess of passion and emotion leading to brutal murder and/or suicide; climax follows climax in quick succession, and no sooner is a mood established than it is destroyed by a contrasting mood.¹⁶

In that context, Carner meant by 'verismo' the musico-dramatic techniques of the Young Italian School, a denomination he accepted in the sense specified in the present study. As such, 'verismo' might be as good as any other label to identify a known product, and Carner would be in agreement with other scholars who adopted that term to identify an autonomous aesthetic trend in the musical theatre. But Carner also connected that meaning with the literary movement which he saw as partly springing from 'a certain tendency to realistic treatment, reflecting a trait in the national character.' He mentioned Verga, Capuana and, in retrospect, Boccaccio's Decameron and Dante's Inferno (Manzoni's realistic novel I promessi sposi was unaccountably missed out). At such a high level of generalization, a similar comparison could be tried for many other 'isms' (romanticism, symbolism, etc.) using the same works, especially in the case of a complex text like Dante's Inferno.

Leaving aside a discussion of realism as a general trend in literature, it must be pointed out that a misunderstanding of verismo and Verga's art, in particular, seems to underlie such a far-fetched evaluation. Formal and emotional restraint, not excess, has been singled out as the dominant feature of Verga's veristic works. Tosca might even be the 'shabby little shocker' of Joseph Kerman's catchy definition, but, if that is the case, the reasons have nothing to do with verismo. Puccini, Illica and Giacosa contrived a melodramatic

mechanism working at a 'veristic' pace and allowing free play to sentimental and decadent ingredients: Scarpia's sadism and sexual frenzy, Tosca's sensual and possessive nature. Giuseppe Giacosa, himself a playwright, was well aware of the modest artistic quality of the text he was handling for Puccini. He disliked the original French play and its shrewd manufacturer Victorien Sardou. In a letter to Ricordi written in 1896, he pointed out as the major fault of the play the contrivance of sensational facts with no space for lyrical expansion: 'Il guaio più grande sta in ciò, che la parte dirò così meccanica, cioè il congegno dei fatti, vi ha troppa prevalenza a scapito della poesia'.¹⁷ Nevertheless the final result of the laborious process of creation was an effective, musically poignant operatic thriller which has so far defied slashing criticism and snobbishness.

The musico-dramatic techniques and the vocal style of Tosca are certainly the ones practised by the Young Italian School, and the term 'veristic' may be applied to them in that sense. On the other hand, the decadent elements, the lack of social background, keep Tosca miles away from literary verismo and, to a large extent, also from the early veristic operas of the 1890s. Pagliacci, with all the sensation of the double murder on stage, respects the fundamental veristic principle of the interaction between environment and main characters. Tosca, instead, is still an opera with individual 'big' roles dominating the stage even in their absence. The compression, and sometimes the obliteration, of the historical and political references which lengthen Sardou's play is particularly noticeable in the character of the painter Cavaradossi. He is just a 'signor tenore', in Puccini's own words, indulging in vocal exploits like the 'Vittoria! Vittoria!' of Act II or his prophetic statement in Act I: 'La vita mi costasse, vi salverò!', hitting on the B natural above the stave. A generous aesthete rather than a committed 'volterriano', Cavaradossi dies gracefully, 'con scenica scienza', contemplating his dream of love. Rome is 'heard' in the 'veristic' introduction of Act III with the Shepherd's song and the Martin bells, but even the Eternal City is under the spell of the perverse Baron Scarpia as Tosca tells us after stabbing him to death ('E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma!'). The whole opera hinges on these two pervasive figures: the female protagonist, the male antagonist. All the rest, the escape of the political prisoner Angelotti, the news of Bonaparte's victory at the battle of Marengo, is instrumental in setting

the melodramatic clockwork in motion.

The preconception about sensationalism and excess as distinctive traits of verismo has led many writers to concentrate their investigation of musical realism on operas such as Tosca, often reaching opposite conclusions. In this particular case, the denigrators have tried hard to coin sensational abuse (Kerman); the supporters have overstated the innovatory character of the opera's undisputed 'verismo'. In his Cambridge Opera Handbook, Carner defined Tosca as 'the opera prophetic of the modern music-theatre' (p. 9).

Musical realism has an earlier Puccini opera as a quieter but suitable representative: La Bohème (1896). Mimì dies with a whimper, not with a bang like Tosca, and apparently the opera qualifies as 'pre-veristic'. In the Tosca Handbook, discussing the recurrence of artists as 'low-life' characters in veristic operas, Carner mentions La Bohème in these terms: 'Pre-veristic opera already shows this tendency, best seen in Puccini's La Bohème, which brings poor artists with their lovers of doubtful virtue on to the stage' (p. 9). Classifying as 'pre-veristic' an opera completed in 1895 seems to dispose of the notion of 1890 as the Anno Domini for 'operatic verismo', unless it is targeted on Puccini's own progress towards the 'verismo' of Tosca, which is just as questionable. La Bohème does not lead to Tosca but to the 'roman musical' Louise (1900) by Gustave Charpentier, in which the milieu becomes more important than the individual characters and the big city (Paris) is a real musical presence with all its variegated voices and noises.¹⁸

The affinity with opéra comique for its blend of pathos and humour and the sugar-laden sentimentalism make La Bohème a late-romantic opera with some of the youthful irreverence and exuberance of the Milanese 'Scapigliatura' which Puccini, Illica and Giacosa had personally experienced in their earlier years. The connection between the French 'bohémiens' and the Milanese 'scapigliati' had been stressed by Felice Cameroni in his preface to the Italian translation of Murger's Scènes de la vie de Bohème published by Sonzogno with the title La Bohème: scene della scapigliatura parigina (Milano, 1872). La Bohème is not, strictly speaking, a veristic opera either in the libretto or in its musical treatment. Yet, the careful illustration of a certain ambience (chilly winter in a big city), the delineation of a social background (poor artists and room-mates), the low profile of

the characters and the avoidance of the 'big role' logic, all point towards a new operatic conception. La Bohème moves away from the heroism and idealism of the romantic 'melodramma' no less than from the emphatic display of passionate feelings and violent gestures of the fashionable 'operatic verismo'. Puccini and his librettists introduced a narrative dimension within each of the four tableaux, and, in so doing, they broke the continuity of the dramatic build-up which was still used in traditional operas. The reduction of the plot to one basic situation (relationship Mimì/Rodolfo + poor health of Mimì), the lyricism of the daily routine, the poetry of small things (e.g., Mimì's pink bonnet), the conversation^{al} style, give the opera a realistic character, make those artists and girls true to life, the bohemian life in Paris, or, more likely, the bohemian life in Milan or Turin.

In conclusion, the advent of realism in the musical theatre is best understood as the development of new musico-dramatic structures and a new vocal style which marked a radical departure from the stylization of nineteenth-century Italian opera. The choice of subjects derived from contemporary literature, possibly dealing with low-life stories, does not in itself make one opera more realistic than another. Nor can an opera be identified as 'veristic' because it exhibits excess and sensationalism. Too often assumed as typifying verismo, such characteristics do, in fact, belong to a minor genre which originated from Mascagni's prototype and can conventionally be defined as 'operatic verismo'. This genre had little bearing on the evolution of late nineteenth-century Italian opera and slowly petered out in the early years of our century. Leoncavallo's Pagliacci is the only survivor of the numerous offspring of Cavalleria.

The influence of literary verismo - exercised through theatrical more than narrative works - manifested itself in the pithiness of dialogue, the more realistic language often enriched by vernacular interpolations, simple and fast-moving stage actions, a new relevance of the social background in dramatic characterization, emphasis on the importance of acting skills along with good singing in performance.

The term 'verismo' may well be used with reference to the new style of the Young Italian School - for operas based on realistic subjects or simply exhibiting realistic musico-dramatic features - provided no undue connection is implied with the literary movement of that name.

2. The offspring of Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana

In the early 1890s the sensation caused by Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana and its unequalled success started a fashion for veristic subjects with a strong regional characterization. Many operas were composed which had an ephemeral life and are today more a subject for sociological and statistical studies than for musical analysis. The customs and folkloric peculiarities of Italy's poorer regions - the South, Sicily and Sardinia - were eagerly exploited by mediocre composers and shrewd versifiers. The tendency to lapse into picturesque-ness and sensationalism, inherent in the veristic theatre, became an irreversible trend with those plebeian melodramas. This minor genre enjoyed a tremendous popularity not only in Italy but also abroad, particularly in Germany.¹⁹

In the absence of a literary source with the artistic qualities of Verga's Cavalleria, the libretti were quickly assembled with all sorts of meretricious ingredients: jealousy and contrasted love, joyful gatherings in village squares, rural surroundings or urban derelict areas, superstitions, curses and swear-words. Violent death was an obligatory device to round off a story with an effective coup de théâtre. Knives were by far the most popular weapon, but there was also the occasional gun (Mascagni's Silvano). Some librettists resorted to sophisticated forms of suicide such as asphyxia from coal fumes (Samara's La martire) or from the smoke of a hay-barn set on fire (Floridia's Maruzza).

From a sociological point of view, these operas were nothing more than consumer products for middle-class audiences whose conservatism was clearly mirrored in the portrayal of peasants and workers indulging in individualistic vendettas but quite harmless in social and political terms. A tribal sensitivity and no class-consciousness made up the most exciting operatic peasant. Regional costumes, idioms and slang words enhanced the picture. In the real world, the 1890s witnessed growing social unrest and heavy-handed repression, mainly in the 'Mezzogiorno' but also in Northern Italy. In 1892 the Italian Socialist Party was founded in Genoa. Between 1892 and 1894 the 'Sicilian Fasci' developed into an organized working-class movement which was ruthlessly repressed with hundreds of arrests and heavy sentences. In Milan, in May 1898, popular protest for the high price of bread was

crushed by troops shooting and killing hundreds of demonstrators and passers-by. In the veristic operas of those years there is never the slightest hint at social discontent in the lower classes. The 'tranches de vie' adopted as pretexts in the libretti, were, in fact, variations on the old romantic themes of passionate love, betrayal and vengeance. The different guise and the hybrid language of the new 'heroes', together with environmental and folkloric ingredients, gave these operas a veneer of modernity.

Some Italian musicologists have invented humorous definitions for such a noisy pack of Cavalleria look-alikes: the 'aesthetics of the knife' (Rubens Tedeschi); 'the melodrama of depressed areas' (Rodolfo Celletti).²⁰ One could chart the problem areas of post-Risorgimento Italy by simply grouping these operas according to their regional settings. The list, far from being exhaustive, and limited to the decade 1890-1900, would read as follows:

- SICILY: Frontini, Malia (1893); Floridia, Maruzza (1894); Bimboni, Santuzza (1895); Mineo, Un mafioso (1896).
- CALABRIA: Leoncavallo, Pagliacci (1892).
- PUGLIA: Mascagni, Silvano (1895).
- NAPLES: Giordano, Mala Vita (1892); Tasca, A Santa Lucia (1892); Spinelli, A Basso Porto (1894); Sebastiani, A San Francisco (1896).
- ABRUZZO: De Nardis, Stella (1899).
- TUSCANY: Luporini, La collana di Pasqua (1896), dealing with coal-miners.
- SARDINIA: Cellini, Vendetta sarda (1895).

A few more operas might be added dealing with particular themes rather than exhibiting a specific regional characterization:

- Francesco Cilea's Tilda (1892), set in the bush around Frosinone in Ciociaria (halfway between Rome and Naples) and dealing with brigands and French troops at the end of the eighteenth century but with a clear reference to a contemporary problem. In the aftermath of the Risorgimento, the new Italian state had to cope with widespread brigandage in the South. The problem was tackled with heavy-handed repression by the army.

The plot of the opera has something in common with Carmen: the scene of the brigands' headquarters in the wood is similar to the one of the smugglers' hide-out in the mountains; Tilda is a sensuous and wilful streetsinger ('saltatrice e canterina di strada') who dances two Saltarelli and has a couple of popular songs like Bizet's gipsy.

- Stanislao Gastaldon's Stellina (1896; not performed until 1905 in Florence), a 'novella lirica' in one act dealing with free love in an urban working-class environment. 'L'azione è in Italia' is the vague indication of the score. The setting is a tidy little room where Stellina, a twenty-year-old 'stiratrice' (an ironer), receives her boyfriend Luigi, a 'giovane operaio', and surrenders to his renewed passionate advances. Gastaldon was also the composer of the very first opera based on Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana, namely Mala Pasqua! (1890), which marked a false start in the history of operatic verismo (see Ch. 2).
- Antonio Smareglia's Nozze Istriane (1895), set in the village of Dignano in Istria, a problem area because of its position at ethnic and political crossroads between Yugoslavia and Italy.

As for the music of these operas, popular songs accompanied by guitars and mandolines, tarantelle and saltarelli or other local dances, drinking songs, litanies and religious hymns, were inserted on the slightest pretext. The vocal style and the musico-dramatic structures had three major references: the scrap-yard of the dismantled romantic melodrama, the contemporary 'veristic' style of the Young Italian School and the drawing-room song style. The third stylistic reference, the 'romanza da salotto', was a popular genre in late nineteenth-century Italy and had its own specialists such as Francesco Paolo Tosti (1846-1916), but it was also cultivated by operatic composers. Sentimentalism and languor, a mild sensualism and a melancholy pose borrowed from contemporary decadentism, characterized the texts which were set to plaintive melodies for the pleasure of dreamy young ladies and their patient suitors. The second most famous veristic opera, Leoncavallo's Pagliacci, has a good example of such stylistic hybrids. The composer-librettist gave the uncouth villager Silvio, in the love duet with Nedda (I, 3), a piece in the style of a 'romanza' both for the words and the music. Over 'mur-

muring' semiquavers, the baritone sings a graceful melody 'sempre a mezza voce, voluttuosamente', complaining that the girl has 'bewitched' him only to leave him with memories of 'warm kisses' given 'amid ardent spasms of voluptuousness' (Ex. 1):

Ex. 1 - Leoncavallo, Pagliacci, I, 3

Andante appassionato. (♩ = 54.)
(lovingly, and trying to move her)

sempre a mezza voce, voluttuosamente

s Why hast thou taught me -
E al - lor per.chè, di,...

Andante appassionato. (♩ = 54.)
ppp e legatissimo sempre
mormorando

s love's magic stor - y, if thou wilt leave me
tu m'hai stre.ga - to se vuoi la - sciar - mi

s hope - less a - lone?
sen - za pie - tà!

Pagliacci is no exception as regards the mixture of composition- al styles and linguistic registers, common to most veristic operas. Echoes from contemporary literature can be found in many of them. At the very end of Pagliacci Leoncavallo thought it appropriate to show off his cultural awareness by borrowing Verga's most typical Sicilian oath, 'Santo diavolone!', to give an unmistakably veristic mark to

Silvio's last line. As the Calabrian peasant draws his knife and steps forward to defend his beloved Nedda from the enraged Canio, he exclaims: 'Santo diavolo! Fa davvero...' Another remarkable literary echo is noticeable in Maruzza (1894, words and music by Pietro Floridia). Decadent ingredients are inserted into a veristic story. After an affair with a peasant girl, a landowner marries a rich woman. The 'dishonoured' peasant lures the man to her house and sets fire to the hay-barn killing herself with him. Before the catastrophe, the man tells the girl how her memory haunts him when he makes love to his wife. His words might well express Andrea Sperelli's morbid fantasies in D'Annunzio's Il piacere:

Giorgio E' strano! Mi perseguita
 al suo fianco l'immagine
 di te...Non solo! Ascoltami!
 (molto somnesso, come sognando)

Al mio seno stringendola
 ho tentato, illudendomi,
 pensar te stessa stringere...
 Ed ho chiuso le palpebre,
 mentre il labbro a reprimere
 il tuo nome sforzavasi!

Apart from Leoncavallo's Pagliacci, which has survived, and Giordano's Mala Vita, which might be worth reviving, most other veristic operas were written by obscure musicians who, in their own time, made a good career as conductors in opera houses in Italy and abroad (Pietro Floridia, Oreste Bimboni) or as song writers (Stanislao Gastaldon, Francesco Paolo Frontini). An illustrious name should be added to the list as in the 1890s the veristic trend in the musical theatre won occasional proselytes also outside Italy: Jules Massenet with La Navarraise (1894; libretto by Jules Claretie and Henri Cain).

The inspiring muse of the 'Épisode lyrique' in two acts was the soprano Emma Calvé, the great veristic singer mentioned above (par. 1), who could join vocal resources with unusually good acting skills. She was the first Suzel in Mascagni's L'Amico Fritz (1891) and sang Santuzza in the première of Cavalleria Rusticana at the Opéra-Comique on 19 January 1892. The libretto of La Navarraise was derived from a story by Jules Claretie, La Cigarette, set in Spain during the Carlist war of 1874. In order to create a main role for Miss Calvé, the

situation of the story was reversed: instead of a Basque peasant killing the leader of the Carlists to get a reward and marry his girlfriend, the opera has a peasant woman, Anita ('la Navarraise'), who steals through the enemy lines at night and kills their captain Zucaraga in order to get a reward of two thousand 'douros'. The amount happens to be exactly the same as that of the dowry Remigio demands from Anita to let her marry his son Araquil, a young sergeant of the regiment stationed in Biscay. But when Anita returns with the money, she finds Araquil mortally wounded by the Carlists. He dies and she goes mad.

Two irreconcilable styles - Massenet's calligraphic, plaintive lyricism and Mascagni's rough-hewn, full-blooded 'verismo' - could only produce a hybrid. The short opera is an unpleasant cocktail of vintage cognac and bubbling lambrusco. The loud motto-theme is very much like any Mascagnian big tune. The only difference is that heavy gun-fire underlines the first statement at the beginning of the opera (Ex. 2):

Ex. 2 - Massenet, La Navarraise, I

In the lyrical passages, the Basque peasant woman sings in the idiom of Manon. The most remarkable piece is the love duet Anita/Araquil in Act I, of which Ex. 3A reproduces the opening motive and Ex. 3B a lovely phrase of Anita's:

Ex. 3A - Massenet, La Navarraise, I

ARAQUIL. Allegro. (avec chaleur et grande expression)

92 = ♩

Je ne pensais qu'à toi, pauvre a-mie a-do-

Allegro.

mf

pulpitant et bien chanté.

ré . . et Et ton re-gard et le son de ta voix

sf

This musical score for Ex. 3A consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Araquil with the lyrics "Je ne pensais qu'à toi, pauvre amie a-do-". Below the vocal line is the piano accompaniment, starting with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. A tempo marking of "Allegro." is present. A metronome marking indicates 92 beats per minute, with a quarter note equal to one beat. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics ".ré . . et Et ton regard et le son de ta voix". The piano accompaniment continues with a crescendo leading to a fortissimo (*sf*) dynamic. The instruction "pulpitant et bien chanté." is written below the piano part.

Ex. 3B - Massenet, La Navarraise, I

ANITA. (avec une tendresse infinie)

(très caressant) *p*

Molto più lento.

A-ra-quil! laisse-moi les yeux Je veux

pp

ped.

les fer-mer sous ma lé-vre,

This musical score for Ex. 3B consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Anita with the lyrics "A-ra-quil! laisse-moi les yeux Je veux". Above the vocal line are the markings "ANITA. (avec une tendresse infinie)", "(très caressant)", and a piano (*p*) dynamic. Below the vocal line is the piano accompaniment, starting with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic and a "Molto più lento." tempo marking. A "ped." (pedal) instruction is written below the piano part. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "les fermer sous ma lèvre,". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar texture.

La Navarraise was first performed at Covent Garden on 20 June 1894 with Emma Calvé in the title role. G.B. Shaw wrote a humorous review of the successful performance describing the impressive noise of the opening 'symphonie descriptive' as follows:

The inhabitants of Covent Garden and the neighbourhood were startled by a most tremendous cannonade. It was the beginning of La Navarraise;...As one who has relieved the serious work of musical criticism by the amusement of dramatic authorship, I can testify to the great difficulty of getting artillery and musketry fire of really good tone for stage purposes; and I can compliment Sir Augustus Harris unreservedly on the thundering amplitude of sound and vigorous attack of his almost smokeless explosives.²¹

Shaw then praised the expressive and dramatic acting of Emma Calvé who cleverly exploited the situations of the role tailor-made for her, and concluded:

As to the work itself, there is hardly anything to be said in face of the frankness with which Massenet has modelled it on Cavalleria. He has not composed an opera: he has made up a prescription.

In October 1895 La Navarraise made its French début at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique and was reviewed by Camille Bellaigue in the Revue des Deux Mondes (15 October 1895). Like Shaw, the French critic pointed out that, though it was the work of a 'maître', the opera could only be ranked among the poor imitations of Cavalleria, the work of an 'ouvrier', but with stylistic consistency and genuine artistic vitality:

A peine ébauchée, et par la main d'un ouvrier, non d'un maître; oeuvre d'instinct plutôt, qu'oeuvre d'art, elle était du peuple, mais elle était vivante. Qu'elle semble pâle, la Navarraise, auprès de sa soeur de Sicile!

Yet, French chauvinistic critics would not admit Massenet's failure in tackling an uncongenial genre. Raymond Bouyer, writing on "Pietro Mascagni et la Jeune Italie Musicale" in the Revue Politique et Littéraire (28 January 1905), commented on reciprocal influences and quoted La Navarraise and Sapho (also composed by Massenet for Emma Calvé):

Par un très curieux choc de retour, la violence de Mascagni

n'a pas laissé que de séduire la souplesse de Massenet: la Sapho du maître français pourrait témoigner; et sa Navarraise...aparaissait comme une Cavalleria espanõla, volontairement découpée sur le patron mascagniste, mais combien musicalement supérieure à l'original!

A survey of the later imitations of Cavalleria Rusticana would not add much to what has already been said. At the end of the line, and at the lowest level of the genre, we find a distasteful melodrama which represents the quintessence of kitsch in the musical theatre: I gioielli della Madonna (1911) by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari; libretto by Carlo Zangarini and Enrico Golisciani. It was the last of a series of 'postcard operas' exploiting all the trite commonplaces about Naples and extremely successful in Germany. Its direct precedents were A Santa Lucia and A Basso Porto discussed in Chapter 4. I gioielli della Madonna was first performed in German at the Kurfürstenoper of Berlin on 23 December 1911. In a few months it was presented to enthusiastic audiences in Chicago (16 January 1912), New York (Metropolitan Opera, 5 March 1912, with Toscanini conducting the orchestra and Wolf-Ferrari as guest of honour), and in London (Covent Garden, 30 May 1912).

The picturesqueness and sensationalism of the genre were pushed to their extreme limits by the inclusion of all possible ingredients which might titillate the morbid curiosity of an audience: spaghetti-eaters, 'morra' players, ragged urchins playing trumpets and other Piedigrotta instruments ('zerre-zerre', 'triccabalacche'), street-cries ('A pizza cauda!', 'Sciure 'e giardino!'), a religious procession accompanied by ritualistic fireworks and folkloric music, a 'Pazzariello' (a sort of clown shouting and miming witty advertisements of local shops and products) with his scratch band, a gang of camorristas and their extrovert girlfriends ('guaglione della mala vita'), assorted songs and dances.

A ludicrous and feeble story unfolds with difficulty from that load of garish trappings. The blacksmith Gennaro loves Maliella; she does not reciprocate his feelings. The camorra boss Rafaele fancies the girl and Maliella falls for him. The camorrist boasts that he would even steal the jewels from the statue of the Madonna to please her. The desperate Gennaro actually does so; the moment Maliella wears the shiny junk she is seized by an erotic frenzy and the two make love on the spot. Loud bells announce the sacrilegious theft.

The camorristas fear they may be accused and abandon their hide-out. Maliella, in despair, rushes to drown herself in the sea and the wretched Gennaro, overwhelmed by shame and remorse, stabs himself in front of a painting of the Madonna.

The most disturbing ingredient in the opera is the sympathetic, light-hearted presentation of the camorristas and their 'values'. In A Basso Porto, also dealing with camorristas and women, the gang is presented just as a bunch of despicable thugs. In I gioielli della Madonna, violence and intimidation are accompanied by self-righteousness and a sinister charm which induces indulgence and almost acquiescence. There is no shade of irony or humour in the coarse song dedicated to the camorrist's knife by one of the girls of 'mala vita' in Act III:

Concetta Viva il coltel del camorrista,
 segnal d'assalto e di conquista,
 e del valore che insegna e impone
 colla ragione!
 Chi può sperar
 con noi lottar?
 Strilliamo in coro
 la forza è il sole del mondo inter!
 Tutti al macel i cor d'agnel!
 Noi sempre siam che in cima andiam!

The camorristas' strength, Rafaele states explicitly in Act I, consists in being above the law: 'Sai la mia forza? osiamo tutto se noi vogliamo! La legge non ci tocca!' At the end of the opera, a chorus of camorristas comments on the outrageous theft of the jewels:

Sacrilegio! Noi siamo gente onorata!
Noi la bella Madonna rispettiamo!
Viva sempre Maria!

(Rafaele e camorristi si sberrettano superstiziosamente devoti)

Their sense of outrage is easily shared by a superstitious and bigoted audience, which results in the isolation of the blasphemous, working-class Gennaro as the only villain of the story. His suicide is a necessary atonement.

The opera contains more noise than music, and the sheer number of 'veristic' ingredients dwarfs the few lyrical episodes in each of the three acts. The London première of I gioielli della Madonna received a long review in The Times (31 May 1912) expressing apprecia-

tion for the performance: 'On the whole it was an admirable production, and it was well cheered by the large audience'. The specific comments on the plot and music could but expose the basic flimsiness of the opera:

It stakes everything on the capacity to make it all seem true, from the festival antics of the Neapolitan crowd to the contrasted characters of the chief personages. So during large parts of the first act the music is literally crowded out in order to make real the shouts of the people, the whistles and drums and bands playing in different keys...When at last we do get to the music which belongs to the essentials of the drama and not to its trimmings, it is disappointing.

I gioielli della Madonna was recently revived at the Wexford Festival (October 1981). For Elizabeth Forbes who reviewed it in Opera (January 1982), this squalid farce exhibits the 'verismo' pioneered by Mascagni in Cavalleria Rusticana, based on the 'staple ingredients...of sex and religion in proportions of about three to one.'

Chapter 2

THE VERISMO OF CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

1. From Verga's "Scene popolari" to Mascagni's opera

Giovanni Verga's "Scene popolari in un atto" Cavalleria Rusticana (1884) marked a turning point in the theatre of post-Unity Italy for the originality of the subject-matter and the innovatory dramatic conception of the work. With Verga's Sicilian peasants, an entirely new world with its ethics and customs was displayed for the first time on the stage. The village square replaced the bourgeois drawing-room of the comedies of P. Ferrari and A. Torelli. A well-defined social context provided the ideological background for the behaviour of the characters and justified the final resort to violence.

Apart from the environment and the characters, the novelty of the play was in the technique of close-knit dialogues and clear-cut scenes strung together by a tense rhythm leading quickly and effectively to the catastrophe. No less importance had the language, devised as a means of self-characterization and instant localization of moral attitudes and social behaviour.

The work was the dramatization of a short story from the collection Vita dei Campi (1880), based on discarded material from an early draft of Verga's novel I Malavoglia (1881).¹ In rewriting Cavalleria for the stage, the novelist kept most of the original features of the story, but he eliminated the economic motivations for the behaviour of Turiddu and Lola, and expanded the role of Santa, making her the 'dishonoured' and jealous girl desperately in love with an unscrupulous young man. Verga also upgraded Turiddu's mother, Nunzia, turning her into the owner of a tavern. In the short story, while Turiddu is away serving in the army, his mother has to sell their mule and a little vineyard, with the result that they are very poor. Lola, formerly engaged to Turiddu, marries Alfio who owns four mules, has a good job and can buy golden rings and beautiful dresses for her. Turiddu envies Alfio's wealth and tries his luck courting Santa whose father is a rich man and lives opposite Alfio's house. However, the girl is soon forgotten when Lola, hurt in her pride, opens her door to her

former fiancé. In the end Turiddu is punished for trespassing on somebody else's property (Alfio's woman) and his last thought is for his poor old mother. He is a loser in economic terms, like many other Verghian characters; the handful of dust Alfio treacherously throws into his eyes before striking the fatal blow is just as much as Turiddu is worth.

By developing the sentimental rather than the economic theme of his story, Verga intended to make the play more acceptable to a non-Sicilian, bourgeois audience: it became a case of adultery, set in an exotic environment, with the complication of a seduced girl who triggers the revenge of a betrayed husband. Even so, the structural peculiarities of his work made Verga apprehensive and sceptical about its impact on the public, although his friend and playwright Giuseppe Giacosa welcomed the experiment with enthusiasm and unfailing confidence in its chances of success. In a letter to his French translator Edouard Rod, written from Turin a few days before Cavalleria was performed, Verga voiced his anxiety while reaffirming his faith in his art:

La mia commedia (tentativo di commedia, chiamiamola meglio, in un genere arrischiatissimo e che fa a pugni col gusto attuale del pubblico) passerà inosservata anche in Italia, e i più alzeranno le spalle come a un'idea sbagliata. E' vero che prima di pubblicare le novelle di Vita dei Campi nello stesso genere e di sperimentare la prima volta lo stesso metodo artistico in un altro campo letterario io ebbi le stesse esitazioni e le medesime apprensioni che poi il successo smentì; Basta, vedremo quel che sarà, sarà una caduta di certo; a me preme soltanto affermare il genere.²

Arrigo Boito, one of Verga's closest friends in Milan, and Emilio Treves, his publisher, had expressed their scepticism after a reading session arranged by the author to test his play; so had Cesare Rossi, the actor-manager of the company Giacosa had contacted in order to have the play performed in Turin. Fortunately, Eleonora Duse, a member of the company and the best actress in Italy, shared Giacosa's enthusiasm and was instrumental in convincing Rossi to stage the play. However, Rossi would not risk the expenses for costumes and setting, which were met by Verga, and would only act in the minor role of Zio Brasi, leaving Turiddu to be played by Flavio Andò coupled with Eleo-

nora Duse's Santuzza.

In an article in the Gazzetta Piemontese, written the day before the première (Teatro Carignano, 14 January 1884), Giacosa stressed the importance of the event and explained the kind of novelty the public was to expect from the play: 'La novità del Verga non consiste nel fare di più, ma, forse, nel fare di meno, certo nel fare diversamente.' It was a success against all the odds, and together with the apologies of Boito, Treves and Cesare Rossi, Verga received the congratulations of Emile Zola who was keeping abreast of the latest venture of his Sicilian 'confrère'.

From Turin, Cavalleria Rusticana started its successful tour of the major Italian cities winning over proselytes to the new 'genere' Verga was so keen to establish in the country: not only, as could be expected, did Capuana, De Roberto, Di Giacomo follow in Verga's footsteps, but Giacosa himself, Northern and bourgeois as he was, somewhat departed from his usual style and, with L'Onorevole Ercole Malardi (1884), Tristi Amori (1887) and other plays, experimented with his own brand of verismo tinged with sentimentalism which would characterize his contributions to some libretti for Puccini, e.g. La Bohème (1896).

A special recruit was to be made by Cavalleria less than a month after the Turin première when it first appeared in Milan, at the Teatro Manzoni, on 11 February 1884: a 21-year-old, obscure musician, Pietro Mascagni. But neither at that time nor five years later - when the composer started his work on the libretto - could he fully appreciate the structural and linguistic peculiarities of the play. The actual choice of Cavalleria was not even entirely his own. In July 1888, the publisher Edoardo Sonzogno advertised in his own periodicals Il Teatro Illustrato and La Musica Popolare his second Competition for a one-act opera to be written by an Italian composer aged not more than thirty and to be submitted by May 1889. After a series of adventurous tours as the conductor of an operetta company, Mascagni had ended up in Cerignola, a small agricultural town in Puglia, where he was living in hopeless misery, giving music lessons and entertaining the local opera fans. His youthful dreams of success and glory were concentrated on the composition of a four-act romantic melodrama, Guglielmo Ratcliff, a tragedy by Heinrich Heine translated and adapted by Andrea Maffei. It was a project he would never be able to realize unless he

first made a name for himself with something more feasible and, most of all, until he got himself out of Cerignola and back into the world of opera.³ So, having decided to run for the top prize of the Sonzogno Competition, his first problem was to get hold of a suitable libretto, possibly free of charge. There was only one person, Mascagni reckoned, he could turn to for help: his Livornese friend Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, to whom he suggested the adaptation of a short story by the Calabrian writer Nicola Misasi. Targioni-Tozzetti started working on that but, shortly afterwards, he went to see a performance of Verga's Cavalleria and immediately relayed his enthusiasm to his friend in Cerignola. On 14 December 1888, Mascagni wrote back:

Era inutile che mi scrivessi, essendomi rimesso completamente in te. Fa quello che vuoi... La Cavalleria Rusticana era già nei miei progetti da quando si eseguì per la prima volta a Milano...⁴

In the five following months, Mascagni composed and orchestrated his opera while a feverish exchange of letters and postcards took place between Livorno and Cerignola: down came bits of the libretto produced by Targioni-Tozzetti and up went Mascagni's objections and delirious outbursts of gratitude and optimism. It all worked out very well in the end. However, the composer's enthusiasm, his impassioned, emotional adherence to Verga's story, did not entirely supersede a sense of expediency, of painful renunciation of a long-cherished project in the face of the harsh necessities of life. Such is the mood of a long and curiously apologetic letter Mascagni wrote from Cerignola to his closest friend in Livorno, Vittorio Gianfranceschi, on 7 March 1889, when he was about to finish his opera. Cavalleria is only a drowning man's straw; his heart is still with Ratcliff:

Io poi abbandonai malauguratamente Milano e...continuai ad immaginare il mio Guglielmo; ...Il mio Ratcliff era per me una necessità, una fede!...Forse la fiamma della mia fede si è spenta?!...No! Ma adesso abbandono l'idea del Ratcliff Cos'è che urge adesso? Togliermi di qua! Potrò ottenere la mia resurrezione con Guglielmo? No! Dunque?... l'idea di tentare un nuovo lavoro, a poco a poco si radicò in me; ma attendevo sempre un'occasione propizia. Oggi quest'occasione c'è: il concorso Sonzogno per un'opera in un atto. Hai fede nei concorsi? Io intanto lavoro alla mia Cavalleria,...sono un naufrago e credo che ogni molecola sia una tavola. E se riuscissi vincitore? Ah! il mio Ratcliff! ⁵

Clearly, no aesthetic motivations or innovatory aspirations were behind Mascagni's decision to set Cavalleria. The play stirred his imagination, suited his purpose and was also recommended by his librettist. As to Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti, he had no previous experience as a librettist, and, with Mascagni pressing unrelentingly from Cerignola, he decided he needed help; so a third young Livornese with literary ambitions joined in: Guido Menasci. On the whole, their collaboration produced a very good libretto, from a purely operatic point of view; but a comparative analysis of the play and the new text shows, beyond an apparent structural similarity, serious distortions of the sociological and ethical characteristics of the original story, and hybrid combinations of linguistic registers borrowed from contemporary poetry or the melodramatic tradition.

Verga's play is organized as a series of duets encompassed by two choral scenes. The action consists in dramatic confrontations which do not modify the characters' psychological positions but build up tension to be released in the catastrophe. Three main dialogues provide the dynamic thrust: Nunzia/Santuzza (scene 1); Santuzza/Turiddu (scenes 2-4); Turiddu/Alfio (scene 7). The first exposes the antecedents of the story; the second contains the confrontation of the seduced girl with her seducer; the third shows the challenge. Two shorter dialogues - Lola/Turiddu (scene 3), Alfio/Santuzza (scene 5) - have respectively the function of heightening the tension of the confrontation which mounts to Santuzza's curse 'Mala Pasqua a te!', and provoking Alfio to challenge his wife's lover.

This purely dialogical structure is put under pressure by an external and objective circumstance over which the characters have no control and must reckon with in timing their actions and working out their response to what is being said: it is Easter day. That seems to be everybody's main concern: it is time for Mass, for cleansing one's own conscience, it is time for rejoicing and celebrating together. In Scene 1, the longest in the play, Verga creates a vast, choral movement using all his minor characters (Zio Brasi, the stableman, Camilla, his wife, Zia Filomena, a neighbour, Pippuzza, a woman selling eggs) to interfere in the dialogue between Nunzia and Santuzza and divert attention towards the special significance of the day. Alfio's first entry is also used to this purpose. He drops in to buy wine from Nunzia for the Easter lunch. His arrival prevents Santuzza

from answering a crucial question about Turiddu's movements in the past few hours:

Gnà Nunzia	Dunque lo sai dov'è stato Turiddu?
Compar Alfio	(dalla prima stradicciuola a destra, con un fiasco in mano). Che ne avete ancora di quello buono da sei soldi, Gnà Nunzia?
Gnà Nunzia	Vado a vedere. Turiddu doveva portar- ne oggi da Francofonte.
Compar Alfio	Vostro figlio è ancora qui. L'ho visto stamattina... ⁶

Alfio's remark seems to answer that question, and yet it increases our curiosity. So, when Santuzza is at last allowed to pour out her misery to Gnà Nunzia, we are eager to take every single word of what she says. It is the only long speech of the play, and, from the very beginning, we realize that the protagonist is no longer the 'defeated' young man of the short story but Santuzza, the seduced and abandoned girl. It was Giacosa who advised Verga to provide a 'gran parte' for Eleonora Duse as a guarantee of success for the play. The speech in sc. 1 and Santuzza's desperate confession to Alfio before her final exit (sc. 5) gave Duse good opportunities to show her dramatic talent. Mascagni capitalized on the melodramatic potential of the role and Gemma Bellincioni, the first operatic Santuzza, was rightly seen as the Duse of the musical theatre.

The emotional climax of Scene 1 is immediately cooled down by Gnà Nunzia: she does not want to be late for the 'funzioni sacre' and makes for the church, soon followed by Zio Brasi who has time to tease Santuzza for her unusual reluctance to go to Mass. The loose texture of the first scene allows for the quick characterization of the principals as well as the minor roles. Alfio, for example, in just a few lines, impresses us as the 'man of honour', the discreet and stern believer in an unwritten code of conduct which empowers a wronged man to take justice into his own hands with no need of intermediaries. Characteristically, his language is elementary and straight in all circumstances, except when his honour is challenged: then, he resorts to the use of metaphors and innuendoes in a mafioso style.⁷ Compare, for example, his down-to-earth answer to Comare Camilla with the one to Zia Filomena who insinuates that Alfio is far too often away from home for his young wife:

Comare Camilla (a Compar Alfio) E vostra moglie, che vi vede soltanto a Pasqua e a Natale, cosa dice?
Compar Alfio Io non lo so cosa dice. Questo è il mio mestiere, comare Camilla. Il mio mestiere è di fare il vetturale e di andare sempre in viaggio di qua e di là.

Zia Filomena Non è bello quello che avete detto, compar Alfio; chè avete la moglie giovane.
Compar Alfio Mia moglie sa che la berretta la porto a modo mio; (battendo sulla tasca del petto) e qui ci porto il giudizio per mia moglie, e per gli altri anche. (Due carabinieri in tenuta escono dalla caserma e si allontanano pel viale della chiesa) I miei interessi me li guardo io, da me, senza bisogno di quelli del pennacchio. E in paese tutti lo sanno, grazie a Dio!

The presence of the 'carabinieri', in their uniforms complete with plume, acquires a special relevance in the context.⁸ Alfio's disparaging reference to them as 'quelli del pennacchio' is tacitly endorsed by the other villagers as they accept his omertà or manliness: Alfio's own justice (symbolized by the knife he carries in his breast pocket) is set against the personification of law and order established by the new Italian state. Later on, in Sc. 7, after the formal ritual of the challenge with the kiss and the bite on the ear-lobe, Alfio speaks with the authority of the man of honour when he says:

Forte avete fatto, compare Turiddu... Questa si chiama parola di giovane d'onore.

Confronted with his natural judge, Turiddu pleads guilty and then fights for Santuzza's sake:

Sentite, compar Alfio, come è vero Dio so che ho torto...

His killing is accepted by the villagers as the right punishment for having infringed the common law which defends the family as the nucleus of society and condemns adultery as a threat to its integrity.

The mafioso component in the psychology of Alfio and Turiddu is explicitly mentioned by Verga in a letter to Menotti Bianchi-Paola, dated 14 June 1886:

Compar Alfio e Turiddu della mia Cavalleria Rusticana non sono mafiosi, ma uomini che seguono le leggi della mafia, quando l'ira e le passioni parlano, come l'omertà detta. Riflesso di costumi e non indole propria.⁹

It should be borne in mind that the word 'omertà' is not used in the modern derogatory sense of connivence but in its originally positive meaning. Giuseppe Pitrè, in his Usi e Costumi, Credenze e Pregiudizi del Popolo Siciliano, devotes a chapter to "La mafia e l'omertà", and explains the second term as 'omineità, qualità di essere omu, cioè serio, sodo, forte', to be likened to the Latin virtus.¹⁰ As to 'mafioso', Pitrè writes:

Il mafioso vuol essere rispettato e rispetta quasi sempre. Se è offeso, non ricorre alla Giustizia, non si rimette alla Legge; se lo facesse, darebbe prova di debolezza, e offenderebbe l'omertà.¹¹

As we turn to examine the libretto derived from the play, we immediately realize the complete wreckage of Verga's first Scene at the hands of Targioni and Menasci. The haunting sense of the religious festivity and the skilfully coordinated movement of well individualized villagers are lost. Of course, Mascagni does manage to suggest the festive atmosphere in musical terms, opening with resounding church bells and adding, later on, organ music and Latin songs. But these devices tend to remain exterior and decorative; they do not permeate the people on stage. In fact, Gnà Nunzia's neighbours are gone. Their place has been taken by a Chorus of blissful peasants who are made to sing an incongruous, anodyne 'canto che i palpiti raddoppia al cor', embellished with 'augelli', 'mirti in fior', 'spighe d'oro', 'spole', 'rustiche opre'. From the crude dialect of the opening "Siciliana" - a sort of folkloric token of what is about to unravel on stage - we move back into the world of Arcadia, where women may well be 'belle occhi-di-sole'. This expression was lifted from a poem by Severino Ferrari, a follower of the Carduccian school. In its original context, the charming image qualifies the shining eyes of little girls listening to a fable told by their grandmother:

La nonna fila e dice. Suggon le sue parole
i bimbi coloriti, le belle occhi-di-sole. 12

In a veristic libretto, it only shows how far Targioni and Menasci were from the spirit and style of the play. The bogus peasants disperse to reappear, minutes later, among cracks of whip and jingles of cart-bells, to usher in the local hero, compar Alfio, the formerly unpretentious carter, metamorphosed into a vociferous Escamillo, who braves icy winds, rain and snow:

Soffi il vento gelido
cada l'acqua o nevichi
a me che cosa fa?

and boasts about his wife's faithfulness:

M'aspetta a casa Lola
che m'ama e mi consola
ch'è tutta fedeltà.

Turiddu's mother underlines such a show of vitality and high spirits with her comment:

Beato voi, compar Alfio, che siete
sempre allegro così!

The unwittingly ironic remark is Alfio's cue for his request to buy wine from 'Mamma Lucia' as he does with Gnà Nunzia in the play although no wine is traded in the opera. That the 'carrettiere' should be given a hero's welcome before such an ordinary transaction, can only be explained by the operatic convention which demands a spotlight and a chorus of witnesses on the entry of the baritone. Yet, those preposterous lines prompt from Mascagni a drab, schematic motive which does render the wilful and sombre character of Compar Alfio. Bizet's indication 'rude et bien rythmé' for Escamillo's couplets might well suit Alfio's segmented song. Its effect is unfortunately banalized by the trivial response of the elated peasants praising the carter's job:

O che bel mestiere
fare il carrettiere
andar di qua e di là.

The lines stem from Alfio's matter-of-fact remark to Comare Camilla in the play, Sc. 1 (see above):

Il mio mestiere è di fare il vetturale e di andare
sempre in viaggio di qua e di là.

While the 'Alleluja' is heard from the church, the noisy intruder departs after giving unwanted instructions to the women:

Io me ne vado, ite voi altre in chiesa.¹³

So the character whose psychological, dramatic and linguistic identity was integrally preserved by Verga in working out the play from the novella, is partly disfigured into an operatic cliché.

Alfio's last line provides a good example of the mixture of different linguistic registers: the colloquial 'me ne vado' and the antiquated 'ite', side by side. Linguistic clashes also occur in Santuzza's romanza (Scene 4), where the veristic account of Turiddu's behaviour is interspersed with stilted expressions as in the line:

Turiddu aveva a Lola eterna fe' giurato

and more strikingly in:

M'amò, l'amai. Quell'invida d'ogni delizia mia,
del suo sposo dimentica, arse di gelosia....
Me l'ha rapito.

where Verga has:

....come lo seppe lei, quella mala femmina diventò
gelosa a morte; e si mise in testa di rubarmelo.

Mascagni's librettists would not accept the veristic 'mala femmina', a slut, and found a decorous alternative in 'Quell'invida', that envious woman; but then, they polished the expression for Santuzza's line in Scene 5:

Quella cattiva femmina ti tolse a me.

Mascagni found everything fully satisfactory. One of his postcards from Cerignola (17 January 1889) informs Targioni very concisely:

Ho ricevuto - ottimamente. Impossibile fare meglio. Impossibile indovinare maggiormente mio gusto. Romanza sop. indovinatissima; finale grande efficacia. Sor-tita carrettiere forte, originale. Già musicata.¹⁴

The four scenes the librettists derived from Verga's Scene 1 are as effective and well constructed, if examined with the logic of operatic conventions, as they are in contrast with the verismo of the play. Apart from the additions and distortions, the elimination of Verga's minor characters - with their proverbs, jokes and digressions - contributes to the melodramatization of the main roles and a stiffening of the action.

The rest of the libretto is modelled very closely on the remaining eight scenes of the play:

PLAY	OPERA
Scene	Scene
1 villagers + Nunzia/ Santuzza	1 Chorus of peasants 2 Lucia/Santuzza 3 Alfio & Chorus 4 Lucia/Santuzza
2 Santuzza/Turiddu	5 Santuzza/Turiddu
3 Santuzza/Turiddu + Lola	6 Santuzza/Turiddu + Lola
4 Santuzza/Turiddu	7 Santuzza/Turiddu
5 Alfio/Santuzza	8 Alfio/Santuzza
	Intermezzo
6 villagers	9 Chorus + Turiddu's drinking song
7 same + Alfio/Turiddu	10 same + Alfio/Turiddu
8 (Lola) Turiddu/Nunzia	11 Turiddu's farewell to Lucia
9 catastrophe (Lola)	12 catastrophe (Santuzza)

The dialogues, apart from the obvious compression required by the musical medium, are transposed almost literally; yet, psychological distortions can be found in the duets as well as in the solo pieces. In Scene 8, the defiant 'carrettiere' received an extra brush-stroke from the composer himself. Less than two weeks before the première of the opera in Rome, Mascagni wrote to his friend in Livorno asking for a few more lines to round off the Alfio/Santuzza duet without too many repetitions of words. Targioni sent two lines for each part, which could be printed only in the second edition of the libretto (August 1890). Alfio's lines were:

No, giusta siete stata io vi condono:
in odio tutto l'amor mio finì.

Mascagni did not like the first one and made up his own endecasillabo:

Io sangue voglio, all'ira m'abbandono

to be sung 'con forza' over the thumping, syncopated rhythm of the orchestra. Once more, the logic of the opera which demanded an effective 'finale' before the melodious "Intermezzo", clashed with the technique of the veristic play where Alfio, on being told of his wife's unfaithfulness, after the first outburst of anger and incredulity, is seized by a sudden calm, full of menace and cold-blooded determination:

Santuzza	Piangere non posso, compar Alfio; e questi occhi non hanno pianto neppure quando hanno visto Turiddu Macca che m'ha tolto l'onore, andare dalla gnà Lola vostra moglie!
Compar Alfio	(tornando calmo tutto ad un tratto) Quand'è così, va bene, e vi ringrazio, comare.

His last line, before he goes home to fetch his knife, has a chilling innuendo:

Ora, se vedete mia moglie che mi cerca, ditele che vado a casa a pigliare il regalo pel suo compare Turiddu.

where the 'regalo' is the instrument of his vendetta.

A good example of thematic modification, from the novella to the play, and of linguistic hybrid in the operatic adaptation, is Turiddu's confession to Alfio before the duel (Scene 7 in the play; Scene 10 in the libretto). In the original short story, Turiddu's motivation for fighting to kill Alfio, though he admits his wrongdoing, is his concern for his old mother:

- Compar Alfio, - cominciò Turiddu dopo che ebbe fatto un pezzo di strada accanto al suo compagno, il quale stava zitto, e col berretto sugli occhi, - come è vero Iddio so che ho torto e mi lasciarei ammazzare. Ma prima di venir qui ho visto la mia vecchia che si era alzata per vedermi partire, col pretesto di governare il pollaio, quasi il cuore

express their horror after the cry 'Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!'.

Yet, this last scene contains an incongruity which distances, once more, the opera from the play in terms of psychological consistency. Lola goes off in Scene 10, accompanied by some women, and Santuzza reappears at the very end of the opera, throws herself into Lucia's arms and sings 'Oh! madre mia!'. Then, on hearing of Turiddu's killing, the two women scream and fall senseless. The reappearance of Santuzza apparently fulfils Turiddu's last wish that his mother should take care of the girl in case he were not to return.¹⁶ But that is not the point. In the last Scene of the play, Verga leaves Turiddu's mother, Lola and the minor characters on stage but keeps Santuzza well out of the way. She exits at the end of Scene 5, making for the church on her own while everyone else is coming out of it after the end of the Easter Mass. Significantly, her last line is a reply to Zio Brasi who notices her strange behaviour:

Zio Brasi - O comare Santa, che va in chiesa quando
non c'è più nessuno!
Santuzza - Sono in peccato mortale, zio Brasi!

She is left alone with her shame and sense of guilt. Santuzza is now not only 'dishonoured' but 'scellerata', wicked, since she has just exposed Lola's adultery and, indirectly, sentenced Turiddu to death. Her expiation begins with her feeling an outcast in her own village. Her despair is of a totally different nature from Gnà Nunzia's motherly grief, and her remorse could hardly concern the mother of the man she has caused to be killed. The last lines of the play, before the naturalistic shout, are for Gnà Nunzia and Lola:

Gnà Nunzia (sempre di più in più smarrita) - Ma dov'è
andato mio figlio Turiddu? Ma che vuol dire
tutto questo?
Gnà Lola - Vuol dire che facciamo la mala Pasqua, gnà
Nunzia. E il vino che abbiamo bevuto insieme
ci andrà tutto in veleno.

The echo of Santuzza's curse 'mala Pasqua a te!' still rings ominously in Lola's words.

As remorse and isolation await Santuzza, institutional justice pursues Alfio, the murderer. Before the curtain drops, 'Due carabinieri attraversano correndo la scena', the very same policemen whose

presence at the beginning of the play (Scene 1) silently embodied the firm authority of the Italian state in juxtaposition to the self-made justice of the Sicilian 'man of honour'. In the opera, the presence of a police station with the 'carabinieri' patrolling the square would spoil the picturesqueness of the Sicilian setting and make it all too realistic, so there is no trace of that.

Having removed or distorted some essential, realistic components of the story, Mascagni and his librettists introduced their own pseudo-veristic ingredients: the "Siciliana", Lola's stornello and Turiddu's drinking song. The idea was to provide on-stage music which would help to characterize the rustic environment and give the principals a natural medium of expression.

In the original short story, Turiddu wreaked his resentment against Lola 'coll'andare a cantare tutte le canzoni di sdegno che sapeva sotto la finestra della bella'. The 'canzoni di sdegno' were one of the four categories of Sicilian popular songs classified according to subject or use: love, jealousy, parting and spite.¹⁷ Two months after the successful Turin première of the play, Verga himself thought of some sort of 'small symphony and musical epilogue of the comedy' to be performed before raising the curtain. On 22 March 1884 he wrote to his Catanese friend and composer Giuseppe Perrotta commissioning the piece and outlining a programme or summary of the moods to be musically portrayed with a truly Sicilian colour:

Un canto d'amore che sospiri nella notte, quasi il caldo anelito di Turiddu che va a lagnarsi sotto la finestra della Gnà Lola e il lamento di Santuzza che attende invano. Poi la vita nel Villaggio che si desta, il suono delle campane a festa, la nota di gelosia e di amore che torna ed insiste a forma di pedale, ed infine lo scoppio furibondo dell'ira della gelosia, le grida dell'accorruomo, della madre e dell'amante.¹⁸

The passionate feelings - love, jealousy, anger - and the festive atmosphere highlighted by Verga in his request are also the leading motives in Mascagni's melodrama. In particular, the 'canto d'amore... sotto la finestra della Gnà Lola' anticipates the "Siciliana". But the three Livornese associates did not bother to consult one of the many collections of Sicilian popular songs (see below, ch. 3, p. 100). to choose a suitable 'canzone di sdegno'. It was a fortuitous cir-

cumstance that was to give Mascagni the idea of a serenade for Lola. A friend happened to visit him in Cerignola and showed the composer some poems of his in Neapolitan. Mascagni found one particularly attractive: 'Brunetta ca s' mmaniche ncammisa', and thought the lines might be adapted to Lola. Unfamiliar as he was with Sicilian, he put together a text in a mixture of Neapolitan and Sicilian which was subsequently amended by the Palermo-born tenor Roberto Stagno, the first Turiddu. However, in the first edition of the libretto (May 1890), the "Siciliana" contained two Latinisms which are hard to account for, 'Supra', 'occisu':

Turiddo

O Lola ch'hai di latti la cammisa,
 si' russa e janca comu li cirasa,
 quannu t'affacci fai la vucca a risa,
 beatu ppi lu primu cui la vasa!
 Supra la porta to' lu sangu è spasu,
 ma nun m'importa si cci moru occisu,
 ma si cci moru e vaju 'n paradisu,
 si nun cci vidu a tia mancu cci trasu.

The Italian translation ('O Lola, bianca come fior di spino') was added in the second edition prepared for the première of Cavalleria in Livorno (August 1890). Turiddo became Turiddu,¹⁹ 'supra' and 'occisu' were replaced by 'Ntra' and 'accisu' and besides other adjustments, four words were again given a Neapolitan spelling:

O Lola c'hai di latti la cammisa
 si bianca e russa comu la cirasa,
 quannu t'affacci fai la vucca a risa,
 biatu pi lu primu cu ti vasa!
 Ntra la puorta tua lu sangu è spasu,
 ma nun me mpuorta si ce muoru accisu...
 e si ce muoru e vaju 'n paradisu
 si nun ce truovo a ttia, mancu ce trasu.

This version was also kept in the 1891 edition of the libretto. The final text of the "Siciliana" was left with a better Sicilian spelling but an odd rhyming scheme (ABCDDCCD):

O Lola ch'hai di latti la cammisa,
 si bianca e russa comu la cirasa,
 quannu t'affacci fai la vucca a risu,
 biatu cui ti dà lu primu vasu!
 Ntra la porta tua lu sangu è sparsu,

e nun me mporta si ce muoru accisu...
e s'iddu muoru e vaju mparadisu
si nun ce truovu a ttia, mancu ce trasu.

(Cavalleria Rusticana, Sonzogno, Milano, 1981)

The concluding hyperbole ('and if I die and go to paradise/if I don't find you there, I won't even go in') is recorded by Alessandro D'Ancona in several regional versions.²⁰ The Prelude with the "Siciliana" was written after the completion of the opera and was handed in personally by Mascagni to the selecting Committee when he was summoned for the audition of Cavalleria in Rome.

It has often been stressed that what ultimately matters in a libretto is not so much the literary quality of the text as the potential effectiveness of its metamorphosis into song and music. In this respect, the "Siciliana" has always had a tremendous impact on listeners as if it were an authentic Sicilian 'canto d'amore'. Luigi Capuana was aware of this when he wrote of the plaintive love songs of his island:

Sotto il cielo limpidissimo ma senza luna, nel vasto silenzio notturno appena appena agitato dal basso stormire degli ulivi, una voce bene intonata cantava la lamentosa cantilena preferita dai contadini siciliani nei loro canti d'amore. Non pensino alla canzone di Cavalleria Rusticana del Mascagni, imitazione artistica non spregevole certamente, ma ibrida fusione di due accenti, se si può dire, il siciliano e il toscano; avrebbero un'idea inadeguata.²¹

The same could be said for Lola's stornello. Its Tuscan flavour has already been noted by several critics.

As to the drinking song, it stems from the rather weak Scene 6 of the play, where the tension drops as the general conversation digresses towards unnecessary considerations on the philandering attitudes of soldiers away from their fiancées. Turiddu's final lines:

Alla vostra salute, gnà Lola! Voi, comare Camilla!
Bevete, zio Brasi. Oggi vogliamo uccidere la malinconia.

point directly to the 'umor nero' of the song. The toast to Lola is converted into an empty-headed bravado - 'Ai vostri amori!' - which, taken seriously, would publicly endorse Santuzza's branding Lola as

a 'mala femmina'. A curious misprint ('Ai nostri amori'), kept in the modern edition of the libretto, turns the insolent insinuation into an open admission, underlined by the joyful 'Viva' of the chorus. The operatic Turiddu was definitely looking for trouble.

In conclusion, the dramatization of the story from Vita dei Campi, which Verga had kept within the formal boundaries of his aesthetics despite the thematic adjustments, was pushed to its extreme of melodramatization by Targioni and Menasci. Apart from the novelty of the subject, the only authentically veristic elements preserved in the libretto were the vividness of the dialogues, the two forceful shouts and the quick pace of the action. There remained, of course, the local colour, enhanced by Mascagni's elemental music. In a flattering letter to Verga, written on 27 March 1890, the composer could claim in all honesty and sincerity that the libretto had faithfully reproduced the play, and that it was largely the merit of the 'strong and dramatic colour' of the subject if the opera had been selected by Sonzogno's Committee:

L'assicuro che il libretto ha riprodotto quasi alla lettera la Sua Cavalleria. conservando per tal modo quel colorito e quell'ambiente che hanno reso immortale il Suo lavoro. Anche la Commissione teatrale dette un voto di lode a quel libretto, non certo per la parte inventiva ma soltanto per la fedeltà della trascrizione....e se i Commissari sono venuti nella decisione di scegliere la mia opera per la prima, ciò si deve alla teatralità della mia musica ed al colorito forte e drammatico, ispiratomi da un soggetto così vero, così umano, così appassionato.²³

The overall result of the 'faithful transcription' shows the limited extent to which literary verismo could be successfully transferred on to the operatic stage. The conventional choruses, Alfio's entry song, Turiddu's 'brindisi', the veneer of musical exoticism provided by the "Siciliana" and Lola's stornello, the stilted vocabulary of standard operatic practice were all as essential to the success of the opera as they were alien to Verga's "Scene popolari". The two librettists invented a new recipe with their sagacious blending of old ingredients and the fresh aromas of Sicily; Mascagni devised a well-timed pressure cooker, and the enterprising Sonzogno dished up the prototype of operatic verismo with the authoritative endorsement of the two selecting Committees of his Competition.²⁴

2. Gastaldon's Mala Pasqua! and Monleone's Cavalleria Rusticana

In a detailed article on Mascagni's 'great hit', The Musical Times (1 September 1890) referred to Sonzogno's Competition and stated inaccurately: 'No less than sixty-seven MS. operas were sent in, and several of these treated the subject of Cavalleria Rusticana'. There was, in fact, one other opera based on Verga's play. Its author was, to quote again the English periodical, 'Signor Gastaldon, whose melodious song, "Musica proibita", a year or two ago reigned supreme in every Italian drawing-room, and who expected to gain an easy victory by spinning out Verga's play into an opera of three long acts, written in much the same pleasing, though superficial style as the song which brought his name before the public'.

The diffuseness and hopeless mediocrity of Mala Pasqua! make it unnecessary to consider this opera from a musical point of view. Stanislao Gastaldon (Turin, 1861 - Florence, 1939) had made a good reputation as a parlour-song writer,²⁵ and would have done better to stick to his congenial repertory of languorous and plaintive romanze, competing with such renowned people as Francesco Paolo Tosti and Pier Adolfo Tirindelli instead of venturing to write operas. However, from a literary point of view, Mala Pasqua! offers interesting elements of comparison with Mascagni's Cavalleria, particularly because the two libretti were written at the same time and for the same competition. Mala Pasqua!, a "Dramma lirico" in two acts, was no. 33 of the 73(!) scores submitted to the selecting Committee set up by Sonzogno. It was later withdrawn (presumably because of its length) and performed with a moderate success at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 9 April 1890, five weeks before Mascagni's opera. Although Mala Pasqua! received very unfavourable reviews,²⁶ it was revived in the autumn of the same year at the Teatro Morlacchi of Perugia, in a revised three-act version, and even managed to arrive in Portugal (Lisbon, 2 February 1891).

The major fault with this libretto is its length: the tense and gripping structure of Verga's play is completely shattered, and dialogues are slackened by pointless and wordy speeches. The revised version interrupts the action after Santuzza's curse 'Mala Pasqua a te!' and starts Act III with Alfio's arrival, thus cooling all the impetus of Santuzza's confession to Alfio soon after the break up with

Turiddu. A superfluous Act I sets the clock a few hours earlier, at dawn, and introduces a restless Santuzza (renamed Carmela in this opera), Turiddu parting from Lola after a night's love, and Alfio returning home for Easter. Act II corresponds to the one act of the play, scene by scene, except for Verga's long Scene 1 reshaped into two. Almost every detail of the setting is reproduced: Zio Brasi and his stable, ^{and} his wife Camilla are kept, the 'carabinieri' station is left out. The colourful villagers who make for the church or group in front of Gnà Nunzia's wine-shop sing exactly the same sort of Arcadian platitudes as in Targioni and Menasci's libretto or even worse if possible:

Il sole getta fiori
sui prati e sui verzieri;
il cielo di splendori
c'imporpora i pensieri,
e più giocondo in core
ci palpita l'amore.

Sorride la natura
più giovane e feconda;
l'aria si fa più pura,
si fa più bella l'onda,
e sona alto nel ciel
il canto dell'augel! 27

After the trivial settenari of the opening chorus, Scene 1 of Act II closes with a procession - church bells and organ music are de rigueur - and the chorus on their knees sing two stanzas of decasillabi reminiscent of an early Verdian libretto (I Lombardi):

O Signore, gli schiavi redenti
palpitanti si volgono al Re!
ma i dolori de' cuori fidenti
tutti aduna ed accoglie la fè
e li porta sull'ali dei venti
come incenso, Signore, per te!
.....
e, propizio a la pace feconda,
benedici la cuna e l'avel!

This is followed immediately (Scene 2) by a veristic dialogue between Carmela and Nunzia:

Carmela	Gnà Nunzia!
Gnà Nunzia	O tu, che vuoi? Vado alla chiesa!
Carmela	Non temete, Gnà Nunzia, me ne vado, Ma ditemi dov'è compar Turiddu!
Gnà Nunzia	Non c'è!

The contrast between the melodramatic register of the choruses and the verismo of Verga's dialogues is much more striking than in Tar-

gioni and Menasci's libretto. Quite often, even the texture and linguistic coherence of the dialogues are disfigured by antiquated metres, operatic clichés, ensemble pieces, producing such absurdities as this extract from Scene 4 of Act II corresponding to Scene 6 of Mascagni's Cavalleria:

	<u>Cavalleria</u>
Lola (ironica)	E...voi...sentite le funzioni in piazza?
Turiddu	Santuzza mi narrava...
Santuzza	Gli dicevo
	che oggi è Pasqua e il Signor vede ogni cosa!
Lola (ironica)	Non venite alla messa?
Santuzza (tetra)	Io no, ci deve
	andar chi sa di non aver peccato.
Lola	Io ringrazio il Signore e bacio in terra!

	<u>Mala Pasqua!</u>
Lola	Ma alla funzione voi non ci venite?
Turiddu	Vengo. Carmela mi diceva....
Carmela	Gli dicevo ch'è solenne questa Pasqua gloriosa, che il Signor legge nei cuori, che il Signor vede ogni cosa.
Lola	Così parlano, comare, le coscienze timorate, ma, nel giorno del Signore, dite! in chiesa non ci andate?
Turiddu	Mi dicea che a vigilare la lasciò la mamma mia,... o Gnà Lola, concedete ch'io vi faccia compagnia. Andiamo via, Gnà Lola.
Lola	Voi non avete fretta!
Carmela	(con intenzione) In chiesa deve andare chi ha la coscienza netta!
Lola	Per me ringrazio Iddio e bacio in terra.

The last opera to be derived from Verga's play was a "Dramma lirico in un prologo e un atto" largely moulded on Targioni and Menasci's libretto, with some ideas borrowed from Mala Pasqua!, but exhibiting a finer literary sensibility: this was the third Cavalleria Rusticana (1902), a deservedly forgotten work because of a remarkable lack of musical originality sometimes bordering on plagiarism, although, in its day, it was well received in Italy and abroad.

Its authors were two young Genoese brothers, Giovanni (1879-1947) and Domenico (1875-1942) Monleone: the former adapted the lib-

retto, the latter composed the music. The opportunity was provided by the 1903 Sonzogno Competition for a new one-act opera.²⁸

A comparison of the three libretti based on Verga's play shows the weak points of the earlier texts being varied and used to their best advantage in the third one. The idea of a 'Prologo' as an introduction to the first dialogue Nunzia/Santuzza is clearly derived from Act I of Mala Pasqua!, and so is the back-dating of the action to the night before Easter Sunday. But, instead of a long-winded and useless act, we find a short and tense orchestral piece which incorporates Turiddu's serenade under Lola's window (sung with the curtain up) and a Wagnerian chromatic passage soaring to a climax with the two lovers singing in unison a D'Annunzian line 'O del labbro, o del cor voluttà!' (Ex. 1). As they retire, the orchestra and an off-stage chorus of 'Pastori' portray the breaking of dawn and the religious fervour of the villagers as life is slowly resumed on the festive day. The inevitable neo-Arcadian lines and the conventional images of the 'Resurrection hymn' are more acceptable than in Mascagni's opera since the chorus is kept out of sight and used as an ingredient of the descriptive music. The libretto also provides guidelines of a romantic character with references to a torrent murmuring sadly in the deep valley and the doleful hoot of a nocturnal bird:

Un'aura tiepida e leggera passa a quando a quando tra
le fronde novelle riempiendole di fremiti e di susurri.
Qualche uccello notturno getta nell'aria il suo grido
lamentevole; e le mille voci indefinite della notte cor-
rono di collina in collina, mentre il torrente ripete il
suo triste cantare nel cupo della valle.
Sulle cime orientali sovrasta un chiarore incerto; la
luna impallidisce... E' l'alba che s'appressa, e l'auro-
ra che arriva gioconda, toccando con le sue dita di rosa
ogni prato, ogni albero, ogni casa! E' l'alba di Pasqua!

I PASTORI lontanamente

Recinta d'aurora la vetta riluce;
gli augelli risvegliansi e cantan d'amore.
E' l'alba; il tuo gregge sospingi, pastore;
è il sole che giubilo agli animi induce.²⁹

The musical style of the piece - and, indeed, of the whole opera - does not come up to the ambitions of the literary text. The young composer blends in an uneven sequence Wagnerian reminiscences, tuneful

Ex. 1 - Monleone, Cavalleria Rusticana

Allegro mosso (♩. 120)

re! —————
 re! —————

Allegro mosso (♩. 120)

p *p* *pp* *p*

LOLA (dalla finestra)
 (vom Fenster)

Ah... Tu . rid . du!...
 Ah... Tu . rid . du!...

con. *trudatamente*

TURIDDU

Sì! —————
 Sì! —————

con. *pp* *con.*

LOLA (discosa, gettandosi nelle sue braccia)
 (kommt herüber und wirft sich in die Arme Turiddu's)

Quanto sof . fri . re!.. Al . cen . de . vo... or sci
 un volate Gio . re!.. Du sola Lieb . der... lab die

Le tue lib . bra!..
 Mea . re Lip . pol!

con forza *accelerando*

Ex. 1 - Monleone, Cavalleria Rusticana (cont.)

Assai sostenuto (♩ = 40)

L
 qual.. *deia!..* Sem - pre?.. *E - mi?..* O del lab - bro, o del
Lipp auf *Lip - po, Kum um*

T
 Tut - ta mi - a! *Dir, mia Lebeal* Prima mo - ri - rel... O del lab - bro, o del
Es - er vor - du - tent... Lipp auf *Lip - po, Kum um*

f *poco rall.* . . . *col canto* **Assai sostenuto (♩ = 40)**

Detailed description: This system contains the first three measures of the score. It features a vocal line for Soprano (L) and Tenor (T), and a piano accompaniment. The Soprano part has lyrics 'qual.. deia!..' and 'Sem - pre?.. E - mi?..'. The Tenor part has lyrics 'Tut - ta mi - a! Dir, mia Lebeal' and 'Prima mo - ri - rel... O del lab - bro, o del Lip - po, Kum um'. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings 'f' and 'poco rall.', and a tempo change to 'Assai sostenuto (♩ = 40)'.

L
 cor... o del cor vo - lut - tà
Kum *Lio - bra - giull* *Sün - no Peial*

T
 cor... o del cor vo - lut - tà
Kum *Lio - bra - giull* *Sün - no Peial*

allarg. *assai.* *f e subito P*

Detailed description: This system contains the next three measures of the score. It features a vocal line for Soprano (L) and Tenor (T), and a piano accompaniment. The Soprano part has lyrics 'cor... o del cor vo - lut - tà' and 'Kum Lio - bra - giull Sün - no Peial'. The Tenor part has identical lyrics. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings 'allarg.', 'assai.', and 'f e subito P'.

and then go, while Zio Brasi suggests:

Su quest'incontri è regola
beverci sopra... E' regola.

Although Alfio's story is dramatically weak, it at least brings out one aspect of the carter's psychology: his readiness to look after his own interests and safety in any circumstance.

The only serious weak point of this otherwise good libretto is to be found soon after the crucial duet Santuzza-Alfio. The Monleones must have felt the need for a spectacular alternative to Mascagni's big Scene 9 with its famous drinking song 'Viva il vino spumeggiante'; so, at the end of the Easter Mass, while the bells chime merrily and people come out of the church, cracks of whip and joyful cheers introduce a cart full of young peasants with bunches and garlands of wild flowers ('I fiori di Pasqua!') which are being handed out to the villagers in the square in order to decorate their homes.³¹ The mannerism of the scene determines a sudden alteration of the linguistic register:

Alcune donne		Che olezzo!
Le fanciulle		Son molli di guazza.
Le donne		Oh i bei biancospini!
Le fanciulle		Se pungono!...

Tutti		Fiori sulle soglie;
		fiori sui balconi;
		fiori all'ostello di Nostro Signor!

Voci lontane		April è amor!....

During this flowery frenzy, only Zio Brasi keeps his usual tone of good-natured sarcasm, and comments with Nunzia:

Zio Brasi	Nunzia, v'adornano oggi la bettola come un altar!
Nunzia	Gioventù! Gioventù!

The worst consequence of this brilliant idea is that the young composer seems to have exhausted his personal resources and makes extensive use of Grieg's theme of the 'Morning mood' from Peer Gynt, not just for the flower scene but also during the Easter celebration at Gnà Nunzia's with Turiddu offering wine to everyone (Ex. 2). Only Alfio's arrival brings the Easter morning mood to an end and Monleone

Ex. 2 - Monleone, Cavalleria Rusticana

BRASI

Di . co . il vec . chio det . ta . to: «Santi . si . ca le fe . ste.» lo l'ho sempre osser.
Her . li . ge Vor . schrift, ge . bie . tet: «du sollst den Festtag sei . ern.» Darnach uill ich mich

(escono con le prime) (Frattanto, tra schiocchi di frusta, è giunto in piazza un biroccio parato a festa; e su di esso un
 (mit den andern ab) gruppo di contadini recanti mazzi di fiori silvestri, fresche e ghirlande)

diam!
schal! Alcuni uomini (s TEN.)
 (Einige Männer)
 (Durch die Mitte herein ein festlich geschmückter Maultierkarren. Heute geht's
 Auf ihm junge Bauern mit Blumen, Ranken und Zweigen)

B

va . to. rickten.. (s SOP.)
 Alcune donne (accorrendo)
 Einige Frauen (eilen herbei) I fio . ri di Pa . squa!
 Oh neht doch! die Blu . men!
 Molti altri (s TEN.) Viele andre
 do riah! I giovani (s HASSI) Die Bauern (accorrendo) I fio . ri di Pa . squa!
 hoch her! (eilen herbei) Oh neht doch! die Blu . men!

Ehi, gun . te, quäl N'è pie . no il bi .
Her kommt doch, kommt! Wir füll . ten untern

Altri uomini (a quelli che rimangono)
 (s TEN.)
 Einige Männer
 Sa . lu . te a tut . ta la compa . gni . a!
 (s BAS.) Willkom . men, willkommen lie . be Frau . en!
 roc . cio. Kur . ren.
 Sa . lu . te a tut . ta la compa . gni . a!

cres.

resorts to his own range of thematic material.

A better change can be found at the catastrophe where Monleone follows Verga's play much more closely than Targioni and Menasci did for Mascagni (see above, par. 1). Santuzza is made to go to church after the end of the Mass; that is noticed and commented on by Zio Brasi:

Zio Brasi (accorgendosi di lei che entra furtivamente)
Santuzza che va in chiesa
quando gli altri se n'escono!

She feels an outcast and will not reappear at the end of the opera. We find, instead, Nunzia and Lola whose last lines are almost identical to the equivalent ones in the play:

Nunzia (sempre più smarrita)
Dov'è mio figlio?
Ma dov'è andato?...Che vuol dir ciò?...
Lola Vuol dir che il vino ci andrà in veleno!

In spite of the patchy style and the borrowings, the opera made a good impression in Turin and, earlier on, in Amsterdam, where Monleone's Cavalleria had its world première on 5 February 1907, at the Paleis voor Volksvlyt, paired with Mascagni's famous prototype.³² It was an enormous success, according to Dutch papers (Het Volk, De week, Het nieuws). Then the opera toured other European cities until a Milanese publisher, A. Puccio, bought it and organized an Italian tour.

This move irritated Edoardo Sonzogno, the number one patron of verismo operas, so that, when the new Cavalleria was scheduled for the Teatro Vittorio Emanuele of Turin on 10 July 1907, he started a legal action to stop it and sued the Monleone brothers, the publisher Puccio and Giovanni Verga for unlawful competition. The embittered and vindictive novelist had not forgiven Mascagni and Sonzogno for the lengthy trial he had had to go through in order to claim his share of royalties, and had given his consent to the new adaptation of his play after seeking advice from the 'Società Italiana degli Autori'.

Verga never had a chance to hear the opera and assess the modest merits of the music, but he was impressed by Monleone's growing success to the extent that he was willing to give him the libretto of La Lupa. A few days after Verga had given his consent, he wrote to his friend Dina di Sordevolo (20 March 1907):

Peccato che il Ricordi non abbia subito preso a cuore il Monleone per dargli La Lupa. Ma se, come spero, il successo di cotesto maestro continua ad affermarsi, gliela darò io La Lupa, se non gliela da Ricordi. Tanto, il suo cammino l'ha fatto senza le grucce del Ricordi come Puccini.³³

The novelist's sympathy for the young musician, who was making his way without the help of Ricordi's 'crutches', was strengthened by his grudge against Puccini for failing to come up to his expectations about La Lupa (see Ch. 3). Almost a month after that letter, in a rare outburst of enthusiasm and optimism, as he felt involved in Monleone's project of having his Cavalleria performed in Italy, Verga wrote again to Dina (18 April 1907):

Aspetto notizie di Monleone che mi ha promesso di informarmi delle trattative che sono in corso per Cavalleria. Pare che cotesto suo nuovo Editore sappia fare meglio dei vecchi; ad ogni modo se ne occupa con fervore. Speriamo bene, e che venga il successo anche per La Lupa. Allora fra i verdelli, la Cavalleria, la Lupa, la Duchessa, che California!

Vedo tutto color di rosa scrivendo questa lettera e correndo col pensiero costì. Tanti tanti saluti di cuore. Giovannino.³⁴

On the night of the successful première in Turin, a telegram informed Verga in Catania and he immediately relayed the good news to Dina:

Catania, giovedì, 11 mattina (July 1907)
Ricevo or ora questo dispaccio da Torino, che mi affretto a comunicarti sapendo di farti piacere: "Cavalleria completo successo malgrado diffidenza. Saluti cordialissimi. Fratelli Monleone, Puccio, e C." Ma com'è che la Stampa che ho seguito giorno per giorno sino a ieri non annuncia neppure la rappresentazione? E' del complotto Sonzogniano?.. Se son rose fioriranno...Ad ogni modo son contento del risultato ottenuto sinora, per dare una lezione a quel famoso Mascagni, che non scrive più opere vedi bullettino accluso, e non ha fatto più nulla dopo la Cavalleria, cioè hanno fatto gli strozzini con me, lui e Sonzogno.³⁵

It is clear from this letter that Verga's resentment against Mascagni was still running high. Of course, there was no Sonzognan plot with the press and Mascagni was anything but idle. La Stampa did announce the performance of Monleone's opera on 10 July in a

sympathetic way. It would be conducted by one of Italy's most prestigious artists, Antonio Guarnieri; Turiddu would be sung by Alfredo Cecchi and Santuzza by Linda Micucci. On 11 July the paper published a favourable and detailed review. Its critic was really generous in assessing the composer's abilities:

Disinvolto, conoscitore dell'effetto, non di rado conciso, efficace, ha chiare vedute e serietà d'intenti. Ma il guaio principale si è ch'egli difetta di personalità e di idee originali, e per quanto gli sia riuscito di liberare lo spartito da reminiscenze mascagnane, - il che non è poco merito, - altre e non lievi influenze di noti autori vi sono, purtroppo, palesi.

Verga's delight and the Monleones' satisfaction did not last long. In court, Sonzogno argued that, by accepting the settlement of 143,000 lire for Mascagni's opera, the novelist had forfeited his copyright on Cavalleria; therefore, Monleone's libretto was an arbitrary appropriation and Verga had been ill-advised to authorize its publication. The publisher seemed to have a good case and the opera had to be withdrawn. Moreover, Verga was made to pay the legal costs (1,500 lire) not only for himself but also for the penniless Monleone and the publisher Puccio who claimed exemption since he had had no part in the arrangements prior to the composition of the opera. Entangled as he was in the dispute, Verga had to sue his partners to be reimbursed, which took a long time and more money. Several letters to Dina document Verga's anger, frustration and mild hopes for a final settlement.³⁶

As to Monleone and Puccio, they were undeterred by the court order. They simply moved abroad and started a long European tour which took the opera to Budapest (17 January 1908, sung in Hungarian), Vienna, Breslau, Marseilles, Paris. On 10 May 1909 the new Cavalleria Rusticana was performed in London, at the Coronet Theatre (paired with Acts 2 and 3 of Rossini's Barbiere), and repeated on the 15th together with Bellini's Sonnambula. In the same week Covent Garden was showing Mascagni's Cavalleria with Pagliacci, and both operas had been previously staged at the Coronet (end of April 1909). So there were plenty of opportunities for immediate comparison, and all the reviews of Monleone's opera obviously insisted on this point. The Times' critic on 12 May wrote:

Still, in spite of these differences [between the libretti of the two operas]...., it all comes very much to the same thing in the end. In both operas the melodies are either laden with sugar or torn to the usual shreds with the usual passion, and in both operas the orchestration is the conventional mixture of harp and muted strings and very much unmuted brass.

Reviewing the second performance of the opera, The Times (17 May 1909) concluded:

Before Bellini's opera the "new" Cavalleria Rusticana was repeated with the same cast as before, convincing everybody that there is not much to choose between the two versions of the work, except that Monleone's falls short of Mascagni's hysterical intensity.

The comment, albeit inaccurate and unfair to Mascagni, betrays a widespread dislike for verismo operas as such. The Musical Times (1 June 1909) took a different view which implied a favourable evaluation of Monleone's setting:

The libretto differs little from that used by Mascagni, but the musical treatment is more advanced in its means of expression, and often makes appeal to the musical intellect rather than to popular taste. For this reason the opera is not likely to achieve so great a vogue as its predecessor.

The Monthly Musical Record (1 June 1909) limited its comment to a matter-of-fact consideration:

Mascagni's opera having achieved so great and so prolonged a success, it seemed somewhat bold on the part of the young composer Monleone to challenge comparison with a work not only based on the same story, but on the same libretto. The rendering of this opera, though there were good moments in it, proved that Mascagni had nothing to fear from his rival.

Although Monleone's biographer claims that the opera was 'buried alive' by the ruthlessness of the mighty publisher Sonzogno, the new Cavalleria would not have had a long life of its own. Perhaps the most interesting critical statement about this otherwise negligible opera can be found in La Stampa's review of the 1907 Turin première. It is not so much a comment on the opera in itself as on Monleone's

late adherence to the verismo fashion which had by then exhausted its innovative potential and turned into a threadbare cliché. The critic concluded his article defining Monleone's 'major wrong' as follows:

...il suo torto maggiore fu di non voler credere, egli solo, agli inganni del verismo, quando questi sono ormai conosciuti anche dal grosso pubblico. Infatti per far guerra al più biasimevole dei convenzionalismi scenici-musicali di trent'anni fa, i nostri giovani maestri, apostoli del cosiddetto verismo, con le convulsioni, i parossismi, le nevrosi superacute della loro musica, non sono riusciti a salvare se stessi.

3. Verga, Mascagni and the Critics

The pathos and emphasis of Mascagni's music established an idyllic, reassuring image of the Sicilians as harmless and God-fearing peasants who might well resort to violence but only for some individualistic point of honour. At a time of growing social unrest in the island and, indeed, in the rest of Italy in the early 1890s, such a comforting view would win full support with the middle-class audiences of the striving cities of the peninsula. So, Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana heralded the entry of rural Italy into the aristocratic and bourgeois world of opera and was hailed as a revolutionary masterpiece by the large moderate strata of the public or branded as a cynical travesty by the intellectual and progressive élites.

The universal acclaim for the opera soon superseded the popularity of the play, and, much to Verga's regret, the distinctive artistic merits of his work were obliterated in the harsh criticism of the patronizing conservatism of the libretto which was often confused with the play itself. Such is the case of the article "Sicilia Verista e Sicilia Vera" by the theatre critic Eduardo Boutet, published in the Rome 'paper Don Chisciotte on 7 January 1894. It was the period of the 'Sicilian Fasci', the first organized working-class movement struggling for decent wages and better conditions in the sulphur mines and the large estates of the island. Under the impression of the alarm-

ing dispatches from Sicily reporting the appalling situation of the striking miners and peasants, Boutet launched an attack on Verga and Capuana for misrepresenting or ignoring the 'true' Sicilians and their sufferings, and offering, instead, 'Arcadian' pictures of 'noble savages'. It was a generalized charge against the whole production of the two Sicilians, but the specific examples quoted by Boutet to support his argument were taken from Cavalleria Rusticana, the libretto of the opera being confused with the play:

Altro che compari Turiddu e compari Alfio, e morsetti all'orecchio e male pasque a te e a me! Basta la storia squadernata al sole della sola zolfara per sentirsi spezzare l'anima....Invece compare Alfio se ne veniva a cantare allegramente alla ribalta: Oh, che bel mestiere fare il carrettiere; e sulle piazzette dei villaggi si trovava un vinetto da brindisi faccio, brindisi faccio;...e chitarre, stornelli, rose, fiori. Lagrimucce fatte per l'applauso alla prima attrice; o tormenti raggruppati in note per lo sfoghetto di un tenore.

And Boutet concluded, with heartfelt sympathy for the wronged Sicilian people, that the Sicily of the 'veristi' was only an unrealistic, man-nered picture of the true one:

Ecco, è chiaro. Vuol dire che la Sicilia degli scrittori che riproducevano dal vero, è diversa, assai diversa, dalla Sicilia vera: popolo che soffre tutti gli strazi e tutti i soprusi, e che cerca nella morte la fine de' patimenti più infami e più ingiusti. Vuol dire che la Sicilia - Cavalleria Rusticana, nella quale si può riassumere la macchietta, il bozzetto e la novella, era una Sicilia esercitazione letteraria.....: di maniera.

Apart from the material inaccuracy concerning the texts of Cavalleria, what could be true for the opera was grossly unfair to Verga's works. In an open letter published two days later in the same newspaper, it was all too easy for Capuana to refute Boutet's charges by simply stating that the critic had not done his homework if he could credit Verga with the 'melodramatic nonsense': Oh, che bel mestiere, fare il carrettiere. But when it came to the dramatic reality of the 'Fasci' and the actual conditions of the Sicilians, Capuana gave away his own social conservatism by writing that Verga and his likes had created works of art 'osservando la Sicilia in istato normale, in istato di sanità e non di eccitazione morbosa'. Moving from opposite ideologi-

cal premises, Capuana chose the same wrong approach adopted by Boutet to criticize Verga's works: their connection with contemporary events in Sicily. On the one hand, Capuana historicized Verga's emblematic and heroic verismo, reducing it to a portrayal of Sicilians in a 'normal' and 'sane' state, therefore subservient and respectful of the status quo; on the other hand, he implicitly censured as insane and abnormal the agitation of the labourers and mineworkers to shake off a shameful system of exploitation and political discrimination in the island.³⁷

The progressive but superficial Boutet can hardly be excused for his blunder at a time when pamphlets, articles and reviews on Mascagni's Cavalleria were being poured out almost as quickly as the opera appeared in the theatres all over Europe, and any assessment of its musical merits was set against the relevance of the original play on the overall dramatic effectiveness^λ ^{of the libretto.} The peak period for such a frenetic output was September 1892, during the Theatre and Music Exhibition in Vienna where Edoardo Sonzogno, along with other veristic operas of his House, presented Mascagni's Cavalleria and L'Amico Fritz.

Since the gentle idyll of Erckmann and Chatrian had come as an anticlimax after the impetuous Cavalleria, the major Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick, commented on the importance of the subject in the success of the opera:

In Cavalleria we were first of all impressed by the extraordinarily happy choice of material. Without doubt this libretto brought out the best in Mascagni and it is of decisive importance in the opera's success. A popular, lively setting, sharply delineated characters, an excellent exposition and heightening of the action, everything well motivated, natural, realistic. And finally the "heavenly brevity", seeing how everyone has had a bellyful of 4-5 hour operas and Gutzkow's novels in 9 volumes!...Mascagni's one-act tragedy surprised and gripped us because it was something quite new. It was not as if the musical ideas were in themselves particularly original, but combined with the shattering events and the passionately involved orchestra they contributed without question to the impression of something new. 38

The echoes of Mascagni's popularity in Vienna and the enthusiastic comments of the Viennese press prompted, among others, a long essay in 5 parts, "Il Fenomeno Mascagni", published in the Corriere

di Napoli (25-30 September 1892). Its author was the editor of the Neapolitan daily, Arturo Colautti, a theatre critic who was to ~~write~~ the libretto of Fedora (1898) for Giordano and Adriana Lecouvreur (1902) for Francesco Cilea. In a humorous but wordy style, he asked, tongue-in-cheek:

Come si spiega questo fenomeno clamoroso, questo vivente paradosso, questo assurdo umanato, che fa sorridere la Germania e mette nell'imbarazzo l'Italia?

Colautti's answer seemed to be: Verga's play. But he soon added, with a better insight than his colleague Boutet, that the success of the opera was mostly due to the embellishments introduced by the librettists:

La parte della Cavalleria lirica che è meglio piaciuta ai pubblici più diversi e più remoti è precisamente quella senza parole...Non basta ancora. Ben altre parti sono di questa insalubre Cavalleria che si sottraggono alla paternità nominale del signor Verga. Occorre citare la siciliana, la canzone di Lola, il doppio coro di introduzione, il concertato religioso, il brindisi, la preghiera di Turiddu,... Ebbene, il successo fu determinato in massima parte da questi hors d'oeuvre poetici, a cui il novel-liere-drammaturgo si dichiara assolutamente incolpevole.

Consequently, the success of the opera, in Colautti's assessment, was due to the play only for one quarter. The journalist cleared Verga of any responsibility for the embellishments which had made his story one of the greatest operatic hits of the century, and devoted the third part of his essay to a musical analysis of Cavalleria. He defined Mascagni as 'an exaggeration of Bizet' and elaborated on the composer's sources:

Senza pregiudizi di scuola e senza ubbie di nazionalità, egli passa indifferentemente, attraverso il corpo di Bizet, da Meyerbeer a Verdi, da Gounod a Ponchielli, da Schumann a Massenet. Questi con preferenza: il giovane premiato ha un debole per l'ex timpanista dell'Opéra. Cavalleria non pare troppo spesso una parafrasi del Roi de Lahore?

After decrying the limited originality of the music, Colautti could

only single out the 'dinamismo musicale' as a decisive factor for the sweeping success of the opera. By that he meant the all too frequent changes of tempo, the restless rhythms, the over-abundant and sharply contrasting dynamics or, in his own words: 'la nevrosi lirica, l'iperemia musicale, il delirium sonans'.

The disparaging remarks on Mascagni which spiced Colautti's long essay could only be matched by an earlier abusive article of Gabriele D'Annunzio. It appeared on the front page of Il Mattino, the new Neapolitan daily founded by Edoardo Scarfoglio and Matilde Serao in the spring of 1892. In "Il Capobanda" (2-3 September 1892) Mascagni was defined as 'il velocissimo fabbricatore di melodrammi', 'vanaglorioso musicante estemporaneo', 'lesto manipolatore', and the pamphleteer's vitriolic pen did not spare Mascagni's publisher and publicity agent Edoardo Sonzogno, dubbed 'Barnum musicale'. The article, however, was just a showpiece of D'Annunzio's linguistic virtuosity and snobbishness. The only serious point made in it concerned the gigantic commercial operation mounted by Sonzogno on the unpredictably successful Cavalleria (e.g. its much publicized presentation at the Vienna Exhibition). Mascagni will always stay out of the realm of pure art, stated D'Annunzio, his unique concern being business, big business. A machine for the intensive production of melodramas, that's what he was, concluded the flamboyant detractor:

In verità, il signor Sonzogno dev'essere molto soddisfatto della sua creatura. Egli favorisce le produzioni rapide, abbondanti e mediocri...Ora, come i suoi gusti inclinano alla musica, qual meccanico prodigioso avrebbe mai potuto costruirgli una macchina di melodrammi più largamente e rapidamente produttiva?

Twenty years later, another member of the Sonzogno family, the young Lorenzo, would mastermind a fruitful collaboration between the sublime poet and the 'prodigious mechanic' which resulted in the 'tragedia lirica' Parisina (1913). In 1892 "Il Capobanda" proved such an outrage against the countless admirers of the composer all over the country that, a few days after its publication, the following correspondence from Venice appeared in the Corriere di Napoli:

Ovazioni a Mascagni
Venezia, 9 - ore 10,20 pom.
Stasera, mentre la musica suonava in piazza la

Cavalleria Rusticana, la folla riconoscendo Mascagni seduto ad un caffè, lo acclamò vivamente. Poi la dimostrazione crebbe, diventando entusiastica....I molti forestieri, convenuti in piazza fecero lo stesso. Le signore agitavano i fazzoletti. Circondato dalla folla, Mascagni stringeva le mani a tutti, ringraziando commosso. Tutti i presenti si associarono ai dimostranti, quale protesta contro un articolo del D'Annunzio aggressivo per Mascagni, riportato dai giornali d'oggi. La dimostrazione seguì sempre più imponente per le vie della città, accompagnando il maestro all'albergo.

Popular enthusiasm versus slashing criticism: with few exceptions, such seems to be the general response to Mascagni's controversial and divisive Cavalleria in Italy. In France, where the Young Italian School could count fewer friends than anywhere else in Europe, the opera caused an uproar on its première at the Opéra-Comique (19 January 1892).³⁹ A strikingly similar approach to the one chosen by A. Colautti in his essay, is noticeable in a review signed René de Récy which appeared in the Revue Politique et Littéraire of 23 January 1892. The critic slashed the 'mélodies qui ont traîné dans nos faubourgs; une platitude prétentieuse et bruyante; des séries de modulations où l'absence de sentiment musical se trahit à chaque mesure; la banalité dans la recherche', and pointed out three reasons for the success of the opera: 'le bruit', for which Mascagni was second to none; 'la légende du concours'; and Verga's play:

La troisième, c'est le drame de Verga, dont la concision tragique se hâte vers le but, sans embarrasser sa marche de préparations oiseuses, d'habiles ménagements, de complications savantes. Cette Chevalerie rustique, c'est proprement le Point d'honneur villageois: comment ils aiment, comment ils trahissent et comment ils se vengent; brusquement, brutalement, à brûle-pourpoint...Tous cela, sans la partition, sans les hors d'oeuvre obligatoires: sérénade, prière, scène religieuse, couplets du charretier, chœur de buveurs, - remplirait vingt minutes à peine, et voilà qui coupe court aux questions indiscretes...pour le plus grand profit du musicien.⁴⁰

The French critic did not miss the opportunity to strike indiscriminately at Italian composers: 'Certes, nous n'attendions pas d'Italie une partition délicate, bien écrite'. A few days later, the Italo-phile and influential Camille Bellaigue, reviewing Cavalleria for

the Revue des Deux Mondes (1 February 1892), admitted that Mascagni's opera had been received 'froidement par le public et très durement par la critique', and picked at his country's chauvinism:

...on a condamné en bloc la première oeuvre d'un écolier, et remontant de là jusqu'aux chefs d'oeuvre des maîtres, c'est l'école italienne tout entière qu'une fois de plus a paru méconnaître et calomnier. Voilà ce qu'il ne faut pas faire.

And Bellaigue quoted the latest masterpiece of his favourite composer, Verdi's Otello, as an example of vitality in the Italian school. He also gave a more objective and analytic evaluation of Cavalleria. Like Colautti, he pointed out the musical reminiscences (Gounod, Bizet, Massenet, Verdi); he criticized harmony, rhythm and instrumentation, and singled out as bad items: 'La très vulgaire chanson du charretier,l'oiseuse et banale prière où se rencontrent le Massenet du Roi de Lahore et l'Adam du trop fameux Noël...l'intermezzo,....La chanson à boire, où des oreilles françaises ne pouvaient pas ne pas reconnaître: J'ai du bon tabac'. But then Bellaigue illustrated the sparing means by which Mascagni achieved intensity of expression and dramatic effectiveness in such pieces as the "Siciliana" ('Je l'aime, cette sérénade tragique, pour son parfum populaire, pour la tache de sang qu'elle fait au seuil du drame'), Santuzza's romanza, Lola's stornello ('d'une gentille allure toscane'). A special mention was made of the dialogue Santuzza/Lucia ('Autant de questions, autant de phrases expressives, d'une humilité, d'une détresse qui attendrit'), and to support his view, Bellaigue quoted the authoritative opinion of Eduard Hanslick:

Nous partageons absolument l'avis d'un de nos confrères allemands, et non des plus petits, M. Hanslick, qui écrivait à propos de Cavalleria: "Dans tout cet opéra on pourrait déclarer excellentes les parties de conversation musicale, de dialogue animé, plutôt que les chants ou le chant proprement dit".⁴¹

In this way, two of the major music critics in Europe specifically acknowledged the truly veristic parts of Mascagni's opera, sorting them out from the 'bruit' of the melodrama.

Most other reviewers, in Italy and elsewhere, were too busy minimizing the novelty of the opera and the grossly overstated im-

portance of Mascagni as an innovator or, even worse, as the successor of Verdi. The major literary journal in Italy, Nuova Antologia, was consistent in slashing the exaggerated enthusiasm aroused by Cavalleria. One exception was the first review of the opera (Nuova Antologia, 1 June 1890), written by Francesco D'Arcais who was a member of the selecting committee of the Sonzogno Competition. The only negative comments concerned Alfio's song, 'il più scadente pezzo', and the duet Santuzza/Alfio, which D'Arcais considered disproportionately long. At the end of 1891, the music critic of the journal, the old conservative Girolamo A. Biaggi stated drily:

...non siamo per nulla con que' critici e quegli scrittori che per la Cavalleria Rusticana (un'opera di un solo atto, e non tutto bellissimo, nè bello, nè lodevole, per giunta) dissero il Mascagni un grande, un sommo, un genio, e non dubitarono di proclamarlo continuatore e successore del più illustre compositore vivente, del Verdi nè più nè meno.⁴²

A similar opinion can be found at the end of an article on "I caratteri musicali del Falstaff" (Nuova Antologia, 15 June 1893) by Ippolito Valetta who defined Mascagni as 'un avventurato improvvisatore' and, like Bellaigue, indicated Verdi as a 'luminoso esempio' for everybody.

In Britain, where Cavalleria arrived in 1891 (London, Shaftesbury Theatre, 19 October, paired with a condensed version of the brothers Ricci's comic opera Crispino e la comare), the response was more or less the same: popular enthusiasm checked by the critics' caution. In those years, a London weekly, The World, benefited from the witty reviews of an exceptional music critic, G.B. Shaw. This is what he wrote after the mild Amico Fritz had partially disappointed Mascagni's fans:

I was not taken in by Cavalleria; and now that everybody finds L'Amico Fritz obviously deficient in first-rate promise and first-rate accomplishment, I am in the pleasing position of being able to say, "I told you so". Let us therefore clear the discussion of all nonsense about genius of the highest order, and of the ridiculous comparisons with Verdi and Wagner which were rife last year, and give Mascagni fair play as an interesting young composer with a vigorous talent, and plenty of courage in asserting it, congratulating ourselves meanwhile on the fact that Bellini has at last

found a disciple, albeit one far inferior to his master.⁴³

In the early years of our century, as the critical tide rose against the veristic fashion in opera and Verga's art was eclipsed by new literary trends, Mascagni's Cavalleria was still faring well. A revival of the opera in Paris, under the direction of the author, prompted an article in the Revue Politique et Littéraire (28 January 1905) on "Pietro Mascagni et la Jeune Italie Musicale" by Raymond Bouyer which exhibits a remarkably different attitude from the 1892 review in the same journal. In the progressive emancipation from Wagner's influence, argued the author, two tendencies had emerged, symbolism and naturalism, which might also be identified as Debussyisme and Mascagnisme (!), and, with ease and little sense of proportion, Bouyer juxtaposed 'le novateur de Pelléas et Melisande' to 'le novateur de Cavalleria Rusticana':

Debussy, n'est-ce pas l'extrême rêve, ultima Thule?
Le mystère quasi muet des nuits sans étoiles ou l'étrange murmure des jours neigeux? L'équivalent musical des nocturnes ébauchés par James Whistler?.....
Mascagni, c'est le jour criard, la lumière crue, sans demiteintes; c'est la vie latine qui reprend conscience en face de la féerie germanique, le document qui veut réagir contre le symbole, le Midi qui lutte sourdement contre le Nord, sous couleur de continuer ses innovations.

But Bouyer's pictorial and atmospheric definition of Mascagni actually concerned the subject of Cavalleria; Verga's 'étude dramatique' was appreciated for its conciseness, healthy sensualism and picturesque ('Le décor, voilà ce qui rehausse à propos ce drame rustique de la jalousie, qui le vérisme italien drape dans le plis d'or du soleil natal'). As to the music, we find again the usual charges ('De la facilité, de l'entrain, du bruit, beaucoup de réminiscences, des chœurs, des airs, adroitement travestis sous la trame ininterrompue de l'action native'), and the indiscriminate denigration of 'la jeune Italie musicale', which, according to Bouyer, was influenced by 'le Mascagnisme' ('les Vies de Bohème parallèles des Leoncavallo et des Puccini, le Paillasse de l'un, la Tosca de l'autre, ouvrages haletants et superficiels,...sans avenir et sans art'). Not surprisingly, Bouyer concluded that 'la 'tranche de vie' ne nous suffit plus', and played off Mascagni against D'Annunzio whose fame

had crossed the Alps and had comfortably settled in France:

Diversement latins, Pietro Mascagni et Gabriele D'Annunzio peignent tous deux la Vie sans bannir le pastiche; mais la nouvelle France artiste préférera toujours celui-ci,...D'Annunzio nous attire beaucoup en nous éffrayant un peu, par sa hauteur d'aristocrate et de lettré, par sa nature de Parnassien frénétique.. Mascagni apparaît plus populaire et plus simple; mais il ne suggère pas cette subtilité dans la sensualité, cette distinction dans la passion; son idéal borné ne promet point ces caresses de voluptueux égoïsme ou de beauté fatale; sa muse plus honnête ignore ces perversités de sirène;

If France preferred the 'perverse sirène', Italy was actually raving about the exquisite and exuberant Gabriele. Verga's austere and pessimistic art had never been 'popular' and his best-selling stories had often been appreciated for the wrong reasons as was the case with Cavalleria Rusticana. On his 80th birthday, L'Illustrazione Italiana (29 August 1920) dedicated the entire issue to the novelist, and G.A. Borgese, in an article on "La Fortuna di Verga", pointed out the superficial understanding of that play:

Cavalleria Rusticana è, senza contrasto, un capolavoro; e, sebbene sia un capolavoro, è popolare. Ma non c'illudiamo. E' popolarità di materia e d'argomento, non di bellezza d'arte. Quella novella e il dramma in cui fu allargata piacquero per sbaglio.... In Cavalleria Rusticana si bearono del pittoresco. C'era un po' di Sicilia barbara, folk-lore, usi e costumi, fichi d'India e coltelli.

It could be added to Borgese's words that the melodramatization of the play not only strengthened the 'wrong' factors in the popularity of the story, but added a further bias against a full and correct appreciation of Verga's art. The awareness of that was a source of resentment for the novelist in his last years.

After Verga's death (27 January 1922), in a celebrative article published in Nuova Antologia (1 April 1922), Francesco Paolo Mulè recalled a visit he had paid to Verga in Catania some ten years earlier and quoted a bitter outburst of the novelist about Cavalleria:

Una volta, chiedendogli che cosa preparasse...si rabbuiò e uscì, insolitamente, in queste parole: - Per chi

dovrei scrivere? Di ciò che ho scritto sopravvive soltanto la Cavalleria Rusticana, nè per virtù mia, ma di Pietro Mascagni. Le porto, quelle paginette, come un cappio al collo. -
Amarezza, ma dignitosa, rassegnata, indulgente.

A few months later, Verga was also remembered by the Revue des Deux Mondes (15 October 1922) with a perceptive article significantly entitled "L'Auteur de Cavalleria Rusticana". Its author, Louis Gillet, opened his survey of Verga's works regretting that the tremendous popularity of the opera had overshadowed the novelist's name:

Rien n'est plus célèbre que l'opéra de Cavalleria Rusticana. Depuis plus de vingt-cinq ans, dans toutes les capitales du monde, cette musique brutale a popularisé le nom de Mascagni, et l'aventure tragique de Turiddu Macca et de Santuzza s'est jointe au répertoire des amants immortels, à côté de l'histoire de Manon Lescaut et de Carmen. Mais le roman de l'abbé Prévost continue de vivre au dehors de la musique de Massenet, et l'éclatant talent de Bizet n'a pas fait oublier la gloire de Mérimée. Au contraire, combien d'auditeurs de Cavalleria connaissent, au moins à l'étranger, le nom de Giovanni Verga?

In 1894 Eduardo Boutet had no justification for confusing the libretto of Cavalleria with the text of the play: how much more remarkable that this should happen, as late as 1928, to so experienced a writer as D.H. Lawrence! Whether it was complete ignorance of the opera or the fact that he took for granted what others had simply assumed as possible, Lawrence concluded the introduction to his own translation of Cavalleria Rusticana and Other stories with this incredible statement:

Everybody knows, of course, that Verga made a dramatized version of Cavalleria Rusticana, and that this dramatized version is the libretto of the ever-popular little opera of the same name. So that Mascagni's rather feeble music has gone to immortalize a man like Verga, whose only popular claim to fame is that he wrote the afore-said libretto. But that is fame's fault, not Verga's.⁴⁴

Although Verga's 'popularity' was still to come, his claim to fame had been vindicated by Luigi Russo with a fundamental essay (Giovan-

ni Verga, Napoli, 1920), followed by A. Momigliano's study on Verga narratore (Palermo, 1923). As a translator of Vita dei Campi and Mastro-don Gesualdo, Lawrence might have been at least more cautious in accepting such an arbitrary attribution.

In a correct critical perspective, as far as Verga is concerned, the operatic adaptation should be relegated to the biographical notes as an unfortunate incident in Verga's long and not particularly happy life. Yet, even in recent times, the controversial popularity of Mascagni's opera has occasionally caused Verga's position to be misrepresented and factual evidence distorted. One example will suffice. In "Pietro Mascagni and Giovanni Verga" (Music and Letters, 1963), John W. Klein claims that, in the relationship between novelist and composer, the initial positions were, in the end, completely reversed, 'for veneration on Mascagni's part was gradually turned into open hostility and even contempt, whereas Verga's initial sympathy tinged with condescension for an 'obscure' musician becomes outraged dignity and, finally, subsides into something closely akin to humility and even gratitude.' At the end of his article, Klein misquotes F.P. Mulè's recollection of his meeting with Verga (see above) and concludes:

Verga was beginning to recognize that his strange relationship with Mascagni had been, after all, the one supreme stroke of good luck in a somewhat harassed existence....an almost ideal partnership that had benefited both men beyond their wildest expectations....

On the contrary, the 'partnership', far from being 'ideal', did, in fact, damage both men: after his first sensational success, Mascagni remained forever a one-opera composer, though some of his later works (Ratcliff, Iris) would testify to a richer and finer personality; Verga was unwittingly dragged into the controversy about operatic verismo and often blamed for 'faults' - sensationalism, excess, picturesqueness - which were none of his own.

As for Mascagni's 'contempt', an episode related by an eye-witness hands down to posterity the composer's last word on his 'strange relationship' with the novelist. It was the spring of 1922, two months after Verga's death. Mascagni was travelling to Catania to conduct Il Piccolo Marat at the Teatro Bellini. Giuseppe Patanè and

some friends went to meet the composer at Messina to keep him company on the last stretch of his journey. The conversation touched on the late novelist and Mascagni expressed his sincere regret at not having been able to make it up to Verga:

Ci domandò, a un certo momento: "E Verga? Lo cercai sempre nei miei viaggi a Catania. E quante volte mi domandai: - Se andassi a sonare il campanello di casa sua...Perchè non potremmo essere amici, Verga ed io?" Ne era crucciato, mentre guardava attraverso il finestrino la riviera di Acitrezza e il treno scendeva tra gli agrumeti, verso le ciminiere della marina di Catania. La evocazione era sincera; il rimpianto, vivo. Altri tempi. Difficili, le amicizie.⁴⁵

In his old age, Mascagni came to consider his youthful 'partnership' with Verga as yet another source of bitterness and grudge. Snubbed by Italy's younger composers, ignored or censured by the critics, entrenched on reactionary positions about opera and music in general, Mascagni found little reason for rejoicing on the fiftieth anniversary of his most popular work. An article he wrote for the Nuova Antologia ("Il cinquantenario della Cavalleria Rusticana in musica", 16 January 1940) is full of nostalgic reminiscences and acrimonious comments on artistic directors (for not including his operas in their season programmes), malevolent critics and even film reviewers. In 1939 a film was made from Verga's Cavalleria for which the producer asked Mascagni to authorize the use of his music. The composer firmly refused 'for personal and deeply felt reasons'; but then he complained about a Neapolitan newspaper, Il Mattino, which claimed, as Mascagni put it in his article, that 'il maggior titolo d'onore della società produttrice è di non aver voluto la musica della Cavalleria che avrebbe contaminato il bel filme'. The Mattino review quoted by Mascagni had enthusiastic comments on Verga's story and the film (featuring first-rate artists: Isa Poli, Leonardo Cortese, Carlo Ninchi), and welcomed the use of 'splendid popular music' as befitting the original character of Verga's work better than 'worn out melodramatic formulas'.⁴⁶ In his resentment, Mascagni over-reacted, detecting a long-nourished hatred for his 'poor' opera in the unsympathetic reviewer:

Per Dio! Che razza di milza debbono avere i redattori del Mattino di Napoli se per cinquant'anni si son tenuti in corpo tanto odio per la mia povera

Cavalleria e si sono sfogati proprio in questo momento in cui qualche anima buona e generosa intende commemorare una data che non può riuscire antipatica al nostro popolo.

And people would still acclaim Mascagni as the author of Cavalleria when he conducted anniversary performances of his opera in Rome (Teatro dell'Opera, 5 March 1940), Milan (La Scala, 12 April 1940) and in other theatres. In 1929, Mussolini's Accademia d'Italia had welcomed the composer as a member and vice-president, in the company of Umberto Giordano and Lorenzo Perosi.

Chapter 3

VERGA AND CAPUANA AS LIBRETTISTS

1. Puccini and La Lupa: Chronicle of an Abortive Project

The project of collaboration between Verga and Puccini goes back to 1891, in the wake of the ever-growing popularity of Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana. The publisher Giulio Ricordi, a shrewd businessman as well as a refined connoisseur, realized that a verismo opera was not, after all, a disreputable thing for his glorious House to promote, and, wishing to beat his rival Sonzogno at his own game, he contacted Verga in order to choose another story from Vita dei Campi and have it turned into a libretto to be offered to Puccini.

At that time, Verga was involved in the controversy with Sonzogno and Mascagni over his share of the substantial earnings Cavalleria was reaping all over Europe, and was only too happy to antagonize the arrogant entrepreneur and the ungrateful composer by providing himself a libretto for a finer musician under the auspices of Verdi's publisher. La Lupa was chosen, and Verga signed a contract with Ricordi by which he undertook to dramatize the story and collaborate with Federico De Roberto in its versification. The project was to go smoothly as far as the two colleagues and Ricordi were concerned, but it soon met with the agonizing irresoluteness of Puccini when he came to grips with the character of the fatal woman from the desolate and scorched fields of Sicily.

Negotiations, decisions and second thoughts are well documented by the correspondence between Verga and De Roberto on one side, and Puccini and Ricordi on the other, covering a large part (14 April 1893-13 July 1894) of the delicate transition phase, in the composer's production, from the great success of Manon Lescaut (Turin, Teatro Regio, 1 February 1893) to the composition of La Bohème. The projects of La Lupa and Bohème were carried on simultaneously for some time until Puccini decided to drop the former and completed Murger's "Scenes" in December 1895.

Unfamiliar as he was with the lengthy and unpredictable process of creation of an opera, Verga set himself to work and, by the end of

1891, he finished the first draft of his "Scene drammatiche". Meanwhile, Ricordi was shopping around for more options to store up for his favourite composer. On 13 January 1892, Verga wrote to De Roberto somewhat resentfully:

Il Commendatore [Ricordi] è più fine che mai. Non solo non so più nulla della Lupa, ma so che ha acquistato il diritto di trarre un libretto dalla Tosca per Puccini...

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 124)¹

During 1892, while Verga and De Roberto worked on the libretto, Puccini was entirely taken by the composition of Manon Lescaut, completed in October. Then came the première of the opera in February 1893, so it was not until the spring that Verga could inform De Roberto that contacts had been resumed. On 14 April 1893 he wrote to his friend:

Puccini mi ha scritto che delle modificazioni che desidera alla Lupa ne parleremo al mio ritorno a Milano, in giugno, e che adesso sta musicando la Bohème.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 28)

As time passed, Verga's scepticism about Puccini's willingness to set his play grew stronger. On the other hand, the changes required by the composer already betrayed his uneasiness with Verga's artistic world. After a meeting with the solicitous Ricordi, the novelist reported his impressions to De Roberto and expressed his conviction that they were wasting time with Puccini:

Tabiano, 15 luglio 1893

Sono stato dal Commendatore...mi ha chiesto qualche mutamento al libretto - meno proverbi, e la parte di Maricchia allargata e resa più tenera nel 2° atto. Risposi sì sul primo punto, ma quanto al secondo, se Maricchia al 2° atto non è gelosa e non si ribella finisce il dramma. E Ricordi ne conviene. Ad ogni modo siccome qualche piccola modificazione volevo già fare al taglio delle scene, promisi di occuparmene qui, e di concertare poi al ritorno con lui. Ma intanto gli dissi il fatto mio. Son persuaso che Puccini non sente quel dramma, e che perderemo il tempo inutilmente con lui.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 125)

Ricordi promised that he and Verga would corner Puccini, "che vuole e non vuole", and force him to make up his mind once and for all. In the meantime, Puccini travelled extensively supervising ever more triumphant performances of Manon Lescaut leading on to the première of the opera at La Scala in February 1894. In the four following months, Puccini's interest in La Lupa seemed to pick up a certain momentum, although he was still travelling with Manon Lescaut (Budapest in March, London in May), and pestering Luigi Illica about the libretto of Bohème. In April the correspondence between Verga and De Roberto became more frequent as the novelist came under pressure from the volatile composer. Verga had gone a long way *beyond* his willingness to make "qualche piccola modificazione...al taglio delle scene". He had, in fact, completely rearranged his first draft of La Lupa. The new form of the original play led to a completely new layout of the libretto. On 7 April 1894 Verga wrote from Milan to De Roberto about "le modificazioni da fare al libretto" and Puccini's impatience to start:

Prima di tutto datti la pena di leggere attentamente il manoscritto del dramma originario, nella nuova forma che ho voluto dargli e che sembrami d'assai preferibile alla prima....Confronta poi il nuovo schema di libretto che ti unisco al vecchio, e dopo un po' ti sarà facile raccapezzarti sui brani da omettere e sulle aggiunte da fare... Per le trasposizioni ti sarà di norma lo schema mio...Nel nuovo cerca di variare al possibile i metri, e farli rotti, come dice il Puccini. Per accontentarlo, se vuoi, giacchè adesso ha furia di cominciare, potresti mandarmi di mano in mano ciascuna scena, a misura che ti esce dalla penna.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 126)

So, each successive stage in the elaboration of the play was motivated and largely conditioned by its parallel conversion into a feasible libretto for Puccini. It is also clear from this letter that De Roberto's part in the project was strictly limited to the versification of the material elaborated or altered by Verga. Less than a week later, answering a letter by De Roberto, Verga put more pressure on his collaborator who shared his own scepticism about Puccini's real intentions:

Milano, 13 Aprile '94

Puccini. Io ci devo credere a forza adesso, perchè mi ha messo in stato di assedio, e viene alle 9 di

mattina a chiedere se hai mandato nulla. Ci credo tanto che mi son messo a lavorarvi intorno,...Dunque fa presto, e manda quello che hai fatto, magari di scena in scena, subito. Toglimi quest'incubo.
(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 127)

As to the final outcome of their joint venture, in case Puccini should drop out, Verga stated, in the same letter, his firm intention to go ahead with the play and get it performed anyway, even before the opera:

...non voglio impegnarmi...a non far rappresentare il mio dramma prima che vada in scena l'opera. Anzi, farò il possibile per darlo prima. I mutamenti e stavo per dire gli abbellimenti li ho fatti al mio lavoro a questo scopo, e non vorrei farli seppellire sotto il pan-pan della musica.

By this time, the dramatization of the story from Vita dei Campi had acquired importance and artistic merits of its own in the eyes of the author, such as to make him wish that they should be appreciated without the pan-pan of the music, whether Puccini's or anyone else's. Anyway, in a third letter to De Roberto, later in the month (28 April 1894), Verga, about to leave Milan for Catania, confirmed that things were going smoothly:

...il Puccini va via anche lui in Toscana, e siamo perfettamente intesi con lui e il Ricordi sul da fare....Stavolta la cosa sembra che vada seriamente.
(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 128)

Verga was to get together with De Roberto in Catania and work on the second act of La Lupa and the revision of the first. The final version of the libretto would then be sent to Ricordi. In the composer's quarters at Torre del Lago, however, things were not going the right way. With his half-hearted attitude towards La Lupa, Puccini was constantly in touch with Illica for the libretto of Bohème. His mood is revealed by a postcard sent to Illica in Milan after a meeting during which they had discussed the second tableau of the opera, the "Latin Quarter":

Torre del Lago, 9 giugno 1894
Caro Gigi,
grazie tua lettera. Avrai veduto Ricordi e gli

avrà comunicato trovata latina. Pensa al finale e all'ultimo. Io per ora lupeggio.²

The curious neologism suggests that the composition of La Lupa was a sort of amusing experiment rather than a serious pursuit. Yet, by the end of that month, Puccini unexpectedly decided to go down to Sicily in order to see Verga in Catania and discuss details of the libretto with him. He also wanted to familiarize himself with the local atmosphere, take photographs of characteristic places, investigate Sicilian folklore. It must have been the full realization of the natural habitat of La Lupa, previously sensed behind the artistic transfiguration of the libretto, no less than Verga's reluctance towards further concessions on the text, that finally convinced the composer to drop the project. He *said nothing to Verga about that*, but as soon as he returned to Torre del Lago, he wrote an apologetic letter to Ricordi in which he motivated his decision to delay the composition of La Lupa until after the performance of Verga's play:

Dopo ritornato dalla Sicilia e dopo le conferenze con Verga, invece di essere animato per La Lupa le confesso che mille dubbi mi hanno assalito e mi fanno decidere a temporeggiare la decisione di musicarlo sino all'andata in scena del dramma. Le ragioni sono "la dialogicità" del libretto spinta al massimo grado, i caratteri antipatici, senza una sola figura luminosa, simpatica, che campeggi. Speravo che Verga mi mettesse più in luce e considerazione il personaggio di Mara, ma è stato impossibile dato l'impianto del dramma...Solo è il tempo perduto che mi accuora, ma lo riprenderò buttandomi a Bohème a corpo morto. ..Per La Lupa è meglio attendere il giudizio che il pubblico darà del dramma.³

According to Puccini's friends and early biographers, Guido Marotti and Ferruccio Pagni, a chance meeting on board the ship which took the composer back to Livorno from Sicily may have had some influence on his decision to drop La Lupa.⁴ During the voyage he made the acquaintance of Wagner's stepdaughter, Countess Blandine Gravina, the second child of Cosima Liszt and Hans von Bülow. In the conversation, Puccini was questioned about his projects and he mentioned La Lupa, much to the horror of the distinguished lady who reportedly urged him to give it up: "Guardatevi, maestro: vi porterebbe dis-

grazia! Mischiare la vostra musica a un fatto di lussuria e di sangue, con quello sfondo religioso della processione!" Be as it may, the composer would never risk his reputation on a subject he found uncongenial and which was yet to be tested on the public.

From that moment the excruciating process of defining the structure and incidents of La Bohème became Puccini's sole occupation (with Illica and Giacosa as his victims and Ricordi as their moderator).⁵ As to Verga, he returned to Milan in August 1894 and, still unaware of the latest turn in his operatic venture, he announced the completion of his play in an interview given to the young writer Ugo Ojetti. It was not until December 1895 that Puccini completed La Bohème and, by a curious coincidence, the two works were premièred in the same city, Turin, within days of each other: the opera at the Teatro Regio on 1 February, La Lupa at the Teatro Gerbino on 26 January 1896. Neither Puccini nor Ricordi ever informed Verga or De Roberto that their project was definitely off. Verga's growing disillusionment is documented by a letter to De Roberto, dated 25 June 1895, in which he complains about Puccini's elusiveness:

..vedo anch'io che il Puccini non ha fatto e non farà mai nulla per la Lupa. Ma perchè non parlare chiaro e confessare che non è nelle sue corde? Ho riletto il contratto, e visto che [è] sino al giugno dell'anno venturo noi dobbiamo aspettare il buon estro che non gli verrà mai. E così sia.
(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 29)

The contract signed by Verga with Ricordi four years before made the libretto the exclusive property of the publishing house until June 1896. Fortunately the play could go ahead independently of its twin text. As pressure mounted for his second confrontation with a Turin audience, Verga realized that the chances of seeing La Lupa as an opera were now nil. His last letter to De Roberto on the matter was written from Turin on 16 January 1896, a few days before the opening night of the play. Almost with relief, Verga informed his friend:

Giacosa è stato a Parigi per combinare con Sardou, d'incarico di Ricordi, circa la Tosca, che deve essere versificata e ridotta per musica da Illica e Giacosa, e musicata dal Puccini. Il contratto è fissato, e addio Lupa di conseguenza. Io concludo che tutto il male non viene per nuocere, poichè il Puccini non la sentiva - non dico non se la sentiva.
(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 130)

Puccini's theatrical instinct and his unfailing sense of the tastes and moods of the public had finally led him to keep clear of Verga's uneven drama of lust and incest only to fall, within a few years, into the coils of Sardou's gruesome melodrama of sex and sadism.

In 1895 Ricordi offered La Lupa to Mascagni who, well aware of his colleague's declared aversion for the libretto, refused it on the grounds of its monotony and lack of lyricism.⁶ As late as 1908 the libretto of La Lupa was still waiting for a composer, and the only candidates seemed to be coming from France and Germany where Verga's play had in the meantime been performed. Two foreign librettists are mentioned in a letter Verga wrote to Dina di Sordevolo on 25 January 1908:

Da Parigi infatti, dopo la Lupa mi scrive Cain il librettista della Cabrera, se non erro, o dell'altra opera premiata dal concorso Sonzogno, e librettista pure di altre opere di Massenet, per chiedermi di collaborare a un libretto della stessa Lupa per un giovane maestro francese 1.º premio di Roma. Anche l'Eisenschitz mi scrive nello stesso senso per un maestro tedesco. Io rispondo che il libretto è già fatto e si potrebbe parlare di tradurlo, se mai, ma intanto passo le due lettere a Ricordi per decidere; poichè non è giusto che se il libretto non sia roba pel dente di Puccini, non possa giovare ad altri.⁷

Some time later, the libretto was set by a modest Sicilian composer, Pierantonio Tasca from Noto (Siracusa).⁸ The "Tragedia lirica" La Lupa may have been written around 1910, not later than 1915 (March 7), the date of a letter by Verga to Dina di Sordevolo who must have inquired about Tasca's opera; Verga answered:

La Lupa è stata musicata infatti dal maestro Tasca di Noto, ma non potevo parlarvene perchè sinora malgrado ogni tentativo del Maestro, nessun Teatro ha accettato di darla, e il successo di cui vi parlò vostra cognata deve essere stato un successo di pianoforte soltanto, in audizione privata, purtroppo.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 29)

Tasca nearly succeeded in having his opera performed at the Teatro Massimo of Palermo in May 1919, with Elvira Magliulo in the title role, but it all came to nothing because the composer was dissatis-

fied with the general standard of the rehearsals and withdrew his opera at the last minute. A libretto was printed for that occasion.⁹ It was not until 1932, two years before Tasca's death, that the opera was premièred in Noto, thanks to the generosity of a local patron, in the open-air theatre of the Littoriale, with Giulia Tess as la Lupa. A new edition of the libretto was published (Rosario Caruso, Noto, 1932) and the first performance on 21 August was acclaimed by a sympathetic audience of 10,000 Sicilians from every corner of the island. The success was renewed on two more nights, and the Catania daily, Il Popolo di Sicilia, gave ample coverage of the event with articles on the libretto and favourable reviews of the opera.¹⁰

2. The short story, the play and the libretto of La Lupa

Between the story and the play of Cavalleria Rusticana there are less than four years, whereas the play and the libretto of La Lupa were written over 10 years after the publication of the short story. At the time of the dramatization of Cavalleria, the concessions made by the author to the requirements of the stage were relatively few: more edge to the sentimental contrast between Santuzza and Turiddu, introduction of the chorus of villagers to provide a social background and adequate response to the main action, toning down of the economic component in the psychology of the characters. The basic ingredients of the original story passed into the play with all their exotic freshness and the novelty of an avantgarde piece. As such they were understood and appreciated by the public at large, while the specialists, like Giacosa, admired the vividness of the dialogues and the quick pace at which transgression and atonement were impressively portrayed in the nine "Scene popolari".

In the intervening years Verga had to realize the nature and limits of the success of Cavalleria, and the fiasco of In portineria (1885) was to strengthen his mistrust in the theatre as an art form as well as in actors and audiences. This brought to a standstill his project of a trilogy for the theatre which, besides the "Scene popolari siciliane", and In portineria dealing with the Milanese urban

proletariat, was to include a play set in an upper class environment. At the time of the first performance of La Lupa his mood was one of regret and apprehension. Writing to the playwright Sabatino Lopez about the rehearsals of the play in Turin, Verga expressed his own anxiety:

...vi confesso che ho una paura puttana, visto l'umore del pubblico...e i precedenti che mi ha lasciati il successo morboso della Cavalleria, che mi è rimasto sullo stomaco.¹¹

Since the 'morbid' success of Cavalleria, Verga had reconsidered his project of reforming the Italian theatre in the light of the aesthetic theories applied in his narrative works. In a letter to his friend and theatre critic Felice Cameroni, in 1888, he described that intention as a 'whim' because of the intrinsic inferiority of the theatre as an art form in comparison with the novel. But, while he reiterated ideas already expressed to Zola as early as 1884,¹² at the same time Verga stressed his determination to continue with his experiments in order to prove "coi fatti, più che colle teorie e le chiacchiere" how a renewal of the theatre should be pursued, regardless of the public's response.¹³ The writing of the last play of the trilogy opened by Cavalleria was finally dropped in 1890, and the story providing the plot and characters was included, as "Dramma intimo", in the new collection of bourgeois short stories I ricordi del capitano d'Arce (1891).¹⁴ As usual, the short stories were, in a way, preparatory exercises for Verga's novels. After Mastro-don Gesualdo (1889), Verga had started working on the third novel of the "Cycle of the Defeated", La Duchessa di Leyra, dealing with the Sicilian aristocracy. The dramatization of La Lupa, therefore, represented a return to the early verismo of Vita dei Campi at a time when Verga's interests were moving upwards in the social scale and consequently his style, imagery and language were being adapted to cope with a different subject-matter. That largely accounts for the substantial alterations in the character of La Lupa, discussed below, although Verga implicitly justified them with the objective limitations of the theatre as an art form. In the interview with Ugo Ojetti (August 1894), after the announcement of the completion of La Lupa, being asked whether he now wrote preferably for the theatre, Verga replied:

Ho scritto pel teatro, ma non lo credo certamente una forma d'arte superiore al romanzo, anzi lo stimo una forma d'arte inferiore e primitiva, sopra tutto per alcune ragioni che dirò meccaniche. Due massimamente: la necessità dell'intermediario tra autore e pubblico, dell'attore; la necessità di scrivere non per un lettore ideale come avviene nel romanzo, ma per un pubblico radunato a folla così da dover pensare a una media di intelligenza e di gusto, a un average reader, come dicono gli inglesi. E questa media ha tutto fuori che gusto e intelligenza: e se poco ne ha, è variabilissima col tempo e col luogo.¹⁵

No matter how questionable the idea of the inferiority of the theatre may be, and even allowing for the inadequacy of actors to cope with unconventional works (producers were still to come), and the existence of half-witted audiences, there is no doubt that the play of La Lupa is artistically inferior to the short story, and the libretto even more so.

The project of an opera libretto which, in the first place, motivated Verga's work, posed two main problems: retaining the original elements of the story while making them palatable to an 'average' theatre audience of the 1890s; ^{and} providing genuine folkloric material for a veristic musical characterization avoiding spurious and dialect pieces like Mascagni's carter's song or the "Siciliana".

Like Cavalleria, the story of La Lupa belongs to the long creative process of I Malavoglia, though not in terms of thematic affinity - as the subject was entirely original and was suggested to Verga by Capuana - but rather for the aura of mythical remoteness, for the artistic transfiguration of the circumstantial data in a legendary, primeval ambience, and for the linguistic originality. The genesis of the character of Pina, la Lupa, was disclosed by Capuana in his enthusiastic review of Vita dei Campi where he defined La Lupa as the best story in the collection:

Quella Lupa io l'ho conosciuta. Tre mesi fa, tra le colline di S. Margherita, su quel di Mineo, passavo pel luogo dov'era una volta il pagliaio di lei, fra gli ulivi, ...Ella abitava lì per dei mesi interi, specie nel settembre e nell'ottobre, quando i fichi d'India erano maturi....Ora il pagliaio è distrutto, e quell'angolo di collina deserto. ...Ma non era il ricordo della vera Lupa che mi faceva evocare con tanta emozione la sua pallida figura

dagli occhi neri come il carbone, dalle labbra fresche e rosse che vi mangiavano, no; era la Lupa dell'arte, la Lupa creata dal Verga che sopraffaceva quella della realtà e me la metteva sotto gli occhi più viva della viva quand'era viva. Tanto è vero che l'arte non sarà mai la fotografia!¹⁶

In his description of la Lupa, Capuana singled out the two attributes which most frequently recur throughout Verga's story: the eyes, 'black as coal', and the lips, 'so fresh and red that they would eat you', enhanced by the woman's pale complexion and her habitual stillness. The obsessive recurrence of those referential traits gives la Lupa the fixity of an archetypal figure, a sort of rural Fury.¹⁷ The black eyes and the red lips, together with her 'firm and vigorous breast', become the symbols of the woman's elemental, all-pervasive sensuality, an unrestrained, vitalistic drive which enthralls her victims. The village women dread her presence and cross themselves whenever she is around to protect their husbands and sons from her evil charm, because la Lupa 'se li tirava dietro alla gonnella solamente a guardarli con quegli occhi di satanasso'.¹⁸ Those eyes enslave Nanni, the young man she has fallen in love with, until he finds the strength to exorcise this demonic creature by killing her with his axe, still spellbound by her black eyes. As she walks defiantly towards her executioner, in the middle of the green corn fields, the red of her lips recedes into sheaves of poppies the woman holds in her hands:

La Lupa lo vide venire, pallido e stralunato, colla scure che luccicava al sole, e non si arretrò di un sol passo, non chinò gli occhi, seguitò ad andargli incontro, colle mani piene di manipoli di papaveri rossi, e mangiandoselo cogli occhi neri.

It is the scene of a sacrificial ritual of purification: red and black have now become metaphors of sinful love and death, or better, of transgression and atonement. Nanni is as much a victim as he is an executioner, looking 'pale and distraught' as he raises his axe to fulfil la Lupa's final wish of self-destruction.

As Capuana put it in his review, 'la Lupa dell'arte', Verga's own creation, transcends the real-life woman whose 'tragic adventure' the writer purports to narrate. The verismo of the story consists, in fact, in its artistic truthfulness which makes the protagonist

'more real than the real woman when she was alive'. Verga combines environmental and psychosomatic details and uses them as an identity card of the protagonist, so that the presence of any of them can immediately conjure up the eerie figure of la Lupa. Her natural habitat is the immense and desolate Sicilian country, swept by the winds ('greco e levante di gennaio, oppure scirocco di agosto') or scorched by the sun ('Nei campi immensi, dove scoppiettava soltanto il volo dei grilli quando il sole batteva a piombo'). There she roves about like a 'hungry she-wolf' when the fields are ablaze and deserted. A hazy wilderness whose only co-ordinates are the sky and Etna, the misty volcano, is set as a backdrop for the seduction of Nanni:

la gnà Pina era la sola anima viva che si vedesse errare per la campagna, sui sassi infuocati delle viottole, fra le stoppie riarse dei campi immensi, che si perdevano nell'afa, lontan lontano, verso l'Etna nebbioso, dove il cielo si aggravava all'orizzonte.

- Svegliati! - disse la Lupa..., che ti ho portato il vino per rinfrescarti la gola.

Nanni spalancò gli occhi imbambolati, fra veglia e sonno, trovandosela dinanzi ritta, pallida, col petto prepotente, e gli occhi neri come il carbone, e stese brancolando le mani.

With unique mastery, Verga brings together the almost supernatural image of the lonely 'living soul' *wandering* in the immense fields with the realistic picture of the harvester asleep in a dusty ditch, in the afternoon heat of a summer day. La Lupa appears to him in all her awful beauty, offering him wine as an aphrodisiac. The young man, exhausted and bewildered, as if he were in the presence of a Gorgon-like creature, hides his face in the dry grass of the ditch, sobbing desperately: 'Andatevene! Andatevene!', inexorably bewitched by those eyes. And she walks away, sure of her conquest, 'riannodando le trecce superbe, guardando fisso dinanzi ai suoi passi nelle stoppie calde, cogli occhi neri come il carbone'. The woman is at one with the natural environment; she is almost an anthropomorphic emanation of the 'hot stubbles' from which she emerges to tempt Nanni and into which she disappears.

Living on the fringe of the rural community, la Lupa shares the hard daily labour which brutalizes men and women ('la Lupa affastellava manipoli su manipoli, e covoni su covoni, senza stancarsi mai,

senza rizzarsi un momento sulla vita, senza accostare le labbra al fiasco'), but she is naturally excluded from the rituals of the community ('Per fortuna la Lupa non veniva mai in chiesa, nè a Pasqua, nè a Natale, nè per ascoltar messa, nè per confessarsi'). She is morally an outcast and socially a misfit. Her condition reflects on her daughter who feels discriminated against in the village:

Maricchia, poveretta, buona e brava ragazza, piangeva di nascosto, perchè era figlia della Lupa, e nessuno l'avrebbe tolta in moglie, sebbene ci avesse la sua bella roba nel cassettone, e la sua buona terra al sole.

Consistently with the psychology of the characters, the scanty dialogues of the story are like sudden flashes in the uniform and subdued narrative context. Breaking her beguiling silence, La Lupa utters curt, final statements which admit no retort, pronounced as they are in a peremptory, wilful tone: 'Se non lo pigli ti ammazzo!', she says between her teeth to Maricchia who is reluctant to accept the man her mother wants to impose on her; 'Ammazzami, che non me ne importa; ma senza di te non voglio starci', says la Lupa to Nanni who threatens to kill her if she comes back to tempt him. The best line in the story, and the most striking example of the mythical language of la Lupa, is her answer to Nanni's question: 'Che volete, gnà Pina?' She has been cutting hay frantically to keep at the heels of the man she loves. One evening, while the other men are dozing on the threshing floor, she answers him:

Te voglio! Te che sei bello come il sole, e dolce come il miele. Voglio te!

The specular structure of the phrase, with the repetition of the verb 'voglio' and the postponement of the object pronoun 'te', conveys the whole weight of Pina's passion for the man; in the middle, the phrase opens up to two archaically poetic similes - the first being a popular Sicilian expression - which colour and soften the 'te' with tenderness and sensual yearning. For once, the sullen and harsh figure of la Lupa is tinged with sentimentalism, but her soft approach only provokes a light-hearted and mocking response from the young man, so la Lupa falls back into her reticence:

- Ed io invece voglio vostra figlia, che è vitella;
rispose Nanni ridendo.
La Lupa si cacciò le mani nei capelli, grattandosi
le tempie senza dir parola, e se ne andò; ne più
comparve nell'aia.

Just as the space dimension of the story creates a sense of vastness, isolation and stillness, so time references provide the necessary pauses to release the tension built up by the segments of direct speech, or contribute to define the mythical character of the narration. After the three opening paragraphs which introduce la Lupa, Maricchia and their relation with the social environment of the village, the actual narration begins in a fairy tale style: 'Una volta la Lupa si innamorò di un bel ragazzo che era tornato da soldato....' It is June, harvest time, and the summer heat is used as a metaphor of Pina's sexual desire. After the brief exchange of propositions between Pina and Nanni quoted above, she leaves him. The next time she talks to him is in October, 'al tempo che cavavano l'olio', and she offers him her daughter. The first section of the story closes with la Lupa's terrible threat to Maricchia: 'Se non lo pigli ti ammazzo!'

No explicit time reference introduces the second section which starts in a minor key: 'La Lupa era quasi malata....', but it is clear that a few years have elapsed. Maricchia and Nanni have been married for some time and have children; la Lupa lives with them and seems to have changed her life style because of her lovesickness:

Non andava più di qua e di là; non si metteva più
sull'uscio con quegli occhi da spiritata - Suo ge-
nero, quando ella glieli piantava in faccia quegli
occhi, si metteva a ridere.

In fact, during this period of apparent subjugation, Pina has been brooding over her passion for her son-in-law which ultimately explodes in the summer heat when la Lupa finds again her old self in the sultry fields and moves to the seduction of Nanni. Here the time reference is a Sicilian proverb: 'In quell'ora fra vespero e nona, in cui non ne va in volta femmina buona', meaning the early afternoon hours, the hottest time of the day, haunted by evil spirits, according to popular superstition. The incestuous relationship goes on for some months, bringing jealousy and despair to Maricchia:

Maricchia piangeva notte e giorno, e alla madre le piantava in faccia gli occhi ardenti di lagrime e di gelosia, come una lupacchiotta anch'essa, quando la vedeva tornare da' campi pallida e muta ogni volta.

She even goes to the 'brigadiere' of the Carabinieri begging for help but la Lupa refuses to move out of her own house. 'E' la tentazione dell'inferno!', says Nanni to the 'brigadiere' who tries to talk him out of that mess.

'Poco dopo', Nanni gets kicked in the chest by his mule and is about to die. The village priest refuses to take him the Communion if la Lupa is still in the house, so she moves out. Nanni repents and eventually recovers. Yet the perverse fascination of those eyes still haunts him. The last time reference is Easter: 'A Pasqua [Nanni] andò a confessarsi,...e poi, come la Lupa tornava a tentarlo...'. He confesses and does his penance, but that won't help him. The vague 'e poi' steers the narration back into the fairy-tale style for its tragic conclusion in the green corn fields strewn with red poppies.

The story, therefore, consists of two narrative sections, each with a series of events covering a few months, divided by a gap of some years. The episodes of the 'brigadiere' and the village priest counterbalance the mythical element with the realistic one in the story. They stress the gravity of Pina's transgression (against the law of men and the law of God), and endorse the moral indignation of the villagers. So Nanni's resort to violence is not only a private gesture but a cathartic rite on behalf of the whole community.

The narrative synthesis of the short story is strictly functional to the artistic portrayal of the protagonist. That emblematic figure is built up through the accumulation of few impressionistic details and their obsessive reiteration as well as the exclusion of any explanatory or transitional passage which would upset the delicate balance between myth and reality and diffuse the tension of the narration.

D.H. Lawrence overlooked this point when he wrote in the Preface to his own translation of Vita dei Campi:

...in Cavalleria Rusticana and in La Lupa we are just a bit too much aware of the author and his scissors. He has clipped too much away. The transitions are too abrupt. All is over in a gasp: whereas a story like La Lupa covers at least several years of time.

As a matter of fact, we need more looseness.... Verga's deliberate missing-out of transition passages is, it seems to me, often a defect. And for this reason a story like La Lupa loses a great deal of its life. It may be a masterpiece of concision, but it is hardly a masterpiece of narration. It is so short, our acquaintance with Nanni and Maricchia is so fleeting, we forget them almost at once.¹⁹

That is precisely how Verga wants us to react: our memory is to be haunted by the fatal figure of la Lupa alone, staring at Nanni with her insatiable black eyes, her hands full of poppies; or silhouetted against the hazy sky and the misty volcano on the parched fields of Sicily. Maricchia and Nanni are only sketched out as victims of la Lupa's elemental sensuality and tremendous will-power.

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The "Scene drammatiche indue atti" and the libretto of La Lupa are closely modelled on the pattern of the short story: the two acts correspond to the two sections, divided by a gap of a few years during which Mara and Nanni get married and have a son. But an analysis of the two texts and their comparison with the story leave us in no doubt about Verga's modest performance as a librettist.²⁰

The innovatory narrative technique which was the major asset of the story becomes an encumbrance in the dramatization. The chromatic and supernatural imagery, the subtle use of time and space references, the free indirect speech interspersed with flashes of dialogue, have all to be discarded. La Lupa has to interact with other characters and make her thoughts and actions instantly apprehensible to an audience. In the process of rationalization of Pina's behaviour, Verga deprives the character of her enigmatic charm and, above all, of that fatalistic dynamism which so forcibly leads to the catastrophe in the story. Consequently, he has to resort to external devices, such as a religious festival, to push the play through to its tragic ending.

For the obvious compression of the action in the dramatization, the first Act starts at dusk on the threshing floor of a farm and ends late at night, with an important variation in the original sequence of events: the seduction of Nanni and the incest take place before the marriage, when Mara has only been promised to the young man. The

change does provide an effective finale for Act I, but it somehow reduces the gravity of the transgression. The second Act, set in the courtyard of Mara and Nanni's house, starts in the morning of Good Friday and reaches its climax with Pina's return from the fields and the ensuing altercation with Mara and Nanni, counterpointed by a procession moving along the street outside the house. The religious and public festivity, set against the private events of the story, creates an atmosphere of repentance and atonement, and brings in the choral response of the villagers (the play has nine well individualized minor characters, reduced to seven in the libretto). The urban and ethical ambience, instead of the green corn fields, obliterates the symbolic overtones of the final act of violence so poetically hinted at in the story and makes it a sordid and desperate crime of passion set against a background of religious bigotry.

Like the play Cavalleria Rusticana, La Lupa is organized as a series of choral scenes and duets:

PLAY	LIBRETTO
ACT I	
Sc. 1 villagers	Sc. 1 villagers
2 same + Nanni	2 same + Nanni
3 same + Pina	3 same + Pina
4 same + Mara	4 same + Mara
5 same less Mara	5 Janu/Nanni/Nunzio
6 same + Mara	
7 Pina/Nanni	6 Pina/Nanni
8 Pina/Mara	7 Pina/Mara
9 Pina/Nanni	8 Pina/Nanni
ACT II	
Sc. 1 Mara/Nanni	Sc. 1 Mara/Nanni
2 same + villagers	2 same + villagers
3, 4 same + Pina	3, 4 same + Pina
5 Mara/Pina	5 Mara/Pina
6, 7 same + villagers	6, 7 same + villagers
8 Janu/Nanni	8 Mara/Nanni
	9 same + Janu
9 same + Pina	10 same + Pina
10 Nanni/Pina	11 Nanni/Pina

In Act I, the choral scenes 1-6 (1-5 in the libretto) define the social environment and introduce the main characters; the duets develop the action. In Act II, the alternate succession of duets and choral scenes builds up the catastrophe. There is something mechanical in this sort of structure since the static character of the choral scenes

does not blend with the sudden thrusts of the duets, and the dramatic build-up is discontinuous. Besides, Puccini's objection to the excessive 'dialogicità' of the libretto (see his letter to Ricordi of 13 July 1894) points to a serious flaw in the dialogical structure of the duets: it does not provide enough moments of lyrical expansion. Yet, Verga made some concessions for one character in particular: Mara, a potentially Puccinian figure, who had a marginal role in the short story. We owe it largely to Puccini's insistence if Mara is turned into something short of an operatic victim. The composer wanted her part 'allargata e resa più tenera nel 2^o atto' (see Verga's letter to De Roberto of 15 July '93). In Act I, sc. 4 of the libretto (the longest because it incorporates sc. 4-5-6 of the play), Mara is given a short 'solo' echoed by a 'Tutti' of the peasants:

Mara (canticchiando, rivolta alla luna)
Luna, bianca luna
tu che splendi quando imbruna,
in un mese vecchia e nuova,
danne tu la buona nuova.

Teased by Nanni who insinuates that the 'good news' is that she may soon get married, Mara answers with four more lines:

Mara (tristemente)
O no, compare Nanni, v'ingannate
s'ora credete questo.
Canto, così...Voi pur non cantate?
Per me, zitella resto.

allocated to

The conclusion of scene 4 is also *allocated to* her with a short invocation to 'Mary, Mother of God', echoed by the women of the group. Scene 4 of the play, on the contrary, is closed by Mara's brusque reply to Nanni after various jocular remarks on the moon from other peasants:

Mara (voltandogli le spalle)
Io non voglio maritarmi.
(entra nella capanna)

In Act II, scene 1 provides another opportunity for lyrical expansion. Nanni and Mara are reconciled; their little boy is being dressed as an angel for the Good Friday procession; so Mara expresses her happiness and faith in God's mercy. Furthermore, the end of sc. 7 of the play is reshaped into a separate duet Mara/Nanni (sc. 8 in the libretto).

to) in order to give Mara one more 'solo' of nine lines. For Puccini, however, these concessions were not enough to create a 'figura luminosa, simpatica' (letter to Ricordi of 13 July 1894); Mara needed more 'light and consideration' than Verga was prepared to allow. Indeed, the best of this character comes out, in Verga's own veristic way, in the tense dialogues of the play (I, 8; II, 4,5), when the author is able to recapture some of the 'lupacchiotta' of the story for Mara's passionate defence of her man and her family.

What really distances the new texts from the short story is not so much the number of structural alterations, justifiable with the requirements of the prose theatre and the opera, as the psychological and linguistic modifications affecting the main characters, which can best be explained with Verga's changed attitude towards his early veristic works. When we consider *la Lupa* of the play and the libretto, we are confronted with an entirely different picture: the mythical, ferine creature of the story has been scaled down to a languorous, coquettish, quarrelsome woman; her instinctive sensuality is now an aberration she has been made conscious of, especially in the conflict between her insane attachment to Nanni and her maternal feelings. Although Pina is still ruled by passion, uninhibitedly, she is capable of self-pity ('sono *la Lupa* è vero....sono una cosa vile', I,7; 'Sono come un cane...un cane senza padrone', II,3, in the play), and self-criticism ('Le madri come me andrebbero bruciate vive!', play, II, 10). Her whole image has been polished, her age prosaically specified; the legendary 'hungry she-wolf' has been humanized and integrated into the rural community.

A comparison between the first few lines of the story and her description in the list of 'Personaggi' Verga placed at the beginning of the play, provides an example of the aesthetic alterations the character has undergone:

La Lupa (short story) Era alta, magra; aveva soltanto un seno fermo e vigoroso da bruna e pure non era più giovane; era pallida come se avesse sempre adosso la malaria, e su quel pallore due occhi grandi così, e delle labbra fresche e rosse, che vi mangiavano.

La Lupa (play) La gnà Pina, detta *la Lupa*, ancora bella e provocante, malgrado i suoi trentacinque anni suonati, col seno fermo da ver-

gine, gli occhi luminosi in fondo alle occhiaie scure, e il bel fiore carnoso della bocca, nel pallore caldo del viso.

The anthropophagic attribute of her eyes and lips (see also the end of the story: 'mangiandoselo cogli occhi neri') has been replaced by the 'fleshy flower', her pallor is 'warm' and her eyes are 'shining'. La Lupa's new look is alluring and sexy, and, not surprisingly, she can dance and sing like a Sicilian Carmen. Her closest counterpart is the protagonist of seven stories in Verga's collection I ricordi del capitano D'Arce: Ginevra, the upper-class socialite with a trail of admirers and lovers, whom envious friends have nicknamed Carmen; and from the short story "Carmen" Verga borrows the image of the 'fleshy flower'. This is how she appears to her latest victim, a young Navy officer:

Un viso delicato e pallido, come appassito precocemente, come velato da un'ombra, dei grandi occhi parlanti, in cui era la febbre, dei capelli morbidi e folti, posati mollemente in un grosso nodo sulla nuca, e il bel fiore carnoso della bocca - la bocca terribile - come dicevano amici e gelosi.²¹

Later on in the story, Verga describes Ginevra's mouth as 'quella bocca di vampiro' and her lips 'le sue labbra dolorose', thus recovering and updating the anthropophagic attribute of the early veristic femme fatale. The picture of Ginevra/La Lupa has now distinctly decadent features. A striking similarity is noticeable between Verga's descriptions and the portrayal of the woman in D'Annunzio's poem "Gorgon", first published in 1885. We find the 'pallor' and the 'shining' eyes; the woman's mouth is a 'painful flower':

Ella avea diffuso in volto
quel pallor cupo che adoro.
Le splendea l'alma ne li occhi
quale in chiare acque un tesoro.
.....Un fiore
doloroso era la bocca,
..... 22
.....

The project of the operatic adaptation conditioned from the very beginning the layout of the play and, specifically, the entrance of the protagonist: Pina appears with a sheaf of wheat on her head

while a dance is going on. She is graceful and flirtatious. In his directions, Verga insists on such connotations as 'con civetteria', 'con grazia', 'dolcemente'. Being invited by one of the men, la Lupa refuses and tries to attract Nanni:

Pina (ridendo) No...Voglio ballare con compare Nanni...(con civetteria facendo una bella riverenza a Nanni Lasca) se son degna di questo onore...
(La Lupa, play, I, 3)

As he refuses, Pina sings him a song; Nanni is still reluctant, so Pina's next move is to dance with someone else in order to arouse the man's interest:

Pina (a Nanni con civetteria) E voi sapete che vi dico? "Chi non mi vuole non mi merita".
(Va ad invitare Cardillo e balla con grazia dinanzi a lui, tenendo distese le due cocche del grembiule colla punta delle dita, e piegando il capo sull'omero).
(Ibidem)

La Lupa does not win Nanni staring at him with her Gorgon-like countenance; she entreats him with tears and sad looks, sometimes hiding her face, and even shrinking with horror from the first physical contact with the man:

Nanni (smarrendosi del tutto) Basta ora, basta...
Non posso vedervi piangere così!..fatelo per amor mio! (l'abbraccia)
Pina (svincolandosi di scatto, tutta tremante e sconvolta) No!...Lasciatemi!...Fate come il coccodrillo adesso!...(rimangono a guardarsi negli occhi, pallidi entrambi)
(La Lupa, play, I, 9)

Having deprived la Lupa of all her magic, Verga tries to recapture the mythical atmosphere of the story by starting the play (and the libretto) with a fairy tale told by an old woman:

Filomena. La maga dunque se ne stava nel palazzo incantato, tutt'oro e di pietre preziose, e come passava un viandante, s'affacciava alla finestra per tirarlo in peccato mortale. Giovani e vecchi, vi cascavano tutti! religiosi anche, e servi di Dio!
(La Lupa, play, I, 1)

The sorceress turned all her victims into pigs and donkeys (snakes and frogs in the libretto). The image of the enchantress in her precious palace points all too easily to a latter-day femme fatale - with such ancestors as Circe, Alcina, Armida - rather than to the earthy and primitive Lupa; however, another character, Janu, the foreman, translates the message of the fable into the more familiar metaphor of a proverb. It is one of the many 'sentenze giudiziose' of I Malavoglia (ch. 1):

Janu (gravemente, togliendosi la pipa di bocca).
Maga o non maga, sapete come dice il proverbio? "L'uomo è il fuoco, la donna è la stoppa: viene il diavolo e soffia!"
(La Lupa, play, I, 1)

The quotation of a proverb is an effective way to introduce the boss of the group of harvesters, the eldest man and the very embodiment of wisdom, who exercises his moderating influence over the members of the small community, including la Lupa. Janu and Filomena, the eldest woman, are the ones who mostly use proverbs to express their thoughts or offer advice, which enables Verga to adopt a neutral linguistic register to convey the ethical and practical views of his characters.²³ Two proverbs, with no markedly Sicilian connotation, are also used jokingly by la Lupa in the dance scene when she flirts with Nanni. The first has already been quoted; the second occurs at the very end of the scene. Nanni is now excited by the dance and comes forward to invite Pina but she refuses:

Pina "Chi tardi arriva male alloggia", compare Nanni! (gli volta le spalle con una risata, e se ne va a destra colle altre donne)
Nanni (piccato) Ora che mi avete scaldato le orecchie? Ora non mi tengo più! Mi sento un Mongibello!

(La Lupa, play, I, 3)

It may well be humorous to see Nanni being left alone, overheated like a volcano, but the woman who engages men in such frivolous skirmishes is no longer the untamed and taciturn Lupa of the story. In the libretto the number of proverbs is significantly reduced. In order to comply with the wishes of Puccini who wanted 'meno proverbi' (see Verga's letter to De Roberto of 15 July '93), Verga left out all but three of the proverbs of the play: the ones quoted by Pina 'con

civetteria', which De Roberto versified as follows:

"Non mi merita quei che non mi vuole"
"Quel che tardi arrivò, nulla trovò"
(La Lupa, libretto, I, 3)

and one used by Nanni to soothe Mara, upset by a quarrel between Pina and Malerba (one of the harvesters):

Nanni Voi non ne avete colpa....Dalla spina
nasce la rosa.
(libretto, I, 4)

But a fourth proverb, quoted by Nanni in the libretto, is missing in the play, although in the original short story it is clearly implied:

Nanni Sapete il detto antico:
"Piglia zitella e carne di vitella"
(ridendo in tono di scusa)
Non ve l'abbiate a male...
(libretto, I, 6)

which corresponds to Nanni's reply to la Lupa in the story:

- Ed io invece voglio vostra figlia, che è vitella;

In the play, instead, the earthy, rustic image of the heifer, used to contrast the fresh and unspoiled girl with the ageing and experienced mother, is weakened and banalized:

Pina (chinandosi su di lui, viso contro viso, con
un suono rauco e inarticolato di belva) Vo-
glio te!
Nanni (scoppiando in riso) Voi!...Perchè non mi
date vostra figlia invece?...Datemi vostra
figlia ch'è carne fresca invece....
(La Lupa, play, I, 7)

Once the project of the opera was abandoned, no more alterations were made by Verga to the text of the libretto, as he concentrated on the play, so the proverb survived. Significantly, a polished version of the original expression of the story was also introduced by Verga in the revised text he prepared for the 1897 illustrated edition of Vita dei Campi: the term 'vitella' is changed to 'zitella'. Pierantonio Tasca, in setting La Lupa, followed Verga's example and amended the expression of the libretto in his orchestral score as follows:

Nanni Piglia zitella....dice il motto antico
(in tono di scusa) non ve l'abbiate a male.

A further piece of evidence of Verga's new literary and stylistic awareness is the wealth of descriptive and psychological notes, interspersed throughout the play and the libretto, which cannot be taken just as stage directions, since they tend to complete and enrich the text with narrative details. The list of 'Personaggi' of the play, for example, describes Mara as a:

giovanetta delicata e triste - quasi la colpa non sua le pesasse sul capo biondo, e non osasse fissare in viso alla gente i begli occhi timidi.

which does not sound quite like the young Sicilian peasant girl of the story but rather anticipates a Puccinian heroine who never came into being. Act I is prefaced by a detailed paragraph which not only provides a description of the set but introduces a series of sound images which appeal more to a reader than to a spectator, particularly in the sentence with the verb 'sembra':

...Si odono passare in lontananza delle voci, delle canzoni stracche, il tintinnio dei campanacci delle mandre che scendono ad abbeverare, e di tanto in tanto l'uggiolare dei cani, sparsi per la campagna, sulla quale scorrono delle folate di scirocco, con un fruscio largo di biade mature. Negli intervalli di silenzio sembra sorgere e diffondersi il mormorio delle acque e il trillare dei grilli, incessante. La luna incomincia a levarsi, accesa - sbiancandosi mano a mano, in un alone afoso.

The whole paragraph, except for the sentence with 'sembra', also appears in the libretto. The images of the whining of dogs and the whistling of crickets are taken from the short story where each of them is qualified by the specific dimensional references of the whereabouts of la Lupa:

'Nei campi immensi, dove scoppiettava soltanto il volo dei grilli'

'i cani uggiolavano per la vasta campagna nera'

Deprived of its disheartening vastness and the sombre figure of la Lupa, the 'campagna' at nightfall is lit by the moon shrouded in a hazy halo, more romantic than veristic, certainly more populated and

familiar than the dismal wilderness of the story.²⁴

The most conspicuous evidence of the interdependence between play and libretto is the unprecedented inclusion of several popular songs and a traditional Sicilian dance in seven of the nine scenes of Act I of the play. When Verga started the dramatization of his story, he set himself the task of providing first-hand folkloric material for a musical transposition of his literary verismo. Just as proverbs represented the uncontaminated, metaphoric expression of the people's ethics and feelings, so popular songs provided an authentic Sicilian idiom for the musical expression of certain moods, or contributed to the definition of the local colour of a story with on-stage music. Verga had to provide an Italian version of the vernacular songs, but it was not a difficult task to select them; he had just to draw from his own memory, or quote from the many collections published in Sicily in the second half of the XIX century, first and foremost the volumes of Giuseppe Pitrè, 'the most devoted and prolific of folklorists', as an English admirer defined him.²⁵

In the dance scene,²⁶ the first song is sung by Pina for Nanni:

Pina (a Nanni, tra scherzosa e ironica, canticchiando nel passargli accanto)
O voi che avete occhi e non vedete,
allora di quegli occhi che ne fate?
(La Lupa, play and libretto, I, 3)

In the first edition of the play (1896), lines such as these are printed in italics and accompanied by the direction that they should be sung. Scene 5 of the play (4 in the libretto) contains the finest song, Pina's strambotto. It is a choral scene: Mara has just retired into the women's hut, and all the other harvesters are still on the threshing floor teasing Pina and Nanni. The young man picks up a hint from Pina ('avete la pelle dura....Ma il cuore l'avete peggio, anche!') and introduces the first song:

Nanni (le volta le spalle canticchiando)
Cuore duro, cuore tiranno....
(La Lupa, play, I, 5)

One of the men interrupts him with two lines of another song on the same theme of the insensitive heart:

Bruno (a Grazia con galanteria)
Mi dice il cuore che tiranna siete,
o mi scordaste, e che più non m'amate...
(Ibidem)

Grazia answers; so a sort of song contest starts with the encouragement of all the peasants, and Pina is invited to sing.²⁷ Her song for Nanni is soft, sweet and languorous:

Pina (dolcemente, quasi parlando fra sè, coi gomiti sui ginocchi e il capo fra le mani)

Garofano pomposo, dolce amore,
dimmelo tu come ti debbo amare!
Tu di nascosto m'hai rubato il cuore,
ed io qui venni se mel vuoi ridare.
E n'ho toccati tanti cuori duri!
Solo il tuo non si lascia intenerire!
Ora men vado a governo d'amore...
Il mio lo lascio a te. Non ti scordare.
(La Lupa, play, I, 5)

The strambotto in ottava rima was a typical Sicilian form of popular poetry which reached other regions of Italy and was also called rispetto (Tuscany). Its rhyming scheme was usually ABABABAB (outside Sicily it rhymed like the classical octave ABABABCC). The image of the carnation can be found in a large number of Sicilian love songs. Vigo's Raccolta amplissima records about a dozen songs from all parts of the island, some with local variations, which have the carnation in the incipit.²⁸ A few more are quoted by L. Lizio-Bruno in his collection Canti popolari delle Isole Eolie e di altri luoghi della Sicilia (Messina, 1871). No. XVIII from Raccuja is the source of Verga's strambotto:

Carofulu pumpusu, duci amuri,
Mandami a diri comu t'haju amari:
Tu m'arrubbasti lu cori a mucciuni,
E vinni apposta si mi lu vo' dari.
E nn'haju rimuddatu cori duri!
Ora lu to' non potti rimuddari!
Jò mi nni vari a cuvernu d'amuri:
Chistu lu lassu a tia; non ti scurdari.

The Italian translation in the play has a slightly irregular rhyme (ABABCDAB). In the libretto, the sixth endecasillabo is reworded to rhyme in -are like the other B lines. The improved version is closer to the Sicilian text: 'Il tuo soltanto non potei piegare'.

After Pina, it is Nanni's turn to sing. Here Verga strikes gold in the form of an old song entirely made up of proverbs. The source is Pitrè's fourth volume of Proverbi siciliani, in which he reprinted, under the heading "Proverbi in canzoni siciliane", a Raccolta di proverbi siciliani in ottava rima by the Monreale poet Antonio Veneziano (1543-1593), first published in 1628. From the second of Veneziano's octaves, Verga chooses four lines for Nanni which aptly illustrate his character of 'handsome young man - fond of women, but even fonder of his own interests'. His solid common sense leads him to respond negatively to Pina's allurements:

Vedi e taci, se bene aver tu vuoi,
 Porta rispetto al luogo dove stai.
 Non fare più di quello che tu puoi.
 Pensa la cosa, prima che la fai.
 (La Lupa, play, I, 5)²⁹

Once Pina and Nanni are left alone and the woman resumes her enticement, she quotes the first two lines of her song, 'quasi soffocata dalla passione amorosa'; Nanni, still in his light-hearted and indifferent mood, quotes the end of his own. The last two lines of Pina's song return at the end of the libretto (II, 11). So the strambotto becomes the musical metaphor of Pina's sensual yearning and Nanni's four-line song expresses his cool, down-to-earth response before he yields to her. In Tasca's setting, Pina's strambotto (Ex. 1) is used as the motto-theme of the opera. It is first presented in a short introduction for strings and then by the chorus (sopranos only) for a second short statement.

Another form of popular song introduced by Verga in the play, in view of the operatic adaptation, is the stornello. A precedent for doing so may have been Lola's 'Fior di giaggiolo' in Mascagni's Cavalleria, but that kind of song was quite common in Sicily as well as in Tuscany where it possibly originated. It consisted of three lines only: a quinario which set the rhyme and usually contained the name of a flower (hence the name ciuri, flowers, for the stornelli in Palermo), and two endecasillabi. In La Lupa, Act I, when the peasants disperse, about midnight, to go to sleep, a touch of local colour is provided by a stornello dying away in the darkness:

(si ode la voce di Nunzio che si allontana cantando)

Cantabile (♩ = 60)

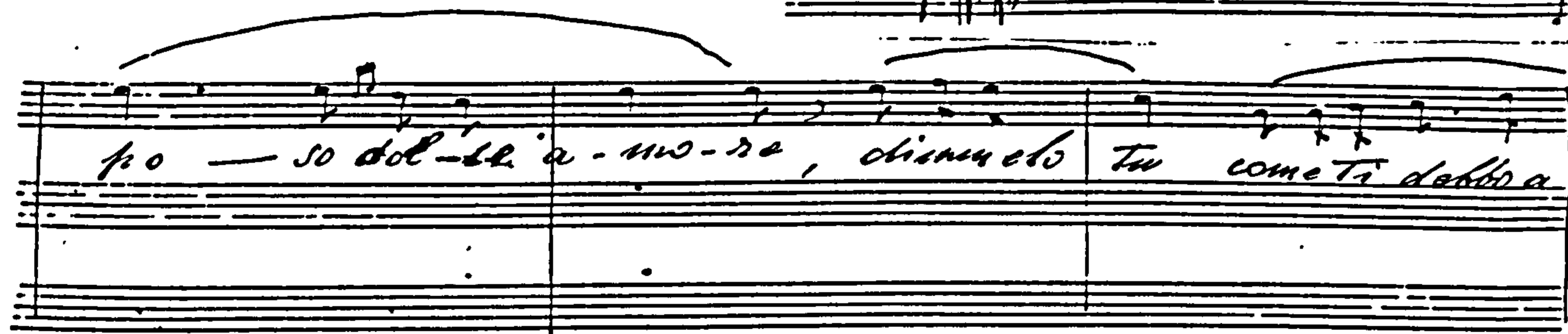
ga-ro-fa-no pom-po-so, dol-ce a-
mo-re, dim-me-lo tu co-me ti deb-bo a-
ma-re! Tu di na-sco-sto m'hai ru-ba-to il
cuo-re, ed io qui ven-ni se mel vuoi ri-
da-re. E n'ho toc-ca-ti tan-ti cuo-ri
du-ri! il tuo sol-tan-to non po-tei pie-
ga-re. O-ra a go-ver-no io me ne vò d'a-
mo-re; il mio lo la-scio a te non ti scor-
da-re.

P. Tasca, *La Lupa*, I, Pina's song
(Biblioteca Comunale,
Noto, Sicily)

Pina
Ga-refare poma
Rainabile
(♩ = 60)



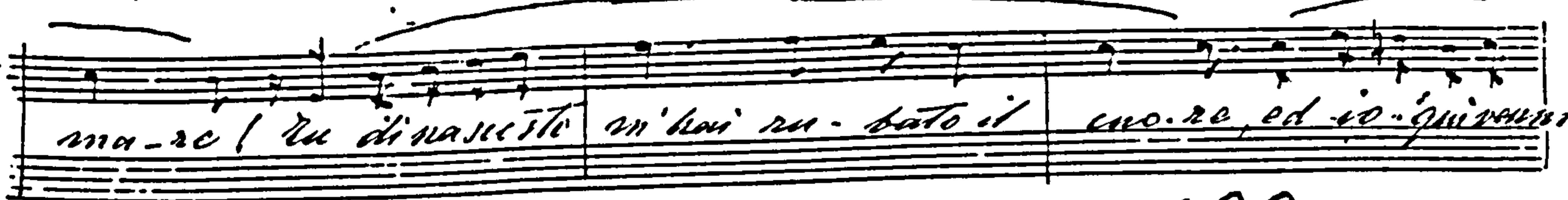
fo — so dol-ll'a-mo-re, disna e lo tu come ti debbo a



sordine
pp
sordine



ma-re! tu di naste in lui ru-bato il cuo-re, ed io qui ranno



bb
ten



se mal onni si-da-re. E n'hotoccati Tan-ti cuori



du-ri! il tuo sol-tan-to non p'eta piega-re. O-ia agguerno io



me me. no' d'a-more; il mio la scia te? non te scos da-re



Muta è la viaaaa...
 E' mezzanotte, e ora vo a trovarlaaaa...
 Nanni (facendo eco alla canzone, mentre accomoda
 la paglia sotto una bisaccia per sdraiarsi
 sopra)
 La figlia bella dell'anima miaaaa...
 (La Lupa, play, I, 6)³⁰

A significant difference between the play and the libretto can be noted in the conclusion of Act I. In the play, la Lupa overcomes Nanni's reluctance and drags him away repressing his last curse. A series of sound effects (suggested by Verga in his detailed directions) heightens the tension of the incest scene with sinister intimations of evil in the 'lugubrious' whining of dogs and the hooting of an owl:

Pina (tirandoselo dietro pel braccio, a capo
 chino, torva, come una vera lupa) Taci!
 ...Non bestemmiare adesso!
 (Scompaiono dalla sinistra, in fondo.
 Silenzio; odesi lontano il mormorio del
 fiume, il fruscio delle spighe, il tril-
 lare dei grilli, e di tanto in tanto,
 l'uggiolare dei cani, lugubre, nell'ora
 tragica. A un tratto passa di nuovo stri-
 dendo la civetta).
 (La Lupa, play, I, 9)

In the libretto, instead, the Act is concluded by a song heard off-stage, while Nanni reappears - 'pale and distraught' as at the end of the short story - after the incestuous intercourse with his future mother-in-law. That return is obviously inopportune; it dampens the erotic tension built up by the dialogue Pina/Nanni occupying the whole Scene. The effectiveness of the conclusion is further damaged by Tasca's idea of translating the song into his own dialect. So it is printed in Italian in the libretto but it is copied in 'Siciliano - sottodialeto di Noto' in the score: something Verga would never have approved. The Italian version is:

Specchio degli occhi miei, trionfo d'oro
 luccichi cento miglia da lontano,
 tu solo hai da venirci quando muoio,
 lascio la vita mia nelle tue mani!

In Act II of both texts, as the set changes from the threshing floor to Nanni and Mara's house, and the Good Friday procession establishes the Easter atmosphere of religious fervour, the popular songs

make room for Latin litanies and a funeral march played by a band on stage. The prevailing animal and vegetal imagery of the first Act gives way to religious or superstitious references in the second. When the confrontation between mother and daughter mounts to a heated dispute, Nanni expresses his exasperation by crossing himself so as to exorcise the devil; the terms 'saint', 'devil', and 'hell' frequently recur in this as in other scenes:

Pina ...Le parole di una santa come te!...che fanno peggio di un coltello!...

Nanni (che sta per prorompere fa il segno della croce)
Brutto diavolo, va via!...tentazione!...

Mara L'avete con me? Volete che vi lasci e me ne vada?

Nanni Escirò io! ...Io me ne vo!...al diavolo!...perchè c'è l'inferno in questa casa, quando siete insieme madre e figlia!...(esce infuriato)
(La Lupa, play, II, 4)

Similarly, the villagers' response tends to relate the Good Friday procession, which can be heard and seen outside Nanni's house, to the affront of Pina's presence inside. The domestic trouble diverts attention from the 'festa' and solicits outraged comments from neighbours and friends:

Grazia Basta, non fate scandali!...

Bruno (entrando) Vi si sente dalla piazza... più forte della banda! Pare che sia qui la festa. Un altro po' lasciano la banda e corrono tutti qui.
(play, II, 6)

Cardillo Ma che siete cristiani o turchi?

Filomena Sentite!...è uno scandalo per tutto il vicinato! Finitela questa vergogna!
(play, II, 7)

Janu Bestie! Peggio delle bestie, siete!
(play, II, 8)

A moral sensitiveness has replaced the carefree attitude of the villagers enjoying themselves or teasing Nanni and Pina in Act I. Since his past weakness and sexual indulgence are so mercilessly exposed, shame and anger seize Nanni and lead him to the physical annihilation

of his former lover. Before the catastrophe, however, in a first outburst of rage, Nanni beats both wife and mother-in-law (play and libretto, II, 7). Public discredit hurts him more than anything else: 'Sono la favola del paese! Siete contente ora?', he shouts after beating Pina and Mara.

Like the finale of Act I, the conclusion of Act II in the libretto presents some differences from the play.

PLAY

Nanni (brandendo una scure furioso) Ah!..Lo rompo io il legame!
Pina (voltandosi verso di lui, col petto nudo, come a sfidarlo) Finiscila! Via! colle tue mani!
Nanni (la spinge sotto la tettoia, cogli occhi pazzi d'ira e di orrore, la scure omicida in alto, urlando colla schiuma alla bocca) Ah! ...Ah!...Il diavolo siete?

LIBRETTO

Nanni (risoluto, afferrando una scure sotto la legnaia) - Ah!
Pina (voltandosi verso di lui col seno scoperto in aria di sfida) Finiscila!...
Nanni (interamente accecato dall'ira, inseguendola fin sotto la legnaia con la scure levata) Ah!...
Pina (indietreggiando barcollante, con immenso e doloroso stupore negli occhi e nel tono della voce smarrita) Davver m'ammazzi, Nanni?... (scompaiono entrambi sotto la tettoia; s'ode un urlo d'ira e un grido di spavento che finisce in un gemito)
Nanni (tornando in iscena con le mani nei capelli, corre fuggendo, pallido e sconvolto) Cristo, che ho fatto!...Che m'han fatto fare!...

In both texts, the eroticism of the naked breast is a poor alternative, in terms of artistic effectiveness, to the mythical figure moving towards her self-destruction with her hands full of poppies and her black eyes staring voraciously at her executioner. However, the fin de siècle, sensual image can still be explained with the updating of the character in the dramatization. What is hard to accept is Pina's last line in the libretto: 'Davver m'ammazzi, Nanni?', which Tasca chooses to leave as a 'parlato'. She staggers with astonishment and dismay at Nanni's determination to kill her; it is a moment of weakness and in-

credulity in the face of the death she herself has been seeking at the hands of her former lover. It sounds human and pathetic, and la Lupa takes her leave on a final note of sentimentalism, a much less dramatic figure than her namesake in the play, let alone the one of the original story.

In the play, Pina keeps telling Nanni that he just doesn't have the guts to put her out of her misery, and her mood is one of 'desperate bitterness' as she feels despised and rejected by Nanni and her own daughter. Before the man brandishes his axe, 'furioso', Pina expresses her agony and abjection bringing in 'hell' and the 'devil':

Pina ...Le madri come me andrebbero bruciate vive!...
Dovrebbero mangiarsela i cani, le madri come me!
...E tu pure che mi tieni nell'inferno!...pei
capelli!...come una pazza!...Hai un bell'andare
a confessarti...Il diavolo ci ha legati insieme!
(La Lupa, play, II, 10)

Death is the only way out and Pina does not falter in the face of it. In the libretto, just before the pathetic turn at the end, we catch a glimpse of the character's coquetry displayed in Act I, now mixed with derision:

Nanni (fuor di sè) - Lupa! Siete la Lupa!
Pina (mentre si asciuga il viso nel grembiale, sorridendogli in faccia con civetteria quasi di scherno)
- E se la Lupa io sono,
se non ti basta il cor...se a Dio perdono
chiedesti...chiudi gli occhi...non guardare...
(La Lupa, libretto, II, 11)

So, at the very end, Verga has to make up for the lack of real dramatic tension with the naturalistic ingredient of two spine-chilling cries: 'un urlo d'ira e un grido di spavento che finisce in un gemito'. In Cavalleria the cry 'Hanno ammazzato compare Turiddu!' is itself the act of (verbal) violence which signals the catastrophe, since the fight takes place off stage. Here the cries just add to the horror and sensation of the murder enacted 'sotto la tettoia', therefore audible if not visible to the audience. Furthermore, Nanni reappears on stage after killing Pina, 'fuggendo, pallido e sconvolto' (see I, 8: 'stravolto e pallido, come fuggendo'), whereas in the play he exits with his axe held high and the murder is assumed to be commit-

ted as the curtain comes down. His return adds a morbid note to the catastrophe, in the manner of a second rate pseudo-veristic opera. We can't resist looking for blood stains on Nanni's hands and clothes as he rants out: 'Cristo, che ho fatto!', and then closes in A minor on the second hemistich of his last endecasillabo: 'Che m'han fatto fare!'

The alteration to the finale in the libretto must have been made by Verga shortly before Puccini went down to Sicily in June 1894, as can be inferred from a letter to De Roberto in Catania, dated 12 May 1894, from Vizzini (Verga's country house):

Eccoti il 2.o atto, meno le prime due scene che hai fatte...Alla catastrofe troverei una piccola variante che sembrami preferibile.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 129)

Verga was wise enough to keep the play with its own conclusion, and the 'small' variation was confined to the libretto.

In rewriting La Lupa for the stage, Verga produced something profoundly different from the early verismo of the 1880s. The "Scene drammatiche" and the "Tragedia lirica", in various degrees, do not match up to the artistic quality of the short story. That this should be so because of the planned 'melodramatization' of La Lupa is only partly correct. Certainly, Verga's purely linguistic solution for a musical transposition of his verismo was inadequate and counterproductive. Proverbs and popular songs, no matter how carefully selected, are idiomatically effective but dramatically irrelevant. Besides, his understandable reluctance to produce heroines (Puccini's 'luminous and sympathetic' figures) and villains, instead of mothers, daughters and neighbours - in other words, the failure to provide sufficient opportunities for his characters to come to life in moments of lyrical expansion - doomed the libretto to its rejection by Puccini and Mascagni.³¹ On the other hand, Verga's veristic theatre suffered from an incomplete fusion of the environment and individual characters into a uniformly dramatic organism. It was a structural weakness in a positively innovative conception which influenced such diverse writers as Salvatore Di Giacomo and Gabriele D'Annunzio.

The latter, with La Figlia di Jorio (1904), revived and expanded the mythical component of Verga's best stories, such as "La Lupa", "Jeli il pastore", "Rosso Malpelo" (from Vita dei Campi) and set shep-

herds and harvesters of his native Abruzzi in a dream world of ancestral customs and superstitions where the protagonist, Mila di Codra - a 'mala femmina' like la Lupa - is burned at the stake while the crowd ('La Turba', as in an old mystery play) chants Latin hymns. In 1908, two years after La Figlia di Jorio found its way into the operatic theatre thanks to Alberto Franchetti, Verga would point towards the same direction with his second and last contribution to operatic literature, the libretto of Il Mistero for Domenico Monleone.

3. Il Mistero by G. Verga, Giovanni and Domenico Monleone

Verga spent the last twenty-five years of his life in Catania, attending to the writing of his last novel La Duchessa di Leyra, which proved an increasingly painful and frustrating enterprise, and occasionally diverting his attention towards the theatre. His last play was Dal tuo al mio (1903), dealing with the dramatic conflict between the sulphur-mine workers and the declining aristocracy in Sicily along with the rise of a mean and greedy middle class. Dissatisfied with the controversial reception of his play, Verga turned it into a novel which was first published in the Nuova Antologia in 1905. His last personal contact with the deceptive world of music publishers and composers came through the ill-fated new Cavalleria Rusticana of Giovanni and Domenico Monleone. Verga's legal and financial involvement in the dispute over the copyright of the libretto derived from his play gave the novelist one last opportunity to write for the theatre.

In 1908, while the controversy dragged on in the courts of Milan and Turin, and his Cavalleria continued its European tour, Domenico Monleone had the idea of adapting a new libretto to his music to counter a possible unfavourable outcome of the appeal against the ban on his opera in Italy. A convenient choice seemed to be another of Verga's stories, and "Il Mistero" from the Novelle Rusticane (1883) was singled out as containing some of the elements of Cavalleria. The two brothers contacted Verga who approved the project and offered to help Giovanni Monleone in drafting the new libretto. The novelist also suggested that, should their appeal be upheld by the Supreme Court, Cavalleria

could keep its music and Il Mistero might be used for a new opera. On 14 September 1908 a contract was signed and in the next two months Verga and Giovanni Monleone worked on the libretto which was completed early in December. Domenico was soon to realize that the new text required a completely different kind of music, but several years would pass before he wrote anything for Il Mistero. He composed three more operas (Alba Eroica, 1910; Arabesca, 1913; Suona la ritirata, 1916) and, in 1914, Giovanni Monleone prepared a different libretto for the music of Cavalleria with the title La Giostra dei Falchi; the opera was performed in Florence (18 February 1914) and Milan (5 September 1917) and then sank into oblivion like the rest of Monleone's works. Il Mistero was premièred in Venice at La Fenice on 7 May 1921, a few months before Verga's death.

The new joint venture Verga/Monleone turned out to be a fresh source of grudge and bitterness for the ageing novelist. Verga's letters to Dina di Sordevolo bear witness to the hard feelings and frustration aroused by what he called the 'wretched Monleone affair':

Catania, 8 May 1910

Dai giornali vedo che il Monleone ha avuto un certo successo a Genova, colla sua Alba Eroica. Egli me ne aveva mandato il libretto, e mi aveva scritto di raccomandarlo a Ricordi. Per sfruttarmi, more solito. Io non gli ho risposto neppure. ...e scrivendomi dell'Alba Eroica non mi dice una parola dell'altra opera Il Mistero che doveva musicare in luogo di Cavalleria.

Catania, 15 January 1913

Dal mio avvocato di Milano ho tante proposte per accomodare la faccenda col Monleone, sacrificando buona parte dei denari spesi, s'intende, che di utili non si parla neppure. Ma è che lo stesso rimborso propostomi, a rate, non mi offre nessuna garanzia. Il Monleone ne parla soltanto adesso per essere libero di dare la sua nuova opera [Arabesca].³²

The correspondence between the Monleone brothers and Verga regarding the libretto, ^{and} the novelist's final sketch of Il Mistero were published in the periodical Scenario in 1940.³³ The libretto was printed by the formerly adverse Casa Musicale Sonzogno on the occasion of the Venice première.³⁴ The vocal score, in the characteristic fashion of most verismo operas, was published in an Italo-German edition: Il Mistero/Das Passionspiel, Milano, Leipzig; Sonzogno,

Breitkopf u. Härtel, 1921-22.

Though the full text of the libretto was the work of Giovanni Monleone, Verga not only provided the basic layout and brief dialogues to be developed into more articulate lines, but he also assisted Monleone with his advice and objections until the libretto met with his full approval. The atmosphere, language and situations are unmistakably Verghian. Monleone's versification shows an extreme diligence in the philological reconstruction of the early veristic style of the story, which at times amounts to a skilful collage of idiomatic expressions lifted from other stories of the Novelle Rusticane and Vita dei Campi.³⁵

A comparative analysis of Verga's short story and the libretto of Il Mistero offers interesting elements of similarity and contrast with the play and libretto of La Lupa as well as the earlier texts of Cavalleria. Besides, Verga's own sketch and his comments on the aesthetic characteristics of the new work illustrate the last stage of dissolution of his verismo of the 1880s and a marked subordination of the realistic components to the legendary and symbolic dimension.

One remarkable similarity can at once be noted in Cavalleria, La Lupa and Il Mistero: the presence of a religious festivity connected with the Easter rituals. The three texts might be grouped together as a 'trilogy of the Holy Week', having Cavalleria set on Easter Sunday, La Lupa (Act II) on Good Friday, and Il Mistero on Palm Sunday. That common feature emphasizes the crucial importance of religion in the life of the rural communities portrayed in the stories. Religion is both a repressive force and an unfailing code of punishment and reward; it is a mixture of genuine religious fervour and superstitious practices sustained by a natural ethical sense. No better time than Easter, in the Catholic liturgical year, could exemplify the Christian sense of spiritual death through sin, and regeneration through confession and repentance. But there is a fundamental difference in the way the festivities are used in the three texts, and in the dramatic relevance they acquire in connection with the psychology of the characters.

In the two earlier plays, Easter Sunday and Good Friday work as catalysts of the action and as common referential terms for almost any comment on the behaviour of the characters. In Cavalleria, all the villagers are going to church having cleansed their consciences of

sin. Only Santuzza is 'scomunicata', unworthy to go to church on Easter Day since she cannot bear to confess her sin in front of God. The five scenes in which she appears are punctuated by statements expressing her self-exclusion from 'le funzioni di Pasqua' until the very end of Sc. 5 when she exits making for the church, the sanctuary of all sinners on their way to repentance.³⁶ In La Lupa, the sense of penance and expiation inherent in Good Friday is repeatedly hinted at or stated throughout Act II. Instead of the church, Verga makes use of the symbolic value of the cross which features prominently in the background of Nanni and Mara's 'cortile rustico':

Al di là veduta del villaggio in proscenio, sino al Monte dei Cappuccini, di cui si vede a sinistra un angolo del convento, e la gran croce di pietra dinanzi alla chiesa.

(La Lupa, play, Act II)

In Il Mistero, the religious festivity of Palm Sunday only provides the occasion for the performance of a mystery play which is itself the basic situation of the libretto: the disruption of the performance at its very outset modifies the situation and brings about the catastrophe. The old device of the theatre within the theatre, adopted by Verga in Il Mistero, enables him to achieve a complete fusion of the external and public element with the private case of the story.

A village girl, Nela, is in love with Bruno, a married man; he visits her at night, taking advantage of the absence of the girl's father, Rocco, who works as a night-watchman in an estate outside the village. Rocco suspects something because Nela refuses any marriage proposal on the slightest pretext. The night before Palm Sunday, on his way home, Rocco notices someone steal out of his house. In vain, the next morning, he questions a fortune-teller about the identity of the stranger; so he searches wilfully for a face, a clue, among the festive crowd. Meanwhile, the 'Personaggi' of the Mystery move in procession to the chapel to assemble for the performance on a nearby platform. Nela is among them, in the red and light-blue costume of the Virgin Mary she has been chosen to impersonate. She falters and hesitates in a state of anguish for the sacrilege she is committing. Bruno appears and urges her to keep the pretence lest the people and her father should find out about them. Bruno's wife,

Mara, also arrives to reproach the girl. As the other 'Personaggi' move on to the platform attracting the attention of the crowd, Nela is overcome by shame and repulsion, falls on her knees and proclaims her unworthiness and her sin in front of the bewildered community. Bruno runs away and Rocco is soon after him in the crowd. An axe flashes and a cry of horror signals the killing of the adulterer.

Substantial differences can be noted between the short story and the libretto as regards the sequence of events, characterization and social background. Indeed, apart from the general idea of some villagers impersonating the characters of a mystery play, there is little else in the story that can be found in the dramatized version. First of all, the Mystery and the killing are totally independent occurrences: a whole year divides them. The female protagonist is not a young girl but a widow who falls for a man called Cola when she sees him act in the Mystery together with her own partner, Nanni. Since that day, Nanni has caught the woman in a state of excitement and in disarray, on more than one occasion. So, one night, he decides to keep watch outside the widow's house to find out about the mysterious visitor. This happens exactly a year after the performance of the mystery play on Good Friday. As Cola approaches stealthily and knocks on the door, a shot resounds in the deserted square lit by the Easter moon. The man staggers away from the widow's house and falls on the spot where the platform for the Mystery was set up the previous year. Cola's mother is the only person in the village who does not join in the Good Friday rituals as she prays at the bedside of her son. The young man dies; the widow becomes known as 'la scomunicata' and has to leave the village; Nanni is eventually caught, tried for murder and sentenced to imprisonment.

The short story is divided into two sections: one for the portrayal of the mystery play as an antecedent; the other for the follow-up of the shooting. The mention of a narrator marks the beginning of each section:

- I Questa, ogni volta che tornava a contarla, gli venivano i lucciconi allo zio Giovanni, che non pareva vero, su quella faccia di sbirro. Il teatro l'avevano piantato nella piazzetta....
- II Qui lo zio Giovanni sentivasi rizzare in capo i vecchi peli, al rammentare. Giusto un anno dopo,

giorno dopo giorno, la vigilia del venerdì
santo....³⁷

In the dramatization, the dichotomy is superseded by a fusion of the Mystery with the killing which can in itself be read as a parable, an exemplum. The climactic public confession and the instantaneous punishment of the sinner, carried out among the crowd, introduce a symbolic connotation completely missing in the gunshot from the widow's other lover lying in ambush in a deserted square at night. The executioner is a father-figure; the instrument is the same axe of La Lupa.

But the most radical change concerns the identity of the female protagonist. In the story the widow is a minor figure; her self-indulgence and callousness make her a despicable character treated by the narrator with detached irony and humour. On the contrary, Nela is a naive girl; she is presented as a victim of the circumstances when she first yields to an older man. In the 'Argomento' of his sketch, Verga wrote:

Bruno è già l'amante di Nela. Un dì, nella calura della messe, la ragazza non aveva più saputo resistergli, e gli si era abbandonata.³⁸

The recalling of that moment, at the end of the love duet between Nela and Bruno, introduces a note of eroticism and sensual nostalgia in the predominantly religious atmosphere:

Bruno	Quella pazzia che nel sole di giugno il primo ti strappava grido d'amore, rodermi come lava oggi ancora la sento nelle vene!... Era Sant'Agrippina....., ti sovviene?... Un papavero avevi tra le labbra... di sopra al grano il petto ti ondeggiava... mi ridevi anelante...
Nela	(ammaliata, supplicante) Bruno!...Bruno!...
Bruno	...e stregata ti ha presa la mia mano e il primo bacio me l'hai dato in bocca!

After her first moment of weakness in the heat of the June harvest, the girl falls prey to her own passion for the man. It is a 'malia', a spell, the usual metaphor for the irresistible call of the senses:

Nela (smarrita negli occhi di lui)
...Una malia
che nell'anima canta è la tua voce
e ci hai negli occhi il sole!...
Se mi parli così!...
Ti son caduta allora tra le braccia
e mille volte ancora ci cadrei!...

Wearing the traditional costume of the Virgin, Nela feels the full weight of her transgression and finds the strength to redeem herself with a public admission of guilt.

The contrast between the awakened sensuality of a young woman and her moral inhibitions is the new element introduced by Verga in the dramatized sketch of his story, and G. Monleone cleverly exploited it in the long love duet he placed towards the end of the opera. In one of his first letters to D. Monleone, Verga insists on a new approach to his old story (the adjective recurs four times in the letter:

(19 Sept. 1908)
Bisogna mettere in rilievo quel che c'è di mistico e di suggestivo nel titolo e nel quadro della rappresentazione religiosa, mettendolo in relazione e in contrasto colle passioni umane che ad esso s'intrecciano; e mi sembra d'esservi riuscito con maggiore e più nuovo effetto drammatico per l'ispirazione.Io penso ad ogni modo di fare opera nuova e originale col nuovo libretto onde le possa servire per una nuova musica.³⁹

At this stage Verga was still working on a general plan drawn out by Giovanni Monleone from the existing Cavalleria. But he was soon to discard that first scheme and make up a new 'bozzetto scenico' where, by his own admission, the legendary and symbolic elements were given more prominence. Two important statements are contained in a letter Verga sent to the Monleones anticipating the dispatch of the new 'bozzetto':

(15 Oct. 1908)
Ho terminato l'altro bozzetto di cui le scrissi pel dramma lirico Il Mistero. ...Questo a me piace assai dippiù, ...perché più suggestivo e adatto a un ampio svolgimento lirico - nuovo pel taglio e l'andamento delle scene - senza cadere in quel cosiddetto realismo che nel dramma lirico io trovo assai volgare. Colore locale sì, ma elevato nel campo poetico. Bisogna intonare perciò anche i versi al tema leggendario e poetico, ri-

fuggendo da ogni tentazione dialettale.⁴⁰

The distinction between the 'dramma lirico' and the 'so-called realism' which Verga found vulgar and inappropriate in the musical theatre, the need to give artistic dignity to the 'local colour', avoiding any lapse into dialect or picturesqueness, sum up Verga's ideas on the whole question of operatic realism. The novelist insists on the legendary dimension of the new work in another letter to D. Monleone written after his own 'bozzetto' had been favourably received by the two brothers. Verga comments on the characteristics of his contribution which Giovanni Monleone has to develop and versify:

(28 Oct. 1908)

Io non ho avuto tempo di sviluppare maggiormente gli accenni per dare il carattere opportuno al soggetto; un che di leggendario, di fantastico liricamente, di jeratico quasi, in certi punti, ma giacchè la trama piace a suo fratello, se crede lo farò appena me lo farà sapere.⁴¹

The change from the veristic novella to the religious exemplum can be seen very clearly in the complete transformation of the minor characters. In the story, the vivid portrayal of the villagers during the laborious preparations and the agitated performance of the Mystery is full of little incidents and humorous vignettes: Don Angelino, the parish priest, script-writer and producer of "La Fuga in Egitto", prompting his stilted lines from behind the backdrop of the stage: 'Vano, o donna, è il pregar; pietà non sento! - Pietà non sento! - Tocca a voi, compare Janu...'; 'San Giuseppe' with his cotton-wool beard being chased by two 'thieves' in a forest of olive branches which hardly reaches their chests in height; the women in the square shouting and picking up stones to deter the 'thieves' from attacking 'San Giuseppe'; Trippa, the butcher, beating his bass-drum to underline the confrontation, etc.. It is a down-to-earth, realistic picture of simple people. Letting his characters speak for themselves, Verga relates the naive impassioned response of the villagers to Don Angelino's mystery play. Their appreciation of the amateur playwright is biased by their critical views on his meanness and greed as a priest:

Don Angelino allora affacciò la testa dalla sua tana, colla barba lunga di otto giorni, affannandosi a calmarli colle mani e colle parole: - Lasciateli fare!

lasciateli! Così è scritto nella parte. Bella parte che aveva scritto! e diceva pure che era tutta roba di sua invenzione. Già lui avrebbe messo Cristo in croce colle sue mani per chiappargli i tre tari della messa. O compare Rocco, un padre di cinque figli, non l'aveva fatto seppellire senza uno straccio di mortorio, perchè non poteva spillargli nulla?

In the second section of the story, some of the villagers fill the house of the dying Cola 'per curiosità', others try to help by bringing in professional figures: the doctor and the fortune-teller. Religion and superstition coexist in any circumstance. Cola's mother pays Don Angelino three 'tari' for the celebration of a mass but her neighbours object and suggest some well-tried fetishes:

Qui ci vuol altro che la messa di Don Angelino! - dicevano le comari - qui ci vorrebbe il cotone benedetto di fra Sanzio l'eremita, oppure la candela della Madonna di Valverde, che fa miracoli dappertutto.

In the libretto, the fragmentary structure of the story, with its colourful sketches and short digressions, is tightened into one composite choral frame dominated by the magmatic presence of 'La Folla', the collective protagonist of Il Mistero. From within this motley crowd, continuously reshaping its contour, there emerge individual figures or small sections weaving details into the main story or subsiding to make room for the principals. Some of those figures are indispensable ingredients of the Palm Sunday festive background: Pedlars, a Frog-seller, a Ballad-singer, a Fortune-teller, girls and boys dressed as 'Verginelle' and 'Innocenti', coming out of the chapel with blessed palms; other figures and small choral sections belong to the mystery play "La Fuga in Egitto": the 'Personaggi', among whom Nela makes her entry, the 'Incappati', the 'Chierici', 'L'Eremita', a holy man who harangues the 'Personaggi' before the performance, 'Verginelle' and 'Innocenti' holding the emblems of Christ's Passion.

The presence of 'La Folla' is felt throughout the opera, even during the love duet. In the stage directions, the crowd is the constant reference point for all the movements of the principals and the other individual characters. The structural flaw noted in La Lupa, consisting in the somewhat mechanical juxtaposition of choral scenes and duets, is finally overcome in Il Mistero. A complex counterpoint

of voices, including the main characters, generates variety and tension until it is eventually condensed to a dramatic confrontation between Nela and 'La Folla' as a collective witness to her confession. The individual figures emerging from the crowd, with their own specific register, convey the same kind of information which can easily be decoded as fragments of the main story. The Frog-seller alternates his cry 'Pesci cantanti!' to the quotation of a popular song: 'Amore, amore, che m'hai fatto fare!', hinting at Nela's being induced by her lover to desecrate the figure of the Virgin with her unworthy impersonation. Its words ring in Nela's reproach to Bruno: 'Cos'hai fatto di me!?' The Frog-seller and his cry were borrowed by G. Monleone from "Pane nero", another story of the Novelle Rusticane. The song was pertinently chosen from Vigo's Raccolta amplissima.⁴² The Ballad-singer's story provides a fantastic transposition of Nela's constant refusal to get married and her final confession:

...Era bella, credete, come il sole.
Conti e baroni a chieder la sua mano
venivano a cavallo da lontano...
Ma lei - No, no! - Le nozze non le vuole...

Ma in morte la figlia al confessore
dice: Ci ho fitto dentro un gran peccato...

On the steps of the chapel, 'L'Eremita' gives his solemn warning to the 'Personaggi' to be worthy of the honour of performing in the holy mystery:

Pensate all'onor grande che vi tocca,
figliuoli miei!
Guai se un che fosse indegno...
se vivendo nel peccato
gli paresse di fuoco
quell'abito che porta!...

The last words anticipate Nela's horrified outburst as she tries to tear off the Madonna's costume she feels unworthy to wear:

Nela (fa per strapparsi di dosso il manto)
Via! Via! Fuoco d'inferno!...

A similar warning is given by the Fortune-teller who mentions, as a bad omen, the appearance of a comet over the village:

Badate a me, cristiani!
Mettiamoci in grazia di Dio, chi mai fosse
in peccato mortale...
Sul paese, stanotte,
ho visto la cometa!...
Malaugurio cristiani!...

As the Mystery is about to start and the background voices subside, Nela makes her own public confession which is mistaken by the crowd as the beginning of the religious performance:

Nela (che non sa più resistere, si butta
ginocchioni innanzi al popolo, sui
gradini della cappella)
Pietà e misericordia!
Pietà e misericordia!
Gente di Dio, davanti a tutti
io mi confesso!...

La Folla (susurrando e disponendosi intorno
curiosa, come per assistere allo
spettacolo)
- Il Mistero!
- Comincia!

Nela Pia a me? Santa?...Bugiarda e impura!

Nela's confession punctuated by the comments of 'La Folla' continues until Rocco interferes with a wild cry and an oath, and plunges into the crowd brandishing his axe. A scuffle and a stampede ensue; then Bruno emerges from the terrorized villagers and drops dead in front of Nela.

The large choral structure of the 'Atto Unico' is preceded by Mara's tense monologue in the 'Prologo'. Late at night in her cottage, the woman lulls her baby to sleep and vents her bitterness and jealousy as she waits for Bruno to return. Originally devised to fit the prologue of Monleone's Cavalleria, this intimate and sombre section of Il Mistero provides an antecedent and a striking contrast to the fast-moving, crowded Act.

On the whole, Verga's second contribution to an opera libretto resulted in a better text than the earlier Lupa. His achievement seems even more remarkable if one considers the modest artistic quality of the original short story and the twenty-five years dividing the Novelle Rusticane from the libretto of Il Mistero. In the early 1890s Verga was misled by an idea of operatic verismo which the success of Mascagni's Cavalleria seemed to have positively established

as the right one. Any attempt at improving that questionable prototype was doomed to fail, and so did the libretto prepared by Verga and De Roberto for Puccini. The rich and ambivalent imagery of "La Lupa", its mythical overtones were obliterated by the plaintive songs and sensational coups de théâtre of the operatic text. In 1908 Mascagni's "melodramma" had long ceased to represent a fashionable model. Verga knew of the great success scored by Gabriele D'Annunzio with his "tragedia pastorale" La Figlia di Jorio (1904) and was informed by Dina di Sordevolo about Franchetti's operatic version presented at La Scala on 29 March 1906. Replying to a letter by Dina, a few days after the première, Verga commented with a sarcastic reference to Mascagni:

(6 April 1906)

Sei stata a teatro e a sentire la Figlia di Jorio.
 Quello sī, che sa fare! Ma si è quel che sī è. Qui
 abbiamo il Mascagni, più Mascagni che mai.⁴³

Franchetti's opera was expected to be the major attraction of the season at La Scala, but it failed to win popular favour and received only a succès d'estime. The sedate and intellectual composer could not aspire to more than that. La Figlia di Jorio was, at any rate, despite the substantial differences of language and imagery, the precedent for Il Mistero. Having to approach his early veristic novella to turn it into an operatic text, Verga created a choral fresco where a personal vendetta was transfigured into a cruel ritual of atonement celebrated coram populo in the village square on a festive day.

As for the music of Il Mistero, the 'Wagnerian' Monleone was further away from trying a veristic approach in setting the libretto twelve years after it had been written. His music is contrived and, at its best, sounds like Wagner revised by Richard Strauss. The basic motive of Nela's lyrical pieces is borrowed from Die Götterdämmerung (Ex. 1):



and is likewise presented in the Prologue (Ex. 2):

Ex. 2 - Monleone, Il Mistero



In the course of the opera, even such veristic components as the cries of the Frog-seller and the Greengrocers are set to fragments of Nela's motive picked up from its development in the Prologue (Ex. 3a, 3b):

Ex. 3a

**Il Ranocchiaio.
Der Froschhändler.**

Po - sci can - tan - til Po - sci can - tan - til
Sin - gon - do Fi - schel Sin - gon - do Fi - schel

Ex. 3b

**I Trocconi.
Die Gemüsehändler.**

Ro - bu stril - la - ta mez - za ven - du - tal
Wur man laut an - preist, ist halb ver - kauft!

The Prologue, however, contains the most effective piece in Il Mistero: Mara's lullaby, with a sombre melody consisting of an ascending chromatic octave introduced by some 'Puccinian' parallel fifths in the bass (Ex. 4):

Ex. 4 - Monleone, Il Mistero

Largo. (♩ = 50)

Largo.

The piano introduction consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of common time. It begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The middle staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp. It features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, starting with a half note G4 in the bass and a half note B4 in the treble. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, starting with a half note G2 and a half note B2.

Mara.

(canticchiando macchinalmente)
(mechanisch singend)

Nella
Ruhig

The first system features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The piano accompaniment consists of a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, starting with a half note G4 in the bass and a half note B4 in the treble. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, starting with a half note G2 and a half note B2.

cul - la mi col - ca - i e quat - tran - go - li tro - va - i che te -
-lag ich in der Wie - ge und vier En - gel zu mir flo - gen und sie

The second system features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The piano accompaniment consists of a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, starting with a half note G4 in the bass and a half note B4 in the treble. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, starting with a half note G2 and a half note B2.

10

ne - a - no a - per - te l'a - le tor - no tor - no al ca - pos - sa - le e nel
hiel - ten ih - re Flü - gel of - fen, schweb - ten rings - um ob mei - nem Kis - sen; in die

poco creso.

The third system features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The piano accompaniment consists of a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, starting with a half note G4 in the bass and a half note B4 in the treble. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, starting with a half note G2 and a half note B2.

mez - zo o - ra Ge - su
Mit - te Je - sus nun trat,

The fourth system features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff. The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The piano accompaniment consists of a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp. It features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands, starting with a half note G4 in the bass and a half note B4 in the treble. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp, starting with a half note G2 and a half note B2.

4. Malia by Luigi Capuana and Francesco Paolo Frontini

Capuana's works for the theatre cannot be studied without constant reference to Verga's own achievements in the same field which, to a large extent, influenced and conditioned them. It should be stressed, however, that the relationship was in no way ^Lundirectional. Apart from the advice and support Capuana offered to his friend during the latter's delicate phase of stylistic experimentation, he can also be credited with at least one direct contribution towards the definition of a new narrative technique which would evolve into Verga's verismo.

In a letter to Capuana, dated 24 September 1882, Verga referred to a short story in Sicilian verse his friend had written several years before, and made an interesting statement which throws light on the genesis of Verga's veristic style as well as on the influence of Capuana exerted on his associate: 'Io non dimenticherò mai certa tua novella in versi appioppata al Vigo se non sbaglio come canto popolare, ... Quello è un piccolo capolavoro, e devo confessarti che la prima ispirazione della forma schiettamente popolare che ho cercato di dare alle mie novelle la devo a te'.⁴⁴ Such an admission sounds quite flattering for Capuana as it comes soon after the publication of Vita dei Campi and I Malavoglia. Verga is undoubtedly more convincing in this acknowledgement of Capuana's influence on the 'form' of his works than in his later reference to the accidental discovery of a sea-captain's log-book as having sparked off his conversion to a plain and concise style.⁴⁵ The tale in verse mentioned by Verga is "Lu Cumpari" ("The Godfather") and has a curious story behind it. Capuana was a keen collector of popular stories and songs; he had also a good sense of humour and a flair for vernacular poetry. At the time when the ethnologist Lionardo Vigo was collecting material for his Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani (1870-74), Capuana offered him, as original material from his native Mineo, several texts in vernacular he had made up by himself to trick the indefatigable researcher. One of them was "Lu Cumpari", which so much impressed Verga. Another 'canto' was an octave which started with this remarkable line: 'Donni, ch'aviti 'ntillettu d'amuri', the incipit of Dante's canzone "Donne che avete intelletto d'amore" from the Vita Nova. The gullible Vigo recorded the fake as no. 980 of his Raccolta and accompanied it with a puzzled note: "This line is Dante's: did he take it from our poets or did they

take it from him?"

After Verga had successfully established his new style, Capuana reappropriated "Lu Cumpari" and turned it into an effective novella, "Comparatico", first published in La Cronaca Bizantina (Rome, 16 September 1882), then included, with substantial stylistic alterations, in more than one of his collections of short stories. It was eventually dramatized in Sicilian dialect (1907) and, when it appeared in vol. III of Capuana's Teatro dialettale siciliano (Palermo, 1912), Verga congratulated his friend and recalled "quell'altro tuo bellissimo Cumparatico dei Canti popolari".⁴⁶ "Lu Cumpari" must have impressed Verga with its tense narrative structure deprived of any transition links, the flashes of vivid direct speech interspersed with naive moralizing remarks by the story teller, the colourful and crude dialect lending an aura of popular legend to the gruesome events of the fiction. Its specific influence, therefore, can best be seen in the structural peculiarities of such stories as "Cavalleria Rusticana"; but the arduous elaboration of Verga's characteristic language, the breadth of his artistic vision are far above any model Capuana might be able to offer. While Capuana can be said to have operated as the theorist and critic of the naturalistic school in Italy, Verga was an autonomous and tenacious innovator who pursued his own artistic ideal and was able to influence his friend. What Luigi Russo wrote about the short story "Cavalleria" - "l'arte ha trasumanato il costume" - could not be extended to Capuana's works where local customs and superstitions are studied for their own sake, and the dispassionate analysis of a pathological case can be made the ultimate goal of a story or play.

In this respect, Malia is a very good example. The first edition of the play (Rome, 1891) bears the dedication: "A Giovanni Verga affettuosissimamente". Verga and De Roberto were among the first few people to be informed about the new work. A letter Capuana wrote to De Roberto from Rome on 25 November 1891 enables us to know the exact date of completion of the play and Capuana's own impression of it:

...ieri alle 2 e 40 p.m. misi la parola fine alla commedia Malia, e domani la leggerò a Cesare Rossi. Io sono contento del mio lavoro: mi pare d'aver fatto una cosa teatralissima, drammaticissima, senza nessuna ombra di convenzione nei caratteri, nei sentimenti, nella parte tecnica della sceneggiatura.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 94)

Malia was written at the time when Verga was working on the dramatization of La Lupa for Puccini. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the success of Mascagni's Cavalleria prompted Capuana to write a libretto for his friend and composer Francesco Paolo Frontini (Catania, 1860-1939). Although Capuana himself, in a letter to the actor-manager Francesco Pasta, stated that the opera libretto was derived from the play, an autograph manuscript in the Biblioteca Comunale of Mineo (Sicily) - "Luigi Capuana. Malia. Melodramma in 3 atti. Roma 16-26 giugno 91" - seems to testify to the contrary. The document is marked "Autografo originale" by Capuana's wife Adelaide Bernardini, and it should be a first draft of the "melodrama" which Capuana later developed into the play and libretto of Malia. Be that as it may, it is clear from Capuana's letter to Pasta that the text of the libretto he read to the actor in Rome must have been completed before the comedy:

Roma, 28 Novembre 1891

Caro Pasta,
...vi scrivo nuovamente per annunziarvi che la mia commedia Malia, quella stessa da cui era tratto il melodramma che le lessi qui a Roma, è già condotta in fine: sto facendo preparare i copioni...Il lavoro mi sembra riuscito caratteristico per la dipintura dei costumi siciliani, e molto drammatico.⁴⁷

When the printed text of the play was ready, Capuana sent copies to Verga and De Roberto, and both friends responded with fully appreciative comments. Besides, writing to De Roberto about their project of La Lupa (see par. 1, letter dated 13 January 1892), Verga commented on the similarities he had noticed between his play and Malia; the cheeky style is the one reserved for his intimate friends and the insults should be read in a jocular key:

E a proposito della Lupa ho scritto a Capuana che è un infame, un porco, un baloss...che mi ha fottuto due o 3 scene della Lupa colla sua Malia, che è pure una bella cosa, la più bella cosa forse che egli abbia scritto, e fui contento di dirglielo...

Two years later, as the elaboration of La Lupa gained momentum, Verga again commented on the similarities with Malia, replying to De Roberto who had raised that point along with his doubts on Puccini's willingness to set their libretto (see par. 1, letter dated 13 April 1894):

I punti di somiglianza con *Malia* di Capuana. Tu sai che la colpa non è mia di certo. E del resto non me ne importa nulla. La scena e le situazioni anche identiche non importano; giacchè venti mani diverse possono manipolarle in modo diverso. Del resto, in confidenza, e me ne dispiace pel nostro Capuana, la *Malia* come opera è morta e seppellita e non se ne parla più.

Verga's remark about the hopeless failure of *Malia* as an opera was justified by its unsuccessful première in Bologna (Teatro Brunetti, 30 May 1893) and its subsequent shelving. A revival in Milan, in 1895, did nothing to secure the opera a chance of survival. Its musical qualities were such as to make Frontini's *Malia* no more appealing than Gastaldon's *Mala Pasqua!* The two composers were skilled manufacturers of drawing-room songs and shared a remarkable deficiency in dramatic talent and musical inventiveness which made them totally unsuited to the composition of operas.

However, the libretto of *Malia* is worth examining for a study of the stylistic and structural elements which characterize the only contribution to the operatic theatre by the theorist of literary verismo. There exist two editions of the libretto, one for each production of the opera: the first was published by Achille Tedeschi (Bologna, 1893); the second by Arturo De Marchi (Milan, 1895) who also printed the vocal score. The play *Malia* was included by Capuana in his collection of short stories *Le Paesane* (1894) on the grounds that he had tried to 'apply to a theatrical work the same artistic formula used in the *Paesane*'.

A wealthy farmer's daughter, Jana, falls in love with her future brother-in-law, Cola, only days before her sister Nedda marries him. The naive and God-fearing young woman is horrified by the physical attraction she feels for the man, and she attributes that to a 'malia', a spell cast on her by Cola himself. During the wedding party, Nino, Jana's fiancé, presses the girl for an explanation of her strange looks and depressed state, receiving only evasive answers. Four months later, visitors gather in Jana's house for the festival of the Immaculate Conception and the procession of the Madonna. Cola and Nedda also arrive; their marriage is running into difficulties because of the philandering tendency of the man. Jana's obscure 'disease' is now a family problem and Cola tries to talk it over with the girl. Much to

his surprise and pleasure, she reveals her passion for him, her secret anguish and horror, and begs him to break the spell. It will not be difficult for the unscrupulous Cola to turn the situation to his advantage. As the procession approaches Jana's house, the desperate woman shouts abuse to the Madonna for not saving her from her shameful frenzy.

Jana falls prey to Cola and their relationship goes on for some months until she finds the strength to resist him. Her refusal exasperates the man and brings more tension between him and his wife. In a dramatic confrontation with Nino, Jana tells him everything and releases him from any obligation towards her. The young man, shocked at first, blames the 'malia' for all Jana has been through and offers to marry her because he still loves her. Jana accepts but Cola interferes trying to dissuade her from leaving him. Nedda overhears their conversation and wreaks her resentment on her sister. After further provocation from Cola, Nino seizes a knife and kills him in front of relatives and grape-harvesters.

Just as in Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana, in Malia the social and cultural environment of a Sicilian village is brought to life through the interaction between the main characters and a chorus of villagers. The pathological case of the 'bewitched' girl is set against the background of a village wedding, a religious festival and a grape-harvest. But, whilst the stylistic and structural devices of Malia point directly back to Verga's "Scene popolari", the psychological analysis is typical of Capuana, and has precedents in his earlier narrative works, such as Profili di donne (1877), Storia fosca (1883), and more specifically, the short story "Tortura" (1889), the study of a middle-class woman raped by her brother-in-law and almost driven to insanity. On the other hand, the incestuous relationship between Jana and Cola has some points of similarity with the situation of Pina and Nanni in La Lupa. In both plays we find the same kind of imagery connected with sin, and the characteristic blend of religion and superstition. The spell allegedly cast on Jana, which ultimately leads her into the arms of her cynical brother-in-law, is adopted by Capuana as the dynamic element of the action. He illustrates the progress of the 'disease' moving from the early stage of the woman's agonizing reflections in Act I when, owing to her behaviour during the wedding party, it becomes clear that something serious upsets her. The gradual involvement of relatives and neighbours reaches a climax at the end of Act II with

Jana's blasphemous accusations against the Madonna followed by a fit of convulsions. In Act III, Jana has already overcome the 'malia' by simply realizing her own mistake in falling in love with the wrong man; but, in arguing her case with Nino, she is still convinced that Cola's attractiveness was an irresistible spell ('Ero nelle sue mani; non potevo resistergli'). Eventually, Nino takes his revenge on the man by publicly 'breaking the spell'.

The local colour contributes to characterize the cultural and social background of the superstitious belief in the 'malia' and, in some cases, offers opportunities for displaying the effects of such a 'disease'. Both in the play and in the opera, the climax of the wedding party is a traditional dance, 'la Ruggiera', which Pitre describes as a 'canto, ballo e pantomima' because it involves two men and two women who, in turn, sing a song while dancing. Jana is reluctant to dance; when they force her to sing, she can manage only one line and breaks off overwhelmed with emotion.⁴⁸ In the play, a sorcerer is called to drive the spell away from the 'bewitched' woman. He is Don Saverio Teri, the protagonist of 'Il Mago', a short story Capuana published in 1889 and then included in Le Paesane (1894), soon after Malia, as a 'commentary on the concept of the play'. The insertion of material from the novella provides some comic relief in Act III when Don Saverio is led in, feeling sick and miserable, and claims to be the victim of a wicked friar, Padre Benvenuto, who is beating him at his own game and has cast a spell on him in the form of rheumatic pains. The poor man is now out of business and can only beg his former clients for help. Cola, who knows best about Jana's predicament, takes advantage of Don Saverio's disgrace to tease the 'mago' and express his scepticism in spells and witchcraft. In the libretto, Don Saverio does not appear owing to the necessary simplification of the action. Consequently, at the end of Act II, Jana's relatives and friends invoke the help of a priest to exorcise the devilish incantation which makes her rail against the Madonna. The mixture of religion and superstition is, therefore, more striking:

Jana:	Giù la buttate!
	Ella è la rea!
	No, benedetta non la chiamate
	Cotesta ebra!
	Potea salvarmi! Non ha voluto!
	Sia maledetta!

Non ha voluto!...Non ha voluto!...
 Sia maledetta! (cade in convulsione)
 Tutti: L'opra infernale è manifesta!
 Qui c'è malia!
 Un sacerdote!...Altro non resta!...
 Malia! Malia!⁴⁹

That is, indeed, the key point of the whole play (and opera): the conflict caused by the awakening of unrestrained sensuality in a young woman with little education but strong religious and moral principles. The very idea of fancying her sister's husband fills Jana with disgust; yet she cannot altogether repress her feelings, and the only reason she can find for that is the influence of an evil spell. In a letter to De Roberto, dated 26 December 1891, Capuana thanks his friend for the favourable opinion expressed on Malia and comments on the character of Jana in the terms outlined above:

Jana ha sentito il fascino di Cola e lo dice chiaro nel suo monologo...Nella sua mente di contadina devota e credente, l'amore pel cognato non può essere altro che effetto di malia. L'analisi non può nè deve farla lei, ma lo spettatore; e mi pare di avergli dato tutti gli elementi.

(Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 177)

The monologue Capuana refers to can be found in Act II of the play, soon after Don Saverio's visit. A helpful but superstitious neighbour, Zia Pina, has arranged for the 'mago' to come with a pretext (selling some cloth) and take a look at the woman. But Jana cannot bear the old man and his panacea, and, being left alone with her affliction, she prays to the Immaculate Mother of God for help and describes how it happened that she fell in love with Cola:

Jana: - Se sapessero! Ah bella Madre Immacolata, salvatemi voi! Non reggo più! Come è stato? Voi sola lo sapete! Mi sedeva accanto.. parlava...ridevo...senza sospetto, con cuor sincero!...Voi lo sapete. E' stato così! E' stato così! Levatemelo voi dalla mente! mi sento impazzire! Ah, che fuoco, che fuoco... Hanno ragione: opera del demonio!...

In the libretto, Jana's impassioned pleading is moved to the very beginning of Act I (Scene 2) so that it may provide the character with an early opportunity for lyrical expansion. The actual prayer is left out and the monologue aims at rationalizing the nature of the

sorcery which afflicts the woman. The warm and genuine expressions of the prose play are stiffened and cooled in the dry symmetry of the operatic verse Capuana inflicts on his 'contadina':

Jana (sola) No, possibil non è, Vergine santa!
Oh, come mai?...Bevevo
Lentamente l'incanto!
Di niente m'accorgevo!
Ei mi sedeva accanto...
Motteggiava...ridevo!
E bevevo l'incanto!
Di niente m'accorgevo!
Ed oggi, d'un tratto, dagli occhi
La benda funesta mi cade!
Mi tremano sotto i ginocchi,
Mi fugge la vita dal cor!
Un senso d'orrore m'invade...
E' opra d'inferno, Signor!

The woman's own subjective and emotional analysis is integrated by the objective description of her unaccountable behaviour Jana's father makes at the beginning of Act II (play and libretto). The caring Massaio Paolo asked the doctor round to see the young woman; an early marriage seems to be the only treatment for the strange 'disease', contrary to the opinion of Zia Pina who swears it is a 'malia' Jana is suffering from. In the libretto the character of Zia Pina is not included and Capuana makes Paolo quote both the scientific and the popular diagnosis:

Paolo (da sè) Questo mal che la martira
Natural cosa non è.
Muta, tetra qui s'aggira,
Piange, o brontola da sè...
Suda freddo, smorta al pari
D'un cadavere si fa:
E, convulsa, con le nari
Sanguinanti, in urli dà.
E' male d'amore! ripete il dottore.
Mal'opra, mal'opra! dottore, pens'io!

Jana's vulnerability makes Cola all the more wicked and despicable in taking advantage of the woman's unwitting infatuation. In Act II, while he makes up hasty avowals of love, he sneers at Jana's anguish quoting a proverb as an aside: 'Amore di cognata è gloria beata'. The proverb becomes a concise way of musical characterization in the opera. During the long duet between Jana and Cola (II, 2), it recurs

four times as an aside and contradicts Cola's hot-blooded statements:

Jana: Peccato grande
E' il vostro, Cola!
Cola: Zitta!
La vostra e la mia stella
La nostra sorte han scritta!
(Da sè) Amor di cognata
E' gloria beata!
Veder vo' se il proverbio
Ha detto il vero o no!

In Act III the situation is reversed. Jana rebels against her subjugation and can stand up to Cola's entreaties and threats; on the contrary, Cola has developed a strong attachment to the woman and won't let her go. It seems as though the 'malia' had backfired.

Cola: E quando mi dicevi?...

Jana: (interrompendolo) - Ero pazza. La vostra malia mi faceva parlare a quel modo.

Cola: E quando giuravi?...

Jana: (c.s.) - Ero pazza. Non sapevo quel che dicevo.

Cola: E ora che hai fatto impazzire me, ora che ti sei preso tutto il mio cuore, tutta l'anima mia, e io stesso non so come è avvenuto...ora?...Voglio vederla!...Sei mia!...Son due mesi che ti vengo dietro come un cagnolino!...Due mesi che mi fai soffrire tutte le pene dell'inferno! Due mesi che mi tieni a bada! Sposerai...ma quando vorrò io, e se vorrò; per ora sei mia, mia sei!...

Malia (play), Act III

Cola's possessive affection and his stubborn interference will determine Nino to kill him.

Capuana is fully successful in his portrayal of Jana. The pathological case of the 'bewitched' village woman is well integrated into the choral movement of relatives and neighbours, some of whom resemble Verga's minor characters. Zia Pina, for example, is similar to Zia Filomena of Cavalleria (and to her namesake in La Lupa). On the whole, Capuana handles the veristic ingredients with greater skill than Verga, and Malia has more cohesion than La Lupa: local colour, humour, psychological analysis, religion and superstition, songs and dances have each a necessary function and combine to produce an effective dramatic result. When we consider the 'commedia' and the libretto, the play is much the better of the two versions. Capuana had fairly old-fashioned ideas about what an operatic text should be like from a linguistic point

of view, and F.P. Frontini could make little use of the innovatory example of Mascagni's Cavalleria in planning the musico-dramatic structure of Malia. In the libretto, all the minor characters are eliminated. The main roles - Massaio Paolo, bass; Jana, soprano; Nedda, mezzosoprano; Cola, baritone; Nino, tenor - are supported by a Chorus (wedding guests in Act I; friends and relatives in Act II; grape-harvesters in Act III). Jana's part is by far the longest. Besides three solos, she is involved in the three long duets of the opera (I, 4: Nino/Jana; II, 2: Cola/Jana; III, 1: Nino/Jana) and interacts with the other characters and the chorus. Two of the solos are prayers, the other (I, 2) discloses her inner feelings and defines her position. The character is given all the prominence and opportunities of a protagonist in operatic terms: that is to say a role Verga would not allow for Pina in La Lupa. Jana's linguistic register exhibits an antiquated literary polish which, compared with the language of Mascagni's Santuzza, makes the libretto of Cavalleria much more veristic, particularly in the duets. The same can be said for Nino's part. A good example of the substantial difference of register between Capuana's prose play and the libretto of Malia is to be found in the crucial duet of Act II (Jana/Cola). In the play, Jana expresses her anguish in truly veristic terms; an obsession with 'hell' and 'damnation', self-pity and moral scruples are clearly understandable in her impassioned words:

Cola: Jana!...Jana! Che male c'è se mi volete bene?
 Jana: No, no! Non mi guardate così! Ah, cotesti occhi! Non mi toccate, Cola: per carità! Abbiate pietà di me! Scioglietemi! Scioglietemi!
 Cola: Vorrei potervi attaccare più forte! Mi avete attaccato peggio, Jana. Non lo vedete? Non lo capite? Vi ho nel cuore anch'io.
 Jana: Non è vero; non può essere; non dev'essere. Che avete mai fatto! Mi avete messo l'inferno nell'anima. Quante lagrime, Signore! Quante notti senza sonno, Signore! Mi volete dannata, insomma?

[Cola takes Jana in his arms and kisses her while she struggles]

Jana: No!...Cola!...Cognato!...No!...Non voglio!...Non vi amo!...No...(gli sfugge dalle braccia) V'odio! Mostro! Mostro! Mostro!

(Malia, play, II)

Ex. 1A - Frontini, Malia

All.^{to} Mosso
JANA sollovoce

V'a . . . mo e v'o . . . dio! Vi ful . . . mi . . . nil

All.^{to} Mosso
pp seguendo il canto

cie . . . lo!

Ex. 1B -

(parlato)
V'a . mo! o

D con forza

(parlato)
v'odiol
COLA

Zitta!

Ex. 1C -

p
Schiava vostra Per di . sfar l'incan.te . si . mo ri . o

ppp sollovoce

Cola is convivial and extrovert:

Cola Su, su, bevete,
Su, su, gustate, amici, i dolci nostri
E la càlia che stimola la gola
E fa bere e riber!... (I, 3)

The càlia are soaked and toasted chick-peas traditionally offered at weddings in Sicily. In Act II, Cola behaves as a cynical liar to take advantage of the 'malia' and make Jana his lover. In Act III, he is insolent and mafioso. He swears and threatens when he is told that Jana is going to marry Nino:

Cola E' vero?...E' vero?
Andrai tu sposa a Nino?...Mal faceste
I conti tutti e due!
. Per la Madonna!
Pel sangue!...
. Ebbene, andrò in galera,
Ma sua tu non sarai!... (III, 3)

In the final confrontation with Nino, the mafioso component comes out when Cola admits no arguing about his claim that Jana is not willing to get married. The sapid, colloquial style of the prose play enlivens the verse of the libretto (to no avail for the music, though):

Cola Se affermo una cosa,
Tutti in paese lo sanno,
Non ci ha gusto a smentirmi chi l'osa!
(libretto, III, 4)

Nino (avvicinandosi a Jana, che smania e piange
in un canto)

- Avete detto di no, Jana?

Cola (afferrandolo pel braccio e scostandolo,
con aria braveggiante) - Quando io affermo
una cosa - tutti lo sanno nel paese - non
ci ha gusto chi pretende smentirmi! (Nino
e Cola stanno per afferrarsi).

(play, III)

The almost literal transposition of the lines indicates how important they are for Capuana to focus the quarrelsome and defiant traits in Cola's personality. The involvement of the villagers as witnesses to a claim points directly to Verga's Alfio. In Cavalleria Rusticana

(play, Scene 1), the resolute 'carrettiere' asserts his right to take care of his own interests by himself and calls on the whole village to support his words: 'I miei interessi me li guardo io, da me,...E in paese tutti lo sanno, grazie a Dio!' It is the same language, but the implications are opposite. Alfio is the hard-working, honourable married man who will not tolerate any wrong; Cola is a despicable boaster.

In the previous scene of the libretto (III, 3), we find a significant similarity with Verga's style in the tense, biting dialogue between Nedda, Cola and Jana, after Nedda finds out about her sister's affair with her husband. The lines are disentangled from the stifling operatic versification and almost restored to the straightforwardness of the veristic prose. The word 'thief', the metaphor of the snake, both used by Nedda with regard to Jana's behaviour, remind us of the conclusion of Scene 5, Act II, in La Lupa (play) which Verga was writing more or less at the same time. Both passages bear the hallmark of the vivid, sharp direct speech of the early Verghian prose style:

Nedda: (scoppiando e mostrandosi)
 Ah! Che sento!...La ladra tu sei?
 Dunque tu mi rubavi il suo amore!
 Ladra! Ladra!...Sgualdrina!...E potei
 Questa serpe allevarmi sul core!...

Jana: Mia sorella!

Cola: Tacete per Dio!...
 (a Nedda)
 Taci! Taci! O ne va di tua vita!

Jana: Mia sorella!...Perduta son io!

Nedda: Ladra!...

Cola: Taci....Ecco gente!...
Malia (libretto, III, 3)

Pina: (investendola, bieca e con voce sorda).
 Schiacciami la testa con le tue mani
 allora...giacchè sono io la vipera!...
 Andrai dal confessore poi...anche tu!

Mara: Scomunicata! scomunicata che siete!

Pina: Taci!

Mara: Ladra! Ladra!

Pina: Taci!

Mara: Ladra! Venite sin qui a rubarmi la mia
 pace! Madre scellerata!

Pina: (come una belva ferita). Ah, vedi? vedi?...
La Lupa (play, II, 5)

Examples such as the one quoted above are exceptions in Malia. In any case, they are limited to Cola's lines and the immediate response of his interlocutors. For the rest, the term 'melodramma' which Capuana chose to define his libretto implies a radical differentiation between the linguistic register of the veristic play and the versification of the operatic text. The interference of the composer on the layout of the libretto could only accentuate the conservative character of the strophic lines and their metres.

On the whole, the opera is conventional and dull. The easy-going, tuneful modes of drawing-room songs are applied to climactic moments and lyrical passages alike. The harmonic texture is unimaginative, insipid, the diminished seventh chord being treated as a daring generator of tension to be used sparingly. Frontini's compositional devices are nothing more than worn-out clichés: string tremolos, arpeggio accompaniments, constant doubling of the vocal line, occasional parlato, strongly contrasted dynamics. The musical verismo of the opera is confined to the quotation of a few popular songs and dances in Act I, a complete song and two stornelli in Act III. The third act opens with an "Andantino villereccio" which aptly introduces the grape-harvesters' song, sung off-stage and interwoven with the duet Jana/Nino. It is a love song and consists of an octave of endecasillabi in alternate rhyme:

Voi delle belle la regina siete,
delle dolcezze la palma portate,
Una spera di sole in petto avete,
E ride il cielo quando voi parlate.
In mano il cuore mio stretto tenete;
Due cuori sono troppi; che ne fate?
Il vostro in petto a me lo riponete,
E sia la vera prova che mi amate.

Frontini availed himself of his first-hand knowledge of Sicilian folk-songs of which he was a keen collector.⁵⁰ The actual practice of choral singing is reproduced. The first two lines are sung by one voice of the chorus while the others hum the cadence on the resting note of each phrase: subdominant-tonic; dominant-tonic (Ex. 2A). Then the whole chorus sings the first line to a different tune and Frontini interpolates a more elaborate section on the second and fourth lines (Ex. 2B). The second quatrain is arranged in the same way with the addition of a countermelody for solo oboe as a finishing touch to the rustic idyll.

Ex. 2A - Frontini, Malia

(Da lontano avvicinandosi a poco a poco)
(Una voce sola)

Voi del-le bel-le la re-gi-na sie-ta Del-

len. len.

sotto voce len. len.

(a bocca chiusa) Ah! Ah!

sotto voce len. len.

Ah! Ah!

-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te

len. len.

Ah! Ah!

len. len.

Ah! Ah!

Ex. 2B -

a tempo
TUTTI

Voi del-le bel-le la re-gi-na

Voi del-le bel-le

Voi del-le bel-le

(with orchestra)

Del-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te.

sie-te Del-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te.

Del-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te.

la re-gi-na sie-te, Del-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te.

la re-gi-na sie-te, Del-le dol-cez-ze la pal-ma por-ta-te.

Apart from the documentary interest of the few songs quoted by Frontini, there is little else his opera could offer. A modern revival of Malia, in the most favourable environment (Catania, 6 April 1957), confirmed its utter mediocrity. A review in the daily 'paper La Sicilia ("Valori musicali della Malia di Frontini", 7 April 1957), apart from praising the inclusion of popular themes, could only underline the non-veristic character of the music and the all-pervasive influence of the drawing-room style.

After the opera sank into oblivion, the play still enjoyed a widespread success in a Sicilian translation made in 1903 by Capuana's friend and playwright Giuseppe Giusti-Sinopoli. In 1911 the vernacular version was published in the first volume of Capuana's Teatro dialettale siciliano and met with Verga's strong disapproval.⁵¹ But the choice of the Sicilian dialect as a natural medium for a story of popular passions and superstitions was a sensible one. In 1908 Malia was performed in Paris by the Sicilian touring company of Giovanni Grasso and Mimì Aguglia and the Revue Politique et Littéraire published an enthusiastic review (Paul Flat, "Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. - Représentations de la troupe sicilienne", 18 January 1908). The author discussed the importance of Italian verismo as a 'doctrine d'art' and remembered how the journal had repeatedly attacked it 'dans sa manifestation lyrique, lorsqu'il s'agissait du vérisme musical italien, celui des Puccini, des Leoncavallo et autres, et de son retentissement jusque dans notre drame musical français, où M. Alfred Bruneau imitait de tels devanciers et s'apparentait à eux.' That critical position did not affect 'L'intérêt du vérisme proprement littéraire,...où il est difficile de ne pas constater un véritable intérêt dramatique, quand il est traduit par des acteurs comme ceux de la troupe sicilienne.'

Chapter 4

SALVATORE DI GIACOMO AND NEAPOLITAN VERISMO

1. The poet of colours and sounds

In a long essay on "La vita letteraria a Napoli dal 1860 al 1900", Benedetto Croce illustrates the revival of literary, philosophical and historical studies and the awakening of literature in Naples which followed the return of the intellectuals the Risorgimento had confined to prison or driven elsewhere. Scholars and thinkers such as Francesco De Sanctis, Silvio and Bertrando Spaventa, Vittorio Imbriani, Luigi Settembrini, injected new blood into the stifled and pedantic University of the former Bourbon capital and opened up the citadel of academic culture to wider interests and larger audiences by promoting and contributing to political and literary journals and daily 'papers'.¹

In the 1880s that generation of revolutionaries and men of letters came to an end, but the cultural life of the city continued to flourish as a new generation of gifted and versatile Neapolitans started their careers in the prosperous field of journalism. Along with articles on current affairs, the newly founded dailies and journals would regularly feature literary reviews, poems and songs in vernacular, essays on the social and artistic life of Naples. Italian verismo and French naturalism, most frequently under scrutiny, exercised a major influence on those young writers. In the late '70s, De Sanctis had set an authoritative example publishing some important articles on Zola in a modest newspaper, Roma, founded in 1862. In the next decade, the young critic and journalist Vittorio Pica followed suit writing extensively on Zola, the Goncourts, Maupassant, and other French and Russian authors. Well before outside influences were felt on the cultural life of the city, realistic tendencies were apparent in the Neapolitan school of painting which had Filippo Palizzi (1818-1899) as its best representative, and distinguished artists such as Gioacchino Toma (1838-1891). Realism was also the prevailing feature in the vigorous art of the Neapolitan sculptor Vincenzo Gemito (1852-1929).

It is in this stimulating cultural environment that we first find

Salvatore Di Giacomo (1860-1934) on the editorial board of the short-lived literary journal Fantasio (1881-83), together with Vittorio Pica and Rocco Pagliara. A daily 'paper, Corriere del mattino (founded in 1876), published Di Giacomo's first short stories. The young poet also contributed to two quality 'papers which were to exercise a strong influence on the tastes and opinions of the Neapolitan middle classes: Il Corriere di Napoli (1887) and Il Mattino (1892).

If we were to remember Di Giacomo only as a sympathetic chronicler of the glories and miseries of Naples, we should range him with another distinguished journalist and writer of his time, Matilde Serao (1856-1927). In some of his prose works we can find the same documentary interest and the impassioned participation we appreciate in Serao's Il ventre di Napoli (1884). It might be more appropriate, though, to consider the wealth of essays, articles and books Di Giacomo wrote on a wide range of subjects connected with Naples, its history and traditions, the arts and the people. In this case, we admire the discreet and engaging narrator of Napoli: figure e paesi (1909) or Luci ed ombre napoletane (1914), and the patient researcher in I quattro antichi Conservatori di musica a Napoli (Palermo, 1923-24, 2 vols.), a meticulous and widely informative work on the Neapolitan school of music. Di Giacomo was certainly a learned man.²

It is, however, the vernacular writer we have to turn to in order to understand and define Di Giacomo's position in late nineteenth century Italian literature. The subject-matter of Di Giacomo's stories, poems and plays, with few exceptions, is always veristic: the sordid aspects in the life of his tormented city, its destitute proletariat, the striking contrast between the natural beauty of the place and the appalling ugliness of the alleys and dwellings (the bassi) in the poor districts of Porto, Pendino, Mercato and Vicaria, the 'bowels of Naples', in Serao's expression. But the scientific, detached approach preached by naturalism is totally alien to the sensibility of the Neapolitan writer, nor is Verga's austere pessimism any closer. Detachment in Di Giacomo means pure lyricism. A breath of poetry turns the crude matter into art; the colourful idiom of the common people is moulded into sonnets and stanzas, endecasillabi and settenari of Metastasian polish. Sunette antiche (1884) is the title of an early collection of poems. From Metastasian opera Di Giacomo borrows the strophic aria form and writes Ariette e sunette (1898); or he alternates

the arietta with the more flexible metres of the canzone in Ariette e canzone nove (1916). No matter how old and illustrious the form may be, the content pulsates with genuine poetic emotion. Melancholy and pity, tempered by formal restraint, permeate the picture of a young prostitute, starving and exhausted after a fruitless night on the pavement, who desperately tries to lure the passers-by in the daylight:

.
Irma: nomme furastiero:
ma se chiamma Peppenella:
fuie ngannata 'a nu furiero,
e mo...campa...(puverella!)

Passa gente. E' fatto iourno.
"Psst! Siente!..." E rire... e chiamma...
C'ha dda fa' si ha perzo 'o scuorno?
C'ha dda fa? Se more 'e famma.

Mmerz' 'e nnove s'ha mangiata
na fresella nfosa a ll'acqua.
E mo, comme a na mappata,
sta llà nterra. E dorme, stracqua.
(Di Giacomo, I, p. 327)

.
Irma: strange name:
but she is called Peppenella:
she was seduced by a quartermaster,
and now...she's on the streets...(poor thing!)

People pass by. It is daylight.
"Psst! Listen!..." And she laughs...and calls...
What can she do if she's lost all shame?
What can she do? She is starving.

At about nine she ate
some bread dipped in water.
And now, like a big bundle,
she lies down there. And sleeps, exhausted.

An arietta portrays the changeable March weather and a woman's fickleness in lyrical images of light and shade. In a moment of stillness, as the bird halts his song and the violet sighs in the wet grass, we feel it is springtime:

Marzo
Marzo: nu poco chiove
e n'ato ppoco stracqua:
torna a chiovere, schiove,
ride 'o sole cu ll'acqua.

March
March: it rains a while
and for a while it stops:
it starts again, it clears up,
the sun laughs with the water.

Mo nu cielo celeste,
mo n'aria cupa e nera:
mo d' 'o vierno 'e tempeste,
mo n'aria 'e primmavera.

Now the sky is blue,
now it looks dull and black:
now it's winter's storms,
now a spring air.

N'auciello freddigliuso
aspetta ch'esce 'o sole:
ncopp' 'o tturreno nfuso
suspireno 'e vviole...

A cold bird
waits for the sun to shine:
over the wet turf
sighs the violet...

Catarì!...Che buo' cchiù?
Ntiéneme, core mio!
Marzo, tu 'o ssaie, si' tu,
e st'auciello songo io.

Catherine!...What more?
Understand me, sweetheart!
March, you know, it's you,
and that bird is me.

In one of his best lyrics, colour and sound are toned down to almost full darkness and silence, and the whistle of a cricket heralds the melancholy of autumn:

Sera 'e settembre - luna settembrina,
ca'int' 'e nnuvole nere
t'arravuoglie e te sbruoglie,
e 'a parte d' 'a marina
mo faie luce e mo no -
silenzio, nfuso
quase 'a ll'ummedità -
strata addurmuta,
.

arillo
ca stu strillo
mme faie dint' 'o silenzio
n'ata vota senti...
 Zicri! Zicri!
 Zicri
accumpagnate 'a casa
stu pover'ommo,
stu core cunfuso,
sti penziere scuntente,
e st'anema ca sente
cadè ncopp 'a stu munno
n'ata malincunia -
chesta 'e ll'autunno...

From: "Arillo, animaluccio cantatore" (Di Giacomo, I, p. 429)

September night - september moon,
black clouds
fold and unfold you,
and over the sea
you shine at times or hide -
stillness, almost
wet with dew -
sleeping street,
.

cricket,
again you whistle
to me in the quiet...
Zicri! Zicri! Zicri!
take home
this poor man,
this troubled heart,
these unhappy thoughts,
and this soul which feels
a new melancholy come
over this world -
the melancholy of autumn...

Di Giacomo's art has the ability to transpose reality into poetical images with the spontaneity of the draftsman who fills his sketchbook with the fleeting visions of life and the skill of the painter who selects and blends his colours. Whether we examine his poems or his stories, or analyse their dramatized versions, we always detect Di Giacomo's pictorial taste at work. 'Realismo di colore', 'realismo lirico o musicale', are some of the definitions used by Luigi Russo in his critical study on the Neapolitan poet (Salvatore Di Giacomo, Napoli, 1921). And discussing Di Giacomo's most powerful composition in the vernacular, the dramatic poem A San Francisco (1895), Russo points out that at the roots of the poet's inspiration there is his 'gusto della tragedia di colore, e non già della tragedia nella sua intimità psicologica'. He adds: 'Con tutto ciò, in cotesta rappresentazione pittorica del tragico, noi sentiamo di vivere nell'assoluto capolavoro' (Di Giacomo, p. 128-29). The exterior nature of the dramatic conflict well suits the miniature form of A San Francisco - a sequence of seven sonnets - and, compressed in those ninety-eight lines, the representation of a murder in a prison fills us with horror. Di Giacomo's veristic technique reminds us of Capuana's tale in verse Lu cumpari (187 lines grouped in stanzas of different length). There, a betrayed husband kills his wife, her lover and their little boy he believed to be his own. Capuana's approach is strictly narrative and the direct speech only heightens the tension of the story. In A San Francisco, the scanty narrative connecting the harsh, tense dialogue, brings to life the sombre interior of a prison room shared by ten men and a twelve-year-old boy. The misery of the inmates, a sense of claustrophobia, the base personality of the two protagonists, are all conveyed by gestures, pauses, swearwords. The sonnet form encapsulates the veristic scenes like pictures on the canvas of an old

story-teller, and the breath-taking account of the murder unfolds under our eyes and catches our imagination.

A man is brought into the prison of San Francesco (in Naples) for having killed his wife. The newcomer, Don Giovanni, recognizes a friend among the inmates, Tore, and the two bribe the gaoler to be allowed to stay up at night to chat quietly. But Don Giovanni knows his friend is his wife's lover, and, after telling him about the woman's death, he kills Tore. The sixth sonnet is entirely taken by the agitated dialogue between the betrayed husband and his next victim. Tore's uneasiness turns into terror when he realizes Don Giovanni knows about him. The fragmentary lines are gradually reduced to monosyllabic growled utterances; then the sudden flash of a knife and the noise of a struggle (sonnet VII):

VI

- Ma...che bulite di'?... - dicette Tore -
Io...nn'arrivo a capi...Ronna Ndriana?!...
- Leve stu ddonna, famme stu favore!
Chiammela a nome... Schifosa, puttana!...

...Ll'aggio accisa! - 'On Giuvà!... - Sì!...Pe ll'onore.
- Ndriana!...Accisa!...E...quanno?...-'A na settimana.
Mme scurnacchiava cu nu mio signore,
e io ll'aggio accisa! Sì! Comm' a na cana!...

...Siente...E pecchè te scuoste? - Io?...Nun..me scosto...
- E pecchè te si' fatto mpont' 'o scanno?...
- Io?...No...- Fatte cchiù ccà...-Sto ccà...Mm'accosto...

- Tu siente?...Siente...Mme ngannava!...-'A n'anno!...
E...saie cu chi? - Cu...chi?...- Mo nn' 'o ssaie cchiù?...
St'amico..nun 'o saie?...-Chi?...-Chi?...Si' tu!-

VII

Lucette 'acciaro 'e nu curtiello. 'O scanno
s'avutaie, s'abbucaie. Tore cadette
e chill'ato 'o fue ncuollo. -E' n'anno, è n'anno
ca te ievo trovanono! - lle dicette.

.....
From: A San Francisco (Di Giacomo, I, pp. 248-49)

VI

- But...what do you mean?...- said Tore -
I...cannot understand...Donna Adriana?!...
- Drop that 'donna', do me a favour!
Call her by her name...Filthy slut!...

...I killed her! - Don Giovanni!... - Yes!...For my honour.
- Adriana!...Killed!...And...when?...- A week ago.
She betrayed me with some kind of a gentleman,
and I killed her! Yes! like a bitch!...

...Listen...And why do you slip away? - Me?...I...don't...
- And why have you moved to the edge of the bench?...
- Me?...No... - Get closer... - Here I am...Close by...

- You hear me?...Listen...She deceived me!...A whole year!...
And...you know who with? - With...who?... -Don't you know that now?...
This friend...you don't know?...Who?... -Who?...It's you! -

VII

The steel of a knife flashed. The bench
tipped and overturned. Tore fell down
and the other one was on him. - A whole year, one year
I have been looking for you! - he said to him.

.

The year after its publication, A San Francisco was turned into a libretto, a "Scena lirica napoletana", which Di Giacomo prepared for a local composer, Carlo Sebastiani (1858-1924). The poem lent itself so well to the operatic transposition that Di Giacomo had just to develop the narrative sections into detailed stage directions and split the lines of the dialogue to make up the individual parts. The rough vernacular was kept exactly as it was in the original sonnets, except for three strong expressions which were rendered with equally veristic but less rude terms. Two of them are in Sonnet VI quoted above: 'Schifosa, puttana!' was mitigated into 'scellerata 'nfama', and 'Mme scurnacchiava' ('she made me a cuckold') became 'S' 'a ntenneva' ('she was having an affair'). The "Scena lirica" was first performed on 13 October 1896 at the Teatro Mercadante, in Naples, with success. The following day the Corriere di Napoli published a long and favourable review stating that: 'Il dramma, così rapido e così denso,...ha vinto iersera e intimamente penetrato tutto quanto il pubblico'. The score of the little opera, lasting only a half-hour, seems to be lost and we can take the Corriere's comments as the epitaph of yet another still-born creature of operatic verismo. The libretto of A San Francisco was printed by the same publisher of the sonnets (Luigi Pierro, Napoli, 1896) and can be read as an annotated edition of the poem.

In 1897 Di Giacomo reshaped the sonnets into a one-act play where the character of Tore, now Peppe, is explicitly qualified as a 'camorrista', treated with respect by the inmates. That was his ac-

tual status in the poem. The new text, however, does not come up to the conciseness and beauty of the seven sonnets. The derivative character of Di Giacomo's plays is no exception in the tradition of veristic theatre. The examples of Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana and La Lupa are well-known. Quite often the comparison between the narrative and the dramatized text is unfavourable to the latter. Di Giacomo's major plays, Malavita (1889) and Assunta Spina (1910), derived from two beautiful short stories, exhibit a distinct character and imply a different approach of the author to the same subject matter, not least because the vernacular is used instead of the Italian of the source. The same can be said for the one-act play 'O mese mariano (1900), derived from the novella "Senza vederlo". The predominance of the environment over the individual characters, the abundance of picturesque and humorous details, the inclusion of melodramatic effects at the expense of emotional restraint, differentiate the plays from the short stories.

These characteristics are mostly evident in Malavita. Its conversion into a veristic opera was, in a way, a natural evolution of the dramatized text in the vernacular. Long after the fashion of veristic subjects in Italian opera had given way to new literary influences, the other two plays were also turned into operas: Mese Mariano (1910) by U. Giordano on a libretto prepared by Di Giacomo himself; Assunta Spina (1955) by the Neapolitan composer Franco Langella (libretto by Vittorio Viviani). By far the most interesting of the three is Giordano's Mala Vita (1892) because it came with the high tide of operatic verismo and marked an appreciable advance on the Cavalleria-prototype as regards the relationship between the prose play and the versified libretto. A comparative analysis of Di Giacomo's novella "Il voto" and the derived play Malavita is essential in order to detect and evaluate the variations introduced in the libretto.

The dramatization of "Il voto", from the collection of short stories Rosa Bellavita (1888), was Di Giacomo's first experiment in vernacular theatre and it proved a success in Naples and elsewhere in Italy. The play was elaborated in collaboration with a local journalist, Goffredo Cognetti. A different title, Malavita, was chosen, but Di Giacomo later renamed it 'O Voto and as such he published it in the first edition of his Teatro (Lanciano, 1910) including A San

Francisco, Assunta Spina, 'O mese mariano, Quand l'amour meurt. The choice of Malavita as a more suitable title was meant to indicate the shift of emphasis from the personal vow to the wretched life of a whole community. Di Giacomo and Cognetti expanded the original situation into a highly coloured choral scene which exposed the morality, superstitions and weaknesses of the Neapolitan lower classes. The illustration of a particular milieu added a topical interest to the story because of the time and place of the action.

The setting of both versions is the maze of alleys in the Pendino district of the city, one of the areas selected for demolition by a major project of urban renewal approved in 1885, after the latest cholera epidemic (1884) had taken a heavy toll of lives in the 'bowels of Naples'. A huge Crucifix, erected on a blue and yellow tiled base, decorates or rather encumbers the corner of an alley, a sad memento of the recent horrors wrought by that devastating disease. A few yards away from the Cross, the workshop of the dyer Vito Amante displays coloured rags of all sorts. Dye-houses were quite common in the area. In Il ventre di Napoli Matilde Serao describes a whole street lined with such unhealthy, dingy places:

La via di Mezzocannone è popolata tutta di tintori: infondo a ogni bottega bruna, arde un fuoco vivo sotto una grossa caldaia nera, dove gli uomini seminudi agitano una miscela fumante; sulla porta si asciugano dei cenci rossi e violetti; sulle selci disgiunte, cola sempre una feccia di tintura multicolore.³

The 'tintore' of "Il voto" suffers from consumption caused mainly by the chemicals he uses in his job. After one more haemoptysis, Vito Amante is so upset by his hopeless illness that he decides to make a solemn vow to the Crucifix in the alley. May God grant that he recover his health and he will redeem a prostitute from her shameful life by marrying her. A popular belief considered that offer to be the utmost a man could do as an expiatory sacrifice because of the personal and public humiliation involved in such a marriage. Vito has much to account for in moral and social terms since he has been having a relationship with a cabman's wife, Amalia, who lives in the same alley. The news of the vow travels fast in the neighbourhood and, as Vito returns from buying candles for the Crucifix, a rose

falls on his shoulders from the window of a nearby brothel. The silent message comes from Cristina 'la capuana', a young prostitute from the little town of Capua, near Naples. The man offers to marry the 'girl from Capua' but his weakness prevails over his commitment. The strong-willed Amalia manages to dissuade him from fulfilling his promise and the unfortunate Cristina goes back to the wretched life in the brothel.

The novella exemplifies Di Giacomo's fundamentally poetic inspiration and his pictorial taste. The veristic narrative technique provides emotional restraint and conciseness, but the writer strikes a personal note when he uses chromatic effects with highly expressive results. The story is organized in five separate sections. The narration starts in medias res with the dyer's vow. Vito's desperate, loud statement in front of the huge Crucifix in the sunlit alley prompts a collective response the poet renders with impressionistic effects. As Vito cries out his misery, his workmen emerge from the murky interior of the dye-house to watch him in silence. Their sickly faces contrast with the blue, red, green dye on their hands and arms:

V'era accorsa a udire e a guardar, sulla soglia, tutta la turba cachettica dei suoi garzoni tintori, le nervose braccia nude, macchiate bizzarramente di verde o di porpora fin sopra a' cubiti, infilate in matasse di lana e di seta gocciolanti azzurrine lacrime intorno. Altre pallide teste s'affacciavano e pigliavano rilievo sul fondo nero della tintoria, altre mani verdi, gialle, sanguigne si puntavano agli stipiti, insudiciati delle continue loro impronte.

(Di Giacomo, I, p. 906)

The loud incipit 'Ah, Cristo crocifisso mio!' resounds throughout section I of the story. The dyer is kept isolated from the onlookers and any response, whether individual or choral, is carefully toned down and spaced by pauses of silence or visual details. The sickening stink and the coughing from the dye-house convey the physical decay of the men and point to the reason for the dyer's vow which has impressed even the children of the alley:

I bambini, davanti alla bottega, s'incantavano, le piccole mani sul dosso, la bocca aperta. E tutto il vicolo s'empiva d'un susurro incessante e partecipava al gran fatto...Da una tinozza un gran fumo azzurrognolo si levava, si diffondeva per la bottega. De' brevi colpi di tosse suonavano. Un acre odore usciva fin nella via, un pessimo odore di con-

cia, che assaliva con fortissima nausea lo stomaco...Vito non si vedeva.

In the closing paragraph of section I, Di Giacomo interrupts the narration on a meticulous description of the Crucifix, lingering on the crudeness of the pierced hands and bleeding wounds. This final image recalls the opening invocation of the vow and spreads a note of sadness over the whole section.

The next two sections fall short of the first one in terms of expressive poignancy. In section II Vito goes out to buy candles for the Crucifix and, on his way back to the dye-house, he receives a rose from Cristina. The third section consists entirely of a long dialogue Vito/Amalia. In sections IV and V Di Giacomo recaptures the initial atmosphere of physical decay, and resumes his compact narration with pictorial effects. Cristina is now the centre of attention. In section IV she goes to the dye-house to tell Vito that her papers are ready and finds him sulky and reticent. The scene is depicted with symbolic overtones. Light and shade contrasts remind us of a Caravaggio interior. The man sits alone in the gloomy dye-house amid the fumes and smells of freshly dyed clothes. His legs stretched on the floor and a burnt-out cigar in one hand, Vito is lost in reverie. High up on the wall a tiny window, fitted with iron bars, projects the light from an adjacent garden. As the sun reaches the window, the light beam gradually falls on the knees, chest and face of the man and dazzles him. At that very moment Cristina arrives at his side and the sunlight soon shines on her minute figure:

Sopra un fondo giallo, tutto giallo e luminoso, un gruppo di foglie nereggiava, palpitava al lievissimo alito del mattino, e ancora più neri, più nettamente, si disegnavano i bastoni dell'inferriata. A un momento il sole si fece strada tra quelle foglie e penetrò nella tintoria. Un nastro d'oro lambì tremante le ginocchia dell'Amante, gli salì sul petto, gli pervenne alla faccia, l'abbagliò...

- Vito! Vito!

La capuana era accosto a lui, gli posava la mano sulla spalla, si chinava per guardare, la testa quasi poggiata alla testa di lui, ov'egli guardasse. Subito una striscia di sole le s'avventò pur su di lei, la raggiunse in petto, sotto alla gola, tra i capelli biondi che s'accesero.

(Di Giacomo, I, p. 915)

A gleam of hope seems to light up man and woman in the dingy room. 'Guardavo il sole', says Vito to her. But their dream of physical and moral regeneration will not come true. The strength of social prejudice no less than his meanness finally lead Vito to break his vow. Amalia finds a prompt ally in Vito's mother who can put up with her son's attachment to a married woman but will never bear the shame of having a former prostitute as her daughter-in-law. As she turns Cristina out of her house, she sweeps the threshold shouting: 'Fuori! Fuori!, trista femmina! Fuori di casa mia! Qui si mangia onore e pane!' Bread and honour, the food of the humble, are turned into a hypocritical shield by the over-protective mother.

The scene of the epilogue (section V) features the huge Crucifix in the dark alley, at night, with the lonely figure of a woman. The same verb of the incipit, 'gridò', used for Vito's vow, recurs for Cristina's bitter, reproachful words to the Christ:

- Tu lo sai cosa ho sofferto! La mia vita la sai,
Cristo in croce! E sei tu che mi ci fai tornare,
pei peccati miei. Io mi volevo salvare. Ho fatto
tutto, ho sofferto tutto, per salvarmi! Non hai
voluto...E sia! Così sia!...Così sia!

(Di Giacomo, I, p. 918)

And turning away from that silent witness of human miseries, Cristina picks up a stone and knocks resolutely on the door of the brothel. Her reticent last words, 'Sono io. La capuana', plunge the young woman into the squalor and alienation of the 'mala casa'.

In the play Malavita, Di Giacomo's lyricism is effaced by Goffredo Cognetti's spectacular and melodramatic effects. The conspicuous presence of the people, a real cross-section of the Neapolitan 'popolo piccolo', and the introduction of the Piedigrotta festival fully justify the definition "Scene popolari napoletane" which accompanies the new title. Structurally, the play is modelled on the pattern of the novella. Act I corresponds to sections I and II (Vito's vow and meeting with Cristina); Act II corresponds to section III (dialogue Vito/Amalia, preceded here by a stormy meeting Amalia/Cristina); Act III corresponds to sections IV and V (dialogue Vito/Cristina and the latter's return to the brothel). The setting of the novella is widened to make room for more people, the inhabitants of Pendino. The narrow alley dominated by the Crucifix now opens into a 'piazzetta' which

displays all the symbols of the local economy. Besides Vito's dye-house, we see a barber's shop, a cobbler's desk and a 'Banco del Lotto', an agency of the state lottery which caters for the strongest passion of all Neapolitans. On the opposite side, the 'mala casa' with its closed green shutters.

The vow is no longer a desperate, lonely gesture of a sick man but a collective performance almost imposed on Vito by his neighbours. It is very much like an operatic choral scene for the way individual and mass movements are co-ordinated and synchronized. Detailed directions in Italian accompany each line in Neapolitan and meticulously indicate the movements of the soloists and the response of the chorus of men and women in separate groups. Vito takes off his cap, so do the men; he kneels down, so does everybody; he rises and makes his solemn promise; all rise with a murmur of wonder and approval. Amalia has just appeared from a side alley and stands apart listening with apprehension to Vito's words; then she has one line of comment. More opportunities for the chorus are provided by the arrival of Vito's mother, Donna Rosa, who is outraged by the disgraceful promise and makes a scene to her son in the 'piazzetta' until she is helped out by Don Marco, the barber.

In a moment of relative quiet, Cristina comes out of the 'mala casa' to fetch water from a fountain in the square. It is a pretext for Vito to talk to her. But fresh trouble soon starts with the arrival of two police officers who want to stop a game of cards going on outside the barber's shop. They notice Cristina and, since prostitutes are not allowed to stay in public places, the two try to arrest her. Vito interferes, a crowd gathers in no time, the confusion grows with the reappearance of Donna Rosa and Amalia. In a gran finale, the officers, Vito, Cristina, Donna Rosa, Amalia and a noisy train of supporters make for the police station. The barber, Amalia's husband Annetiello, and a few others rush to the 'Banco del Lotto' to try their luck on the numbers corresponding to the event: thirteen, the arrest; twenty-one, the dyer; thirty, the 'popolo piccolo'.

In Act II the setting changes from the noisy square to Amalia's basso, a ground-floor room, modestly furnished, with a glass door on the alley. There is no crowd around and the main characters can come to the fore with their hot-blooded passions and their miseries. Amalia confronts Cristina with growing hostility and verbal aggressiveness as she tries to buy her out of the planned marriage with Vito. The

girl counters with dignity and determination to stick to her only chance of rehabilitation. Vito's spineless, cowardly personality emerges in all its disheartening squalor. Being pressed by Amalia, he tries to stand up to her but then he backs down and promises not to marry Cristina. The mounting tension in the room is underlined by the outbreak of a storm. Cristina calls Vito from the alley. The man tries to get away but the possessive Amalia prevents him from moving and shuts the glass door. The curtain falls on the desperate girl shouting 'Vito' while the rain is pelting down, and the woman holding tight to her wretched lover inside the basso.

Another character is briefly sketched out in the drab interior of the basso: the cabman Annetiello, Amalia's tolerant husband. The paltry fellow works at his leisure because his wife can always make up for lost earnings with her own money. Gambling and drinking are the favourite pastimes of this low-class hedonist. In a clash with his wife, he takes a vicious pleasure in telling Amalia that the money she lavishes on Vito now goes into nice things for the dyer's new girlfriend.

In Act II the main characters are shown in turn trapped in the inescapable prison of their wretched condition. Debauchery, callousness, cowardice are permanent blemishes for which they pay a daily toll of bitterness and misery. They can only hurt each other badly, yet they are stuck together for life. An ephemeral relief from their 'mala vita' comes with the traditional 'festa di Piedigrotta', a yearly event which provokes a dionysiac frenzy of songs, dances, convivial entertainments in the open air. On the night of Piedigrotta (7 September) the 'canzone nuova', the best new song, receives its official blessing and is sung by everybody, everywhere in the city. Di Giacomo wrote a number of poetic texts for such songs, the most famous being perhaps A Marechiaro set by F.P. Tosti. Piedigrotta drives the people of the bassi from their sordid alleys to the Northern part of Naples, where the hill of Posillipo gently slopes down towards the sea of Mergellina and a tunnel opens the way to the neighbouring town of Pozzuoli. There, in a church near the tunnel, the Madonna of Piedigrotta (i.e. at the foot of the tunnel) has been worshipped for centuries by the rich and the needy, the powerful and the humble. The real 'festa', however, has little to do with the religious celebration; it is mostly the noisy frolicking that attracts the people. Vito, Amalia,

Annetiello, Donna Rosa and Don Marco, the barber plan to spend the evening at Piedigrotta and have fun. The cabman provides free transport, Vito pays for the food. Act III of Malavita has the typical atmosphere of the Piedigrotta night in the background. In the deserted 'piazzetta' of Pendino the sounds of mandolines, guitars and other popular instruments can be heard in the distance. On stage, Don Marco, sitting outside his shop, plays the guitar and sings a serenade from the opera Salvator Rosa (1874) by A.C. Gomes. Neapolitan songs are quoted by joyful voices off stage. At the end of the Act, cracks of whip and jingles of bells signal the departure of Annetiello's carriage and his oddly-assorted party. While the echo of one last song dies in the dark alleys, Cristina moves away from the Crucifix, picks up a stone and knocks on the door of the 'mala casa'.

Like the storm at the end of Act II, the Piedigrotta songs and music are nothing more than sound effects, colourful ingredients which underline the situation on stage. The violence on Cristina, her being shut off from the company of people who are no better than herself, is conveyed in spite of the musical references. In his study on Di Giacomo L. Russo blames Cognetti for the excesses in the use of local colour, and regrets that the play 'manca effettivamente d'ingenuità e di immediatezza, e soprattutto di sobrietà' (Di Giacomo, p. 136). More restraint would certainly add to the dramatic effectiveness of the play, particularly in Act I. On the other hand, the ubiquitous, loud neighbours, children, tradesmen, testify the choral, theatrical character of everyday life in the alleys of Naples, the lack of privacy and the cramped living conditions of the bassi. Verga's "Scene popolari siciliane" portray the moral world of a small village; Di Giacomo's "Scene popolari napoletane" expose the inferno of a big city and the moral debasement of its less fortunate inhabitants. For both authors the 'piazzetta' and the people play an essential part in the characterization of the main roles. Verga himself gave Di Giacomo the first authoritative recognition of the artistic merits of Malavita. As soon as the play was published, the Neapolitan poet sent a copy to Verga. The novelist thanked him with a letter from Catania dated 10 December 1889 in which he praised the 'scene popolari' and expressed some reservations on Cognetti's melodramatic effects:

C'è tanta intensità di passione, e così sincera rap-

presentazione di vita vera nelle vostre scene popolari, che a leggerle m'han dato quella schietta soddisfazione artistica che devono produrre alla recita... Il Cagnetti, meno qualche melodrammaticità d'effetto che mi è parsa un po' convenzionale in quelle scene così belle di semplice e schietta verità, s'è giovato bene del vostro bell'argomento.

Working on his own, Di Giacomo achieved higher artistic results with Assunta Spina, two acts written at a distance of a few years from each other and first performed in 1910. The veristic technique of characterization through the interaction environment/individuals is used to its best advantage in the splendid Act I, perhaps the best thing in Di Giacomo's vernacular theatre. It portrays a few hours in the busy life at the law courts in Naples filled by a small crowd of solicitors, witnesses, relatives, visitors, ushers and policemen. For each of them Di Giacomo has a revealing line, an aside, a gesture which defines their personalities and establishes their comparative positions. It is a rich and variegated tableau with life-size figures and a complex counterpoint of voices and gestures.

Fundamentally a poet, not a dramatist, an illustrator more than a narrator, Di Giacomo proved the expressiveness and versatility of the Neapolitan vernacular by shaping it into delicate lyrical poems, sentimental or humorous songs, or else unleashing its caustic, spicy potential in the realistic dialogues of his plays. His musical and pictorial disposition, the gentle and melancholy approach to the problematic reality of Naples, distance his veristic works from the greater models of his time. Di Giacomo's regionalist art has no deep ethical and aesthetic premises apart from an appeasing existentialism and a middle-class curiosity for the destitute and despicable members of the poet's own society.

2. Mala Vita by Nicola Daspuro and Umberto Giordano

The melodramatic character of Di Giacomo's "Scene popolari" and their lasting success made Malavita an ideal choice for a Neapolitan veristic opera. Giordano, while still a student at Naples Conserva-

tory, had submitted an opera, Marina, to the 1888 Sonzogno Competition which launched Cavalleria Rusticana. After the three top operas, the selecting committee awarded an honourable mention to thirteen works and Marina was the second of the group. It was never performed but Sonzogno was impressed by Giordano's music and wanted to give him a chance to write a full-length opera. The journalist Nicola Daspuro (Lecce, 1853 - Naples, 1941) was asked by the publisher to turn Malavita into a libretto for the young composer soon after he had finished with the adaptation of L'Amico Fritz for Mascagni. From the light comedy of Erckmann and Chatrian, Daspuro turned to the haut-goût of the "Scene popolari napoletane" and produced a very good libretto. Mala Vita was successfully presented at the Teatro Argentina of Rome on 21 February 1892 but failed at the San Carlo of Naples on its first and only performance of 26 April 1892. Away from its natural milieu, however, the opera continued to be well received. On 27 September of the same year, it made its début at the Vienna International Theatre and Music Exhibition with other veristic operas of Sonzogno's publishing House (Cavalleria Rusticana, L'Amico Fritz, Pagliacci, etc.), and was favourably reviewed by Eduard Hanslick. In December 1892 Mala Vita reached Berlin (Krolloper, sung in German) and in June 1893 it was again performed in Vienna (Theater-an-der-Wien).

Daspuro treated Di Giacomo's text with scrupulous respect for the general layout, the characterization and the environment. In the translation of the Neapolitan prose into Italian lyrical verse, the librettist tried hard to preserve metaphors, idioms, structures of the original vernacular. He had to trim superfluous material from Act I for the necessary compression and simplification of the action. The interference of Vito's mother, the noisy episode of the police officers, the final rush to the 'Banco del Lotto' were eliminated. These cuts heightened the intense atmosphere of popular superstition surrounding the choral scene of the vow, and concentrated undivided attention on the duet Vito/Cristina. No Arcadian platitudes were used to gloss over the veristic lines of the chorus (cf. the introductory idyllic song of the peasants in Cavalleria). The scene of the vow reproduced the exact situation of the play with the essential relation between Vito and his neighbours being stressed in simple, meaningful lines. Daspuro kept the minor character of Nunzia, an elderly woman with the typical job of 'pettinatrice' ('capera', in Neapolitan), that

is, an itinerant hairdresser for the poor. She interacts with the chorus in helping Vito out of the dye-house after he has had an haemoptysis, and in convincing him to turn to the Crucifix for help. Amalia's comment on Vito's vow and the response of the chorus are arranged in the same way as in Di Giacomo's scene:

Nunzia (additando a Vito il Crocefisso)
 Ed a quel buon Gesù vi rivolgeste mai?
 Coro Ah, sī, Vito! - Pregatelo! - Egli è pietoso assai!
 Vito No! non ne son degno!
 Coro Egli vi ascolterà!
 Nunzia Se gli farete un voto, certo l'accoglierà.
 Vito (si leva commosso e cade inginocchiato - Le donne lo imitano; gli uomini si sberrettano tutti)

 Tu che vedi il martirio del mio cor,
 tu che sai che speranza ho solo in te,
 non mi lasciare, abbi pietà di me!...
 Ed io voto ti fo'
 che una donna perduta sposerò,
 strappandola al peccato!
 Amalia Che mai dice? E' impazzito!

Giordano, Mala Vita, I, 2

A footnote to Vito's lines informs the public that marrying a 'donna perduta' was a superstitious custom of the Neapolitan lower classes.

No preposterous lines were given to the cabman Annetiello who happened to have a similar job to the one of Mascagni's Alfio. The debauched, hedonistic, dionysiac character of Amalia's husband, created by Di Giacomo and Cognetti, was, if anything, emphasized in the operatic transposition. The young composer gave him the baritone role in the Escamillo/Alfio manner: he makes his entry in Scene 3 with a train of people and soon has a catchy song to impress the audience with his extrovert personality. But, contrary to what happens with Alfio in Cavalleria, Annetiello's lines are fully consistent with his psychological and dramatic identity. He first exchanges rude comments¹² about himself being a cuckold¹⁴ with Marco the barber. Then he mentions the Piedigrotta festival and provides a precise indication of time for the sequence of events in the whole opera. We learn that, in a few days, everyone in Naples, whether rich or poor, will be going to Piedigrotta, which is what happens in Act III. As a logical development of this point, the cabman's song is dedicated to the preparation of horses and carriages for the feast, and expresses the man's

wish to have fun and be happy, soon echoed by the chorus (Ex. 1):

Annetiello

Tutto è già pronto,
tutto fissato è già:
i legni ed i cavalli,
i finimenti belli,
le piume alte
da porre sui capelli...
alle ragazze languide
l'occhietto si farà!
Io vo' scordar - ogni dolor,
mi voglio all'allegrezza abbandonar,
io vo' quaggiù - godere ognor;
voglio ridere!...ridere e cantar!
Giordano, Mala Vita, I, 3

Ex. 1 - Giordano, Mala Vita, I, 3

ANNETIELLO

con vivacità

(♩ = 104)

Tutto è già pron - to, tut - to fis - sato è già:

i legnied i ca.valli,i fi.nimen.ti bel . li,

Having finished his song, Annetiello and some men of the chorus make for the tavern (the only addition to the setting of the 'piazzetta') and Scene 3 comes to an end. On the whole, Annetiello's Scene seems

much better handled by composer and librettist than the parallel Scene 3 for Alfio in Mascagni's Cavalleria. After the first appearance, the cabman's character is coherently developed through the next two Acts. At the end of Act I, Annetiello emerges from the tavern having drunk more wine than he needed and teases Vito and Cristina. In Act II (set in Amalia's basso) he drops in with some friends, asks for wine and is chased out by his angry wife. In Act III, he is the plebeian reveller about to set out for Piedigrotta with a noisy party of friends at the sound of joyful songs.

The characterization of Vito, Cristina and Amalia is left almost exclusively to three main duets: Vito/Cristina, I, 4; Amalia/Cristina, II, 3; Amalia/Vito, II, 4. None of them has memorable tunes such as Santuzza's passionate phrases or Alfio's loud threats in Cavalleria. But they are better proportioned to the general framework of the Acts and less agitated in the vocal tension and the orchestral support of the parts. Lyrical, expansive phrases can be found in all three of them, sometimes with interesting reminiscences. The first duet Vito/Cristina was one of the most widely appreciated pieces in the opera. At a crucial point in the duet, when Vito suggests that he might redeem Cristina from her condition and love her, the tenor has a broad, descending motive ('Ed a qualcuno avete mai pensato/che vi voglia difendere e salvar') which looks back to Violetta's 'Amami Alfredo' in Traviata (Ex. 2A):

Ex. 2A - Giordano, Mala Vita, I, 4

VITO

Ed a qual - cu - no a - ve - te mai pen - sa - to

It is taken up by Cristina in her answer ('ah! ma chi può aver pietà di me?') and joined to her own characteristic motive (Ex. 2B):

Ex. 2B - Giordano, Mala Vita, I, 4

CRIS.

Ahi quan - te vol - te io l'ho so -

- gna - to; ahi ma chi può a - ver - pie - tà di me?

ff

allargando

The similarity between the Parisian demi-mondaine and the low-class Neapolitan prostitute did not escape the attention of E. Hanslick in his review of Mala Vita, and it must certainly have struck the imagination of the young Giordano when he composed the duet.

The most sensational moment in this veristic opera occurs at the end of the duet Vito/Amalia when the unfortunate 'girl from Capua' gets a taste of what is in store for her. In a heavy storm she calls the man from the alley and Amalia slams the door of her basso on Cristina's face to protect her lover. The situation of the play is exactly transposed into the opera and the sheer emotional power of the music emphasizes the base selfishness of the adulteress in imposing her will on the spineless man and the wretched young woman.

The on-stage music for the Piedigrotta background of Act III has the qualities of authenticity and originality. For any Neapolitan of that time the idea of Piedigrotta was instinctively connected with dozens of contemporary songs, like those collected by Di Giacomo in his illustrated volume Canzoni napoletane (Napoli, 1891), or old ones

like the legendary Te voglio bene assaje, the first Piedigrotta song dating from 1835 and attributed to Gaetano Donizetti.⁵ Another obvious and more important association was with one of the most popular Neapolitan operas of the mid-XIX century, the 'commedia per musica' La festa di Piedigrotta (later simply Piedigrotta) by Luigi Ricci, first performed at the Teatro Nuovo on 23 June 1852. Its third Act opened with the most famous piece of the opera, the celebrated tarantella, and featured a 'canzone nova'.⁶

Act III of Mala Vita follows a similar pattern. Giordano wrote a beautiful piece having in mind Ricci's splendid dance. The infectious euphoria, the easy flow of separate melodic ideas strung together by the irresistible rhythm, the alternation E minor/E major throughout the piece are to a large extent reproduced in a purely instrumental tarantella whereas the model was also sung by the chorus. Ex. 3 shows two sections, respectively in E minor and E major, from the tarantella of Ricci's Piedigrotta (III, 1):

Ex. 3 - Ricci, Piedigrotta, III, 1

Musical score for the first section of the tarantella. It consists of three staves: a vocal line in the soprano clef, a vocal line in the bass clef, and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics for both vocal parts are: "Vie-ne cca non fa echiù".

Musical score for the second section of the tarantella. It consists of three staves: a vocal line in the soprano clef, a vocal line in the bass clef, and a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics for both vocal parts are: "Zeza te re-molla Carme-nè: vi-de, vi, si fat-ta me-za, ne sai dirme lo pec-chè".

Da chell' o - rach' a la festa nce ncon - traiemo Carme - nè

Da chell' o - rach' a la festa nce ncon - traiemo Carme - nè

Ex. 4A reproduces the beginning in E minor of the dance from Mala Vita (III, 1):

Ex. 4A - Giordano, Mala Vita, III, 1 ("Tarantella")

The tonal scheme of Giordano's piece is more varied. After an episode in G and C, there follow the reprise in E minor, a new episode in E major with the melody in the bass (Ex. 4B) and a final state-

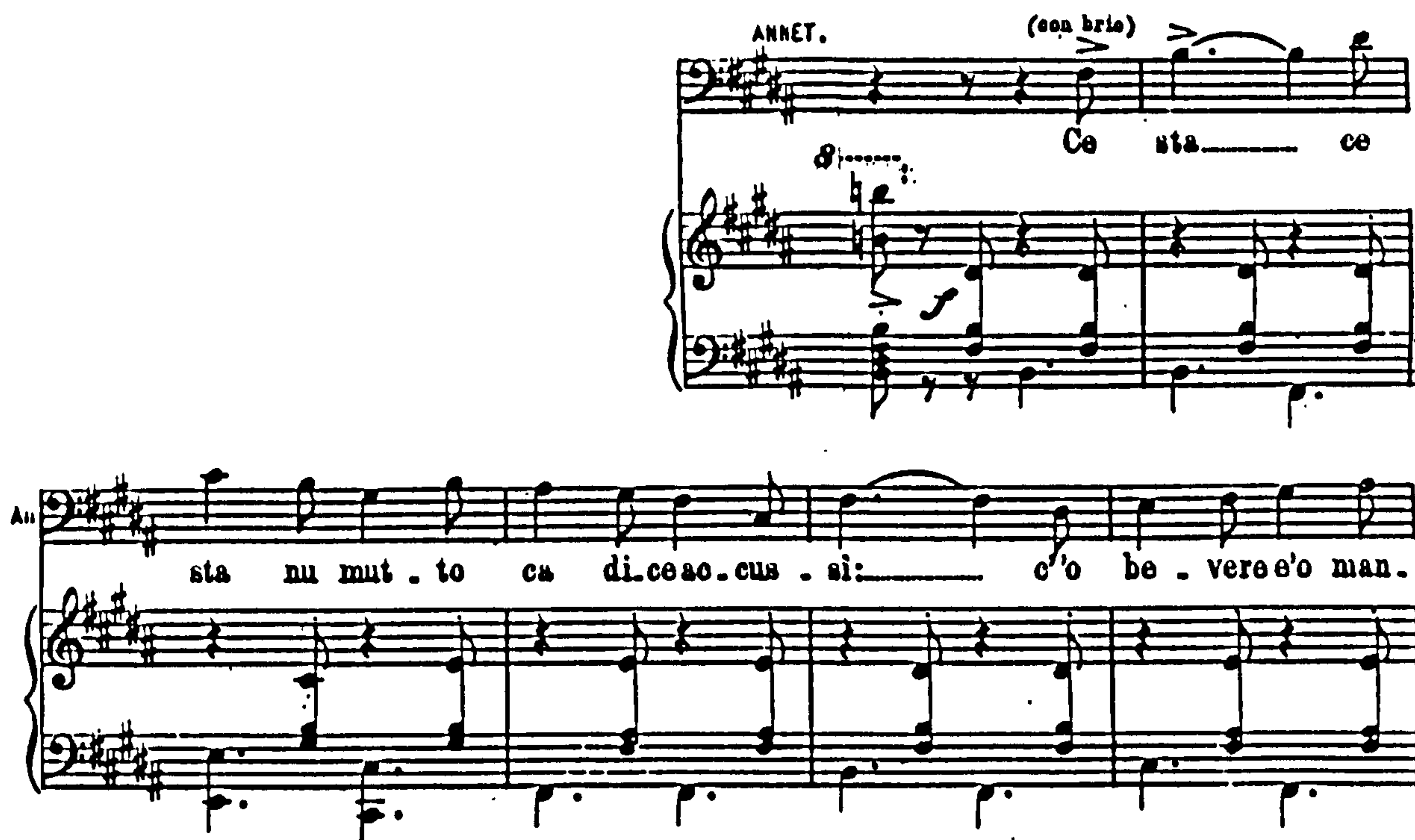
ment of the refrain in the major key:

Ex. 4B - Giordano, Mala Vita, III, 1 ("Tarantella")



The following scene of Mala Vita (III, 2) features the 'canzone nuova' for Piedigrotta, sung by Annetiello and the chorus (Ex. 5):

Ex. 5 - Giordano, Mala Vita, III, 2





The Neapolitan lines were written by Di Giacomo as a personal contribution to the libretto. Annetiello once more expresses his pleasure-loving nature and his gross materialism:

Annetiello

Ce sta
ce sta nu mutto ca dice accussì:
c' 'o bere e 'o mangià
e 'o meglio ca ce sta!

Chi sa
taverna a l'ato munno si nce n'è,
si ce vedimmo llà
amice mieie,
chi sa...
chi sa!

Ma si l'uoglio pe mo
dura a la lucerna,
scurdammecille, amice
'e guaie nanz' 'a taverna!...

Giordano, Mala Vita, III, 2

There is
a saying which goes like this:
drinking and eating
are the best things on earth!

Who knows
whether there are taverns in the next world,
whether we'll meet there
my friends,
who knows...
who knows!

But if there is oil
in the lamp for now,
let's forget our troubles,
friends, at the tavern!...

The vernacular version of the old 'carpe diem' theme, the image of the oil for the lamp owe something to these lines from Piedigrotta

(III, 4) which precede the scene with the 'canzona nova':

Magnammo, amice mieie, e po vevimmo
Nzi ch'arde lo lucigno a la cannela;
Pocca st'ora de spasso che tenimmo
Scappa, comme pe mare fa la vela.
Nce simmo mo, vedimmoncenne bene.
Lo ppresente è no sciuscio, e non se vede;
Lo passato è ppassato, e chiù no vvene;
E a lo dimane chi nce mette pede?
L. Ricci, Piedigrotta, III, 4

Let's eat, my friends, and then let's drink
as long as the wick burns on the candle;
since this hour of fun we have
will pass, like a sail over the sea.
We are here now, let's enjoy ourselves.
The present is a flash, and can't be seen;
The past is gone, and will never come back;
As to the morrow, who will tread therein?

Annetiello's song is heard again at the very end of the opera, sung off stage by the chorus while Cristina ends her soliloquy in front of the Crucifix. The repetition of the 'canzone nuova' suggests the general merriment involving the whole town on Piedigrotta night and heightens the sense of exclusion and loneliness to which the prostitute is doomed by her condition. On hearing the song, the 'girl from Capua' rises and turns away from the Christ, shouts 'with deep contempt': 'Infami! Vili!...Ah!' to the distant singers and then rushes towards the door of the 'mala casa'. Before the fiery 'tarantella' creates the traditional atmosphere of the popular 'festa' and Annetiello's 'canzone nuova' appropriately focuses the plebeian reveller, Vito is given a languorous serenade which brings out his self-indulgent, sensual character. Act III of Mala Vita opens at dusk with Vito and a group of men sitting in the 'piazzetta' outside the tavern and playing 'morra' (they call out numbers simultaneously and show them with their fingers). Vito soon steps out of the group and sings some banal lines which Giordano sets to an interesting melody. The first motive of the phrase ('Canzon d'amor') seems to anticipate the incipit of a famous Neapolitan song, 'O sole mio (1898). It is followed by a second motive ('che l'ala d'or) exhibiting the typical Neapolitan minor sixth and the augmented fourth which turns the phrase back to its F major tonic (Ex. 6):

Moderato

VITO (alzandosi)
Canzon d'a - mor.

TEN. *f* (parlato)
Quattrol set.tel cinquel

BASSI *f* (parlato)
Set.tel no.vel cinquel

GIOCATORI

Moderato

fff *pp* *mf*

che l'a - la d'or.

quattrol die.cil no.vel

cinquel no.vel die.cil

V

An analysis of the libretto definitely shows Mala Vita to be more veristic than Cavalleria Rusticana both in the relationship between the operatic text and the original prose play in the vernacular and for the additions and variations introduced by Nicola Daspuro and Giordano. The opera sounds Neapolitan because the composer devised a musical idiom with a discreet Neapolitan flavour. The 'tarantella' and the Piedigrotta song are authentic pieces of musical folklore cleverly written and skilfully inserted into the action of Act III. Influences from major operatic composers on the style of a young man can easily be expected, but Giordano was no plagiarist and the three duets of Mala Vita testify to a dramatic talent and a good melodic inventiveness. A clear concession to the Cavalleria-prototype was the insertion of a short "Intermezzo" between the duet Amalia/Cristina and the ^{one} Amalia/Vito of Act II. Giordano's piece does not have the blatant mellifluousness of Mascagni's ~~one~~. It is dramatically justified because it provides time for Cristina to inform her fiancé about her heated conversation with Amalia and, in turn, for Vito to go to his lover and argue his case only to fall into the snares of the unscrupulous woman.

We are now left with a puzzling question: why should an opera based on a successful play, with good music in it, with no knives and murders on or off stage, be accepted almost everywhere except in its natural environment? From all that was written on the opera, the answer seems to be: Mala Vita was too true to be good. The circumstances and the reasons for the Neapolitan fiasco can be reconstructed from the articles and reviews which appeared in the city's major newspapers, Il Corriere di Napoli and Il Mattino. Their theatre critics, Roberto Bracco and Rocco Pagliara, were both friends and colleagues of Salvatore Di Giacomo. Nicola Daspuro was a local man. The young Giordano was known in Naples for having done all his musical studies at the prestigious Conservatorio S. Pietro a Maiella. The subject of the new opera was being shown with success at the Teatro Rossini while Giordano rehearsed his work at the San Carlo.

While Mascagni's Cavalleria came out of the blue and took audiences and critics by surprise, Mala Vita was expected with interest and trustfulness by the Neapolitan theatre-goers who were kept informed by the Corriere di Napoli about the progress of the opera. After the tremendous success of Cavalleria, the first interpreters of San-

tuzza and Turiddu, Gemma Bellincioni and Roberto Stagno, had cast themselves in the role of patrons of young composers writing veristic operas. A long article in the Corriere di Napoli (17 February 1892), signed by Roberto Bracco with the pseudonym of 'baby', informed the readers of the enthusiastic and affectionate participation of the couple Stagno/Bellincioni in the rehearsals for the Rome première of Mala Vita. Bracco also examined the libretto and described it as being 'fedele al dramma di Di Giacomo' and 'scenicamente sobrio, efficace e commovente'. For the San Carlo the new opera was to be the last production of the season which closed on 30 April. Just before Mala Vita, Bellincioni and Stagno sang in Traviata and Cavalleria Rusticana for several nights, always prompting enthusiastic comments in the press. Announcing a repeat performance of Traviata on 20 April, the Corriere di Napoli compared Bellincioni's Violetta to Eleonora Duse's Marguerite Gautier and concluded: 'Gemma Bellincioni sulla scena lirica - tale quale Eleonora Duse su quella drammatica - è artista eccezionale perchè è intensamente donna'. On 26 April Il Corriere di Napoli and Il Mattino published sympathetic announcements wishing good luck to Mala Vita and its young author. Roberto Bracco, in Il Corriere, indicated the Neapolitans as the 'natural public' of Giordano's opera and suggested that any judgement would be 'sereno e affettuosamente giusto' if the audience did not expect to find the qualities of a mature artist in a beginner's work. So Mala Vita seemed to have the best chances to confirm the success it had received in Rome two months earlier: it had the most suitable, enthusiastic and popular interpreters, good publicity, friendly support. But the opera failed. And despite the fact that Il Corriere di Napoli warmly recommended that Mala Vita ^{should be given} a second hearing, the opera season at the San Carlo came to an end with two more performances of Traviata (28 and 30 April 1892).

On 27 April Il Mattino and Il Corriere di Napoli devoted long reviews to the unsuccessful opera. For the Neapolitans Mala Vita was outrageous; an insult to their city and their glorious opera house, the Real Teatro San Carlo. The unsweetened, crude display of the Pendino little square with its brothel, the dingy bassi and the stinking dye-house were something of a shock. Such a sad and disturbing reality would be willingly ignored or at least confined to a vernacular play for a second-rate theatre. At a time when the 'sven-

tramento' works in the low districts of Naples (see above, note 3) were in progress and that shameful reality seemed to be disappearing under the pickaxe, the middle-class patrons of the illustrious San Carlo deeply resented that an opera displayed it as typical of their city. R. Bracco expressed his regret for having witnessed Bellincioni and Stagno sing amid 'the garbage of the alleys' and 'the prisons of sinful womanhood' which seemed to have been transferred, 'per uno sventramento al rovescio, dal mefitico basso Napoli alle scene magnifiche del San Carlo'.

But the fiasco of Mala Vita was not just the reaction of a conservative audience to a distasteful subject for an opera house. What interests us is the assessment of the musical qualities of Giordano's opera. Since the librettist stripped away all the humorous and picturesque ingredients which cushioned the impact of the psychological violence of the story, the composer could bring out the full dramatic potential of the situations. The vow at the beginning of the opera, the Piedigrotta song at its very end lost most of their decorative or picturesque value and appeared for what they were: a sign of popular superstition and a musical metaphor of the cheap hedonism of the uneducated masses. The musical idiom with a Neapolitan connotation sounded too familiar and prosaic. The unheroic, unromantic treatment of those wretched figures from the Pendino bassi made them unattractive and irritating. In short, Giordano's scrupulous faithfulness to reality did not pay. Those are the points on which R. Bracco based his criticism of the music of Mala Vita:

[Giordano] è stato scrupolosamente fedele al fatto, all'ambiente e non ha nobilitato nè l'uno nè l'altro...Il colore locale c'è, ma l'orecchio è troppo spesso investito da ritmi, da modulazioni, da ondulazioni melodiche, da frasi, cui l'abitudine nega gli onori della teatralità artistica...Ma quando del colore locale il musicista non si è preoccupato, un'altra idea fissa ha pregiudicata la concezione musicale. Egli temeva di falsare il carattere de' personaggi, egli temeva altresì di guastare nel lusso dell'arte la semplicità popolare dei sentimenti e delle idee...Il maestro non ha voluto concepire la musica indipendentemente dalla popolarità del dramma: -e il dramma, che ha perduto l'importanza sostanziale del verismo, ha trovato nella musica, insieme col calore della passione, la volgarità e la pochezza plebee.

The journalist and playwright seemed to bring in a verdict of impossibility for a truly veristic opera. The verismo of Mala Vita did not sublimate a tranche de vie into art; it kept reality at its ground level and the melodramatization acted as a magnifying glass over those miserable, ragged characters. The dramatic and psychological distortions, the musical embellishments which disfigured the aesthetic quality of a much less outrageous text such as Verga's Cavalleria Rusticana, were not to be found in Mala Vita. Paradoxically, despite the purely musical shortcomings due to Giordano's own limits, and the more artificial medium, the opera resulted in a more veristic work than the play itself, and it was rejected.

Rocco Pagliara in Il Mattino also criticized the opera because the subject was too daring and unsuitable for the San Carlo. He praised the duets, the singers, the conductor, the orchestra, but he blamed the realistic mise-en-scène for increasing the 'antipathy' of the story:

La messa in scena, invece, ed i costumi hanno aggravato l'antipatia del libretto, forse appunto con quello che si è creduto fare con maggiore calore e con più evidenza di carattere.

It must be noted that the Roman critics had made the same point about the unsuitability of such a veristic opera for their Teatro Argentina. In a more modest venue, they argued, those popular customs and feelings so uncompromisingly portrayed by Giordano would be less hurtful and vulgar.

Far away from Naples and the susceptibility of the Neapolitans, Eduard Hanslick was in a better position to assess the merits of the opera. All the more so as he had the unique chance to hear Mala Vita together with Cavalleria, Pagliacci and two minor operas (F. Cilea's Tilda and L. Mugnone's Il birichino), produced by the same Italian opera company with Gemma Bellincioni as the veristic prima donna par excellence. He gave therefore a comparative view when he wrote:

In its merciless truthfulness to life Mala Vita is both gripping and revolting at the same time, like most of these realistic pieces. The music of Maestro Giordano makes its effects through the rough-hewn ability to achieve a tone appropriate to the situation, and now and again by means of a gentler passage, as for example in Cristina's first entry.

His sense of drama is stronger than his musical talent, his temperament stronger than his artistry.⁷

Hanslick concluded his review praising the extraordinary interpretation of Gemma Bellincioni as Cristina: 'It would be hard to say in which of these scenes Bellincioni displays more intelligence, more sensitivity, more overpowering truth. I admit to never having seen anything more perfect. If Giordano saw and heard Cristina the way Bellincioni portrays her, then he is a true poet, musician and painter in one person'.

A few years later, after the triumph of Andrea Chénier (La Scala, 26 March 1896), Giordano tried to revive his youthful work and make it more acceptable to the public. Nicola Daspuro helped the composer reshape the libretto and tone down its unmitigated verismo. The revised edition was presented as Il Voto, sung by Enrico Caruso and Rosina Storchio, at the Teatro Lirico of Milan on 10 November 1897. Neither the audience nor the critics were much impressed. Alfredo Colombani for the Corriere della Sera (11-12 November 1897) wrote: 'Nulla più urta ora, è vero, ma nello stesso tempo nulla più interessa o commuove'. The new version was simply absurd. The setting was moved from the Pendino district to one of the new and healthier residential areas near the green hills surrounding Naples. The brothel was scrapped and Cristina, the 'donna perduta', was camouflaged as a 'donna tradita', a woman with some kind of unhappy experience in her past. So the vow itself became rather feeble and the heated confrontation Amalia/Cristina in Act II lost part of its credibility. The most outrageous character, the debauched Annetiello, was eliminated and the Piedigrotta song of Act III was given to Marco the barber.

The revision was meant to be an opportunistic operation of cosmetic surgery but it completely disfigured the pungent verismo of the opera. Far from conceiving a possible improvement of Mala Vita in musical terms, Giordano would only try to 'upgrade' it by effacing its most original features. In conclusion, when the composer scored his greatest success with Andrea Chénier, he severed his connection with literary verismo and destroyed the only opera worth the veristic label for its faithfulness to the prose play. Many years later, Giordano turned again to Di Giacomo for the "bozzetto lirico" Mese Mariano

(Palermo, Teatro Massimo, 17 March 1910), but it was a totally different kind of veristic story. The pathetic sketch featured nuns and children, and was set in the huge 'Real Albergo dei Poveri', the poorhouse of Naples built under the first Bourbon king, Charles III. Giordano composed some tenuous, subdued music for the unadorned verses of Di Giacomo's slim libretto. It was not, therefore, a belated return to the youthful verismo of Mala Vita but rather a disavowal of its sensational, emphatic connotations.

3. Musical postcards from Naples: A Santa Lucia and A Basso Porto

Goffredo Cognetti's "Scene popolari napoletane" A Santa Lucia and A Basso Porto are the literary sources of two veristic operas which, together with Mala Vita, make up a small group of uniformly Neapolitan works composed between 1892 and 1894. The librettist of A Santa Lucia was the Neapolitan poet Enrico Golisciani (1848-1918) who had written Marion Delorme (1885) for Ponchielli and was to concoct, in collaboration with Carlo Zangarini, the most outrageous pseudo-veristic libretto set in Naples, I gioielli della Madonna (1911) for Ermanno Wolf Ferrari. The librettist of A Basso Porto was the journalist and theatre critic Eugenio Checchi (Livorno, 1838 - Rome, 1932), a staunch supporter of operatic verismo since the Rome première of Cavalleria Rusticana. As for the music, the composer of the first opera was the Sicilian Pierantonio Tasca (1864-1934), an obscure and not particularly talented beginner who was to set Verga's Lupa many years later. On the contrary, the composer of A Basso Porto, Nicola Spinelli (Turin, 1865 - Rome, 1909), just as young as his colleague, had already achieved a moderate success with Labilia (Teatro Costanzi, Rome, 9 May 1890), the second prize (after Mascagni's Cavalleria) of the 1888 Sonzogno Competition.

A common feature of the two operas is the fact that their ephemeral success started and ended in Germany where they were first performed. A Santa Lucia was premièred at the Krolloper of Berlin on 16 September 1892, sung by Bellincioni and Stagno, and it was revived

there in 1905. In less than two years the opera was heard in Trieste (17 March 1893), Prague (in German, 26 March 1893), Hamburg (in German, 29 May 1893), Vienna (4 October 1893), Manchester (in English, 1 October 1894), and in several Italian cities including Naples. A Basso Porto was premièred in German at the Stadttheater of Cologne on 18 April 1894; although it reached Rome (Teatro Costanzi, 4 March 1895), the opera was never performed in Naples due to its libretto featuring mischievous camorristi and camorra rituals (the Neapolitan fiasco of Mala Vita had not been forgotten).

About a hundred years later, these operas can be seen only as consumer products for the foreign markets (mainly German), illustrated postcards from a much maligned but longed for city, the 'Sehnsucht nach Italien' epitomized in open-air songs and dances, and in sensational stories about hot-blooded, extrovert, down-to-earth people. Some critics (e.g. E. Hanslick), having to account for the artistic flimsiness of these latest imports from Italy, took the view that the popular favour surrounding them was due to an indigestion of the hazy and chilling mythologies of the North distilled in mastodontic operas. Others were seriously impressed by their impact on the public and tended to overstate their intrinsic value. The reporter of The Musical Times (1 November 1893) wrote about the première of A Santa Lucia in Vienna:

Signor Tasca's A Santa Lucia, a striking and uncompromising specimen of the verismo of young Italy, was given on the 4th ult. at the Vienna Court Opera, and, thanks mainly to the superb performance of Signora Bellincioni and Signor Stagno, the success was a very brilliant one.

A Santa Lucia was just a specimen of the numerous offspring generated by Cavalleria Rusticana at an inflationary rate. The low quality of the literary source was one of the basic weaknesses of the two-act opera; the other was Tasca's limited resourcefulness as a composer. Luigi Ricci's Piedigrotta, Mascagni's Cavalleria and popular Neapolitan songs were the main musical references to which Tasca had little to add. The result was a piece of folkloric verismo cunningly exploiting the fashionable stereotypes of Naples, a colourful wrapping containing little dramatic substance. The setting of the opera was the 'strada di Santa Lucia a Napoli' and featured a tavern, the stall of an oyster-seller, the sea and Vesuvius in the background, and the rising moon in the blue sky. This attractive location was filled with 'mor-

ra' players, fishermen, sellers of mineral water, shellfish and snails, and the typical Neapolitan crowd of tarantella dancers. The ingredients in themselves were true to life, but the glossy operatic picture of Santa Lucia would hardly tally with the grim, unpoetical description given by Matilde Serao in Il ventre di Napoli, in a section significantly dedicated to "Il pittoresco". She concluded the paragraph with a disheartening comment on the assumedly blue sea of Santa Lucia: 'Forse il colera non vi avrà fatto strage: vi è il mare e vi è il sole. Ma che mare nero, untuoso! Ma quale putrefazione non illumina quel sole!'⁸

The opening scene of A Santa Lucia is largely dependent on Piedigrotta for the realistic and folkloric details and for its overall structure (Ex. 7):

Ex. 7 - Tasca, A Santa Lucia, I, 1

Allegro con brio. (♩ = 144.)
Concettina.

Totonno.
 Ao-qua zur - seg - nal
 Wäs-ser von Tor - rel

O - stre - che do ca - stiel - lo!
 Aus - tern kauft vom Cas - tel - lo!
 lo - stre
 Fri - sche

Giocatori. Zwei!
 Spieler.
 Basel. Trol
 Dreil
 Drei!

seil
 Seche!
 tre!
 Drei!

quattro!
 Vie-re!
 cinquel
 Fün-fe!

per mei
 und zwei!

CHOR.
 Bevitori. Ohel
 Trinker. Ohel
 Bassi. Ohel

CHOR.
 Sopr. e Contr.
 La Folla.
 Die Menge.
 Ton.

La la la la la la la la la la la la la la la
 La la la la la la la la la la la la la la la

Ba - - ra - on - - da più gio - con - da do - - ve
 Glück - lich Volk! Wer ant es bes - ser, wo geht es

Bassi.
 Ba - - ra - on - - da più gio - con - da do - - ve
 Glück - lich Volk! Wer ant es bes - ser, wo geht es

ff

Ex. 7 - (cont.)

Conc. *Ac-qua fer - ra - ta!*
Kauft O - ran - gen!

Tot. ca - - - - - rol
Aus - - - - - tern!

Bev. Por - ta Gra - gna - - - - no! Portane an -
Brin - ge Chi - an - - - - ti, im - mer bring'

F. *lal O hel O hol*
lal O hel O hol

mai si può tro - var?
lus - t'ger su - - - - - nia hier?

mai si può tro - var?
lus - t'ger su - - - - - ala hier?

Bev. co - - - - - ral
mehr - - - - - noch!

co - - - - - ral
mehr - - - - - noch!

It concentrates, in one long and lively sequence, street cries in vernacular, a choral section of 'morra' players, a choral section of drinkers (the Gagnano wine is the same one ordered by the Piedigrotta re-

vellers; The German translation 'Bringe Chianti' sounds terribly out of place), the 'la la la' of the tarantella dancers, and the crowd enjoying the show and commenting with the stale tourist-brochure slogan 'veder Napoli e morir' (faithfully translated as 'Seh'n Neapel und dann sterben'). Act I of Ricci's opera was set in 'Piazza della Carità, in the heart of Naples, on the old 'strada Toledo' (now via Roma), and opened with the cries of the coffee-sellers ('E' bollente è sto caffè') and the men selling brandy ('Acquavitaro') and anisette ('Sammuchella forte e doce'). In A Santa Lucia, set on the sea-front, the merchandise is different but the effect is the same. The tarantella of Act III of Piedigrotta has been mentioned in connection with a similar number in Mala Vita. Tasca used the dance as an ostinato throughout the opening scene of his opera.

The thin plot of A Santa Lucia is about two women, Rosella (soprano) and Maria (mezzo-soprano), in love with the fisherman Ciccillo (tenor). Rosella commits suicide to prove her faithfulness to the man who loves her after a slander by her rival convinces him that she is about to marry his father. The tenor's song 'Amore è morto, e la rosella muore' (Act I, Sc. 2) anticipates the catastrophe and is first heard, played behind the curtain by a mandoline, in the "Prelude" of the opera; it returns at the very end, played by guitars and mandolines, while Ciccillo carries the dying Rosella in his arms. The whole story is more a chain of pretexts for songs, street brawls, invectives and perorations, than a purposeful dramatic action. In Act I, for example, Rosella is shown hiding a knife in her breast. On a slight provocation, a quarrel between her and Maria breaks out, and she strikes her rival with the knife. Cognetti's hand can easily be detected in what follows, bearing in mind Act I of the "Scene popolari" Malavita: a crowd soon gathers, police officers arrive and the two women are taken to the nearest police station, followed by an uproarious cortège of assorted folk. The music is banal and repetitive, and even Ciccillo's melancholy song sounds just like any barrel organ Neapolitan tune (Ex. 8):

Ex. 8 - Tasca, A Santa Lucia, I, 2

Cantabile. (♩ = 60.)
Ciccillo. (venendo dalla spiaggia) (portando la voce)
 (vom Ufer kommend)

pp A - more è morto, e la ro - sel - la muore! Tu
 Die Lieb' ist todt, nun wel - ket auch die Ro - so! Der

ppp

ck. pa - re, hel - la, più tro - var non puoi.
 See - le' Frie - den wird dich, Schönste, mei - - - den,

The influence of Cavalleria can be seen in some structural similarities: a "Prelude" with an off-stage song, an "Intermezzo", the insertion of Latin litanies and organ music which attract people to a church. There is also a brisk little song for the baritone (Ciccillo's father) who praises his job of oyster-seller and quotes his own cry, surrounded by a joyful crowd.

Eduard Hanslick wrote a long review of A Santa Lucia when it was premièred in Vienna, and expressed a mildly favourable opinion of the opera as a whole. He pointed out Tasca's limited melodic inventiveness and lack of originality, and dedicated over a third of the article to Gemma Bellincioni's Rosella. Her acting skills were described in more detail than her singing. The 'realistic truth' of her gestures, facial expressions, postures, gait, were all praised in connection with the particular situation they represented. 'In a dramatic creation of this magnitude - wrote Hanslick - the beauty of the purely musical sound almost ceases to be of importance'. The conclusion was that Bellincioni's interpretation of Rosella surpassed her earlier ones of Santuzza and Cristina in so far as 'Rosella is more broadly characterized by composer and librettist, placed in more varied situations and thus offers the actress greater scope'.⁹ That was meant to be a positive comment on the main character of A Santa Lucia. But Rosella has

no long and revealing showpiece like Santuzza's romanza 'Voi lo sapete, o mamma', and her ariosi are short and contain modest, unremarkable melodies. Considering also the dull recitatives with chordal accompaniment which bridge the ensemble pieces of the opera, we have to conclude that it was really the impressive stage presence and the unique acting of Gemma Bellincioni that created the character and made up for its musical deficiency. It must have been like watching a good film show with a mediocre sound track.

Spinelli's A Basso Porto is much the better of the two operas and it comes close to Mala Vita not just for the daring originality of the subject but also for the quality of the music, the more mature style and the dramatic effectiveness of some situations. On the title-page of the vocal score, after "Scene popolari napoletane di Goffredo Cagnetti", we find the ambitious definition "Dramma lirico in 3 atti", whereas both Mala Vita and A Santa Lucia have "melodramma". After the Pendino with the bassi and the prostitutes, another district in the 'bowels of Naples' is displayed for the first time on the operatic stage, and not in Italy but in Germany: the Porto with its unedifying gangs of camorristi and the indispensable tavern for the card games and the disputes. In 1904, when Matilde Serao completed the second part of Il ventre di Napoli, the Porto district was still much of an eyesore, having survived the urban renewal of the 1890s. Checking the place as she remembered it from her youth, the writer could still see 'le case di Basso Porto, ricetti di povertà inaudite, ricetti di delitti e di delittuosi, ricetti di tutte le cose e le persone infami e dolenti'.¹⁰ By 'crimes and criminals' Serao meant the activities of the camorra which prospered mostly in the popular districts of the city. Long before her or any other Neapolitan author, that squalid scenario of poverty and crime had been described by the cosmopolitan writer Marc Monnier (born in Florence, he lived and worked in Germany, France, Switzerland and Italy) in his study La Camorra (1863). Initiation rituals, hierarchy, activities, notorious figures of that 'popular secret society for organized extortion', as he defined it, were all carefully analyzed on the basis of police records and other documents.

The plot and characters of A Basso Porto almost bring to life situations and people from Monnier's book. Checchi and Spinelli por-

tray the camorristas without many concessions to gratuitous folkloric ingredients. There is no tarantella, for example, and the tenor's song with its unmistakable Neapolitan character has a dramatic justification for being repeated at the end of the opera. The story is quite straightforward. A camorra boss has been imprisoned after a tip-off by an informer who seems to hide in the gang itself. Ciccillo (baritone) is quick to impose his own authority over the camorristas, and pledges his word to unmask the spy. A member of the gang is Maria (mezzo-soprano), at one time Ciccillo's lover and now his sworn enemy because of reciprocal tip-offs which caused the death of Ciccillo's next girlfriend and the imprisonment of Maria's husband. Maria has a daughter, Sesella (soprano) in love with Ciccillo, and a son, Luigino (tenor), a 'picciotto', that is, a junior member of the camorra, who spends his time playing cards with the tavern keeper, Pascale. Ciccillo plans to take his revenge on Maria by turning Sesella into a prostitute and Luigino into a gambler. The news of a second arrest spreads fresh anger and apprehension among the camorristas. Maria has only to stare Ciccillo in the face to confirm her own suspicions about his being the spy. Ciccillo tries to accuse Luigino and at the same time he arranges to run away with Sesella at midnight. But Maria manages to convince her daughter of the man's wickedness and his real intentions about her. Sesella now wants to expose Ciccillo's treachery and summons all the camorristas. A camorra tribunal is set up by Pascale in his tavern and he presides over the trial. At first, Luigino is asked to clear himself of the charge of treason. Maria steps in to defend her son and endorses Sesella's allegations against Ciccillo. The camorrist is found guilty and sentenced to death. Luigino is chosen as the killer and is handed a gun by Pascale. It is a chance for the 'picciotto' to be promoted as camorrist if he carries out the execution of the spy. It will take place at midnight and the camorristas will lie in ambush not far from Luigino. The last note of his song "Mare d'argento" will signal the attack. But Maria will not have her son turned into a murderer. Just before midnight, she confronts Ciccillo and stabs him to death.

The camorristas are not romanticized or glorified. They are shown as quick-tempered and sectarian, inexorable and efficient as Marc Monnier described them in his documentary study. The two women

are no more likeable than the men. Sesella's infatuation for the bossy schemer, Maria's sense of guilt and concern for her daughter are rendered with the same sombre and unsympathetic tint as the doomed character of Ciccillo. He is just an arrogant petty criminal. Checchi and Spinelli took great care in his musical and dramatic presentation. At the beginning of the opera (Act I, Sc. 2) he is given a self-assertive, defiant motive (Ex. 9):

Ex. 9 - Spinelli, A Basso Porto, I, 2

Andante mosso. Energico.

con slancio

brillante

un poco stent.

Ciccillo.

un poco rall.

a tempo

Hört Pas-ca - le
Si Pa-sca - le,

Ei-nen Be-cher bringt Gra-g-na - no.
un bicchie-re di Gra-gni-no.

p a tempo

un poco rall.

which accompanies the camorrist whenever he bullies people or states something relevant to the action. Halfway through the opera (Act II, Sc. 3), soon after Ciccillo has accused Luigino of being the spy, he sings a dramatic monologue which brings out his rancour against Maria, his dissatisfaction with the 'mala vita' and his fear of the prison. Spinelli set the lines as well as he could, that is nothing like Iago's "Credo" in Otello. The core of the monologue is in the lines:

Ah! ch'io non era nato a questa viltà!
Sempre la mano pronta al coltello e al sangue;
tradir la compagnia
per salvar me che son di lor,...
che son di lor la spia!...
E aver negli occhi orribile visione...
la pesante catena e la prigione!

Spinelli, A Basso Porto, II ,3

Maria also has her characteristic motive, very Mascagnian in its melodic outline and orchestral accompaniment. From the outset of the opera to the very end, just before she kills Ciccillo, it voices Maria's frequent invocation: 'Ah! Madonna santa, voi lo sapete qual sia la croce della mia vita!' (Ex. 10):

Ex. 10 - Spinelli, A Basso Porto

Maria. *ff*
Hoi - li - ge Ma - don - na, o hör mich
Ah!..... Ma - don - na San - ta! Voi lo sa -

p *dolcissimo*

Maria.
fleh'n, du weist mein Krouz, Ah!
- pe - - te qual sia la cro - ce

cresc.

cresc.

The veristic characterization of the camorristas and the uninhibited use of their jargon and swearwords disrupt the linguistic uniformity of the libretto usually pitched in the high-flown register of pre-veristic opera. A few examples can illustrate the kind of operatic language used by Checchi in conjunction with veristic expressions. A typical case is the frequency of the adjective 'rio/reo' for wicked or guilty which recurs mostly in Maria's lines:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Maria: | 'rio cimento'; 'Son rea'; io solo rea'; 'Di rei misfatti la dissi complice'; 'ria sventura'. |
| Pascale: | 'reo misfatto'; 'Del traditore che è reo convinto'. |
| Ciccillo: | 'La rea masnada dei camorristi'. |

Ciccillo recalls Maria's betrayal, his imprisonment and her marriage in Act I, 5 with these lines:

.
Mentr'io languivo nella prigione!
E tu?... proterva, correvi all'ara,
tra fiori e incensi, veli e corone!

In Act II, 4 he gives Sesella a distorted version of the same facts in order to convince the girl to elope with him. The language is the same, the verse differs. Instead of quinari doppi, we find quatrains of senari:

In carcer fui posto:
la donna obliosa
i giuri d'un altro
infida ascoltò!
Tornai, la rividi:
proterva ed abbietta
di baci negati
mi chiese l'ardor.

In sharp contrast with their lyrical verses, the same characters often use colloquial and slang expressions. The adjective 'malo' is just as typical as 'rio/reo' in its frequency:

Sesella: Della vostra onorata compagnia
è il malo sbirro, è la venduta spia!
Maria: Va! di mala femmina vivrai la vita infame!
Luigino: figlio di mala fem...
Ciccillo: La mala vita fuggir dobbiamo
Luigino: Infame sorte!
dee morir di mala morte
chi le carte in man mi dà!

Sesella's expression 'onorata compagnia' is obviously referred to the camorra gang. Before accusing Ciccillo of betrayal, Sesella puts herself under the protection of the 'onorata compagnia' ('Io sono sotto la vostra protezione'). The colloquial style of the libretto is very similar to ordinary prose, particularly in the dialogues Maria/Sesella, Sesella/Luigino:

Sesella Ouf, che caldo!
Più non reggo all'oppressura!

Maria E tu, figlia, smetti un po' di lavorare!

Maria Dove vai?

Sesella Mammà, siete voi?

Maria Son io!

Sesella and Maria try to stop Luigino who is playing cards and losing money with Pascale)

Sesella Luigino! Ma non senti? C'è la mamma!

Luigino Disdetta! Neppur una mi riesce. Eh, non seccarmi!

Pascale Ehi, compar! son dieci lire che mi devi.

Maria E perdi ancora!

Luigino Pagherò! vanne in malora!

There are even two proverbs in Act I. The first is provocatively quoted by Pascale during the card game with Luigino (I, 1):

Fidarsi è bene... Non fidarsi...[è meglio]

the second, quoted by Ciccillo, is directed to Maria (I, 2):

A far bene nel mondo si deve essere ucciso.

The shift from the lyrical verses to the veristic and prosaic lines coincides with the sections of 'musical conversation' (as Hanslick called similar parts in Cavalleria), but this is not to say that the opera contains strophic songs, apart from Luigino's serenade. The opera consists mostly of large-scale concertati with all the principals and the chorus, syllabic declamation and arioso with expansive, well-devised melodies like, for example, Sesella's love motive. Ex. 11 shows it in an orchestral repeat towards the end of the duet Ciccillo/Sesella in Act I, 3:

Ex. 11 - Spinelli, A Basso Porto, I, 3

The musical score for Ex. 11 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Soprano (Sesella) and the middle staff is for Contralto (Ciccillo). The piano accompaniment is shown in the bottom two staves. The tempo is marked 'A tempo con effetto'. The dynamics include 'ppp dolcissimo' and 'molto roco'. The lyrics for Sesella are 'Sesella, nimmer da l'a-mo-re' and for Ciccillo are 'Sesella, nimmer da l'a-mo-re'.

Sop. Nenn' mich nicht fühl - los, — dich
 Non dir-lo in - gra - to..... non

Cic. mei - nengleicht kei - ne Lie - be
 tu - o il mio non ra - le

Sop. lieb ich
 dir - lo

Cic. so komme wenn es dunkelt, herzur Ta - ver - ne.
 Ebben... sta - sera al - la cau - ti - na, di mi, rer - ra - i?

Piano: *dolciss. pp* *mf*

Considering that it was originally written for a German audience, the clever use of such motives (see also Maria's and Ciccillo's ones) may have suggested a Wagnerian approach which added to its attractiveness.

The linguistic unevenness is only due to Checchi's inability to give up the stilted versification of pre-veristic opera and adopt a uniformly low register throughout the libretto. In this respect, the libretti of Mala Vita and A Santa Lucia do have a uniformly veristic register, including quotations in vernacular (street cries and songs), with none of the shifts noticeable in A Basso Porto.

Among the veristic operas presented by Sonzogno at the 1892 Vienna Exhibition, Hanslick rated Pagliacci and Mala Vita as the best in the group, apart from Cavalleria. A Santa Lucia and A Basso Porto remain on the level of postcard operas although an allowance should be made for the better musico-dramatic quality of Spinelli's opera.

C O N C L U S I O N

The operatic transposition of works belonging to Italian literary verismo was made possible only by substantial alterations to the stylistic and structural components of the texts. The adaptations were arranged from theatrical versions of earlier narrative works, that is from texts which were already a compromise between the aesthetic premises of verismo and the requirements of the stage.

Three elements characterized the veristic prose theatre in a positively innovatory way: the quality of the language, the dialogical structure, the interaction between individuals and social milieu. In the operatic transpositions, the veristic idiomatic register had to come to terms with the established conventions of the versified libretto, which often resulted in poor hybrids; the dialogical structure was fairly well preserved thanks to the new dynamic duet-form evolving in late nineteenth-century opera; the characterization of the social milieu was largely marred by the survival of conventionally operatic choruses.

The adoption of veristic subjects by the musical theatre came at a time when Italian opera was undergoing far-reaching changes affecting its musico-dramatic structures and vocal style. The actual contribution of the veristic theatre to the evolution of late nineteenth-century opera was overstated because of the sensation caused by the introduction of low-life stories into the destabilized system of the Italian romantic 'melodramma'. When the dust settled, operatic verismo - as the minor genre started by Cavalleria Rusticana was conveniently called - was left lagging behind in the general evolution of opera, clattering along with its truculent and pathetic heroes to some dusty library shelf.

Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana and Giordano's Mala Vita epitomize, in different ways, the musical transposition of literary verismo. Leoncavallo's Pagliacci represents the archetype of veristic opera based on the 'tranche de vie'. Imitation of these models in the 1890s meant degeneration into stereotypes, exploitation of worn-out clichés (violence, sensationalism, picturesqueness) and a patronizing, conservative attitude towards the 'low' subject matter.

In its heyday, operatic verismo was either overrated or abused. German audiences welcomed it as a relief from their heavy Wagnerian

diet; French critics anticipated or endorsed Debussy's contemptuous definition of it as 'l'usine du néant'; in Italy, heated disputes on its merits raged well into the first half of our century. Its critical assessment should have remained within the main problem of defining the compositional style which was developed by the post-Risorgimento composers collectively referred to as the Young Italian School. But in the event, due to the indiscriminate (and often derogatory) use of the term 'verismo' almost as a synonym for late nineteenth-century Italian opera, the minor question of the influence of literary verismo on the musical theatre became a hindrance to a solution of the problem.

In Italian musicological terminology, the expression 'verismo musicale' is today accepted and currently used to define an autonomous aesthetic category which was largely the outcome of a realistic tendency in the musical theatre and was not exclusively connected to, let alone created by, the adoption of veristic subjects from contemporary literature.

However, generalizations and inaccurate evaluations still persist, although many musicological studies have introduced the notion of a fundamental distinction between the artistic peculiarities of literary verismo and the merits or shortcomings of late nineteenth-century Italian opera. Jay Nicolaisen, for example, discussing the various meanings attributed to 'verismo', writes: 'For Grout and Carner veristic opera must be shocking - a quality hardly central to Verga's style' (Italian Opera in Transition, 1871-1893, p. 245). And Carl Dahlhaus, in one of the latest and most stimulating studies on the subject, states: 'Although the archetype of veristic opera, Cavalleria Rusticana, uses a libretto based on an incontestably veristic play by Giovanni Verga...the number of criteria of naturalistic style which the opera still observes is remarkably small' (Realism in nineteenth-century music, p. 69).

In Italy, modern studies have superseded the narrow view put forward by Mario Rinaldi in the earliest specific investigation of the connections between verismo and opera. He claimed that there simply was no such thing as veristic music: 'Troppo facilmente è stato scambiato il periodo musicale basato sulla letteratura verista con quello inconcepibile di musica verista. Musica verista è un binomio che è incapace di vita' (Musica e verismo, 1932, p. 13). As late as 1953, Ildebrando Pizzetti reiterated a similarly negative view in an article

for the Corriere della Sera (2 July 1953) significantly entitled "Musica verista?" The critical reappraisal of operatic verismo and the realistic tendency in late nineteenth-century opera witnessed a fresh start in the 1960s (a decade of anniversaries: Mascagni, b. 1863; Giordano, b. 1867). Besides the two bulky monographs on those composers, edited by Mario Morini in 1964 and 1968, the quarterly journal L'Opera dedicated an entire issue (Jan./March 1966) to 'verismo musicale'. The following year, a major exhibition was mounted at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala on the theme Problemi del Verismo nell'Opera in Musica (2 Dec. 1967 - 7 Jan. 1968). Articles and studies appeared in major newspapers and musical periodicals. Interest waned in the 1970s but has recently picked up again. In 1984 a beautifully illustrated volume on Mascagni included four essays by leading musicologists (Casini, Salvetti, Cella, Nicolodi). One of the latest contributions on the subject is Luigi Baldacci's "I libretti di Mascagni", published in Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana (July/September 1985).

The question of verismo in the musical theatre is far from being finally settled. Further clarification may come with a comparative evaluation of French naturalism. In this musical movement, Emile Zola, the main figure of literary naturalism, was involved as librettist.

NOTES to Chapter 1

- 1 Egon Voss, "Verismo in der Oper", Die Musikforschung, no. 31, 1978, p. 303.
- 2 Boito wrote for Ponchielli the libretto of La Gioconda (1876) and for Catalani the libretto of his first opera La falce (1875). Praga rearranged the libretto of Ponchielli's I promessi sposi for its 1872 new version. A detailed survey of the 'Scapigliatura' operas can be found in Guido Salvetti, "La Scapigliatura milanese e il teatro d'opera", Il melodramma italiano dell'Ottocento. Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila, Torino, 1977.
- 3 Pietro Mascagni, Cinquantenario della "Cavalleria Rusticana". Le Lettere ai librettisti durante la creazione del capolavoro, ed. Giovanni Cenzato, Milano, 1940, p.36.
- 4 G.M. Gatti, "D'Annunzio and the Italian Opera-Composers", The Musical Quarterly, April 1924, pp. 284-85. Gatti stated that 'the whole opera suffers from elephantiasis'. He concluded: 'In so far as Parisina contains pages proving the musician's efforts to solve certain stylistic problems presented in the text, and in so far as praise is due for greater care in orchestration and, in general, with regard to the technical elements of expression, this opera may be entered without hesitation to the credit of the Italian composer.'
- 5 Verdi, G., I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi, ed. G. Cesari and A. Muzio, Milano, 1913, p. 559. See also Charles Osborne, The letters of Verdi, London, 1971, p. 212.
- 6 Two months before Verdi's letter, Luigi Capuana had published an enthusiastic review of Vita dei Campi in the Corriere della Sera (20-21 September 1880). Verga lived in Milan from 1872 to 1887. He had access to the prestigious salon of Clara Maffei, Verdi's lifelong friend. See Raffaello Barbiera, Il Salotto della Contessa Maffei, Firenze, 1915, p. 368.
- 7 See letter to Clara Maffei dated 20 October 1876 in I copialettere, p. 624.
- 8 René Leibowitz, "Vérisme, Véracité et Vérité de l'Interprétation de Verdi", Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani, Parma, 1969, p. 146.

- 9 Richard Langham Smith, ed., Debussy on Music, London, 1977, pp. 119-20.
- 10 See: David Kimbell, "Verdi and 'realism' - La Traviata", Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism, Cambridge, 1981, p. 654; Carl Dahlhaus, "Realism in Italian opera", Realism in nineteenth-century music, trans. Mary Whittall, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 66-68. Dahlhaus makes allowances for 'individual departures from tradition in the musical procedures', and examines the duet Violetta/Giorgio Germont of Act II pointing out Verdi's tendency to shape it in blocks of musical dialogue while keeping it within the conventional structure of the cantabile-cabaletta sequence.
- 11 Giovanni Ugolini, "La Traviata e i rapporti di Verdi con l'opera verista", Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani, Parma, 1969, pp. 261-67.
- 12 Giovanni Ugolini, "Umberto Giordano e il problema dell'opera verista", Umberto Giordano, ed. Mario Morini, Milano, 1968, pp. 19-29.
- 13 A detailed analysis of the radical changes in Italian opera in the period coinciding with the short-lived 'operatic verismo' can be found in Jay Nicolaisen, Italian Opera in Transition, 1871-1893, Ann Arbor, 1980, particularly in the chapter "The Composer's Task", pp. 42-67.
- 14 G.A. Biaggi, "Rassegna musicale", Nuova Antologia, 1 April 1891, p. 551.
- 15 Carteggi pucciniani, ed. Eugenio Gara, Milano, 1958, p. 182.
- 16 Mosco Carner, Giacomo Puccini. Tosca, Cambridge, 1985, p. 7. Carner reiterates what he wrote in his earlier Puccini. A Critical Biography, London, 1958, p. 242.
- 17 Carteggi pucciniani, p. 151 (letter dated 23 August 1896).
- 18 See Carl Dahlhaus, "The 'musical novel'", in Realism in nineteenth-century music quoted above, p. 93.
- 19 See Marcello Conati, "Mascagni, Puccini, Leoncavallo & C. in Germania", Discoteca, August 1976.
- 20 Rubens Tedeschi, "L'estetica del coltello", Addio, fiorito asil. Il melodramma italiano da Boito al verismo, Milano, 1978; Rodolfo Celletti, "Il melodramma delle aree depresse", Discoteca, 15 June 1962 and 15 July 1962.
- 21 G.B. Shaw, Music in London 1890-94, London, 1950, III, p. 246.

NOTES to Chapter 2

- 1 "Cavalleria Rusticana" and the other stories of Vita dei Campi appeared in periodicals and were later published in a volume by Emilio Treves in the following order: "Fantasticheria", "Jeli il pastore", "Rosso Malpelo", "Cavalleria Rusticana", "La lupa", "L'amante di Gramigna", "Guerra di santi", "Pentolaccia". The thematic nucleus of "Cavalleria" was part of the narrative material called "Padron 'Ntoni", a 'bozzetto marinaresco', which Verga mentions in a letter to Treves of 25 September 1875 as being unsatisfactory and about to be completely redrafted (see "Storia de I Malavoglia - Carteggio con l'editore e con Capuana", by V. and L. Perroni, Nuova Antologia, 16 March - 1 April 1940). In 1892, after the success of Mascagni's opera and in view of the dramatization of "La lupa", Treves published a new edition of Vita dei Campi with the title Cavalleria Rusticana ed altre novelle and placed "Cavalleria" and "La lupa" at the beginning of the book.
- 2 G. Verga, "Lettere a Edouard Rod", Opere, ed. L. Russo, Napoli, 1961, p. 918.
- 3 Mascagni did manage to complete Ratcliff and had it premièred at La Scala on 16 February 1895.
- 4 Pietro Mascagni, Cinquantenario della "Cavalleria Rusticana", p. 11.
- 5 Pietro Mascagni, ed. Mario Morini, Milano, 1964, I, p. 278.
- 6 All quotations are taken from Giovanni Verga, Tutto il teatro, Milano, 1980.
- 7 For the analogies between Cavalleria and an earlier Sicilian play, I mafiusi (1863) by Gaspare Mosca and Giuseppe Rizzotto, see Anna Barsotti, Verga drammaturgo, Firenze, 1974, ch. 2.
- 8 The setting of Cavalleria featured a 'carabinieri' station along with the church, Nunzia's tavern and Zio Brasi's stable.
- 9 G. Verga, Lettere sparse, ed. Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri, Roma, 1979, p. 180.
- 10 G. Pitrè, Usi e Costumi, Credenze e Pregiudizi del Popolo Siciliano, Palermo, 1889, II, p. 294.
- 11 G. Pitrè, Usi e Costumi, II, p. 292. Pitrè also regrets that the word 'mafia' should have acquired a negative connotation (p. 293). A similar statement can be found in a lecture by Luigi Capuana on

"La Sicilia nei canti popolari e nella novellistica contemporanea" (1894), now in L. Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, ed. Mario Pomilio, Bologna, 1972, pp. 145-46.

12 Severino Ferrari, "La nonna", Nuovi Versi, 1888 .

13 In the play, after Alfio states his readiness to take care of his own interests with no help from 'quelli del pennacchio', he is gently reproached by Zia Filomena and his response is a sensible and sedate one:

Zia Filomena (a compare Alfio) - Piuttosto andate a dire a vostra moglie che suona la messa, scomunicato!

Compar Alfio - Corro a governare le mie bestie, e vado a dirglielo. Non dubitate, son cristiano anch'io.

14 P. Mascagni, Cinquantenario della "Cavalleria Rusticana", p. 13.

15 The four quatrains of the concertato were published in P. Mascagni, Cinquantenario della "Cavalleria Rusticana", p. 14.

16 In his farewell (Sc. 11) Turiddu sings:

s'io non tornassi...voi dovrete fare
da madre a Santa, ch'io le avea giurato
di condurla all'altare.

which is an exact rendering of Turiddu's last words in Scene 8 of the play: 'E se mai...alla Santa, che non ha nessuno al mondo, pensateci voi, madre.'

17 Giuseppe Pitre lists these categories in a "Studio introduttivo sui canti popolari siciliani" which opens vol. 1 of his Canti popolari siciliani, Palermo, 1870-71, 2 vols. On p. 183 of the same volume he quotes a Sicilian song incorporating the four terms:

Cantami quantu vôi ca t'arrispuonu:
D'amuri, gilusia, spartenza e sdegnu.

('Sing as much as you want that I will answer you:/About love, jealousy, parting and spite').

18 G. Verga, Lettere sparse, p. 160. A piece for chamber orchestra was written by Perrotta and sent to Milan; but it was considered too difficult to play. It was first performed in Catania at the Teatro Pacini in 1886.

19 Originally the two librettists had Italianized the Sicilian diminutive of Salvatore into a ludicrous 'Torello'. Mascagni suggested that the Verghian character should keep his name.

20 A. D'Ancona, La poesia popolare italiana, Livorno, 1906, p. 281.

- The first edition appeared in 1878 and was therefore available to Mascagni's friend Giacomo De Zerbi for his poetical exercises.
- 21 L. Capuana, "La Sicilia nei canti popolari e nella novellistica contemporanea", Verga e D'Annunzio, p. 134.
 - 22 The English translator, Frederic Weatherly, rendered the line with a reticent 'To your heart's dearest!' in the libretto (Rustic Chivalry, London, 1892), while, for the vocal score, he preferred a less accurate rhythmic version: 'To all true lovers!'
 - 23 Quoted in Giulio Cattaneo, Giovanni Verga, Torino, 1963, p. 261.
 - 24 The 'Commissione musicale' was composed of Filippo Marchetti, Giovanni Sgambati, Amintore Galli, Pietro Platania and Francesco D'Arcais. The 'Commissione teatrale' was composed of Paolo Ferrari, one of the most distinguished playwrights in Italy, Antonio Ghislanzoni, the librettist of Aida, and Felice Cavallotti, a progressive member of Parliament.
 - 25 His most successful song, "Musica proibita", was known in Britain as "Unspoken Words", text by H.L. D'Arcy Jaxone.
 - 26 In a letter dated 21 April 1890, written by Verga to F. De Roberto to thank him for sending the newspapers with the reviews of the opera, the novelist commented sarcastically: 'Che roba quella Mala Pasqua, e che roba quei critici! Belli! Belli! Belli! (Verga-De Roberto-Capuana, p. 118).
 - 27 Quotations are from S. Gastaldon and G.D. Bartocci Fontana, Mala Pasqua!, Milano, 1890.
 - 28 Monleone's biographer claims that: 'Il lavoro piacque ai giurati, ma irritò Sonzogno e non fu classificato'. (Mario Pedemonte, Domenico Monleone. Il musicista e l'uomo, Genova, 1942, p. 12). The first prize of the competition went to La Cabrera by Gabriel Dupont. Cavalleria was Monleone's first opera. He also wrote the operetta Una novella del Boccaccio (Genoa, 1909) signing it with the pseudonym of 'Walter von Stolzing'; Alba eroica (Genoa, 1910); Arabesca (Rome, 1913); Suona la ritirata (Milan, 1916); Il Mistero (Venice, 1921); Fauvette (Genoa, 1926); Schêuggio campann-a (Genoa, 1928; three acts in Genoese dialect); La Ronda di notte del Rembrandt (Genoa, 1933). Most of the libretti were written for Monleone by his brother Giovanni.
 - 29 Giovanni and Domenico Monleone, Cavalleria Rusticana, Milano, 1907.

- 30 Reviewing the première of the opera in Turin (10 July 1907), the critic of Turin's major newspaper La Stampa wrote: 'Tutto il prologo piace ed è applaudito con un certo calore: infatti il musicista, pur senza spiccare il volo alto e vigoroso, vi afferma simpatiche qualità di sinfonista, chiaro ed efficace. E' sembrato a noi che questo prologo sia la pagina migliore dell'opera'.
- 31 Giuseppe Pitrè describes a similar scene as a May flower festival and stresses its analogy with the Tuscan May Day (G. Pitrè, Spettacoli e Feste Popolari Siciliane, Palermo, 1881, p. 254). G. and D. Monleone back-dated May Day to Easter Sunday to add a touch of floral folklore to their opera.
- 32 In his early 20's, Monleone had started a successful career as a conductor and had been involved in opera seasons in Vienna (Theater an der Wien), Constantinople, Athens and Amsterdam where he made friends with a local impresario, De Hondt, who sponsored Cavalleria a few years later.
- 33 G. Verga, Lettere a Dina, ed. Gino Raya, Roma, 1963, p. 177.
- 34 Ibidem. The 'verdelli' are early lemons which Verga grew on his estate of Novalucello. 'La Duchessa' is Verga's unfinished novel La Duchessa di Leyra, the only chapter of which was published by De Roberto after Verga's death.
- 35 G. Verga, Lettere a Dina, p. 179. In 1893 Verga accepted a lump sum of 143,000 lire to settle the dispute with Sonzogno and Mascagni about the royalties for Cavalleria. He later considered it inadequate.
- 36 As late as 21 September 1911, Verga gave his friend the 'notizia di aver vinto in parte a Milano la causa pel rimborso spese che dovevo avere da Monleone e Puccio...lire 5900 circa' (Verga, Lettere a Dina, p. 74).
- 37 Boutet's article and Capuana's letter can be read in L. Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, pp. 117-125. They were first included by Capuana in his Gli ismi contemporanei, Catania, 1898. Verga's only comment on Boutet's article can be found in a letter to Capuana, dated 20 January 1894, where he referred to Mascagni's Cavalleria as 'quel pasticchetto musicale, col relativo brindisi'.
- 38 E. Hanslick, "Freund Fritz" (1892), in Fünf Jahre Musik (1891-1895), Berlin, 1896. A more markedly negative attitude towards

Mascagni's music can be found in Hanslick's review of A Santa Lucia by P. Tasca: 'I will make no secret of my own personal feeling, namely that the operas of Mascagni make not only a smaller impact on me each time I hear them, but also a more unpleasant one. After a lengthy interval,...I heard both Cavalleria and Fritz again on the occasion of Bellincioni's guest appearances and found the paucity of their musical invention almost embarrassing. In Cavalleria this is covered over by the array of physical effects, but the contrast with these massed forces highlights on the other hand the undeservedly famous Intermezzo, which only makes its impact through its flat melifluousness.' Idem, "A Santa Lucia" (1893).

- 39 A comprehensive survey of the French critical response to the operas of the Young Italian School in the years 1892-1910 can be found in Fiamma Nicolodi, Gusti e tendenze del Novecento musicale in Italia, Firenze, 1982, ch. 1: "L'opera verista a Parigi: una 'querelle' musicale a confronto". The two articles from the Revue Politique et Littéraire quoted here are not mentioned in Nicolodi's study.
- 40 Verga's play was already known in France thanks to a production by André Antoine at his Théâtre Libre on 20 October 1888 where it failed to make a favourable impression on critics and audience. For the reasons of that early failure, see Francis Pruner, Le Théâtre Libre d'Antoine. Le Répertoire Étranger, Paris, 1958.
- 41 Bellaigue quoted from Hanslick's first review of the opera: "Sicilianische Bauernehre (Cavalleria rusticana) von Pietro Mascagni. 1891", Aus dem Tagebuche eines Musikers, Berlin, 1892.
- 42 G.A. Biaggi, "Della musica melodrammatica italiana, del M.o Mascagni e dell'Amico Fritz dato alla Pergola di Firenze", Nuova Antologia, 1 December 1891, p. 540.
- 43 G.B. Shaw, Music in London 1890-94, London, 1949, II, "1 June 1892". In vol. I, "21 October 1891", Shaw reviewed the première of Cavalleria in these terms: '..it is a youthfully vigorous piece of work with abundant snatches of melody broken obstreperously off on one dramatic pretext or another. But, lively and promising as it is, it is not a whit more so than the freshest achievements of Mr Hamish MacCunn and Mr Cliffe.'
- 44 D.H. Lawrence, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. A. Beal, London,

1982, p. 291. A similar statement can be found in a preface to Mastro-don Gesualdo which Lawrence then rejected in favour of a shorter prefatory note: 'He is, as far as anybody knows his name, just the man who wrote the libretto to Cavalleria Rusticana. Whereas, as a matter of fact, Verga's story Cavalleria Rusticana is as much superior to Mascagni's rather cheap music as wine is superior to sugar-water.' (Idem, p. 271).

45 Giuseppe Patanè, "Mascagni e Verga. Coautori ma non amici", Corriere d'Informazione, Milano, 26-27 July 1951.

46 "Cavalleria Rusticana", Il Mattino, 2 November 1939: '...saluteremo lietamente questa versione della grande novella verghiana: questo capolavoro del naturalismo italiano che non certe sgangherate edizioni melodrammatiche di terz'ordine, nè le risibili oleografie che adornano le pareti delle osterie fuori porta, nè l'incrollabile fortuna radiofonica dell'antica melodia mascagniana sono riusciti a contaminare. La saluteremo lietamente perchè ha colto il profumo e il sentimento di quel piccolo mondo paesano...E perchè s'è preferito per mano - per commentare l'azione senza che il corale splendore e il viluppo tragico del racconto si deformassero in risapute formule melodrammatiche - a smaglianti musiche popolari che suggestivamente s'armonizzano col carattere originale ed etnico dell'opera verghiana.'

NOTES to Chapter 3

- 1 Verga-De Roberto-Capuana. Celebrazioni Biceninarie. Biblioteca Universitaria, Catania. 1755-1955, ed. Angelo Ciavarella, Catania, 1955, p. 124. Puccini's interest in Sardou's drama is documented from May 1889 when he wrote to Ricordi 'imploring' him to take the necessary steps in order to obtain Sardou's permission.
- 2 Carteggi pucciniani, ed. Eugenio Gara, Milano, 1958, p. 102.
- 3 Ibidem.
- 4 Marotti-Pagni, Giacomo Puccini intimo, Firenze, 1926. Earlier on the incident was reported by Giuseppe Adami, "Le opere che Puccini non scrisse", in La Lettura, 1 August 1920.
- 5 According to Mosco Carner (Puccini: A Critical Biography, London, 1958, p. 320), Rodolfo's 'Nei cieli bigi' is taken from musical sketches Puccini had composed for La Lupa.
- 6 This fact was first disclosed by Mario Morini in his contribution to a conference on opera libretti held in Florence in December 1977. See "Tavola rotonda: Libretti d'opera", Teatro dell'Italia unita, ed. Siro Ferrone, Milano, 1980, pp. 289-319.
- 7 G. Verga, Lettere a Dina, p. 183.
- 8 P. Tasca (1864-1934) belonged to the landed aristocracy of Southern Sicily; he was a baron. For his opera A Santa Lucia (1892) see below, Ch. 4.
- 9 La Lupa/ Tragedia lirica in 2 atti/ di/ Giovanni Verga e Federico De Roberto/ Musica di Pierantonio Tasca/ Palermo/ Barravecchia & Balestrini/ 1919, in-8, pp. 68.
- 10 The articles published in Il Popolo di Sicilia are: Gioacchino Caprera, "La musicalità nelle opere del Verga" (7 August); G. Caprera, "Musicalità della Lupa" (13 August); Alfredo Sangiorgi, "Il libretto della Lupa" (21 August); A. Sangiorgi, "La prima di Lupa al Littoriale di Noto" (23 August), and short reviews for the performances of August 23-25. The opera was conducted by Franco Ghione, the chorus by Roberto Benaglio.
- 11 G. Verga, Lettere sparse, p. 308.
- 12 After the success of Cavalleria in Turin and Zola's congratulations, Verga sent him a complimentary copy of the play with a French translation and accompanied the gift with a letter in which he acknowledged the influence of Zola's 'idées sur la littérature au théâtre'

on his work. Verga also stated that in Cavalleria 'les acteurs n'y ont aucun prétext pour un succès personnel. Je vous avouerai que cet effet quasi impersonnel de Cavalleria Rusticana me laisse le plus satisfait de mon travail, car je pense que le théâtre, comme oeuvre littéraire, est de beaucoup inférieur au roman...' (Idem, p. 163).

- 13 See letter of Verga to Cameroni of 15 June 1888, in M. Borghese, "Lettere inedite di Giovanni Verga", Occidente, 20 May 1935.
- 14 The comedy to be derived from Dramma intimo, which Verga never completed, illustrated a similar situation to the one in La Lupa: mother (a countess) and daughter are in love with the same man (a marquis); the daughter marries the man and the mother dies of consumption.
- 15 Ugo Ojetti, Alla scoperta dei letterati, Firenze, 1946, p. 122.
- 16 La Lupa appeared for the first time in Rivista Nuova di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 15 February 1880. Capuana's review of Vita dei Campi was written for the Corriere della Sera (20-21 September 1880) and collected with other critical studies in Capuana's Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea, II serie, Catania, 1882. Here it is quoted from the modern reprint in Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, ed. Mario Pomilio, Bologna, 1972, pp. 79-80. In an obituary for the death of his friend, published in Giornale dell'Isola, 30 November 1915, Verga acknowledged his debt to Capuana: '...il suo senso artistico era così schietto e penetrante, che anche a sentirgli accennare a certi avvenimenti che egli reputava troppo arrischiati per farne argomento di novella o di scena, se ne subiva la comunicante ispirazione. Così a me venne "La Lupa", la tragica avventura di una contadina sua vicina a Santa Margherita.'
- 17 Capuana noted in his review: 'Qua e là sembra la traduzione di qualche leggenda popolare, con quel ritorno d'immagini e di parole di cui l'autore s'è stupendamente servito.' A modern critic, commenting on the recurrence of the 'pale' attribute, recalls that the tragic Erinyes or Furies were accompanied by three figures: Terror, Rage and Pallor. See G. Mazzacurati, "Scrittura e ideologia in Verga ovvero le metamorfosi della Lupa", in his Forma e ideologia, Napoli, 1974, p. 163.
- 18 All quotations of La Lupa are taken from G. Verga, Opere, ed. L.

- Russo, Napoli, 1961, pp. 124-128.
- 19 G. Verga, Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories, translated by D. H. Lawrence, London, 1928, pp. 23-24. The merits and faults of Lawrence's translation of Vita dei Campi and Novelle Rusticane are discussed by Giovanni Cecchetti, "Le traduzioni verghiane di D.H. Lawrence", in his Il Verga maggiore, Firenze, 1968, p. 189 et seq.
 - 20 The play was first published by Treves in 1896, in a volume including Cavalleria Rusticana and Il portineria. All quotations are taken from G. Verga, Tutto il teatro, Milano, 1980. The two editions of the libretto (Palermo, 1919; Noto, 1932) are absolutely identical.
 - 21 G. Verga, Tutte le novelle, Milano, 1982, II, p. 192. "Carmen" was first published in the Gazzetta letteraria, 15 February 1890, and then included in I ricordi del capitano d'Arce (1891).
 - 22 G. D'Annunzio, Poesie. Teatro. Prose, ed. M. Praz and F. Gerra, Milano-Napoli, 1966, p. 24.
 - 23 Filomena: 'Ai miei tempi si diceva: 'Vile chi si pente!' 'Il buon panno sino alla cimosa!' (play, I, 2): Janu: 'Comare Pina, sapete come dice il proverbio: "Maritati e muli lasciali soli"' (play, II, 9). In the libretto, II, 10, Janu says: '...ma il mondo dice: "Il lupo perde..."', intending "Il lupo perde il pelo ma non il vizio". The line was not set by Tasca; like Puccini, he did not appreciate proverbs in an opera.
 - 24 Siro Ferrone writes about Verga's passage: 'Il filtro lirico con cui è guardata la campagna non mimetizza neppure la struttura letteraria, lasciando che si manifesti un punto di vista dell'autore sovrapposto a quello dei personaggi, un periodare narrativo più 'romantico' che 'verista'.' See "La Lupa. Dissoluzione del verismo teatrale", in S. Ferrone, Il teatro di Verga, Roma, 1972, p. 226.
 - 25 Rachel Harriette Busk, The Folk-Songs of Italy, London, 1887, p. 4. Miss Busk's anthology includes some "Canzuni" and "Ciuri" of Sicily, 'selected expressly for this work by Dr. Giuseppe Pitre of Palermo'. The main collections of Sicilian songs are: Lionardo Vigo, Canti popolari siciliani, Catania, 1857 and its second enlarged edition Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani,

Catania, 1870-74; S. Salamone-Marino, Canti popolari siciliani in aggiunta a quelli del Vigo, Palermo, 1867; Giuseppe Pitrè, Canti popolari siciliani, Palermo, 1870-71, 2 vols. Pitrè specifies that his volumes contain little less than 1000 Sicilian popular songs 'quasi tutti inediti, da aggiungere ai 1300 di Lionardo Vigo e ai 750 di Salvatore Salamone-Marino. Essi sono comunissimi in tutta la Sicilia'.

- 26 The 'ballo tondo' which precedes and accompanies Pina's entrance (play and libretto, I, 2, 3), may have been suggested by a personal recollection of the author. In the article published in Giornale dell'Isola on Capuana's death (see above, n. 16), Verga wrote, referring to his friend: 'In quel podere che gli era stato caro, ... egli mi fece vedere la capanna della "gnà Pina", la sciagurata madre adultera; e assistendo al ballo dei contadini la sera, dinanzi a quella candela fumosa appesa al torchio delle olive mi parve di vedere anch'io, viventi, le fosche figure di quel dramma fosco'.
- 27 Miss Busk states in her anthology: 'The habit of singing a gara ...prevails to a greater extent and with greater earnestness in Sicily than elsewhere; sometimes in public fairs, rustic gatherings, at vintage and harvest, sometimes merely at the wineshop and cottage doors' (R.H. Busk, The Folk-Songs of Italy, p. 48). See also Pitrè, Canti popolari, I, p. 43.
- 28 No. 666: 'Galofaru di Spagna, duci amuri' (Bronte)
 " 742: 'Galofaru russu 'ncarnatu d'amuri' (Aci)
 " 743: 'Galofaru di spassi e di piaciri' (Palermo)
 " 744: 'Galofiru di Spagna dilittusu' (Catania)
 " 745: 'Galofiru di Spagna si' vinutu' (Mazzara)
 " 746: 'Galofiru chiantatu 'n virga d'oru' (Milazzo)
 " 747: 'Galofaru d'argentu lu miu Amuri' (Alimena)
 " 748: 'Galofaru chi fai stu bell'oduri' (Termini)
 " 1703: 'Galofaru d'argentu spampinatu' (Palermo + variation [from Mineo]).
- 29 Here is the octave in Sicilian from Pitrè's Proverbi, IV, p. 283:

Vidi, e taci, si bene aviri voi,
 La cosa no la diri, si non sai,
 Ama l'amicu, cu li vizii soi,
 Porta rispettu à lu locu, undi stai,
 Vògghinni chiù pri li vicini toi,
 Chi non pri cui nò lu vidisti mai,

Nun fari chiù di chiddu, chi tu poi,
Pensa la cosa avanti, chi la fai.

- 30 A similar song is included by Pitрэ in "Canzuni e Ciuri" of his Canti popolari siciliani, I, p. 254: 'Muta la via/'Nnamurateddu di l'armuzza mia'. Another stornello is inserted as an ironic comment from a minor character on Pina's return to Nanni's house, in Act II, 3 of the libretto only: 'Foglia di fico: /E' ver che amor nuovo trova luogo,/ma non si scorda mai l'amore antico!' The strambotto, the stornello and other forms of popular poetry are discussed at length by Alessandro D'Ancona in his fundamental work La poesia popolare italiana.
- 31 In his letter of refusal to Ricordi, quoted by M. Morini (see above, n. 6), Mascagni, with characteristic self-assurance, stated: 'lo trovo impossibile sotto tutti i rapporti, un soggetto monotono e per nulla adatto alla musicabilit ;...quella madre, quella figlia che se ne dicono di tutti i colori, il carattere di Pina scoccante da cima a fondo, quel ballo con canto di stornelli, quella poesia fatta unicamente di stornelli e di rispetti... Sapevo che di lirico non c'era nulla - glielo aveva detto Puccini - ma speravo che i versi fossero migliori.' The composer of Cavalleria had become a fastidious connoisseur! The only parts of the libretto he praised were the domestic idyll opening Act II and the lyrical solos for Mara.
- 32 G. Verga, Lettere a Dina, p. 245 and p. 296.
- 33 Giulio Pacuvio, "Verga e un Mistero derivato da Cavalleria Rusticana", Scenario, March 1940, pp. 112-116.
- 34 Il Mistero/ scene siciliane in un prologo e un atto/ di/ Giovanni Verga and Giovanni Monleone/ musica di/ Domenico Monleone/ Milano/ Casa Musicale Sonzogno/ 1921, pp. 31.
- 35 In a scuffle among the crowd, some women shout: 'Sciamannona!', 'Arrabbiata!', 'Paneperso!' (from "Pane Nero" of the Rusticane), and 'Santo diavolone!' (from "Cavalleria Rusticana"). G. Monleone was an accomplished philologist. His major achievement was a critical edition: Jacopo da Varagine e la sua Cronaca di Genova dalle origini al MCCXCVII. Studio introduttivo e testo critico commentato di Giovanni Monleone, Roma, 1941, 3 vols.
- 36 Gn  Nunzia. Senti, va a buttarti ai piedi del Crocifisso.
Santuzza. No, in chiesa non ci posso andare, gn  Nunzia.
(Sc. 1)

- A. Beal, London, 1982, p. 290. Russo gave adequate importance to Capuana's influence on the evolution of Verga's verismo ('Oggi che non si può dir bene del Verga, senza dir male del Capuana, bisogna fare alto onore a quest'ultimo per quella influenza che egli ebbe nella formazione spirituale del nostro scrittore di prosa narrativa più grande che si abbia avuto, in Italia, dopo il Manzoni.' L. Russo, Giovanni Verga, Napoli, 1920, p. 51).
- 46 G. Verga, Lettere a Luigi Capuana, p. 223. The tale in Sicilian verse, a late version of the Italian novella and an English translation were published with a short introduction in a bilingual edition by Alfred Alexander, Il "Comparatico" di Luigi Capuana e gl'inizi del verismo, Roma, 1970. An earlier and better version of the novella can be read in a modern edition of Capuana's Le Paesane, ed. Edoardo Villa, Milano, 1974.
- 47 Gianni Oliva, Capuana in archivio, Caltanissetta-Roma, 1979, p. 359.
- 48 In the opera, Cola invites Jana to another traditional dance, the 'chiodo', and again she stops after just a few bars. Giuseppe Pitrè dedicates a long chapter to "Sonatori e Balli" in his Usi e Costumi, Credenze e Pregiudizi del Popolo Siciliano, Palermo, 1889, I. He defines 'la ruggera' or 'lu ruggeri' as the most curious of all dances (p. 355). The 'chiodo' is described in vol. II of the same work (p. 84) in the section devoted to "Weddings".
- 49 All quotations of the comedy are taken from the text published in Le Paesane, ed. E. Villa, Milano, 1974, pp. 303-347. For the opera, the 1893 libretto has been used. It is identical to the one published in Milan in 1985 except for the pagination (35 pages instead of 32).
- 50 Frontini published a collection of fifty Sicilian popular songs complete with piano arrangement: Eco della Sicilia, Milano, Ricordi, [1883].
- 51 Verga wrote a letter in Sicilian to his friend (31 May 1911), defending Malia in Italian against the version in the vernacular (G. Verga, Lettere a Luigi Capuana, p. 217). The Sicilian translation of Malia was published in recent times by Alfredo Barbina in Teatro verista siciliano, Bologna, 1970, and by Pietro Mazzamuto (Luigi Capuana, Teatro dialettale siciliano, ed. P. Mazzamuto, Catania, 1974).

- 1 Written in 1909 for the periodical La Critica, the essay was later published as an Appendix to Croce's La letteratura della nuova Italia, Bari, 1915, IV. In 1903 Croce wrote a critical essay on Di Giacomo which was included in the third volume of the same work together with studies on Verga, Serao, Capuana and others.
- 2 The modern two-volume edition of Di Giacomo's works, edited by Francesco Flora and Mario Vinciguerra, published by Mondadori in 1946, devotes the first volume to Le Poesie e le Novelle and the second to Il Teatro e le Cronache including most of his writings on the history and culture of Naples. The 1979 reprint is used in this study and is indicated as Di Giacomo I or II followed by the page number.
- 3 Matilde Serao, Il ventre di Napoli, Napoli, 1973, p. 10. The work is a collection of articles prompted by the cholera epidemic of 1884 and written by Serao partly in that year and partly some twenty years later. The title was suggested by a dramatic statement made by the mayor of Naples, Nicola Amore, at the time of the cholera: 'Bisogna sventrare Napoli'. The 'sventramento', that is, the clearance of the low districts of the city (Pendino, Porto and Mercato) to make room for a wide straight road connecting the railway station to the centre and the building of decent homes, began in 1889 and was completed in the early years of our century.
- 4 G. Verga, Opere, ed. L. Russo, Napoli, 1961, p. 943.
- 5 The text of the song was written by the optician Raffaele Sacco. Donizetti was in Naples at that time for the première of Lucia di Lammermoor (San Carlo, 26 September 1835). The attribution of the song to him is convincingly disputed by Marcello Sorce Keller in his article "Io te voglio bene assaie, celebre canzone napoletana tradizionalmente attribuita a Donizetti", Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana, no. 4, Oct./Dec. 1985. Di Giacomo devoted an article of his Napoli: figure e paesi (1909) to the story of this song.
- 6 In the chapter "Piedigrotta" of his Luci ed ombre napoletane (1914), Di Giacomo outlines the history of the popular festival

and mentions Ricci's opera as having been performed three hundred and sixty-four times. He defines the famous "Tarantella" as 'the most characteristic and original example of that kind of music' (Di Giacomo, II, p. 722). A description of the typical Piedigrotta instruments is included in the chapter.

- 7 Eduard Hanslick, "Italienische Opern von Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Cilea, Mugnone, Giordano", Fünf Jahre Musik (1891-95), Berlin, 1896.
- 8 M. Serao, Il ventre di Napoli, p. 69.
- 9 E. Hanslick, "A Santa Lucia", Fünf Jahre Musik (1891-95), Berlin, 1896.
- 10 M. Serao, Il ventre di Napoli, p. 99.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

The following is a list of libretti and vocal scores which were consulted and from which quotations and musical examples have been taken. Arrangement is alphabetical by composer.

L I B R E T T I

The name of the librettist is given in brackets after ^{that of} the composer: ;
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- GIORDANO, Umberto (N. Daspuro), Mala Vita, "Melodramma in tre atti", Milano, E. Sonzogno, 1892.
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