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Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Illustrated Fiction in Italy: Southernness and the Aesthetic of the Picturesque. The case of Giovanni Verga's "Vita dei Campi" (1897)

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by

Valerio Rossi

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Dedication

A mia madre, Cinzia

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Abstract

Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Illustrated Fiction in Italy: Southernness and the Aesthetic of the Picturesque. The case of Giovanni Verga's "Vita dei Campi" (1897)

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

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Abstract: This dissertation embarks on a compelling exploration of the intersection of text and image in the context of Verismo literature and the picturesque visual elements that accompanied these works. While prior scholarly investigations of Giovanni Verga, the Veristi, and their literary contributions have predominantly focused on textual analysis and thematic exploration, this study highlights the visual dimension that was integral to their works. During the late nineteenth century, an era marked by a proliferation of illustrated publications, these visual elements played a transformative role, captivating readers' imaginations and shaping their perceptions.

The primary objective of this research is to bridge the gap in our understanding of how illustrations influenced the reception and interpretation of Verismo literature. By shedding light on the tension between Veristi's commitment to providing a social commentary on reality and the picturesque aesthetic, this dissertation unveils new layers of meaning within these literary classics. It introduces a fresh perspective that reconsiders the interplay between text and image, emphasizing the dynamic relationships between the two.

The research takes readers on a journey through southern Italy as depicted by Giovanni Verga and the illustrators who brought his work to life. It delves into the complexities of the

picturesque aesthetic, demonstrating how it both harmonized with and diverged from the realities presented in the literature. The exploration of letters exchanged between the author, publishers, and illustrators provides invaluable insights into the creative processes behind these collaborations. Rather than viewing illustrations as mere adornments, the study presents them as influential companions to the written word, embodying an artistic tension that adds depth and complexity to the Verismo movement.

Among the various works discussed in this research, particular emphasis is placed on Verga's illustrated edition of "Vita dei Campi" (1897), chosen as an exemplary case study of the intricate interplay between text and image. Through this in-depth examination, this dissertation strives to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of illustrations in shaping the reception and interpretation of Verismo literature, providing fresh insights into the intersection of southernness and the aesthetic of the picturesque in Italian literary history.

Table of Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	10
<i>List of Figures</i>	11
INTRODUCTION	13
<i>Chapter I</i>	40
<i>Italian Publishing Industry: Rise and Use of Illustrations in the Late Nineteenth Century</i>	40
Letture Amene.....	47
Publishers.....	52
Audience and Affordability.....	61
The Use of Images, Format, and the Public.....	65
<i>Chapter II</i>	71
<i>Veristi and Figurative Arts between Truth and Fiction</i>	71
Veristi and Figurative Arts.....	72
Macchiaioli.....	73
Truth and reality: the Verism.....	83
Truth or imagination: the Scapigliati.....	87
Verga and the search for the real.....	91
<i>Chapter III</i>	121
<i>Writer, Publisher, Illustrator: The Illustrated Editions of Verga's Works</i>	121
Verga and the editors.....	124
The account books.....	126
The Novelle Rusticane.....	127
Verga and Montalti.....	129
Giulio Aristide Sartorio's Cover.....	135
Calandra's Drawings in Cavalleria Rusticana.....	137
Towards an Illustrated Edition of Vita dei Campi.....	144
Ferraguti in Sicily.....	149
The reintegration of Nedda.....	155
<i>Chapter IV</i>	163
<i>The illustrated edition of Vita dei campi (1897): narrative parallelism</i>	163
<i>between visual and written text</i>	163
Some background.....	163
The female figure.....	181
Illustration as syntagm.....	185

Visual text.....	193
Nedda.....	193
Fantasticheria.....	200
La Lupa.....	208
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>214</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>216</i>

List of Tables

TABLE 1 - SALARIES TABLE	62
TABLE 2 - BOOK COST TABLE	62

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 - ILLUSTRATION IN "CHIARIVARI," 1839	40
FIGURE 2 - LES VEILLÉES POPULAIRES	54
FIGURE 3 - L'EMPORIO PITTORESCO	57
FIGURE 4 - L'ILLUSTRAZIONE POPOLARE	60
FIGURE 5 - L'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA	60
FIGURE 6 - IL DOTTOR BASILIUS	66
FIGURE 7 - A. DUMAS, I QUARANTACINQUE, IL ROMANZIERE ILLUSTRATO	68
FIGURE 8 - GEORGE SAND	68
FIGURE 9 - COVER OF THE FIRST EDITION OF NOVELLE RUSTICANE (1883), ILLUSTRATED BY MONTALTI.	133
FIGURE 10 - ILLUSTRATION BY MONTALTI FOR LA ROBA (1883), P. 107.	134
FIGURE 11 - ILLUSTRATION BY MONTALTI FOR LIBERTÀ (1883), P. 231.	134
FIGURE 12 - COVER OF DRAMMI INTIMI (1884) ILLUSTRATED BY SARTORIO.	136
FIGURE 13 - COVER OF CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (1884), ILLUSTRATED BY CALANDRA.	137
FIGURE 14 - CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA FRONTISPICE (1884) ILLUSTRATED BY CALANDRA.	141
FIGURE 15 - CHARACTERS PRESENTATION PAGE IN CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (1884), ILLUSTRATED BY CALANDRA.	142
FIGURE 16 - CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA FINAL PAGE (1884), ILLUSTRATED BY CALANDRA.	143
FIGURE 17 - VERGA'S IL TRAMONTO DI VENERE IN NATALE E CAPO D'ANNO DELL'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA, 1892, ILLUSTRATED BY AMATO.	146
FIGURE 18 - IL TEATRO DELLA SCALA. IL BALLATOIO DEI MACCHINISTI FRA UN ATTO E L'ALTRO, BY FERRAGUTI, IN NATALE E CAPO D'ANNO DELL'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA, 1901-1902, P. 23.	148
FIGURE 19 - IL TEATRO DELLA SCALA. LO SPOGLIATOIO DELLE PICCOLE, BY FERRAGUTI, IN NATALE E CAPO D'ANNO DELL'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA, 1901-1902, P. 11.	148
FIGURE 20 - COVER OF VITA DEI CAMPI (1897), ILLUSTRATED BY FERRAGUTI.	149
FIGURE 21 - JELI THE HERDSMAN IN ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, SATURDAY 11 JUNE 1892, P. 9.	150
FIGURE 22 - ILLUSTRATION BY FERRAGUTI IN CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA, VITA DEI CAMPI (1897), P. 17 ("TURIDDU CERCAVA DI SALVARSI FACENDO SALTI DISPERATI ALL'INDIETRO...").	154
FIGURE 23 - ILLUSTRATION BY FERRAGUTI IN NEDDA, VITA DEI CAMPI (1897), P. 90 ("NEDDA, CHE AVEVA UDITO DA DIETRO IL MURICCIUOLO, SI FECE ROSSA, SEBBENE NESSUNO LA VEDESSE").	156
FIGURE 24 - A. FERRAGUTI, ALLA VANGA, 1890, OIL ON CANVAS, MUSEO DEL PAESAGGIO, VERBANIA	167
FIGURE 25 - LA LUPA	169
FIGURE 26 - CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (1)	169
FIGURE 27 - CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA (2)	169
FIGURE 28 - GUERRA DI SANTI	170
FIGURE 29 - NEDDA	170
FIGURE 30 - PALIZZI, DONNE CHE LAVANO PRESSO IL FIUME SARNO	171
FIGURE 31 - PALIZZI, STRADA DI PAESE CON RUDERI	172
FIGURE 32 - ROSSO MALPELO	172
FIGURE 33 - MASTHEAD OF LA LUPA	174
FIGURE 34 - JELI AND MARA	174
FIGURE 35 - MARICCHIA	174
FIGURE 36 - GRAMIGNA	174
FIGURE 37 - FERRAGUTI, LE TRE GRAZIE	176
FIGURE 38 - MICHETTI, LA DOMENICA DELLE PALME	176
FIGURE 39 - MARA DANCING AND SINGING	177
FIGURE 40 - PENTOLACCIA	177
FIGURE 41 - PALERMO, RICAMATRICI NEL RIONE DELLA KALSA, 1880. REPRODUCED WITH THE TITLE NELLE ZOLFATARE DI SICILIA - TIPI DI DONNE DI LERCARA IN L'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA, 21, N. 43, OCT 28 1894.	179
FIGURE 42 - JELI "MARA GIRAVA IN TONDO..."	179

FIGURE 43 - UN'ALTRA GIORNATA ANDATA A MALE	181
FIGURE 44 - VADO CON DIO E CON MARIA	182
FIGURE 45 - GIOLI, GIOVENTÙ	182
FIGURE 46 - FANTASTICHERIA	183
FIGURE 47 - IL TRAMWAY ELETTRICO	183
FIGURE 48 - I MAGAZZINI MELE (1)	184
FIGURE 49 - I MAGAZZINI MELE (2)	184
FIGURE 50 - JELI AND TWO HORSES	186
FIGURE 51 - JELI (CONCLUSION)	186
FIGURE 52 - MARA E JELI	186
FIGURE 53 - LA LUPA (INTRO)	188
FIGURE 54 - TURIDDU E LOLA	190
FIGURE 55 - PENTOLACCIA (2)	190
FIGURE 56 - PENTOLACCIA (1)	190
FIGURE 57 - FANTASTICHERIA, AL TIMONE	191
FIGURE 58 - JANU LA TRATTENNE PER LE VESTI...	196
FIGURE 59 - SEDETTERO AL REZZO...	197
FIGURE 60 - LA DONNA SOLA	204
FIGURE 61 - ACITREZZA	205
FIGURE 62 - ERAVATE ALLA STAZIONE	206
FIGURE 63 - L'ALBA CI SORPRESE	207
FIGURE 64 - SCCELLERATA!	210
FIGURE 65 - EI COME LA SCORSE	210

INTRODUCTION

La gloria di Verga è senza popolarità [...]. In Cavalleria Rusticana si bearono del pittoresco. C'era un po' di Sicilia barbara, folk-lore, usi e costumi, fichi d'India e coltelli. Il gusto viziato di quegli anni potè sorvolare sulle passioni, così sinteticamente esplorate da poter sembrare elementi decorativi, e compiacersi dello spettacolo, come se anche quelle pagine e quelle scene appartenessero alla bella flora paesana di cui i frutti più cospicui furono forse il San Francisco di Di Giacomo e la Figlia di Iorio.¹

In 1924, the Sicilian writer Giuseppe Antonio Borgese offers, in *Tempo di edificare*, a description of the very complex stratification of the success that Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) had received over the years. Borgese makes a distinction between a popular fruition of Verghian works and an intellectual critical tradition. He states:

Ma è poi Verga veramente un artista pittoresco? Che i suoi grandi romanzi e le piccole novelle sian lodate per questo, che Cavalleria Rusticana, sull'ali del canto, abbia fatto il giro del mondo esponendo al continente e agli stranieri i truci splendori dell'isola focosa e sanguinaria, poco male. È anzi bene che l'oscuro bisogno di ammirare si foggia qualche pretesto, e che chi non ha cuore per la passione della Carmen si compiaccia dei costumi spagnoli, chi non sente il grande gusti l'interessante. Ma Verga, nemmeno in Cavalleria Rusticana, mira all'interessante e al pittoresco; e le peculiarità della Sicilia non lo divertirono, come quelle del Veneto divertirono Fogazzaro. Niente sarebbe più erroneo che considerarlo come uno spirito folkloristico e appaiarlo, che so io, al Pitrè; niente è più frettoloso che far dipendere la maturità della sua arte dalla scelta dell'argomento indigeno.²

Borgese's words are significant in demonstrating the elements that the national imaginary had selected to build the image of Sicily and the South, and how it interpreted Verga's texts. Verga had represented an authoritative and important voice, but also a "manipulated" witness. His works have been often read as the confirmation of a predominantly picturesque and folkloristic characterization of the southern regions of the country. This "manipulation" has been facilitated by the addition of a wide repertoire of illustrations, that accompany most of his

¹ G. A. Borgese, *Tempo di edificare*, Treves, Milano, 1924, p.11.

² *Ivi*, p.6.

publications. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked, indeed, a period of profound transformation. During this era, the literary movement of Verismo sought to depict the raw, unvarnished reality of life in Italy's southern regions and Sicily, specifically. Yet, at the same time, a seemingly contradictory aesthetic was still present—the picturesque. This picturesque aesthetic, celebrated for its romanticized portrayal of Italy's landscapes and people, often manifested prominently in the illustrations. Thus, the clash between the Verismo movement's commitment to realism and the allure of the picturesque aesthetic, as conveyed through illustrations, emerged as a compelling and richly layered subject of study.

This dissertation embarks on an exploration of this intriguing intersection. By delving into the dynamic interplay between Verismo literature, particularly the works of Verga, and the picturesque visual elements that accompanied these texts, this research has as its objective to illuminate this dimension of Italian literary history.

Scholarly examinations of Verga, the Veristi, and their literary contributions have primarily focused on textual analysis and thematic exploration. While these are undoubtedly essential ways of understanding their works, one crucial aspect has often been marginalized—the visual dimension. In the late nineteenth century, a period witnessing a remarkable surge in illustrated publications, the presence of illustrations in literary works was pervasive and transformative. These visual elements served as gateways to the readers' imagination, shaping their perceptions and their engagement with the text.

The purpose of this research lies in its aspiration to fill the gap in our understanding of how these illustrations influenced the reception and interpretation of Verismo literature. By shedding light on the tension between the Veristi's commitment to providing a social commentary of reality and the picturesque aesthetic, this dissertation endeavors to reveal new

layers of meaning in these literary classics. It offers a perspective that reconsiders the interplay between text and image in these seminal works.

This research will traverse southern Italy through the eyes of Verga and illustrators and will navigate the intricacies of the picturesque aesthetic, showing how it both harmonized and clashed with the realities depicted in the literature. By examining the letters exchanged between the author, publishers, and illustrators, we gain insight into the creative processes that gave birth to these collaborations. The illustrations will be analyzed not as mere adornments but as influential companions to the written word, which embody an artistic tension that adds depth and complexity to the Verismo movement. Among the several works that will be discussed in this research, a particular focus will be given to Verga's illustrated edition of his *Vita dei campi* (1897) as an exemplary case of this intersection.

One of the main theoretical frameworks of this research is the concept of Orientalism, as expressed by Edward Said starting in 1978, which offers an opportunity to reflect on the representation of otherness within the context of geographical and political domination. In this discourse, texts play a crucial role as vehicles for constructing the public perception of a given place's geographical and cultural identity. Specifically, within the Italian context, Said's reflection can be applied to the notion of the South. Much like the East, the South underwent a process of representation by the North, making it an object of study and portrayal. This phenomenon became particularly pronounced in the late nineteenth century when Italian unification was achieved, and illustrations started to have a pivotal role within the publishing industry. Italian writers, together with illustrators and publishers, developed their specific poetics and engaged in aesthetic debates and antagonisms that revolved around diverse representations of the South. These debates were intricately tied to the struggle for political

hegemony in the country. Central to this process of orientalizing of Southern Italy were the aesthetic categories of the picturesque and anti-picturesque, engaged in a constant dialectical relationship that often became so deeply hybridized that isolating the most relevant traits became a challenging task.

The debate on Italian Orientalism is closely linked to the nation-building phase of the country, especially concerning the gradual loss of specific historical and geographical connotations in the Southern regions. These regions, over time, transformed into the "Orientalized" region known as *Mezzogiorno* (literally noon, midday; the South) in the collective European imagination. Scholars have engaged with Said's Orientalism in this context, with works like *Italy's Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country* (edited by Schneider in 1998), *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Midday* (Dickie 1999), and *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Moe 2002). These works have thoroughly analyzed and described the orientalizing of Southern Italy through various categories, highlighting the fundamental role played by literature in defining the South, and they represent pivotal works around which this dissertation has developed.

The works of Giovanni Verga, in particular, provide a crucial key to understanding this process, where the equilibrium between the picturesque and anti-picturesque reflects the tendencies and contradictions of an era in which the geographical awareness of the South and Sicily was intricately linked to the political process of conquest and unification.

To initiate an analysis of the recent debate on the role of literature in constructing a significant part of the identity of the Italian *Mezzogiorno*, it is necessary to start with Edward Said. He as a keen observer of the geocultural relationships between the West and the East, and is renowned for his study of how the European gaze constructed the idea of the Orient, structuring

it as a binary and dialectical relationship characterized by hierarchy.

In *Orientalism*,³ Said defines and elucidates the concept of Orientalism, tracing its historical-cultural, artistic, and literary profiles. He systematically explores the processes involved in constructing identities in the relations between the West, specifically England and France, and the East. He pays particular attention to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries within the broader European imperialist context. Said's analysis allows us to interpret the relationships between geographical cultural imaginaries and embark on an analysis focused on the discursive, textual, visual, and rhetorical dimensions through which the identity of communities, nations, and people is built.⁴

As Nelson Moe emphasizes in *The View from Vesuvius*, when addressing the Italian processes of orientalization of the South, one must understand "how and when southern Italy became 'the south'."⁵ To answer such a question, Said's work becomes indispensable, as it offers different and potential applications of the paradigm of Orientalism. Moe asserts that Orientalism is a study of how "one part of the world imagined another in the process of dominating it."⁶ At the core of Said's conception of Orientalism lies the idea that human communities construct and re-elaborate forms and modes of their own geographical identities over time, primarily through rhetorical and narrative processes. Said contends that categories like East and West are not natural entities but rather "geographical and cultural entities, locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made."⁷ The strength of these representations lies in the relations

³ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, Random House, New York-Toronto, 1979.

⁴ Cfr. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso ed., London, 1983.

⁵ N. Moe, *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, University of California Press, 2002, p. 5.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Said, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

between them, characterized by contrasts and interdependencies centered on the concept of otherness and various dynamics of power and domination. Ultimately, Orientalism, as defined by Said, appears as a real "system of representations,"⁸ a collection of interests interwoven with geographical imaginaries that are tied to the social and cultural perceptions of communities and collective actors:

It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape, and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains.⁶

Said interprets the modalities of representing otherness as one of the primary tools for constructing collective identities and, simultaneously, as one of the most powerful instruments of domination. It involves a hierarchical relationship conveyed through a series of degrading features attributed to the East. This is made possible because Orientalism, according to Said, is fundamentally based on a genuine "textual and schematic attitude."⁹ It constitutes a universe that does not allow any replication of the represented object, with its sole audience being the urban Western reader.

Therefore, Orientalism is seen as a collection of texts (in the broadest sense), capable of constructing a domesticated and captivating representation of Eastern otherness. It involves a

⁸ *Ivi.* pp. 202-203.

⁹ *Ivi.* p. 12.

codification of 'typical' Oriental characters that ultimately forms a significant narrative tradition, a repository of representations serving to reinforce the hegemonic position of the writer while shaping the perception that Orientals have of themselves. From this perspective, an extensive range of contradictory clichés about Orientals is analyzed and categorized: irreducible otherness, passivity, and laziness, an inability to self-govern, gendered and feminized sensuality, exoticism, proximity to nature, folklore, and popular traditions, primitiveness, instinct, a tendency to violence and betrayal, despotism, and fatalism.

In Said's analysis, literary and para literary texts (including novels, short stories, travel diaries, tourist guides, poetic texts, memoirs, and autobiographies) played a significant role in the Orientalization process of the East. In Said's conceptual framework, literature occupies an absolutely crucial position. On one hand, it serves as one of the most powerful channels through which orientalizing textual discourse can be constructed. On the other hand, it provides the categories for analyzing Orientalist discourse to the extent that the entirety of Orientalism can be viewed as an immense theatrical performance. Said writes, "the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined,"¹⁰ and he further states:

Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet, or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. [...] The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation. [...]. My analysis of the Orientalist text, therefore, places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations as representations, not as "natural" depictions of the Orient.¹¹

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 63.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 65.

A few elements of this last statement become key points of this research. The ‘exteriority’ is what illustrations are based upon, deviating somehow the text from its rhetorical and allegorical dimension to the representation itself, to the ‘image’. If a written text gives space for our own imagination, providing us only with some ‘clues’ that we can combine into an image or a scenery, illustrations offer a pre-made construction, which does not allow any further elaboration. Through these visual components, the orientalized depiction of the south is even more reinforced and remains impressed in the reader/viewer’s memory even more easily. Another question that this last statement raises is whether there is indeed the possibility of a "real" reproduction of reality, an aspect that Said seems to presuppose in his work. However, even though the description of the East certainly involves appropriation by the West, which takes possession of it through its representations, it is impossible to imagine a naturalistic description that is entirely truthful to reality. This is because descriptions, narratives, or representations are all shaped by human subjectivity, and they cannot escape the perspective of the authors that represents their reality. We will see later, in chapter two specifically, how the objective of representing the “truth” becomes a problematic issue that is addressed and perceived differently by the various characters involved in the circulation of illustrated media, publishers, illustrators, writers, and audience.

In regard to the Italian context, it is essential to review some of the main contributions on the subject. *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country*,¹² edited by Jane Schneider in 1998, is a collective volume that resulted from a multidisciplinary approach involving literary critics, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists, and criminologists. It is credited with presenting the Southern Question within a new framework,

¹² J. Schneider, *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in one country*, Berg, Oxford/New York, 1998.

opening up numerous avenues for scientific research on the South. The emerging idea is that it is possible to use an Orientalist approach to interpret the Southern Question, seeking insight within the dynamics of the Risorgimento, public rhetoric, and collective representations of geocultural relations between the North and South. This orientalizing approach gradually gave rise to a totalizing and performative discourse on the South.

The representative scheme of the South mirrors that of the East and is understood as a discursive construction by central-northern Italy. The relationships created between the European, bourgeois, capitalist, and modern ethnocentric gaze (primarily the Grand Tour travelers, subsequently adopted by the Risorgimento elites, and eventually nationalized into middle-class public opinion) and the South of Italy relegate the latter to the role of a second term of comparison, marked by radical and irreducible difference. The outcome of this process is a moral geography, a "representation of the South as truly other,"¹³ characterized by ambivalent and incoherent distinctive features, including social, political, economic, and cultural backwardness; the beauty of the landscape; the legacy of ancient civilizations and a great artistic heritage from the past, evidenced by ruins and monuments; behavioral tendencies like violence, jealousy, revenge, betrayal, laziness, and passivity; the survival of popular rituals and folkloristic customs; superficial and undifferentiated homogeneity between regions, customs, languages, physiognomic traits, and ways of life; constant comparisons to Africa or the East.

In 1999, one year after *Italy's 'Southern Question'*, John Dickie published one of the most significant contributions on the rhetorical and discursive constructions of the Italian South, a volume titled *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900*.¹⁴ As

¹³ Ivi, p. 10.

¹⁴ J. Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno 1860-1900*, MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1999.

suggested in the title, Dickie's analysis centers on the stereotyped representations of Southern Italy and highlights the international nature of these processes concerning nation-building dynamics:

The South as a place of illiteracy, superstition, and magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously, alluringly African or Oriental. The South as the theater of sweet idleness (dolce far niente) and of the “crime of honour”; of tragic courage and farcical cowardice; of abjection and arrogance; of indolence and frenzy. Southerners as friendly people in whom lie dormant the seeds of mafiosità and atavistic violence; a “woman people” who practice an “Arabic” oppression of woman; a pathologically individualistic people [...] ungovernable and slavish. The South as a society verging on anomie that is resilient in its feudalism or clientelism; a society shot through with residues of a precapitalist past that is also the site of hopes for a national resurrection [...]. Italy's greatest problem [...]. Representations of the South from the centers of political and cultural power in Liberal Italy were informed by a repertoire of stock images and criteria akin to those I have just listed. The common element in those stereotypes was the situating of the South as Other to Italy and to totemic values considered all but synonymous with the Italian nation.¹⁵

Dickie recognizes the binary narrative matrix that has represented the Italian *Mezzogiorno* over centuries, transforming it into a tradition of rhetorical themes, figures, and characters. This textual dimension is embedded within regional collective identities, in a national and European

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 1.

perspective that reaffirms the southern regions of Italy have served as the ambiguous and contradictory embodiment of otherness, a generic and undifferentiated geocultural South.

Dickie attempts to delve into the rhetorical and stereotyped constructions, for which Franchetti was one of the primary authors. Through the analysis of Franchetti's *Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia*,¹⁶ Dickie identifies some rhetorical and narrative structures that Franchetti presents to the Italian middle class of that era, anchoring the South to a static and immutable position of marginal otherness. In fact, Dickie claims that Franchetti's Sicily mirrors the ideal of Italian-ness underlying the investigation itself: "What we find is that Franchetti understands Sicily as an inverted mirror image of the model of liberal, paternalistic capitalism that provides both his social ideal and his analytical protocols."¹⁷ This analysis demonstrates a strong connection between the knowledge (anything but scientific or impartial) of Southern Italy, here understood as making it intelligible to the country, and the need to govern it in the light of the new national dimension of southern problems.

Dickie identifies a similar process in the political and cultural contributions of the publisher Treves and his *Illustrazione Italiana*, within the construction of a national geographical consciousness, in which the category of picturesque plays a fundamental role in the representation of the South.

The aesthetic of picturesque is an easily accessible pattern for conceptualizing and representing Southern Italy because of its intrinsic characteristics. The picturesque allows for the artistic appreciation of a simple or complex element (landscape or population) through its aesthetic enjoyment, involving a distance between the observer and the object and an explicit artistic frame. This aesthetic belongs to bourgeois artistic sensibility, facilitating a process of simplification that

¹⁶ L. Franchetti, *Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia*, Donzelli editore, Roma, 2011.

¹⁷ Dickie, op. cit., p. 65.

reduces complex cultural aspects into symbolic elements often characterized by folkloristic connotations. It is, therefore, a bourgeois aesthetic aiming at making familiar and understandable what might appear different and hostile.

Thus, the South exists in the collective and narrative imagery of the North in a form of dualism, oscillating between legendary, heavenly, and idyllic places (in reference to landscapes) and a hostile land inhabited by devils and wild population. In this regard, it is significant to quote Franco Cassano's *Il pensiero meridiano*,¹⁸ which, referring to the reason for the emergence of the "pensiero meridiano," notes that:

*[...] restituire al sud l'antica dignità di soggetto del pensiero, interrompendo una lunga sequenza in cui esso è stato pensato da altri. [...] ha il dovere di vedere e combattere [...] la devastante vendita all'incanto che gli stessi meridionali hanno organizzato delle proprie terre. [...] Due facce dominanti del sud: paradiso turistico e incubo mafioso.*¹⁹

However, it is interesting to observe how, continuing in the same work, Cassano reveals the dependence of the attitudes, characters, customs, and thoughts of the populations on the geographical configuration of the place where they live. With reference to Greece, he states, "[...] omologia strutturale tra la configurazione geografica della Grecia (ed in particolare il rapporto tra terra e mare) e la sua cultura."²⁰ He continues: "[...] i cui abitanti hanno dentro di sé il mare, sono agitati dall'inquietudine di chi sa che non esiste solo un orizzonte."²¹ Therefore, Cassano appears to offer an environmental justification for human behaviors, narrowing the scope of his

¹⁸ F. Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. VIII.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 21.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 24.

arguments in favor of the South, for which the southern socio-cultural features have a historical origin given by continuous dominations and marginalization. He claims:

[...] rompere con una lunga abitudine alla passività, a dimostrare che essa non è un dato ontologico e immutabile del sud, ma deriva dalla subordinazione, dall'interiorizzazione di un sentimento di marginalità, dall'assuefazione alla mancanza di autonomia e alla dipendenza da altri [...]. Gran parte dei cosiddetti "vizi" meridionali, non sono, come fa comodo credere, una prerogativa del sud, ma l'effetto di una lunga emarginazione dalla grande storia [...].²²

Nonetheless, it is fundamental to underline that, also in Cassano's analysis, a Saidian approach to the South is clearly evident, which appears to be the object of history and representation by a dominant North.

In 2002, Nelson Moe published a monograph on the processes of orientalization of the Italian *Mezzogiorno: The View from Vesuvius. Italian Culture and the Southern Question*. Trying to reason about the multiple and varied representations of Italy that in the XVIII and XIX centuries were conceptualized and written down by foreign travelers (predominantly writers and intellectuals), the American critic immediately identified a common distinctive trait in the coexistence of two different and (apparently) antithetical perspectives, two narrative approaches that see Italy at the same time as a fascinating nest of peace and beauty and a disgusting receptacle of dirt and bestiality. Moe defines this oscillation as the distinctive feature of the discourse on Italy, that gradually abandoned the national dimension, becoming, in the collective perception, the

²² *Ivi*, pp. X-XI.

typical characterization of the South. He identifies the signs of this opaque dynamic of restoring the geographical imaginary in the works of Montesquieu, de Bonstetten, and Winkelmann, in the texts of Goethe, Dickens, Stendhal, De Sade, Riedesel, and Brydone, in the novels of Madame de Staël and Anna Jameson, in interventions by intellectuals such as Dupaty and Renan, in the letters of some Napoleonic administrators. It traces the consequences in the positions taken by Italians like Genovesi, Cuoco, Casanova, Gioia, Cavour, and Leopardi. The result seems to be the definition of a space in the Italian cultural geography that connoted Italy as otherness and diversity, between the exaltation of the ancient and the denunciation of the present, the appreciation for nature and horror for society. Moe writes, “Italy’s very lack of civilization and Mediterranean climate could delight, entertain, regenerate. From the perspective of the bourgeois subject’s needs and desires for recreation and restoration, Italy’s perceived lack of contemporary civilization was appreciated and celebrated as picturesque.”²³

Precisely the reflections and analysis on how this complex and contradictory discourse on Italy, on its otherness, and on its supposed belonging to a generic, superficial, and stereotyped south have been introjected and re-functioned by the ruling classes of central-northern Italy during the Risorgimento process marks a further step forward in this debate. It is significant to mention some statements made by some of the most prominent figures on the political scene of the time in order to understand the perception that the ruling class had of the South and the Southerners: Nino Bixio (“*che Nigra non scordi che i napoletani sono degli orientali, non capiscono altro che la forza*”²⁴), Luigi Carlo Farini (“*che paesi sono mai questi, il Molise e Terra di Lavoro! Che barbarie! Altro che Italia! Questa è Africa: i beduini, a riscontro di questi caffoni, sono fior di*

²³ Moe, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

²⁴ C. Cavour, *Carteggi di Camillo Cavour. La liberazione del Mezzogiorno e la formazione del Regno d'Italia*, 5 voll., Zanichelli, Bologna, 1949-1954, vol. IV, p. 301 (Nino Bixio was one of the most prominent Italian general, patriot and politician who actively took part of the unification process).

virtù civile”²⁵), and Paolo Solaroli (“*la popolazione è la più brutta ch'io abbia veduto in Europa [...], mollezza, vizio, sudiciume [...]. Sembra impossibile che in luogo ove la natura fece tanto per il terreno, non abbia generato un altro Popolo*”²⁶). These names belong to the same political and cultural actors that in April 1861 will animate the first parliamentary debate on the South.²⁷

It is from the mix of stereotypes about the South that Moe starts to shed light on the two different aesthetics that, in his opinion, will oppose the hegemony over the representations of the South in the seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century, marking the collective perception in the coming decades of the geographical and cultural identities of the whole of southern Italy: the picturesque of the *Illustrazione Italiana* and the anti-picturesque of the Southern discourse. Moe writes:

Readers of Illustrazione thus delighted in Naples, and in the south more generally, a traditional, picturesque world on the brink of destruction. They could take a last look at a world that, from the safe distance of the center-north, appeared in all its picturesque charm. [...]. The south of Illustrazione was, in sum, less significant for its participation in modernity than for its separateness from it. If one looked to the south not as a resource for aesthetic delectation, however, but as a part of the nation-building process, and considered its distance from the more advanced and European center-north from a more political point of view, then one's perspective on southern difference could change dramatically. Instead of nostalgia for a traditional world that was passing away, one might feel frustration for a feudal world that resisted change. Outrage could take the place of delight, fear, and

²⁵ *Ivi*, vol. III, p. 208 (Carlo Luigi Farini was Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy from 1862 to 1863)

²⁶ *Ivi*, vol. V, pp. 231-232 (Paolo Solaroli, prominent military figure).

²⁷ Cfr. Moe, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-177.

*consternation the place of pleasant emotions. Instead of issuing a call to save that world, one might aim to destroy it.*²⁸

However, Moe points out that even the anti-picturesque aesthetics of the Southern discourse was fed by the processes of orientalization and stereotypes, re-proposing, in fact, visions and representations that marginalized the South of Italy to make it sometimes more immutable than its comfortable picturesque version. The crude Verghian representations of the misery and harshness of Sicilian life, for example, feed a process of orientalization of Sicily, which becomes something other than the North, the home of the bourgeois public.

Moe, with regard to the central role that literature has had within this cultural horizon, defines the characteristics of a certain literary production - specifically the Verghian one – as "geographical poetics":

*On the one hand, I read Verga's working relation to certain publishing and reading trends in the north at this time and, more specifically, in relation to the modes of representing the south. [...]. Verga's work articulates what I call a geographical poetics and brings into sharp relief something we have seen repeatedly over the course of this study: namely, that texts "make" the south, elaborate a vision of a particular physical and human territory. At the same time, Verga shows that geography affects representation and that the Mezzogiorno makes special claims on the Italian and European imagination.*²⁹

Therefore, with regard to the literary production of Giovanni Verga, it is possible to

²⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 222-223.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 218.

observe his role in the consolidation of a national geographical conscience of Sicily. Indeed, he is at the center of many of the cultural, political, editorial, and literary trends referred to the debate on Orientalism in one country. Interacting with the publishers, magazines, and intellectuals who were the protagonists of that process of discursive construction of the geographical identities of Southern Italy, Verga intercepts and reformulates almost all the aesthetic and geocultural themes connected with the representation of the South, marking the collective perception of the Sicilian identity in a profound and lasting way. Although subject to significant poetic oscillations, Verga's work produces a substantial reservoir of images and narratives on the landscape, economy, folklore, religiosity, passions, myths, and sufferings of a mostly rural Sicily, and it becomes one of the bases on which the national knowledge of the southern regions of Italy was based.

The dialectic between the picturesque and anti-picturesque is fundamental for reading and interpreting Verghian production, as his works sometimes prioritize the representation of an immutable, mythical, passionate, beautiful, and folkloristic Sicily, while at other times, they emphasize economic and social depression, poverty, or the extreme climate. Moreover, by interpreting his texts, it is of most significance to analyze the intertextual relationships that exist between the written content and images. In fact, we should consider Verga's publications in their materiality, as they were offered to the public. As we will see later in detail, a large portion of Verga's works was published with illustrations, mostly through the different periodicals, but in more prestigious volumes as well. What struck the most about these works is the consistency of conservative images, which tends to reinforce and re-propose stereotypical and picturesque figures and views that do not often follow the development of the stories.

The collection of novels *Vita dei campi*³⁰ was published in a volume in 1880 by the

³⁰ G. Verga, *Vita dei Campi*, Fratelli Treves Editori, Milano, 1881.

Milanese publisher Treves and, since the first edition, it collected the Sicilian-themed production that the writer had published in various magazines between 1878 and 1880. The second illustrated edition was published later in 1897 in collaboration with the illustrator Arnaldo Ferraguti. Six years had passed between the publication of *Nedda* and the edition of *Vita dei campi*. Between 1874 and 1880, Verga underwent a process of global rethinking of his profession as a writer and his personal, cultural, and literary development. This process led the Catanese writer to increasingly align with Treves, who had already published his first novels. Treves began to appear as a central figure in the narration of the southern regions, intended almost exclusively for the consumption of the central-northern bourgeoisie of the country. Treves' commercial-driven aims had a massive impact on the authors' choices. Indeed, as we will see later, even when in the illustrated editions the images seem to disagree with Verga's narration, the author has never or very rarely complained about it, showing how the commercial reason of the literary production had a fundamental influence on his work.

It was precisely the incredible success that the sketch *Nedda* achieved that led Verga to revisit some ideas regarding the material he narrated and the relationships it had with the broader national context in which he had been living and working for some years. Indeed, it was from his geographical location in Milan that Verga began to perceive the great potential that the remote conceptualization of Sicily could offer to a southern writer aiming to enter the world of national literature. In one of his letters to Capuana, Verga stated:

[...] avrei desiderato andarmi a rintanare in campagna, sulla riva del mare, fra quei pescatori e coglierli vivi come Dio li ha fatti. Ma forse non sarà male dall'altro canto che io li consideri da una certa distanza in mezzo all'attività di una città come Milano o

*Firenze. Non ti pare che per noi l'aspetto di certe cose non abbia risalto che visto sotto un dato angolo visuale? e che mai riusciremo ad essere tanto schiettamente ed efficacemente veri che allorquando facciamo un lavoro di ricostruzione intellettuale e sostituiamo la nostra mente ai nostri occhi?*³¹

Therefore, it was precisely because of his geographical, anthropological, political, and cultural distance that the realist narrative of Giovanni Verga originated. It is framed and perceived through the lens of a *cannocchiale*. The concept of *vero* assumes subjective connotations, as we will see in the chapter about figurative arts, and does not aim to *document* the reality, but to *represent* it. This aspect raises interesting questions regarding the typology of representations of Sicily that the writer suddenly found himself motivated to produce. From the simple sketch of *Nedda* to *Vita dei campi*, one can observe the development of what resembles a "*omogeneo contesto fantastico, che è da tutti comprensibile nella misura in cui non esiste fuori dalle invenzioni narrative,*"³² a discursive universe revolving around "*personaggi popolari che vengono da [...] una periferia che è un'isola, con una sua identità separata e segreta, anteriore a qualsiasi collegamento, a qualsiasi esperienza di viaggio e ritorno,*"³³ giving life to the myth of Sicily.

The aspect of *Nedda* that interested Emilio Treves the most is the aesthetic of the picturesque, perfectly expressed by the preamble-frame:

Il focolare domestico era sempre ai miei occhi una figura retorica, buona per incorniciarvi

³¹ G. Verga, *Lettera a Luigi Capuana*, 14 marzo 1879, in G. Raya, *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, Roma, 1984.

³² N. Merola, introduction to G. Verga, *Le novelle*, Garzanti, Milano, 1980, p.XXXVII

³³ S. Campailla, introduction to G. Verga, *La lupa e le altre novelle di sesso e di sangue*, Newton & Compton, Roma 1996, p. 7.

*gli affetti più miti e sereni, come il raggio di luna per baciare le chiome bionde; [...] E in una di coteste peregrinazioni vagabonde dello spirito, la fiamma che scoppiettava, troppo vicina forse, mi fece rivedere un'altra fiamma gigantesca che avevo visto ardere nell'immenso focolare della fattoria del Pino, alle falde dell'Etna.*³⁴

The novellas of *Vita dei campi* present a very picturesque image of Sicily, mostly a memorial representation of events from the mythical and premodern world. In his writing, the primitive characters are under the influence of uncontrollable passions and interact with an exotic nature. However, Verga compensates for this with a massive presence of anti-picturesque elements. As analyzed later in chapter four, *Nedda* portrays the immense struggles of a poor and desperate girl, and the text, although it indulges sometimes in some descriptions influenced by romanticism, creates a vivid representation of this. What becomes even more significant is the visual component that accompanies this text in its 1897 edition (which are mostly the same ones published earlier in the different issues of *Illustrazione Italiana*). Here, indeed, the equilibrium between picturesque and anti-picturesque is distorted in favor of the first. This distortion comes often to an extreme, by subverting the descriptions of the characters and by creating its own narration (even the chronological order of the events is sometimes twisted). This confirms a mixture and alternation of the two trends which is accentuated in the illustrated editions. Publications and illustrations lend it a predominantly naturalistic or folkloristic character,³⁵ focusing on the backwardness and primitiveness of the population, which, by contrast, highlights the modernity of the North, the homeland of their readers.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the literature on illustrated Italian publications is scarce and

³⁴ G. Verga, *Nedda*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 2011, p. 4.

³⁵ Moe, op. cit., p. 291.

often lacunose. The aforementioned scholars only touch upon the topic without offering a detailed analysis. A significant contribution is, instead, offered by the Gino Raya's volume *Verga e i Treves*,³⁶ a collection of the entire correspondence between Giovanni Verga e the Treves' family (which also includes Arnaldo Ferraguti, the illustrator of his book, married to Olga Treves). Chapter three and four of this dissertation are, indeed, mostly based on these letters, allowing us to define and observe the relationship that Verga built with his publisher, the illustrator, and have a first-hand look at the ideas, comments, and responses related to the illustrations.

Another fundamental theoretical framework for this research is provided by Paola Pallottino's *Storia dell'illustrazione italiana*,³⁷ which traces the historical evolution of the use and role of illustrations in the Italian context. Particularly relevant for the purpose of this work is the second part of the volume. Pallottino presents the most prominent aspects and factors involved in the rise of illustrations during the nineteenth century in Italy. Moreover, in chapter seven, she provides a detailed analysis of the illustrated editions of the *Promessi sposi* and the role and participation of the author, Alessandro Manzoni, in the production of these publications. The structure of this section has inspired the organization of this dissertation, which has been divided into four chapters:

- Chapter one describes the significance of illustrations in the late nineteenth century Italian publishing industry. This was a time of profound transformation, both socially and culturally. It marked a period of great change, where the nation was undergoing a transition from fragmented city-states to a unified kingdom. This era witnessed not only political

³⁶ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, Herder, Roma, 1986.

³⁷ P. Pallottino, *Storia dell'illustrazione italiana. Cinque secoli di immagini riprodotte*, La casa Usher, Firenze-Lucca, 2020.

upheaval but also a flourishing of artistic and literary endeavors, as Italy sought to reclaim its cultural heritage and assert its place on the global stage. Within this dynamic context, the publishing industry emerged as a powerful force for the dissemination of ideas, stories, and knowledge.

This chapter delves into the heart of the late nineteenth-century Italian publishing landscape, shedding light on its multifaceted facets and exploring the intricate relationship between illustrations and literary works. To understand the role that illustrations played during this period, it is essential to grasp the broader context in which they existed. As the nation moved towards unification, a fervent desire to celebrate the Italian cultural heritage emerged. It was in this atmosphere that the publishing industry thrived. Publishers, writers, and artists collaborated to produce works that not only reflected the political and social changes of the time but also paid homage to Italy's illustrious artistic past.

One of the most striking features of late nineteenth-century Italian publishing was the prominent role played by illustrations. Illustrated books, magazines, and newspapers were not merely a means of enhancing the visual appeal of literary works; they were integral to the reading experience itself. The rich illustrations that adorned these publications served as more than just decorative elements; they were windows into the content, offering readers a visual narrative that complemented and enriched the text.

The significance of illustrations in this period extended beyond aesthetics. They were tools for conveying complex ideas, cultural commentary, and even political messages. Artists and illustrators used their talents to express the essence of the written word, capturing the nuances of characters, settings, and emotions in a way that sometimes took its own path, creating double or multiple narratives within the same work. These

illustrations served as a bridge between the literary and visual arts, forging a powerful connection between storytelling and image-making.

This chapter seeks to unravel the intricate web of influences that shaped the late nineteenth-century Italian publishing industry. Specifically, it takes a closer look at some of the main Italian publishers who played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of the time. Publishers such as Barbera, Sonzogno, and Treves not only facilitated the dissemination of literary works but also actively contributed to the development of a distinct Italian publishing style.

The chapter also delves into the influence of the British and French publishing industries on their Italian counterparts. The exchange of ideas, content, styles, and formats between these nations had a profound impact on Italian publishing. British and French literature and publishing practices found their way into the Italian market, enriching it with new genres, storytelling techniques, and design. The chapter pays specific attention to the circulation of different illustrated media, such as newspapers, periodicals, and books. It explores how they catered to diverse audiences and how they shaped reading habits and preferences. The emergence of illustrated periodicals, for instance, democratized access to art and literature, making them more accessible to a broader spectrum of society. Moreover, by exploring the reception and impact of these illustrated publications, we can understand the ways in which they resonated with readers and contributed to the cultural dialogue of the era.

- Chapter two holds a pivotal place in this research as it offers a unique exploration of the intricate relationship between Giovanni Verga and the world of figurative art, particularly during a time when Italy was teeming with artistic movements seeking to redefine their

approaches to truth and representation. It also delves into the role of illustrators who, much like their literary counterparts, were actively engaged in these artistic movements. By unraveling this connection between Verga and the figurative arts, the intention is to illuminate a lesser-known aspect of his creative world. Moreover, understanding how the concept of "truth" was interpreted during this period is essential in shedding light on the intent behind his texts and the illustrations of Southern Italy. While these illustrations did not always claim objectivity, they were frequently presented as a form of documentation capturing the realities of Southern Italy. This phenomenon was shaped by the unique blend of news, fiction, reportage, and stories within the same publications, such as periodicals and newspapers. Through this lens, we examine how Veristi confront the challenge of depicting the picturesque South while navigating the broader social, cultural, and political landscapes of their time.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Verismo's approach to truth and fiction, we turn our attention to the artistic movements of the same era, such as the *Macchiaioli* in Florence and the *Scapigliati* in Milan. This chapter explores the connections and influences among these movements, shedding light on the shared ethos of seeking truth through art. Furthermore, in the context of 19th-century Italy, the boundaries between fact and fiction were often blurred, and artistic expression played a significant role in shaping public perception.

The chapter seeks to navigate the complex landscape where art, literature, and illustration converged to create a multifaceted depiction of Southern Italy. By examining the various narratives woven into these publications, we uncover how artists and writers engaged with the concept of truth in their respective mediums.

- Chapter three revolves around the collaboration between authors, publishers, and illustrators, which has often remained in the shadows. Yet, within this intricate choreography lies a rich tapestry of relationships, negotiations, and creative struggles that shape the final form of literary works. Within the work of Giovanni Verga, we find a fascinating exploration of this triad. This chapter delves deep into the heart of this artistic synergy, unveiling the complex dynamics that governed the production of illustrated editions of Verga's literary masterpieces. The road to producing these illustrated editions was far from straightforward. It was marked by twists and turns, moments of tension and arguments. This chapter embarks on a comprehensive analysis of this path, unraveling the unique situations that Verga encountered with various publishers and illustrators.

At the center of this exploration stands the figure of Giovanni Verga himself. His letters, those intimate missives that offer glimpses into his thoughts, emotions, and ambitions, become the guiding light. Through these epistolary exchanges, this chapter traces Verga's footsteps as he forged alliances, faced dilemmas, and pursued his artistic vision within the realms of illustrated publications. These letters are like windows into the past, revealing the inner workings of Verga's mind, his creative process, and the underlying motivations that drove his decisions.

Emilio Treves, a prominent Milanese publisher, emerges as a pivotal figure in Verga's literary journey. Their relationship, though fraught with tension at times, remained resilient. Treves's letters to Verga offer profound insights into his tolerance and understanding, even in the face of his author's ever-heightening reactions. Through these letters, we come to appreciate the delicate balance of friendship and business that underpinned their collaboration. The painter Arnaldo Ferraguti's voice echoes with

significance, particularly in his statement that Verga did not favor the illustration of his works. This ambivalence toward the figurative arts is an intriguing facet of Verga's personality that warrants exploration. Did Verga's engagement with visual representation come from a calculated pursuit of profit, or were there deeper motivations at play?

Beyond Treves and Ferraguti, this chapter illuminates Verga's interactions with other prominent figures of his time, such as the publishers Barbera, Montalti, and the writer Luigi Capuana. Through their correspondence and collaborations, the goal is to uncover the multifaceted nature of Verga's relationships within the literary and artistic communities.

- Chapter four embarks on an immersive journey into the heart of the 1897 illustrated edition of Giovanni Verga's *Vita dei campi*, offering a close textual analysis that seeks to unveil the intricate relationship between the visual and written components of this work. This exploration hinges on a fundamental question: How do the visual and written narratives interplay within the pages of this edition, and what stories do they tell? At its core, this chapter endeavors to dissect the visual and textual synergy that defines this volume. While the illustrations are inspired by Verga's written words, they often embark on an autonomous path, creating narratives that subtly diverge from the written text. To better understand this dynamic, we employ the categories of "picturesque" and "anti-picturesque."

Illustrations are emblematic of traditional, canonical views and representations that align with the picturesque tradition. They often emphasize the folkloristic and aesthetically pleasing aspects of Sicilian life, painting a vivid and romanticized portrait of the region. This approach tends to overshadow the social commentary and the representation of the *vinti*, the defeated or marginalized, a central theme in Verga's work. Conversely, the anti-picturesque serves as a counterbalance, spotlighting the harsh realities and social injustices

embedded within Verga's narratives. It seeks to unmask the stark truths that underlie the idyllic veneer presented by the picturesque tradition.

The tension between these two narratives, the picturesque and the anti-picturesque, forms the crucible in which the visual and written texts interact. To comprehend this intricate interplay, this chapter delves into the scenes behind the production of this edition. Emilio Treves, the publisher, played a fundamental role in bringing this project to fruition. His belief in the power of visual storytelling set the stage for this publication. Arnaldo Ferraguti, the illustrator, embarked on this creative endeavor with a profound admiration for Verga's work. His illustrations, guided by the picturesque tradition, take on a life of their own, providing readers with a parallel narrative that enriches and sometimes diverges from the written text. Through a meticulous examination of the visual and written components, this study aims to unveil the hidden narratives, the nuanced tales that unfold within the pages of this edition. I explore how the visual elements amplify and complement Verga's prose, offering readers a textured and layered reading experience.

Chapter I

Italian Publishing Industry: Rise and Use of Illustrations in the Late Nineteenth Century

An illustration published in *Charivari* could serve as a clever example of the formation of a new audience, primarily composed of women who were always kept on the sidelines of reading (Fig.1). The caricature, created by Honoré Daumier, depicts, under the title *Moeurs conjugales*, an angry husband turning towards his wife, who instead of mending his trousers, is calmly sitting in an armchair reading a novel by George Sand. The cartoon, published on June 30, 1839, becomes even more relevant by the end of



Figure 1 - Illustration in "Charivari," 1839

the nineteenth century when the publishing industry is acquiring a well-defined identity. The European context is witnessing a considerable increase in sales, as a glance at some data shows.

The number of titles registered with the *Bibliographie de la France* goes from 3,357 in 1815 to 6,739 in 1830, 11,905 in 1860, 14,195 in 1875, 20,951 in 1900, and reaching 24,443 in 1914. Similarly, the 506 printers in 1811 become 4,006 in 1911. In France, the sale of newspapers also increases exponentially: in 1870, the global sale of newspapers reached one million copies per day, in 1881, three million, and on the eve of the Great War, there were 30 national titles and 175 regional ones, totaling between 8 and 9 million readers.³⁸

³⁸ Cfr. J.Y. Mollier, *La lecture et ses publics à l'époque contemporaine*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2001.

In England, the situation is not very different from France, with the birth of historical newspapers such as the "Daily Mail" (1896), the "Daily Mirror" (1903), magazines for children like "Wonder" (1892), "Marvel" (1893), "Union Jack" (1894), and magazines for girls: "Forget-Me-Not" (1891), "Home Chat" (1895), and "Woman's Weekly" (1911).³⁹

In Italy, the book market is also expanding rapidly, thanks in part to the significant increase in the railway network from 2,000 km in 1860 to 8,700 km in 1880, becoming a determining factor for the diffusion of newsstands across the country, which went from 89 in 1872 to 875 in 1894.⁴⁰ However, it is still an evolving situation, as Ettore Fabietti pointed out in his *Manuale per le Biblioteche Popolari*,⁴¹ a text written in 1908 and published thanks to the *Consorzio delle Biblioteche Popolari* in Milan:

*Le biblioteche popolari mirano ad uno scopo chiaro e determinato: poi che il gran pubblico specialmente in Italia, non cerca il libro e non dimostra ancora di sentirne sufficientemente il bisogno, è necessario far sì che il libro cerchi il lettore e lo innamori poco a poco di sé, fino a imporglisi come un bisogno: in una parola, mettere il libro in valore e dargli la vita che gli manca.*⁴²

The judgment seems too pessimistic when compared to some data that mark, instead, a constant progress in the publishing sector compared to the years immediately after the Unification of Italy. The situation remains fragmented and varies from region to region, with two main

³⁹ P. Pallottino, *Storia dell'illustrazione italiana*, Firenze, La Casa Usher, pp. 17-24.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Cfr. *Ettore Fabietti e le biblioteche popolari, atti del Convegno di studi* (Milano 30 maggio 1994), eds. P.M. Galimberti, W. Manfredini, Società umanitaria, Milano, 1994.

⁴² E. Fabietti, *Manuale per le Biblioteche Popolari, Consorzio delle Biblioteche Popolari*, Milano, 1908, p. 7.

publishing centers emerging, Milan⁴³ and Florence, and some others on the rise, such as Rome, Naples, Palermo, and Catania. To clarify the panorama, it is useful to review some figures that highlight an increase in book and periodical publications: from 6,340 books in 1880, it goes to 9,657 in 1895, followed by a period of decline with 9,108 in 1896, 8,976 in 1897, 8,898 in 1898, 8,845 in 1899, finally rising to 9,328 publications in 1900. Simultaneously, magazines increase from 1,126 in 1873 to 1,606 in 1887. All of this despite the fact that the illiteracy rate remained high, with 64.09% of children between 6 and 12 years old and 54.30% of those between 12 and 20 years old unable to read or write in 1881.⁴⁴

Alongside these social changes, there is also a profound evolution in the field of semantics and visual-textual perception.⁴⁵ Magazines and books, both governed by their own semantic-

⁴³ A significant fact is that Lombardy alone held 40% of the titles in circulation, while the south held only 5%. In Milan, furthermore, thanks to Sonzogno, Treves, and Ricordi, the printing industry grew significantly, with 88 printing houses operating in 1893 and 1,115 workers employed in the paper production sector. Other data indicating the significant development of Milanese publishing are the publications and newspapers: out of a total of 10,758 publications, 2,140 came from Lombardy, and in Milan alone, 11 newspapers were printed, requiring particular technological updates and specialized labor. Furthermore, newspapers and magazines were the communication channel through which the middle layers of the population entered the cultural circuit.

⁴⁴ If we look at the numbers of literary production in Italy in the last two decades of the 19th century, we are struck by the significant development. The literary group, including philology, contemporary poetry, novels, short stories, theater, popular readings, and fine arts, went from 1,452 titles in 1872 to 1,650 in 1898, with a peak of 1,854 in 1887. Even more impressive is the growth of popular literature, reaching 322 titles in 1889, compared to only 79 in 1872. Speaking about titles, in 1901, Collodi's *Avventura di Pinocchio*, published by Bemporad with new illustrations by Carlo Chiostri, reached 350,000 copies. In 1904, De Amicis's *Cuore*, published by Treves, reached 300,000 copies. There is also *Storia di una capinera* by Verga with 20,000 copies. Exceeding 10,000 copies was considered a success. Cfr. V. Castronovo, *La stampa italiana dall'unità al fascismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1972; *L'editoria italiana tra Otto e Novecento*, eds. G. Tortorelli, Bologna, Edizioni Analisi, 1986; G. Ragone, *Un secolo di libri. Storia dell'editoria in Italia dall'Unità al post moderno*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.

⁴⁵ In this regard, as Giovanni Ragone noted, during the second half of the 19th century in Italy, there was a transition from old to new cultural codes. Simultaneously, two major pre-unitary typologies can be identified, namely, the Milanese model and the Tuscan model. In the former case, it was the aristocracy that imposed its viewpoint on the Lombard intellectuals, leading to the publication of numerous occasional poems, genealogies, memoirs, and poetic compositions. In the Tuscan case, on the other hand, the intellectual community managed to prevail by leveraging the role of academies and universities. Consequently, a large number of research works on productive activities and ancient Italian historical texts were published. In Tuscany, a self-referential and homogeneous circle had formed, but it remained closed in on itself, representing the so-called "salon culture" that was widely prevalent. This culture both published and read works, and as a result, there were no conditions for the creation of a true middle-class audience. Indeed, the new genres of biography and historical novels were "consumed in a political context, as a recognition and affirmation of a political-ideological consciousness, belonging to a new linguistic community" (G. Ragone, *Un secolo di libri*, cit., p. 12). In Milan, on the other hand, conditions were conducive to the subsequent development of a more diverse audience, ranging from aristocrats to the new 'patriotic' bourgeois. This audience became involved in the national cultural apparatus through newspapers, magazines, and the development of the educational system.

constructive logic, where the layout and structuring of the page itself convey a precise meaning influencing the reading process, were revolutionized in the 1880s by the advent of modern phototypographic techniques (starting with the *similigravure-tipographique* patented by Petit in 1878, and culminating in heliogravure in 1895). However, the significant and revolutionary step forward occurred in 1889 when photocollography was officially patented with this name at the Paris Congress. Its main characteristic is:

[...] di non apparire retinata, perché non ha bisogno, come le altre tecniche di stampa (la fotocalcografia, o incisione fotografica su rame; la fotozincotipia, a rilievo sullo zinco), che la sua superficie sia sottoposta alla suddivisione ottica per mezzo dei reticoli, o retini, che sono più o meno vistosi, a seconda del maggiore o minor numero di puntini per centimetro di matrice. In realtà un “retino” esiste anche nella fototipia, ma è determinato dalla caratteristica granitura del materiale utilizzato.⁴⁶

Therefore, photography must be considered from a dual perspective, the receptive-perceptive and the technical-scientific one. These two aspects intersect and influence each other, as demonstrated by magazines—from *L'Illustrazione Italiana* to *Il Mondo Illustrato*, from *L'Illustrazione per tutti* to *La Domenica del Corriere*—founded and flourishing, albeit with varying fortunes, from 1875 onwards, benefiting from the technological advancements in printing as the years went by.

It is not a coincidence that the writer and critic Enrico Thovez, in 1898, stated that:

⁴⁶ I. Zannier, *L'occhio della fotografia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1988, p. 79.

[...] alla bellezza propria della fotografia se ne è aggiunta, in questi ultimi anni, un'altra tutt'affatto casuale, ed è quella dovuta alla fotoincisione sullo zinco, alla cui praticità e basso costo è dovuto completamente l'immenso sviluppo dell'illustrazione fotografica dei giornali e dei libri. [...] Dopo l'invenzione dei caratteri mobili l'arte della stampa non ha visto forse scoperta psicologicamente più importante.⁴⁷

In illustrated magazines, the use of photography even goes on to change the composition and editorial direction of the periodical itself. It evolves from the old '*Magazzino*,' mostly focused on past events, to the modern prototype of '*Illustrazione*,' which seeks to capture the public's attention with colorful covers depicting current events, with a pronounced preference for tragic episodes (shipwrecks, miraculous rescues, robberies, murders) or social occasions (royal weddings or public celebrations). In this way, the reader projects themselves into their own contemporary world, becoming an active and engaged citizen for the first time, experiencing and reinterpreting Italy's historical and current events.⁴⁸

Photography has been used as a transitional element from the real event to the cover image. Indeed, pictures are seen as a tool to help the illustrator in the reproduction of reality, they are very rarely directly transposed in the publications. Thus, the mediation of the illustrator has a fundamental role. As will be analyzed later in chapters three and four, the images provided in Verga's *Vita dei campi* are based on actual photos that the author requested from his friend Capuana, however, they serve as a source of inspiration for the illustrator, and they are not printed or even reproduced faithfully in the illustrations. Nonetheless, it is evident how the publishing industry is moving towards a more realistic representation, at least in the intentions. The idea of

⁴⁷ E. Thovez, *Poesia fotografica*, in *Scritti d'arte di Enrico Thovez*, eds. B. Saletti, Canova, Treviso, 1980, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Cfr. M. Giordano, *La stampa illustrata in Italia dalle origini alla Grande Guerra*, Guanda, Milano, 1983.

“reproducing” reality can be recognized in most of the periodicals’ pages, in which detailed attention is given to crime news, scandalous episodes, or catastrophic events. The mixture of news, scientific discoveries, travel reportages, and literary works offered by these publications, often makes it difficult to draw a clear line between the narrative fiction of authors like Verga, De Amicis, or Capuana, and the "reality" of "scientific" articles and news.

Illustrative in this regard are some covers of *Tribuna Illustrata*, ranging from those discussing the discovery of malnourished and mistreated children saved by law enforcement to the one (dated October 12, 1902) outlining the discovery of the lifeless body of Emile Zola (domestics hesitatingly stand at the door of the room, and at the foot of the bed lies the body of the great writer). The fearful expression of the butler, the focal point of the page on the empty chair looming over Zola's waxen face, is conceived as if we were looking at the novel's cover, enhancing the event's emotional and irrational connotations. The mediation of the illustrator functions as an enhancer of some specific connotations and emotions. As the art historian Mariadelaide Cuozzo suggests:

in tale utilizzo dell'immagine in funzione suggestiva e persuasiva, la fotografia — sebbene fosse ormai largamente impiegata nei giornali illustrati — non poteva che risultare perdente al confronto con l'illustrazione, la quale aveva al suo arco la freccia di una forza immaginifica nella ricostruzione degli eventi cui l'“obiettività” della prima non poteva attingere. La funzione della fotografia in questa fase fu dunque [...] soprattutto quella di costituire, almeno per quanto riguardava le immagini di copertina, un “documento di passaggio, come materia prima che l'abilità dell'illustratore dovrà rielaborare.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ M. Cuozzo, *Illustrazione e grafica nella stampa periodica napoletana dalla belle époque al fascismo*, Electa, Milano, 2005, p. 31.

The publishers aimed to create a unified figurative imaginary between information and escapism, where black chronicle stories, disasters, attacks, and street clashes alternated.⁵⁰ One of the innovations of the “*Supplementi Illustrati*,”⁵¹ which distinguished them from a magazine like *Illustrazione Italiana*, was precisely to place the main image of the week on the cover, to immediately attract the reader, a function clarified by Michele Giordano's words:

*Alle copertine dei Supplementi veniva affidata una funzione di impatto mai osata prima; il meglio del giornale veniva offerto tutto e subito, perché attirasse l'attenzione già sul banco di vendita, e invitasse il lettore all'acquisto. [...] Non si può non riconoscere in questa nuova impostazione un barlume di quelle studiate tecniche di persuasione cui fa ricorso oggi buona parte dei periodici, consapevoli dello stretto legame che intercorre, settimana per settimana, fra copertina e tiratura, indipendentemente dalla sostanza vera e propria del giornale.*⁵²

Thus, in this historical phase, illustrators of current affairs magazines and those of novels or stories from the naturalist-verist current developed figurative techniques that were extremely close to each other. Drawing inspiration from photography, both reworked it into a successful artistic product. For example, Ferraguti wrote current affairs reports with photographic accompaniments, especially for the periodical *Il Secolo XX*, and at the same time, he was the favored illustrator of authors like De Amicis and Verga, embodying both of the professional roles just described.

⁵⁰ M. Giordano, op. cit., p. 179.

⁵¹ For example, *La Domenica del Corriere* or *La Tribuna Illustrata*.

⁵² M. Giordano, op. cit., p. 181.

Letture Amene

La biblioteca popolare [...] a differenza delle biblioteche d'altro tipo, non esclude i lavori di pura immaginazione, cioè le letture amene, scegliendole però fra le opere che hanno già acquistato o sono evidentemente destinate ad acquistare fama duratura per qualche loro pregio sostanziale o d'arte. A proposito delle letture amene, la diffusione di esse per mezzo delle biblioteche popolari non è priva di utilità. Ciò che più di tutto importa è che il popolo si abitui alla lettura; ora, se il romanzo, la commedia, il libro di versi non avessero altro ufficio che quello di attrarre il lettore novellino coll'esca del diletto, la loro presenza nella biblioteca popolare sarebbe più che giustificata. Come si procede coi bambini, si procede colle persone incolte, poiché, in fondo, sono dei primitivi gli uni e le altre; e l'insegnamento infantile cerca d'insinuarsi per le vie del diletto. Non sono poche le persone di media cultura che appresero un'infarinatura di storia francese sui romanzi di Dumas padre o che furono da essi invogliati allo studio della storia autentica; così come non sono pochi i giovani che s'innamorano delle scienze fisiche e naturali sui libri di Jules Verne.⁵³

Fabietti focuses on a crucial issue of the time: the role of "light readings." The concept expressed by the journalist is clear: recreational readings serve to educate the humble classes without them feeling the burden of study, perhaps after a hard day's work. Following this statement is a faithful list of authors and titles in the ideal library catalog, compiled by Fabietti himself at the end of the volume. The author first defines the field of magazines and then moves on to books, divided into: 1) Classics (ancient and modern, Italian and foreign), 2) Light Reading (novels, short stories, theater, poetry, books for children), 3) History and Geography (biography, memoirs and

⁵³ E. Fabietti, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

historical documents, travel, customs and traditions), 4) Experimental Sciences (physics, chemistry, natural sciences, mathematics, technology), 5) Speculative Sciences (philosophy, sociology, politics, pedagogy, legal sciences, literary criticism and history), 6) General works, textbooks, educational materials, periodicals, fine arts, and miscellaneous.

Within this division, a clear majority is attributed to the category of light readings, and assuming a collection of 1000 volumes, Fabietti establishes that 300 should be light readings, doubling all other categories and covering alone one-third of the total titles. The same criterion is reflected in the list of authors, where De Amicis is the most represented with 26 works, followed by Verga, Capuana, Fogazzaro, Deledda, as well as some French authors, like Zola and Hugo. A list that quite faithfully reflects Fabietti's dedication of the book, "*A Filippo Turati che rianimò in Italia dopo trent'anni d'oblio l'idea delle biblioteche popolari*": a choice with a moderate-socialist inclination which combines foreign authors, close to naturalism, and the Italian Veristi and Scapigliati. However, two great protagonists of Italian feuilleton literature, namely Francesco Mastriani and Carolina Invernizio, are missing, and this apparent anomaly can be explained precisely by the desire to spread "good books" in various environments ranging from prisons to evening schools, from museums to clubs, and even to popular universities. This intention is declared and made even more explicit by Ettore Fabietti in a subsequent passage:

Viene talvolta qualche lettore popolano in cerca di un romanzo de più turpi e feroci, di cui la abietta speculazione corrompe oggidì e perverte la letteratura popolare, la quale fu già sì ingenua e sana fra noi. [...] ma che, in vece loro, ve ne stanno altri che non turbano, non sconvolgono, eppure piacciono di più, e dalla cui lettura si esce con pensieri e sentimenti

*migliori.*⁵⁴

The author condemns the "appendices" and the "*letteratura a un soldo*," which, on the contrary, found favor with broad segments of the population, thanks to their:

*funzione consolatoria e compensatoria, giocata sull'opposizione moralistica di vizio-virtù, buoni-cattivi, vittima-carnefice. Ma ciò che caratterizza questo nuovo genere è il situarsi delle vicende narrate nel presente e nell'ambiente umano e sociale della città. Una città spesso degradata, colta nei suoi aspetti tenebrosi, squallidi, nei suoi bassifondi, tra le piaghe aperte e maleodoranti di ospizi, ospedali, postriboli, galere, dove vive un'umanità diseredata e affamata, tra osterie di infimo ordine dove con qualche centesimo è ancora possibile riempire lo stomaco.*⁵⁵

This type of narrative is balanced on the boundary between reality and fiction, with continuous authorial interventions to guarantee the veracity of the narration, starting with Cletto Arrighi with *La Scapigliatura* and *il 6 febbraio*, Evelina by Cesare Tronconi, down to *Milano sconosciuta* and *Gli scamiciati. Seguito alla Milano sconosciuta*, which consists of reports made with a notebook in hand on the streets of Milan by Paolo Valera.

This genre of literature motivated the creation of series aimed at promoting "good press," such as the *Letture cattoliche* - initiated by Don Bosco in 1858, divided into moral instructions, pleasant stories, edifying stories - or the *Piccole letture cattoliche* funded by Count Giovanni

⁵⁴ *Ivi*, p. 67.

⁵⁵ A. Chemello, *La letteratura popolare e di consumo, in Storia dell'editoria nell'Italia contemporanea*, Giunti, Firenze, 1997, p. 169.

Acquaderni in 1861. Between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, Catholic publishing was in lively ferment. In 1908, within the Salesian publishing, the *Società anonima internazionale per la diffusione della buona stampa* was founded, which in 1911 changed its name to *Società editrice internazionale*, taking care of publishing the *Letture cattoliche* with print runs of 10,000-12,000 copies at a low price, light literature series, and publications for schools. Between 1908 and 1923, SAID-SEI published as many as 2400 titles.

Not only was Catholic publishing active, but, as shown in Ettore Fabietti's manual, also the socialist, whose main newspaper was *La Plebe* (1868-1883), which consecrated anarchist-libertarian and socialist publishing. Alongside the newspaper, Enrico Bignami promoted the *Biblioteca socialista* series with informative booklets priced at 5 cents, and the *Biblioteca socialista italiana* with little red-covered booklets priced at one lira. Nerbini was a major player, publishing about thirty books a year, 13 series between 1897 and 1910, and periodicals such as *Garofano rosso*, the artistic-literary weeklies *Quo vadis?* (1902-1903) and *l'Avanti della Domenica* (1903). The Florentine publisher consistently paid attention to the illustrative apparatus, publishing numerous serialized novels, such as Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* with illustrations by Bastianini and Hugo's *Les Misérables* with illustrations by Carlo Chiostrì.⁵⁶ The introduction to Sue's *Les Mystères du peuple* with illustrations by Scarpelli is interesting, as it makes clear that Nerbini had grasped the importance of images and the use of serialized publications in the dissemination of the texts, understanding what kind of reader he was facing:

In vista dell'esito veramente straordinario avuto colla pubblicazione dei Misteri di Parigi, del celebre romanziere Eugenio Sue, illustrati per mio conto, con circa 200 disegni, dal

⁵⁶ Cfr. G. Tortorelli, *Le edizioni Nerbini (1897-1921)*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1983.

pittore A. Bastianini, mi sono deciso di por mano ad altro lavoro dello stesso autore, I Misteri del popolo, romanzo di maggior mole e della massima importanza, che avrà circa 300 quadri illustrati del pittore E. Scarpelli. Facilmente i cortesi lettori si accorgeranno che tali pubblicazioni sono ben lontane dal mirare al solo, unico interesse personale, non avendo io risparmiato ogni cura e dispendio perché le edizioni riescano splendide ed accurate sotto ogni rapporto [...]. Questa importante opera verrà pubblicata a dispense, onde facilitarne l'acquisto nel modo più economico, a chiunque abbia desiderio di istruirsi e di aumentare le proprie cognizioni. Lo scopo prefissomi è abbastanza semplice e chiaro, e quindi non dubito menomamente di vedermi incoraggiato in questa mia nuova intrapresa, molto più che l'odierna pubblicazione esce dal consueto, sia per il formato a due colonne, sia per le illustrazioni e per la qualità della carta appositamente fabbricata.⁵⁷

The problematic point to address is to what extent such a programmatic desire reflected the actual situation in Italy, and this was precisely the objective of the survey on *I libri più letti dal popolo italiano*, conducted in 1906.⁵⁸ From the surveys carried out, it emerged that women read more than men, and in particular, women from the upper classes read Fogazzaro, Matilde Serao, Marchesa Colombi, Neera, Anna Vertua Gentile, De Amicis, and Verga; those from the petite bourgeoisie read Elisabetta Werner, Elisabetta Marlitt, and Guglielmina Heimburgh, while the third category of readers, the lower classes of the population, read the 'appendices,' including novels by Invernizio. Additionally, good readers were considered to be workers, seamstresses,

⁵⁷ E. Sue, *I Misteri di Parigi*, Firenze, Nerbini, 1908, introduction. Regarding Catholic and Socialist publishing, Cfr. F. Traniello, *L'editoria Cattolica e socialista tra libri e riviste*, in *Storia dell'Editoria nell'Italia Contemporanea*, op. cit., pp. 299-319.

⁵⁸ *I libri più letti dal popolo italiano. Primi risultati della inchiesta promossa dalla Società Bibliografica Italiana*, Società Bibliografica Italiana, Biblioteca di Brera, Milano, 1906.

milliners, and lingerie workers. Indeed, this survey is confirmed by some titles and the characters in the stories, where, alongside individuals from the upper bourgeoisie or aristocracy, protagonists from the lower classes appear: one need only think of titles like *L'orfana del ghetto* by Invernizio, or *Nedda* by Verga.

Publishers

So far, I have examined the cultural publishing context from the perspective of the observer. I considered the variations in the reception of a text and the strategies, in their similarities and differences, adopted by publishers to make a book cover or the front page of a periodical convincing. In this context of continuous experimentation, numerous series were created, as mentioned at the beginning, targeting different segments of the population. Therefore, it is appropriate to explore and focus on the main publishers engaged in designing innovative series in terms of format and layout. It is precisely from this angle that the book-product will be analyzed, with a particular focus on the physical object and its typographical presentation. Specifically, a more detailed analysis of a selection of prominent editors who engaged with Verga's production will be offered: Barbera (Florence), Sonzogno, and Treves (Milan).

It is worth briefly mentioning the installment system in French illustrated popular publishing, from which modules and iconographic styles were derived, especially concerning the visual effectiveness of book covers. A turning point was the publication in 1847 of the series of novels in installments titled *Panorama de la Littérature et de l'Illustration*, emblematic not only in its title but also in the program that appeared in the first issue:

Prodige de bon marché. Pour 5 francs, 2 volumes in -4°, 800 pages, 1600 colonnes, 600

gravures, publiés en so livraisons à 10 centimes. *Le Panorama de la Littérature et de l'Illustration* rédigé par MM. Hugo, Dumas, Soulié, Féval, Karr, Louis Luzine, Méry, Th. Gauthier, etc. etc. pour 10 centimes, 32 colonnes de littérature, plus que n'endonnent en une semaine *La Presse*, *Les Débats* et *Le Constitutionnel* réunis, et ces 32 colonnes illustrées.

This announcement marked the beginning of a precipitous race towards illustrated popular editions, with publishers like Gustave Havard, Joseph Bry, and Marescq standing out.⁵⁹ Another sector was that of *romans-journaux*, published in 8 or 16 pages at the end of newspapers, usually containing two or three popular novels in feuilleton and some variety articles, sometimes with excellent illustrations, as demonstrated by the case of Gustave Doré, who created 360 drawings for the *Journal pour tous*.

In response to the invasion of *journaux-romans*, popular publishers released their own version of the *journaux-romans*. Joseph Bry published *Les amis du peuple*, Gustave Havard published *Le Journal du Dimanche* and *La lecture*, Boisgard published *L'omnibus*, and Barba published *Le journal populaire*. The theme of reading for everyone was prominently featured on the covers of the time. For example, consider the *Bibliothèque du peuple*, a series published by the Jondé et Cie society starting on January 23, 1851, for a duration of 15 years. The header is dominated by a farmer plowing a field, with a radiant sun on the horizon illuminating the scene. On the left, a soldier reads alongside a worker, and on the right, a mother shows the newspaper to her children.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ In January 1848, the publisher Gustave Havard launched the series *Les Romans Illustrés*, and Joseph Bry started *les Veillées Littéraires Illustrées*. In December 1849, Bry and Marescq initiated the first of the *Oeuvres Complètes Illustrées d'un auteur contemporain*, with the first author being Eugene Sue. Havard and Marescq, in 1851, began *Les Chefs d'oeuvre de la Littérature et de l'Illustration*.

⁶⁰ Significant is the mission of the series: “Réaliser, dans la mesure du possible, l'affranchissement matériel des travailleurs par l'association industrielle et commerciale, et faire servir les forces de cette association à l'affranchissement matériel du peuple entier: telle est la pensée qui a présidé à la fondation de 'Union des Courtiers, Dessinateurs, Graveurs, Typographes, etc. Publier, à bon marché, de bons et beaux livres, associer aux bénéfices de cette oeuvre utile et moralisatrice tous les éléments qui y auront contribué, depuis l'écrivain jusqu'au Libraire: réunis

The header of *Les Veillées populaires*, published by Joseph Bry in 1851, is noteworthy (Fig. 2). It is a large structure divided into layers: at the bottom, enclosed in a large circle that occupies the entire lower part, is the title. Just above, two cherubs hold a banner with the collection's heading. Finally, above the composition, there are three circles, one large in the center and two smaller ones on the sides. In the center, there is a scene of a popular interior, with the father, surrounded by his children, reading a booklet to the family. On the left, a woman is weaving while another on the right is lighting the fire for dinner. On the sides, equally emblematic scenes feature a soldier and a blacksmith who, in their respective contexts, are reading a booklet to their companions. To support the banner, there is a winch made up of popular work tools.⁶¹

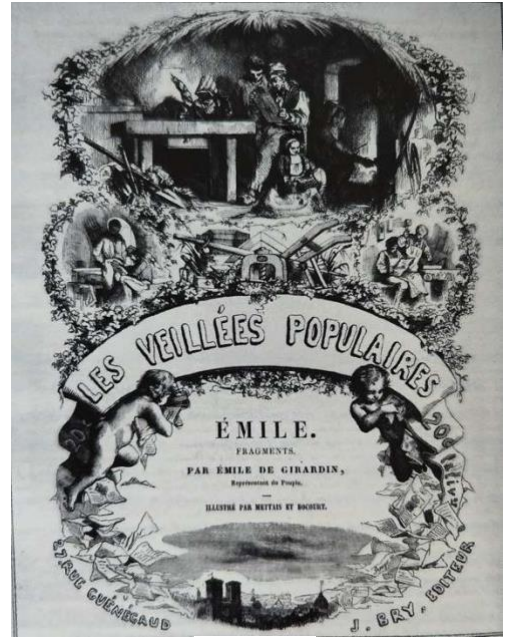


Figure 2 - *Les Veillées populaires*

These illustrated installment collections would be fundamental for Italian publishers, who would often draw not only ideas and inspirations from their French colleagues but also concrete indications, such as the format of publications, cover design, page structuring in relation to the image, and the series of *journaux-romans*.

pour la première fois, dans un intérêt commun, les travailleurs de la science, des arts et de l'industrie, tel est notre but.

⁶¹ Cfr. C. Witkowski, *Monographie des éditions populaires. Les romans à quatre sous. Les publications illustrées à 20 centimes. 1848-1870*, Paris, Comagnie Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1981.

- *Barbera*

The Florentine publisher Barbera was a prominent figure in the late 19th century.⁶² The first edition of *Le Veglie di Neri* was released in 1882 under the series *Opere di amena lettura*, created by Piero Barbera, the son of the founder. This series was active mainly between 1880 and 1886. The publisher initially targeted an educated but non-specialized audience by publishing works by Gioberti, Dante, Ariosto, and later works by De Amicis and Carducci. Barbera was also the creator of the *Collezione Diamante*, a collection of Italian literary masterpieces aimed at a diverse audience, including intellectuals, aristocrats, merchants, and artisans.

The biography of the founder Gaspero Barbera, and his courageous and determined rise to establish the publishing house reflected the bourgeois ideology of the time. This ideology was based on an unwavering belief in hard work and diligence, influenced by Samuel Smiles' "Self-help," which was published in Italy in 1859. Gaspero Barbera was a major publisher of texts promoting the so-called 'self-help' doctrine. He published works like Samuel Smiles' "Character," George Craik's "The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties,"⁶³ Michele Lessona's "Volere è potere," and Benjamin Franklin's "Autobiography." These texts reflected the conservative beliefs shared by the Florentine aristocracy and were rooted in the established power structures, emphasizing respect for hierarchies and individualism under the influence of English liberal ideals.

In this perspective, the modern entrepreneurs were not only seeking personal success but also believed that their personal and professional achievements should serve as examples for those working under them and for the public. They felt a spiritual mission to educate people. It is possible to recognize this pattern in the work of the publishers of that time. The rise of the illustrations can

⁶² G. Barbera, *Memorie di un editore (1818-1880)*, Firenze, Barbera, 1930; G. Tellini, *Opere di amena lettura*, in *Editori a Firenze nel secolo Ottocento*, eds. I. Porciani, Firenze, Olschki, 1983, pp. 43-93.

⁶³ Translated in Italian as *Costanza vince ignoranza*.

be seen as the outcome of this tendency. Publishers wanted to reach all possible audiences and provide them with the tools to understand the world. The idea of offering a holistic view of the world is also suggested by the choice of adjectives that frequently accompany the titles of these publications. *Universale* and *mondiale* are just a couple of examples. As explained by the economist Sapelli, the ideology of the industrial bourgeoisie in its early stages was "*un misto di conservatorismo e filantropia*."⁶⁴

While there was a focus on educating the population through the *Raccolta di opere popolari*, including writings by Smiles, Craik, D'Azeglio, and Franklin, there was also a production of textbooks and technical works for schools, especially high schools. The series *Opere di amena lettura* was created for similar purposes but also as a response to the significant publishing initiatives of Sommaruga, who was considered the first 'industrial' publisher at the time, targeting the emerging lower middle class and working class in the Italian cultural landscape. This new series aimed at a wider, non-elite audience attracted by the excellent typographic quality of the texts, often enriched with sophisticated full-color illustrated covers. Piero Barbera managed to secure the works of authors like Verga, Serao, Pratesi, and D'Annunzio for this series, outperforming the competition from Sommaruga (with whom D'Annunzio gained national attention) and other publishers in northern Italy like Treves and Casanova (who also published Verga and Serao).

⁶⁴ G. Sapelli, *Gli "organizzatori della produzione" tra struttura d'impresa e modelli culturali*, in *Storia d'Italia, Annali IV: Intellettuali e potere*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981, pp. 591-686.

However, Barbera's publishing endeavor did not extend much beyond Sommaruga's failure in 1885 and effectively concluded in 1886. The reasons for Barbera's failure can be attributed to substantial economic setbacks, partly due to the relatively high book prices for the target audience. Another reason for the failure was likely, as Tellini says, “*la scissione in atto tra una cultura universitaria di respiro europeo, essa sì d'avanguardia, e una cultura non accademica che crede di essere militante ed è invece spesso d'evasione, provinciale e salottiera.*”⁶⁵ Thus, there was a lack of a sufficient market consisting of a middle-class audience that could have made Barbera's initiative successful.

After Barbera's unsuccessful attempt, the authors who had worked in Florence returned to the northern Italian publishers, particularly those in Milan, with Verga returning to Treves, D'Annunzio continuing to work with Treves, and Fucini coming under Ulrico Hoepli's influence.

- *Sonzogno*

Edoardo Sonzogno⁶⁶ primarily targeted the emerging lower middle class and urban working-class, publishing *Lo spirito folletto*, a humorous political-social illustrated newspaper, and *L'Emporio pittoresco*, a magazine



Figure 3 - *L'Emporio Pittoresco*

founded in 1865 and directed by Eugenio Torelli-Viollier (Fig.3). *L'Emporio pittoresco* was mainly composed of images, similar to later photo novels, featuring exceptional news events and illustrated novels. Its circulation, with a low price point, reached as high as 60,000 copies. In 1865,

⁶⁵ G. Tellini, op. cit., p. 68.

⁶⁶ Cfr. L. Barile, *Per una storia dell'editoria popolare: l'ascesa de "Il Secolo"*, in *Il Ponte*, 31, 1975, pp. 1090-1111; L. Barile, *Per una storia dell'editoria popolare: le riviste illustrate di Sonzogno*, in *Esperienze Letterarie*, 2, 1977, pp. 97-110; L. Barile, *Le parole illustrate: Edoardo Sonzogno editore del popolo*, Modena, Mucchi, 1994.

Il Romanziere illustrato was founded, initially as a periodical, later becoming a publication in installments. In 1866, the *Biblioteca romantica illustrata* was launched, featuring most of Victor Hugo's and Alexandre Dumas' works. This series, numbering 62 titles by 1870, was well-received and led Sonzogno to create the *Biblioteca romantica economica* in 1873, followed by the *Biblioteca romantica tascabile*. These series popularized the use of the feuilleton format. By 1881, the *Biblioteca romantica economica* featured over 150 titles by about 60 authors, including D'Azeglio, Grossi, Guerrazzi, Achille Bizzoni, Tarchetti, Tronconi, Farina, and Verga. In comparison, the *Biblioteca romantica illustrata* distinguished itself with greater graphical attention and the inclusion of figurative plates. In 1881, it featured 130 titles, including works by foreign authors like Dumas, Dickens, Hugo, Sand, Sue, and Italian authors such as Ghislanzoni, Mastriani, Tarchetti, and Torelli Viollier. Sonzogno also dedicated various collections to illustrated novels, such as the *Romanzi celebri popolari* and the *Romanzi celebri illustrati*.

Another series, initiated with the Clemenceau trial, was *I processi celebri illustrati*, accompanied by *I processi celebri illustrati di tutti i popoli*. Sonzogno also published specific collections like *I libri bijou illustrati* for the female audience and the *Biblioteca illustrata di educazione* for children, following the 19th-century principle of educating through entertainment. Another successful series was the *Romanziere contemporaneo illustrato*, which featured works by Dickens, Hoffman, Cantù, Longfellow, Dumas (the son), among others. In the realm of popular publishing, Sonzogno produced booklets used in evening schools, which were part of the *Biblioteca del Popolo* founded in 1873. These booklets were smaller-format treatises, often illustrated, covering various subjects such as agriculture, history, mechanics, geography, physiology, music, and philosophy. In 1882, the *Biblioteca Universale* was established, compiling great literary masterpieces from around the world and selling them at an affordable price of 25

cents. In just two years, 120 volumes were published, featuring numerous authors. The series included works by Voltaire, Cavallotti, De Marchi, Giordano Bruno, George Sand, Rousseau, Goethe, Tolstoy, Wagner, Schopenhauer, Hoffmann, Daudet, and Pierre Loti, among others. However, Sonzogno's crowning achievement was the daily newspaper *Il Secolo*, founded in 1866. During the National Exhibition of 1881, the newspaper reached a circulation of 100,000 copies.

- *Treves*

Emilio Treves had a different approach, focusing on the cultured people market and striving to publish innovative and avant-garde works.⁶⁷ Treves published works by great Italian authors like Giovanni Verga (*Eva* 1873, *Vita dei campi* 1880, *I Malavoglia* 1881, *Novelle rusticane* and *Per le vie* 1883, *Mastro don Gesualdo* 1888) and Edmondo De Amicis (*La vita militare* 1868, *Ricordi di Londra* 1874, *Marocco* 1876, *Costantinopoli* 1878, *Cuore* 1886), as well as prominent foreign authors such as Cervantes, Walter Scott, Tolstoy, and Zola. He did not overlook popular literature, releasing series such as *Biblioteca utile*, *Biblioteca Amena*, *Biblioteca dei viaggi*, and *Biblioteca delle Meraviglie*. He also published magazines, paying special attention to the role of images. Significant is the manifesto of the *L'Universo Illustrato* opening issue (1866):

Quelli che non sanno leggere hanno occhi per vedere; amano le vignette, le illustrazioni, i santini. V'è certa gente che lo sa e perciò sparge nelle campagne i librettini di devozione e di superstizione dove le figure sono più numerose che le parole. Così si parla agli occhi, all'immaginazione. Noi faremo lo stesso, con un giornale illustrato.

⁶⁷ Cfr. M. Grillandi, *Emilio Treves*, Torino, UTET, 1977.

L'Universo Illustrato becomes *The Nuova Illustrazione Universale* in 1873, in which the adjective ‘*nuova*’ functions as element of distinction from the homonymous unfortunate periodical published by Sonzogno, and transitioned into *L'Illustrazione Italiana* on November 1, 1875 (Fig.4). It gained recognition in bourgeois salons and among the humble, thanks to its economical version, *L'Illustrazione popolare*, launched in 1869 (Fig.5). Cordelia directed publications aimed at women and children, such as *Margherita* (1878-1922) and *Mondo piccino* (from 1886).



Figure 5 - *L'Illustrazione Italiana*



Figure 4 - *L'Illustrazione Popolare*

Audience and Affordability

A significant issue to consider is the affordability of these publications and which audience could actually afford to buy them. We can question whether the different series were also targeted at two different audiences. In this regard, the figures related to education levels and average salaries, published by Vera Zamagni, are of great help.⁶⁸

These indices reveal how challenging it is to refer to a popular audience when, during the period in question, a laborer or even a low-level worker could barely reach subsistence levels. Therefore, it is useful to analyze a table that relates years of schooling to the average salary. Zamagni identifies four groups based on school attendance, ranging from 0 years of schooling, followed by the 1-5, 5-13, and 13-17 age groups. To each group corresponds an average salary, which is respectively 350 lire, 900 lire, 3000 lire, and 6212 lire. At this point, we need to verify if the relationship between salaries is also reflected in the prices of different types of illustrated books.

Indeed, in the field of book production, we can roughly identify four categories, including *libri economici* costing 1.20 lire, *libri economici illustrati* ranging from 2 to 2.50 lire, illustrated books in a “*Biblioteca Amena*” for 5 lire,⁶⁹ and large illustrated books (such as Hoepli's 1897 edition of *I Promessi Sposi* or Treves' *Vita dei Campi* from the same year) costing 20 lire or more.

⁶⁸ We know that a daily laborer could only reach the subsistence threshold by working 280 days a year, while the average was around 180-200 working days. The cost of food for an adult male was 0.76 lire, and on a per capita basis, it was 0.64 lire. A male laborer earned 2.10 lire per day, while women earned 1.10 lire. For urban workers, things were slightly better. They worked for about 270 days a year, with an average wage of 1.66 lire per day in 1890, which increased to 2.84 lire in 1913. However, it should be noted that there were additional costs due to the fact that the price of basic food was 1.78 lire in 1890 and 2.84 lire in 1913. Therefore, the cost of living for urban workers was higher due to increased expenses on food and housing. In 1911, an industrial worker earned around 2.67 lire, with males earning an average of 3.25 lire and women earning 1.50 lire. In 1904, at Ansaldo, 29 engineers earned 3,900 lire annually, 9 draftsmen earned 1,730 lire, 47 supervisors earned 3,230 lire, and 56 accountants and secretaries earned 1,714 lire. A typical metalworker earned 877 lire. Cfr. V. Zamagni, *Istruzione e sviluppo economico in Italia, 1861-1893*, in *Lo sviluppo economico italiano 1861-1940*, edited by G. Toniolo, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1973, pp. 187-240.

⁶⁹ Barbera's *Biblioteca Amena* for instance.

If we compare the coefficients of the first the first table with the second one, we will notice how they mostly align with each other. This demonstrates that publishers were perfectly aware of whom and how to target their products, taking into account the wage categories described earlier. Notably, the most significant discrepancy between salary coefficients and book costs is related to the third category, reflecting a widespread medium-low bourgeois book market and a small segment of the high-bourgeois and aristocratic audience.

Table 1 - Salaries table

<i>School attendance</i>	<i>Average salary</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>
0 years	350 lire	1
1-5 years	900 lire	2.6
5-13 years	3000 lire	8.6
13-17 years	6212 lire	17

Table 2 - Book Cost table

<i>Book types</i>	<i>Average cost</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>
<i>Libri economici</i>	1.20 lire	1
<i>Libri economici illustrati</i>	2/2.50 lire	2.1
Illustrated Books (Biblioteca Amena)	5 lire	4.7
Big Illustrated Books	20 + lire	16.6

In this diverse and composite landscape, where the readers of the upper bourgeoisie ideally stood alongside dressmakers and seamstresses, the illustrated novels of the time were capable of engaging different types of readers.⁷⁰

The illustrations are indeed conceived and elaborated for a specific audience that should immediately understand the type of text they are about to read from the images. This informative clarity, which unfolds through the narrative strategies described by Umberto Eco, is one of the main objectives of the cover illustrations.⁷¹ The reader participates in the development of the plot, in the construction of a “possible world,” not only by recognizing the typical topoi and logical-narrative structures of a particular narrative genre but also by seeing and identifying a specific type of image that is placed on the “threshold” of the text.⁷² The illustrated cover thus contributes to shaping a very specific horizon of expectations in the reader.

When considering illustrated novels, it is essential to keep Eco's words regarding popular novels in mind:

⁷⁰ Indeed, considering the salary levels, we can hypothesize that a seamstress or a laborer might purchase a book priced at 2 lire or 2.50 lire, as a Christmas gift, attracted by its captivating graphic design and the illustrations that adorned the publication (on the cover and on the first page before the title page). Meanwhile, a wealthier individual could buy a serialized novel at the newsstand for daily leisure (Cfr. G. Peresson, *Editori e librai: la distribuzione del libro tra Otto e Novecento*, in *Lavoro critico*, 29, 1983, pp. 79-103). Furthermore, in this context, we should consider the phenomenon of reading aloud, which allowed even illiterate individuals to participate in the popular culture of the time. We should also examine circulating and popular libraries, although when assessing their impact on late 19th-century publishing, some limiting factors need to be considered. In fact, concerning Catholic publishing, the turning point occurred quite late, as seen in 1898 when Romolo Murri announced the founding of the Italian Catholic Publishing Union in *Cultura sociale*. On the other hand, socialist publishing, as mentioned earlier, also developed at the end of the 19th century through small publishers-booksellers-printers and aimed at educating the proletariat with a varied publication focused on the dissemination of reformist or even revolutionary ideas (anarchist texts). Another point of discussion concerns the phenomenon of popular libraries themselves. Established as early as 1861, they faced repeated setbacks until the *Consorzio delle Biblioteche Popolari* was established in Milan in 1904, which published Fabietti's manual (cfr. G. Barone and A. Petrucci, *Primo non leggere. Biblioteche e pubblica lettura in Italia dal 1861 ai nostri giorni*, Milano, Mazzotta, 1976; R. Monteleone, *Che cosa legge la classe operaia?*, in *Movimento operaio e socialista*, XXIII, 1977, n. 2-3, pp. 370-381; S. Pivato, *Quanto legge la classe operaia? Editoria popolare e lettori in Italia alla fine dell'800*, in *Società e Storia*, 30, 1985, pp. 823-850; S. Pivato, *Lettura e istruzione popolare in Emilia Romagna tra Otto e Novecento*, in *L'editoria italiana tra Otto e Novecento*, pp. 33-48.

⁷¹ U. Eco, *Lector in fabula. La cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi*, Milano, Bompiani, 1979.

⁷² G. Genette, *Soglie. I dintorni del testo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1989.

Finita la stagione democratica, rimarranno nel romanzo popolare i luoghi classici e i personaggi topici, svuotati di quella funzione a suo modo redentrice che li investiva di un valore ideologico calcolato. Il romanzo conservatore del tardo Ottocento, da Ponson du Terrail a Carolina Invernizio, e quello reazionario del primo novecento [...] useranno l'armamentario del feuilleton avulso dal suo contesto funzionale: vendette e riconoscimenti agiranno a vuoto, senza più che alcun progetto di risarcimento sociale — sia pure populistico e borghese — li sostenga e dia credibilità a quanto avviene.⁷³

The popular novel, as explained by Eco, is a "consolatory" novel, never problematic, where, at a narrative level, the "inferential" projections of the reader are never contradicted, and, at an ideological-social level, the established order is never questioned, limiting itself to a benevolent-paternalistic view of the dispossessed masses.

It is precisely in this context that the picturesque comes into play as a conservative aesthetic category that tends to pivot on a cultural substrate aimed at maintaining specific canons and stereotypes, reassuring the reader-observer without ever placing them too close to the narrated object, maintaining a safety distance akin to that of a passing traveler who never has an authentic experience but only provides tourist glances. In this way, the illustration plays an essential role, as it carries a message to the observer, occupying a privileged place in the cover. Through the cover, the book presents itself to the reader, who would be able to recognize immediately the literary genre just by looking at the image and the title. As evident, the illustration reinforces a conservative tendency, which, as we will see later, is also present in Verga's veristic works.

⁷³ U. Eco, *Il superuomo di massa. Retorica e ideologia nel romanzo popolare*, Bergamo, Bompiani, 2005 (first partial edition 1976), pp.16-17.

The image thus serves a dual function, signaling a genre and identifying a specific narrative text, sometimes even distorting the content of the text itself. For example, a woman lying unconscious on the ground with a man bending over her signals to the potential reader that the novel will likely contain a scene of crime or violence, or that it will probably deal with turbulent love affairs and passions. However, that image also refers to a specific moment in the narrative, namely, the moment of revelation of the love between Janu and Nedda, with an attempted kiss. From now on, a double recognition circuit is activated, emphasized by the fact that publishers would often reproduce the same illustrations in subsequent editions of the same novel to facilitate the recognition of the particular work through the visual association of an image. The illustration immediately anticipates that narrative mechanism that Eco identifies as one of the typical elements of late nineteenth-century conservative feuilleton, namely, the repeated and predictable recognition, conceived to activate a mechanism of consolation in the reader.⁷⁴

The Use of Images, Format, and the Public

It is necessary to make some observations regarding the use of illustrations in conjunction with a specific editorial strategy. Despite the diverse and complex publishing landscape, it is possible to create a concise framework. By categorizing publications based on format and target audience, we can understand how images function.

⁷⁴ Eco explains that the popular novel “*costituisce una combinatoria di luoghi topici articolari tra loro secondo una tradizione che ha dell’ancestrale [...] e dello specifico [...]. E giocherà su caratteri prefabbricati, tanto più accettabili e graditi quanto più noti, in ogni caso vergini di ogni penetrazione psicologica, come lo sono i personaggi delle favole. Quanto allo stile, si giocherà di soluzioni precostituite, atte a procurare al lettore la gioia del riconoscimento del già noto,*” in *Il superuomo di massa*, op. cit, p. II.

The first category of books consists of small 16mo booklets (approximately 16x10 cm) priced between 5 and 50 cents, where images often play a decisive role. An emblematic example is Alexandre Dumas' *Doctor Basilius*, published in 1862 by Giuseppe Scorza Di Nicola (Fig.6).⁷⁵ It divides the novel into four booklets, each with two illustrations, one on the cover and one inside. The publisher devised a mechanism where, if the reader wanted to solve the puzzle of one of the two images, they had to buy all four booklets. For instance, the first cover depicts an event that will only be revealed in the third booklet, the second cover reveals an event from the fourth booklet, and so on. The third and fourth booklets reverse the images, with the third featuring the scene captioned in the first booklet and vice versa for the fourth booklet. With this method, if the reader wanted to decipher all the images, they

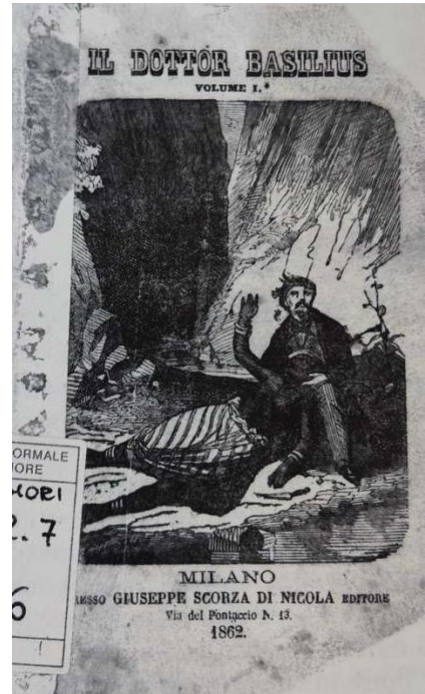


Figure 6 - *Il Dottor Basilius*

would have to purchase the entire series, or else they would not understand the figures, structured in a "linked resolution" relationship between the first-third and second-fourth booklets.

Placing prominent scenes from the drama on the cover was common practice in publishing at the time. A slightly different concept of the sequence is where the cover image and the title page image are placed in precise chronological order, defining the narrative core of the novel. The goal is to invite potential buyers to flip through the pages after the cover to find the solution to the visual puzzle triggered by the first illustration. This creates a sequence akin to a comic strip, generating curiosity and inviting the reader to symbolically cross the 'threshold' of the cover to discover what will happen in the subsequent scenes. It is a journalistic style focused on piquing the reader's

⁷⁵ A. Dumas, *Il Dottor Basilius*, Milano, Giuseppe Scorza Di Nicola, 1862.

curiosity by describing and depicting a scene, sometimes with great attention to detail. The photographic style is combined with optical precision that lingers on details.⁷⁶

At a second price level, we find the *Biblioteca Amena* by Treves, the *Biblioteca romantica tascabile* by Sonzogno, both sold for 50 cents, and the *Biblioteca Nazionale Economica* by Successori Le Monnier. These formats likely drew inspiration from similar French series, such as the *Bibliothèque-Charpentier* which featured a yellow cover with the author and title in the center. However, the reduced format was not necessarily associated with a popular audience, as for example in Renato Fucini's *Le Veglie di Neri*, published in small 8mo format, initially by Barbera in 1882 for 3 lire and later by Hoepli in 1889 with rich illustrations for 5 lire.

Within the realm of popular publishing, Edoardo Sonzogno's production stands out. Sonzogno shifted away from the smaller 16mo and 8vo formats mentioned thus far. The Lombard publisher, like Salani and Perino, recognized the paramount role of images in storytelling and sought to enhance their prominence. This led to the creation of large, serialized novels, which could cost 3 or 5 lire for an annual subscription, consisting of 40 or 50 installments, published weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Models for *Il Romanziere illustrato* or the *Biblioteca romantica illustrata* can again be traced back to the French context, such as the *Oeuvres illustrées*, series of major authors published by Librairie Blanchard and Librairie Marescq et C., which offered well-illustrated collections of major writers (Fig.7-8). Another example is the *Romans Populaires Illustrés* published by Gustave Barba, featuring a talking illustrated header, which may have influenced Perino's *L'Illustrazione per tutti* some years later.

These various Sonzogno series were easily distinguishable by their formats. The *Biblioteca romantica tascabile*, with its reduced format (17 x 10.5 cm), was characterized by a green cover

⁷⁶ In the fourth chapter we will see how Verga's *Vita dei Campi* is built through this sequency.

featuring the title in black on a white background within a diagonal cartouche at the center of the

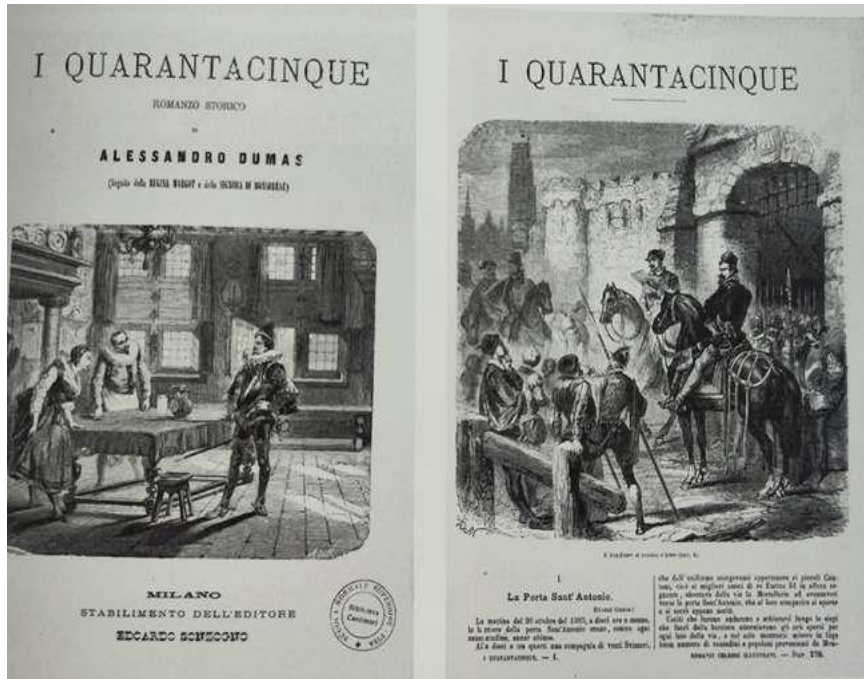


Figure 7 - A. Dumas, *I Quarantacinque*, *Il Romanziero Illustrato*

presented a more refined look, with an intricate typographic design on the opening page.

Another distinctive aspect of these series was that the initial illustration (17.2 x 18.2 cm) was larger than the subsequent ones (16.9 x 13.8 cm) and matched the size of the cover illustration.

This emphasized the difference between the dust jacket and the title page, with the former identified by the image at the start of the first chapter and the latter depicting an episode within the story, increasing the reader's curiosity to discover what moment was illustrated.

The periodicity of these publications was similar to that of modern television series, binding a reader to a novel for an entire year. The success of many of these series is highlighted by the fact that they also had provisions for annual subscriptions in foreign countries. The appearance of these series also served to identify any competitive

title page, along with the large inscription "50 centesimi ogni volume." In contrast, the *Biblioteca romantica economica* featured an oval on the cover, maintaining a similar page format (18 x 11.5 cm) with the usual pricing-author-title breakdown. The latter series

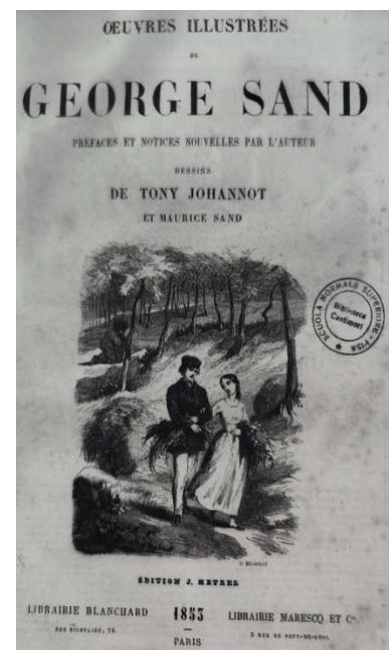


Figure 8 - George Sand

projects by other publishers. For example, Treves attempted to capture a portion of Sonzogno's market with their *Biblioteca Amena*, which corresponded to the *Biblioteca romantica tascabile*. It featured a smaller format (17 x 12 cm), each volume priced at 50 cents, with the title and author prominently displayed. On the other hand, the *Biblioteca Nazionale Economica* by Le Monnier featured a pink cover, was of reduced format (18 x 12 cm) and was defined by an extremely subtle floral-themed border. While other publishers prominently displayed the price on their series, these publications only included the title, author, publisher, and publication year on the cover.

In conclusion, the late nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable transformation in the Italian publishing industry, marked by a surge in production and a growing fascination with illustrations. This pivotal period was characterized by a confluence of factors that reshaped the landscape of Italian publishing, as it evolved into a thriving cultural and commercial phenomenon. The widespread adoption of illustrations within literary works was one of the most significant developments. The inclusion of visuals served not only to enhance the aesthetic appeal of books but also to deepen the engagement of readers. The interplay between text and image blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality, creating a captivating fusion that made it increasingly challenging to distinguish one from the other. This fusion exemplified the power of visual storytelling, where the words on the page came to life through the accompanying illustrations. The result was a rich and immersive reading experience that captivated the imaginations of Italians at the time, which also created multiple narratives and reinforced specific models, images, and aesthetics, such as the picturesque. Furthermore, the Italian publishing industry was not an isolated entity but rather a part of the broader European literary landscape. The influences of French and British publishing practices were keenly felt, shaping not only the content but also the format and types of reproductions employed in Italian publications. This cross-cultural exchange contributed

to the diversification of the Italian publishing market, exposing readers to a wider array of literary genres, but it also facilitated the standardization of visual styles, which is exemplified perfectly by the portrayal of Southern Italy, as it will be examined in the following chapters. Beyond mere entertainment, the intentions behind these illustrations were profound. They aimed to educate, enlighten, and communicate complex ideas in a visually accessible manner. In this sense, illustrations served as a powerful tool for disseminating knowledge and fostering a shared understanding of the world. The desire to create a universal and absolute comprehension of various subjects, from scientific concepts to historical events, was clearly evident in the meticulous attention to detail and accuracy exhibited in the illustrations. However, this goal came with a negative counterpart, which is the simplification and homogenization in the narrating process of historical, social, and cultural aspects and events. The publishing industry created repetitive patterns, both in the narrative and in the aesthetic, that readers could easily recognize and decipher, and the picturesque represents one example.

Chapter II

Veristi and Figurative Arts between Truth and Fiction

Non accusate l'arte, che ha il solo torto di avere più cuore di voi, e di piangere per voi i dolori dei vostri piaceri. Non predicate la moralità, voi che ne avete soltanto per chiudere gli occhi sullo spettacolo delle miserie che create, – voi che vi meravigliate come altri possa lasciare il cuore e l'onore là dove voi non lasciate che la borsa, – voi che fate scricchiolare allegramente i vostri stivalini inverniciati dove folleggiano ebbrezze amare, o gemono dolori sconosciuti, che l'arte raccoglie e che vi getta in faccia
(Verga, *Eva*, Introduzione)

Giovanni Verga's *verismo* distinguishes its name and poetics from that of the other nineteenth-century schools of Realism and Naturalism. Since its etymology, the choice of the term *vero* instead of *reale* does not reveal much about the Sicilian writer's need to step away from the other literary currents, but mostly shows the centrality of the search for truth in his writing. In order to understand how the truth combines with the picturesque fictionality, discussed in the previous chapter, it is fundamental to analyze Veristi's conception of art and their relationship with the artistic movements of their time. In fact, as we will observe, the goal of representing the real world in their writings does not correspond to strict and objective documentation. Veristi are aware of the impact of society on our perception of reality, and artists are not immune from this influence. Human beings are not free, even in their artistic expressions, but refer to a collective imagination, to a society, to a cultural background that affects their perception of truth. Thus, the intention of documenting the world through an unbiased and unprejudiced lens is impossible and unreal. How is this discourse meaningful in comprehending the picturesque representation of the South? Although these new artistic movements do not refer to an absolute Ideal but the Real as their subject, and they attempt to overtake the firm precepts of the Accademia dell'Arte, their objective is not to demolish the authorship and the subjectivity of the artist, but to eliminate a direct authorial

intervention and display the inner world of the characters, its relationship with the external sphere, and the internalization of the social judgment. This process of internalization, which is at the center of the Veristi's narrative, may be taken to a further level and seen as the acknowledgment of the authorial interiorization of a wider social discourse which, in this case, is deeply imbued with a bourgeois picturesque aesthetic and a colonial attitude. Moreover, this analysis is fundamental in understanding the context and background of the illustrators and the illustrative apparatus itself, which accompanies the verist production and refers, even more clearly, to a visual heritage firmly anchored to the exoticism and colonialism, central tendencies of the editorial industry and the commercial success.

Veristi and Figurative Arts

Verga's investigation on the truth starts in Florence in the second half of the nineteenth century and continues in Milan between 1870 and 1880. In these two cities, and in these same years, a similar attention to the terms *vero* and *reale* in relation to the creative and artistic process is given by two other important groups of writers and painters: the Scapigliati in Milan, and the Macchiaioli in Florence.

By virtue of the collaboration between Veristi, Macchiaioli, and Scapigliati in the context of the lively cultural activity of Florence and Milan in the years 1850-1870, it is significant to observe how Verga welcomes in the progressive elaboration of verist poetics both the requests of the Macchiaioli on the need for study of contemporary reality from the actual everyday life, and those of the Scapigliati on the truth of the world of the spirit.

Macchiaioli

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Florence was one of the main Italia cultural centers. In Florence, around 1852, Caffè Michelangiolo⁷⁷ was the privileged meeting place of the Macchiaioli, a lively group of artists who discussed art, literature, theater, and politics.⁷⁸ In 1852, this group, which still had neither a name nor a poetics, met regularly in the private room of the Caffè Michelangiolo. This meeting place was created as an alternative and in opposition to the Accademia dell'Arte and its traditional teaching methods. The alternative paths of research that attracted the attention of the artists of the Caffé came mostly from France: they were inspired by Positivism, the school of Barbizon,⁷⁹ the first theories of Realism, and by the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon⁸⁰ that ranged from the economic, political, and social fields to that of aesthetics. Moreover, in 1855, some of the painters who frequented the Florentine Caffé visited the Universal Exposition in Paris, and they did not fail to share the novelties and enthusiasm with their colleagues who remained in Italy. The group of painters who met at Caffè Michelangelo began to welcome these novel ferments of novelty within their own artistic discourse in an attempt to develop a poetics in line with their time.

¹ Caffè Michelangiolo opened around 1848 and closed in 1866. Cfr. E. Spalletti, *Gli anni del Caffè Michelangelo (1848-1861)*, De Luca Edizioni d'Arte, Firenze, 1989.

⁷⁸ Cfr. N. Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987; A. Boime, *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento: Representing Culture and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

⁷⁹ Barbizon school was a mid-19th-century French school of painting, part of a larger European movement toward naturalism in art, that made a significant contribution to the establishment of Realism in French landscape painting. Barbizon painters turned away from the melodramatic picturesqueness of established Romantic landscape painters as well as from the classical academic tradition, which used landscape merely as a backdrop for allegory and historical narrative. The Barbizon artists painted landscape in realistic terms and for its own sake.

⁸⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination social*, Garnier frères, Paris, 1865.

In particular, the ideas deriving from the affirmation of Positivism push the Macchiaioli to a reconsideration of the relationship between the figurative arts and the world. The philosophical presuppositions of the Romantic-Risorgimento art had been emptied and impoverished of their contents, surviving in a series of precepts perpetuated by the Accademia. This impoverishment was exacerbated by the application of the method of the exact sciences to the field of artistic research. This application involved the redefinition of art and its objectives. The Macchiaioli replaced the concept of art as a concrete form of the Idea (or Absolute)⁸¹ with that of art as a representation of nature, which can be directly observed in reality. In 1865, Diego Martelli,⁸² critic of art, leader, and patron of the group, writes:

Di più, altrove che nella natura, in qual luogo si comprendono gli originali di tutte le cose? [...] Finché si tratta di sentire tout simplement, si può sentire anche l'infinito, almeno v'è chi lo dice; ma dovendo fare è gioco forza ricorrere alla materia; vedere e toccare. Quindi noi per principio aborriamo da quell'arte fantastica che si toglie dal mondo per rappresentarci un incognito ideale, e domandiamo invece che nell'essere che ci vien presentata predominino queste tre cose: verità, carattere e sentimento.⁸³

⁸¹ Cfr. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche*, cit.; Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003; Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006.

⁸² Cfr. F. Dini & P. Dini, *Diego Martelli: storia di un uomo e di un'epoca*, Umberto Allemandi & C., Torino, 1996.

⁸³ D. Martelli, *Sulla pubblica mostra di Belle Arti della nuova Società promotrice in occasione del centenario di Dante*, in *L'Avvenire*, anno I, 8-9 Giugno 1865, published in F. Dini, *Da Courbet a Fattori. I principi del vero*, Skira, Milano, 2005, p. 246.

From this passage it is evident how the Ideal, which was placed at the foundation of romantic aesthetics, is understood by the Macchiaioli as the fantastic, the unknown, as something that removes art from the world and, therefore, it has no connection with it. On the contrary, for the romantics, the experience of the Ideal through art led to the comprehension of the world. This type of identity between Ideal and Real (the world) was no longer reflected in the theoretical writings of the Macchiaioli. Instead, what attracted the attention of the latter's artistic research was the world of nature in its observable and demonstrable being. As mentioned in the quotation, according to Martelli, it is only in nature that the original form of all things is understood. Knowledge of the world is no longer equivalent to knowledge of the Idea-reality, but to the study and analysis of observable reality. It is from the search for observability and provability that the idea of painting "from the truth" derived, a truth that is not a synthesis of ideal and reality anymore, but it is limited to the latter.

Telemaco Signorini, an influential painter and theorist of the Macchiaioli, also elaborates on the need for art anchored in life on the pages of Florentine newspapers. Signorini deepens the discussion on the preference for the study of the present over the past. Even history, another fundamental component of the romantic art, loses interest to give way to contemporaneity. In 1864 he writes:

Concludiamo finalmente che l'arte moderna dovendo essere una pagina dei nostri tempi, una emanazione dei sentimenti nostri e dei nostri costumi, non potrà certamente modellarsi sui secoli passati, che ebbero usi, costumi e sentimenti dissimili affatto da noi; solo analizzando e studiando il secolo nostro possiamo avere un carattere speciale, come i tempi di Risorgimento l'ebbero; solo col libero

*esame e colla franca critica possiamo giungere a rivaleggiare colle altre nazioni; solo formandoci un presente saremo degni del passato che abbiamo. [...]Se parliamo di realismo, non fu per farci campioni né di una setta né di una scuola; fu solamente per mostrare le tendenze attuali dell'arte nostra e dove siano le speranze del nostro risorgimento.*⁸⁴

In this passage, the centrality of the study and analysis of the present in artistic research is obvious; in these terms (study and, above all, analysis) we recognize the application of the scientific method to the field of art. It is only from such an analysis, linked to time and place, that the “*carattere speciale*” of the art of their time (so called by Signorini and Martelli) derives. To the absolute of the Hegelian Ideal, the Macchiaioli oppose that of the nature of a specific place and time.

The moments of triumph and fall of the arts are thus recognized by Martelli through the adoption of the criterion of a greater or lesser proximity to truth (or reality), corresponding to a greater or lesser closeness to the character of that people, of their place and of their time. In fact, he continues:

*In quanto che per la spinta data all'individualismo dai tempi ogni opera dell'ingegno deve necessariamente manifestare l'intima natura dell'artefice e della cosa da lui rappresentata e quindi tanto più necessaria addiviene una serie di profondissime investigazioni sulla natura delle cose tutte in generale.*⁸⁵

⁸⁴ T. Signorini, *Del fatto e del da farsi nell'arte*, in *La Nuova Europa*, 2 agosto 1863, published in F. Dini, *Da Courbet a Fattori. I principi del vero*, op. cit., p. 246.

⁸⁵ *Ivi*, p. 130.

According to the Macchiaioli, artistic fiction is a manifestation of the intimate nature of the craftsman, who is connected to a specific time and place. Furthermore, Martelli creates a strong bond between the creator, the artist, and what they represent. The *vero* is the product of this relationship. They do not try to get rid of the authorship. On the contrary, the truth is deeply subjective and connected to the spatial and temporal context. Therefore, the *vero* coincides with the reality, in its accidental, finite, and relative form, and includes both nature and the individual, and their socio-cultural environment.

Signorini's reviews published in the *Gazzettino* are based on these same principles. Signorini comments on two paintings by two Macchiaioli colleagues (Giovanni Fattori and Silvestro Lega):

Il sig. Fattori non ha realizzato una forma in questo suo quadro, egli ha realizzato un sentimento; il sentimento della campagna in una data stagione in un dato paese e vi è superiormente riuscito. Se quelle donne fanno una cosa piuttosto che un'altra non riguarda affatto l'autore, esse rendono evidente il paese e il paese le rende evidenti, le circonda della sua luce, le riflette, le illumina. [...] Il quadro del sig. Lega ha il merito non comune di aver le figure di quel paese e il paese di quelle figure, esse son così e non possono essere altrimenti per la ragione potente che ha ogni paese di assimilarsi tutto ciò che lo compone dando l'impronta del proprio carattere.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ T. Signorini, *I quadri dei signori Fattori, Lega e Borrani*, in D. Martelli, *Gazzettino delle arti del disegno*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

Like Martelli, Signorini emphasizes the synergy between the nature, the social context, and the individual. According to Signorini, the merit of both paintings is that of having captured the specific feeling and character of the place and of the people that are represented. This was possible because the author was not focused on creating a certain *forma*. With this term Signorini refers to the works of art of the past, whose forms acted as a reference model for the youngest painters. They are the forms that the academies taught and that critics appreciated. According to the Macchiaioli, these forms had lost value and contact with their world. They responded only to criteria arbitrarily established by the author and by that public for which the work was conceived and from which it received legitimacy (the academies and juries of the exhibitions in particular). To these arbitrary criteria that guided the artists in the creation of certain forms, the Macchiaioli oppose those of nature (in its relativity and accidentality) studied from life. When, in the review, Signorini emphasizes that Fattori's choice of the place and of the figures does not really concern the author, he intends to highlight the coherence in the choice and combination of the humans and the background, creating an 'anthropological landscape'. Coherence that is derived from the observation of individuals, their social and natural context from life and not from criteria arbitrarily established by academies or juries.

To this ideal of form promoted by the academies, the Macchiaioli oppose the *macchia* (patch or spot). It is precisely for the use of the term and of a specific technique that the group will be nicknamed by an anonymous journalist with the term Macchiaioli, with denigrating intent. The words of this anonymous journalist can help to understand the concept of *macchia* in relation to that of *forma*. The review says:

[...] ma cosa sono questi macchiajoli? [...] Son giovani artisti ad alcuni dei quali si avrebbe torto negando un forte ingegno, ma che si son messi in testa di riformar l'arte, partendosi dal principio che l'effetto è tutto. Vi siete mai ritrovati a sentire qualcuno che vi presenti la sua scatola da tabacco di barba di scopa, e che nelle vene e nelle macchie svariate del legno pretenda di riconoscervi una testina, un ominino, un cavallino? E la testina, l'ominino, il cavallino c'è di fatto in quelle macchie.... basta immaginarselo! Così è dei dettagli nei quadri dei macchiajoli. [...] Ma che l'effetto debba uccidere il disegno, fin la forma, questo è troppo. Se va di questo passo, i macchiajoli finiranno col dipingere col pennello in cima a una pertica [...].⁸⁷

In this article it is possible to observe at least two issues, linked to each other: the first is that of the anonymous reviewer's reaction towards the *macchia*, which is considered by him to be a non-form. For the reviewer, the problematic and unacceptable aspect of the *macchia* is its unfinished aspect. He refers to the figures in these paintings as spots without form. In this regard, the Macchiaioli do not care at all about the idea of form. On the contrary, for them the *macchia* is the form par excellence, in its ability to express the feeling and the characteristic of their time. For the Macchiaioli, in fact, the *macchia* is not born following arbitrary criteria, but almost spontaneously, like any other phenomenon of nature.

The term Macchiaioli, in fact, before becoming distinctive of the Macchiaioli art, was used for some time, in pictorial jargon, precisely with reference to the character of spontaneity. At the time of the Macchiaioli, one of the most recent definitions of *macchia* was that of Filippo

⁸⁷ T. Signorini, *Zibaldone*, Sillabe, Firenze, 2008, p. 55.

Baldinucci in *Il Vocabolario delle Arti del Disegno*, the first technical vocabulary of painting published in 1681 and reprinted in 1806. Baldinucci gives the following definitions of the term *macchia*:

*I Pittori usano questa voce per esprimere la qualità d'alcuni disegni, ed alcuna volta anche pitture, fatte con istraordinaria facilità, e con un tale accordamento, e freschezza, senza molta matita o colore, e in tal modo che quasi pare, che ella non da mano d'Artefice, ma da per sè stessa sia apparsa sul foglio o su la tela, e dicono; questa è una bella macchia.*⁸⁸

According to this definition, the distinctive quality of the *macchia* is that of appearing as if a given form materialized by itself on the canvas. An older reference to the *macchia* dates back to Leonardo da Vinci's *Trattato di pittura*. Leonardo speaks about spots referring to “*alcuni muri imbrattati di varie macchie o pietre di vari misti,*” and according to the imagination of Da Vinci, such *macchie* appear as “*similitudini di diversi paesi, ornate di montagne, fiumi, sassi, alberi, pianure grandi, valli e colli... diverse battaglie... figure strane, arie di volti ed abiti ed infinite cose.*”⁸⁹ Unlike in the dictionary, in the treatise the *macchia* is not the work of the artist, but of nature itself. The spot arises spontaneously, and these characteristics and the ability to refer through the imagination to recognizable forms of reality are the fundamental elements recovered by the Macchiaioli within the poetics of the *macchia*.

The second significant issue in the review is its prophetic conclusion. Here, taking the *macchia* method to its extreme consequences, the reviewer glimpses at the possibility of the total

⁸⁸ Term «*macchia*» in F. Baldinucci, *Vocabolario delle arti del disegno*, Santi Franchi, Firenze, 1681.

⁸⁹ L. Da Vinci, *Trattato di Pittura*, Parte Seconda, Carabba Editore, Lanciano, 1947, p. 63.

loss of the recognizable figure and, therefore, of abstractionism. With this hypothesis, the reviewer focuses the attention on a question that the Macchiaioli do not seem to care about, namely that of the subjective character of the *macchia*, implicit in its unfinished nature.

First of all, in the theoretical writings of the Macchiaioli, the subjectivity of the *macchia* is never problematized since the individual (the artist) and their environment (natural and social) are seen as an organic unity, represented by the spots. The intimate nature of the craftsman and the represented object are both the result of the same reality. The artist who interprets their world is not isolated, but an integral part of their object of study.⁹⁰ Many of the Macchiaioli paintings represent, in fact, the individual immersed in nature precisely to underline this connection between the individual and their natural and social environment.

Secondly, the Macchiaioli understood the relationship between fiction and reality not in terms of the identity of particular forms, but of the recognizability of a specific reality. This discourse is elaborated by Signorini on several occasions and, particularly, in theoretical treatises in defense of landscape painting, in which he states:

Questa casta ricca ed ignorante [la borghesia inglese] che crede in buona fede che l'artista possa e debba fare quel che è, e non quello che gli pare che sia, viene solleticata nella sua vanità di protettrice delle arti, da quegli artisti che produttori per guadagno soltanto, copiano per lei che le vuole, le fredde minuzie della macchina fotografica e tutte le foglie di un albero e tutti i capelli nel proprio ritratto, venendo a sconoscere i meriti di ciò che ha di più insigne la loro nazione nei due sopra citati artisti [Turner e Consable].⁹¹

⁹⁰ Martelli and Signorini refers to artistic fiction both as translation and interpretation of the reality.

⁹¹ T. Signorini, *Del paesaggio e della sua influenza nell'arte moderna*, in D. Martelli, *Gazzettino delle arti del disegno*,

This passage shows how the free interpretation of the artist does not corrupt the truth. Indeed, such freedom is, according to Signorini, necessary, essential to the nature of painting itself, as what distinguishes it from photography. It is precisely in this interpretation that painting can be said to be the “natural” product of its time. On the contrary, since photography is a machine product, it lacks the nature of the artist. Regarding the landscape, Signorini writes:

Disgraziatamente adunque [il paesaggio] non è ufficialmente rappresentato, poiché toltagli in questo modo la importanza che merita, è divenuta opinione generale fra noi, che chi esercita il paesaggio non sia che un aborto dell'arte storica o per lo meno un inutile produttore della campagna che è sempre più bella vera che riprodotta! (come se chiunque potesse vederla bella come l'artista la vede, e come se questo famoso bello fosse nella natura soltanto e non anche nell'individuo che la interpreta) o è il paesaggio un genere per lo meno senza scopo direttamente morale ed istruttivo e viene allora a mancare a quella missione che fa tanto importante la pittura di storia.⁹²

Signorini emphasizes the essential value of the artist’s interpretation, which add values to the reality. It is precisely in that increased degree of beauty, given by the artist, that the viewer may appreciate and recognize a specific reality.

op. cit., p. 259.

⁹² *Ivi*, p. 266.

As will be seen later in the pages dedicated to the Verists, the question of the artist's subjectivity in relation to the discourse on truth, reality, and fiction, is posed to the center of the realist discussion. Verga and Capuana arrive in Florence in the sixties, when the Macchiaioli promoted their ideas on contemporary painting. Later, we will see how, starting with these premises, the discourse on subjectivity is further elaborated also under the influence of the French naturalist literature.

Truth and reality: the Verism

When Capuana and Verga moved to Florence, the poetics of the *macchia* and the need for an art anchored in life are two of the main topics in the artistic and literary debate. It is significant to notice that in 1863, in the middle of the Macchiaioli's movement, Verga published in installments the novel entitled *Sulle lagune* on the pages of *Nuova Europa*, the magazine on which Signorini was carrying out his aesthetic battles. Therefore, since the beginning of the sixties, Verga follows the Florentine cultural activity through magazines and then moves to the capital of the kingdom in 1869.

The issues debated by the artists of the Caffè Michelangiolo fascinated Capuana, who resided in Florence between 1864 and 1868, and became a regular visitor of the Caffè. Among the Macchiaioli, Capuana made friends with Signorini and Martelli, who were particularly interested in the novelties of literary literary. While Capuana followed Signorini's journalistic activity on the *Nuova Europa*, Signorini payed attention to the theater reviews that Capuana simultaneously wrote for the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione*.⁹³

⁹³ From 1866 to 1868 Capuana is a theatre journalist for the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione*, one of the main publications in the united Italy. The articles published in these years will be collected and published by Capuana in 1872 in the volume *Il teatro contemporaneo*, Luigi Pedone Lauriel, Palermo, 1872.

Since the Florentine years, both Verga and Capuana appropriated the Macchiaoli's vocabulary and topics. Capuana, in his activity as a critic, related them first to the theater, as evidenced by the articles for *La Nazione*, and then to novels and short stories, artistic genres which he began to promote in those same years. Among the most significant theoretical issues that Capuana made his own was that of the need to study life in order to represent contemporary reality. Staying within the limits of the theater, Capuana, like the Macchiaioli, reproaches the theatrical writers for repeating themselves in empty forms, which have now become formulas, unable to represent and dialogue with the present. Capuana invites the writers to study life to free themselves from the slavery of traditional forms. According to Capuana, as to the Macchiaoli, the study of life has to do with a renewed search for new forms. However, Capuana believed that the truth (and therefore also the form) does not have to do with natural features and/or socio-cultural characteristics, but with the inner self of each individual. In particular, one of his articles for *La Nazione* testifies to this. In it, while negatively reviewing the play *Marianna* by the contemporary Milanese writer Paolo Ferrari, Capuana writes:

Allorchè la critica ed il pubblico (che è la critica inedita) rimproverano a' nostri autori drammatici di non saper riuscire a dipingere la società contemporanea, gli autori rispondono che nel far ciò presso di noi vi sono difficoltà quasi insormontabili [...] In Italia invece, con quasi altrettante società quante erano le antiche divisioni politiche, l'autore che descrive perfettamente l'aspetto d'una data provincia trovasi sempre nel pericolo d'esser frainteso o non capito nelle altre. Onde non restringersi in una cerchia troppo angusta, lo scrittore italiano è quindi costretto a crearsi una società ideale, o meglio, eclettica che abbia un poco della

fisionomia di tutte e non rassomigli partitamente a nessuna; è costretto a vagare nell'indeterminato, a rassegnarsi ad un colorito senza toni precisi; a sacrificare insomma, per così dire, l'arte all'arte, nell'attesa di poter ritrarre una società unicamente italiana, che intanto è ancora di là da venire. In cotesta difesa degli autori vi è un po' d'equivoco che ci sembra giusto deciferare. Essi, parlando di società, tengono conto soltanto di certe note affatto esteriori delle quali l'arte vera si preoccupa poco, e paiono non darsi verun pensiero delle passioni e de' caratteri che da migliaia d'anni durano i medesimi nella loro sostanza, subendo appena qualche leggiera modificazione pella diversità de' luoghi e de' climi. [...] Dunque, secondo noi, è difetto di studio dal vero come direbbero i pittori. Difetto che non solamente traspare dalla parte sostanziale della maggioranza delle nostre opere teatrali, cioè dal concepimento del soggetto e de' caratteri, ma anche dalla parte affatto esteriore, cioè dalla lingua e soprattutto dallo stile.⁹⁴

As can be seen in this passage, the diversity of places and climates, so important for the Macchiaioli, are defined here instead as quite external notes, appearances of which true art cares little. To the relativity of reality appearances, Capuana opposes the continuity and identity of the spirit, those “*passioni e [quei] caratteri che da migliaia d'anni durano i medesimi nella loro sostanza, subendo appena qualche leggiera modificazione pella diversità de' luoghi e de' climi.*”

When Verga moves to Florence⁹⁵ he is included in the group of friends of Francesco Dall'Ongaro, holder of the first chair of dramaturgy in Italy, theater writer, novelist, as well as art

⁹⁴ L. Capuana, *La Nazione*, 13 novembre 1866, in *Il teatro italiano contemporaneo*, Luigi Pedone Lauriel, Palermo, 1872, p. 123.

⁹⁵ Nicola Niceforo provided him with letters of recommendations to comedians and theater journalists, while Mario Rapisardi introduced him to Dall'Ongaro and Ludmilla Assing. On Verga's friendships in Florence cfr. I. Gambacorti,

critic. The Dall'Ongaro's *salotto* is animated by a large group of writers, actors, and artists. Since Verga's arrival in Florence, Caffè Michelangiolo has already closed its doors and Capuana has returned to Sicily. However, the need for an art portrayed from life is now at the center of not only artistic but also literary discussions. In addition to Capuana, even Dall'Ongaro recognizes the innovative potential of this new trend. This is testified by his words of praise towards the Neapolitan painter Domenico Morelli,⁹⁶ published in January 1869 in the context of a report on the state of Italian painting at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1867. Morelli, a painter who was not strictly Macchiaiolo but who carried out an important role in the initial transition towards the new movement, he is defined by Dall'Ongaro as the true and first author of the artistic movement of our age.⁹⁷ This primacy is due to the restoration of the study of nature, which brings back Italian painting to the living sources of truth.⁹⁸ According to Dall'Ongaro, Morelli had attracted the attention of young artists from all over Italy with his purpose of looking for less forbidden and less frivolous topics. It was necessary to study the characters, the composition, the colors from life. Everything had become a convention in academic schools: the moves, the types, the contrasts of light, reflections, and shadows. It was necessary to make the light on the canvas, as the sun did it in the atmosphere.⁹⁹

The judgment on Morelli testifies to Dall'Ongaro's alignment with the idea of a study of nature from life as proposed by the Macchiaioli painters. As previously mentioned, Verga and Capuana also welcome the Macchiaioli's invitation to study of life, not without disregarding,

Verga a Firenze, Le Lettere, Firenze, 1994.

⁹⁶ Domenico Morelli and Saverio Altamura, both Neapolitans, contributed to spreading the Parisian pictorial novelties in Florence, among the Macchiaioli. They played an important role in the very first years of the group's formation and the formulation of the poetics of the *macchia*. Cfr. C. Maltese, *Storia dell'arte italiana (1758-1943)*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1960.

⁹⁷ F. Dall'Ongaro, *L'arte italiana a Parigi nell'esposizione universale del 1867*, Giovanni Polizzi e Comp., Firenze, 1869, p. 30.

⁹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 31.

⁹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 32.

however, the need to redefine the truth. In fact, Verga, as Capuana, starting from the Florentine novel *Storia di una capinera* (1869), directs his interest towards the study of the inner world and its contrasts with that of "appearances", of "external notes", as the young Capuana would have said.

After his stay in Florence, the intellectual connection between Capuana and Verga is corroborated by an intense exchange of letters and by Verga's reading of Capuana's *Teatro italiano contemporaneo* (1872). In this text Capuana collects his articles published on *La Nazione* between 1866 and 1868. Regarding the impact of reading this book, Verga's own words are worth quoting:

Truth or imagination: the Scapigliati

In the volume on contemporary theater, Capuana announces the publication of his next book *I nostri giovani romanzieri*, and the review of *Storia di una capinera*.¹⁰⁰ Among the writers that Capuana intended to include in the volume *I nostri giovani romanzieri*, never published in its original form, there are Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, Ippolito Nievo, Vittorio Bersezio, Anton Giulio Barrili, Salvatore Farina, Luigi Gualdo, Edmondo De Amicis, and Giovanni Verga. Many of these novelists belong to the Milanese Scapigliati group. Among these, particularly significant is the interest of Capuana for Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, who in the short span of his life had carried out an important activity in Milan, parallel to that carried out by Capuana in Florence. In 1865 Tarchetti created, together with Salvatore Farina, the *Cenacolo artistico letterario* and participated in the

¹⁰⁰ In the review, never published, Capuana congratulates Verga for refraining from expressing a moral judgment because “*in ogni vera opera d'arte [...] la lezione, la moralità c'è di suo diritto, e è tanto più grande quanto meno l'autore abbia avuto l'espressa intenzione di mettervela.*” (A. S. Abate, Introduzione a Capuana, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1989, p. 39). This judgment highlights one of the main differences between Capuana's idea of literature and Dall'Ongaro's and allows us to associate Verga more with the former than with the latter, already in this Florentine novel.

foundation of the *Rivista Minima*, the main newspaper of the Milanese Scapigliatura until 1883. The essay *Idee minime sul romanzo* was published in this magazine in 1865, in which, as Capuana does in *La Nazione* in Florence, Tarchetti promoted the validity of the novel as a literary genre. Between 1865 and 1869, the year in which he died from phthisis, Tarchetti published short stories and novels that will have a certain echo in the literary debate and production, as in Verga's and Capuana's.¹⁰¹

Once he moved to Milan, Verga is introduced by Capuana to the Scapigliati circle. One of the distinctive aspects of this movement is the interest in the relationship between the physical world and the spiritual or psychic one, between the natural and the supernatural, and between the real and the fantastic or the imaginary. Tarchetti disputes the primacy of the scientific method. The affirmation of Positivism threatens the presence of the imagination as one of the modalities to understand the reality. In highlighting the impossibility of drawing a clear boundary between the imaginary and the real, Tarchetti underlines the groundlessness of a system of thought that excludes the former in favor of the latter. The short story *Riccardo Waitzen*, published in 1867 in *Strenna Italiana*, is preceded by a long reflection on imagination. The story begins with this series of questions:

Che cosa è l'immaginazione? Chi ne definisce le facoltà? Dove rintracceremo noi quella linea che separa l'immaginario dal vero? E nel mondo dello spirito, nelle sue vaste concezioni, esiste qualche cosa che noi possiamo chiamare assolutamente reale, od assolutamente fantastico? O piuttosto non è egli tutto fantastico nello

¹⁰¹ Signorini's connections with the Scapigliatura group are numerous and lasting. Particularly significant is the one with Emilio Praga. Signorini accompanies Praga's collection of poems *Tavolozza* (1862) with his etchings. The collection includes, among other things, a series of five poems with the significant title of *Pittori sul vero*. Cfr. F. Dini, *I Macchiaioli. Sentimento del vero*, *op. cit.*

spirito? [...] Forse la letteratura avvenire non mirerà più ad altro fine che a questo: essa arresterà lo spirito degli uomini sempre rivolto all'ideale e al fantastico per trattenerlo sui campi della realtà, ove noi dobbiamo combattere, qui e non altrove, vogliosi o non volenti, la lotta secolare della vita.¹⁰²

In this passage, the terms true and real are used interchangeably. However, unlike the Macchiaioli, in Tarchetti's distinction between the world of the spirit and the external reality, what loses consistency is precisely the world of observable and demonstrable reality. The moment the individual perceives a real object, that object ceases to be a reality of the external world and becomes a reality of the spiritual world. Therefore, what loses consistency, what ceases to exist for the individual, is the real. In this sense, Tarchetti can assert that in the spirit everything is fantastic and real at the same time.

In his battle against the scientific method as the only source of truth, Tarchetti calls into question the occult world, spiritism and dreams. The existence of these elements is sufficient to question the boundaries of a reality exclusively defined by a scientific basis. In fact, he adds to his observations:

Perocchè chi ha mai potuto definire le proprietà degli spiriti, e i rapporti che essi hanno tra di loro? Che cosa è il sogno, il sonnambulismo, il presagio, l'astrazione, il pensiero, e più di tutto l'incubo? I sensi – ecco i limiti estremi delle nostre facoltà; nulla di positivo, nulla di assoluto fuori di essi – ogni altra cosa è immaginaria e fantastica; essa appartiene a un'altra sfera di esseri, sulla cui natura, sul cui fine,

¹⁰² I. U. Tarchetti, *Tutte le opere*, ed. E. Ghidetti, Cappelli Editore, Bologna, 1967, Vol. I, pp. 598-600.

sulle cui facoltà, nulla ci è dato di comprendere e di asserire con sicurezza. [...]
Chi vi dice ancora che voi sognate? Che cosa è il sogno se non che un'esistenza piena, colma, smisurata, al cui confronto l'esistenza della veglia non è che la vita monca e impotente della pietra?... Veglia, sonno... parole! Io non vi domanderò ancora quale sia quella linea che separa questi due mondi – negatemi che i fenomeni esistano.¹⁰³

To the interest towards the truth and the world of passions, an interest that Capuana and Verga have cultivated since the Florentine years, they also add the Scapigliati's discourse. They turn their gaze to the world of the spirit. In particular, the Scapigliati pay attention to those manifestations of the spirit as real in everyday experience as impossible to explain with the method of science; among these, madness, and dreams, specifically.

Between the sixties and the seventies, neither Capuana nor Verga are strangers to the Scapigliati's tension towards the fantastic, the dreams and the imagination. In fact, in 1872 Capuana takes up the discourse on the dream world in a short story entitled *Un caso di sonnambulismo*. Like Tarchetti, with this story Capuana questions the primacy of the physical world. In the conclusion, he writes: "*Quando vediamo il nostro organismo mostrar tanta potenza in casi tanto eccezionali ed evidentemente morbosi, chi ardirà d'asserire che le presenti facoltà siano il limite estremo imposto ad esso dalla natura?*"¹⁰⁴ At the same time, in these years Verga shows his attention to the reality of dreams in the novella *La coda del diavolo*, originally entitled *Sogno*, in the collection *Primavera ed altri racconti*. In the preface, Verga states:

¹⁰³ *Ivi*, pp. 601-602.

¹⁰⁴ E. Ghidetti, *Racconti fantastici dell'Ottocento*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1985, Vol I, p. 230.

Questo racconto è fatto per le persone che vanno colle mani dietro la schiena, contando i sassi; per coloro che cercano il pelo nell'uovo e il motivo per cui tutte le cose umane danno una mano alla ragione e l'altra all'assurdo; per quegli altri cui si rizzerebbe il fiocco di cotone sul berretto da notte quando avessero fatto un brutto sogno, e che lascerebbero trascorrere impunemente gli Idi di Marzo; per gli spiritisti, i giuocatori di lotto, gli innamorati, e i novellieri. [...] Infine, per le persone che non vi permetterebbero di aprir bocca, fosse per dire una sciocchezza, senza provare qualche cosa, questo racconto potrebbe provare a spiegare molte cose, le quali si lasciano in bianco apposta, perchè ciascuno vi trovi quel che vi cerca.¹⁰⁵

As the Scapigliati and Capuana, Verga appears reluctant in adopting the scientific method for the purposes of demonstration. In the following pages, we will see how Verga welcomes and elaborates, in the works of the Florentine and Milanese years, both the requests of the Macchiaioli about the need to study the contemporary reality contemporary from life, and those of the Scapigliati about the truth of the world of the spirit.

Verga and the search for the real

Starting from Verga's works between 1869 (the year of his arrival to Florence) and 1880 (year of the accomplished poetics of the Verismo),¹⁰⁶ it will be possible to see how his discourse

¹⁰⁵ G. Verga, *La coda del diavolo*, in *Tutte le novelle*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 43-44.

¹⁰⁶ Cfr. AA. VV., *Il caso Verga*, Palumbo, Palermo, 1975; G. Baldi, *L'artificio della regressione. Tecnica narrativa e ideologia nel Verga verista*, Liguori, Napoli, 1980.

on truth in relation to reality and fiction unfolded. In the previous pages, it was observed the Macchiaioli's desire to re-establish a link between art and the world starting from the observable reality. From this will derived the Macchiaioli emphasis on representation from life, where the truth coincided with the contemporary reality.

The Verists, like the Macchiaioli, are interested in re-establishing a link between fiction and the contemporary world. As we have seen in Capuana review, even the Verists consider the study of life as a necessity to renew artistic forms. However, for the two Sicilian writers, this discourse on truth becomes more articulated. Sharing the doubts about science already advanced by the Scapigliati, the Verists elaborate a further distinction between reality and truth, where not only these two terms do not coincide but are in opposition, and where the developments of one and the other are placed in conflict. It will also be seen how this distinction between truth and reality entails a problematization of the position of the subject (the artist) with regard to representation.

An important stage in the development of Verga's discourse on truth is that of the two novels he worked on during his time in Florence: *Storia di una capinera*,¹⁰⁷ completely written in Florence, and *Eva*, with a more complex composition. Although very different from each other, both novels feature numerous points of contact with some short stories and Tarchetti's *Fosca*. Both reveal the interest of the young Verga for the truth of the world of the spirit and his attention to the Scapigliati's themes of madness and obsessions, unlike the Macchiaioli. In these early novels, in fact, individuals are not represented as a result of their natural and social environment, but they are in conflict with it.

¹⁰⁷ G. Verga, *Storia di una capinera*, Mondadori, Milano, 1991.

The epistolary novel *Storia di una capinera* is the story of the monastic vows of a young girl. Written entirely in the summer of 1869, immediately after the serial publication of *Fosca* on the *Strenna*, the novel evidently draws from Tarchetti's fiction. Verga's attention to Tarchetti's work marks off the interpretation provided by Dall'Ongaro, for example, who sees *Storia di una capinera* as a social novel, an interpretation that has been linked to this book since its publication.¹⁰⁸ Rather, the interest of the novel is oriented towards the investigation of the inner world of the main character, the fragility of the psyche and the contrast between individual and social reality. Verga explains the reasons behind the title in the introduction to the novel, where he compares the story of the main character to a blackcap (*capinera*) he had seen die in a cage:

*Allorché la madre dei due bimbi, innocenti e spietati carnefici del povero uccelletto, mi narrò la storia di un'infelice di cui le mura del chiostro avevano imprigionato il corpo, e la superstizione e l'amore avevano torturato lo spirito: una di quelle intime storie, che passano inosservate tutti i giorni, storia di un cuore tenero, timido, che aveva amato e pianto e pregato senza osare di far scorgere le sue lagrime o di far sentire la sua preghiera, che infine si era chiuso nel suo dolore ed era morto; io pensai alla povera capinera.*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Dall'Ongaro's letter to Caterina Percoto, which accompanies the first edition of *Storia di una capinera*, ends with the following words: "Ora voi li leggerete [i fogli manoscritti] qui pubblicati in questo volumetto, in fronte al quale velli porre il vostro nome come eccitamento ed augurio al giovane scrittore che si mette sotto la nostra bandiera" (Verga, *Storia di una capinera*, op. cit, Documenti).

¹⁰⁹ *Ivi*, p. 4.

The author underlines that he is dealing with “intimate” stories.¹¹⁰ As Capuana intends to study the passions of his characters, Verga turns his gaze to what is hidden; stories that, as Verga states, go unnoticed every day.

Verga's attention to the inner world is anticipated by two expressions that can be found in the manuscripts of two other novels of these years. On the first page of the manuscript *Una Peccatrice* (1864), he writes “*bozzetti sul cuore,*” and similarly, in *Eva*, “*schizzi sul cuore.*”¹¹¹ Therefore, all three novels of this period of formation aspire to become rapid representations, “sketches” of the interiority of the characters.

If the link between the psychological study and the novel does not represent a novelty in the nineteenth century, different is the way in which Verga approaches the study of the dynamics between the individual and the environment. With the image of the blackcap in a cage, for example, the author promotes a social denunciation of the female condition, as well as the contrast between the development of the inner world and that of reality, understood as the cultural environment, as the society. These developments are not represented in a systemic and parallel way as by the Macchiaioli, but in conflict. The natural development of the protagonist's inner world takes, in fact, a different path from the one the *capinera* herself, her family and her community expect. Verga's interest in this character does not focus on the family's responsibility but on the fragility of the ego, on its inability to recognize and accept its own will and to assert it on that of the family and the social context, experienced as natural, the right one. The drama of the *capinera* is not presented in terms of a constraint imposed on her from the outside but from the inside, by herself.

¹¹⁰ The adjective derives from the Latin *intimus*, superlative form of *interus*, which means “what is more inside.”

¹¹¹ Comitato per l'edizione nazionale delle opere di Giovanni Verga, *I tempi e le opere di Giovanni Verga*, Le Monnier, Firenze, 1986.

As stated in the introduction, the *capinera* did not dare to “*far scorgere le sue lagrime o di far sentire la sua preghiera.*”¹¹²

Throughout the novel, on several occasions Maria considers her monastic vows as a natural fact; consequently, all the unexpected feelings are interpreted as a deviation from that natural course. The most significant occasion is the scene in which Nino, the boy she falls in love with, leaves the evening ball to visit Maria, left alone at home. During the dialogue, Nino asks her if she intends to return to the convent:

«Ascoltatemi,» ripigliò; «voi siete una vittima.» «Oh! No, signore!» «Sì, voi siete la vittima della vostra posizione, della cattiveria di vostra matrigna, della debolezza di vostro padre, del destino!» «No, signore, no!» «Perché dunque siete costretta a farvi monaca?» «Nessuno mi ha costretta, signore... è stata la mia libera volontà...» «Ah!» [...] «La necessità», ripresi. Egli non disse nulla. Poi dopo alcuni istanti di silenzio mi domandò, ma la sua voce era rauca: «E rientrerete in convento?». Esitai, ma risposi: «Sì». Egli tacque di nuovo. [...] Ci fu un istante che non vidi più nulla nè colla mente nè cogli occhi e mi trovai colle mani nelle sue. «Maria» mi diceva, «perchè andrete in convento?» «Lo so io, forse? È necessario, nacqui monaca.»¹¹³

Nino invites Maria to consider the possibility not to return to the convent. She, however, rejects it, asserting at first that she freely chose her monastic vows; right after, she attributes her choice to the necessity, referring to her economic and social condition. Finally, when for one last

¹¹² Verga, *Storia di una capinera*, p. 4

¹¹³ *Ivi*, pp. 50-51.

time Nino asks her the reason for that choice, Maria declares that she does not know. In this third instance the responsibility no longer falls either on her will or on that of the family but on an entity beyond her comprehension. In that “*nacqui monaca*,” Maria made her social condition a “natural state”, something that cannot be modified, thus any attempt to oppose it would fail.

Such inability does not only concern Maria, but her entire family. In the initial introduction, when Verga talks about the little bird, the blackcap, he defines the two children as innocent and ruthless executioners of the poor little bird, and specifies that “*i suoi custodi, le volevano bene, cari bambini che si trastullavano col suo dolore e le pagavano la sua malinconia con miche di pane e con parole gentili.*”¹¹⁴ Thus, none of the characters emerges as the cause of the protagonist's condition; rather, they all participate and anticipate the condition of the vanquished individuals.

The story of Maria's attempts to adapt herself to the monastic vows is all told in the first person by the protagonist in a series of letters she sends to her friend Marianna. The tone of the narrative is confessional, a revelation of her interiority. The descriptions of the environments are reduced to a minimum and are related to the relationships with the society (the family and the convent), and the landscape of Monte Ilice. While in the first case, Maria emerges promptly as an estranged character, the description of nature mediates the protagonist's access to intimacy. In the first letters to her friend, Maria speaks about her family. In the description of her stepmother, for example, she says:

La mia matrigna è un'eccellente donna, perchè non si occupa che di Giuditta e di Gigi, e mi lascia correre per le vigne a mio bell'agio. Dio, se mi proibisse di

¹¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 3.

*saltellare per i campi come lo proibisce ai suoi figli [...] sarei molto infelice, non è vero?*¹¹⁵

This tangled logic anticipates the one Verga will use to develop Rosso Malpelo's story: his characters, Rosso Malpelo and Maria, have internalized the judgment of the community as true. With this strategy, the author excludes himself from the judgment: while the *capinera* defines the stepmother as an excellent mother, the reader recognizes the injustice.

Like the stepmother, all the other characters are presented in relation to the protagonist. Just like in many figures in the Macchiaioli paintings, the reconstruction of the physiognomy of the faces is only sketched out, entrusted to the reader's imagination. About the protagonist, we know that she wears a black cassock and that on the day of the vows she will take on the white veil. Not a hint of her height, the color of her eyes or that of her hair, which will be a fundamental element during her vows, when they will be cut. Each member of the family, father, stepmother, sister, and brother is presented to her friend Marianna through their gestures or their own specific attribute. The father, for example, is described in the act of greeting and hugging his daughter, while the sister, Giuditta, is portrayed through the way she fills her room, with several hats and dresses. Not even the physiognomy of her lover Nino is described. With these few details, the greeting and the hug of the father, the prohibition of the stepmother and the clothes and hats of the sister, Verga captures the way Maria lives her relationships. From this representation the *capinera* emerges as an estranged character, always separated from the convent and from the family.

Through the description of nature, Verga accesses the protagonist's intimacy. A significant example is that of the relationship with Nino, mediated by a dog, an image that prefigures that of

¹¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 8.

the donkey mediating the affection between Mena and Alfio in the Malavoglia. In one of her letters, Maria tells of a walk in the countryside with her brother, Nino and his dog. Returning from the walk, Maria and Nino sit next to each other on a small wall:

Io non vedevo che il calcio del suo schioppo che disegnava sulle zolle certe bizzarre figure. Alì venne a posare la sua grossa testa sui miei ginocchi sorridendomi con quei suoi begli occhi pieni di vita; io lo accarezzavo ed esso mi ringraziava dimenando la coda. Il suo padrone mi disse: Vedete come vi vuol bene Alì? Lo amate voi?». Non so perchè quell'innocentissima domanda mi commosse tutta, e mi parve d'amare immensamente quel povero Alì... E accarezzò anch'egli il suo cane... e allora le nostre mani s'incontrarono, e sentii che la mia tremava. Cercavo una risposta e non seppi balbettare che: «Come è bello il vostro cane, signore!...» Egli non disse più nulla e sospirò.¹¹⁶

In this passage, the contrast between the judgment of innocence that the *capinera* attributes to Nino's question and the confused reaction to that same question stands out. The feeling that Maria confesses neither to Nino, nor to her friend nor to herself finds expression in regard to Nino's dog.

The *capinera's* progressive attempt to resign herself to her condition as a nun is transformed in obsession, first, and, at the end, in madness. As in Tarchetti's works, craziness redefines the concept of reality by questioning the stability of the rational ego and its manifestations of will. In a last moment of lucidity that precedes the madness, Maria says:

¹¹⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 36-37.

Oggi ho passato tutto il giorno a guardare la porta per la quale sono entrata... quella porta tutta nera con rossi chiavistelli, che si apre soltanto per far entrare delle vittime e che non si ripassa mai più... Ed io sono entrata per quella porta!... Ero libera, al di fuori, ed ho passato coi miei piedi quella soglia! Nessuno m'ha trascinato, nessuno m'ha spinta! ... Com'è stato, Dio mio? Ero matta? Sarà stato in sogno? Al di là di quella porta che cosa ci sarà mai... Che cosa si deve provare nell'anima oltrepassandola?¹¹⁷

Significantly, only now, one step away from entering the cell, Maria, consciously freeing her family from all responsibility, wonders how she could freely choose her monastic vows. Compared to the initial conversation with Nino, on one hand she recognizes her responsibility for the choice, on the other, seeing only now the absurdity, she recognizes the unawareness, the unconsciousness, and she compares it to a state of madness or a dream. In this final passage, Verga confirms his interest in the *capinera* in relation to the ego, its fragility, and its difficulties in trying to adapt to a given social reality.

In the novel *Eva*, Verga returns to the dynamics between individual and society, although, compared to the *capinera*, greater emphasis is given to the responsibility of the external world. The first drafting of this novel dates back to the years in Catania. The writing continues intermittently in Florence to be resumed again in Catania and completed in 1872, when Verga arrives in Milan. The closeness of this novel to the Scapigliati literature is revealed from the very

¹¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 115.

first words of the introduction, where Verga specifies that the truth of his novel does not depend on its being taken from reality. He writes:

Eccovi una narrazione – sogno o storia poco importa – ma vera, com'è stata o come potrebbe essere, senza rettorica e senza ipocrisie. Voi ci troverete qualche cosa che vi appartiene, ch'è il frutto delle vostre passioni, e se sentite di dover chiudere il libro allorchè si avvicina vostra figlia – voi che non osate scoprirvi il seno dinanzi a lei se non alla presenza di duemila spettatori e alla luce del gas, o voi che pur lacerando i guanti nell'applaudire le ballerine, avete il buon senso di supporre che ella non scorga scintillare l'ardore dei vostri desideri nelle lenti del vostro occhialetto – tanto meglio per voi, che rispettate ancora qualcosa.¹¹⁸

Verga underlines that the indifference between dream or story does not imply the lack of connections between the narration and the real world. Quite the contrary: the readers will find something that belongs to them in that process of unmasking their passions. In fact, the introduction continues with an attack on the hypocrisy of bourgeois morality:

Non accusate l'arte, che ha il solo torto di avere più cuore di voi, e di piangere per voi i dolori dei vostri piaceri. Non predicate la moralità, voi che ne avete soltanto per chiudere gli occhi sullo spettacolo delle miserie che create, - voi che vi meravigliate come altri possa lasciare il cuore e l'onore là dove voi non lasciate che la borsa, - voi che fate scricchiolare allegramente i vostri stivali inverniciati

¹¹⁸ G. Verga, *Eva*, ed. G. Tellini, Mursia, Milano, 1991, p. 47.

*dove folleggiano ebbrezze amare, o gemono dolori sconosciuti, che l'arte raccoglie
e che vi getta in faccia.*¹¹⁹

If in *Storia di una capinera* art is used to turn our gaze towards the intimate stories that pass unnoticed every day here it collects unknown pains in order to throw them in the audience's face. Compared to the *capinera*, in the introduction to *Eva Verga*, in regard to those pains, points the finger at the responsibility of the world ("voi"). Verga concludes this invective with a defense of art from the accusations of amorality that in those years were aimed at realist fiction. He says:

*Però non maledite l'arte ch'è la manifestazione dei vostri gusti. I greci innamorati
ci lasciarono la statua di Venere; noi lasceremo il cancan litografato sugli scatolini
da fiammiferi. Non discutiamo nemmeno sulle proporzioni; l'arte allora era una
civiltà, oggi è un lusso: anzi un lusso da scioperati. La civiltà è il benessere, e in
fondo ad esso, quand'è esclusivo come oggi, non ci troverete altro, se avete il
coraggio e la buona fede di seguire la logica, che il godimento materiale. In tutta
la serietà di cui siamo invasi, e nell'antipatia per tutto ciò che non è positivo –
mettiamo pure l'arte scioperata – non c'è infine che la tavola e la donna. Viviamo
in un'atmosfera di Banche e di Imprese industriali, e la febbre dei piaceri è la
esuberanza di tal vita.*¹²⁰

The whole novel is imbued with this polemical tone, aimed specifically against the moral judgment of society. *Eva* is the story of a love between the *prima ballerina* of the Florentine theater

¹¹⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 47.

La Pergola, Eva, and Enrico Lanti, a Sicilian painter who recently moved to Florence. The story is told by Giorgio, a writer of fairy tales, also a Sicilian, contacted by Enrico in the hope that he would help him understand the absurdity of his life:

Se tu sapessi come mi sento spregevole e vile! Come mi disprezzo! [...] - voglio domandarne a te che ti occupi di coteste orribili malattie... Dimmi come possano farsi di tali cose per una donna che si disprezza, che si odia... Dimmi come pur sputandole in faccia tutto quest'odio e questo disprezzo si possa morire per lei, si possa sacrificarle l'onore, la vita, la famiglia, la giovinezza, l'arte, tutte le cose che sorridono e che si amano per abbeverarsi del fiele dell'amore di lei...¹²¹

The two faces of the society, the “*febbre dei piaceri*” and that of “*dei dolori dei [...] piaceri*” mentioned in the introduction, are personified in the figure of Eva, and in her double life: a public one, and a private and secret one, that of the love relationship with the painter Enrico Lanti. The drama arises from the impossibility of connecting these two spaces and from their mutual interdependence.

The relationship is born and continues in secret, while Eva continues her public life, made of dance and receptions in her apartment. Tired of such secrecy and jealous of the numerous suitors, Enrico Lanti asks her to renounce her public life to move in with him. Although Eva is aware of the risk she faces, she leaves the theater and moves into Enrico's modest apartment. Once she has moved, Enrico realizes that he no longer loves her. Both reduced to poverty, Eva leaves Enrico to go and live with the rich count Silvani. Then, when they both meet again after some time

¹²¹ *Ivi*, p. 57.

and after having overcome their respective economic difficulties, Enrico, overwhelmed by jealousy, challenges Count Silvani to a duel. Both come out injured. Enrico finally dies, after some time, of tuberculosis, in Sicily, with his family. In the final dialogue with his friend Giorgio, Enrico reflects on the contradictions of his personal history:

Che m'importa della mia coscienza, e di tutti quei fantasmi che voi altri avete creato a furia di paroloni! Che m'importa del vero e del falso!... ho tempo di perderci la testa io?... [...] Ho visto tante mostruosità rispettate, tante bassezze cui si fa di cappello, tante contraddizioni di quello che chiamate senso morale, che non so più dove stia la verità. [...] Chi sentenzia del bene e del male? Il mondo! Che cos'è?¹²²

To the “truth” of the world, Enrico opposes that of the spirit, of the absurd, of the mystery of the heart, of which the artist, just like Giorgio, is a tireless observer, witness, and messenger. On the Scapigliati model, Verga continues to deepen the relationship between the truth of the world and that of the spirit by focusing on the obsession and the absurd.

Shortly after the publication of *Eva*, the short story *Nedda* (1874) represents an important development in Verga’s writing. This novella is, in fact, the first of a series of Sicilian stories and novels that will reflect the complete affirmation of the Verism. Furthermore, 1874, the year of publication of the short story, is particularly significant because Emile Zola’s works begin to attract the attention of Italian critics. Specifically, from this year onwards, literary critics will place at the center of the artistic discussion the questions of the figure of the ‘man’ of letters as a scientist and that of the novel's impersonality, the latter already addressed by Gustave Flaubert and re-proposed

¹²² *Ivi*, p. 131.

by Zola. In regard to the impersonality, both naturalist and realist writers problematize, albeit in different ways, the presence of the authorial voice in the text in relation to the truth.

In the preamble to *Nedda*, it is observable that the Scapigliati's suggestions are still present in Verga's storytelling. Verga the author, indeed, addresses the reader directly with the first person and lets himself be carried away, as in a daydream, in front of the fireplace, by fantasy and imagination:

Io lascio il mio corpo su quella poltroncina, accanto al fuoco, come vi lascerei un abito, abbandonando alla fiamma la cura di far circolare più caldo il mio sangue e di far battere più rapido il mio cuore; e incaricando le faville fuggenti, che folleggiano come farfalle innamorate, di farmi tenere gli occhi aperti, e di far errare capricciosamente del pari i miei pensieri. Cotesto spettacolo del proprio pensiero che volazza vagabondo senza di voi, che vi lascia per correre lontano, e per gettarvi a vostra insaputa come dei soffi, di dolce e d'amaro in cuore, ha attrattive indefinibili. Col sigaro semispenso, cogli occhi socchiusi, le molle fuggendovi dalle dita allentate, vedete l'altra parte di voi andar lontano, percorrere vertiginose distanze: vi par di sentirvi passar per i nervi correnti di atmosfere sconosciute; provate, sorridendo, l'effetto di mille sensazioni che farebbero incanutire i vostri capelli senza muovere un dito o fare un passo. E in una di coteste peregrinazioni vagabonde dello spirito la fiamma che scoppiettava, troppo vicina forse, mi fece rivedere un'altra fiamma gigantesca che avevo visto ardere nell'immenso focolare della fattoria del pino, alle falde dell'Etna.¹²³

¹²³ Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, op. cit., p. 6.

This passage shows a peculiar alternation of the subject pronouns I-you-I corresponding to the alternation of the conscious state and that of semi-trance of the narrating voice. In the variation of the subject pronoun, Verga recognizes a subject that is Other, neither the author nor the narrator. That vagabond spirit communicates with that body abandoned on the sofa by sending “*correnti di atmosfere sconosciute*” capable to “*incanutire i [...] capelli senza muovere un dito o fare un passo*”, and images, as the “*focolare domestico*” from which Nedda's story begins. The ego of the narrating voice thus becomes a witness-messenger of this “*voi,*” of this “*altro da sé.*”

Verga had already lent his voice to these wandering spirits, by proposing to the reader intimate stories such as that of the *capinera*; unknown loves, like that of Enrico and Eva; or currents of unknown atmospheres, like this one coming from the Sicilian countryside. Compared to previous novels, in this short story, it is possible to notice some changes in the treatment of the hero's interiority. Whereas in the prior works characters speak of their own intimacy through the epistolary form, as in *Storia di una capinera*, or by using the figure of the witness, as Giorgio in *Eva*, Nedda is not allowed to talk about her feelings. The access to the intimacy of the character is guaranteed through the description of the natural world with which a mutuality is established. Therefore, the narrative loses the introspective form and becomes more descriptive, but no less intimate.

From the very first pages of the story, Nedda, the young olive harvester, is associated to the animal world through repeated comparisons with a little bird. The reader is prepared to this association since the beginning, when Nedda is identified by her workmates as the singer. Later, she is explicitly compared to a frightened bird when, after the week of the olive harvest, she leaves during the night, alone, to reach her sick mother. During this nocturnal journey, Nedda will find

solace and companionship in the song of a nightingale. The comparison with the frightened little bird occurs again when the narrator begins to delve into the story of the turbulences which come with her falling in love with Janu. After Janu shows her some interest by waiting for her at the front door, Verga writes:

Ella non disse altro e guardò l'orticello al di là del muricciolo. I sassi umidicci fumavano; le gocce di rugiada luccicavano su di ogni filo d'erba; i mandorli fioriti sussurravano lieve lieve e lasciavano cadere sul tettuccio del casolare i loro fiori bianchi e rosei che imbalsamavano l'aria; una passera petulante e sospettosa nel tempo istesso schiamazzava sulla gronda, e minacciava a suo modo Janu, che aveva tutta l'aria, col suo viso sospetto, di insidiare al suo nido, di cui spuntavano fra le tegole alcuni fili di paglia indiscreti. La campana della chiesuola chiamava a messa.¹²⁴

In this passage, the narrator follows Nedda's gaze as she moves from the rocks to the dew, to the almond trees, and to the image of the threatened nest. These images lead the readers through the emotions of the character, in her progressive opening to Janu, but also in her perception of the sense of danger, suggested by the cackling of the little bird in defense of the nest. We are then brought back to (social) reality with the ringing of the church bell. The bell, significantly placed at the end of the passage, marks a strong contrast between the movement of Nedda's soul and the obstacles of social reality that oppose this movement. Immediately afterwards, in fact, Nedda's friend, uncle Giovanni, will point out to Janu the inappropriateness of their potential union. The

¹²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 21.

images of the landscape and the nest are presented again to anticipate the union between Nedda and Janu. Finally, after the death of Nedda's daughter, the narrating voice marks the end of the protagonist's sentimental adventure and her definitive closure on herself, with a final similarity between Nedda and a wounded bird that goes to curl up in the nest.¹²⁵ In this *novella*, on one hand the protagonist is always placed outside the social environment, on the other, the natural space weaves a connection with her inner world, which allows the author to refrain himself from comments and judgments.

Between 1875 and 1880 the studies on Zola's naturalism were intensified, as demonstrated by the letters between Verga and Capuana, the writings of Felice Cameroni on the *Rivista Minima*, and those of Francesco De Sanctis. Verga and Capuana took possession of the naturalist vocabulary and method but remained substantially faithful to a distinct project on the search for truth. This is evident, in particular, in the theoretical discourses presented in two short stories, both written in 1880, and later collected in the volume *Vita dei Campi: Fantasticheria* and *L'amante di Gramigna*.

Fantasticheria has a very important role both in relation to the collection of short stories *Vita dei Campi* and to Verga's *opera omnia*. This *novella*, in fact, introduces the reader to the new and first collection of short stories, all with Sicilian subjects, and traces the outline of the future *Malavoglia*. Significantly, Verga attributes to it the title of *Fantasticheria*. Referring to the concept of fantasy, the Verga of *Vita dei Campi*, narrator of the reality of the Sicilian countryside, distances himself from the figure of the literate sociologist and scientist à la Zola and, rather, refers to a tradition close to that of the Scapigliati.

¹²⁵ Ivi, p. 28.

In the years preceding the publication of *Fantasticheria*, Francesco De Sanctis had published a series of studies on Zola, reflecting precisely on the difference between the scientist and the artist. In the elaboration of this distinction, the discourse is centered on the relation between fantasy (or imagination), the feeling and the artistic form. De Sanctis writes:

Però è impossibile che le cose osservate e rappresentate non abbiano ripercussione. E qui è appunto la differenza tra scienziato e artista. Nello scienziato la ripercussione prende forma dalla riflessione; nell'artista dalla immaginazione e dal sentimento. [...] È lì [nell'immaginazione] il foco dove si fondono e si trasformano i metalli; lì è il centro della vita ideale, che dà agli oggetti la sua movenza e la sua luce.¹²⁶

In this passage, De Sanctis operates a clear distinction between the formation of the object in the thinking process, logic and rational, and the one in the imagination. The shaping of the object in the imagination is compared to an alchemist's operation guided by the 'center of the ideal life', not the individual reason; a center where both the Self and the Other blend together and transform. The position of the self in relation to the center of the ideal life recalls, on one side, the dynamic between the "io" and "voi" in the preamble to *Nedda*, and, on the other, contributes to shed some light on the different conception of impersonality between Naturalists and Veristi.

For the Naturalists, impersonality is linked to a scientific conception of truth. In this case, the Ego to remove is the reasoning one, the logical and rational. This elimination means exclusion

¹²⁶ F. De Sanctis, *Saggi sul realismo*, ed. S. Giovannuzzi, Mursia, Milano, 1990, p. 186.

of the ego from the process of object formation. As in any other scientific experiment, the ego must be eliminated to guarantee the objectivity (equivalent to the truth) of the result.

The Veristi also intend to eliminate the rational self. As seen earlier in *Nedda*, for example, the description of nature allows the author to deepen the protagonist's intimacy without direct intervention. However, their concept of impersonality is distinct. According to the Verists, impersonality is not linked to an objective conception of truth, but to a view of the truth linked to the artistic form. This form has its origin in the "fire" of the imagination, a faculty of the spirit independent from the intellectual ego but able to include and modify it. Thus, the intellectual ego is eclipsed in the form, in the imagination. The impersonality of the Veristi does not exclude the ego, but it hides it.

In light of De Sanctis' words, the title of the opening story *Fantasticheria* appears as a precise declaration of poetics: it speaks both of the desire to distance itself from the figure of the scientist and of a different conception of truth. The truth is not provided by the documentation of the external reality, but from the "form," the way in which the reality is represented and filtered through the eyes of the protagonist. Both in *Fantasticheria*, as well as in the semi-trance state of *Nedda*'s preamble, Verga emphasizes the value of imagination and feelings in relation to the truth.

Fantasticheria is the story of an unsuccessful journey, a missed encounter between an individual and a specific social reality. It is the real place of the encounter between the Aci-Trezza fishermen and the French woman. The tale is the only place where a coexistence of two worlds may happen, which have tried to understand each other without success. The story is about a trip to Sicily of the author and his bourgeois French female friend. Both the journey and the story are initiated by two of his friend's wishes: living for a month in the picturesque village of Aci-Trezza and having a book dedicated to her. The actual duration of the trip will be forty-eight hours, time

in which Verga and his friend have the opportunity to get to know the inhabitants of Aci-Trezza. During the story, the narrator returns to the various attempts of her friend to understand that world of fishermen. Verga writes:

Avevate un vestitino grigio che sembrava fatto apposta per intonare coi colori dell'alba. – Un bel quadretto davvero! e si indovinava che lo sapevate anche voi dal modo col quale vi modellavate nel vostro scialletto, e sorridevate coi grandi occhioni sbarrati e stanchi a quello strano spettacolo, e a quell'altra stranezza di trovarvici anche voi presente. Che cosa avveniva nella vostra testolina mentre contemplavate il sole nascente? Gli domandavate forse in qual altro emisfero vi avrebbe ritrovata fra un mese? Diceste soltanto ingenuamente: «Non capisco come si possa viver qui tutta la vita.»¹²⁷

Although the dress matches the colors of the dawn, nevertheless that “*bel quadretto*” is a “*strano spettacolo*” where the woman and the world of Aci Trezza are always strangers to each other. In writing *Fantasticheria*, Verga satisfies the desire for the book's dedication and tries to remedy that sense of strangeness, that desired, albeit lacking, understanding of Aci-Trezza:

Eppure, vedete, la cosa [vivere tutta la vita ad Aci Trezza] è più facile che non sembri: basta non possedere centomila lire di entrata, prima di tutto; e in compenso patire un po' di tutti gli stenti fra quegli scogli giganteschi, incastonati nell'azzurro, che vi facevano batter le mani per ammirazione. Così poco basta

¹²⁷ Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, p. 122.

*perchè quei poveri diavoli che ci aspettavano sonnecchiando nella barca, trovino fra quelle loro casipole sgangherate e pittoresche, che viste da lontano vi sembravano avessero il mal di mare anch'esse, tutto ciò che vi affannate a cercare a Parigi, a Nizza ed a Napoli.*¹²⁸

With this observation, Verga explains and at the same time distracts his friend's attention from that “*come*” related to the obvious economic and social differences of the two worlds. In fact, he adds: “*La vita è ricca, come vedete, nella sua inesauribile varietà; e voi potete godervi senza scrupoli quella parte di ricchezza che è toccata a voi, a modo vostro.*”¹²⁹ Alternatively, the writer proposes a different point of view, looking at life “*dall'altro lato del cannocchiale.*” Thus, Verga enters the world of Aci-Trezza from the perspective of its inhabitants and concludes by writing:

Forse perché ho troppo cercato di scorgere entro al turbine che vi circonda e vi segue, mi è parso ora di leggere una fatale necessità nelle tenaci affezioni dei deboli, nell'istinto che hanno i piccoli di stringersi fra loro per resistere alle tempeste della vita, e ho cercato di decifrare il dramma modesto e ignoto che deve aver sgominati gli attori plebei che conoscemmo insieme. Un dramma che qualche volta forse vi racconterò e di cui parmi tutto il nodo debba consistere in ciò: - che allorquando uno di quei piccoli, o più debole, o più incauto, o più egoista degli altri, volle staccarsi dal gruppo per vaghezza dell'ignoto, o per brama di meglio, o per curiosità di conoscere il mondo, il mondo da pesce vorace com'è, se lo ingoiò, e i suoi più prossimi con lui. – E sotto questo aspetto vedete che il dramma non

¹²⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 125.

*manca d'interesse. Per le ostriche l'argomento più interessante deve essere quello che tratta delle insidie del gambero, o del coltello del palombaro che le stacca dallo scoglio.*¹³⁰

After having identified in the “*ideale dell'ostrica*,” the driving force of those “*plebei [conosciuti] insieme*,”¹³¹ the mystery of the drama of those who detach themselves from the group, “*per vaghezza dell'ignoto, o per brama di meglio, o per curiosità di conoscere il mondo*,” remains. Here, Verga focuses his interest on the drama of the interiority, together with the struggles caused by external conditions, those of the environment, “*del gambero, o del coltello del palombaro*.” Therefore, not only the title, but the whole story focuses on some fundamental aspects that distinguish Verga's search for truth from that of Zola; issues such as the determining role of fantasy and imagination, and the marginal role of environmental conditioning in determining the character and destiny of the individual.

L'amante di Gramigna brings to completion Verga's research path. First published in *Rivista Minima*¹³² and addressed to Farina, director of the same magazine, the short story is divided into two main sections: a theoretical and a narrative. In the theoretical one we recognize the development of the themes discussed so far, specifically: the centrality of the “*studio dell'uomo interiore*” in the modern novel; the need for a new study method, that is ‘from life’, as the Macchiaioli would say, or starting from the human document, as Zola would say; and finally, the question of impersonality. The presence and influence of the naturalist discourse is evident here in particular in the terminological choices. First of all, it is noticeable that the story is addressed to

¹³⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 127-128.

¹³¹ *Ivi*, p. 127.

¹³² The title of the first publication in *Rivista Minima* was *L'amante di Raja*.

those who “*studiano nel gran libro del cuore.*” In the short theoretical introduction that precedes the story, Verga returns four times to the connection between the novel and the interiority of the individual, referring to the novel as the study of the “*fenomeno psicologico,*” “*conquiste delle verità psicologiche,*” “*studio dell'uomo interiore,*” and finally as the “*scienza del cuore umano.*”¹³³ At the same time, Verga remarks the characteristics of the modern study of the inner human, compared to that of the novels of the past. These differences are based on the study of the “human document,” of the fact drawn from reality, and on the different method, “*che l'analisi moderna si studia di seguire con scrupolo scientifico.*” In this clarification, we see that, while in *Eva* Verga still expressed a certain indifference to whether the story was a dream or reality, here, following the example of the naturalists, the author emphasizes the value of the happened event as a guarantee of relevance of the story for the world. In fact, he writes:

*Io te lo ripeterò così come l'ho raccolto pei viottoli dei campi, press'a poco colle medesime parole semplici e pittoresche della narrazione popolare, e tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore.*¹³⁴

As in *Fantasticheria*, also in this case Verga proposes again a point of view within the represented world. Naturalist literature, whose topics were received in those years in Farina's magazine, offered itself as an indispensable point of reference for the acquisition of a new method. The verist art is focused on the recreation of the “*misterioso processo per cui le passioni si annodano, s'intrecciano, maturano, si svolgono nel loro cammino sotterraneo nei loro andirivieni*

¹³³ Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, op. cit., pp. 191-192.

¹³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 191.

che spesso sembrano contraddittori."¹³⁵ Since the process through which passions develop and intertwine remains "*misterioso*" and "*contraddittorio*," the analysis of the human document and its logical development are a necessary but insufficient method to understand the psychological truths, towards which the novel tends. Verga, in fact, postpones to the future the moment in which "*i soli romanzi che si scriveranno saranno i fatti diversi*," the moment when the description of the reality will be sufficient for the comprehension of the inner human. Verga concludes:

*Io credo che il trionfo del romanzo, la più completa e la più umana delle opere d'arte, si raggiungerà allorchè l'affinità e la coesione di ogni sua parte sarà così completa che il processo della creazione rimarrà un mistero, come lo svolgersi delle passioni umane; e che l'armonia delle sue forme sarà così perfetta, la sincerità della sua realtà così evidente, il suo modo e la sua ragione di essere così necessarie, che la mano dell'artista rimarrà assolutamente invisibile, e il romanzo avrà l'impronta dell'avvenimento reale, e l'opera d'arte sembrerà essersi fatta da sè, aver maturato ed esser sorta spontanea come un fatto naturale, senza serbare alcun punto di contatto col suo autore; che essa non serbi nelle sue forme viventi alcuna impronta della mente in cui germogliò, alcuna ombra dell'occhio che la intravvide, alcuna traccia delle labbra che ne mormorarono le prime parole come il fiat creatore; ch'essa stia per ragion propria, pel solo fatto che è come dev'essere, ed è necessario che sia, palpitante di vita ed immutabile al pari di una statua di bronzo, di cui l'autore abbia avuto il coraggio divino di eclissarsi e sparire nella sua opera immortale.*¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 192.

Although Verga has narrowed the boundaries of the narratable within those of the actual events, the truth of literary fiction does not derive neither from the fact of being drawn from the reality, nor from the analysis method of the event. The issue of truth is once again intimately linked to that of fiction, of the artistic form, in its appearance of seeming “*essersi fatta da sé.*” In this expression we recognize a clarification on the relationship between fiction and the artist, similar to that expressed by De Sanctis. According to Verga, the will of the author is replaced by that of the form of art which, although it operates in the author, nevertheless operates by its own will.

The discourse on the relationship between reality, truth and form is finally taken up and elaborated by Capuana in his essay, *Per l'arte* (1885), a summary of the theoretical and artistic achievements of Verism. Among other elements, it should be noted that a substantial part of this essay had been published a year earlier with the title of *Fantasia e Immaginazione*, title that clearly shows proximities with De Sanctis's essay and Verga's reflections. Here, Capuana elaborates many of the points already touched by Verga. The essay is articulated in the form of an imaginary dialogue between Capuana and the critique. The writer intends to defend himself from three different critiques: the Verist writers' lack of originality, accused of being mere imitators of the French naturalists, amorality, and finally lack of fantasy and imagination, all deriving from the predilection for the human document. In responding to these critiques, Capuana tries to clarify a confusion that lies at their root, which is what art is and what the characteristics of realist art are. The discussion begins with the attempt to explain the need to stick to a precise historical-geographical and social reality, to the human document. Capuana writes:

Questa benedetta o maledetta riflessione moderna, questa smania di positivismo di studi, di osservazioni, di collezione di fatti, noi non possiamo cavarcela di dosso. [...] Il romanziere, il novelliere guarda di qua e di là, osserva, prende nota. Se non poggia un piede sopra un fatto vero, non si crede punto sicuro, e non si avventura a metter l'altro innanzi. Il Verga – parliamo di cose nostre, non guasta – quando gli vien l'idea di foggiare in forma artistica i suoi contadini, non si limita soltanto a raccogliere delle generalità, ma circoscrive il suo terreno. Non gli basta che quei suoi personaggi siano italiani – il contadino italiano è un'astrattezza – egli va più in là, vuole che siano siciliani: molto di più e di più concreto. Credete voi che n'abbia assai? Nemmeno per sogno. Ha bisogno che siano proprio d'una provincia, d'una città, d'un pezzettino di terra largo quanto la palma della sua mano. Allora soltanto si ferma. – Che ce n'importa? – Ma importa a lui, alla sua coscienza d'artista moderno: importa a tutti noi che vogliamo esser moderni, del nostro tempo, al pari di lui.¹³⁷

Capuana like Verga, seems to have revised his previous positions during his years in Florence by emphasizing the accidental, to what he had defined “*apparenze esteriori.*” Capuana points out that it is not the analysis of a specific reality that makes the fiction true. He adds:

Se un romanzo, una novella vi fa esclamare: Questo è impossibile! Questo non è vero! state sicuri che, novantanove volte fra cento, la colpa è tutta dello scrittore. I romanzi più impossibili sono quelli che accadono ogni giorno sotto i nostri occhi,

¹³⁷ L. Capuana, *Per l'arte*, ed. R. Scrivano, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, Napoli, 1994, p. 43.

attorno a noi, in alto e in basso. Non ci sarà mai né un romanziere naturalista, né un novelliere verista il quale abbia tanto coraggio da inventar nulla che rassomigli, da tanto lontano, alle continue e terribili assurdità della vita reale. E se il romanziere e il novelliere rispondono alla vostra esclamazione col mettervi dinanzi i documenti, per provarvi così che essi han narrato un fatto vero, replicate che la difesa diventa peggior dell'accusa.¹³⁸

As Verga underlines in *L'amante di Gramigna*, Capuana places the intimate identity between form and truth at the center of his attention. In continuing his investigation on the relationship between reality, truth, and fiction, Capuana presents to the reader an example of a document from the criminal chancellery. It is a fact that really happened and full of information that would be a great base to create a work of art. Yet, Capuana writes, this text alone is not enough:

Quella vecchia è un problema psicologico, che nella realtà, voi dovete accettare, perché è così e vi sopraffà inevitabilmente colla forza brutta del fatto. Ma appena passeravvi per capo di rifonder cotesta creatura umana nella forma dell'arte, essa non riuscirà più accettabile e non vi sopraffarà, se voi non avrete indovinato l'intimo processo di quel suo problema e non avrete rifatto organicamente tal quale. Organicamente significa che non basta indovinarlo, penetrarlo, scioglierlo nel crogiulo dell'analisi; questa è un'operazione preparatoria; non dobbiamo mai dimenticare che arte vuol dir forma. L'analisi può darci benissimo un essere astratto, quasi chimicamente suddiviso in tutti i suoi integrali elementi [...] Ma è

¹³⁸ Ivi, p. 36.

*ancora nulla, finchè l'immaginazione non interviene e non vi soffiava su il suo gran spiraculum vitae. Allora soltanto non avrete più campo di fare distinzioni di sorta; il miracolo è riuscito. Quegli elementi disgregati son diventati forma, organismo vivente per l'eternità, [...] quel che dovevano essere: un'opera d'arte.*¹³⁹

This passage shows several similarities with De Sanctis' language and reflection, especially in the “*rifonder [la] creatura umana nella forma dell'arte*” and in the value attributed to the imagination in the alchemist process. By virtue of the imagination, form is capable of capturing “*il vivo processo di quei fatti,*” which is placed outside the power of the analysis.

Moreover, in these words, it is possible to observe the centrality given to the psychological problem. Differently from Zola, the comprehension of this problem does not come from the physiological study, the inheritance, or the environment. The artist's research is oriented towards the intimate process, towards what is more hidden, and art gives it a form and life. Fantasy and imagination help the artist in reconstructing “*organicamente tal quale*” the intimate process.¹⁴⁰

Capuana adds:

Il romanziere moderno è uno scienziato, aggiungiamolo subito, dimezzato. Lo scienziato, appena creato o scoperto un processo (val tutt'una) è più fortunato di quello: può riprodurre il fatto a piacere, quante volte gli garba, e può servirsi di tal processo per scopi più belli e più ragionevoli che non siano quelli della Natura.

¹³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁰ Similarly, on the occasion of the ‘Darwinism in art’ conference (1883), De Sanctis writes about imagination: “*Quando un oggetto o piuttosto l'immagine di un oggetto si presenta nel nostro cervello, noi ne riceviamo una impressione; e quando quella immagine vogliamo tradurla al di fuori nella parola, questa contiene in sé non solo l'oggetto ma l'impressione prodotta. Quella immagine è l'oggetto trasformato nel cervello. E questa parola è arte nella sua forma più elementare.[...]*” in De Sanctis, *Saggi sul realismo*, op. cit., pp. 235-237.

Il suo fatto avviene fuori di lui; è il suo schiavo. Il romanziere moderno, invece, dopo che ha scoperto o creato un processo (ripetiamolo: val tutt'una) non può verificare il fatto, non può riprodurlo a suo piacere. È un'inferiorità naturale, invincibile: non sappiamo che farci. [...] Per rappresentare, per far del vivo ci vogliono sempre quelle due divine facoltà: la fantasia, l'immaginazione, che potrebbe anche darsi siano un'identica cosa.¹⁴¹

Like De Sanctis, Capuana elaborates on the distinction between the scientist and the artist. The artist is presented as a “*scienziato dimezzato*” in his/her inability to reproduce the fact as he/she wants. Through the metaphor of the fact as the scientist's slave, Capuana underlines on one hand the extraneousness of the intellectual ego from the fact and, on the other, its being the authority, the guide. The scientific fact happens in the real world, outside the scientist, but it comes from his/her will. The relationship between the artistic fact and the artist is different. In this case, the slave is not the fact, but the artist. The article, in fact, ends with a distinction between the art, the artist and their relationship. Capuana writes:

È perché voi confondete due cose ben diverse: l'arte e l'artista. Se l'artista, colla potenza del suo genio, fissa una delle tante forme dell'arte, se produce un capolavoro immortale, di quelli che sguscian fuori ad intervalli di secoli, non significa mica che la forma rimanga cristallizzata, imprigionata eternamente nell'opera sua. La Forma (coll'effe maiuscolo) ha più genio, è più divina di tutti i divini genii del mondo presi insieme; cresce, si sviluppa, fiorisce; e quando è

¹⁴¹ L. Capuana, *Per l'arte*, op. cit., p. 45.

pronta per un nuovo frutto, cerca e trova il fortunato individuo che le occorre, come ne avea trovati degli altri, uno, dieci secoli avanti – essa non ha punto fretta – e gli si concede, in un fecondo abbraccio spirituale, e gli lascia gettar nel bronzo, scolpir nel marmo, dipinger sulla tela, costringer nelle note musicali o nelle pagine d'un libro quel momento dell'altra sua vita ideale.¹⁴²

In this passage, the will of the scientist is opposed to the will of the “*Forma (coll'effe maiuscolo)*,” “*più divina di tutti i divini genii,*” which seeks and finds the fortunate artist, its slave. The Form is presented as a living subject, whose will allow the artist to “*gettar nel bronzo, scolpir nel marmo, dipinger sulla tela, costringer nelle note musicali o nelle pagine d'un libro quel momento dell'altra sua vita ideale.*” Finally, it is in the intimate relationship of the Form both with the finite character of the moment and with the infinite character of its other ideal life, that its double bond with reality and truth is realized.

¹⁴² *Ivi*, p. 47.

Chapter III

Writer, Publisher, Illustrator: The Illustrated Editions of Verga's Works

In his novels and short stories, Verga reveals a constant interest in the world of artists: writers, poets, painters, actors, and musicians. In their stories of success or failure, of ascent or decline, Verga reflects his own experience, unconsciously exorcising the risk of disillusionment and the humiliation of failure.¹⁴³ Some autobiographical elements are recognizable in Pietro, the protagonist of *Una peccatrice* (1866), who squanders “*le splendide promesse del suo ingegno*” in a devastating love affair: with all hope of literary glory dashed, he wearily drags through life, “*rimando qualche sterile verso per gli onomastici dei suoi parenti, e dissipando il più allegramente possibile lo scarso suo patrimonio.*”¹⁴⁴ More subtly, but with even more heartfelt self-pity, the Verga of *Eva* (1873) hides behind the character of Enrico Lanti, no longer a writer but a painter; moreover, readers of the *Malavoglia* will have no difficulty in making an immediate recognition when the ballerina in the artist's studio asks for a painting of the cliffs at Aci Trezza as a gift. Enrico Lanti torments himself over the sacrifices imposed on his family for unnecessary expenses:

*[...] avevo comperato degli abiti nuovi, avevo bisogno di essere elegante, di lavarmi le mani con acqua di Colonia, di essere bene alloggiato, di desinare da Doney, di portar dei guanti [...] divenni esigente sino all'impossibile verso la mia povera famiglia – fino a strapparle il necessario per comprarmi delle cravatte.*¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Cf. G. Debenedetti, *Verga e il naturalismo*, Milano, 1976 (pp. 175-238).

¹⁴⁴ G. Verga, *Una peccatrice – Storia di una capinera – Eva – Tigre Reale*, Milano, Mondadori, 1978, p. 155.

¹⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 291.

The letters that Verga sent to his mother from Florence in 1869 often deal with expenses made for reasons of “image”: “*Al presente, alloggio [...] in una graziosa camera [...] assai propria per ricevere*”; “*Il pranzo lo faccio alle 7, ai Risorti, magnifico restaurant con giardino [...]. Fo colazione la mattina alle 11,30 da Doney*”; “*Ieri mi son fatto prendere la misura per un vestito dal Del Lungo.*” Regarding the clothes he brought from home, he states:

Non sono da mettere, ed anche i calzoni a righe bianche e turchine e l'abito a due petti, che sto usando al presente, devo farli riformare da un sarto buonissimo e di economia [...], perché il loro taglio non è più confacente per quello che qui si usa [...]; Saranno minchionerie da un certo punto, di vista, ma dall'altro canto son delle minchionerie a cui il mondo bada [...]. Desidererei due gilets Bianchi di lana a docco, quella che più si usa

Everything is geared towards the coveted success:

*Spero [...] che io potrò farmi un po' di strada e di nome. Non potrei altrimenti farmi perdonare i gravi sacrifici che impongo alla famiglia che compensandoli con qualche successo, ed io lavorerò per fare almeno il mio dovere.*¹⁴⁶

In Enrico Lanti/Verga, there is contempt for the success obtained by exploiting the inclinations of a corrupt and gullible public: “*Ero falso nell'arte com'ero fuori del vero nella vita – e il pubblico mi batteva le mani. Quegli applausi, delle volte, mi umiliavano agli occhi miei stessi, ma sovente mi ubbriacavano.*” But there is also a love-hate relationship with an art that

¹⁴⁶ These extracts are from the collections of letters to his mother published in G. Cattaneo, *Giovanni Verga*, Torino, 1963, pp. 63-67.

often does not provide for its practitioners: “*Arte pitocca e bugiarda! [...] che vai tronfia d’orgoglio e non dai pane da sfamare!*.” And above all, there is the terror of failure, the fear of reducing oneself to living on poor expedients (“*Per vivere alla meglio avevo accettato una delle più umili occupazioni — dipingevo ad oleografia*”).¹⁴⁷

Certainly, in Florence, and then in Milan and Turin, Verga had the opportunity to meet numerous artists who appreciated his literary work, sometimes drawing inspiration from it. (On January 25, 1883, for example, sculptor Davide Calandra sent Verga a note: “*La prego di gradire la fotografia di una mia statua, alla quale mi son fatto lecito di apporre il titolo d’una delle sue splendide creazioni*”: and it will be *Tigre reale*).¹⁴⁸ Like Enrico Lanti, who describes the ballerina’s body, exhausted after the fatigue of the performance, with merciless realism (with the makeup smudged, the awkward muscles, the red spots on the skin, the protruding shoulder blades, the disordered hair), Verga too could say to the reader: “*ti parlo da pittore*.”¹⁴⁹ But it is likely (the correspondence is, in fact, eloquent in this sense) that he did nothing to have relationships with an environment in which disheveled, or otherwise transgressive attitudes persisted, which were in stark contrast to the program of integration tenaciously and constantly pursued by the writer in Milan, in fact, according to Roberto Sacchetti’s memory, he used to frequent “*la società più aristocratica ma solamente quella*.”¹⁵⁰

Verga has never directly addressed his appreciation or dislike for the illustrations in any of his statements but, through the voice of the illustrator Arnaldo Ferraguti, one can assume that he was not particularly enthusiastic:¹⁵¹ in this lies the minimum degree of openness to the figurative

¹⁴⁷ G. Verga, *Una peccatrice – Storia di una capinera – Eva – Tigre Reale*, cit., pp. 320, 311, 309.

¹⁴⁸ *Fondo Verga*, Biblioteca Universitaria, Catania, n. 2195. A statue named *Tigre Reale* is also mentioned in C. Ricci, *D. Calandra Scultore*, Alfieri & Lacroix, Milano, 1916, p. 10.

¹⁴⁹ G. Verga, *Una peccatrice – Storia di una capinera – Eva – Tigre Reale*, cit., p. 271.

¹⁵⁰ R. Sacchetti, *Vita letteraria*, in *Milano 1881*, Milano, 1881, p. 451.

¹⁵¹ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, Roma, 1986, p. 58.

arts, also found in poets and writers who are less inclined to engage with Horace's locution *ut pictura poesis*. This minimal reflection - whether spontaneous or induced, and always inextricably intertwined with the calculation of profit - was present in Verga, and it is certainly worth trying to reconstruct its profile, starting from the examination of illustrated editions. There are a few of them, but by studying them thoroughly, one can take stock of an issue that concerns not only the relationship between the writer and the figurative arts, but also the very history of the text, its elaboration, and its tradition.

Verga and the editors

The first illustrated volume, *Novelle Rusticane*, was published by the Turin publisher Francesco Casanova in December 1882. It was released after a difficult gestation, which began with a new crisis in the relationship between Verga and the publisher Emilio Treves. Despite the strong tension, they did not come to an actual break-up, thanks to Treves' tolerance, who had more than one reason to note that his author had "*diventato suscettibile, diffidente, sospettoso*":

*Ma basta; già capisco che di affari non ne faremo più, per le ragioni ut supra; finché non vi siate scottato o bruciato con altri. Conserviamo in ogni modo l'amicizia, se a voi piace. A me sì, e vi stringo la mano.*¹⁵²

The letter is dated October 19, 1881. Clearly dissatisfied with the treatment he received from the Milanese publisher, Verga immediately turned successfully to Casanova. He had done a

¹⁵² G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 61.

similar move seven years earlier. After giving Treves *Eva* along with the reprint of *La Capinera*, to exploit the wave of the unexpected success obtained by *Nedda*, he had agreed with this publisher for *Eros* (1875), *Tigre Reale* (1875), and for the collection of short stories *Primavera* (1877).¹⁵³ But this time the situation was quite different; or so it seems to us, who perhaps load with particular meanings the fact that Treves will later be the publisher of *Vita dei Campi* and *I Malavoglia*. Moreover, a few months later, as appears from the tone of the correspondence, the relationship between Verga and Treves returned to a certain guarded cordiality. This meant that Verga, even after finding a good mooring in the port of the most prestigious Italian publishing house, never wanted to give up the ability to occasionally sell his works to the publisher who had made him the most financially attractive offer. Thus, even without ever cutting ties with Treves (who would publish *Il marito di Elena* in 1882 and the collection of short stories *Per le vie* in 1883), Verga made agreements with Casanova, Sommaruga (publishing house that printed *Drammi intimi* in 1884), and Barbera, which in 1887 published *Vagabondaggio*. Indeed, in January 1886, Verga wrote to Barbera to offer him the contracts of *Eva*, *Storia di una Capinera*, *I Malavoglia*, *Il marito di Elena*, and *Primavera*, believing he should “*doverle dare la preferenza avanti di cedere ad altri il diritto di ristampa.*” In the same letter, he also tries to find a solution for the rights of *Gesualdo*, already sold to Casanova:

A questo proposito l'amico Casanova, quando gli dissi della pubblicazione che si era combinate fra di noi, mi offriva di cedere il contratto che con lui abbiamo pel Mastro-don Gesualdo, il mio prossimo romanzo che verrà dopo I Malavoglia nella serie dei Vinti, a

¹⁵³ Cfr. V. Perroni, *Sulla genesi de "I Malavoglia"*, “*Le Ragioni Critiche*”, II, n.6, ottobre-dicembre 1972, pp. 477-479.

*suo speciale riguardo e per far cosa a me grata, ma alla sola Casa [Barbera] aggiunse espressamente, e a nessun altri.*¹⁵⁴

It does not take much to understand, beyond the convoluted phrasing, that Casanova was eager to cede the contract, and Verga no longer knew where to turn to make money. But at first, the relationship with Casanova had gone smoothly. Together with the *Rusticane*, Casanova had in fact wanted to secure the *Gesualdo*'s right. The novel, yet to be written, was announced "in press" already in the catalog of Casanova editions that followed the *Rusticane*, along with other new releases from the publishing house such as *Fantasia!* and *Rosa Mystica* by Serao and *Le Verbanine* by Faldella.

The account books

For *Gesualdo*, Casanova paid 2,500 lire in two installments. The writer used to record his income and expenses in special account books. Verga kept track of everything with incredible attention to detail, day by day, with monthly and annual summaries. The trend of expenses is rather uniform, as can be deduced from the examination of these agendas.¹⁵⁵ The receipt of the first installment is recorded on November 22, 1882, along with substantial expenses aimed at consolidating an image of gentility and bourgeois affluence to show to friends and visitors. He bought paintings, expensive furniture, and elegant clothes. On January 19, there is a payment of 100 lire for "*Tassa d'entrata Società Giardino*" and another 100 lire for "*Annualità 1883 Società Giardino*,"¹⁵⁶ as well as 58 lire for a "*braccialetto*," likely a proportional exchange for the

¹⁵⁴ G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, *Lettere sparse - Giovanni Verga 1840-1922*, Bulzoni, Roma, 1979, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ *Fondo Verga*, cit., n. 5384, 5385 (1883).

¹⁵⁶ The members of the *Società del Giardino*, located at Palazzo Cusani in via San Paolo, belonged "*in maggioranza*

“portamonete” given to him by his beloved Paolina Greppi.¹⁵⁷ However, soon expenses became more closely monitored. For example, on April 20: “Pane 0,20; panna 0,15; farina per il merlo 0,35; tabacco 0,75; pranzo 2,90; giornale 0,5.” This is the daily expense norm. Verga is very thrifty. However, winnings and losses, sometimes of a certain size, are punctually recorded. Verga plays at “*casa Conti, via Monforte 26, le sere in cui non c’è Scala*”; at “*Casa Re, Corso Magenta 10*” as can be deduced from a list of “*Indirizzi 1878*” included in his agenda.

The Novelle Rusticane

The first nucleus of the *Rusticane* is made up of three novellas that Verga had offered to Treves to replace, in the second edition of *Vita dei campi*, the novella *Il come, il quando ed il perché*, which the publisher had decided to include in order to increase the volume. They are *Roba*, *Cos’è il re* and *Storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe*. Treves did not agree to the operation, arguing - not without reason - that the three novellas could have been part of another volume, and that “*qui sarebbero state sacrificate.*”¹⁵⁸

The preparation of the new volume was firmly governed by the Turin publisher’s hand. Casanova, in fact, maneuvered to obtain from Giannotta the transfer of *Pane nero*, already published in a separate booklet; he also managed to extract an unpublished work from Verga, *Di là del mare*, and finally suggested the title of the collection, which was supposed to appear first as *Bozzetti siciliani*, and then as *Racconti riusticani*. The title was then discarded to avoid confusion with Berthold Auerbach’s *Racconti rusticani*. Moreover, the publisher asked for textual

al ceto commerciale. Non c’è gran banchiere, non c’è industrial cospicuo che non ambisca far parte della Società del Giardino, la quale aggiunge a molte belle qualità quella di un’ospitalità splendida davvero.” A. De Nadoso, *La società e le società*, in *Milano 1881*, cit., pp. 497-498.

¹⁵⁷ G. Verga, *Lettere a Paolina*, eds. G. Raya, Roma, 1980, p. 63.

¹⁵⁸ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 54.

interventions even when the text was ready for publication. Verga has freed himself from such forced interventions in reworking the text for the 1920 edition. The late revision saved more than one of these induced variants, as shown by Tellini, who observed that:

[...] al profilo della stampa 1883 di queste novelle ha voluto concorrere anche il capriccio di circostanze fortuite, la casualità di evenienze accidentali che hanno alterato il disegno dei testi, consegnandone alla memoria dei lettori un'immagine comunque difforme da quella autonomamente calibrata dall'autore.

Thus, the decision to print the two editions separately, 1883 and 1920, responded to the intention of *“riguadagnare il significato complessivo dell'intera tradizione a stampa delle raccolte, senza sacrificare la storia interna di Verga ad un momento, sia pure rilevante, del suo divenire.”*¹⁵⁹ A new critical perspective is emerging. It considers the various original editions of Verga in two ways: as carriers of variants, material moments of a history of formal elaboration (subject to multiple external conditioning) in which to recognize and distinguish - from time to time - creative phases and degenerative moments; and as complete objects in themselves, to be considered in their specific and concrete identity as editorial products.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, in the presence of different authorial editions, the very concept of a “base text” ends up being reduced to *“un'utile astrazione da manuale.”*¹⁶¹ The collection of bibliographic data, collation of texts, and scrutiny of variants appear - in the specific case of many works by Verga - as operations to be directed towards the construction of a critical edition of *that* edition and of *that*

¹⁵⁹ G. Tellini, *Nota ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, II, cit. pp. 564, 544-545.

¹⁶⁰ Cfr. R. Bigazzi, *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 22 aprile 1981, p. 244.

¹⁶¹ G. P. Marchi, *Ricerche sulla tradizione e l'elaborazione di testi letterari*, Padova, 1984, pp. 151, 167.

Verga (the author taken at a specific moment). Thus, one can speak of a critical edition of *Novelle Rusticane* in 1883 and a critical edition of *Novelle Rusticane* in 1920, and likewise, for *Vita dei Campi* in 1880 and *Vita dei Campi* in 1897.

In this perspective of renewed attention to critical issues related to the editorial process, the relationships between the author and the artists, called to illustrate Verga's works, have also to be addressed.

Verga and Montalti

For the illustrations of the *Rusticane*, the publisher Casanova chose Alfredo Montalti. The sources don't tell us much about this painter, besides that he had a troubled and unhappy life. Born in Turin in 1858, he studied at the Accademia Albertina and later moved to Venice. Due to poor health and economic difficulties resulting from the dispersion of his family's wealth, he mainly worked as an illustrator. The Boito brothers recommended him to Giulio Ricordi, who provided him a continuous collaboration. His drawings can also be found in the *Illustrazione Italiana* and various occasional publications.¹⁶²

Once commissioned by Casanova, Montalti immediately turned to Verga for suggestions and photographic documentation. Verga declared his availability, also because he knew he could count on his friend Capuana, whose passion for photography was very well known. The letter he sent him on December 7, 1881, almost sounds like an order:

¹⁶² A. M. Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei*, IV, Milano, 1973, p. 2089.

Fammi un gran piacere, e subito, il più presto che per le illustrazioni al mio volume che pubblicherò di seguito a Vita dei campi, desidera delle fotografie, disegni, schizzi di costumi, paesaggi, e tipi contadineschi siciliani. È una richiesta legittima, che mostra la sua intelligenza artistica e promette bene pel mio volume. Fammi il piacere di raccogliere tutto ciò che puoi su questo genere. Fammene tu, se credi, fotografie, disegni a lapis o a penna, incisioni, tutto quello che trovi, per dare il carattere, i tipi, la fisionomia, l'intonazione dei miei bozzetti, che si svolgono tutti in un paese che tu conosci quanto me, che puoi rendere intelligibile ad altri anche lontani e che non ne possono avere idea in un modo chiaro e artistico; mandami tutto presto, presto, presto.

Despite the “*inerzia*” that afflicted him during that period, “*gli sconforti, la fiacchezza della vita facile e disoccupata, la ruggine della provincia*” (as can be read in Verga’s aforementioned letter), on January 3, 1882, Capuana sent the requested photographic material:

Ti mando 17 fotografie, o meglio provacce di fotografie. Non ho potuto metter insieme altro. Il mio atelier fotografico è in pieno disordine [...]. Credo che a qualche cosa potranno servire. Mi duole non poter contribuire altrimenti alla illustrazione del tuo volume: sarei stato superbo di leggere nella prefazione: le fotografie furono fatte da L. Capuana.¹⁶³

Verga keeps suggesting the graphic layout of the volume, as can be seen in a letter from Montalti, reassuring him on March 23, 1882: “*I disegni sono disposti nel modo che Ella mi ha*

¹⁶³ G. Raya, *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, cit., pp. 135, 138.

indicato.” However, the painter, who would have liked to add a historiated initial as well, worked with exasperating slowness, showing a tendency to talk about his drawings and express his doubts rather than complete the work. From the context provided by Montalti’s letters, it can be inferred that Verga provided all the requested instructions with “*quel finissimo e così giusto sentimento di semplicità col qual le novelle sono scritte.*”¹⁶⁴ Afflicted—as he declares—by the *horreur de la banalité*, he indulges in compositions full of signs and symbols. It was his style, which certainly must have appealed to the tastes of the time, as evidenced by Treves’ decision in 1885 to hire him to illustrate Capuana’s book of fairy tales *C’era una volta....* In any case, apart from Verga’s complaints to the publisher about the slow progress of the work, there were no real incidents, except for the cover, which was rejected by Casanova. Montalti had conceived a cumbersome composition: “*in alto un piatto arabo-siculo e in basso un quadrello coll’emblema borbonico — il piatto deve avere un cerchio in oro,*” as stated in a letter to Verga on October 21, 1882.¹⁶⁵ To avoid hurting the painter’s pride, Casanova justified the rejection with reasons of political expediency, which would have discouraged the printing of the Bourbon emblem. The painter thought of remedying the situation by proposing to replace it with “*le cifre dell’editore,*” but Casanova remained firm in his refusal, reassuring Verga at the same time, who must have somehow expressed his concerns about the inconsistencies of the painter:

Il vol. delle Novelle rusticane è tutto stampato, ad eccezione della copertina, che gira e volta sarà della massima semplicità perché quella complicata composta dal Montalti non mi va proprio giù e la tiratura ne sarebbe lunga e direi inutile, così il Suo desiderio sarà

¹⁶⁴ G. P. Marchi, *Le bellezze diverse*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1991, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 76-77.

*fatto colla semplicità della copertina sulla quale non figurerà che la figurina che chiude I galantuomini.*¹⁶⁶

Montalti considered the frontispiece drawing dedicated to Nena la Rossa from *Pane nero* as “*il migliore fra tutti.*” In the second edition, released in 1885, this drawing replaces the mentioned vignette of *I galantuomini* on the cover. Certainly, the drawing reflects Montalti’s ideal, which wanted to impart “*un carattere abbastanza nuovo*” to his illustrations, with the intention of avoiding “*la solita scena riprodotta dalla descrizione, banalmente riprodotta, e qualche volta Dio sa come.*” But he often struggled to assemble a complicated symbolic and allusive machine, which sometimes showed some inadequacy and incongruity, as in the headers of *Cos’è il re*, *Don Licciu Papa*, and *Pane nero*; while certain tailpieces are almost incomprehensible, as in the case of *Storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe* and *Pane nero*. However, more successful were the headers for *Il Reverendo*, *Il Mistero*, *La Roba*, and *Storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe*. The same positive judgment can be extended to the tailpieces of *Malaria*, *I galantuomini*, and *Libertà*. This disparity in results makes it likely that Montalti was betrayed in some cases by the significant reduction that the drawings underwent in the *clichés* (executed in Vienna impeccably, not without some refinement in craftsmanship). It is clear, however, that this circumstance can only be a mitigating factor.

When Verga had the volume in his hands, he realized the negative impression that certain illustrations could have on the public, and on December 15, 1882, wrote to Capuana, who had promised to review the *Novelle rusticane*: “*Se parli delle mie novelle, ti prego di trattarmi bene il Montalti, che ha fatto miracoli, per uno che deve far a indovinare il paesaggio [...] Non parlare*

¹⁶⁶ G. Tellini, *Nota ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, II, cit., pp 558-559.

di stonatura, ti supplico."¹⁶⁷ Capuana immediately reassured his friend: "*tratterò bene il Montalto*";¹⁶⁸ and so he did with the review that appeared in the *Fanfulla della Domenica* on January 14, 1883.

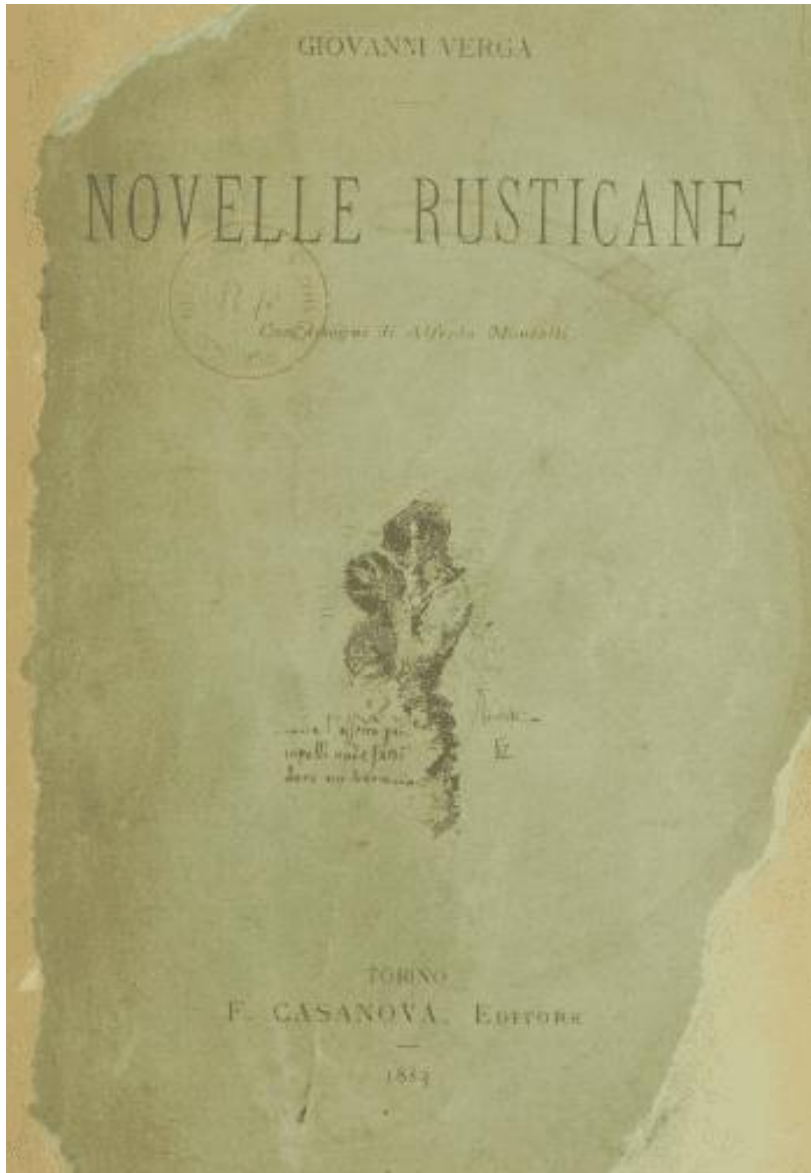


Figure 9 - Cover of the first edition of *Novelle Rusticane* (1883), illustrated by Montalti.

¹⁶⁷ C. Riccardi, *Nota ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, cit., p. 1032.

¹⁶⁸ G. Raya, *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, cit., p. 183.



Figure 10 - Illustration by Montalti for *La roba* (1883), p. 107.



Figure 11 - Illustration by Montalti for *Libertà* (1883), p. 231.

Giulio Aristide Sartorio's Cover

In February 1884, just over a year after the publication of the *Rusticane*, the collection of short stories titled *Drammi Intimi* was released by the publisher Sommaruga in Rome. Verga's book, along with *Infedeltà* by Panzacchi, inaugurated Sommaruga's "*Collezione moderna*," which announced the publication of other prominent authors.

Verga's new collection of short stories presented very appealing editorial features: heavy pink colored paper, a red and black title page, ornaments at the beginning of each story (red for the first one), and an illustrated cover with a blue-printed engraving depicting a feverish young woman lying on a bed or a chaise longue. Presumably, this represented the young countess Bice from *Drammi Ignoti* who, in love with her mother's lover, "*si moriva di malattia di languore*." The engraving is marked with the initials GAS, which can easily be deciphered as Giulio Aristide Sartorio. Born in Rome in 1860, Sartorio is now remembered almost solely for the frescoed frieze in the Montecitorio Chamber and for his large-scale canvases exhibited at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome. Sartorio had initially experimented with realistic painting, inspired by social issues: his work *Malaria* had gained great success when exhibited in 1882. It is worth noting that Verga's short story of the same title had appeared the previous year in the *Rassegna Settimanale* magazine. He was also a notable illustrator, and his signature frequently appeared in Adolfo de Bosis' *Convito* and in the periodical *Cronaca Bizantina*. For example, he designed the header in the February 1, 1884 issue of *Cronaca Bizantina*, where the text of the drama *Cavalleria Rusticana* is reproduced on the central pages.¹⁶⁹

There is no record of Verga being consulted by the painter or illustrator regarding the cover of *Drammi Intimi*. It is known, however, that Sommaruga believed it was not his duty to submit

¹⁶⁹ Cfr. *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XXX, p. 883.

the cover to the author, “*facendo parte essa del lavoro puramente tipografico e non avendo relazione con la letteratura.*” This was expressed during the controversy with D’Annunzio regarding the cover of *Libro delle Vergini*.¹⁷⁰

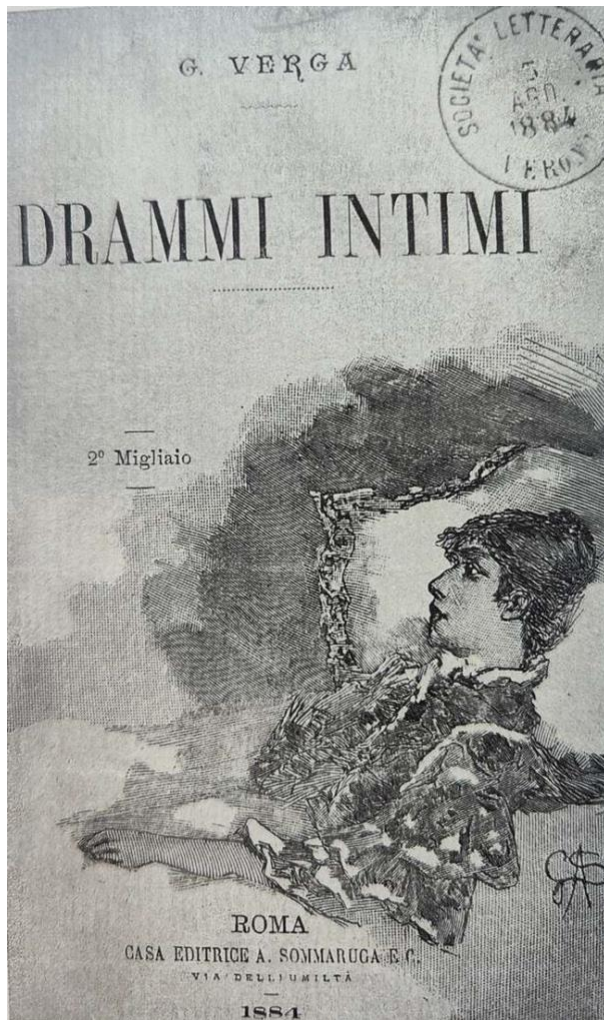


Figure 12 - Cover of *Drammi Intimi* (1884) illustrated by Sartorio.

¹⁷⁰ A. Sommaruga, *Cronaca Bizantina [1881-1885]*, Roma, 1941, p. 134.

Calandra's Drawings in Cavalleria Rusticana

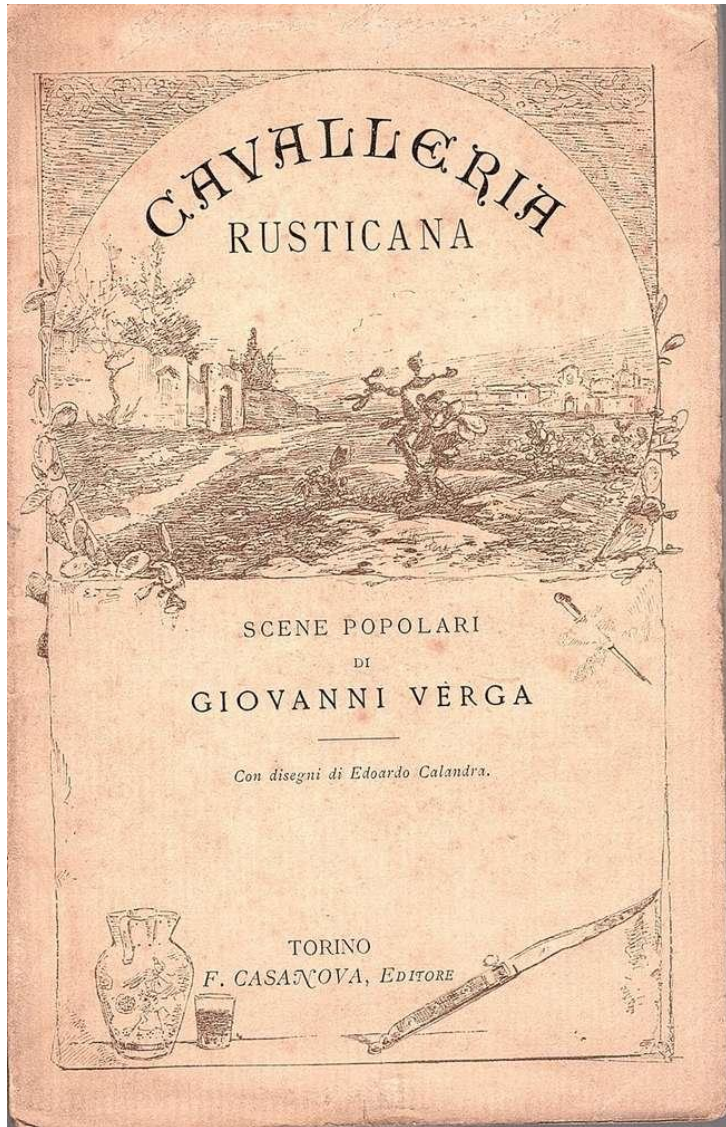


Figure 13 - Cover of *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1884), illustrated by Calandra.

Despite the exhausting and disappointing experience of the illustrated edition of the *Rusticane*, Verga did not want to give up on another proposal that came to him from the publisher Casanova. After the great success of the drama *Cavalleria Rusticana* (first performed in Turin on January 14, 1884), the publisher suggested to Verga to publish the text in a separate booklet

accompanied by illustrations. The chosen artist was Edoardo Calandra (brother of the sculptor Davide), who was better known as a writer but certainly deserves a place in the history of nineteenth-century painting as well.¹⁷¹ For *Cavalleria Rusticana*, he was able to benefit from the materials used for the stage and costume designs, as evidenced by a letter from Verga to him dated February 8, 1884:

*Mandai al nostro Casanova la Cavalleria rusticana pubblicata dal «Fracassa» colle mie correzioni che potrà servire a lei pei disegni e poscia al Casanova per la stampa. Il 1° Marzo egli può se vuole, pubblicare in volume la commedia. E torno a ringraziare Lei che mi fa l'onore d'illustrare il mio lavoro. La prego vivamente, se ha ricevuti dalla Sig.na Duse i bozzetti, fotografie e disegni che le lasciai per la messa in scena, di rimandarmeli Lei prontamente, perché mi sono necessari subito onde mettere in scena la commedia a Firenze. Se mai li chiedo pure in mio nome alla Sig.na Duse, e le faccia tanti e buoni saluti da parte mia. Qualora poi questi le occorressero ancora per le illustrazioni che Lei farà, me ne tenga avvisato per rimandarglieli subito dopo.*¹⁷²

It is known that the sets and costumes were meticulously taken care of by Verga himself, who once again benefited from the valuable advice of Capuana, whom he had consulted as early as October 29, 1883:

Ora fammi un gran favore, subito, subito, subito, e pensa che tutto dipende da te l'esito della mia commedia; e sai che buona parte dell'esito dipende non solo dal perfetto

¹⁷¹ Cfr. G. Petrocchi, *Edoardo Calandra*, Brescia, 1947.

¹⁷² F. Monetti, G. Zaccaria, *Undici lettere inedite di G. Verga a E. Calandra*, "Sigma", X, n. 1-2, 1977, p. 315.

*affiatamento ma pure dai menomi particolari di scene, costumi, ecc. Ora mandami subito, ti prego, delle fotografie di contadini (e tu sai i personaggi principali), due donne giovani, colla mantellina, una senza e vecchia, anche per vedere la pettinatura, e qualche tipo di carrettiere e di contadino. Insomma dai un'occhiata alla novella e ti regoli. Se potessi anche mandarmi una fotografia d'interno di villaggio, strada o piazza, sarebbe il colmo del bene. Ai costumi segna in nota il colore e possibilmente la stoffa dei panni particolarmente.*¹⁷³

Capuana fully met the expectations, even acting as a prop master. On February 1, 1884, Verga once again turned to his friend for iconographic material to use for the illustrated edition of *Cavalleria*:

Fammi un gran piacere a proposito della commedia che Casanova pubblicherà presto in elegante volumetto. Mandami due o tre fotografie, cioè: S. Pietro di Mineo, col suo campanile. Il collegio e la chiesa di Santa Maria, Più qualche tipo di contadino e Contadina caratteristici, Insomma degli schizzi da poter servire al disegnatore per le illustrazioni che verranno intercalate nel testo. Fammi subito questo favore, tanto più che avendo le negative non hai a far altro che a trarne le copie.

Just one week later, Capuana informs his friend about the shipment of a first series of photographs, not without a polemical comment, undoubtedly directed towards the female characters depicted by Montalti:

¹⁷³ G. Raya, *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, cit., pp. 208-209.

Ho spedito al Casanova quattro fotografie di paesaggio: fra giorni spedirò alcuni gruppi di contadini e di contadine, fatti a posta per l'occasione e che spero serviranno a qualche cosa; giacché l'altra volta al Montalti non servirono ad altro che a fargli disegnare dell'ibride figure, tra romane, napoletane e lombarde.¹⁷⁴

On March 8, 1884 (previously apologizing for the delay caused by bad weather that prevented outdoor shooting), Capuana sent a second group of photographs:

Ho spedito al Casanova 8 fotografie, cioè due gruppi di contadini e di contadine, in diverse foggie; tre ritratti di contadine con mantellina in testa, sulle spalle o senza; un ritratto di vecchio contadino, con berretto bianco, caratteristico assai, e finalmente due vedute. Meno queste due ultime, tutte le altre fotografie sono state fatte apposta per te, e se sono state mandate con ritardo, la colpa è della continua precarietà in cui si trova uno studio di dilettante in una città dove tutto deve ritirarsi da Catania o da Milano.¹⁷⁵

Calandra was able to make remarkable use of the material at his disposal with considerable skill. His illustrations remain faithful to the text, without any interpretive deviations, to the extent that the vignettes could be the equivalent of stage photos. The cover is also noteworthy, featuring a Sicilian landscape with essential contours, framed by the profile of a small town squeezed between two churches in a Baroque style. This image captures the essence of the picturesque and evokes a sense of timelessness and geographical distance. The choice of putting the landscape as the cover is significant. It frames the story, bringing the readers to a specific delimited space. The

¹⁷⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 217-218.

¹⁷⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 219-220.

title page offers Santuzza's profile, and the sketch of the characters, whose portraits are more or less detailed depending on their importance in the drama.

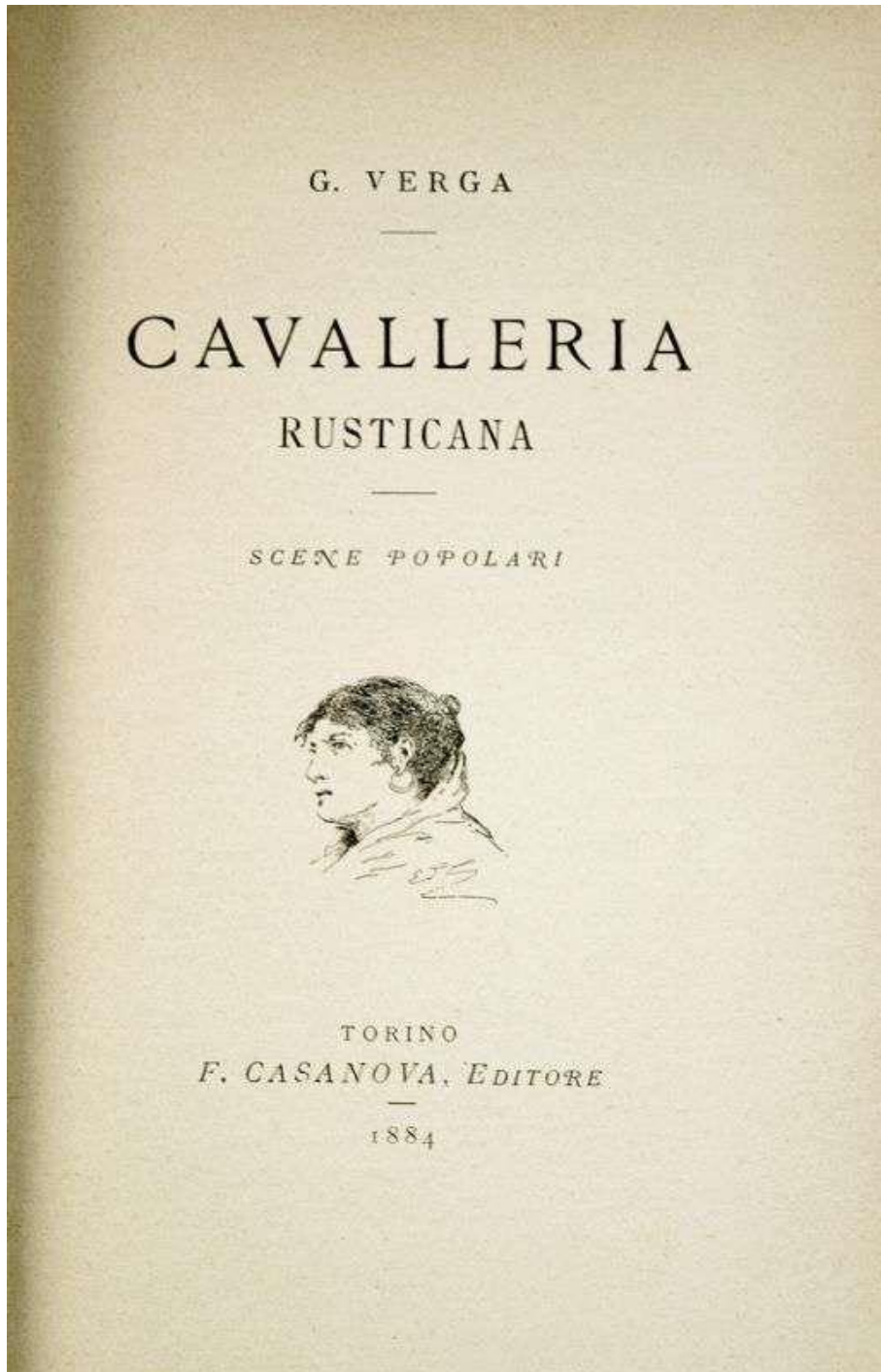


Figure 14 - Cavalleria Rusticana frontispiece (1884) illustrated by Calandra.



Figure 15 - Characters presentation page in *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1884), illustrated by Calandra.

However, one significant exception exists to the total adherence to the text. It is known that Turiddu's death, as described in the novella, occurs offstage in the drama and is announced by Pippuzza, who rushes in from the background, shouting. Well, on the last page of the booklet, below the vignette representing Pippuzza with a thin and ill-omened face, shouting her famous line, there is a splendid image of Turiddu lying in his blood, with features degraded by the signs of death, while his right hand, having dropped the knife, contracts and sinks into the ground (p. 61).



Figure 16 - *Cavalleria Rusticana* final page (1884), illustrated by Calandra.

Verga expressed his satisfaction to Calandra in a letter dated April 12, 1884:

*Un rigo anche a Lei caro Calandra, per dirle il gran piacere che mi ha fatto il vedere interpretato così artisticamente il mio pensiero colle sue illustrazioni, specie quella del frontespizio, che ha tutto il carattere desiderabile, e quelle a pag. 34, 40, 42 e 61, e quanto la ringrazii della collaborazione artistica che ha prestato a questo nostro volumetto.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ F. Monetti, G. Zaccaria, *Undici lettere inedite*, cit., pp. 315-316.

It has been observed that “*le preferenze verghiane vadano ai disegni che si pongono in una posizione mediana tra convenzionalità fredda e accademica, da un lato, ed eccessiva teatralità dall’altro.*”¹⁷⁷ As for Calandra’s distinctive style, Contini describes it as “*un segno minuzioso, esile quanto insistente, timido della linea generale, perduto dietro al minimum concreto, felice di chiudersi in un emblema; secco, diffidentemente, quasi disperatamente secco*”:¹⁷⁸ therefore, far from being incongruous (one could conclude), in relation to the text of *Cavalleria*. Of course, we are at a very different level from the *Rusticane*. And even compared to the illustrations accompanying the sumptuous and celebrated 1897 edition of *Vita dei campi*, the last page of this *Cavalleria* stands out for its quality and beauty.

Towards an Illustrated Edition of Vita dei Campi

In a letter dated July 21, 1888, in the midst of negotiations (and misunderstandings) for the publication of the *Gesualdo*, Verga already mentions an illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* as a pendant to the edition of *Novelle Rusticane*. He writes to Casanova:

*Sarei stato contento di pubblicare con lei un’edizione illustrata di Vita dei campi, da far riscontro alle Novelle Rusticane, ma Treves ne ha ancora un gran numero di copie, e da quanto mi disse lei vedo che anche la vendita delle Novelle non è stata in proporzione dei sacrifici che dovette fare per la pubblicazione illustrata.*¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 316.

¹⁷⁸ G. Contini, *Introduzione ai Racconti della scapigliatura piemontese*, Milano, 1953, p. 45.

¹⁷⁹ C. Riccardi, *Introduzione*, in *Vita dei campi*, p. xxxviii.

In fact, to get rid of the surplus copies of the *Rusticane*, Casanova was authorized by Verga to “*simularne una nuova edizione, ribassandone il prezzo a lire 3 il vol. anziché lire quattro.*”¹⁸⁰

The idea of an illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* comes back three years later, initiated by the painter Arnaldo Ferraguti, who had recently become a permanent member of the Treves family. In April 1891, Ferraguti married Olga, the daughter of Michele, the eldest of the Treves brothers. On December 16 of that year, after receiving preliminary approval from Giuseppe Treves, Ferraguti sent a long letter to Verga to explore the possibility of an illustrated edition. It is a very significant document, as it testifies to the ample resources invested in the project and reveals the slightly overconfident wit of the painter, who maliciously criticizes other illustrators from the Treves publishing house, such as Antonio Bonamore and Gennaro Amato. These judgments are, in truth, inspired by the most typical rivalries among artists. This is not to say that Verga had any particular reasons to be enthusiastic about the two sumptuous plates by Amato, which accompany the edition of his novella *Il tramonto di Venere* in the *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana* issue of 1892. The interpretation of Leda's drama appears so conventional and externalized to us, the “*astro della danza*” fallen from the “*firmamento della Scala e del San Carlo*” into the sadness of minor engagements and eventually the hospital, “*dove finiscono gli artisti senza giudizio.*” The two plates conventionally depict the theme of “*splendori e miserie di una ballerina.*” In the first illustration, the ballerina is shown in her dressing room, surrounded by bundles of flowers, with newspapers talking about her on the floor, while an admirer courts her. In the second plate, Leda, lying and dying on a hospital bed, sees herself in an elegant open carriage, portrayed with the ex-voto technique amidst dreamlike clouds on the left side of the vignette. However, it must be added that it was practically impossible to create a graphic

¹⁸⁰ G. Tellini, *Nota ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, II, cit. p. 564.

interpretation of the ballerina's drama, evoked by Verga in terms of bitter sarcasm through the story of the man who had exploited her.



Figure 17 - Verga's *Il Tramonto di Venere in Natale e Capo d'Anno* dell'*Illustrazione Italiana*, 1892, illustrated by Amato.

Certainly, Ferraguti was the most talented among the illustrators at the Treves publishing house. Born in Ferrara in 1862, he studied at the Accademia di Napoli under Domenico Morelli and Filippo Palizzi. His large canvas (approximately three meters by six) titled *Alla vanga* (1890) received widespread acclaim and is now housed at the Museo del Paesaggio in Verbania. The composition retains academic rigidity but demonstrates a keen perception of social reality. The Abruzzese peasants, hunched over their shovels under the watchful eye of the overseer, while women and children bring food, do not seem to share the hope of the proletarians marching in

Pellizza da Volpedo's *Quarto Stato*.¹⁸¹ Instead, there is a sense of sad resignation among them. The only possible rebellion is emigration, of which Ferraguti was a sensitive and disillusioned witness, as shown by the 191 drawings accompanying De Amicis' book *Sull'Oceano* (Milan, Treves, 1890). The four canvases preserved at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Milan (bequeathed by Virginia Treves Tedeschi) also attest to Ferraguti's remarkable qualities as a still-life painter.¹⁸²

The taste for the "human document," for the truth behind the scenes, that runs through the splendid illustrations of *Sull'Oceano*, is fully manifested in the series of theater scenes published in the *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana* issue of 1902, dedicated to La Scala in Milan. Here, the painter's eye emulates the lens of the camera (which, incidentally, was widely used by him and many other painters of the time, not only as a subordinate technical tool) and captures moments of theatrical life with accents of assured originality. Certainly, Ferraguti shows knowledge of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, but this series (*Il ballatoio dei macchinisti tra un atto e l'altro, La soffitta degli scenografi, Lo spogliatoio delle piccole, La folla dei curiosi davanti all'ingresso, Fra le quinte*)¹⁸³ goes beyond the inevitable resonances with great European painting and retains its own originality, which may appear to some as a touch of the vernacular: an exaltation of bustling Milan, its people hard at work, and the circulation of money.

¹⁸¹ A. M. Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori*, II, cit., p. 685.

¹⁸² L. Caramel, C. Pirovano, *Galleria d'Arte Moderna – Opere dell'Ottocento*, Electa, Milano, 1975, illustrations n.880-883.

¹⁸³ *Fra le quinte* is reproduced in *Catalogo dell'arte italiana dell'Ottocento n.14*, Mondadori, Milano, 1985, p. 234.

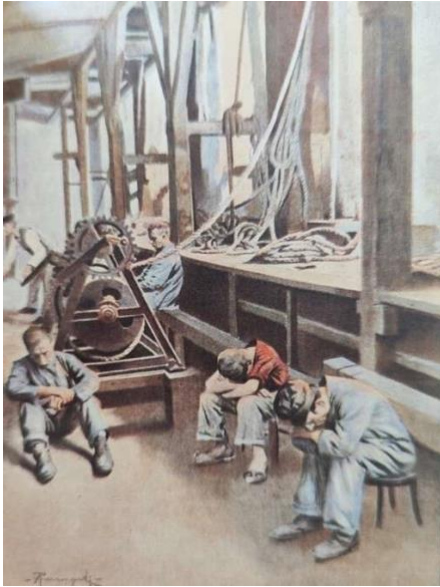


Figure 18 - *Il Teatro della Scala. Il ballatoio dei macchinisti fra un atto e l'altro*, by Ferraguti, in *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana*, 1901-1902, p. 23.



Figure 19 - *Il Teatro della Scala. Lo spogliatoio delle piccole*, by Ferraguti, in *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana*, 1901-1902, p. 11.

Ferraguti in Sicily

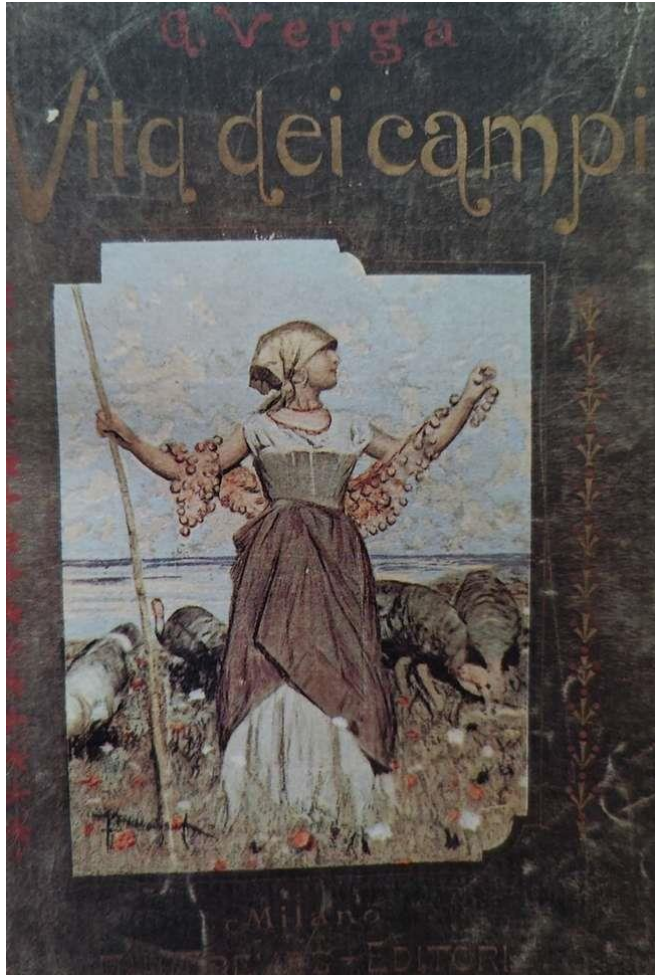


Figure 20 - Cover of *Vita dei campi* (1897), illustrated by Ferraguti.

In June 1892, after receiving approval from the publishing house and Verga, Ferraguti was preparing to leave for Sicily to gather material for the illustrations when he received “*un numero del London News*’, illustrato, con su la novella *Jeli il pastore ed illustrazioni analoghe*,” along with a letter from Giuseppe Treves, who “*lo pregava a tralasciare il lavoro*.” The English publication could only mean that Verga “*aveva dovuto cedere, per l’Inghilterra almeno, il diritto*

di illustrazione e di traduzione."¹⁸⁴ *Jeli il pastore* was published in two installments (June 11, 1892, pp. 721-24; June 18, 1892, pp. 753-55) in the *Illustrated London News* edited by Helen Zimmern, a reputable English Italianist.



Figure 21 - *Jeli the Herdsman* in *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 11 June 1892, p. 9.

The illustrations are signed “R. Caton Woodville.” This refers to Richard Caton Woodville, painter, illustrator, and writer who studied in Dusseldorf and Paris, later participating in the Russo-Turkish War in 1878 and the expedition to Egypt in 1882. He was a notable painter of battles and an acclaimed illustrator of Kipling. His works can be found in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool and Windsor Castle. His work for Verga’s novella is respectable and shows substantial congruity

¹⁸⁴ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 122.

with the tone of the story, albeit with emphasis on folkloristic elements and canonical landscape features that repropose the aesthetic of the picturesque. It is also evident how the battle painter excels in scenes dominated by the presence of horses, such as the injury to the “*stellate*,” Jeli’s horse (“But Jeli did not move from the side of Stellato”).¹⁸⁵

Even though the legal term for the translation rights of Jeli had expired, on April 6, 1891, Zimmern had written to Verga to obtain a “*permesso formale*.” And Verga agreed, as we learn from the letter dated September 20, 1893, in which the Anglo-Florentine lady insisted on asking for permission to translate *Cavalleria* “*per un giornale americano*.” During this negotiation between authors and translators, which bypassed the publishing house, Treves was evidently annoyed. And probably even Verga did not view these translations with excessive enthusiasm, as they mostly brought him only modest moral satisfaction. It is worth transcribing the letter sent to him by Zimmern on January 8, 1893, which allows us to reconstruct one of these typical editorial skirmishes:

Firenze [Via Leone Decimo, 2], 8 gennaio '93

Gent.mo Signore,

*La ringrazio tanto della sua lettera Preziosa che volle scrivermi e che mi conferma sempre più la sua modestia e la ringrazio in quanto la lettera è una non piccolo soddisfazione al mio amor proprio e soprattutto in questo momento che mi giunge una scortese lettera del Signor Treves al quale avevo chiesto il permesso di tradurre la novella *All'erta sentinella della Serao*, permesso già accordatomi dalla Serao stessa.*

In questa lettera, dietro mie rimostranze al Treves, egli mi risponde: « Che Ella aspetti sieno spirati i termini per fare la traduzione di novelle italiane, lo sappiamo dal Signor

¹⁸⁵ S. B. Chandler, *Verga's Fortune in English Periodicals, 1881-1892*, in *Italica*, 39, 1962, p. 267.

Verga che se ne è lagnato ». Questo mi pare così paradossale che ne scrivo ridendo a lei, così gentile con me quando le chiesi il permesso di tradurre Jeli il pastore.

Del resto conosco il Treves molto meglio di quello che forse egli non s'immagina e conosco Lei, signor Verga, per poterne trarre le mie deduzioni. Soltanto ho voluto scriverle perché Ella sia informata come Treves si valga del suo nome per scrivere delle scortesie ad una Signora.

Ella faccia il conto che crede di questa informazione che le do, mi conservi la sua amicizia e mi creda dev.ma sua

HELEN ZIMMERN¹⁸⁶

Regardless of how things had turned out, when Verga received the letter from Ferraguti announcing Giuseppe Treves' suspension of the illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi*, Verga felt the need to take action and sent a clarifying letter to the painter. Ferraguti forwarded it to Treves, who, evidently reassured, conferred “*nuovamente e definitivamente[...]* il gradito incarico di *illustrare Vita dei campi*”¹⁸⁷ to the painter. Thus, Ferraguti was finally able to embark on his artistic journey to Sicily, which took place in 1892, between the end of October and the first two weeks of November. Here are the initial impressions communicated to Verga from Catania, dated November 2nd:

¹⁸⁶ Zimmern's letters are part of the *Fondo Verga*, Biblioteca Universitaria di Catania, 4159-4161.

¹⁸⁷ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 123.

Sono da qualche giorno sul teatro delle gesta rusticane e naturalmente ho subito profittato dei gentili biglietti di presentazione da lei datimi prima di partire. Ho dunque conosciuto e suo fratello e Di Roberto, i quali sono stati davvero molto molto buoni con me.

Oggi o domattina partirò per Vizzini e paesi limitrofi seguendo le norme da lei datemi. Qui, da Catania, ho fatte due gite ad Aci Trezza ed ho raccolto il materiale per diverse illustrazioni.

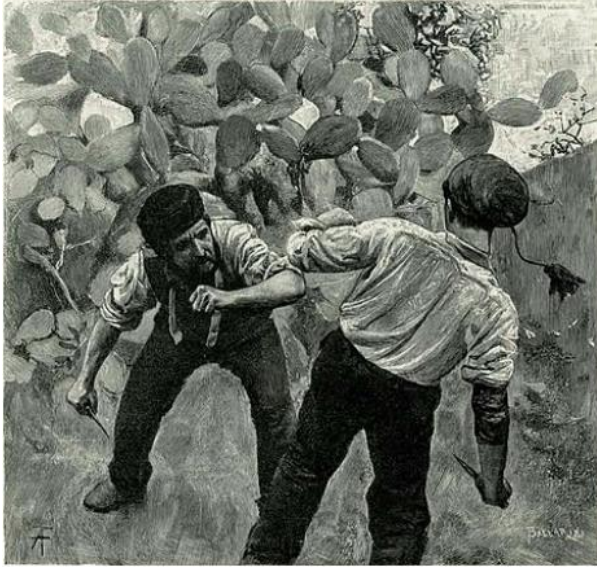
Che strani ed originali paesi! E che cielo e che vegetazione! La mia passione è divenuta la pianta del fico d'India, e ne ho schizzate e fotografate un vero bosco!

Conto di servirmene benché in giusta misura, con molta efficacia.¹⁸⁸

The “*passione*” for the typical Sicilian flora was not short-lived, as in March 1897, Ferraguti wrote to Verga, who was now in Catania, asking to send him, for the garden of Villa Olga in Pallanza, “*qualche piccolo pianta di fico d’india, e qualche altra di agave, di quelle belle agavi di cui costì fanno le siepi.*” The shipment was promptly made by Verga, who also included a “*gentile biglietto di istruzioni per la piantagione.*”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 125-126.

¹⁸⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 176-178.



Turiddu cercava di salvarsi facendo salti disperati all'indietro.... (pag. 20).

Figure 22 - Illustration by Ferraguti in *Cavalleria Rusticana, Vita dei campi* (1897), p 17 (“Turiddu cercava di salvarsi facendo salti disperati all'indietro...”).

The collaboration between Verga and Ferraguti continued even after the painter's trip to Sicily, as evident from this letter from Ferraguti dated April 4, 1893:

Eccole la nota che mi chiede, e le sarò grato se vorrà collaborare anche lei al mio materiale artistico. Avrei, per esempio, assai caro che lei mi facesse l'interno di un mulino da ulive (a Vizzini ce ne sono due superbi che vidi con suo fratello).¹⁹⁰

Ferraguti clearly intended to obtain a photograph from Verga, who, in a letter to Treves dated August 20, 1893, confessed that photography had “*rimasta l'unica mia gran passione.*”¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 133.

¹⁹¹ *Ivi*, p. 138.

Verga expressed satisfaction with the work Ferraguti was doing for *Vita dei campi*. During a summer meeting with the painter, he expressed his appreciation with “*lusinghiere parole*.”¹⁹²

A first sample of the illustrations was offered to the public in December 1893, in the issue of *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana*. In this issue, three novellas by Verga were reprinted: *Jeli il pastore*; *Fantasticherie* (as it was titled); and *Nedda*.

The reintegration of Nedda

There seems to be no documentation available to motivate the reason for including *Nedda* in the *Illustrazione Italiana* triptych, clear anticipation of the new book edition. This inclusion, certainly approved and definitively recognized in the 1897 edition, requires motivation and interpretation. Was it a belated acknowledgment by the author of a character finally recognized as worthy of standing alongside the others in *Vita dei campi*? Was it a device intended to convey to the reader the difference between the old and the new, between the pathos of the 1874 sketch and the realistic study of the mechanism of passions in the other stories? It is difficult to think so. More simply, the inclusion of *Nedda* corresponded to the old need to replace *Il come, il quando ed il perché* with a text of similar length and more congruent subject matter.

Even in 1892, Treves was unwilling to proceed with the publication with less than 55 pages, since Verga wanted to remove *Il come, il quando e il perché* since 1891,¹⁹³ so he reprinted it in the fifth edition of *Vita dei campi*, released in 1892 under the title *Cavalleria rusticana ed altre novelle*. It could also be considered that the fait accompli of the illustrations already published in the *Illustrazione Italiana* of 1893 played a role in the inclusion of *Nedda*. However, upon closer

¹⁹² *Ivi*, p. 137.

¹⁹³ Cfr. C. Riccardi, *Note ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, cit. p. 1041.

inspection, taking into account the high cost of illustrations, this circumstance seems to indicate that the incorporation of *Nedda* into the prestigious collection *Vita dei campi* had been decided or at least accepted by Verga as early as 1891, when planning the new edition, which also facilitated extensive textual reworking.



Nedda, che aveva udito da dietro il muricciuolo, si fece rossa, sebbene nessuno la vedesse (pag. 94).

Figure 23 - Illustration by Ferraguti in *Nedda, Vita dei campi* (1897), p. 90 (“*Nedda, che aveva udito da dietro il muricciuolo, si fece rossa, sebbene nessuno la vedesse*”).

The importance of these innovations was emphasized by Giovanni Cecchetti, who was the first to mention the existence of the 1897 Treves edition, highlighting its highly relevant peculiarities.¹⁹⁴ This discovery eventually helped unravel one of the most intricate knots of what was called the “*vulgata mondadoriana*.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ G. Cecchetti, *Il testo di 'Vita dei campi' e le correzioni verghiane*, in *Belfagor*, novembre 1957, pp. 667-684.

¹⁹⁵ G. P. Marchi, *Concordanze verghiane*, cit., p. 159.

The illustrated edition was announced “*d'imminente pubblicazione*” in the advertising pages of the 1896 *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana* issue. It is worth quoting the text of the announcement, preceded by the reproduction of the vignette from the frontispiece:

*Vita dei campi è illustrata dal pittore Arnaldo Ferraguti, che andò appositamente in Sicilia fra i modelli che il Verga stesso aveva studiato. Ferraguti fece settanta pastelli dal vero, che egli chiama studii, ma che sono vere composizioni, piene di vita e di color locale. L'edizione ha un'impronta nuova, differisce da tutte le pubblicazioni di lusso congeneri: ogni novella oltre le ricche e numerose vignette a pagina intera o intercalate, è accompagnata da una tavola in cromotipia di una delle composizioni più salienti e più drammatiche dei pastelli di Ferraguti; sono nove quadri che arricchiscono e decorano in modo veramente artistico e degno l'opera di Giovanni Verga.*¹⁹⁶

The price of the new volume is 15 lire in paperback, 20 lire “*legato in tela e oro.*” The regular edition, on the other hand, costs 3 lire. A new incident, at the beginning of 1896, disrupted the preparation of this edition. Verga’s German translator, the Viennese Otto Eisenschitz, had been working on an illustrated edition, a separate luxury volume, of *Jeli il pastore*. After the necessary contacts, on January 18, 1896, he informed Verga of the conditions offered by the publisher Engel:

Sono lietissimo poterle annunziare d'aver combinato col editore Emil M. Engel di Vienna. Egli farà un edizione di lusso della di Lei novella leli, il pastore con una ventina di disegni

¹⁹⁶ *Natale e Capo d'Anno dell'Illustrazione Italiana*, 1896, p. 7.

*e frontespizio di Ferraguti. Edizione mille esemplari. Noi riceviamo L. 150 in oro, Ferraguti riceve L. 300 in oro.*¹⁹⁷

The agreement had been reached without Giuseppe Treves' knowledge, and when he became aware of the situation, he expressed his regret to Verga in clear terms (February 14):

Perché non dirmelo? Perché farmi credere invece tutto il contrario?

Cosa ne avvenne? Che in seguito alla tua lettera scrissi all'Eisenschitz risentito, ed egli mi rispose per le rime. E così ebbi il danno e le beffe.

Per il danno transeat ma per la figura barbina, confesso, non posso mandarla giù.

*Ferraguti poi, se appena avesse avuto un po' di delicatezza, non avrebbe mai dovuto accettare quell'incarico. Almeno fosse per un forte interesse! Ma per un tozzo di pane!*¹⁹⁸

It seems that the main responsibility for the mess lies with Ferraguti, although Verga must have had his part in it as well, as can be understood from this other letter that Treves sends to him on February 18th:

All'Eisenschitz avevo scritto che il mandato esclusivo di trattare i tuoi diritti di traduzione l'avevi confidato a noi e che era inutile ti tediassimo scrivendoti direttamente in proposito. Che di pubblicazioni di novelle isolate non potevamo concedere l'autorizzazione, tantopiù d'una che faceva parte del volume Vita dei Campi che eravamo in procinto di pubblicazione in edizione illustrata. Che mi meravigliavo tentasse di sedurre i nostri artisti

¹⁹⁷ G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 159.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

*a valersi per l'opera del sig. Engel di schede fatte per la nostra edizione. Ciò lo dissi perché non avrei mai creduto il Ferraguti si sarebbe azzardato a commettere simile indelicatezza. Ora eccoti la risposta che ne ebbi dall'Eisenschitz. Giudicane tu, e suggeriscimi una risposta. L'interesse non c'entra per nulla in questo affare. È l'amor proprio che vi è di mezzo. Mi dispiace recarti noja, ma non è mia la colpa".*¹⁹⁹

However, the edition was successfully completed towards the end of the year. The copy sent to Verga by Eisenschitz bears a simple dedication (“*omaggio all'autore!*”), dated Vienna December 18th, 1896.²⁰⁰ It is a 125 pages volume, with 24 illustrations taken from Ferraguti's drawings: 12 more than those that will be included in the Treves' edition. Publisher Engel specialized in luxury editions, illustrated by well-known contemporary painters.

The widespread public taste for Sicilian folklore is also reflected in the illustrations for the charming collection of Verghian novellas published, also in 1896, in Boston, edited by Nathan Haskell Dole; the identification of the painter who signs the drawings as Edward M. Bannister (1830-1901), active in Boston, is uncertain. It is likely that Verga knew nothing about it; therefore, in relation to the perspective of this research, it will be sufficient to have made a simple mention of it (there are no references to this edition in Verga's correspondence).²⁰¹

As previously seen, on the occasion of the new Treves' edition of *Vita dei Campi*, Verga had the opportunity to establish a new organization for the novellas that make up the collection, with the inclusion of *Nedda* and the final farewell to *Il come, il quando e il perché*; he could also

¹⁹⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 159-160.

²⁰⁰ *Jeli, der Hirt*. Novellen von G. Verga. Deutsch von Otto Eisenschitz. Mit 24 Original-Illustrationen von Arnaldo Ferraguti. Einzige, vom Verfasser genehmigte Übersetzung. Wien, und Leipzig. Verlag von Emil M. Engel (no year indicated). This volume is described in *Biblioteca di Giovanni Verga. Catalogo*, eds. C. Lanza, S. Giarratana, C. Reitano, Catania, 1985, pp. 447.

²⁰¹ N. H. Dole, *Under the Shadow of Etna. Sicilian Stories from the Italian of Giovanni Verga*, Joseph Knight Company, 1896.

rework the text and follow the work of the illustrator. However, even this time, not everything went as desired by the author. As soon as the volume was printed, Giuseppe Treves sent a copy to Verga, expressing at the same time his conviction (letter of December 26th, 1896) that it was “*un vero gioiello*.”²⁰² But the author’s consent was not unconditional: he was not satisfied with the arrangement of the novellas, printed according to the sequence adopted in 1892 for *Cavalleria rusticana e altre novelle*, with the insertion of *Nedda* in the third position: *Cavalleria rusticana, La Lupa, Nedda, Fantasticheria, Jeli il pastore, Rosso Malpelo, L’amante di Gramigna, Guerra di santi, Pentolaccia*. Giuseppe Treves had the opportunity to respond: “*Sono lieto che l’edizione ti sia piaciuta. La disposizione è tua. Non ti han forse mandato le bozze? Sarà per un’altra edizione, speriamo. Ti ho mandato qualche copia*”.²⁰³

Therefore, it is not entirely unfounded the attempt by Vito Perroni to propose, in the 1959 Mardersteig edition, the “*calibratissimo ordinamento originario*” of the 1880 *editio princeps*. Perroni based his idea on “*alcune note orientative*” provided by Verga to Ferraguti, perhaps contained in a lost letter, one of the many that are missing: *Nedda, Fantasticheria, Jeli il pastore, Rosso Malpelo, Cavalleria rusticana, La Lupa, L’amante di Gramigna, Guerra di santi, Pentolaccia*.²⁰⁴

However, because of the unavailability of the documentation that would allow us to examine Perroni’s proposed solution, even other editions, such as the 1980 Salerno’s curated by Tellini, respect the order of Treves 1897. It remains certain, however, that even this edition, albeit limited to the sequence of the novellas, did not correspond to the author’s final will.

²⁰² G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, cit., p. 174.

²⁰³ *Ivi*, p. 175.

²⁰⁴ Cfr. V. Perroni, *Nota*, in *Vita dei campi*, Mondadori, Milano, 1959, pp. 167-168.

At this point, it becomes imperative to explore the significance of these illustrated editions to the writer himself, Giovanni Verga. The comprehensive analysis of his correspondence and interactions with various stakeholders shed light on Verga's perspective towards these illustrated editions. What becomes evident is that, unlike some of his contemporaries, Verga's approach to these editions was primarily rooted in commercial considerations, where the publisher, the illustrator, and the author all had their vested interests. This perspective starkly contrasts with the profound relationships that other notable authors of his time shared with their illustrators, exemplified by Pascoli's collaboration with De Witt and D'Annunzio's and Pascoli's engagements with De Carolis.²⁰⁵

One can notice Verga's tacit acceptance of the presence of illustrations in his works, almost as if it were a given, an unquestionable facet of the publishing process. There is a conspicuous absence of direct statements from Verga that explicitly refer to the illustrations. This silence speaks volumes about how the inclusion of illustrations was largely dictated by the publishers, and authors like Verga seemed to have little room for negotiation in this matter.

This implicit agreement is further underscored by Verga's correspondence, particularly his exchanges with fellow writer Luigi Capuana. In these letters, there is a notable absence of any indication that Verga contested or questioned their inclusion.

The commercial aspect of these illustrated editions cannot be understated. For Verga, they represented an opportunity to reach a broader readership. The illustrations added a visual dimension to his works that could appeal to a wider audience, including those who might be drawn to the visual aspect of the book rather than the text alone. This alignment of interests among the

²⁰⁵ P. Paccagnini, *Antony de Witt illustratore pascoliano*, in *Labyrinthos*, 7-8, 1985, pp. 232-308; G. Oliva, *I nobili spiriti. Pascoli, D'Annunzio e le riviste dell'estetismo fiorentino*, Bergamo, 1979.

publisher, the illustrator, and the author created a symbiotic relationship where each party stood to benefit from the success of the illustrated edition.

Chapter IV

The illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* (1897): narrative parallelism between visual and written text

Some background

The 1897 Treves' edition of *Vita dei campi* was illustrated by Arnaldo Ferraguti with nine color plates, fifty-eight black-and-white illustrations plus the title page and cover. This impressive set of illustrations had been preceded by Ferraguti's illustration of three of the short stories included in the collection, *Jeli il pastore*, *Fantasticheria*, and *Nedda*, published in the "Numero Unico di Natale e Capodanno, 1893" of the *Illustrazione Italiana*,²⁰⁶ which would then be merged, together with others, into the subsequent Treves' volume. To better understand the relationship between the literary and the figurative text, it will be useful to retrace the background that led to the Treves edition and the relationship between the writer and the illustrator.

Valuable testimonies are contained in Verga and Ferraguti's correspondence.²⁰⁷ The first mention of an illustration project for *Vita dei Campi* dates back to December 1891. Arnaldo Ferraguti writes to the writer:

È da vario tempo che ho intenzione di portare la mia Arte illustrativa in un campo più affine alla mia pittura o meglio alle mie tendenze pittoriche. Ella a Pallanza, ha avuto causa, benché a traverso a dei semplici abbozzi, di osservare quali siano tali mie tendenze! Non è l'Oceano né Cuore, il mio campo! Ma dovetti sottostare al desiderio dei miei editori! E d'altra parte mi lusingava

²⁰⁶ *Illustrazione Italiana*, Dec 24, 1893, XX, 52.

²⁰⁷ Cf. G. Raya, *Verga e i Treves*, Herder, Roma, 1986.

*anche il nome e la simpatia vivissima ch'io avevo per lo scrittore! Ho letta, riletta, studiata ed ammirata pazzamente la sua Vita dei Campi. Quelle novelle sono i soggetti miei, i loro episodi sono le mie concezioni. Infine il suo libro e proprio quello ch'io cerco! [...] Ho intenzione dunque di fare una grande edizione, con 60 o 70 composizioni scelte, magari insieme, dai momenti più salienti delle novelle, nonché un certo numero d'intercalati.*²⁰⁸

The first impression that one gets from this letter concerns the persuasive skill employed by Ferraguti to obtain the approval to work on the illustrations of Verga's book. Moreover, the painter seems to want to involve the writer in his project, to have him collaborate in the conception of the images, as will actually happen. Perhaps unconsciously, the letter contains a persuasive structure based on presenting *Vita dei campi* as a book that stands out from the contemporary literary panorama well known by Ferraguti, considering his collaboration with De Amicis' and Cordelia's editions.²⁰⁹ At the same time, the artist presents his qualities as superior to those of his colleagues in *Illustrazione Italiana* (Antonio Bonamore and Gennaro Amato²¹⁰): thus, according to Ferraguti, the combination of both their artistic qualities is certainly above the average. Finally, he mentions the desire to adopt an innovative technique at the time, the full engraving,²¹¹ and to be guided by a model of European stature, Marchetti, illustrator of Halévy's French works.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Raya, p. 118.

²⁰⁹ Cf. A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure. Gli illustratori italiani dei libri per l'infanzia*, Torino, Einaudi, 1972, pp. 114-119; P. Pallottino, *Storia dell'illustrazione italiana: libri e periodici a figure dal 15° al 20° secolo*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1988, p. 190.

²¹⁰ On Gennaro Amato, who illustrated Verga's novella *Il tramonto di Venere*, consult Pallottino, p. 187.

²¹¹ On the contribution of photography to the illustrations, consult Pallottino, pp. 144-150.

²¹² Ludovico Marchetti (1853-1909), an Italian painter who settled in France, achieved success at a European level for his historical and battle paintings; he was also a highly regarded graphic designer. Ludovic Halévy (1834-1908), in his youth librettist of Offenbach's operettas, wrote short stories and novels, including some relating to memories of the war of the 1870'; he joined the Académie Française.

There is no reason to doubt the genuineness of Ferraguti's admiration for Verga. Moreover, being a member of the Treves family (in 1891 he had married Olga, daughter of Michele, the eldest of the brothers), as well as his collaboration with his father-in-law's company, put him in the privileged position of having all the important information that circulated in the Milanese literary milieu.

What Ferraguti proposed would not have been the first experience of illustrating Verga's works.²¹³ Among the previous experiences, there is the collaboration with Montalti,²¹⁴ which has been unsatisfactory for the writer. Montalti was a mediocre painter who, thanks to his friendship with Camillo Boito, was able to obtain a contract as an illustrator for the publisher Ricordi. He was also chosen by the publisher Casanova to illustrate the *Novelle Rusticane*. Writing to Capuana who intended to review the work, Verga said: "*Se parli delle mie novelle, ti prego di trattarmi bene il Montalti, che ha fatto miracoli, per uno che deve far a indovinare il paesaggio... Non parlare di stonatura, ti supplico.*"²¹⁵ The cover of *Drammi Intimi* is also extraneous to Verga's style. Designed by Sartorio,²¹⁶ it is entirely within the decadent-glorious taste of D'Annunzio. Perhaps Calandra,²¹⁷ painter and writer, close to the Piedmontese Scapigliatura, succeeded more than the others in expressing the drama of *Cavalleria rusticana*.

²¹³ Verga's works illustrated up to that moment: *Novelle rusticane*, Torino, Casanova 1882, illustrated by Alfredo Montalti; *Drammi intimi*, Roma, Sommaruga 1884, with cover by Aristide Sartorio; *Cavalleria rusticana*, Turin, Casanova 1884, illustrated by Edoardo Calandra; *Il tramonto di Venere*, in *Numero Unico di Natale e Capodanno*, *Illustrazione Italiana*, 1892, illustrated by Gennaro Amato.

²¹⁴ Alfredo Montalti (1858-1928) studied at the Accademia Albertina in Torino and at the Accademia di Venezia. As a painter, he specialized in live painting, both of landscape and figure. The disease forced him to slow down his activity and limit himself to the work of an illustrator. Montalti's letters to Verga are published in G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, *Giovanni Verga e le arti*, in A. Franceschetti, *Letteratura Italiana e arti figurative*, vol. 2, Firenze, Olschki, 1988, pp. 894-895.

²¹⁵ C. Riccardi, *Nota ai testi*, in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, Milano, 1979, p. 1032.

²¹⁶ Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860-1932) joined the group "In arte libertas" in 1892, illustrated D'Annunzio *Isaotta Guttadauro*, and decorated the Camera dei Deputati in Montecitorio.

²¹⁷ Edoardo Calandra (1852-1911), a well-known writer, often recalls the eighteenth-century Piedmontese atmosphere in his novels and stories.

It seems that Verga was not prejudicially opposed to the practice of illustrated books. On the contrary, from a letter dated 1888 to the publisher Casanova, it can be deduced that, when he received Ferraguti's offer, the writer had already been thinking of making an illustrated edition of *Vita dei Campi*:

Sarei stato contento di pubblicare con lei un'edizione illustrata della Vita dei campi, da far riscontro alle Novelle Rusticane, ma Treves ne ha ancora un gran numero di copie, e da quanto mi disse Lei vedo che anche la vendita delle Novelle non è stata in proporzione dei sacrifici che dovette fare per la pubblicazione illustrata.²¹⁸

Who was Arnaldo Ferraguti? Born in Ferrara in 1862, he began his scientific studies in Naples, but he was soon expelled from school, which he did not like, for having drawn the profile of Garibaldi in front of a Bourbon professor. He was then able to enroll in the Accademia where he studied with Domenico Morelli.²¹⁹ In 1893 he presented his painting *Alla Vanga* (fig. 24) in Brera and subsequently he took part in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* in Rome and exhibited in Dresden, Munich, and Vienna as well.

²¹⁸ Riccardi, XXXVIII.

²¹⁹ Domenico Morelli (1826-1901) studied at the Accademia di Napoli, traveled in Italy and Europe, and lived in Paris. His fast painting with elusive brushstrokes ensured him international fame.



Figure 24 - A. Ferraguti, *Alla Vanga*, 1890, oil on canvas, Museo del Paesaggio, Verbania

At the *Terza Esposizione Internazionale di Venezia* in 1899, he exhibited six colored pastels entitled *In città* and *Al mare*, and it was on this occasion that the art critic Vittorio Pica²²⁰ reproached him for being too influenced by photography, a passion which on the other hand brought him closer to Michetti,²²¹ as well as the verismo writers. In his activity as an illustrator for the *Illustrazione Italiana*, Ferraguti distinguished himself from his colleagues because his images were generally live drawings, while the usual technique was that of faithfully copying from photographs.²²² To illustrate *Vita dei campi*, the artist undertook a trip to Catania, once again to observe the landscapes and the types that he was supposed to reproduce. On November 2nd, 1892, from Sicily, Ferraguti writes:

²²⁰

²²¹ Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851 -1929), painter who was Morelli's pupil in Napoli. He portrayed aspects of his homeland, Abruzzo, with folkloric and elegiac intonations. *Il Voto* is his most famous work. Later he focused on photography, still on the same subjects of his homeland.

²²² Cf. Faeti, pp. 112-113.

*Qui, da Catania, ho fatto due gite ad Aci Trezza [...]. Che strani ed originali paesi! E che cielo e che vegetazione! La mia passione è divenuta la pianta del fico d'India, e ne ho schizzate e fotografate un vero bosco! Conto di servirmene, benché in giusta misura, con molta efficacia.*²²³

The prickly pear must have greatly impressed Ferraguti's artistic sensibility since it often appears in the illustrations of the book. A few years later, the painter contacted Verga, now in Catania, to have some plants sent for his villa in Pallanza: which the writer did, by also enclosing the instructions for the cure and maintenance of the plants. Ferraguti used a realist approach not only for landscapes but also for the interiors and he gave them a documentary color. On March 3rd 1893, from his villa in Pallanza, the illustrator asks Verga if it was his intention to take some photographs and he wrote: "*rammenti di fare per me degli interni e qualche bel dettaglio di fichi d'India!*" And on April 4th he added a more detailed request, namely the pictures of "*l'interno di un molino da ulive.*"²²⁴

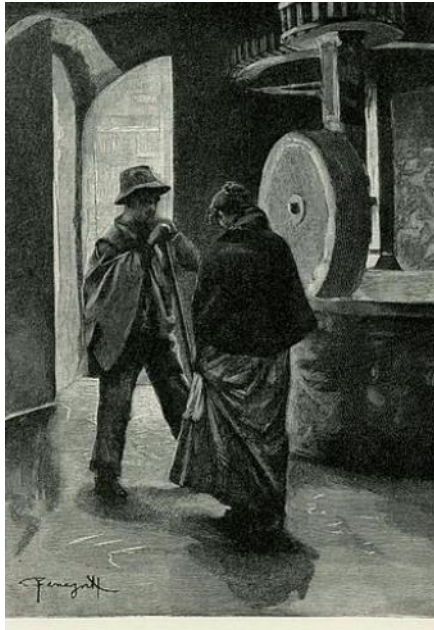
The iconic results of the journey and the studies *from life* were not long in coming: in 1893 a full-page black-and-white table was published in the *Illustrazione Italiana* made up of the combination of some drawings of details, almost as if to constitute a sort of photomontage ante litteram of Sicilian snapshots. And if the interior of the olive mill is found in the illustration that depicts the meeting between La Lupa and Nanni, protagonists of the short story *La Lupa*, to find an agreement on his marriage to Maricchia (Fig. 25),²²⁵ the prickly pear, widely and luxuriantly represented in the illustrations, forms the entire background for a few plates in *Cavalleria*

²²³ Raya, pp. 123, 126.

²²⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 132-133.

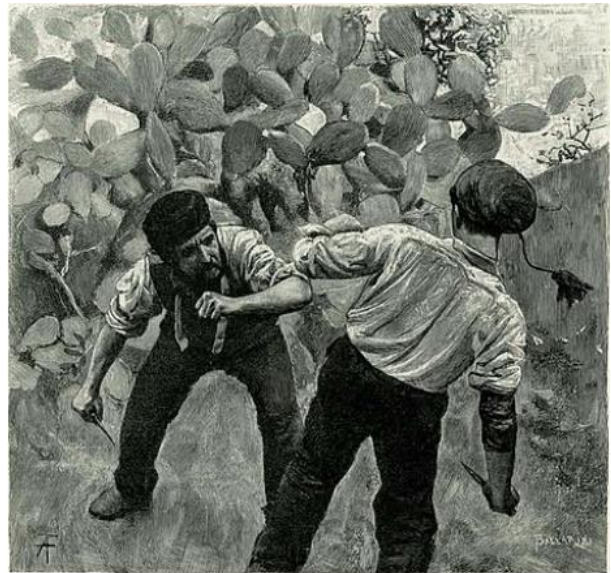
²²⁵ All the page annotations in the text refer to the 1897 edition of *Vita dei Campi*.

rusticana (Fig. 26-27) and *Guerra di santi* (Fig. 28). The same applies to the arch surmounting a wooden door, which is reproduced almost identically in the figure representing the meeting between Nedda and her uncle Giovanni at the door of the house, in the short story *Nedda* (Fig. 29).



— Se è così se ne può parlare a Natale (pag. 31).

Figure 25 - *La Lupa*



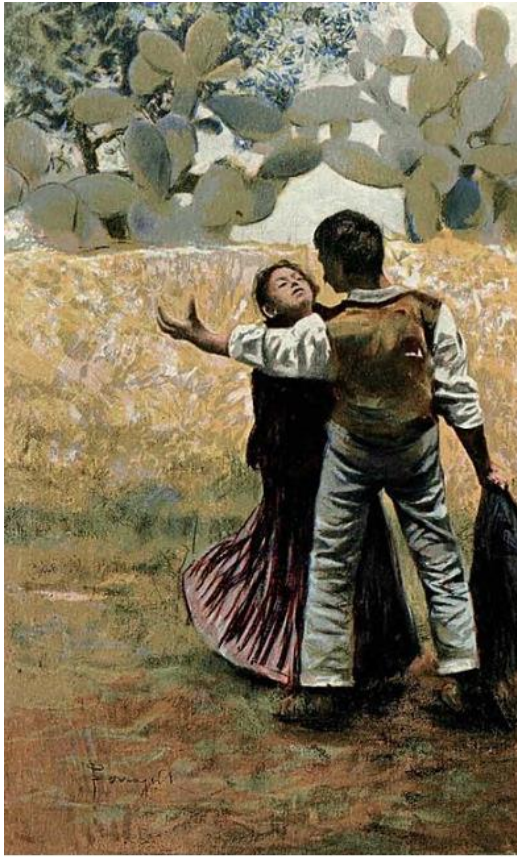
Turiddu cercava di salvarsi facendo salti disperati all'indietro.... (pag. 20).

Figure 26 - *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1)



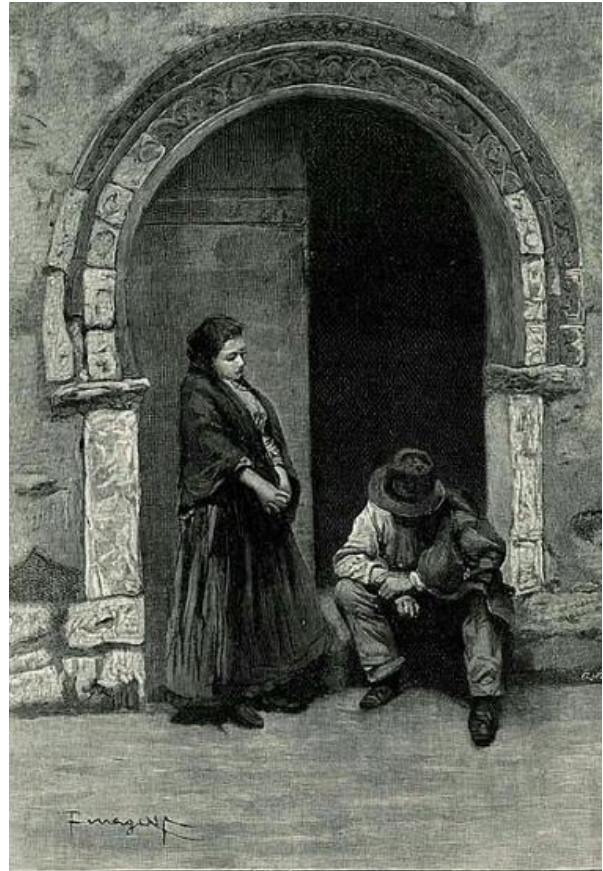
Turiddu annaspò un pezzo di qua e di là tra i fichidindia o poi cadde come un masso.

Figure 27 - *Cavalleria Rusticana* (2)



GUERRA DI SANTI. — Per l'amor di Dio! Per l'amor di Dio! — strillava sua sorella Saridda (pag. 289).

Figure 28 - Guerra di Santi



Il vecchio si assise accanto a lei, sulla soglia.... (pag. 80).

Figure 29 - Nedda

In search of a language

Ferraguti's meticulous search for truth is not a mere artisanal scruple; what the artist is developing in this phase is a visual language to tell Verga's stories. In this sense, the tables published in the *Illustrazione Italiana* testify to the search for minimal units of meaning, visual signs whose combination may construct the "discourses" of the illustrations. The sequence of these discourses will form visual texts parallel to the verbal ones of the *novellas*. Therefore, it comes quite naturally to assume that Ferraguti's iconic language, like the language of a writer, is

structured on a combination of suggestions, movements, and trends that compose the visual culture of his time.

Before working with the publishers Treves, Ferraguti had already built up his artistic physiognomy within the Italian pictorial Realism movement,²²⁶ still in its early days, of which Morelli, his teacher in Naples, had been the initiator and the connection between the Neapolitan Realism and the Macchiaoli. Moreover, painters such as the Palizzi brothers, who renewed painting both in terms of forms and themes, had worked in the same Neapolitan environment. Two paintings by Filippo Palizzi,²²⁷ *Donne che lavano presso il fiume Sarno* (Fig. 30) and *Strada di paese con ruderi* (Fig. 31), both from the 60s, recall impressively the Sicilian environments of *Vita dei campi*: the first, for the immediacy of the depiction of a group of women in the act of washing clothes in the river; the second, a foreshortened steep road recalls the illustration in *Rosso Malpelo* that represents the boy returning home after work (Fig. 32).



Figure 30 - Palizzi, *Donne che lavano presso il fiume Sarno*

²²⁶ Cf. C. Maltese, *Storia dell'Arte in Italia 1785-1943*, Torino, Einaudi, 1963, pp. 168-215.

²²⁷ Filippo Palizzi (1818-1899) was an exponent of pictorial realism. He preferred the representation of the countryside and domestic animals. It can be considered a forerunner of verismo themes.

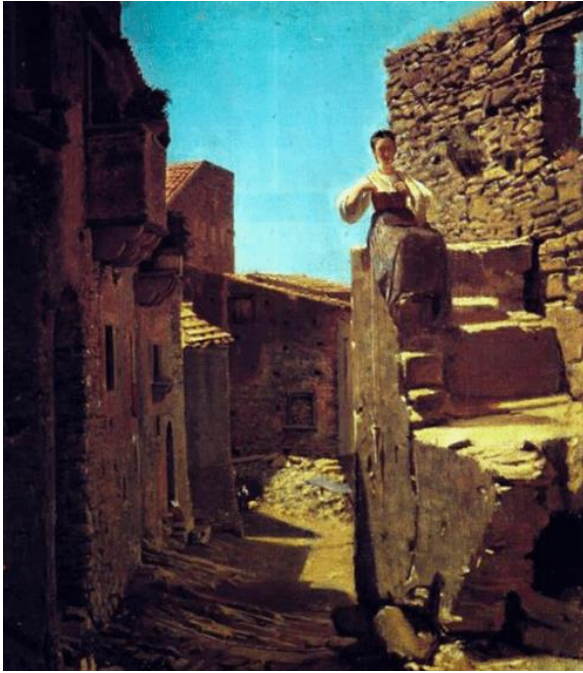


Figure 31 - Palizzi, *Strada di paese con ruderi*

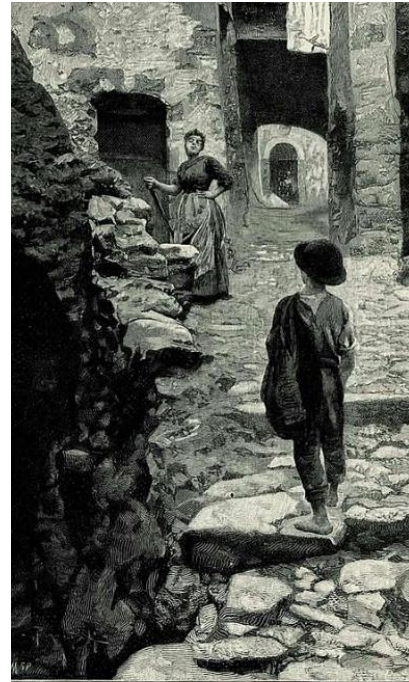


Figure 32 - Rosso Malpelo

Ferraguti's realism takes on the aspects of humanitarian socialism²²⁸ (also called *social-popolare* movement) — whose best-known representative in painting is Pellizza da Volpedo²²⁹ — and this tendency, per se oriented towards the popular theme, is particularly exalted by illustrated books and magazines, which see a growing diffusion during the nineteenth century.²³⁰ This *social-popolare* movement is fundamental in enforcing a new popular visual culture which for the first time is truly a mass phenomenon, as the various avant-garde movements will well understand a few decades later.

²²⁸ Cf. Faeti, p. 113.

²²⁹ Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo (1868-1907) began his career as a *verista* painter. However, he oscillated between naturalism (*Quarto Stato*, 1901, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milano) and symbolism (*Girotondo*, 1906, Galleria d'arte moderna, Milano).

²³⁰ On some illustrated books of the late nineteenth century, consult Pallottino, p. 180. On illustrious forefather of Italian illustrated books, the illustrated edition of the *Promessi Sposi*, consult F. Mazzocca, *L'officina dei Promessi Sposi*, Milano, Mondadori 1985.

As we know, every mass cultural phenomenon, by its very nature, welcomes different and sometimes conflicting tendencies and the visual culture of this period is no exception. It is widely influenced by that portentous and invasive means of communication which is advertising, still in its infancy but already endowed with an extraordinary persuasive force. Therefore, it is the era of posters and *réclame* that link their iconic language to the style and suggestions of the Liberty, spreading on a large scale what painting was proposing in the exhibitions. However, figurative realism tended to take on sentimental and symbolic connotations, to the point of moving away from its origins. The Liberty has a deep bond with the *social-popolare* movement. Art critics, indeed, during the 1894 exhibition in Milan, identify in *Maternità* by Previati (one of the main representatives of the *social-popolari*) the first example of Italian pictorial Liberty.²³¹

In the illustrations of *Vita dei campi*, Ferraguti incorporates elements of the new style to a considerable extent, despite the contrasts with social humanitarianism, which had guided his work of illustrating De Amicis' novels and that had attracted him towards the Verga's *mondo dei vinti*. The floral style, a typically Liberty decorative element, embellishes the color table that precedes *Nedda's* story, depicting a love scene between the girl and Janu amidst a riot of flowers (Fig. 34, p.34), and transforms the rough color of Verga into a scene of bucolic passion more in the guise of D'Annunzio. Vegetal elements as decorative stylistic features frequently appear in the illustrations of this book: the tree, massive and gnarled as in the masthead of *La Lupa* (Fig. 33); the luxuriant bushes, like the one from which the childish figures of Jeli and Mara emerge (Fig. 34); stylized branches that fall along the figure as in the illustration that portrays Maricchia crying (Fig. 35). Finally, the sovereign plant of this series of images, that prickly pear which was supposed to represent a marvelous novelty in the visual imagination of northern Ferraguti, technically acts

²³¹ R. Bossaglia, *Il Liberty. Storia e fortuna del Liberty italiano*, Firenze, Sansoni 1974, p. 10.

as a backdrop but in fact, it is the true protagonist of the image that portrays Gramigna hunted by *carabinieri* (Fig. 36).



Era alta, magra, aveva soltanto un seno fermo e vigoroso da bruna — e pure non era più giovane — era pallida come se avesse sempre addosso la malaria, e su quel pallore due occhi grandi così, e delle labbra fresche e rosse, che vi

Figure 33 - Masthead of *La Lupa*



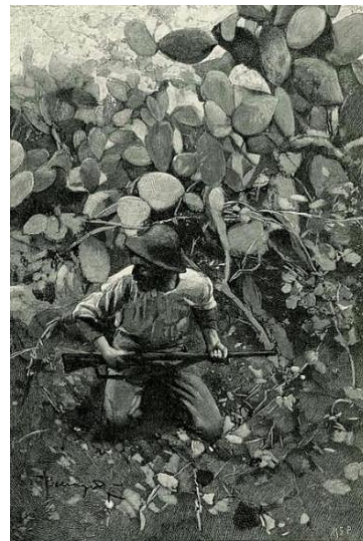
— Io sono Mara, la figlia di Massaro Agripino.... (pag. 151).

Figure 34 - *Jeli and Mara*



Maricchia, poveretta, buona e brava ragazza piangeva di nascosto.... (pag. 26).

Figure 35 - *Maricchia*



.... correva carponi nel folto dei fichidindia.... (pag. 271).

Figure 36 - *Gramigna*

Ferraguti had a close friendship with the painter Francesco Paolo Michetti. As Ferraguti, Michetti developed his art from the Realism movement, but since his early days, he had begun to

develop a romantic approach which will be displayed later in his production, when he will combine both the realistic and the bucolic-pastoral motives.²³² Subsequently, the artist will abandon painting to devote himself to photography, whose results will be judged even superior to the pictorial ones; first, however, he will carry out important works of illustration in different authors' books. Michetti's painting has been sometimes defined as "*verismo di folklore*" or "*realismo mitico*"²³³ and, indeed, his Abruzzo seems projected into an imaginary dimension, a bit like D'Annunzio's Abruzzo. I would argue that this categorization may find some similarities with Ferraguti's illustrations of Sicily as well, which will be analyzed later in detail.

There is, in fact, a painting by Ferraguti entitled *Le Tre Grazie* (Fig. 37), which was also reproduced (through an engraving by Cantagalli) in the *Illustrazione Italiana* (1893), that presents various reasons of interest. The scene, obviously with a Sicilian setting, represents a country festival and was made up of two groups: that of women, on the left, which depicts three young girls in regional costume who hint at dance steps while keeping their hands clasped, flanked on the left by an older woman, smaller in stature, not participating in the dance. To the right, the group of two men seated on an embankment, with another one next to them half-recumbent, all wrapped up in heavy cloaks, watching the women dance.

²³² M. Miraglia, *Michetti pittore e la cultura del suo tempo*, in Miraglia, *Francesco Paolo Michetti fotografo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1975, p. 17.

²³³ Maltese, pp. 227 and 254.



Figure 37 - Ferraguti, *Le tre grazie*

Meanwhile, the motif of the three women in regional costume linked together and accompanied by a fourth, this time a little girl on the right, is also found in a famous painting by Michetti entitled *La Domenica delle Palme* (Fig. 38). Both paintings offer a gentle rustic atmosphere completely unrelated to Verga's tone, but very close to the folkloric rehabilitation of regional traditions to which D'Annunzio himself was very sensitive.



Figure 38 - Michetti, *La domenica delle palme*

But then, the theme of the three women linked in a dance, flanked by a smaller one (this time it's a girl and she's to the right of the three, as in Michetti) is found again, translated into a more moving and stylized language, in the illustration of *Jeli il Pastore*, that depicts Mara dancing and singing with her companions (Fig. 39),²³⁴ an illustration that also appears on the title page of the volume. The group is reinterpreted according to a pre-liberty spirit: in fact, it overshadows the theme of the *carola* (dance and song of intertwined young women), of French origin, destined to become a “sign” of that artistic movement.²³⁵ Finally, we notice that the half-recumbent male figure wrapped in a cloak on the far right in Ferraguti's painting is the same figure that appears in the initial illustration of the short story *Pentolaccia* (Fig. 40).



Mara colle compagne saltava e cantava.... (pag. 190).

Figure 39 - Mara dancing and singing



Figure 40 - Pentolaccia

In the last part of the century, a significant role was played by photography both for its relationship with painting and, what is of interest here, for its influence on illustration as a means

²³⁴ The identical color plate on the *Numero Unico* of *Illustrazione Italiana* 1893 with the caption: “*Tutta la gente era vestita da festa*”; on the title page of *Vita dei campi*, in blue without caption. In the volume, in black and white with the caption “*Mara colle compagne saltava e cantava.*”

²³⁵ Cf. Bossaglia, pp. 46 and 48.

of reproducing the illustrator's drawing, without the mediation of the engraver, but also as a means of direct reproduction of reality.²³⁶ The analysis of movement is a characteristic of the photographic language that particularly influences pictorial research between the 19th and 20th centuries.²³⁷ One may think, for instance, of the Futurist dynamism, which was strongly influenced by attention to photography. Depiction of movement will lead the Futurists to cinematographic experimentation, in which Michetti and D'Annunzio will also try their hand. Ferraguti's illustrations were influenced by the photographic model as well²³⁸ and his role as a draftsman for the *Illustrazione Italiana* had a fundamental impact: the idea of photographic reportage makes its way into the periodical, which imposes illustrations endowed with the immediacy feature typical of the snapshot. It is in 1893 the publication of a series of photographs by Eugenio Interguglielmi, portraying Sicilian subjects, from a group of fishermen and women of the Kalsa neighborhood to the small towns of the plain of Catania and Bagheria (Fig. 41).²³⁹

²³⁶ It is known that photography was practiced in the *verismo* environment by Capuana and by Verga himself: cf. W. Settimelli, G. Garra Agosta, *Giovanni Verga fotografo*, Milano, Centro Informazioni 3M, 1970.

²³⁷ The first to use the photographic medium for movement analysis was the Englishman Eadweard Muirbridge (1830-1904) who in 1878 made a series of shots of a galloping horse, to demonstrate that there is a moment in which all four hooves do not touch the ground.

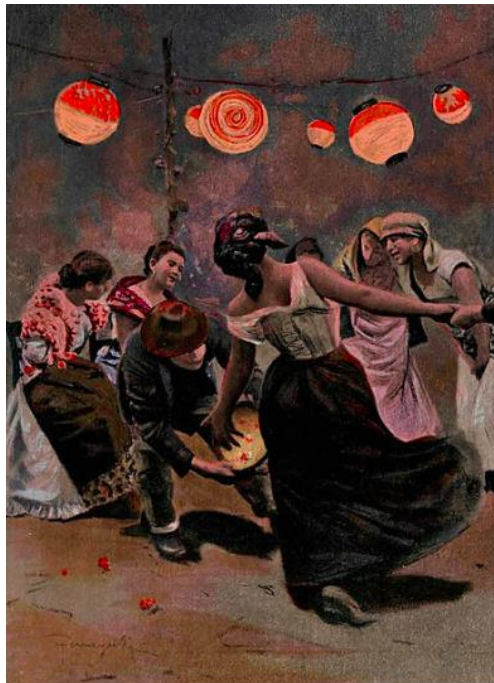
²³⁸ Cf. Pallottino, p. 147.

²³⁹ *Illustrazione Italiana*, Nov 12, 1893, XX, 46.



Figure 41 - Palermo, Ricamatrici nel rione della Kalsa, 1880. Reproduced with the title *Nelle zolfatare di Sicilia - Tipi di donne di Lercara* in *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 21, n. 43, Oct 28 1894.

The illustration of *Vita dei campi* in which, in my opinion, the photographic experience is utilized most strikingly, is the color plate that precedes *Jeli il Pastore*, in which Mara dances with the son of farmer (Fig. 42).



JELI IL PASTORE — Mara girava in tondo e si accoccolava come una colombella in amore.... (pag. 187).

Figure 42 - Jeli "Mara girava in tondo..."

Here the dance takes on the sense of a courtship in front of the pleased eyes of her parents and the implied eroticism of the scene, so effectively described by Verga, is visually represented by the bare shoulders and arms of the woman who seems to open towards her suitor, who bends down in the dance almost to the point of genuflecting in front of her. But above all the swirling rhythm of the movement imprinted on Mara's body represented from behind, a rhythm well depicted in the flutter of her skirt, creates a sense of excitement and an almost uncontrolled situation. In an equally decisive manner, the photographic experience is revealed in the framing with an unusual cut of the illustration that depicts the duel between Alfio and Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* (Fig. 3, p. 7). The point of view here shifted slightly upwards, and the symmetrical divergence of the two male figures helps to give the scene a sort of rotating movement almost like a mobile camera raised above them. In a couple of cases, then, Ferraguti's illustrations closely recall photographic images of his friend Michetti. In reality, we do not know whether Verga's illustrator actually saw them, or if they are aesthetic coincidences. A very evident visual proximity appears between the image of the *Lupa* approaching Nanni who is sleeping on his stomach (p. 36), and that of the olive picker photographed by Michetti (about 1890) in the same position, albeit carrying out a very different activity. We encounter a similar case with the header illustration of *Guerra di Santi*, depicting the progress of a village procession (p. 287), which looks very similar to the photo entitled *Processione a Orsogna* (about 1895) both for the object represented and for the front framing which highlights the tabernacle of the saint at the center.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ For these and other Michetti's photos, consult Miraglia, 1975.

The female figure

In the female portrait, Ferraguti creates a skillful contamination of languages entirely aimed at an iconic characterization of the character, generally completely different from Verga's, albeit with its own effectiveness. The stylistic and ideal contrast - sometimes the extraneousness - between the narrative text and the illustrations is frequently laid bare by the collision of the image with the caption taken from Verga's text.

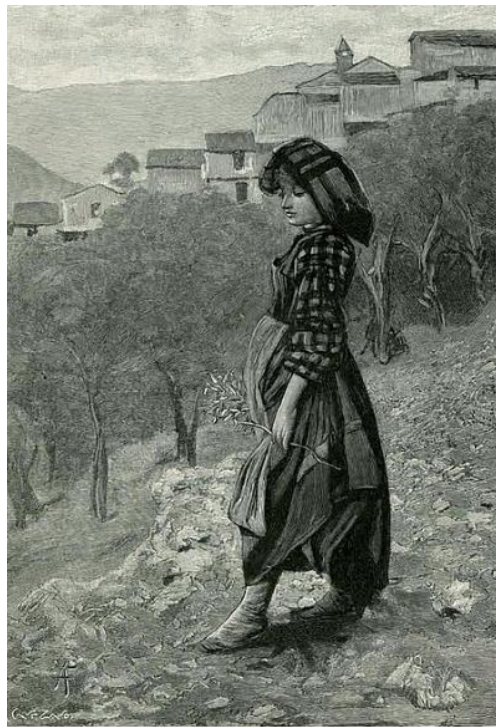
Emblematic in this sense is the case of *Nedda*. I recall here only the essential features of the description of the protagonist, indeed very famous: the author describes “*una ragazza bruna, vestita miseramente*” to whom “*gli stenti e le fatiche*” had altered “*anche la forma umana.*” (p. 52). With lucidity close to ruthlessness, he portrays her body: “*Le sue membra schiacciate da pesi enormi, o sviluppate violentemente da sforzi penosi, erano diventate grossolane, senza esser robuste*” (p. 53). And this is how he describes her clothing: “*I cenci sovrapposti in forma di vesti rendevano grottesca quella che avrebbe dovuto essere la delicata bellezza muliebre.*” (p. 53). The first full-page image of Nedda that the illustrator presents to us shows a couple of young girls conversing outdoors, endowed with their own rustic elegance in the drapery of splendid regional costumes; there is also the almost affected refinement of an amphora, evidently empty because it is very light, delicately held by the figure on the left (Fig. 43).



— Ecco un'altra giornata andata a male... (pag.61).

Figure 43 - *Un'altra giornata andata a male*

The caption, which states “*Ecco un'altra giornata andata a male,*” refers to a passage in which the sparse dialogue between Nedda and one of her companions at the moment of awakening in the morning alludes to the bad weather that will nullify the possible profit of the day. The same contrast is repeated in the following illustration (Fig. 44); the caption, “- *Vado con Dio e con Maria – disse semplicemente la povera ragazza,*” is taken from the passage in which Verga describes the departure of the poor and humiliated girl to join her dying mother. The image, instead, depicts a peasant girl portrayed in profile with her graceful regional costume, in the act of sticking out her foot and holding up the edges of her skirt with a sort of dancing pose: an almost identical figure appears in Gioli’s *post-macchiaiolo* painting entitled *Gioventù* (Fig. 45),²⁴¹ and reproduced in 1893 in the *Illustrazione Italiana*.²⁴²



– Vado con Dio e con Maria. – disse semplicemente la povera ragazza (pag. 67).

Figure 44 - *Vado con Dio e con Maria*



Figure 45 - Gioli, *Gioventù*

²⁴¹ The caption reports the name of Domenico Gioli. Whereas, the two *macchiaioli* Tuscan painters Gioli were Francesco and Luigi.

²⁴² It is significant to notice that this illustration does not appear in those included in the *Numero Unico*. Therefore, it can be assumed that it was drawn after 1893.

The portrait of the writer's friend in "Fantasticheria" is based on a different female model, destined to become even more popular in the visual culture of the time. The color plate that opens the novella, on which I will dwell further later, exemplifies the contrast between the image and the accompanying caption (Fig. 33, p. 29).²⁴³ The latter focuses on the old sailor who drives the boat, while the illustration emphasizes the portrait of the woman, sitting precariously on a very colorful boat, against a background of pastel-colored sky and sea. One almost gets the feeling that for the first time the illustrator is completely at ease in portraying a typical character of the visual imagery of his time, that of the city lady, elegant and charming. As a matter of fact, the concluding illustration of the short story, which depicts her against the marine background in the act of turning lively towards the person portraying her (Fig. 46), recalls the same style used in several representations of urban scenes, such as the drawing by Ferraguti reproduced in the *Illustrazione Italiana* (1893) entitled *Il tramway elettrico* (Fig. 47).



Figure 46 - *Fantasticheria*



Figure 47 - *Il tramway elettrico*

²⁴³ "Vi ricordate anche di quell vecchietto che stave al timone della nostra barca?"

The image of the lady in *Fantasticheria* contains an important additional element, the movement, which is expressed in the attitudes of the body and the fluttering of the clothes: in this case, even more than a debt to instant photography, we must speak of the influence exerted by Chéret's graphics,²⁴⁴ a French poster designer and book illustrator, whose woman model will also make school in Italy, finding a large following in certain Art Nouveau advertising graphics, such as that of Metlicovitz²⁴⁵ for the *Magazzini Mele* (Fig. 48-49).²⁴⁶



Figure 48 - I Magazzini Mele (1)



Figure 49 - I Magazzini Mele (2)

It is not always easy to distinguish between the suggestions that can influence an artist and compose the mosaic of his style: even without having the intention of establishing relationships of some kind, I limit myself to noticing that the image of the lady with the open umbrella looking at the horizon next to a friend kneeling at her feet (Fig. 39, p. 45) is very similar to a photograph taken by Verga himself of Dina di Sordevolo, portrayed with an open umbrella together with a

²⁴⁴ Jules Chéret (1836-1932), was a self-taught painter and had great fame as a poster designer during the Belle Epoque.

²⁴⁵ Leopoldo Metlicovitz (1868-1938), from Trieste, spent most of his life in Milan. After modest beginnings, he became a valuable poster designer and represents the most typical exponent of the first phase of Italian liberty graphics.

²⁴⁶ Bossaglia, p. 75, table 31.

friend.²⁴⁷ And one last example of the complex relationship between photography and illustration is offered by a plate from *La Lupa*, which depicts Maricchia in the act of facing her mother reproaching for her relationship with Nanni (Fig. 40, p. 48): the protagonist is portrayed frontally against the black background of an open door, which brings out the chest and face of the woman; a strong, almost square face dominated by the terrible fixity of her black eyes. There is a photographic portrait executed by Michetti, entitled *Donna di Orsogna*,²⁴⁸ which represents a young peasant woman in festive attire: the front shot, the strong face devoid of a smile, and the intense black eyes. The similarities with *La Lupa* are impressive.

Illustration as syntagm

As already mentioned, three novellas, *Jeli il Pastore*, *Fantasticheria*, and *Nedda* were published with 17 illustrations, only two in black-and-white, in the “*Numero unico di Natale e Capodanno 1893*” of the *Illustrazione italiana*. All these illustrations are reproduced in the 1897 edition of *Vita dei campi* and many others are added, but the color illustrations are only one per novella, full page, with the caption, before the page bearing the title of the story. These color illustrations function as a pre-title with a very strong visual impact on the reader, they anticipate the impressions of the novella itself and suggest its interpretation. Thus, the color illustrations act as the syntagms of the visual texts parallel to the verbal ones of the short stories.

First of all, a preliminary observation: as much as Verga’s titles are denotative and synthetic, so the visual titles point towards emphasis and emotional involvement. In fact, of the nine Verghian titles, five consist of the name or nickname of the protagonist (*La Lupa*, *Nedda*, *Jeli*

²⁴⁷ Finocchiaro, 249, table X.

²⁴⁸ Miraglia, *Donna di Orsogna*, 1883, table 31.

il Pastore, Rosso Malpelo, Pentolaccia), two concern the situation developed in the novella (*Cavalleria rusticana, Guerra di santi*), one binds the male protagonist to the female protagonist (*L'amante di Gramigna*) in a single syntagm. The writer evidently focuses on understatement, on the deliberate lack of indications.

Let's now take a look at some illustrations: *Jeli il Pastore*, for example. In *Illustrazione Italiana* the text of the short story was preceded by a large color plate with the portrait of Jeli as a child and two horses in the background later reproduced in black-and-white in the volume (Fig. 50). But there are two other plates whose format would have made it possible to reproduce them as in the collection. The first depicts the two young protagonists in conversation at the moment in which Mara, now poor, induces Jeli to ask her in marriage (Fig. 51). The second effectively represents the tragic conclusion of the story (Fig. 52).



.... Purchè ci avesse la sua sacca ad armacollo, non aveva bisogno di nessuno....

Figure 50 - Jeli and two horses



- A Tebitti dicevano che saremmo stati marito e moglie, lo rammenti? (pag. 199)

Figure 52 - Mara e Jeli



Jeli a un tratto si rizzò sulla vita, colla lunga forbice in pugno... (pag. 216).

Figure 51 - Jeli (conclusion)

Instead, the table in color included in the collection, as an introduction to the story, was chosen to favor the female protagonist, giving it a joyful tone that is foreign to the spirit of the text.

The caption appears consistent with the illustration: “*Mara girava intorno e si accoccolava come una colombella in amore.*” Through a process of decontextualization, the caption does not allow the reader to understand that Mara’s image is filtered through Jeli’s mortified gaze, as described in the text:

Il figlio di massaro Neri... dopo i fuochi si accompagnò con loro, e li condusse al ballo, e al cosmorama, dove si vedeva il mondo vecchio e il mondo nuovo, pagando lui, beninteso, anche per Jeli, il quale andava dietro la comitiva come un cane senza padrone, a veder ballare il figlio di massaro Neri (p. 187).

Regarding *Nedda*, the format of the plates in *Illustrazione Italiana* allowed the choice between two possibilities: one, that of the table which was actually printed showing the romantic scene between Nedda and Janu (Fig. 34, p. 34), and the one representing the conversation between Nedda, poorly dressed, who has just lost her mother, and uncle Giovanni on the doorstep (Fig. 6, p. 8). Here too, instead of the meditative and calm moment, more prominence was given to the only passionate hint of the novella. Verga shows how a fate of death is handed down from one generation of *vinti* to another. The setting of the image, the floral style mentioned above, the elegance of Nedda’s costume, and the languid pose of the white hand stretched out on the lawn make one think rather of D’Annunzio’s naturalism: in *Terra Vergine* (1882), the poet had been influenced by *Vita dei campi* but had reduced the simple passions of Verga’s characters to pure sexual instinct. The 1890s now saw the literary trend turning in favor of D’Annunzio’s decadentism: Duse, who in 1884 had successfully interpreted Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* in Turin, is moving towards D’Annunzio’s theater and does not interpret *La Lupa* (1896). Probably,

a re-reading of *Nedda* in the light of D'Annunzio may be a significant influent factor of this illustration. What is particularly striking in these color plates is the distance that separates them both from the spirit of the novellas and the unfolding of the story. The image of Nedda that remains after reading the novella is certainly not that of a woman overwhelmed by passion, but that of a creature bound to a fatal destiny.

On the contrary, the theme of *La Lupa* is the devastating desire which animates the protagonist and which indeed becomes the insane engine that moves the action up to its tragic epilogue. The beautiful color plate that introduces the novella (Fig. 53) thematizes Nanni's penance to atone for his sin. The protagonist appears surrounded by the people of the village. The village is only mentioned in the text, but is instead particularly developed in the theatrical reproduction. The first representation of *La Lupa* was given in Milan on January 26th 1896, right before the Treves edition. However, we have no evidence that the theatrical staging influenced the design of this illustration.

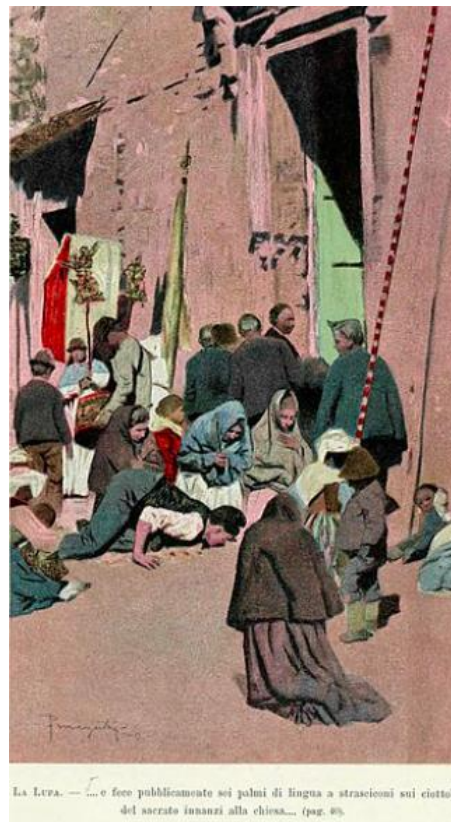


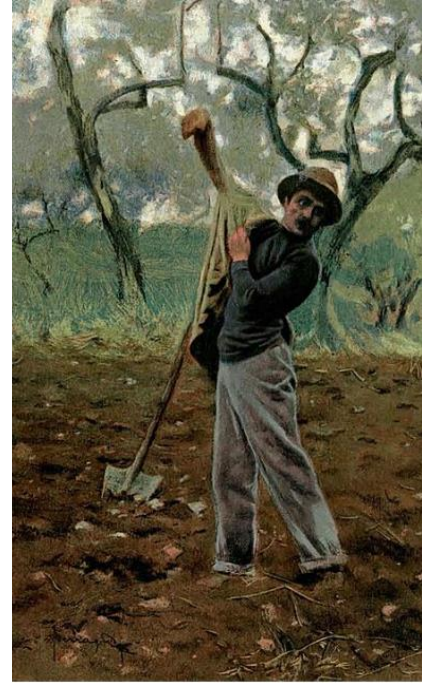
Figure 53 - *La Lupa* (intro)

The narrative center of gravity of *Cavalleria rusticana* is, in my opinion, more than the final duel between Turiddu and Alfio, the meeting between the two at the tavern and the *bacio della sfida*. The events between the four characters (Turiddu, Alfio, Santa, and Lola) all converge toward this point. There is an extratextual story, the falling in love between Turiddu and Lola; but the story begins with the dissolution of this relationship by her will, when she marries Alfio. Santa then appears on the scene, courted by Turiddu; there are now two couples, both endowed with social recognition: the Alfio-Lola couple, the spouses, and the Turiddu-Santa couple, the lovers. But passion creates a third couple that breaks the social norm, the Turiddu-Lola couple. The equilibrium is restored only with the symmetrical creation of a fourth couple, Alfio-Santa, that is the couple of the offended which is based on mutual complicity against the transgressors. The tavern scene, that will lead to the duel, is generated by the twist of all these events. The color plate illustrates a moment in the conversation between Turiddu and Lola, during which she confirms that she is about to marry Alfio (Fig. 54). The fulcrum of the story, the love conflict that leads Turiddu to his death, does not appear from the image that seems to allude rather to a rustic idyll, and does not even convey the young man's state of breathless anguish: "*Il poveraccio tentava ancora di fare il bravo, ma la voce gli si era fatta roca*" (p.5).

In *Pentolaccia* the keystone that directs the action of the protagonist towards the inevitable conclusion lies in the scene in which the man involuntarily hears the gossip of the peasants about his wife and Don Liborio, a scene depicted in a black-and-white illustration in the text (Fig. 55). The image however lacks a fundamental element for understanding the scene: the protagonist listening to the conversation. The plate that precedes the story, on the other hand, depicts Pentolaccia in the act of concluding his work, and portrays him as a good farmer at the end of his day (Fig. 56). A far different drama is instead taking place inside him.

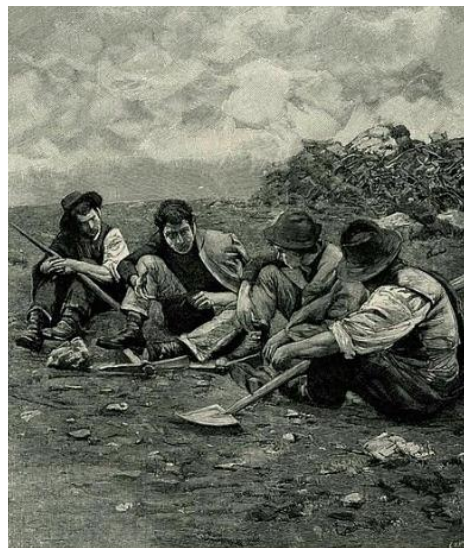


Figure 54 - Turiddu e Lola



PENTOLACCIA. Prima d'imbrunire, piantò la zappa nel solco... (pag. 320).

Figure 55 - Pentolaccia (2)



... gli altri contadini che lavorano nel maggese, chiacchieravano... (pag. 317).

Figure 56 - Pentolaccia (1)

The greatest gap between text and image is offered by *Fantasticheria*. Compared to the others, the novella is atypical for various reasons. First of all, this is the only case in which the writer stages bourgeois characters, i.e. the narrator himself - so much so that the narration takes place in the first person - and his friend, a lady of the city, on a trip to the locations where the short stories take place. In addition to this, there is no real plot here, but only the recollection of the main character's sensations and thoughts aroused by those circumstances. During this recalling process, the contrast emerges between the lady who visits these places, capricious, amused, charming, and fickle, but incapable of understanding what she sees, on the one hand, and that group of poor people so similar to “*un esercito di formiche*” (p. 117) on the other. This is the illuminating opposition for the writer, which allows him to ‘see’ and portray the stories of the *vinti* of his land.

Something more should be said of the female model depicted in the color plate that portrays the lady on the boat. Its incongruity with the caption, in fact, should be further emphasized. The image (Fig. 57) only portrays her companion, half-hidden in the background while the subject of the caption (“*Vi ricordate anche di quel vecchietto che stava al timone della nostra barca?*”) disappears.

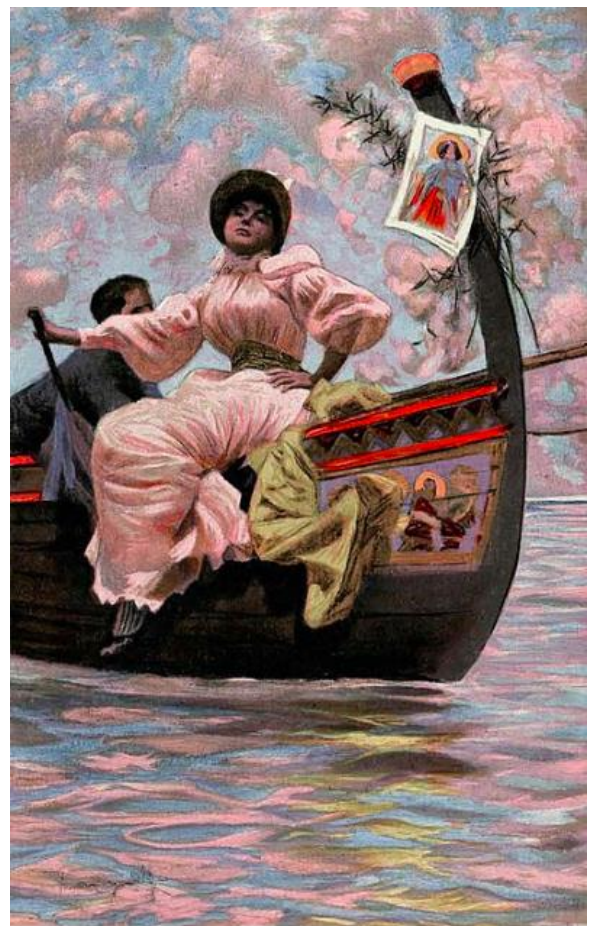


Figure 57 - *Fantasticheria*, al timone

FANTASTICHERIA — Vi ricordate di quel vecchietto che stava al timone della nostra barca? (pag. 121).

But the main character of this part is exactly he, described in his characterizing traits: a “*povero diavolo,*” endowed with an innate kindness “*perché egli vi ha impedito dieci volte di bagnarvi le vostre belle calze azzurre*” (p. 121), although he was only able to speak a “*dialetto semibarbaro*” (p. 122); the outcome of his existence is overshadowed: “*Ora è morto laggiù, all’ospedale della città*” (p. 121); an unforgettable figure who would never renounce his desire to die “*sotto le sue tegole*” and the need for his “*occhiata di sole,*” (p. 122) not even in order to admire the beautiful French lady. By deleting this character, the essential order of the novella, the extraneousness, and the opposition between the popular world and the bourgeois world, a central theme of Verga’s poetics, is canceled through the image-title: without even leaving some indeterminacy to the expectations of the audience, as the title of the novella offers instead, it peremptorily concentrates attention on the lady, with a complicit wink at the female readers, a common trend of the publishing industry of the time.

As the visual title, the black-and-white illustrations that accompany the novella also focus the reader’s attention on the figure of the lady: a header illustration without caption that depicts her at the railway station in the act of leaning out of the platform waiting for the train to arrive (p. 111), and the other two mentioned earlier. In addition to these, there are an image depicting the landscape of a small port (p. 117), and another one (p. 121) representing “*quella povera donna cui solevate far l’elemosina*” (p. 118). This female figure contrasts with that of the lady and it appears as the only concession made by the illustrator to the world of the underprivileged, the true protagonist of *Fantasticheria*. However, it is with the lady that the reader and even more the female reader will end up identifying: because of the number of illustrations that are dedicated to her, of her gaze towards the spectator, and because of the context in which she places herself, a tourist in locations that are still semi-unknown to most Italians.

Visual text

With these last considerations, we approach the relationship between the color ‘out of text’ plates (or visual titles) and the black-and-white illustrations in the body of the novella. Syntagmatic relationships are established between complex systems of iconic signs and images, which constitute a real visual text parallel to the verbal one of the writer. I hypothesize that these illustrations can be considered as statements linked to each other by a sort of deep structure, the theme of the novella, which determines, through the contiguity and succession of the image statements, the coherence of the visual text. This parallel text tends to emphasize, both through the figurative elements and the narrative, the picturesque aspect of Verga’s stories. Sometimes the reader may also witness a work of invention, where the non-picturesque motif of the novella is converted into a new picturesque meaning in the visual component. The different narrative strategies employed by the illustrator and the writer, and their different stylistic accents are precisely the subject of this reflection. The specific selection of three novellas offered in the following pages is meant to underline the dynamism of Verga’s poetics, which gradually reduces the picturesque element in favor of the non-picturesque instances, as Moe proposes,²⁴⁹ and the static nature of the illustrations, which instead offer a conservative tendency tight to the picturesque aesthetics.

Nedda

Nedda has been already the subject of several examples in the previous pages. However, a detailed look at some passages will be fundamental to assessing the connection created by the

²⁴⁹ Cfr. N. Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question*, University of California Press, 2002.

written and the visual components. Many reviewers have noticed that *Nedda* represents Verga's formal transformation from his early to his more experienced writing style. It will serve as a model piece that illustrates the distinctions between northern and southern Italian civilizations, acting as the cornerstone of Verga's future work.²⁵⁰ *Nedda* is not a perfect example of his new style, but an introduction to what would soon be refined. The author is learning to shed the romantic impulses that dominated the preceding years. Another remarkable feature is the linguistic aspect. The majority of readers would not have been able to understand Verga's characters speaking in their native Sicilian dialect, but he does enable the Sicilian dialect's vocabulary, syntax, and morphology to permeate the standard Italian that he is using.

Nedda offers two perspectives on Sicily: the first one folkloric and lovely, and the second one filled with hardship and suffering.²⁵¹ Verga engages with the picturesque through two specific literary techniques: framing and narrative distancing. Framing is a literary technique in which Verga transports the narrator from his present to the time and place of the tale he is narrating by using an element from the narrator's present. This technique, which bridges the gap between the narrator and the location of the story, goes hand in hand with narrative distance. There would not be a need for Verga to utilize framing if there was no separation between the narrator and the story's environment. The framing complements the narrative distance since it takes the reader to rural Sicily. This act of transposition is essential for the picturesque, which exists exactly in this dimension of distance. In *Nedda*, the picturesque is not there where the narrator is, but in his memory.

The prelude, which is fairly distinctive among Verga's novellas, also discusses the difficulty the narrator encounters in traveling between his northern living room and the rural

²⁵⁰ *Ivi*, p. 306.

²⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 261.

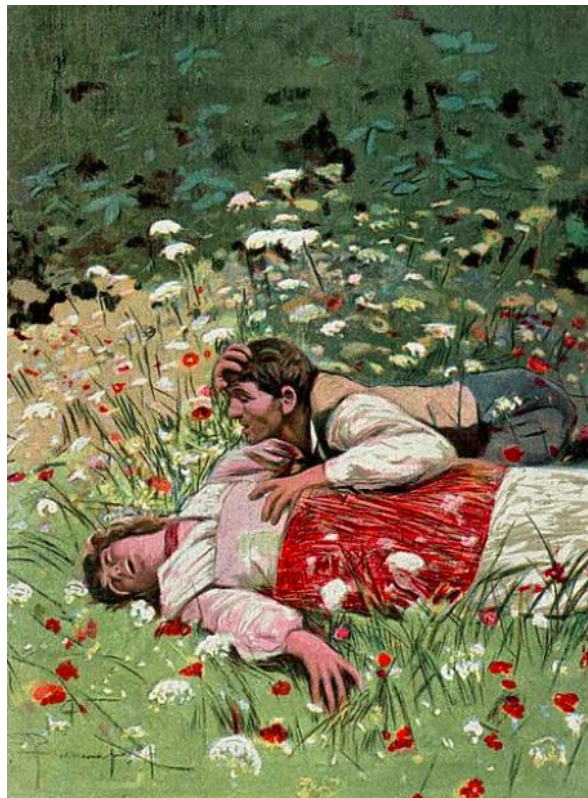
scenery of Sicily.²⁵² The fireplace serves as a vehicle for the author's nostalgia, which shapes the prelude into a stream of consciousness, constructed on the contrast between the current northern bourgeoisie location and the southern places where Nedda's story unfolds. The picturesque aspect emerges specifically through the scenery. In the description of the environment, Verga includes meadows, olive trees, the Etna, and the happy chirping of the birds. However, Verga expertly blends Nedda's realist story with the gorgeous features of these places. The fact that Nedda abandoned her ill mother at home to find employment is continually brought up to the reader. Even though the scenery is stunning, Nedda is constantly faced with challenges, as when she alone crosses the lava fields, when losing money due to bad weather, and not making enough money to buy the necessary medication for her mother.

After her mother's death, verism and picturesque converge once more. The young girl laments the loss of her mother as she hears a robin chirping in the backyard and a flock of magpies picking at some olives. The abundance of nature outside her window serves as a somber reminder of what her mother no longer enjoys. A frequent constant in Verga's writing is the impossibility or difficulty of the characters to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of their places. The lovely picturesque of her places, which plays a significant role in the eyes of the reader, is functional to the contrast with Nedda's experience. Although Verga will gradually remove the picturesque component from his stories, in this phase the author still offers it on his page, but at the same time, he builds an opposition between the scenery and the protagonist's life. The canonical stunning and pleasant Sicilian landscape, offered by Verga to the reader, turns into a place of suffering and hardship. This contrast works as a subjectifying factor: Nedda's experience does not correspond to what the audience may expect from that place. The chirping of the bird, for instance,

²⁵² G. Cecchetti, *Aspetti della prosa di 'Vita dei Campi'*, in *Italica*, 34.1, 1957, 30-42, p. 33.

accompanies the protagonist's desperation. Therefore, Verga undermines the roots of the picturesque aesthetics, which is built on the universality of the images, based on the assumption that a specific element corresponds to a specific reaction or emotion. However, Ferraguti's parallel visual text translates Verga's operation into its exact opposite, as a reinforcement of the picturesque. A few illustrations have been already commented on previously, but the analysis of other parts of the text will make this contrast even clearer.

The opening image, which welcomes the reader right after the title, offers an emblematic example of the distortion that the visual component operates on the author's text. A color plate (Fig. 58) characterized by vivid and brilliant chromaticity shows Nedda laying down on a beautiful meadow of flowers, an image that reminds of Monet's paintings.²⁵³



NEDDA. — Janu la trattenne per le vesti, tutto stravolto, e balbettando parole sconnesse...
(pag. 100).

Figure 58 - Janu la trattenne per le vesti...

²⁵³ See for instance “*In the Meadow*”, Monet, 1876.

Her posture, the head resting on the ground with her mouth half open and the eyes closed, suggests a state of semi or total unconsciousness. Only the left hand holds Janu's head as if she is trying to arrest his approachment. Janu, on his knees, embraces Nedda's body, his face addresses the woman and the opening of his mouth seems to reflect the stammering described in the caption: "*Janu la trattenne per le vesti, tutto stravolto, e balbettando parole sconnesse...*" As soon as the reader leaf through the pages, the illustrator offers a meaningful depiction of the story, left vague by Verga's title instead. We may expect the love story between Nedda and Janu as the life motif of the novella, a misleading introduction to the author's text (not the illustrator's), which is reinforced even in Nedda's physical aspect. Our first encounter with the protagonist does not correspond at all to what we will read later, as we already discussed. However, it is fundamental to add that this image deviates from all the other visual representations of Nedda, even from the one that accompanies the same scene within the text,²⁵⁴ which is rather more in line with Verga's words (Fig 59). Janu and Nedda are sitting on the grass, as the author also describes, and the protagonist's dress corresponds to the one proposed in the other images.



Verso il mezzogiorno sedettero al rezzo, per mangiare il loro pan nero....

Figure 59 - Sedettero al rezzo...

²⁵⁴ The two images represent the same scene and the captions are just a few lines apart.

The pose of the two and the dress are the two elements that stand for their diversity. Verga's text never suggests an evident change of posture, besides Nedda's head that will bow at some point due to the wine and, probably, to the questions that Janu is asking her:

Ella chinò gli occhi come se ci vedesse delle fiamme, e le sembrò che tutto il vino che aveva bevuto le montasse alla testa [...] — Andiamo via! — esclamò corrucciata, scuotendo la testa pesante. — Che hai? — Non lo so, ma andiamo via! — Mi vuoi bene? Nedda chinò il capo (p. 99).

At the end of the scene is Nedda the one who will actually stand on her knees in the act of leaving, and Janu will try to hold her until she will finally leap up:

Ella lo guardò serenamente, e gli strinse forte la mano callosa nelle sue mani brune, ma si alzò sui ginocchi che le tremavano per andarsene. Egli la trattenne per le vesti, tutto stravolto, e balbettando parole sconnesse, come non sapendo quel che si facesse. Allorchè si udì nella fattoria vicina il gallo che cantava, Nedda balzò in piedi di soprassalto, e si guardò attorno spaurita. — Andiamo via! Andiamo via! — disse tutta rossa e frettolosa (p.100).

Nedda's agency disappears in Ferraguti's color plate. On the contrary, she looks unable to act, almost unconscious perhaps. We may hypothesize the illustrator emphasized to its maximum the effects of alcohol. Furthermore, the incongruencies are also remarked on by her clothing. If the rustic traditional dress already stands out for its richness and tidiness in opposition with the rags worn by Verga's Nedda, here the colors accentuate this contrast. Pink, red, and white, as the

flowers surrounding her, characterize her appearance, a chromatic choice that would fit a wealthy lady more than a peasant. Indeed, the same pink will return a few pages later (Fig.33, p. 29) in *Fantasticheria* with the French lady's dress. Moreover, this palette does not coincide with the other illustrations. Although in black-and-white, the skirt, white in the color image, appears darker and the apron, red in the first, has a very light shade, probably white, in the other plates.

The last element that should be addressed in this analysis is the scenery, specifically the presence of flowers both in the color and in the black-and-white plates discussed so far. Verga's description is quite detailed:

Il sole era caldo come in giugno; i prati lontani cominciavano ad ingiallire, le ombre degli alberi avevano qualche cosa di festevole, e l'erba che vi cresceva era ancora verde e rugiadosa. [...] Regnava il profondo silenzio del meriggio; le più piccole foglie erano immobili; le ombre erano rade; c'era per l'aria una calma, un tepore, un ronzio di insetti che pesava voluttuosamente sulle palpebre. Ad un tratto una corrente d'aria fresca, che veniva dal mare, fece sussurrare le cime più alte de' castagni (pp. 97-98).

The heat dominates the scene. The summer is approaching, the meadows are yellowing, the humming of insects stands out, and the small leaves are static until some fresh air from the sea shakes the top of the trees. The only lush and green grass grows in the shade of the chestnut grove, where Nedda and Janu find some rest. The flowers that are so predominant in the illustrations are completely absent from the author's description. The color plate, in particular, seems to immerse the two characters in this explosion of flowers, which almost embrace Nedda's body and share the same chromatism. This reminds immediately of the rich floral elements that characterize the Art Nouveau, also called "*stile floreale*." A decorative motif that wraps the scene in a bucolic

environment. The protagonist looks protected by the nature, in a sort of *panismo dannunziano*. Besides her hand holding Janu's face, nothing would suggest the discomfort created both by the wine and her lover's pressing questions. Again, the visual text develops a parallel story that highlights, and sometimes makes up, picturesque features that polish Verga's *Nedda* from the rough and brutal reality. Starving, exploitation, struggle, and physical deterioration are absent in Ferraguti's story, and the picturesque aesthetics casts a shadow over them.

Fantasticheria

Written in 1879, *Fantasticheria* was included in Verga's first edition of *Vita dei campi*, published in 1880. This story presents some unique peculiarities. It is written in an epistolary form, a letter addressed to a woman, the companion of the narrator during a past journey to Sicily, which is brought back to life through his memories. A *rêverie*²⁵⁵ that seems to follow the pattern already seen in the previous novella *Nedda*. An act of imagination that is now conveyed through a letter, while the reader may have the impression not to leave the living room and the fireplace where the author left us a few pages before.

The natural and picturesque themes are still present in Verga's writing. He highlights the beauty of his land and the sea, the cliffs, and the pastel shades of the skies are abundant throughout the pages. However, the depiction of the landscapes, which seems even more romantic than the one we encountered in *Nedda*, is functional to the collapse of the picturesque aesthetics. The French woman's desire to visit Sicily and spend a month in Aci Trezza quickly vanishes after two days. The distance, a prerequisite of the picturesque,²⁵⁶ disappears and the wealthy lady faces the misery, the cruelty, and the monotony of the Sicilian village life. This aspect, the distance, is the

²⁵⁵ The English title is, indeed, *Reverie*, from the French term.

²⁵⁶ N. Moe, p. 276.

major life motif of *Fantasticheria*. The narrator and his companion are often presented by Verga in the act of viewing, with a perspective that is usually wide and scenic, which reminds of the *paesaggismo*, the landscape picturesque painting. Indeed, their overview is a “*bel quadretto*” (p. 117). The panorama of Aci Trezza from the train, “*affacciandovi allo sportello del vagone*” (p. 113), the dawn from the cliffs, “*l'alba ci sorprese in cima al fariglione — un'alba modesta e pallida, che ho ancora dinanzi agli occhi*” (p. 114), are just a couple of examples of the point of view that Verga assigns to the two characters. The distance inspires also the contrasting metaphor of the telescope and the microscope. In order to understand the stubbornness of the “*esercito di formiche*” (p. 119),²⁵⁷ the poor inhabitants of these lands, determined to live despite the brutality of their life, we should avoid the broad view and look at the details: “*chiudere tutto l'orizzonte fra due zolle, e guardare col microscopio le piccole cause che fanno battere i piccoli cuori. Volete metterci un occhio anche voi, a cotesta lente?*” (p. 120). A rhetorical question addressed to the woman, representative of the bourgeois world, the one watching this universe through the telescope: “*voi che guardate la vita dall'altro lato del cannocchiale?*” (p.120). The core of the story is the disillusionment that the French lady experiences. After the brief excitement of finally seeing with her eyes the village of Aci Trezza, contained in the first three lines, the lack of distance and the actual encounter with this land, even with its beauty, destroy her interest and fascination almost immediately: “*esclamaste: 'Vorrei starci un mese laggiù!' Noi vi ritornammo, e vi passammo non un mese, ma quarantott'ore*” (p. 113).

The first aspect that contributes to this loss is the monotony. The picturesque Sicilian landscapes and villages become tedious and repetitive, and even the colors bore her: “*stanca di vedere eternamente del verde e dell'azzurro, e di contare i carri che passavano per via*” (p. 114).

²⁵⁷ Aci Trezza's inhabitants would later on be referred as *ostriche* (p.131). Verga frequently uses animal imagery, particularly when referring to the picturesque.

The boredom is such that she affirms “*Non capisco come si possa viver qui tutta la vita*” (p. 117). Verga introduces the direct speech only twice, and this statement contrasts with the previous exclamation when she wishes to stay there for a month. The choice of displaying the character’s voice only twice with two opposed statements remarks the hypocrisy and inconsistencies of her behavior, which mirrors the entire bourgeoisie aesthetics of the picturesque.²⁵⁸

The proximity to the simple yet miserable life of the locals is the second factor that demolishes the fascination for these places. As a means of comparison with the spoiled lady, Verga introduces the figure of a poor old woman:

mi son rammentato del vostro capriccio, un giorno che ho rivisto quella povera donna cui sollevate far l’elemosina col pretesto di comperar le sue arancie messe in fila sul panchettino dinanzi all’uscio, [...] la mantellina di quella donnicciola freddolosa, accoccolata, poneva un non so che di triste, e mi faceva pensare a voi, sazia di tutto (pp. 120-122).

The old boatman offers the same pretext to address the lady’s wealth and haughty attitude:

Vi ricordate anche di quel vecchietto che stava al timone della nostra barca? Voi gli dovete questo tributo di riconoscenza, perchè egli vi ha impedito dieci volte di bagnarvi le vostre belle calze azzurre [...] Egli era vissuto sempre fra quei quattro sassi, e di faccia a quel mare bello e traditore, col quale dovè lottare ogni giorno per trarre da esso tanto da campare la vita e non lasciargli le ossa; eppure in quei momenti in cui si godeva cheto

²⁵⁸ M. Greenberg, *Giovanni Verga's verismo*, in *The New Criterion*, 22, 2004 (18-24), p. 19.

cheto la sua “occhiata di sole,, [...] non avrebbe voltato la testa per vedervi, ed avreste cercato invano in quelli occhi attoniti il riflesso più superbo della vostra bellezza (pp. 123-124).

The lack of distance generates a sense of strangeness. The French woman feels out of place: “*stranezza di trovarvici anche voi presente*” (p. 117). The beautiful *quadretto* loses its appeal, the eyes of the outsider who used to own the scenario through an overlooking perspective are now forced to see the reality. The *picturesque* is deprived of the *picture* and its framing power, and the arbitrariness of choosing what and when to see collapses. The only possible outcome is the departure of the lady from this place for good.

Opposed to Verga’s text, Ferraguti’s *Fantasticheria* follows a different path, which instead reinforces picturesque aesthetics. Starting from the opening image, already mentioned earlier, the reader may appreciate a beautiful color plate that portrays the French woman elegantly wearing a light pastel pink dress while sitting on the edge of the small boat conducted by the *vecchietto*. This representation shares different features with *Nedda*’s first plate. First, the female figure merges with the chromatic shades of the surroundings. The pink of her clothing is the exact same as the clouds and the sea ripples. Moreover, what’s significant about the color is the complete arbitrariness with which Ferraguti chooses it. In Verga’s words, the reader encounters color indications only twice: “*avevi un vestitino grigio*” (p. 117), which refers to the first scene when the two characters are observing the sunrise from the *faraglioni*, but appears a few pages after the color plate, and “*le vostre belle calze azzurre*” (p.123), referred to the scene on the boat, which comes much later in the text. The lady’s stockings are barely visible in the image and the light blue is not easily recognizable. A second aspect is the pose. The French woman, as *Nedda*, is depicted

in a very unnatural posture. Instead of sitting in the boat, she is right on the edge of it with her legs hanging. Her facial expression is also quite significant to observe. Her head is slightly lifted and her eyes are closed in a sort of ecstatic state. An image that seems to portray a dream, a navigation into the imagination, a *fantasticheria*, instead of reality.

However, if this scene is a pretext for Verga to introduce the description of the miserable, but dignified and meaningful, life of the old man, which covers four long paragraphs, in Ferraguti's narration there is no trace of the boatman. He is completely erased from the story and the only figure the reader sees besides the French woman is her companion, the narrator, in the background, mostly hidden by the other character's body.



La donna sola non aveva mutato.... (pag. 119)

Figure 60 - *La donna sola*

The centrality of the lady is the core narrative motif of Ferraguti's *Fantasticheria*. Along with the first color plate, all the other black-and-white illustrations are focused on this character, except for only two: the view of Aci Trezza and the poor woman. The latter seems to be one of the few cases in which the veristic appeal stands out. Verga's *donnicciola freddolosa* is quite faithfully reflected in the illustration (Fig. 60).

However, through the Aci Trezza's panorama (Fig. 61), Ferraguti re-proposes the same pattern the reader has seen in the color plate. Verga writes "*Quel mucchio di casipole è abitato da pescatori*" (p. 118) to introduce a fundamental reflection on the *vinti*, the inhabitants of this land, which is masterfully expressed through the metaphor of the "*esercito di formiche*" and its "*brulicame*" (p. 120), powerless and at the mercy of the sea, the weather, the illnesses, and the hunger. The description of the village is only left to the few terms that the caption reports. The illustration promotes instead a large *veduta*, which recalls a postcard or a picture, a view from the telescope, exactly what Verga is criticizing in his text.²⁵⁹



Quel mucchio di casipole è abitato da pescatori....

Figure 61 - Acitrezza

As mentioned, the other images are centered on the French lady. The illustration that immediately follows the first color plate portrays the woman and her companion, behind her, at the train station (Fig 62). They both face the rails, and she stretches her neck to better view the

²⁵⁹ Luchino Visconti will later use the same sort of perspective and shots to represent Aci Trezza in his film "*La Terra Trema*" (1948). The choice of the term postcard (*cartolina*) is a reference to this movie as well (the scene when Cola decides to leave Aci Trezza while looking at some postcards of the village).

oncoming train while she holds her long skirt. The representation gives a sense of impatience, and the collocation at the beginning of the novella, without a caption, seems to suggest the eagerness to visit the location where the story takes place. Rather, the lines that inspire the illustration describe the exact opposite situation, namely her excitement to leave Aci Trezza: “*La mattina del terzo giorno, [...], eravate alla stazione, e gingillandovi impaziente colla catenella della vostra boccettina da odore, allungavate il collo per scorgere un convoglio che non spuntava mai*” (pp. 113-114).



Figure 62 - *Eravate alla stazione*

The following illustrations offer another emblematic example of this trend. The French woman is at the center of the scene, with her companion on his knees right next to her while she looks at the horizon on a calm sea background (Fig. 63). Besides the resemblance to Verga’s photograph of Dina di Sordevolo, this image proposes a very common representation of upper-class women. Immediate is the reference to impressionism, Monet in particular.²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Monet depicted several women with parasol. See for instance “*Woman with a Parasol, facing left*” (1886), whose similarities with the illustration are very impressive.



... E l'alba ci sorprese nell'alto del fariglione...

Figure 63 - *L'alba ci sorprese*

However, we should highlight again the deviation that Ferraguti operates from Verga's narrative path. The illustrator gives to the reader the *bel quadretto* that the author mentions remarking on the woman's attitude towards this land. Something to appreciate from a distance, to view. A 'picture' that Verga utilizes to deepen the woman's (the bourgeois' world) hypocrisy. There is no hint in the image of the character's statement "*Non capisco come si possa viver qui tutta la vita*" (p. 117). The caption, indeed, emphasizes the romantic and pleasant moment of the dawn, and the choice to include the bay is emblematic in this sense.

Thus, as already seen in *Nedda*, the story consists of a double narration that may collide or agree. Although the reader witnesses a gradual evolution towards a more veristic approach,

unhampered by the picturesque motif, Ferraguti's style seems instead very consistent and conservative throughout the collection.

La Lupa

With "La Lupa," Verga favors the anti-picturesque, and the picturesque seems to be left behind. However, as Moe explains, the anti-picturesque still focuses on some characteristics that were provided by the picturesque, but it depicts them without any form of romanticization.²⁶¹ Specifically, as we will shortly see, "La Lupa" offers a depiction of the irrationality, the instinct, the uncontrolled passion that drives the main character. Illustrations follow the same path, but they seem to maintain a romantic and picturesque aura. The main characters of the short story configure a love triangle that also occurs in other cases (*Cavalleria rusticana*, *Jeli il pastore*, *Pentolaccia*): but in this case, the triangle appears particularly transgressive because the dispute over the same man takes place between the mother and daughter. After the usual portrait of the protagonist that opens the text of the novella, flanked by the one of her daughter Maricchia mostly built through a subtractive process, the first scene, that of the harvest, lays the foundations for that relationship between the Lupa (she-wolf) and Nanni, the central theme of the story, and concludes with this exchange between the two: " - *Te voglio! Te che sei bello come il sole, e dolce come il miele. Voglio te! - Ed io invece voglio vostra figlia, che è zitella -*" (p. 27). Within a few words the previous situation is defined and a new situation opens up, that of the triangle. Then there is a time gap ("*Ma in ottobre rivide Nanni,*" p. 28). The next scene takes place in an oil mill and sees all three protagonists in the act of concluding a marriage deal in which the interests, even partially different, of Nanni and the Lupa converge, while the daughter is bent to their will by the violence

²⁶¹ N. Moe, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

of the mother. In the following part, the action returns outdoors to the fields where the Lupa works “*cogli uomini, proprio come un uomo*” (p. 32) and succeeds in her plan to seduce Nanni, while in the background, inside the house, Maricchia’s solitary desperation is consumed. Maricchia, in the next scene, with an act of open rebellion against the mother, will be the one who will attempt to change the tragic plot. The girl’s gesture opens a parenthesis of physical and moral illness (repentance) which, however, does not serve to change the nefarious course of things: the final scene, again in the fields, sees the woman returning to Nanni, as a force of nature, and it seems to predict a tragic end, with Nanni holding an ax.

Introduced by the color table mentioned above, the visual text consists of seven black-and-white illustrations. The first is constituted, as almost all the images placed in the masthead, by the portrait of the protagonist accompanied by the minor portrait (as in the novella) of the daughter in the background (Fig. 10, p. 12), wrapped in a shawl, the chest leaning forward with an attitude of fearful modesty as she looks sideways at her mother. Her image that contrasts with the bold attitude of the Lupa, who turns her back on her daughter, with her right hand on her hip. More than a portrait of the protagonist, the intention is to immediately offer the reader, through the attitudes of the two women, the interpretative trace of the relationship between mother and daughter. Maricchia’s figure will return in the following illustration, but as an image of desperation, with no other physical or psychological connotations, in the explicit gesture of hiding the head in her hands to cry, in a conventional backdrop with superfluous floral decorations,²⁶² almost in ideal opposition with the triumphant image of the Lupa (Fig. 12, p. 12). The fact that this illustration without caption was included in *Nedda*’s text in *Illustrazione Italiana* testifies to the generic nature of the girl’s portrait.

²⁶² The caption states: “*Maricchia, poveretta, buona e brava ragazza, piangeva di nascosto.*”

The next three images illustrate three moments in the relationship between Gnà Pina and Nanni: the harvest and falling in love, the conversation in the oil mill, and the Lupa in the act of seducing Nanni. The second does not appear very convincing. It depicts a conversation between the young man and the woman (Fig. 2, p. 7). The text describes a scene of Maricchia's *mercimonio*, when the Lupa offers a little more than a cash prize to the man she is in love with. Barbarism is sculpted by the words of the novella in Nanni's description: "*Nanni era tutto unto e sudicio dell'olio e delle olive messe a fermentare, e Maricchia non lo voleva a nessun patto*" (p. 31): Maricchia, whose presence is canceled in the illustration, reappears in the sixth plate, in a domestic setting that now seems to be the only environment in which the girl can move and find courage, and she is represented in an accusatory gesture of theatrical amplitude against the mother who returns from the fields (Fig. 64). The final illustration, with a floral jubilation, typical of the picturesque, that contradicts the same caption, appears more like the apotheosis of a peasant love than the prelude to a tragedy, if it weren't for the disturbing detail of the ax that Nanni holds in his hand (Fig. 65).²⁶³



Figure 64 - *Scellerata!*



Ei come la scorse da lontano, in mezzo a' seminati verdi, lasciò di zappare....

Figure 65 - *Ei come la scorse*

²⁶³ The caption states: "*Ei come la scorse da lontano, in mezzo a' seminati Verdi, lasciò di zappare.*"

the Lupa and her passion for Nanni triumph. Thus, in the visual text, the story of two women is built, the first shady, the other sunny, as had been promised in a certain way in the masthead illustration. Furthermore, the three protagonists are never depicted together, not even when the text of the novella would require it; yet, the transgressive triangle Gnà Pina-Nanni-Maricchia has recomposed thanks to the contiguity of the illustrations in the layout of the book: the joyful image of the Lupa and Nanni during the harvest is flanked on the previous page by that of a desperate Maricchia. The same happens with the image of the Lupa who voluptuously approaches Nanni and is immediately followed by Maricchia's rebellion against her mother. Therefore, a cause-effect relationship is established syntagmatically between the love affair of Lupa and Nanni on the one hand and Maricchia's strong reactions on the other, whose vigorous gestures end up giving rise to a more lively and dynamic female image than that of the Lupa, often crystallized in statuesque immobility.

In conclusion, through this meticulous analysis and comparison of the visual and written text, it is possible to observe the intricate web of narrative parallelism that emerged between these two distinct yet interrelated dimensions. What became abundantly clear throughout this investigation was the fascinating manner in which the paths of the visual and written texts intersected and occasionally diverged, creating two parallel stories characterized by both similarities and differences.

The parallelism that emerged from this examination of the illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* echoed a phenomenon observed in the previous chapter, where I delved into the broader context of Italian publishing during the late nineteenth century. This coexistence of visual and written narratives was often rooted in the commercial purpose of these publications. Publishers

frequently took it upon themselves to collaborate closely with illustrators, leaving little room for authorial intervention or negotiation. Even when authors like Verga were involved in the process, they often seemed to yield to the weight of these industry norms.

Verga's relative lack of explicit opinion or resistance to the inclusion of illustrations in his works hinted at the normalized nature of this practice within the Italian publishing landscape of his time. It was as if the presence of illustrations was taken for granted, a non-negotiable aspect of the publishing process. This, in turn, reflected the pervasive influence of commercial considerations, where the inclusion of visuals was seen as a means to broaden the readership and enhance sales.

The parallel narratives explored in the illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* served as a microcosm of the larger dynamics at play in Italian publishing during the late nineteenth century. They underscored the delicate balance between commercial imperatives and the creative autonomy of authors and illustrators.

Furthermore, this study holds substantial significance in the broader context of understanding Giovanni Verga's literary contributions and the Verismo movement. By delving into the intricate relationship between text and illustration in *Vita dei campi* and shedding light on the prevailing norms of late nineteenth-century Italian publishing, we gain valuable insights into the reception and interpretation of Verga's works at the time. It allows us to appreciate the literary landscape in which Verga operated, where the coexistence of written and visual narratives shaped not only the way his stories were presented but also how they were perceived by the contemporary audience. This contextualization is essential in unraveling the layers of meaning in Verga's texts and deepening our comprehension of the Verismo movement.

Conclusion

In the course of this dissertation, I embarked on a captivating journey through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, traversing the landscapes of Italian literature and illustration to uncover the nuanced relationship between text and image in the works of Giovanni Verga and the Verismo movement. As I conclude this exploration, I reflect upon the path I have traveled, the insights I have gained, and the significance of the findings in shedding light on the interplay between southernness and the aesthetic of the picturesque in Italian literature.

Throughout the four chapters of this dissertation, I observed the dynamic relationship between literary narratives and visual elements. I began by situating this study within the context of the late nineteenth century, a period marked by a surge in illustrated publications. At its core, this research sought to illuminate the ways in which illustrations influenced the reception and interpretation of Verismo literature, particularly the works of Giovanni Verga. While scholarly examinations have predominantly focused on textual analysis and thematic exploration, this dissertation has highlighted the visual dimension as a pivotal yet understudied aspect of these literary classics.

This journey took me through the landscapes of southern Italy as depicted by Verga and various illustrators. I navigated the intricate terrain of the picturesque aesthetic, which both complemented and challenged the social realism of Verismo literature. Through an examination of letters exchanged between author, publishers, and illustrators, it was possible to gain invaluable insights into the collaborative processes that brought these illustrated editions to life. These illustrations were not mere embellishments but rather integral companions to the written word. They embodied an artistic tension that added depth and complexity to the Verismo movement. Moreover, they shaped readers' perceptions and enhanced their engagement with the text.

One notable exemplar of this intersection between text and image was Verga's illustrated edition of *Vita dei campi* (1897), which I scrutinized closely. In doing so, the layers of meaning within this work were unraveled and the reader could witness the interplay between the realities depicted in the literature and the picturesque elements that accompanied them. This case study illuminated the delicate balance and occasional discord between the Veristi's commitment to providing a social commentary on reality and the allure of the picturesque.

This research has not only contributed to a deeper understanding of Giovanni Verga's works but has also enriched the comprehension of the Verismo movement itself. By spotlighting the interplay between southernness and the picturesque, it offered a fresh perspective on these seminal literary classics.

In conclusion, this dissertation has served as a bridge between literature and art, connecting the textual narratives of Verismo with the visual aesthetics of the illustrations. It has provided a nuanced exploration of how these elements intersected and diverged, ultimately contributing to the multifaceted legacy of Italian literary history.

As I finish this dissertation, I find myself inspired to continue my exploration of Giovanni Verga's literary world and the intriguing interplay of illustrations within the Italian publishing industry of his time. This research has opened a door to a fascinating dimension of Italian literature and art, and I am eager to extend my inquiries to encompass other Verismo authors and their works. In particular, I am keen to delve into the short stories of authors like Luigi Pirandello and examine how their narratives intersect and diverge with the visual elements in a manner distinct from Verga's approach. This comparative study promises to shed further light on the role of illustrations in shaping the reception and interpretation of Verismo literature and other works, and I am excited to embark on this future research, building upon the foundations laid in this dissertation.

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