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Journal

Carte Italiane, 2(8)

ISSN

0737-9412

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Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/C928012310

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From Meridionalismo to Orientalism: Three Representations of Sicily in the Contemporary Narrative of the Risorgimento

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The South, like the Orient, is a construct.¹

The island of Sicily has served as one of the most important settings for Risorgimento narratives. Italian literature dedicated to narrating the events of the country's period of unification seems to be, in fact, somewhat obsessed with the island, which has been created and recreated in novels, *novelle*, and short stories written by both Sicilian and northern writers. This distinction between Southern and Northern writers will play a key role in our understanding of the literary representations of the island, because the social, economic, cultural, and political divisions that exist between the North and the South of Italy becomes of vital importance since any text written about Sicily must be classified either as a production by a southern writer depicting his own land, or as text written by a northern writer who narrates Sicily from the outside. In fact, before starting a novel that deals with the events of 1848 or 1860 in Sicily or any part of the Italian South, we are forced to ask where the writer was born, and, if he turns out to be Sicilian or from some part of the Meridione, we are obliged to complicate the matter further by asking where he has lived his literary life: whether he stayed in his hometown or moved north. Why these questions are not only valid but necessary will become apparent as we move through the vast production of literature that deals with the Risorgimento in Sicily.

As a result of literature's obsession with the island, due in part, but not exclusively as we will see, to its geographical and historical importance, we have hundreds of novels that narrate the Risorgimento's passage through Sicily, spanning generations of writers, literary movements and centuries. They may be classified in three large, distinct groups: northern writers who wrote about Sicily as outsiders, southern writers who stayed in the South and wrote about it from there, and southern writers who emigrated into the northern regions of the country but continued to set much of their literary production on Sicily. The

relevance of these distinctions will become apparent when we limit the scope of this paper to the three texts that concern us here.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore how the land, culture, and population of Sicily are depicted in three key narrative texts of the twentieth-century in order to see how they may participate in the cultural, social, political, and literary phenomenon known as *Meridionalismo*, which, may ultimately be compared in attitude and scope to Orientalism (as described by Edward Said). The fact that these Meridionalist attitudes appear most clearly in texts written about the process of Risorgimento is particularly relevant because it is during this period of supposed unification that the country's division between North and South became most prominent. Since the production of novels and short stories containing literary representations of Sicily during the Risorgimento is so vast and complex, we must limit ourselves to these three twentieth-century narratives by writers who belong to the third group of narrators. Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, Leonardo Sciascia's *Il quarantotto*, and Gian Carlo De Cataldo's *I traditori* all deal with the events of 1860 and the process of the Risorgimento as it occurred in Sicily, and were all written by men born in the South (Lampedusa and Sciascia were born in Sicily, De Cataldo in Puglia) but were writing while living in the North. We will attempt to see whether the stereotyped social and cultural representations of Sicily that characterized much of Meridionalist literature are present in these texts and, if so, how they may or may not connect the literature written about the Meridione by southern writers living in the north with the literature written about the Orient. By limiting ourselves to these texts, we attempt to see how the Meridionalist views of the South infiltrate the novels of these decidedly southern authors who actively question the validity of the project of Risorgimento in Sicily and of the division between the North and the South.

Nevertheless, before we move on to the literary texts, we must, however briefly, offer a theoretical framework that will aid us in our attempt to understand the importance of the division between North and South, the concepts of *Meridionalismo* and Orientalism and the way in which they may be related through the three aforementioned texts, especially in the context of the Risorgimento. During this period of Italian history, the political and cultural need for a unified nation was confronted with a series of old stereotypes about the South that had been part of the entire country's way of thinking for centuries. When soldiers and politicians from the North arrived in the South, and when Southerners migrated North during and after the Risorgimento, the perceived differences between the two regions became ever more apparent as they clashed in a completely new way. As a result, the period of unification created the perfect atmosphere for Meridionalist literature and an even stronger separation of North and South. When it comes to this division, we must always return to Antonio Gramsci's seminal text, *La questione meridionale*, in which he calls attention to

the division not only in economic and political, but also in cultural and literary terms. This Southern Question is at the heart of the problem that occupies us here, since it is in the division of the nation and its people into two large groups, and in the dualities that arise from it that we will find the connections between *Meridionalismo* and Orientalism, most of which were either created or exacerbated during or immediately after the Risorgimento.

The Southern Question is concerned with the very real discrepancy that exists in political and economic terms between the industrialized North and the largely rural South. The reasons and consequences for this discrepancy are, unsurprisingly, the subject of much debate, but the matter that concerns us here is not the Meridione reality, but how it appears in literature. The undeniably dominant North, somehow possessor of a sort of authoritarian voice, views the South in a way that has its origins in literature. The Meridione seems to be put, explicitly or otherwise, in a constant comparison with the North and is constantly forced into a series of dualisms that place it on the bottom half, both literally and figuratively, of the duality. As Antonio Gramsci explains, "It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated [. . .] by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie among the masses of the North: the South is the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in the civil development of Italy; Southerners are biologically inferior beings, either semi-barbarians or out barbarians by natural destiny; if the South is underdeveloped it is not the fault of the capitalist system, or any historical cause, but of the nature that has made Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric."² Although Gramsci is concerned here with the large scale impact of these perceptions in the political and economic spheres, he points to two important facts about the way in which these perceptions function.

First, Gramsci recognizes that the North's views of the South are constructions, that is, they are not based on any sort of actual credible sociological evidence, but rather constructions that may or may not (although Gramsci doesn't call attention to the difference) have propagandistic ends. Second, and most importantly, he points to the fact that these stereotypes work by blaming any economic or social problems the southerners may have on their "nature." This means that any shortcoming, real or perceived, is viewed as a direct result of an unavoidable destiny that awaits *all* southerners. We shall see how this essentializing tendency is an important part of the Orientalist tendencies of *Meridionalismo* and of the way in which our southern authors write about Sicily. Gramsci also recognizes that northern cultural expressions are concerned with studying the South as if it were a completely foreign, practically mystical, land that must be understood before it can be civilized. "It could in fact be said that, all cultural initiatives by medium intellectuals that have taken place in the twentieth-century in Central and Northern Italy have been characterized by 'southernism.'"³ What he fails to see, and what we intend to prove here, is that this southernism (*Meridionalismo*) is not reserved for the North and its writers. The discourse of *Meridionalismo*, with

its stigmatizing dualities, is not created exclusively in the North by northern writers. Jane Schneider, who has studied the issue, argues that the Meridionalist texts of southern writers respond to “the tendency for southern intellectuals and liberal elites to articulate a profound critique of their native society and government, becoming the interlocutors of northerners’ negative views.”⁴ She further declares that “many southern intellectuals remained complicit [sic] in essentializing the South, rendering it culturally, if not racially homogenous and unchanging.”⁵ With this in mind, we have chosen to search for the instances in which these three authors, Lampedusa, Sciascia and De Cataldo, add, in some way or another, to the Meridionalist literature, and connect it to Orientalism in a historical process of unification that can be considered both cause and effect of deeply rooted perceptions of division between the North and the South.

Before we proceed, however, we must establish what we understand by Orientalism as defined by Edward Said to see how some of its traits can, at least in part, be found in the novels of Lampedusa, Sciascia and De Cataldo. In his seminal text on the matter, *Orientalism*, Said argues that the distinction between the East and the West (or between the North and the South, or between any two entities in a hegemonic association) is determined by a relationship of power. “Ideas, cultures and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configuration of power, also being studied. [. . .] the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”⁶ Thus all representations of the Orient created in the West respond to a relationship of dominance that, as we will see, may correspond to that between the North and the South of Italy. Said further explains that all of the dualities that lie at the heart of the distinction between the dominator and the dominated are culturally coded. In his words, “Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious ‘Western’ imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly [. . .] texts.”⁷ Thus, we know that literature plays a key role in the creation of the double relationships that Said finds in western representations of the Orient.

The Orient is often structured, Said argues, around the myriad of dyadic relationships that arise from the opposition between West and East where the Orient is placed in constant comparisons that range from civilized/barbaric to masculine/feminine, active/passive, rational/irrational, scientific/mystical, industrial/rural, white/black, etc. Additionally, in Orientalist representations of the East, the subject matter (that is, the Orient itself) is loosely defined in both geographical and racial terms. In fact, there is never a clear distinction of the Orient’s geographical limits, or what the racial characteristics of its people are. In this way, we can see that, *Meridionalismo* shares many traits with Orientalism. In fact, most

of the dualities that divide the Orient from the Occident are the same ones that divide the North of Italy from the South. As Schneider explains, these differences are created and fixed after the Risorgimento: “The Southern Question discourse [. . .] took on its radical oppositional contours –North versus South, advanced industrial versus backward agrarian, well governed ‘civic’ versus clientelistic– in the 1870s to 1890s, after the Unification of Italy, when the contrasts became not only essentialized, but racialized as well.”⁸ The fact that the expedition of the *Mille* was nothing but a military conquest of the South by an army from the North undoubtedly plays a part in this sort of perception. For northern soldiers, as we will see in the subsequent literary examples, their role in the Meridione was first to conquer the land and then to liberate it from its own inadequacies. In the same way, for many Sicilians, the *Mille* were seen not as a liberating and unifying army but rather as another invading force. Thus, the contrast in apparent attitudes begins to take place: the North is active and brave while the South is passive and cowardly. As Schneider continues, the difference between North and South is also geographical, although, as it happens with the Orient, there is no clear notion of where the *Mezzogiorno* begins and where it ends. In fact, it often begins in Rome, but other times it starts either north or south of Naples. However, there seems to be some consensus of where it ends, in what can be called the most extreme iteration of southernness: the island of Sicily. It is almost as if Sicily belonged to a category all on its own, separated from the mainland and more southern (in all respects) than any other part of the country.

The Meridionalist tradition is therefore undoubtedly connected to that of Orientalism, in the way in which the dominant party views and creates the dominated one by placing it in the above mentioned dyadic sets, and assigning those characteristics to the “nature” of the people and places of the Orient. As Frank Rosengarten explains, “*Meridionalismo*, [. . .] like Orientalism, is a widespread phenomenon, a cluster of value-judgments that make the South seem like an irredeemable victim of its cultural and political backwardness, itself the result of a ‘history’ that has been transmuted into an essential ‘nature’ no longer amenable to reform and change.”⁹ As a result, it can be said that the South, like the Orient, is a construct; in Said’s words, it is a ‘constituted entity and is thus constituted through literature.’¹⁰ We will focus initially on *Il Gattopardo* and *Il quarantotto*, as they are written by famously Sicilian writers who challenged the traditional view of the Risorgimento and the validity of the unification project while, consciously or not, contributing to the essentializing literature of the Meridione.

These two writers have certain similarities in the way they treat Sicily. They were both born there, and the texts were both written during their exile in the North. Although they share different interpretations of the Risorgimento and their thoughts on the role of the intellectual and the historical novel with regards to the island have been the focus of great debate (complicated in part because of Sciascia’s many controversial comments on the subject),¹¹ there is one common

element to their depiction of Sicily and its people that can place them both within the same style of Meridionalist literature. Both authors believe strongly in a sort of natural sicilianità; in other words, in a set of moral, political, social and cultural values that are inherently part of the Sicilian spirit. They believe, in short, that Sicilians have a natural way of being. Although it may seem like a minor detail, this essentializing behavior is one of the key factors that link *Il Gattopardo* and *Il quarantotto* with Meridionalist and Orientalist literature. As Jane Schneider explains, “both Sciascia and Lampedusa held fast to the concept of an essential way of being Sicilian –a distinctive mentality or culture – whose foremost feature was resignation, a deep, unshakable fatalism about the future.”¹² This lack of trust in the future and in the Risorgimento in particular, seems to be one of the issues that most commonly divide people from the North and the South in these texts. While northerners are often described as hopeful and even romantic when it comes to the unification of Italy, southerners, especially Sicilians, are almost always untrusting and callous. Moreover, the ideals of Risorgimento in these texts appear to be imposed upon the people of the South, who either accept them with resignation or take advantage of them for their own benefit.

Additionally, physical features and racial stereotypes also serve as a way of describing Sicilians. In Tomasi di Lampedusa’s 1958 novel, Prince Salina’s skin, hair and eye-color are used to describe how his undoubtedly superior Germanic blood has been corrupted by the inferior, darker, Sicilian stock.

Ma nel sangue di lui fermentavano altre essenze germaniche ben più incommode per quell’aristocratico siciliano nell’anno 1860, di quanto potessero essere attraenti la pelle bianchissima ed i capelli biondi nell’ambiente di olivastri e di corvini: un temperamento autoritario, una certa rigidità morale, una propensione alle idee astratte che nell’*habitat* molliccio della società palermitana si erano mutati in prepotenza capricciosa, perpetui scrupoli morali e disprezzo per i suoi parenti e amici che gli sembrava andassero alla deriva nel lento fiume pragmatistico siciliano.¹³

The Prince’s Germanic moral rectitude is opposed to that of his countrymen, who seem to be drifting along the slow river of “Sicilian pragmatism,” where “pragmatism” is code for corruption, *clientelismo* and general disregard for the written law. He has also been transformed; his authoritarian attitude becomes, because of the Sicilian influence in his blood, a sort of inferior capricious prepotency. Rosengarten explains that “there can be little doubt about it in this novel: darkness is suggestive almost always of a variety of unworthy, even contemptible traits, while the blond, blue-eyed people, although also tainted by their native Sicilian roots, are handsome, proud in their bearing, idealistic yet shrewd.”¹⁴ Additionally, the way of life in Palermo is called *habitat* (described as lax, in

comparison no doubt to German strictness), as if it pertained to a different order of life. Sicilians are therefore, from the very beginning of the novel, a source of inferior blood. It is only the Prince's central European heritage (and to a lesser degree Tancredi's) that allow for some sort of greatness. After their demise, all that is left is pure Sicilian blood and all the inadequacies it contains. Tancredi himself recognizes that Concetta's "sicilianità" is a source of ignorance, passivity, narcissism, and boredom: "è la più cara creatura che esista, uno specchio d'ogni virtù; ma è un po' chiusa, ha troppo ritegno, temo che stimi troppo sè stessa; e poi è siciliana sino al midollo delle ossa; non è mai uscita da qui."¹⁵

Aside from the blood and race of the people, the climate is also used often in Orientalist literature to elucidate supposed behavioral patterns of a population. In famously Orientalist novels like *Heart of Darkness* or *The Secret Garden*, the extreme heat (of Africa and India respectively) is used to explain supposed attitudes of passivity, lethargy and laziness. The same occurs in *Il Gattopardo*, where, in a clearly ironic, although relevant moment, the children's French governess screams out "“*Mon Dieu, [. . .] c'est pire qu'en Afrique!*”"¹⁶ In this passage, Sicily appears to be further from France, from the rest of Europe and Northern Italy than even Africa. In fact, it is characterized as worse than Africa: hotter, more distant, perhaps wilder and more uncouth. Later, the Prince himself adds "da noi si può dire che nevicava fuoco, come sulle terre maledette della Bibbia; in ognuno di quei mesi se un Siciliano lavorasse sul serio spenderebbe l'energia che dovrebbe essere sufficiente per tre."¹⁷ He goes so far as to compare Sicily with those mystical, foreign, burning lands of the Bible, a common technique in any Orientalist text. These comments drive Sicily further south, further away from the North of Italy and Europe and make the division between the North and the *Mezzogiorno* ever more notable and unsurpassable.¹⁸ By making the island a part of either Africa or some mystical land from scripture, Lampedusa's novel sets the ground for any dualisms that may arise from the extreme separation of Sicily from Italy. Thus, it would seem that Sicilians are lazy because the very climate of the island makes them so, as if an alleged cultural trait were a result of their nature, a notion, as we have seen, typical of Meridionalist and Orientalist literature. It is no wonder, then, that these novels are set during the Risorgimento and that this is a period rife with Meridionalist attitudes. Sicily and the South ironically appear the farthest from the rest of Italy precisely during the time in which they were supposed to become part of the new republic.

The laziness, the inability to change in time is another representation of the fatalistic way of seeing the present and future described above by Schneider. This sort of impassivity before the changing times is at the heart of Lampedusa's representation of Sicily and its inhabitants. In fact, the island seems to belong, like the Orient, to a mystical region that is somehow taken away from the flow of time, where, as the famous line goes, "everything changes so everything can stay the same." The island's "tradizionale impermeabilità al nuovo" is in fact one

of the novel's main problems and the source of much of its Meridionalist comments, which can be found, not surprisingly, when the Prince converses with an envoy from the North who has come to offer him a place as a Senator in the newly formed republic.¹⁹

This passage, almost a soliloquy, summarizes how a Sicilian author would write a Sicilian nobleman talking about his own island. He, the Prince, explains Sicily's unwillingness to change, first as a result of a sort of the lethargy that came about after centuries of occupation and which has become part of the people's character, and then as an expression of an imminently Sicilian sense of pride:

In Sicilia non importa far bene o far male: il peccato che noi Siciliani non perdoniamo mai è semplicemente quello di 'fare'. Siamo vecchi, Chevalley, vecchissimi. [. . .] da duemila cinquecento anni siamo colonia [. . .] è in parte colpa nostra, ma siamo stanchi e vuoti lo stesso [. . .] Il sonno, caro Chevalley, il sonno è ciò che i Siciliani vogliono, ed essi odieranno sempre chi li vorrà svegliare, sia pure per portar loro i più bei regali. [. . .] Tutte le manifestazioni siciliane sono manifestazioni oniriche, anche le più violente: la nostra sensualità è Desiderio di oblio.²⁰

The Prince adds that this Sicilian lethargy (no doubt a relative of the lethargy Indians and Africans were accused of in earlier Orientalist texts) is combined with an inordinate feeling of self love and the famous ability to change easily from one convenient camp to the other.²¹ These apparently contradictory traits only make the Sicilian man seem even more irrational, passive, and weak in the eyes of his Northern counterpart, in this case, Mr. Chevalley: "I Siciliani non vorranno mai migliorare per la semplice ragione che credono di essere perfetti: la loro vanità è più forte della loro miseria." The final incidence of the Sicilian immutability (that will appear in Sciascia as well) comes at the very end of the meeting, when the Prince expresses, finally and with great bitterness and resignation the futility of fighting against the Sicilian fate: "Tutto questo [. . .] non dovrebbe durare; però, durerà sempre; il sempre umano, beninteso, un secolo, due secoli. . . ; e dopo sarà diverso, ma peggiore."²² Here, the project of Risorgimento is, as Prince Salina's mind-set will show, destined to fail: the *Mille* are yet another invading force that will hopelessly try to change Sicily while the island's inhabitants watch it all from the sidelines, convinced that any sort of commitment to the cause of Risorgimento (or any other imported cause) is as foolish as it is useless. According to the way in which they are portrayed in this text any change that results from the new political atmosphere will be nothing but a new iteration of an age old *status quo*; it will undoubtedly be different, but more importantly, it will stay the same. And if Prince Salina, a Sicilian nobleman, cannot see or explain his land and his people without typically Meridionalist stereotypes, what chance is there

that Chevalley and his northern allies will ever see southerners as equals fit to govern the new Italian nation alongside their northern counterparts? If the Risorgimento was intended to dispel stereotypes and bring the entire peninsula together under one cultural and political banner, Meridionalist views of the South, created and perpetuated in literature and held by both northerners and southerners, jeopardized the viability of the project.

We have thus seen how the characterizations of Sicily present in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* correspond to characterizations that are somewhat similar in scope, attitude and content to those present in Orientalist literature. We can therefore say that this novel participates in the sort of *Meridionalismo* that is closely related to Orientalism and that Lampedusa contributed in no small part to the creation and perpetuation, voluntary or otherwise, of stereotypes of Sicilian ways of being. As we shall see, Leonardo Sciascia's novella, *Il quarantotto* participates in the same Meridionalist attitude.

The most important character in Sciascia's *Il quarantotto*, aside from the narrator-protagonist, is the Baron Graziano, a Sicilian nobleman who spends the entire novella switching from side to side as the different shifts in power course through the island. First, during the revolt in 1848, he goes from the Bourbon camp to the liberals and becomes a member of the newly formed local government. When the island is retaken by the monarchists, the Baron is accepted into their ranks as if he had never left. Finally, in 1860, when the *Mille* and Garibaldi arrive, the Baron again abandons his supposed ideological and political allegiance with the throne in Naples to receive, with arms wide open and as his distinguished house-guests, the revolutionaries led by Garibaldi, whom, moments before, he called a band of brigands. The novella is written in an ironic tone, but this along with the fact the Sciascia was deeply committed, both intellectually and politically to Sicily, does not mean that we will not find the same Meridionalist cues here as in Lampedusa's novel. The effect of the ironic tone on these attitudes and stereotypes is, at the very least, debatable. Nevertheless, it is necessary to look through them in order to see how they help us connect these Sicilian novels to the Orientalist style of *Meridionalismo*.

The Baron's constant changing, his *Gattopardismo*, if you will, plays right into the image that constantly portrays Sicilians, especially the ruling classes, as sneaky and morally ambiguous, something that ties the novella with its literary predecessors, *Le confessioni di un Italiano*, *Il Gattopardo* and *I Viceré*. The Baron's will to remain in power is comically depicted when Garibaldi's troops come dangerously close to his lands:

Il barone dapprima aveva reagito con violenza, l'aveva chiamato traditore e delinquente, poi aveva inveito contro i generali del re, poi contro il re che come un cretino si faceva prendere a gabbo e tradire: e infine aveva dichiarato che, mettendosi così le cose, era tempo che

ognuno badasse alle cose proprie, e se il re non era buono a badare alle sue ‘forca chet’inforca al piano della Marina’ cioè: finisca come vuole finire ‘io della sua sorte me ne fotto e so quel che fare per la sorte mia’ e subito aveva cominciato a mettere sottosopra la casa, a far rimuovere dalle pareti ritratti e stampe del re e della real familia.²³

He has a moment of something close to remorse, but the way in which he quickly sides with the currently-winning party, a move later described as essentially Sicilian, calls attention to the way Sciascia viewed the project of the Risorgimento in Sicily and also, perhaps unintentionally, shows how the writer chose to portray Sicilians. Of Sciascia’s take on the Unification, Mark Chu says “the Risorgimento [. . .] is a missed opportunity for social and political renewal, and Sciascia’s representation of elements of the ruling classes seizing their chance to adapt to the prevailing political climate and consolidate their power locally is not dissimilar to those of De Roberto and Tomasi di Lampedusa.”²⁴ The Risorgimento is indeed seen as a failure, and in this sense all of the novels we deal with here share similar Gramscian interpretations of the historical event. As Chu explains, “this idea of *revolution manqué* is recurrent in Sciascia’s discourse, which tends to put forward an image of Sicily as a static system, or one that is, in any case, excluded from great historical events [. . .] Sciascia’s view of the island’s history imposes a negative view, for Sicily’s marginalization seems to consign it to a state of timelessness.”²⁵

On the other hand, as it also happened with Lampedusa, Sciascia describes Sicily as a place caught in time, where any sort of significant change is impossible. In fact, that very impossibility is what drives the narrator’s desire to tell his story. In one of the rare instances when he speaks to the reader, he says,

questi ricordi scrivo mentre mi trovo, in solitudine, rifugiato in una casa di campagna nel territorio di Campobello. Fedeli amici mi hanno offerto scampo all’arresto, a Castro mi cercano carabinieri e soldati; come allora i soldati e i gendarmi del Borbone, carabinieri e soldati del Regno d’Italia arrestano a Castro, e in ogni paese della Sicilia, gli uomini che lottano per l’umano avvenire.²⁶

For him, any sort of change before or after the Risorgimento is completely impossible: as a young man he was persecuted by Bourbon soldiers and as an adult by nationalist from the North. Either way, for him and for Sicily, things changed but they somehow managed to stay the same, and nothing can be done about it. This belief in a sort of fate that condemns the island to remain forever a land outside of time and history places Sciascia’s Sicily squarely within Meridionalist literature. As Frank Rosengarten puts it, “among the common traits attributed to the East was (and is) its fatalism, its renunciation of will [. . .] its passive and

total resignation to whatever events the shifting sands and historical circumstance might bring about.”²⁷ The Risorgimento is the greatest historical shift to hit the island for centuries, and yet, even in this time of great turmoil and change, Sciascia’s characters remain the same and their faith in their own inability to change is unshaken.

Furthermore, Sciascia also participates in the idea of a Sicilian nature that determines the island’s place in the world and within Italy. He expressed it several times outside of his fiction, such as in *Pirandello e la Sicilia*, where he says: “essenziale carattere della vita che riconosciamo e diciamo ‘siciliana’ è una forma esasperata di individualismo in cui agiscono, in duplice e inverso movimento, le componenti della esaltazione virile e della sofistica disgregazione.”²⁸ As we have seen, this sort of essentialist characterization is predominantly Meridionalist, so Sciascia is paradoxically contributing to the cultural trend of separating the North from the South and assigning certain values to all the people from a certain region. It is no surprise then that *Il quarantotto* ends with the writer Ippolito Nievo, who participated in the expedition of the *Mille*, describing the Sicilian spirit in what is perhaps the most quoted passage from the novella:

‘Vedete’ continuò Nievo ‘questo è un popolo che conosce solo gli estremi: ci sono i siciliani come Carini, e ci sono i siciliani come... come questo barone, insomma.’ [...] ‘Perché’ disse Nievo ‘io credo nei siciliani che parlano poco, nei siciliani che non si agitano, nei siciliani che si rodono dentro e soffrono: i poveri che ci salutano con un gesto stanco, come da una lontananza di secoli; e il colonnello Carini sempre così silenzioso e lontano, impastato di malinconia e di noia ma ad ogni momento pronto all’azione: un uomo che pare non abbia molte speranze, eppure è il cuore stesso della speranza, la silenziosa fragile speranza dei siciliani migliori... una speranza, vorrei dire, che teme se stessa, che ha paura delle parole ed ha invece vicina e familiare la morte... Questo popolo ha bisogno di essere conosciuto ed amato in ciò che tace, nelle parole che nutre nel cuore e non dice...’²⁹

At this point, we must consider the irony of the situation: Sciascia, a Sicilian writer who spent much of his life defending Sicily and its interests, puts these words into the mouth of a Northern writer who is visiting the island during the time when much of the Meridionalist stereotypes were being cast. The tone of the entire story is ironic, but this seems to be one of the very few passages in which the narrator seems completely sincere. Not only is what Nievo says a continuation of the need to label and define the *sicilianità*, it is also said in direct contrast to the Baron’s moral promiscuity. It therefore seems that, at least in this instance, Sicilians can be sneaky and changeable (like the Baron and the ruling classes) or passive and resigned (like the nameless masses). Either way, they are

found lacking when compared to their northern counterparts and must be led, in one way or the other, into modernity and civilization by someone else – in this case, the *Mille* and the entire idea of an Italy unified under northern cultural rule. Regardless of what Sciascia was trying to do, of how he saw the Risorgimento, and of the skill with which he emulated Nievo's voice in this passage, he created a decidedly Meridionalist text that behaves (or at least pretends to behave) with regards to Sicily like Orientalist texts behave with regards to the East.

We can now continue to the third novel we will work with here. While it was not written by a Sicilian, it offers a very complex representation of the island during the time of the Risorgimento and perhaps the most interesting example of a contemporary Meridionalist text. *I traditori*, by Giancarlo De Cataldo, is undoubtedly the most lucid of all three texts when it comes to its Meridionalist attitudes. It purposely plays with some of the stereotypes we have discussed from the beginning. In fact, the first pages of the novel show a sort of ritualistic ceremony of initiation into a Mafia circle, which is followed by the attempted burning of a witch somewhere in the South of Italy, all of this only a few years before unification. Thus, the entire Meridione is portrayed as a superstitious, backward world that is practically medieval. It is unclear, as with Sciascia's text, to what extent the author is consciously calling attention to the absurdity of the stereotypes and to what extent he is participating in them, but the fact is that they are present and cannot be ignored, especially since they are used to portray the South's inability to join a modern, nineteenth-century European nation.

The notion of a land stuck in time is also present in *I traditori*, but this time what remains constant is not only the ruling class and the Sicilian way of being, but also the all-powerful *Società*, the Mafia that will inspire a great deal of Meridionalist fiction after the Risorgimento: "Nella partita fra baroni e liberali, la Società stava in mezzo, o per meglio dire, da tutte e due le parti. Chiunque avesse vinto, loro sarebbero stati sempre. Perché di cose eterne, a questo mondo, non ce n'è solo una, ma due: la morte e la Società."³⁰ Thus, both the Sicilian passivity and the Sicilian willingness to play on all possible sides come together in the figure of the Mafia.

However, the passage of *I traditori* that most interests us here comes, unsurprisingly, during the expedition of the *Mille* in Sicily, and from the lips of a Piedmont officer. The officer is clearly speaking, although without calling it by name, to the Southern Question and practically all of the Meridionalist attitudes we've seen so far:

Fu verso la mezzanotte che il tenente piemontese illustrò ai pochi ancora svegli [. . .] la sua teoria delle 'due Italie'. [. . .] Una onesta, laboriosa, tenace, composta dai popoli che abitano le motagne e le pianure del grande Nord, e un'altra ritardata, molle, incline all'ozio, asservita all'ignoranza e al crimine, che va da Roma sino alle sponde

di questa magnifica isola. . . Magnifica per la sua natura selvaggia, ma, ahimè, altrettanto selvaggiamente popolata [. . .] È la storia dei popoli che ha condotto a tanto [. . .] Il Nord fu dei celti, dei regni romano-barbarici, e poi dei comuni e dei difensori della libertà. Il Sud, caduta Roma, non fu che latifondo e miseria. La conformazione fisica stessa di codeste genti ne rimarca la profonda diversità. Pensate ai lombardi, ai gallo-liguri, così alti, magri, persino ascetici, e ai meridionali, scuri, rotondetti, dagli occhi e dal sangue sicuramente invaso dall'elemento saraceno.³¹

Undoubtedly, De Cataldo is aware of the images that northerners had of Sicily and of the connections that can be established between Meridionalist views, like those of the lieutenant, and Orientalism (not in vain does the same soldier ask Lady Violet, the passionate British noblewoman, about the relationship between the British Empire and its colonies). It is no coincidence that these words are spoken precisely as the brave, bright, and beautiful people of the North attempt to bring light, education, and rationality, to the boorish South. The fact that these northern soldiers feel that one of the main goals of their expedition is to educate an otherwise hopelessly backward land is an example of the paternalistic scope, so typical of Orientalist and Meridionalist dualistic thought, that underlies the entire Risorgimento. By thus essentializing the roles that southerners and northerners played in the process of unification, De Cataldo points to a dualistic conception of the Risorgimento that seems to imply that the North valiantly created the nation while the South was merely where the process took place. The entire novel is structured in a two part system, with the South of Italy on one side, and the North and the rest of Europe on the other. In fact, almost every chapter set in the island is immediately followed by one set in London or some part of the North. It is as if the novel itself proposes a constant comparison between one and the other. Almost always, Sicily is found to be barbaric, treacherous, and irrational while the North is almost always the opposite. The consequences of these types of representations are clearly Meridionalist, although De Cataldo's original intentions are unclear. It could mean that he is ironically calling attention to them in order to criticize them, but the fact that a large part of the novel's plot and character development rests on the essentializing division between North and South makes that seem unlikely.

As we have seen, these three writers have participated, willingly or not, ironically or otherwise, in a series of value judgments and stereotypes that portray the South of Italy, and especially Sicily, in an inferior position with the North. This sort of literature, which we have called here *Meridionalismo*, treats the southern regions with an attitude surprisingly similar to that used by what Edward Said has called Orientalism. These two ways of dealing with the Other, *Meridionalismo* and Orientalism, perpetuate their respective stereotypes through literature written,

not only by writers from the “dominant” entity, but also in novels, *novelle* and short stories written by intellectuals from the “dominated” parts. The ways in which each text deals with the events of the Risorgimento in Sicily is relevant not only as a social or an historical document of that time, but as a tool to see how Italians see themselves and each other and whether or not the stereotypes discussed here are still a part of Italian letters today. If the Risorgimento is indeed a failed revolution or an incomplete unification of two parts of the country, it must be, at least in part, a result of the Meridionalist views portrayed, and perhaps created, in the literature written about the South. Our study here has merely touched a very small part of the literature written about Sicily in the twentieth century. In a period focused on post-colonialism, a more comprehensive study of the way in which Italians, from both the South and the North, see and write this island is not only desirable but necessary.

Notes

1. John Dickie, “Stereotypes of the Italian South, 1860–1900,” in *The New History of the Italian South*, ed. Robert Lumley and Jonathan Morris (Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 116.

2. Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdichio (West Lafayette: Bordighera Inc., 1995). 20.

3. *Ibid.*, 42.

4. Jane Schneider, “The Dynamics of Neo-orientalism in Italy (1848–1995),” in *Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 8.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

6. Edward Said, “Orientalism,” in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Theory*, ed. David H. Richter (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2007), 1802.

7. *Ibid.*, 1806.

8. Schneider, *Neo-orientalism*, 3.

9. Frank Rosengarten, “Homo Siculus: Essentialism in the Writing of Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia,” in *Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 118.

10. Dickie, *Stereotypes*, 116.

11. See for example: Abruzzo, Giovanna Ghetti. *Leonardo Sciascia e la Sicilia*. Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1974. Print. Or: Corrente, Santi. *La Sicilia di Sciascia*. Catania: Edizioni Greco, 1977. Print. For two opposing comments on the author’s views of the island and the literature that represents it.

12. Schneider, *Neo-orientalism*, 12.

13. Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*, 97 ed. (Milano: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, 2011). 33.

14. Rosengarten, “Homo Siculus: Essentialism in the Writing of Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia,” 128.

15. Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*: 168.

16. *Ibid.*, 70.

17. *Ibid.*, 180.

18. It should be noted here that the very existence of these names “The Meridione” or “The Mezzogiorno” is evidence of a Meridionalist attitude. Surely, “The Mezzogiorno” sounds more exotic, romantic and picturesque than “The South” and there are certainly no such nicknames for northern Italy.

19. Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo*: 155.

20. *Ibid.*, 179.

21. See for example: “illusioni no credo che ne abbia più di me, ma è abbastanza svelto per sapere creársele quando ocorra” *ibid.*, 181. The prince is referring to Don Calogero Sedará, his political successor, who, belonging to a purely Sicilian bloodline, will be able to come up with as many convictions it takes to succeed in the politics of the new nation. This is a great example of what has been called Gattopardismo: something will change, it will be a commoner, not a nobleman, representing the island, but, even with that, everything will remain the same.

22. *Ibid.*, 185.

23. Leonardo Sciascia, “Il quarantotto,” in *Gli Zii di Sicilia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989), 83.

24. Mark Chu, “Of Garibaldini and Pugnalatori: Revolution and Reaction in Sciascia’s Sicily,” in *Risorgimento in Modern Italian Culture*, ed. Norma Bouchard (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 200.

25. *Ibid.*, 202-03.

26. Sciascia, 48, 54.

27. Rosengarten, “Homo Siculus: Essentialism in the Writing of Giovanni Verga, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, and Leonardo Sciascia,” 117.

28. Leonardo Sciascia, *Pirandello e la Sicilia* (Roma: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 1968). 12.

29. Sciascia, 48, 84.

30. Giancarlo DeCataldo, *I traditori* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010). 151.

31. *Ibid.*, 430.

