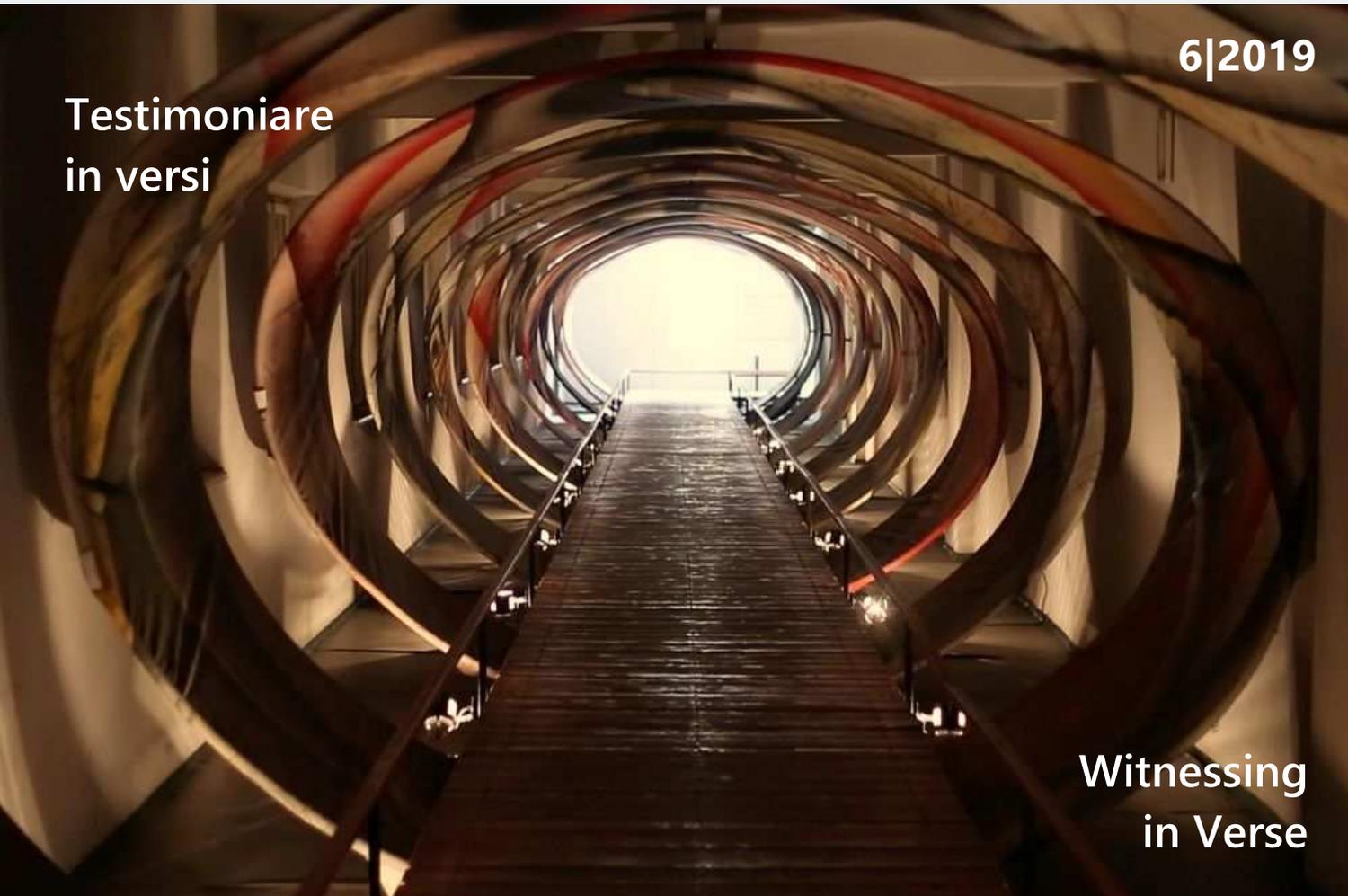


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The Poem-documents of Leonardo Sciascia: The Exordium, the Memoir

Matteo Cantarello (Williamsburg)

Questo articolo analizza come Leonardo Sciascia tratta la morte, il silenzio e la Sicilitudine ("Siciltitude") in La Sicilia, il suo cuore (1952), la sua unica opera poetica. A partire da un'analisi stilistica che spiega come i seguenti temi appaiono in poesia per poi compararli a come vengono trattati nelle opere in prosa dell'autore, l'articolo illustra in che modo La Sicilia, il suo cuore costituisce, allo stesso tempo, l'esordio e il testamento letterario di Sciascia. Dopo questo esperimento, infatti, l'autore siciliano abbandona la poesia in quanto poco adatta a raccontare la Sicilia a un lettore non siciliano. Nonostante ciò, La Sicilia, il suo cuore presenta la ragione per la quale anche la prosa di Sciascia fallisce nel raggiungere pienamente il suo scopo divulgativo: l'impossibilità di trascrivere e razionalizzare l'intima relazione tra l'autore e la sua isola.

This article analyzes the themes of death, silence, and Siciltudine ("Siciltitude") in La Sicilia, il suo cuore (1952), Leonardo Sciascia's sole poetic work. Departing from an analysis of how Sciascia's poems express these themes and a comparison to their appearance in his prose, the article demonstrates that La Sicilia, il suo cuore constitutes both the author's literary exordium and memoir. I argue that Sciascia abandons poetry because its form proves unhelpful to explaining Sicily to the non-Sicilian reader; yet, the poetic collection simultaneously reveals the very reason why Sciascia's prose fails to achieve a revelatory scope: the impossibility of fully transcribing and rationalizing intimacy.

Even though Leonardo Sciascia wrote and published all sorts of literary genres over the course of his lifetime, he is perhaps best known for the style of his prose, described by Giuseppe Bonaviri (1998, 46) as "schiva, lineare, condensata, priva di barocchismi di fondo". As a writer, an intellectual, and a politician, Sciascia dedicated his life to speaking openly of the Sicilian mafia, *Cosa Nostra*, and to advocating for his island, forgotten by the Italian state for too long a time. His *impegno* dealt with Italian politics and society as well as with the country's intellectual production. These multifaceted commitments made him one of the most important authors in the twentieth-century Italian literary landscape.

Giovanna Jackson has argued that Sciascia's most common themes – reason, truth, and justice – and "stylistic experiments" led the author to "the style of the documentary narrative" (Jackson 1981, 7s.). This attitude toward a literature firmly grounded on the archival makes Sciascia, according to Barbara Pezzotti (2016, 176), "the founder of a new literary trend in Italy:" literary journalism. However, Sciascia's fondness for journalism leads his prose work – in particular his detective novels – to an impasse: it remains impossible to find truth even in the presence of hard evidence. As Joseph Farrell (2011, 63) has written, for Sciascia "truth is personal or unknowable," and "relativism is all". Joann Cannon has resolved this short circuit in Sciascia's production by suggesting that the detective genre allows the writer to merge "the exercise of reason" with "dismay at the defeat of reason" (4). Sciascia himself defined this process as "[una] ragione che cammina sull'orlo della non ragione" (Di Stefano 2016). In light of this, it is not surprising that the absence of emotions and subjectivity have become defining features in the prose and intellectual project of the Sicilian writer, for whom the word is a "word-document," as Liborio Adamo (1992, 9s.) has proposed.

Yet the literary career of the author from Racalmuto in fact began with a collection of poems, the content and style of which stand apart from the "canonical Sciascia." Published by the Roman house Bardi in 1952, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* reveals the author's intimate and emotional attachment to Sicily. Barring few exceptions, the anthology has not been an object of study. Of the few critics to have considered the collection, a number have found its significance to pale in comparison to Sciascia's prose. Giuseppe Traina, for example, has suggested that "le poesie [...] tendono irresistibilmente, e significativamente, alla prosa" (Traina 1999, 204), an evaluation that discredits Sciascia's poetical endeavor by suggesting that prose exclusively serves the Sicilian writer's intellectual mission. Indeed, the poems of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* present a loose approach to prosody and focus on narrating scenes rather than interrogating emotions. This article will show, however, how the lyric self that speaks across the works of the collection is bound profoundly to poetry, standing in contrast to the language and (absent) emotions that characterize Sciascia's "canonical" style of prose.

La Sicilia, il suo cuore contains twenty-four poems, divided into two sections: eight initial poems are followed by sixteen collected under the subtitle "Foglietti di diario" (the first five of which are ordered with roman numerals). The first eight compositions describe Racalmuto, Sciascia's hometown. Of the poems of "Foglietti di diario," five were written outside of Sicily,^[1] one during a train trip ("Ballerine in treno"), and the ten poems that close the collection return to describing Sicily, though it remains unclear whether they also take place in Racalmuto.

This article analyzes the first eight poems and nine of those in "Foglietti di diario" to demonstrate that Sciascia's literary exordium^[2] (and sole lyrical experiment) also constitutes a literary memoir for the author from Racalmuto. In moving forward with his prose projects, Sciascia abandons the bond found in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* between the poet-narrator's experience of his land and the emotive essence of his verse. Yet it is these same emotions, articulated only in his early collection of poetry, that establish those anxieties which permeate Sciascia's subsequent prose production. *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, in sum, offers a distilled overview of those very questions that the author seeks to unravel in his subsequent corpus. The reasons underlying the lack of answers to be found in Sciascia's prose, with particular regard to themes like justice, truth, and Sicily's inner essence, constitute the core of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*.

The analysis will follow two distinct, parallel pathways. In the first section, the reading will trace the evolving themes of silence and death. These two elements, taken both independently and as a pair, have a primary role in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*; they also constitute cornerstones of Sciascia's broader oeuvre. For example, in works like *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl*), *A ciascuno il suo* (*To Each His Own*), and *Il contesto. Una parodia* (*Equal Danger*), to name but a few, silence and discretion emerge as traits that characterize the inhabitants of Sicily. The author from Racalmuto thus orients his narratives around processes of reasoning that decode the unsaid for himself and the non-Sicilian reader. Furthermore, and in relation to this, scholars like Elena Past and Joseph Farrell, among others, have underscored Sciascia's urge to break the silence that characterizes Sicily with particular regard to one of the island's most notorious inhabitants: the mafia (16s. and 49, respectively). Sciascia tackles the issue of *omertà* because he holds it responsible for the dysfunctionality of justice on the island. Death, relatedly, emerges as a product of organized crime and of the widespread corruption that features in most of Sciascia's prose works. The codification of murders and violence on the island, as illustrated in novels like *Il giorno della civetta* and *A*

ciascuno il suo, characterize much of Sciascia's oeuvre. In *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, the reader witnesses the author's early acknowledgment of these two issues of silence and death, as well as his first attempts to unravel their enigma, both for his own sake and the reader's, through an intimate rather than dispassionate lens.

In the second section, attention will be drawn to the crescendo of Sciascia's *sicilitudine* ("Sicilitude"), a notion that also pervades his literary production and that parallels the themes of silence and death. As opposed to the idea of *sicilianità* ("Sicilian-ness"), which defines mafia-related traits, *sicilitudine* grounds Sciascia's endeavor to grasp the essence of Sicily and its inhabitants. *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* constitutes the first, and most likely the last instance in which Sciascia resorts to himself, disguised as the poet-narrator, to decrypt *sicilitudine*, before starting to utilize foreigners or outcasts as main characters and narrators. For this reason, this collection represents a unique opportunity to look into Sicilians' intimacy through the subjective lens of the author.

Finally, the conclusions of the analysis will highlight the limits Sciascia encounters in poetry, which regard his attempts to explain silence, death, and "Sicilitude." This convinced Sciascia to abandon poetry and embrace prose – despite the fact, notably, that the inexplicability of Sicily's more impenetrable features remain a constant throughout his oeuvre.

1. Silence and Death

All the poems of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* analyzed in this article include references to silence, death, or both. Most interestingly, silence and death are embedded in Racalmuto, as Gaspare Giudice (1999) and Giuseppe Bonaviri (1998) have pointed out. In regard to silence, Giudice cites Sciascia's description, provided in an interview, of Racalmuto's municipal emblem, which depicts a man holding his finger in front of his mouth under which is written, "Nel silenzio mi fortificai" (In silence, I grew stronger) (Giudice 1999, 31). Through time, as Sciascia explains in the interview to which Giudice refers, silence has become a distinctive trait of the place (cf. *ibid.*). Quite similarly, Bonaviri (1998, 46) reminds us of a plausible etymology of the toponym Racalmuto, which, in Arabic, means "il paese dei morti" (the town of the dead). Silence and death are thus deeply intertwined with Racalmuto's origin, as they play a primary role in the poems of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*.

In the collection's eponymous poem, "La Sicilia, il suo cuore" (11), Sciascia establishes themes and motifs that are present in all the following lyric works. The poem encapsulates Sicily through the eye, emotions, and memories of the author; the poet-narrator gives voice to images that move from a painting of Chagall to the desolation of Sicily, from the presence of silence and death to the annihilation of any sort of mythical or epic past.

Come Chagall, vorrei cogliere questa terra
dentro l'immobile occhio del bue.
Non un lento carosello di immagini,
una raggiera di nostalgie: soltanto
queste nuvole accagliate,
i corvi che discendono lenti;
e le stoppie bruciate, i radi alberi,
che s'incidono come filigrane.
Un miope specchio di pena, un greve destino
di piogge: tanto lontana è l'estate

che qui distese la sua calda nudità
 squamosa di luce – e tanto diverso
 l'annuncio dell'autunno,
 senza le voci della vendemmia.
 Il silenzio è vorace sulle cose.
 S'incrina, se il flauto di canna
 tenta vena di suono: e una fonda paura dirama.
 Gli antichi a questa luce non risero,
 strozzata dalle nuvole, che geme
 sui prati stenti, sui greti aspri,
 nell'occhio melmoso delle fonti;
 le ninfe inseguite
 qui non si nascosero agli dèi; gli alberi
 non nutrirono frutti agli eroi.
 Qui la Sicilia ascolta la sua vita.

Like Chagall, I would like to see this land
 in the tranquil eye of the ox.
 Not a slow-paced carousel of images,
 a halo of nostalgies: only
 these thick clouds,
 the crows that descend slowly;
 and burnt bundles of sticks, the sparse trees,
 that can be carved like filigree.
 A blurred mirror of sorrow, an oppressive destiny
 of rains: so far away is summer
 that here extends its hot nudity
 in flakes of light – and so different is
 the coming of fall,
 without the voices of the grape harvest.
 Silence is voracious over all things.
 It cracks, if the reed flute
 even dares to blow: and a deep fear spreads.
 The ancients did not smile at this light,
 choked by clouds, that moans over
 withered lawns and dry river beds,
 in the muddy eye of springs;
 the nymphs given chase to
 did not hide here from the gods; the trees
 did not feed fruit to the heroes.
 Here, Sicily listens to its life.

In this poem, Sciascia juxtaposes Marc Chagall's colorful and vivid painting, *I and the Village* (1911), to his hometown, "miope specchio di pena" (9). The details that open the poem and the collection establish an eerie and dismal landscape, far from the idyllic stereotype of Sicily. Thick clouds, ("Nuvole accagliate" 5), crows slowly descending, burnt bundles of sticks ("stoppie bruciate" 7), and sparse trees ("radi alberi" 7) mark the passage from a bright summer to a silent fall ("tanto lontana è l'estate / [...] e tanto diverso / l'annuncio dell'autunno" 10, 12-13). Silence becomes the protagonist: people's voices and the noises from the time of the grape harvest are gone, and silence dominates, voracious ("vorace" 15) over all things. The mythic character of Sicily is also demystified, as the poem suggests that ancients, nymphs, gods, and heroes never inhabited

this land (18-24). However, this mournful and spectral portrayal is the prelude to the "life" that the author is about to narrate: "Qui la Sicilia ascolta la sua vita" (25).

The poem that follows, "In memoria" (12), provides an even more lugubrious description of the landscape. It opens with a powerful image: the passage from winter to spring is hailed not by enthusiasm (1-5); rather, winter ("gelida nitida favola" 2-3) moves aside for the arrival of a deadly spring, epitomized by the blossoming of poppies, the red of which is associated with blood ("una fiorita di sangue" 5). Roses also bloom, but in pale hands ("mani esangui" 6), suggesting a macabre source for the blood imbibed by the poppies. It is, therefore, a life-sucking land, instead of a land of life. The juxtaposition of sulfur and olive trees that characterize the landscape ("valle di zolfo e d'ulivi" 7s.) also suggests, along with local resources, a land constantly grappling with symbols of war (with sulfur representing the debris of guns) and peace (the olive tree) as it proceeds along "dead" train tracks ("lungo i binari morti" 8).

The landscape introduced by the first two poems culminates in the morbid nature of the Sicilians who are the protagonists of the third poem, "I morti" (13). Here, a funeral procession parades through the town streets. The first human characters we encounter in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* are the dead, who are depicted as actively moving ("I morti vanno" 1) inside a black wagon decorated with gold, drawn by a slow procession of horses and accompanied by music from a band. Thus, a human presence – after the first two poems that described a dead and desolate land – is introduced for the first time through a funeral. To this appearance of human life, the townspeople respond by closing themselves within their houses and shops: "le donne si precipitano / a chiudere le finestre di casa, / le botteghe si chiudono" (5-7). Sciascia lingers on describing the locals, who hide from the procession yet leave small openings to peep at the sorrow of others: "appena uno spiraglio / per guardare al dolore dei parenti, / al numero degli amici che è dietro, / alla classe del carro, alle corone" (7-10). Sciascia underscores the dark curiosity that grips the townspeople, in lieu of empathy, as one might expect. Furthermore, he insists on the mix of good and evil that is concealed behind each door: "il bottegaio che pesa e ruba, / il bambino che gioca e odia" (15-16).

In the three poems that open the collection, Sciascia juxtaposes the brutality of nature – the benevolence of which is foreign to the author's work, as Jackson (1981, 31) argues – to the locals' lack of empathy. While this parallelism will be further developed in Sciascia's prose writing, in the poems that follow the poet-narrator shifts focus, emphasizing his commitment to the land. The poem "Vivo come non mai" (14) offers an ambivalence in the title itself. The word 'vivo' can in fact be interpreted as both the adjective 'alive' and the verb form 'I live'. In either case, the title offers a significant opposition to the deadly and lethargic setting of the first three poems, thus highlighting Sciascia's internal struggle between a sense of belonging and a rejection of local cultural features.

In this poem, the protagonist's entry on foot into the silent town ("entro nel silenzio dei tuoi viali" 1s.) epitomizes vitality, and the image is accompanied by the vivid color of the grass ("ri-goglio verdissimo dell'erba" 4). However, this liveliness is, once again, paralleled by a desolate and frigid landscape: "silenzio dei tuoi viali, tra i marmi / che affiorano come rovine [...] e un marcio odore di terra e foglie" (1-3, 5). The poem carries forward this opposition between the vitality of some elements and the sense of death and stillness provided by others. In this autumnal landscape, the sun attempts to offer energy ("nell'autunno che in te stagna, / anche se il sole / folgora"

6-8). The poet is approaching a cemetery that suggests a "perpetua stagione di morte" (10) Yet, it is this proximity to death that reinvigorates the poet's sense of life: "mi ritrovo / vivo, gremito di parole / [...] vivo come non mai, presso i miei morti" (10s., 13). Here, the importance of the word, "parole," makes its first appearance.

The four poems that close the first section and precede "Foglietti di diario" describe the memory of somebody who has left their hometown and returns to visit only sporadically. Yet the stillness and gloomy quiet of the place never abandon the thoughts and memories of the poet-narrator. In "Ad un paese lasciato" (15), the melancholy the poet-narrator feels for the silent town is revealed, surprisingly, in the last two verses: "una nave di malinconia apriva per me vele d'oro, / pietà ed amore trovavano antiche parole" (17-18). Once again, this two-verse epitaph underscores the attachment of the narrator to his hometown, even though the description of it does not instill positive sentiments in the reader.

This melancholy recurs several times in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* as a lens employed by the poet-narrator. As Giudice (1999, 67) points out, "[l]a malinconia giace in fondo all'opera e ne costituisce il punto di prospettiva". The three verses opening "Ad un paese lasciato" reiterate what has been presented in the previous poems. The memory of the place is, to the person who is writing, relaxing ("Mi è riposo il tuo ricordo" 1). The gray days ("giorni grigi" 1), the disorder and crowded old houses ("vecchie case che strozzano strade" 2), silent men dressed in black ("silenziosi uomini neri" 3) and their somber stride ("cupo il passo degli zolfatari" 9), churches immersed in shadow ("le chiese ingragliamate d'ombra" 8) do not prevent the narrator from feeling nostalgia and unconditional love, even though roads seem to conceal "cavi sepolcri, profondi luoghi di morte" (10). Memory is tied to a past of teachings and lessons; from his people, the narrator learned "grevi leggende / di terra e di zolfo, oscure storie" (4-5). The atmosphere of mourning is, however, broken by the three verses preceding the final epitaph. A memory of colorful and idyllic sunsets ("i tramonti tra i salici, [...] / il giorno che appassiva come un rosso geranio" 14-15), the blowing of trains horns (14), and the presence of women (16) ignite a spark of joy in the dark melancholy.

"Family Reunion" (16) and "Hic et nunc" (17) reveal the narrator's intention of breaking the ubiquitous silence with the power of words. In "Family reunion," the poet-narrator portrays the timeless and immutable silence of a home. Everything is unchanged ("Tutto è immutato in questa stanza" 1), frozen in time; the clock has been still for years ("l'orologio da tanti anni fermo" 2). The scene is a "chest of boredom" ("un'arca di noia") that seems ready to swallow everything in a silence that obscures words and memories. Once again, a non-human presence accompanies the subject: a dog's sorrowful gaze ("antica angoscia" 15) helps distill time into painful verses ("scioglie il tempo umano in acri sillabe" 18).

A similar image appears in "Hic et nunc," where the poet-narrator compares himself to a mutilated statue at the bottom of the sea. Feeling immobilized and broken ("fermato [...] e spezzato" 3), a series of natural elements ("un tremore di cose" 4) reinvigorate and propel him to transform his immobility into words ("mutare il nulla in parola" 8). In "Insonnia" (18), the last poem of the section, the poet seems to have lost his vitality. The attempt to give voice to an otherwise silent landscape seems voided. Frightened by the windy Night [sic] that tears through the usual silence ("Il riso stridulo della Notte / si è aperto nel silenzio" 1s.), the poet curls up into fetal position from fear ("E sono stato nascosto in me, / cieca preda spaurita" 4s.). Not even the light of dawn appears able to revive life. Rather, the town, which resembles a ship ready to set sail ("il paese è come un

vascello che salpa" 8), once again paralyzes the poet who feels snagged on a deadly sail ("per me s'impiglia una vela di morte" 10).

Across all of these poems, Sciascia grapples with explaining his emotional attachment to his hometown and island. Both the natural elements and the locals' lack of empathy create a hostile environment that the poet cannot ignore and that makes it harder for him to rationalize his sentiments. In the group of verses that follow, under the subtitle "Foglietti di diario," the poet-narrator briefly leaves Sicily and then returns. Upon his re-entry, he seems to unearth a renewed spirit. The melancholic lens adopted in the preceding poems does not disappear; however, other elements of life appear newly able to counteract and prevail over the heavy motionlessness of the place.

In "Un velo d'acque" (25), it is the presence of water and the springtime regeneration of plants that seem able to revive and give voice to the locale ("E la linfa cerca il secco rancore, / scioglie i nodi del gelido cruccio" 6s.). At the beginning of "Aprile" (26), Sciascia uses, for the first time in the collection, an expression that clearly recalls the mafia as he sits and reflects on his life ("Sto a far camorra sulle cose, seduto" 1). The mafia is referred to explicitly only in two occurrences across *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*: once in relation to the element of silence and once to that of death. In "Aprile," the reader sees how "far camorra" refers to the act of ruminating. "Camorra," that is, the mafia from Campania, here clearly links the local culture of silence with Sicilian criminality. Continuing his gaze from the countryside, the poet-narrator sees his town lost amidst lush vegetation (8-9) while he himself sits near children playing in the sun (4). However, the noise and vivacity of the youngsters soon expose the illusion of the scene: in fact, "di là da questo gioco / pieno di voci, è solo un paese di silenzio" (9-10).

An unprecedented liveliness is provided by "Dal treno, giungendo a B****" (27), the most energetic poem of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*. In it, images and colors – but in particular the spirit of the poet-narrator – counteract the sorrow and languor of the preceding lyric works.

La casa splende bianca in riva al mare;
e la palma che svetta nell'azzurro,
il verde trapunto del giallo dei limoni,
la fredda ombra sotto la trama dei rami.
I suoni stridono sul cristallo del giorno,
una barca rossa si allontana piena di voci.
La ragazza che esce sulla spiaggia
ha dimenticato i sussurrati segreti della notte;
saluta con la mano alta i clamori della barca,
l'azzurro giorno marino, il sole già alto;
poi si china armoniosa a slacciare i sandali vivaci.

The house shines white on the sea coast;
and the palm tree that towers into the blue,
the green blanketing the yellow of the lemons,
the cold shade beneath the weft of the branches.
Noises screech on the crystal of the day,
a red boat sails away full of voices.
The girl who walks on the beach
has forgotten the murmured mysteries of the night;
she waves high to the clamorous boat,
to the marine blue day, to the already high sun;
then she bends elegantly to untie her lively sandals.

From the window of a train, the poet-narrator describes the passing seascape: bright colors and natural elements blend with a human presence that simultaneously disrupts and enhances the verdant seaside. The colors, lights, and sounds of "Dal treno, giungendo a B****" counteract the landscape portrayed in the opening poem of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*. The joyous scene witnessed by the train passenger recalls the glorious past of the island—inhabited by gods and nymphs—that the first poem of the collection is eager to dismiss. The vivacity depicted in the poem is, however, short-lived, likely a product of the poet-narrator's excitement about his imminent return to his island. Indeed, upon arrival, the effervescence of summer gives way to the decay of fall.

As a matter of fact, the three poems that follow break this enchantment of vitality. Each of them depicts a different moment in the transition from summer to fall and fall to winter while juxtaposing human silence and sloth to the noisy vigor of nature. In "Pioggia di settembre" (28) a summer storm – accompanied by the frantic movements and screeching of birds ("il grido dei corvi / urlante incalza il volo dei passeri" 2,7) – leaves room for the sun, that brings new life to the town. Once again, it is the energy of natural elements rather than the maneuvers of mankind that might rescue the place from certain death. As in "Aprile," the poet-narrator returns in "Fine dell'estate" (29) to images of youths and the natural landscape to help resuscitate the somber setting: "ragazzi scalzi invadono / i mandorleti: scettri di miseria;" "I loro occhi acuti / [...] scoprono / la nuda mandorla lasciata" (1s., 4-6). And in "Invernale" (30), Sciascia attempts to counteract the deadly specter of winter with nature and humans once again. The windy winter day blows toward an opaque window ("Il giorno soffiato in vetro torbido" 1), hitting heavy and fragile things ("cose fragili e grevi" 2). Trees will crumble, as will even the light ("gli alberi crolleranno [...], / crollerà [...] la luce" 3-4). But the sun rises to help, filling the gaps left by the wind and the cold (5-7). Human existence emerges as the only viable weapon against boredom, represented as a layer of lead ("la lastra di piombo della noia" 9).

In "Ad un amico" (32), Sciascia reiterates the idea that it is not humans who can redeem the ambience of mortality that permeates the town. In the two opening verses, the poet-narrator gazes into a friend's eyes to grasp what makes the two men different (1s.). What characterizes the other's gaze is hate and malice (3 and 5, respectively), found in the depths of his eyes like a dead man in a pit ("In fondo ai tuoi occhi, come un ucciso in un pozzo" 4s.). The image, which recalls the theme of death introduced early in the collection, also offers the second and final connection between the mafia and death: for the Sicilian mafia, those who commit a direct fault against the "cosca" are killed and left in plain sight; quite oppositely, the corpses of those who do not deserve to die are hidden from view.^[3] In the four verses that close the poem, the poet-narrator insists on saying that hatred is, in fact, the only force fueling the other man ("vivi soltanto per questo" 9). The intensity of this sentiment is exemplified by the lack of empathy felt in light of the poet-narrator's misfortune ("tu possa nel mio piatto povero / metter lo schifo di una mosca morta" 11s.).

The last two poems of Sciascia's collection guide the reader back to the sorrowful atmosphere that opens the work. In "Roncisvalle" (33), the lament of a horn ("il corno lugubre" 2) fills up time in a valley of death ("Suonare in questa valle [...] / che valichi gli anni" 1s.). This scene as well as the poem's title remind the reader of the death of the paladin Roland, who blows his olifant. In so doing, the reader is drawn full-circle, back to the negation of heroes declared in the collection's introductory poem, a notion that remains a feature of Sciascia's subsequent prose production (cf. Traina 1999, 12). The sound of incumbent death in "Roncisvalle" is juxtaposed with the arrival of

newborns, marked by an immediate condemnation: "la nuova schiera dei nati dalla terra, / a perire nello stesso gorgo" (5-6).

The poem "La notte" (34) closes *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, and a widespread sense of silence, death, and despair is the only protagonist of its verses. The night itself falls onto the houses like an avalanche ("frana cieca sulle case" 1). In an image that recalls of the eruption of Pompeii, this avalanche eliminates human existence by leaving only a "calco atroce" (3) that represents our last living presence ("l'ultimo nostro volto" 3) on the last night of the world ("nell'ultima notte del mondo" 4).

So far, this analysis has provided examples of the silence of Sicily and its people, and how together they adopt a primary role in the lyric collection. Stemming from the morose, noiseless landscape that Sciascia depicts, the voice of the poet-narrator grows louder to stress the importance of the 'word' in breaking the melancholy silence of Sicily. This voice-giving act represents a strategy that is fundamental to Sciascia's mission of decoding Sicily's essence through its silence ("mutare il nulla in parola" as Sciascia writes in "Hic et nunc"); doing so attempts to provide answers about the island's and islanders' enigmatic nature. It is a strategy, however, that is unlikely to be found in his prose, which is more concerned with documents, evidence, facts, reality. The medium of poetry, instead, permits the synthesis of the author's and the island's history through memory.

This fusion appears several times throughout *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* and is exemplified by the constant alternation between 'I', 'we', and 'it' or 'they'. In the collection's opening poem, for instance, the "[io] vorrei cogliere questa terra" of the first verse is accompanied by "la Sicilia ascolta la sua vita," as if the intention of the poet-narrator merges into Sicily's disposition to listen to its own past. In "Family reunion," too, the subjects are multiple. Even though the interlocutor of the poet-narrator might be a relative or a friend recently passed away, a number of the recurring themes of the collection – the word, silence, memory – appear in a sequence that combines the reiteration of 'we' ("potremmo dimenticare ogni parola, / lasciare che il silenzio ci salvi [...] fin quando ci accolga un fuoco certo" 10-13) with the impersonal ("si dissanguia la memoria" (12)).

2. "Sicilitude"

Beyond the poet-narrator's varied representations of the themes of silence and death, the notion of *sicilitudine* also plays a primary role in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* and in the rest of Sciascia's oeuvre. "Sicilitude" is a debated concept that has been discussed, among others, by Domenico Ribatti, Enzo Siciliano, and Joseph Farrell – and that has appeared, in English, in the work of Rino Coluccello (2016, 199). Ribatti uses Alberto Moravia's words as they appeared in an article of the *Corriere della Sera* after Sciascia's death: Moravia employs the term *sicilianità* and associates it with Sicily's mysterious and inexplicable features, adding that, for Sciascia, Sicily itself remained a mystery (Ribatti 1979, 10). Of paramount importance is Siciliano's point that Sciascia, unlike other authors who preceded him, was moved by the need to "conoscere e capire la Sicilia: non solo di rappresentarla" (Siciliano 1998, 61s.) – hence, Sciascia's unique interpretation of "Sicilitude." Finally, Farrell cites an interview of Leonardo Sciascia conducted by Tom Baldwin, in which the former explains the difference between *sicilianità* and *sicilitudine*. Sciascia says that "*Sicilianità* is a kind

of ideology of *Sicilianismo*, which is itself the ideology of the mafia. *Sicilitudine* for me is the consciousness of being Sicilian, but, as it were, transposed into literary terms" (Farrell 1995, 39). Sciascia adds, "*Sicilitudine* is the nobler side of 'feeling Sicilian'" (ibid.).

Thus, it is for the reasons expressed by the author himself that I consider *sicilitudine* ("Sicilitude") instead of *sicilianità* ("Sicilian-ness") to analyze *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*. In regard to the two elements that compose *sicilitudine* – the island and the islanders – Giudice (1999, 45) points out that, for Sciascia, Sicily and Sicilians were two separate entities. While the former adopted the form of an atemporal symbol that transcended geography, the latter only existed in a specific time and space (45). Yet *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* merges together these two dimensions in a specific time-space hybrid: the memory.

The element of memory and the act of its transcription remain a constant across Sciascia's literary production. But his prose always encloses Sicily and Sicilians in a particular time and space. Instead, the poems of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* offer the unique opportunity to view the panorama and inhabitants of Sicily as a symbol, and to imagine Sciascia's personal attachments through the ambiguous chronology of memory that is simultaneously recognizable and atemporal. In these lyric works, Sciascia's *sicilitudine* is distilled through two elements: the silence and provincialism of its inhabitants, and Sicily's melancholy character. Through the poems, which stem from Sicily and return to Sicily, the poet-narrator embarks on an intimate voyage that aims to unravel the essence of "Sicilitude:" first for himself, and then for the reader. The timeless landscape evoked by the poet-narrator contributes to Sciascia's overarching mission of acknowledging and comprehending Sicily – "conoscere e capire," as Siciliano writes – in a more absolute way than the author's prose. The atemporality that characterizes the works of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* merges the author's memory with the past of the island. Therefore, while Sciascia's prose is forced, by narratological devices, to set its narrative within a given time and space, Sciascia's poetry approaches "Sicilitude" through an ahistorical – and hence absolute – perspective.^[4] In doing so, the voice of the poet-narrator does not have to ascribe to the rationality that characterizes Sciascia's narrators and characters in his prose works. In *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, the lyrical self is completely absorbed in the exploration of its emotional bond with places and people.

Antonio Motta (2018, 1) argues that, for him, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* dismantles the figure of Sciascia as a committed author. Quite oppositely, I would argue that *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* provides a starting point to understand what motivated Sciascia to embark on his subsequent mission as an intellectual and a politician. Farrell writes that, along with Pier Paolo Pasolini and Alberto Moravia, Sciascia "belonged to a generation [...] who [was] imbued with a sense of the obligation of the 'intellectual' towards society;" yet, this mission was not linked to a specific political party or any ideology, as was the case for Elio Vittorini (3). At the same time, I do not believe that, as Gaspare suggests, Sciascia was looking at other models in order to 'find' Sicily ("la ricerca della Sicilia in un *altrove* [sic]") (52). Instead, throughout his life, Sciascia attempted to explain Sicily without trying to circumvent its inexplicability; in fact, he would tackle that same *sicilitudine* that emerges in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* in his prose, but through formats that escape the atemporality of memory. In other words, Sciascia resorts to prose because the stylistic constraints of poetry prevent him from explaining Sicily and *sicilitudine* to satisfaction.

The title of the collection itself, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, indicates a literary trip toward the inner soul of the author's motherland. It is not through rationality that the poet-narrator wanders, but

rather through the passions and emotions, or sometimes lack thereof. Furthermore, the section title "Foglietti di diario" suggests the process of extracting certain memories from one of the most personal objects of an individual – a diary – to share with the reader. This act of objectification can be interpreted as the poet-narrator's first step toward explaining "Sicilitude" through memory. In other words, the "Foglietti" represent the earliest process of translating intimate, subjective thoughts into a collection for public consumption – a collection that attempts to render "Sicilitude" accessible to the general public.

The opening poem, carrying the same title of the collection, introduces the work's thematic and stylistic elements while providing a declaration of literary intent. As mentioned above, its opening lines evoke Marc Chagall's *I and the Village* (1911). In the painting, a bovine figure, probably an ox, and a human stare at each other. The smiles of the two main figures, the juxtaposition of cold and warm colors, and the balanced presence of human, animal, and floral elements provide a sense of equilibrium and optimism. Sciascia nostalgically observes Chagall's painting, envying the serenity with which the Russian-French painter remembers his home village and his relationship with it. And Sciascia responds to Chagall's idyllic vision with gloom: pain, silence, and fear ("pena," "silenzio," and "paura," respectively) are the protagonists of Sciascia's memories about his village and his people.

This is the sort of dualism that makes *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* important and unique within Sciascia's oeuvre. As Giovanna Jackson has pointed out, and as mentioned previously, Sciascia dismantles the longstanding portrayal of a bucolic Sicily. "From the *Idylls* of Theocritus of Syracuse," Jackson (1981, 41) writes, Sicily's nature "is idealized and she offers a setting of beauty, calm and order". Other Sicilian authors like Verga, Vittorini, Tomasi di Lampedusa, Brancati – to name a few – interrupt this vision (cf. *Ibid.*, 41). Sciascia moves this impulse forward, "us[ing] the natural elements [...] to represent a nature which is mainly hostile or absent from man" (*ibid.*, 42). His "descriptions of landscapes," as emphasized in the analysis above, "are ominous and often connected with death" (*ibid.*, 42). Jackson goes on to distinguish between two landscapes in Sciascia's corpus: the actual landscape, and what she defines as the "landscape of the mind" (*ibid.*, 47). This distinction, extremely evident in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, is carried forward in Sciascia's oeuvre to the extent that, through his lucid and rational style of prose, Sciascia presents to the reader a Sicily whose landscape is not colored by the author's personal memories.

With respect to this inner struggle, which undergoes a process of rationalization in Sciascia's prose, Domenico Ribatti (among others) has reflected on the dualism between "Sicilitude" (and the representation thereof) and rationality in Sciascia's work, including as regards the author himself. In fact, Ribatti (1979, 9) affirms that "il suo [Sciascia's] essere 'siciliano' [...] ed il suo essere 'razionale'" are the two elements that interest Ribatti from the very beginning. Liborio Adamo (1992) has delved deeper into Sciascia's relationship with Sicily and his *sicilianità*, saying that "[i]l rapporto di Sciascia con Regalpetra^[5] è quanto mai contraddittorio: odio e amore [...] lo definiscono. Due diverse realtà, due universi si scontrano: da una parte un uomo e il suo pensiero, dall'altra un paese inchiodato, muto nella sua povertà materiale e spirituale" (14s.). *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* is the only work by Sciascia in which this contradiction is presented without the author demonstrating an urge to resolve it.

La Sicilia, il suo cuore not only stands apart from the rest of Sciascia's production in regard to its style, as an intimate, sentimental, and sometimes hermetic portrait. It is Sciascia's mission that

undergoes a revolution in later works. As mentioned above, the emotional power of Sciascia's poetic voice is completely reversed in his prose, the lucidity and rationality of which epitomize the need to give voice to the inexplicable. The questions posed by Sciascia himself in those later works, however, remain unanswered. One of the explanations lies in his need to separate Sicilies and Sicilians in his prose, locating them in different times and places for stylistic reasons. Yet, the dismemberment of "Sicilitude" that occurs across Sciascia's prose corpus might be reassembled by returning to *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*: the poetic collection plants the seeds for the author's intellectual mission and provides answers to questions of "Sicilitude" that recur time and time again in his prose.

3. The Exordium Memoir

In this sense, although Sciascia's poetry has not attracted significant attention from literary critics, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* is noteworthy for how it bridges Sciascia's literary exordium and the rest of his production. While the style of Sciascia the prose writer differs significantly from Sciascia the poet, the vast majority of the themes contained in his prose production are already present in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*. At the same time, the emotional complexity that emerges from his lyric leads Sciascia to a narrative dead end. Yet, by asserting that these poems are "poco liriche (...) e nel complesso poco riuscite" (Traina 1999, 204s.), Traina does not consider that the author's first and last attempt with poetry may very well coincide with the reason why Sciascia leaves poetry for prose. In the face of poetry's ambiguity and lack of clarity – rather in line with Sicily's own ambiguity and lack of clarity – Sciascia's search for further answers and better explanations propels the author from Racalmuto into his famed production. Borrowing from Walter Mauro, it can be said that the poems encapsulate Sciascia's "preistoria tematica" (Adamo 1992, 13): Sciascia's prose aims to contextualize historically what his poetry depicted in a timeless landscape and as the product of emotions and memory.

Nevertheless, Sciascia's experiments with prose, however extensive, lead to another dead end in his quest for answers. The idea that the historicizing process would de-lyricize the voice of the poet-narrator and, hence, shed light on Sicily and "Sicilitude," does not come to fruition. If on one side prose enables the author and non-Sicilian readers to explore Sicily's contradictions through sharper lenses, on the other side the themes that characterize Sicily in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* – death, silence, "Sicilitude" – are developed further without finding any significant resolution: they remain unsolved and, to a certain degree, unexplained, unclear, obscure, hermetic. For instance, the shortcomings of the majority of Sciascia's protagonists – as highlighted by Traina in *La soluzione del cruciverba* (9s.) – epitomize the difficulty of finding and describing truth and rationality in Sicily. The idea that prose can help the author explain some of the island's cultural and social features to both himself and to non-Sicilians turns out to be an illusion, for reasons that are already evident in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*.

The personal history and the memory of the poet-narrator reveal themselves to be entrenched in Sicily's nature and in the experiences shared with past, present, and future islanders. The historicizing process of the prose veers away from providing an absolute answer to the questions Sciascia poses of Sicily – implicitly, rather than explicitly – in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*. Indeed, Sciascia's prose offers the opportunity to deconstruct history and memory into separate time-space

frameworks for each text. However, the absence of an intimate voice like that of the poet-narrator forces the prose-narrator to include non-Sicilians in the narratives; it is they who identify and seek to comprehend (to return to our earlier refrain) the silence and mystery of the island. In *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, human silence is broken by the liveliness of nature, whereas in Sciascia's prose human silence is broken by the voice of the narrator or of protagonists who attempt to decode the widespread silence. As a matter of fact, in many of his works, Sciascia employs diverse stylistic tools to break this silence in an effort to *explain* Sicily and Sicilians to mainlanders.^[6] In so doing, Sciascia's description of Sicily gradually adopts an artificiality that veers away from the island's portrayal in the poems of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*, where his representation is more obscure but closer to Sicily's hermetic essence. In fact, the poet-narrator recalls memories and thoughts about Sicily for his own sake, while the prose-narrator addresses an unspecified audience; in the prose, therefore, Sciascia must sacrifice "Sicilitude" in favor of clarity and reason.

The themes, style, and anxieties of *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* anchor Sciascia's literary production and intellectual commitment as well as the author's lifelong relationship to Sicily. Silence and "Sicilitude," entrenched simultaneously in the memory of the poet-narrator and in the island's timelessness, constitute a proper introduction to Sciascia's oeuvre. At the same time, reasons can also be found in *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* for Sciascia's continued failure to unravel fully the "Sicilitude" of his prose. The poetic collection's atemporality and fluctuating emotions, filtered through the lens of memory, portray a distilled form of "Sicilitude" that allows us to consider the rest of Sciascia's production in new light. The failed attempts of the prose to answer Sciascia's questions of "Sicilitude" suggest that, in regard to this goal, poetry went as far as prose. In sum, on one side *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* reveals the near totality of Sciascia's themes in the literary production that follows. On the other side, the collection offers a compelling explanation of Sicily and "Sicilitude" that the prose production matches but does not surpass. For these reasons, *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* can be considered, simultaneously, Sciascia's exordium and memoir.

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Note

- [1] In the title of these poems the author writes where they were written: Rapolano Terme, Siena, San Gimignano, Roma.
- [2] *La Sicilia, il suo cuore* is preceded only by *Favole della dittatura* (published two years before, in 1950).
- [3] In *The Day of the Owl*, for instance, the corpses of entrepreneur Salvatore Colasberna, murdered for refusing criminal deals, and Little Priest, killed for double-crossing the mafia, are left in the town's main square and in front of his house, respectively. Conversely, the tree pruner is eliminated because he sees, by mistake, Colasberna's murderer: his body is hidden in a deserted area.
- [4] Most of Sciascia's novels refer to historical events that took place in Sicily or fictionalize real-world characters and facts. Sciascia's search for the truth, or for features based in reality that are somehow revealing about Sicilian mores, forces him to provide context for his novels. Such limits are absent from *La Sicilia, il suo cuore*.
- [5] A literary alias for Racalmuto.
- [6] In *The Day of the Owl*, for instance, Sciascia brings a northerner, the *carabinieri* captain Bellodi, to investigate on the murder of a little town. The presence of an *alien* justifies the multiple explicit explanations that many characters give about local customs and habits – that would, otherwise, remained unsaid.