

GIUSEPPE FAVA'S INTELLECTUAL COMMITMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME

"Alien Sciascia": a reversed poetics

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Abstract

Throughout his professional career as a journalist, Giuseppe Fava (1925-1984) developed an ethical conception of journalism as a social force capable of preventing and fighting social injustice. A very similar ethics found expression in his intellectual activities as a novelist, playwright, screenwriter and documentarian. Through an analysis of *Alien Sciascia*, the ironic portrait that Fava made of his most famous and respected contemporary, Leonardo Sciascia, this article aims to provide insight into Fava's literary ethics and poetics, as well as into his interpretation of the intellectual's function within society and in the fight against organised crime. What emerges is a call for intellectuals to act as involved inter-generational bridge figures who have witnessed and critically analyzed the tragic consequences of mafia violence and oppression in the decades following World War II without giving in to feelings of hopelessness or cynicism.

Keywords: Giuseppe Fava, anti-mafia movement, critical consciousness, intellectual commitment, Leonardo Sciascia

Introduction

Next January will be the thirty-fifth anniversary of Giuseppe Fava's foundation of his own monthly magazine, *I Siciliani*, with which he aimed to give an audible and truthful voice to the 'righteous Sicilians' as well as to contribute to the cultural renewal of the island and to its liberation from the mafia.¹ It marked the culmination of his long professional career as a journalist, during which he had moreover proved himself as a novelist, playwright, screenwriter and documentarist. Despite the various cultural forms of Sicilian and Italian upstream anti-mafia engagement across Italy that have drawn and continue to draw inspiration from his creative acts, Fava's

¹ See *I Siciliani*, *I Siciliani perché?*, in "I Siciliani", 1984, 12, p. 1.

assassination by the Catanese mafia on 5 January 1984, shortly before the publication of the twelfth issue of *I Siciliani*, has long overshadowed the public memory and appreciation of his cultural versatility and social function as an intellectual. Through an analysis of the article *Alien Sciascia*², in which Fava made an ironic portrait of his most famous and respected contemporary, Leonardo Sciascia, this contribution³ aims to provide insight into Fava's literary ethics and poetics, as well as into his interpretation of the intellectual's function within society and in the fight against organised crime. What emerges may still provide mental stimulation to those who fear the self-destruction of the anti-mafia movement due to abuses and internal conflicts, as well as to those intellectuals who seek to unite and guide the younger generations in their search for social justice.

1. An ethical conception of journalism and literature

*"I do not believe that there are any differences between one man's various ways of being: each one of them is imbued with the others, each one of them is part of the others. There is an interdependency between all activities of one and the same man. That is to say that I am a dramatist because I am a journalist, or rather, I am a certain type of dramatist because I am a certain type of journalist. Had I been a painter, an engineer, a plumber or a peasant (because also peasants can be dramatists), I would probably have written a different kind of theatre plays. As I am a journalist (for I consider myself a journalist, I passionately want to be a journalist), I am inclined towards making a certain type of theatre, which is not the only way of making theatre, but one way of making theatre."*⁴

For Giuseppe Fava, journalism was a way of life and of approaching his contextual reality, which pervaded the wide variety of intellectual activities in which he

² See Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, in "I Siciliani", 1983, 5, pp. 86-95.

The full text of the article can be found here: <http://www.fondazionefava.it/sito/i-siciliani/sciascia-alien/>.

³ The content of this article is part of the author's doctoral dissertation in Italian Literature, entitled *Truth. Justice. Freedom. Giuseppe Fava's narrative documents of the Southern soul as catalysts for contemporary anti-mafia culture*.

⁴ Salvo Barbagallo, *Il dolore di un uomo come tanti*, in "Espresso Sera", 10 November 1983. My translation.

engaged as a writer and artist. In his last television interview, Fava moreover stated that his journalistic experiences were the main source of inspiration for his narratives about the Sicilian mafia.⁵ Over the years, Fava had developed an ethical conception and practice of journalism, which he put in writing in the by now legendary article entitled *Lo spirito di un giornale*. It provides important insights into what specific 'type of journalist' Fava was, into his journalistic involvement and commitment as well as into the essential role he believed journalism could perform in society. In his view, it was only when correctly informed of the injustices, problems, facts, stories and persons that composed the reality they lived in, that Sicilians could make decisions and start solving their problems by following their conscience. Where there is truth, he affirmed, justice can be enhanced and freedom can be defended.⁶ Fava called for journalism to be an active, bold and open participant in Sicilian society rather than a mouthpiece for its most powerful representatives and to accept responsibility openly and unashamedly for assuming such a role. From this point of view, journalism takes on an emancipatory force, aimed not just at informing readers, but also at handing over to them some essential keys to a fuller understanding and a more active interpretation of reality, as well as to a more conscientious interaction with it. By actively involving readers in the pursuit of truth, journalism could contribute to creating an atmosphere in which Sicilians regained their capacity to choose, act and make their own decisions in the pursuit of social justice and freedom.

Fava's journalistic orientation strongly influenced the way in which he approached reality as a writer and artist. What is more, to some extent, his journalistic and literary activities served a similar function. Theatre, he once said, is a way of searching for the truth that coincides with that of journalism.⁷ Accordingly, he described various of his theatrical works as *documents* of his time. This implies that unveiling the truth was an activity that Fava did not exclusively reserve for his journalistic profession. Some of the most important truths that Fava sought to unveil

⁵ Giuseppe Fava, *Film Story - Mafia e Camorra*, Enzo Biagi (ed.), Milan, Retequattro s.r.l.

⁶ My translation.

⁷ My translation. Quoted in Giuseppe Fava, *A che serve essere vivi. Tutto il teatro, volume 1*, Bietti, Milan, 2014, p. 10.

and document in his journalistic works lay hidden beneath the surface of news stories and deep inside the hearts of the people who were most directly involved in the events on which he reported. The relationship that he conscientiously chose to establish with them was one of close engagement, of emotional though critical and professional involvement characteristic of an active witness. His journalistic writings aimed to do more than report bare facts; they aimed to offer keys to a critical reading of reality and to an understanding of the social injustice that was hidden behind its greatest challenge. As a consequence, some of the truths that Fava unveiled through his close engagement with his culture and society could not be contained in strictly journalistic terms. In order to grasp and to render the human condition behind the ills of his society, Fava adopted a flexible and open writing style already within his journalistic reports. He moreover documented some of the truths that already transpired through the most poetic and passionate episodes in his journalistic works through wholly different channels that offered him unrestricted poetic freedom, giving form to literary and artistic creative acts and to creative acts that almost unnoticeably crossed the boundary between journalism and fiction. The aim of these documents, Fava's colleague Michele Gambino⁸ stresses in *Prima che la notte*, was always the same:

“In his articles, the accuracy of the facts is the least of his problems. He is much more interested in the human beings, in the way the facts exalt and overwhelm them. Actually, the people in his articles speak and move as though they were characters performing on stage. In the documentaries about Sicily he made for Rai with Vittorio Sindoni, actual interviews alternate with interviews shot with actors and sometimes it is hard to tell the difference. And yet it is not a scam, but a staging of reality. Fava trusts in the intelligence of the spectator, the spectator has to trust him: even though what I am showing you might be fake, it nevertheless represents the truth. In all his works – of journalism, cinema, theatre, painting – reality is treated as screenplay material, and fiction helps him to give a better description of reality. There is no difference between

⁸ Like Antonio Roccuzzo, Riccardo Orioles, Claudio Fava and others, Michele Gambino belonged to the editorial team of *Giornale del Sud* and later of *I Siciliani*, put together by Fava in 1980.

an article and a staging, for the aim is always the same: to denounce and fight the misery of the human condition.”⁹

Apart from complementing his journalistic activity in order to give an even more truthful account of Sicilian reality, narrative fiction moreover offered Fava the opportunity of applying what the existentialists describe as a “powerful mode of engaging the free imagination of the reader and thus of calling them to action”.¹⁰

2. A reversed poetics

From a contemporary perspective, the symbiotic relationship that Fava established between journalism and fictional storytelling in search of a new discourse that gave a full and authentic picture of his epoch has played an essential role in the innovativeness of Fava’s cultural acts within Sicilian society. As Vincenzo Consolo suggested in his essay *Un rumoroso e fastidioso estraneo*,¹¹ though, the consequent hybridity and immediacy of his oeuvre may nevertheless have caused some of his contemporaries to fail to regard Fava as a literary writer or as an intellectual of full status. Also as a public figure, Fava differed too strongly from the protagonists of the official Catanese intelligentsia to move in the same circles as they did. In *Mentre l’orchestrina suonava “gelosia”*, Fava’s colleague Antonio Roccuzzo¹² compares and contrasts the main differences between Fava and this intellectual elite:

⁹ Claudio Fava and Michele Gambino, *Prima che la notte*, Baldini & Castoldi, Milan, pp. 24-25. My translation.

¹⁰ Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*, in “The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy”, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2015. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-existentialist/>

¹¹ The essay appeared in a series of “promemoria” of thirteen Italian journalists and intellectuals in the first issue of *I Siciliani* to be published after Fava’s assassination on 5 January 1984. Rather than in memoriam notices of Giuseppe Fava, these notes aimed to help the readers and authors to remember the function that Fava had fulfilled as an intellectual in the previous decades and on the potential effectiveness of his project of cultural renewal of Sicilian society.

¹² In this autobiographical work, Antonio Roccuzzo focuses on his experiences as a young journalist working for and with Giuseppe Fava in the editorial teams of *Giornale del Sud* and *I Siciliani*, between 1980 and 1984. From this book – together with Neapolitan journalist, writer and director Gualtiero Peirce – Roccuzzo adapted the script for the docufiction *I Ragazzi di Pippo Fava*, which was broadcast on Rai 3 on the day of the thirtieth anniversary of Fava’s assassination.

“To academic and modernist Catania, Fava did not appear scientific enough. A street kid who had written moralistic books and comedies about the corruption of the powerful and about the destiny of being Sicilian. And to intellectual Catania that magazine of his appeared old-fashioned because it made accusations against the only modern firms, because it spoke of peasants who became migrant workers, because it was pacifist and Sicilian. It dealt a lot with humanity, but never with the quaternary sector.”¹³

What emerges from this comparison is that a part of the Catanese intelligentsia believed that Fava focused too much on raising awareness of specific local issues and too little on the self-referential intellectual discourse on literature and research in which they were more interested. Indeed, Fava never gave a comprehensive account of his literary or dramatic poetics and neither did he write an essay about what he believed to be his specific function as an intellectual or literary author within Sicilian society. Or rather, he did not formulate his ideas on the subject as concretely as he had done for his conception of journalism in *Lo spirito di un giornale*. And yet, Fava wrote one text that offers a deeper understanding of his literary and artistic poetics, as well as of the role he believed intellectuals should fulfil in Sicilian society and in the fight against organised crime. *Alien Sciascia* – subtitled ‘portrait of a living Sicilian myth’ – was a sharp, poignant and ironic portrait of novelist, essayist, playwright and politician Leonardo Sciascia, one of the most famous Sicilian intellectuals of Fava’s time who was moreover internationally renowned for his literary anti-mafia commitment. This highly critical article about what Fava believed to be the alienated and alienating cultural response that the Sicilian intelligentsia offered to their tragic present was published in the fifth issue of his monthly magazine *I Siciliani* and clearly reflected the growing divergence among intellectuals and citizens about the right cultural and civic approach in relation to the fight against organised crime.

By May 1983, Fava and *I Siciliani* had put themselves on a militant collision course with the Sicilian mafia and with its partners within the political and economic

¹³ Antonio Roccuzzo, *Mentre l’orchestrina suonava “gelosia”: crescere e ribellarsi in una tranquilla città di mafia*, Mondadori, Milan, 2011, p. 114. My translation

establishment of their island. In the fifth issue they also clearly stated their position on the role that a part of the Catanese and Sicilian intelligentsia was assuming in the fight against the mafia. They believed it to be characterised by what they called marginal and second-hand *sciascismo*: intellectuals, politicians and a whole generation of middle-aged citizens dropping quotes of Leonardo Sciascia – ‘sciascisms’ – out of context and sustaining especially his most sceptical opinions about the new anti-mafia social movement that was gaining strength at the time. About Sciascia’s position on the *sciascismo* front, Antonio Roccuzzo recalls that

“despite himself, in the last years of his life – and well after that – the writer had been dragged into precisely one of those typical paradoxes that he had described in his first great novels: that of the exculpatory witness who is called to the field by a swarm of councillors and politicians facing moral difficulties rather than being quoted by ordinary citizen readers.”¹⁴

Far from questioning his authority as a literary author and as the first Sicilian literary author to have turned the mafia as a factual phenomenon – as well as its political and economic interests¹⁵ – into narrative material, they took a clear stand against Sciascia’s sceptical attitude towards the renewed anti-mafia movement that was taking form from the bottom up among Sicilian students and in the growing Sicilian civil society¹⁶. The assassination of General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa had recently intensified the spontaneous growth and activity of a variety of autonomous anti-mafia initiatives and associations, the protagonists of which were especially

¹⁴ *Ibidem*. My translation.

¹⁵ In the July issue of *I Siciliani*, Fava wrote the following about *Il Giorno della Civetta*: “Twenty years ago, Leonardo Sciascia wrote *The day of the owl*, changing the concept that the Italians had of the mafia and changing especially the relationship between the conscience of the Italians and other forms of power that had until then been regarded inviolable: the great clergy, justice, the government. ... Ever since then, no one has written another *The day of the owl*. Not even Sciascia.”, p. 23. My translation.

¹⁶ In what follows, I shall use the term ‘civil society’ to refer to what Paul Ginsborg defines as “an area of interaction which fosters the diffusion of power rather than its concentration, builds horizontal solidarities rather than vertical loyalties, encourages debate and autonomy of judgement rather than conformity and obedience.” cfr. Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its discontents 1980-2001*, Penguin Books, London, 2001, p. 95.

young and educated militants.¹⁷ Rather than simply as another polemic against Leonardo Sciascia, though, *Alien Sciascia* can be regarded as a highly satirical negative from which a positive print of Fava's intellectual and literary commitment of the preceding decennia can be extracted. As a consequence, it offers a very interesting starting point for an analysis of the most fundamental differences between Fava's intellectual commitment and that of his contemporaries. It will, moreover, help to provide insight into the complementarity and compatibility of Fava's commitment with that of the younger generations that harboured the hope and willingness to act in opposition to the mafia and to change their society. Interestingly, Leonardo Sciascia never responded to the portrait that appeared of him on the pages of *I Siciliani*.

Through ten critical observations, in *Alien Sciascia*, Giuseppe Fava dissected the character, the intellectual attitude and the motivations of his contemporary, whom he stated to be "Sicilian like no other and yet completely different from any other Sicilian".¹⁸ The observations can be grouped into three categories, three areas in which Sciascia and Fava fundamentally differed from one another as writers and intellectuals and from which not only some of the most original threads running through Fava's multi-faceted oeuvre can be inferred, but also the innovativeness of his conception of intellectual commitment in the fight against social injustice and organised crime. They can be formulated as follows: the intellectual's involvement in society, the staging of the human condition behind the burdens of that society and the possibility of redemption and renewal for Sicilian society.

2.1 The intellectual's involvement in society

Fava immediately set the tone for his article by stating Sciascia to be the greatest Italian writer and certainly the only one with European fame. If a top ten of the greatest Italian writers were to be made, he wrote, Sciascia and Moravia would nevertheless be the only living in a list of dead protagonists who belonged to a

¹⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *L'Italia del tempo presente. Famiglia, società civile, Stato. 1980-1996*, Einaudi, Turin, 1998, p. 236.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, in "I Siciliani", 1983, 5, p. 87. My translation.

bygone culture.¹⁹ In his two following observations, Fava illustrated his statement by suggesting Sciascia to have adopted a highly aloof attitude towards the themes and contradictions that affected their contemporary society. With this quality, Fava stated ironically, Sciascia could moreover have become the greatest Italian journalist of all:

“By standing there, motionless in his place, he has been able to measure the velocity at which the event has evolved and, while it moved, to observe it in its various aspects. He therefore knows it perfectly, unlike those who, out of passion or out of a humane interest, travel along with the event or within the event itself, and can therefore always know but one aspect: their own. While others seethe, Sciascia remains ice-cold: neither grief, pity, nor emotion will make him budge even an inch from his view on the human event. In the eternal conflict between reason and sentiment he has always motionlessly sided with the former. His greatness is also his weakness. Sciascia is the icy, motionless electronic brain.”²⁰

With this juxtaposition, Fava openly affirmed his own approach to important issues in their society to be diametrically opposed to Sciascia's. The two profiles that Fava outlined here agree with two diametrically opposed journalistic orientations: a mainly aloof and rationalist orientation on the one hand, and a mainly subjective and involved one on the other. The latter closely corresponds to what John Calhoun Merrill has termed the “existential” journalistic orientation.²¹ Sciascia's detachment, his overly rational intellectual orientation and his infallible logical strictness, Fava wrote, had resulted in his isolation, in his having escaped into an inauthentic moral personage who perfectly mastered each of his acts, words, thoughts and solutions, but never acknowledged his own fragility or faults.²² This attitude – Fava implied – moreover caused polemics²³ like the one between Sciascia and General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa's son Nando to escalate and prevented intellectuals who found

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 88.

²⁰ *Ibidem*. My translation.

²¹ John Calhoun Merrill, *Existential journalism*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1996, p. 8

²² Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 92

²³ Cfr. Sciascia's articles: *Mafia: così è (anche se non vi pare)* in “Corriere della Sera”, 19 September 1982; *Anche i generali sbagliano* in “L'Espresso”, 20 February 1983 and *Un Dalla Chiesa piccolo* in “L'Espresso”, 6 March 1983.

themselves on the same side of the fence with regard to the mafia from joining forces:

“Sciascia explains what pathetic human vanity got General dalla Chiesa killed, causing also the death of the girl he had married. Lacking even the slightest intellectual digression, his discourse has the infallible coherence of a theorem. But General dalla Chiesa’s son rises up, rebels and cries out that there is a mafia-like rationale behind Sciascia’s statements. He is a confused and tormented young man who knows for certain that his father ingenuously faced his own death, but he also knows that someone at the inscrutable political top sent him to die in Sicily. He does not know who, he does not have any evidence and he never will. He is a sad and furious young man who needs someone to firmly put their hand on his shoulder and say: reason with me, boy! Instead, Sciascia ... simply shouts at him that he is a wicked fool. He obliterates him, he obliterates every part of him: his reasoning, his grief at his father’s death, his rebellion, his desperation over the possibility of ever obtaining justice!”²⁴

The contrasting profile – which also emerges from Fava’s suggestion for a more empathic and constructive debate with dalla Chiesa’s son – more closely corresponds to that of the involved, participating and people-oriented intellectual “who is controlled by his sensitivity to people connected with the story,” a characteristic that was essential to Fava’s orientation towards a journalism of engagement in which also his artistic creative acts were rooted.²⁵ It can moreover be interpreted as a call for intergenerational dialogue and for a constructive communication process rather than for the unidirectional transference of opinions and analyses.

From his experience as a journalist, Fava understood that the intellectual’s representation of the mafia phenomenon should be indissolubly connected with an empirical knowledge and experience of the concrete problems within Sicilian reality and with an attentiveness to the human condition of the poorest Sicilians, whose voices were rarely heard. He found their despair and unhappiness to be indispensable to a thorough understanding of the remote, invisible and tragic causes

²⁴ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 93. My translation

²⁵ John Calhoun Merrill, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

of the mafia. In *Alien Sciascia*, Fava noted Sciascia's intellectual approach to Sicilian reality to somehow lack this necessary involvement. In his opinion, Sciascia had become a detached observer of the mafia tragedy – who philosophised on the phenomenon from a safe distance²⁶ – rather than an active witness who experienced and investigated it in order to be able to represent it in his works:

*“Sciascia is a genius and he is considered a mafiologist. ... In fact, Sciascia knows everything about the mafia, but in the same way as Kant knew everything about the Prolegomena. He has never truly given an account or an interpretation of the mafia phenomenon, but only a philosophy. He has given it a patent of intellectual dignity, he has forced statesmen, political analysts and heads of state to treat the mafia as one of the most fundamental topics of our time. Had he not been the most ruthless and lucid adversary of the mafia, Sciascia would have been the most brilliant mafioso of all.”*²⁷

Had Sciascia been raised in a different environment and by a different family, had he gradually acquired different sorrows and different hopes, then most probably his intellectual abilities would have been guided towards a wholly different direction, Fava suggested.²⁸ Even though he supported the existentialist proclamation that every conscious human being has the ability to transcend the facticity in their situation Fava stated that one almost had to be saint to be able to surpass all the conditions, enticements and needs of their environment.²⁹

²⁶ Fava's observation is reminiscent of Danilo Dolci's reply to Sciascia's critique of his non-violent methods in the fight against the mafia: “sarebbe serio, soprattutto per un siciliano, quando si parla di una situazione come questa, conoscerla anzitutto direttamente. Capisco che non esistiamo soltanto noi, chi l'ha mai detto?, ma se Sciascia vuol parlare di noi, di quello che facciamo, dovrebbe venire a vedere. E in tutti questi anni, non un giorno solo, non un minuto solo è venuto. ... dallo scrivere dei libri e romanzi di successo sulla mafia al prendere posizione diretta, qualche differenza corre. Scrivere romanzi di successo sulla mafia non credo possa incidere sulla scomparsa del fenomeno” (cf. Ragone 233).

²⁷ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 89. My translation.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 88.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 89.

2.2 *The human condition behind the burdens of society*

The detached and rational orientation that Sciascia adopted in relation to his society, Fava suggested in *Alien Sciascia*, moreover caused the writer to be completely out of touch with the human condition behind the most serious problems of Sicilian society, which he himself believed to constitute the most fundamental social components of the mafia phenomenon.³⁰ This moreover resulted in his detachment from the characters and their human condition in his narratives about the mafia:

*“Mafiosi are the way they are because of a historical configuration of elements: psychology, traditions, conflicting interests. In all Sciascia’s books, the violence of men derives from their having been determined characters from the very beginning. In none of these characters can one ever discern the social suffering of men, the sorrow of the individual, their desperation to somehow change their fate. In other words, they never embody the ancient and unchanged sorrows of the South: misery, solitude, ignorance.”*³¹

This view on Sciascia’s creation of mafia characters was in stark contrast with the way in which Fava himself translated his empirical and involved journalistic approach to reality into fictional writing. The characters of his plays and novels – including criminals and mafiosi – rarely fit the preconceived images that are usually associated with their roles: they are human beings whose true essence derives from their values and from the choices they make. Finding out what experiences, dreams, fears and frustrations motivated these choices – and thus what social mechanisms, despair, misery and solitude were hidden behind the *cronaca* of his times – were essential threads running through Fava’s fictional works. From his analysis emerges that the highly diverging approaches to the construction of the characters that populated their narratives made Sciascia and Fava two very different directors of the staging of Sicilian reality:

³⁰ Cf. Giuseppe Fava, *Mafia. Da Giuliano a dalla Chiesa*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1983, p. 21.

In this essay, Giuseppe Fava stated that the mafia phenomenon was made up of three fundamental social and human components: the misery of the individual, the fear that terrorised Sicilian society and the distance and absence of the State.

³¹ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 89. My translation.

“The characters come onstage already perfectly delineated, with all their clothes on. Each of them has to recite lines that have already been written, without ever explaining why they are either the good, the bad, the killer, the witness or the victim, without ever explaining how it all happened: because of what grief, what act of rebellion, what deceit this one ended up in the role of the assassin and the other one in that of the victim. ... It seems as though Sciascia enters the theatre while the performance of being Sicilian has already begun and as though he aims to base his interpretation of the protagonists on nothing more than the words they utter. The rest, the past, what has already been said and done is of no consequence. It is obscure. Intuition becomes very difficult. The intellectual game becomes all the more fascinating.”³²

Again, the contrast between Fava’s and Sciascia’s intellectual approaches to the characters that populated their fictional reality³³ is one between a so-called “factualist” approach “which focuses on *what* [is] said or done”, and a “personalist” one, in which the *why* behind the events is of major importance.³⁴ Despite the choreographic perfection with which Sicilians sometimes seemed to interpret their roles in the ‘tragedy of the South’ or in the Sicilian ‘misery show,’ as he remarked in his essay *Processo alla Sicilia*, Fava was nevertheless attentive to the human condition of its protagonists.³⁵ The main question that interested Fava when he investigated the reality of the sulphur mines in Caltanissetta or when he created a character that worked in the mines, for instance, was ‘who would risk their own life or have their lungs damaged by sulphur?’ and thus what other options they had in order to survive.³⁶ These questions offered him the possibility of inviting his reading public to reflect on the inequitable distribution of roles in their society and to critically reflect on its causes: ‘in the sulphur mines you will never find that peasant

³² *Ibidem*. My translation.

³³ In *La Sicilia come metafora*, Sciascia himself stated that the freedom of his characters and the *why* behind their actions were not always of primary importance to the aim of his narratives: “in my works, policemen simply embody the law ... honest and strict, inspired by good principles, those principles that inspire each democratic state, but they are practically reduced to impotence. In any way, my policemen are ideas rather than characters, abstractions rather than reality”, pp. 67-68. My translation.

³⁴ John Calhoun Merrill, *Existential Journalism*, cit., p. 19.

³⁵ Giuseppe Fava, *Processo alla Sicilia*, Fondazione Giuseppe Fava, Catania, 2008, p. 93.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

who had a good piece of land to cultivate, nor that craftsman who knew how to make shoes and who sold them at a good price, nor that unsuccessful student who still hoped to find a job, nor that mechanic who knew how to repair cars'.³⁷ Similarly, in his novels and scripts, Fava explored the reasons why his protagonists either worked in the mines, decided to emigrate or even committed crimes, as well as the hopes they had of improving their living conditions.

2.3 The possibility of redemption and renewal

From Fava's observation emerges yet another contrast, namely that between an author who staged especially his own interpretation of Sicilian reality as a static entity and an author who staged his unceasing effort at discovering and understanding the human condition behind the ever transforming Sicilian reality. This contrast resulted in the different degree of autonomy and self-determination that Sciascia and Fava respectively granted to the protagonists of their narratives.

*"Sciascia is the less Pirandellian of all modern writers, for he denies his characters any form of independence. ... he is a tyrant, he does not grant his characters any faculty at all. They are never in search of an author, neither are they ever different from who they appear to be, and not even different from who they would like to be. They are simply who Sciascia has decided them to be. It's all Sciascia's work: he only grants freedom to the powerful and he only grants power to the talented."*³⁸

Fava reproaches Sciascia for giving his characters unalterable destinies and, in doing so, denying them the existential freedom to which all human beings are by nature condemned. From this point of view, Fava's critique of Sciascia's attitude as a writer is highly reminiscent of French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre's fierce attack on his contemporary François Mauriac, entitled *Monsieur François Mauriac et la liberté*. In this open letter, Sartre denounced Mauriac's attitude as an omnipotent and omniscient demiurgic author who manipulates his characters as though they

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 92. My translation.

were marionettes, and contrasted it with his own existentialist aesthetics: “Do you want your characters to live?” Sartre wrote, “See to it that they are free. It is not a matter of defining passions and unpredictable acts, still less of explaining them..., but rather of presenting them”.³⁹ Those characters to whom Sciascia consistently granted the least existential freedom of all, Fava argued, were women:

“Sciascia probably does not consider woman equal to man, neither as an individual, nor within history. She is an aggregation, an appendix, an element of entertainment. Women ... come onstage to play their part and that’s it. They are uninfluential, they utter sounds, they do not communicate feelings. Extras who, if anything, are of use to the witty remarks and observations of men. At best, they are supporting actresses who are of use to the dialogue, in which the male protagonists nevertheless end up formulating the most essential thought, the only one worthy of respect.”⁴⁰

In contrast to this description of their counterparts in Sciascia’s works, Fava’s female characters were mostly given central roles. Many of them moreover embodied the possibility of resistance against the wrongs in the especially male-dominated Sicilian society. Like many other characters in Fava’s novels and stage plays, women often rebelled against the destiny to which society had condemned them. *Prima che vi uccidano* clearly illustrates this: each and every one of the innumerable characters in this novel somehow rebels against their being no more than products of their own history, against being trapped in their situation. Even though their rebellion does not always have its desired effect, these characters nevertheless live in the hope that one day they will be able to transform their own reality or that they will at least understand the deeper meaning behind their suffering. The possibility of rebellion and of active participation in liberating action upon reality was a potential that Fava attributed to all individuals in society – either within their own minds or in their personal environments – and to Sicilian civil society in general. And this is the area in which Fava may have differed most fundamentally from his contemporary Sciascia. If the mafia was a phenomenon that

³⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Literary and philosophical essays*, Collier Books, New York, 1962, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., pp. 90-91. My translation.

had its roots in Sicilian society, Fava believed, then righteous Sicilians could also find the inner strength to fight it. His intellectual commitment to unveil the truth was inspired by his faith in man's individual existential freedom and potential of critical reflection and dialogue in order to creatively transform their situation and intervene in the historical process. It was aimed especially at raising his readers' awareness of that potential. From this point of view, Fava's article could moreover be seen as an appeal for hope, as an indispensable complement to a strong critique of the current state of affairs, in the light of a radical social transformation and cultural renewal of Sicily. A very similar emancipatory intellectual commitment to offering people useful keys to a critical interpretation of their contextual reality and, consequently, to transforming and liberating action upon that reality can be found in Danilo Dolci's dialectic research methodology named "reciprocal maieutic approach", as well as in the critical pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.⁴¹

In some of his works, Fava illustrated Sicilian civil society's capability of liberating action by referring to well-known historical episodes such as the insurrections of the 'Fasci siciliani dei lavoratori' (Sicilian workers leagues)⁴² in the early 1890s and the Bronte massacre⁴³ in 1860: they served to show that the Sicilians' capability of rebellion to the oppressors was as old as oppression itself and that citizens had the responsibility to act upon their reality democratically in order to avoid further bloodshed. In Sciascia's works, Fava remarked in *Alien Sciascia*, references to the past were motivated by quite different reasons and produced a very different effect on him as a reader. The historical events to which Sciascia referred, Fava wrote,

⁴¹ The reason behind the close similarities between Fava's intellectual commitment and that of his contemporaries Paulo Freire and Danilo Dolci – which I have explored in detail in my doctoral dissertation – can be found in the correspondences between the contextual realities with which they engaged very closely. The themes that characterised post-war Sicily and certain authoritarian regimes or underdeveloped societies in Latin America were very much alike and so were the artefacts that these intellectuals created in response to them.

⁴² Fava referred to the 'Fasci siciliani dei lavoratori' in his posthumously published play *America, America*. It was a revolutionary, predominantly socialist, movement that had his origins in Sicily between 1891 and 1894. The movement involved sulphur miners, peasants and labourers in the struggle against the exploitation and for the socialisation of all means of production and could be considered the first mass movement that opposed the mafia. By order of the Crispi government, their demonstrations and strikes were violently repressed by armed forces.

⁴³ The Bronte massacre was thematised in another posthumously published play entitled *Rivoluzione*. In this play, he makes explicit references to Giovanni Verga's novella *Libertà*, to illustrate how the Sicilian mafia had originated from the desperate attempt of oppressed citizens at rebelling against the grave social injustices inflicted on them by the dominant elite.

were never driven by the human needs and desperate rebellion of the masses, but by intelligent and strong obscure individuals to whom only Sciascia himself could relate:

“He despises the present ... Instinctively, while he should be speaking of our time he looks for ancient relatives: his conclusion, which is certainly erroneous and yet profoundly Sicilian, is that in fact nothing new ever happens, but that everything keeps on happening as it did a hundred or five hundred years ago.

In the South, of course. Everything happens so that everything can mysteriously remain unchanged. The Sicilian named Sciascia, who is the opposite or even the philosophical negation of the Sicilian named Pirandello, is identical to the Sicilian named Tomasi di Lampedusa. The history of the South remains unchanged: passion, hatred, love, ambition and betrayal endlessly repeat themselves. The only hypothesis of modification would be that of a great atomic blast, after which everything will finally be different. Or be no more!”⁴⁴

Even though, in 1960, Sciascia had expressed his regret at the fact that – through its sceptical and historical description of Sicilian reality – *Il Gattopardo* marked the end of neorealist literature as well as the victory of literary values over ideology and dissent; twenty years later, he acknowledged⁴⁵ that he had grown to agree with it and that his rereading of the novel had even strengthened his scepticism.⁴⁶ Fava suggested that, instead of drawing lessons from the past in order to gain a better knowledge and understanding of his present, Sciascia stressed the mystery in which reality was intrinsically shrouded. Sciascia moreover seemed convinced that Sicily was destined to relive its tragic history over and over again and that, consequently,

⁴⁴ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 97. My translation

⁴⁵ See Matteo Collura, *Sciascia. L'inguaribile Sicilia del gattopardo*, in “Corriere della Sera”, 2 November 1999, p. 31. “When ‘The Leopard’ was first published, I felt a surge of rebellion at the way in which the author described Sicily, as a geographic and climatic abstraction where nothing happened and nothing could change: he really dedicated it to immobility. Now, looking back years later, I must say that he was writing. But the fact that he was writing does not mean that I deny that ideas can move the world. It just kind of keeps alive my scepticism.” My translation.

⁴⁶ See Salvatore Costantino and Aldo Zanca (eds.), *Una Sicilia “senza”. Gli atti del convegno di Palma di Montechiaro del 27-29 aprile 1960 sulle condizioni di vita e di salute in zone arretrate della Sicilia occidentale*, curati da Pasqualino Marchese e Romano Trizzino, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2014, pp.293-94.

the mafia became an inescapable element of this destiny. Though he “sought to mediate between the mystery of Sicily and the reason of Europe,” Jane and Peter Schneider state in *Reversible Destiny*, “all the while [Sciascia harboured] deep reservations⁴⁷ about the extent to which a culture of reason could penetrate Sicily”.⁴⁸ In Fava’s view, Sciascia’s distrust of the Italian State, his pessimism regarding the future of his society and his deep-rooted scepticism towards its possibility of cultural renewal left no hope for rebellion and redemption and thus provided public opinion with little motivation, with no tasks to be undertaken, to engage in transforming action upon their reality. And this was something Fava felt his society – and especially the younger generations – to be in desperate need of at that specific moment in Sicilian history. From his statement that “dovendo parlare del nostro tempo, [Sciascia] va a cercare gli antichi parenti”, we can infer that Fava regarded it as the Sicilian writers’ duty to explore and discuss the themes of their contemporary reality and to approach them with due involvement.⁴⁹ By showing his readers what happened beneath the surface of their own reality and by presenting a full and recognisable picture of its protagonists – as he did in his journalistic writings – in his fictional narratives, Fava staged an active interpretation of that reality, a willingness to gain profound knowledge of its most pressing needs and to identify the causes of its most serious problems. In so doing, as a writer, he encouraged his readers to take on a similar attitude, so that together they could consider options for transforming reality.

In *Alien Sciascia*, Fava expressed his disappointment in how – throughout the 1970s – Sciascia’s intellectual attention seemed to have moved further and further away from specific problems in Sicilian society, away from the social relevance that, in the early years of his career, he still attributed to forms of *letteratura d’opposizione* through which intellectuals could make a pact with the disadvantaged classes.⁵⁰ He regretted that Sciascia had exchanged the recognisable contemporary Sicilian

⁴⁷ For Sciascia’s views on his own scepticism, see Leonardo Sciascia and Marcelle Padovani, *La Sicilia come metafora. Intervista a Marcelle Padovani*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milan, 1979, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Reversible Destiny. Mafia, Antimafia, and the Struggle for Palermo*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, p. 504.

⁴⁹ Giuseppe Fava, *Sciascia Alien*, cit., p. 97.

⁵⁰ See Salvatore Costantino and Aldo Zanca (Eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 293.

reality that he knew from personal experience for “unnamed spaces” and for a metaphorical Sicily that was “detached from [its] inhabitants and landscape,” until it represented nothing more than a “constructed space” or than an embodiment of the ‘space of the non-reason’ and of the ‘non-society’.⁵¹ His writings about the mafia underwent a similar evolution, Elizabeth Wren-Owens points out in *Postmodern Ethics*: while, in his earlier works, he showed “through his depiction of real space that the mafia was intrinsically woven into the social fabric of the island,” his later works drew “on conceptual space to engage with the idea that the mafia was becoming [a] universal evil”.⁵² Fava’s call for literature to retain a stronger connection to everyday reality again closely matches a more existentialist approach to literature, the main aim of which is to “properly [name] the world in order to unveil the immense injustice reigning in it”.⁵³

Fava concluded his article defining Sciascia as “maybe the most Sicilian of all great narrators of all times, and yet different from any other Sicilian. ALIEN!” and himself as “a Sicilian who is not fond of Sciascia, who considers himself identical to all other Sicilians of his time and who discovers the beauty of his life in this”.⁵⁴ What emerges from Fava’s concluding comparison is a clear dichotomy between two Sicilian intellectuals who belonged to the same generation and who found themselves on the same side of the fence with regard to the mafia phenomenon, but who had, nevertheless, developed different interpretations of intellectual commitment within society and with civil society. This dichotomy was in certain respects comparable to the one Consolo presented in *Un rumoroso e fastidioso estraneo*, seven months from then. “Contrary to us, who remained shut inside our houses, with music and poetry,” Consolo wrote to Fava, “you were outside, fighting for the living, against the most tragic and terrible things”.⁵⁵ From this point of view, the ‘Alien Sciascia’ that Fava presented in his article could be seen as one of the intellectuals who sought shelter from the violent Sicilian reality, self-defensively retreating in an attitude of

⁵¹ Elizabeth Wren-Owens, *Postmodern Ethics. The re-appropriation of committed writing in the works of Antonio Tabucchi and Leonardo Sciascia. 1975-2005*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2007, pp. 64-69.

⁵² *Ivi*, p. 70.

⁵³ Jean-Philippe Deranty, *op. Cit.*

⁵⁴ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 97.

⁵⁵ Vincenzo Consolo, *Un rumoroso e fastidioso estraneo*, in “I Siciliani”, 1984, 12, p. 45.

scepticism. Even though his metaphorical reclusion led to great literary works and sophisticated analyses of the recent history of Sicily and Italy, Sciascia seemed to have grown out of touch both with the reality that was raging outside that private world and with the people who were facing up directly to that reality. With *Alien Sciascia*, Fava contrasted this attitude with his own choice to take part in that reality and to seek to fully understand and experience its transforming dynamics. The fact that he stated himself to feel equal to all other Sicilians, in intellectual and any other status, suggests that Fava was convinced that all Sicilians who were ready and willing to do so could assume the role of intellectuals within society, engage in critical reflection on their reality and evaluate the possibility of changing it responsibly from within.

Conclusion

By satirically and ruthlessly desecrating the “living Sicilian myth” Sciascia,⁵⁶ the auratic image of a public figure who was widely respected as a mafia specialist and as a sophisticated ‘highbrow’ intellectual, Fava called attention to Sicilian civil society’s need for a more inclusive and dialogical form of intellectual commitment and thus for intellectuals who stood with both feet in their society and reflected with rather than for their fellow citizens. By actively stimulating their readers to engage in critical reflection upon the problems in their society, upon their relationship and responsibilities within that society and, consequently, upon their possibility of transforming it, intellectuals could actually have a bearing on Sicilian civil society’s emancipation from mafia oppression.

Rather than an exhaustive comparison between Sciascia’s and Fava’s works and intellectual orientations, my analysis has aimed to offer insight into Fava’s ethical conception of the intellectual’s function within Sicilian society. What emerges from *Alien Sciascia* is a call for intellectuals to act as involved inter-generational bridge figures who witnessed and critically analysed the tragic consequences of mafia violence and oppression in the decades following World War II without giving in to

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Fava, *Alien Sciascia*, cit., p. 86.

feelings of hopelessness or cynicism.⁵⁷ A call for intellectuals to raise their fellow citizens' awareness of the knowability and vincibility of the ever changing mafias by presenting them as objective-problematic phenomena that can be understood and solved and in the fight against which each citizen has an active role to play. A call for intellectuals to offer their readers keys to ways of understanding their contextual reality, so that they can become more critically aware of the mechanisms that make their societies vulnerable to corruption and organised crime, as well as of their individual responsibility in enhancing social justice. A call for intellectuals to stimulate their readers to act as self-conscious subjects of transformation who can critically intervene in reality and actively change the course of history. Where there is truth, justice can be enhanced and freedom can be defended.

⁵⁷ See Pierpaolo Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea*, Mimesis, Milan, 2012, p. 146.