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Chapter 1

What Is the Mafia?

The Mafia has long been a source of public fascination. Hollywood made its debut in organized crime in 1912 with D. W. Griffith's *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* and championed the genre again in 1922-23 with *Dr. Mabuse*

and *The Gambler* (Parts I and II), directed by Fritz Lang. Both dramas centered on a criminal boss, evil but charismatic. *Underworld* (1927) directed by Josef Von Sternberg signaled a remarkable first by presenting the mobster's point of view. The film earned many accolades, among these the "Best Story Award" for Ben Hecht. During the 1930s and 1940s Italian-American gangster films turned into a thrilling cult of killers engaged in a ruthless quest for power and money. *Little Caesar* (1930), starring Edward G. Robinson as Rico Bandello, an alias for Al Capone, was followed by Howard Hawks's *Scarface: The Shame of a Nation* (1932). Paul Muni was Tony Camonte, another alias for Capone. The film introduced machine guns allowing the carnage on screen to reach epic proportions with a total of twenty-eight victims. Richard Thorpe's *The Black Hand* (1950), New York's local version of the Sicilian Mafia, resumed the trend while Terence Young's *Joe Valachi* (1972) dramatized the mobster's revelations of *Cosa Nostra's* secrets to a congressional committee. American appetite for mob stories reached its zenith that year with Francis Coppola's *The Godfather* based on Mario Puzo's best selling novel. The film's phenomenal success was partly due to its emotional appeal. Marlon Brando as Don Corleone and Al Pacino as his son succeeded in conveying the strong family bond that made the saga of Sicilian-American immigrants especially appealing. *The Godfather* gave a perceptive rendition of what Sicilians call *sentire Mafioso* ("Mafioso feeling") an expression that conveys the blend of native pride and the resentment for governmental intrusion in family business that throughout history made the Mafia the only organization Sicilians could trust to protect their individual rights. Today *The Sopranos* revives an interest in Mafioso exploits and makes HBO's weekly series a must watch. As Steve Busceni, occasional director of *The Sopranos* makes clear, the reason Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) scores high notes with TV viewers lies in the intense emotional impact of the character often compelled to perform murderous deeds to keep intact the family's reputation and its hold on the business.

While *The Sopranos* offers an exceptional study of Mafia assimilation to the American way of life, the cultural and historical circumstances that shaped the Mafia in Sicily are quite different. Italian experts on the Sicilian Mafia generally agree that the *onorata società* ("honorable society") commonly known as Mafia, started in Sicily's *latifondi*, ("rural

communities”) as a safeguard against abusive local absentee landlords—mostly aristocrats—who eventually were expropriated and replaced by their clever Mafiosi administrators or *campieri*. The administrators made it their business to take advantage of the powerless farm hands that depended on them to make their living. Sicilian Mafia scholar Giovanni Cucinotta writes:

“The Baron who considered the administration of the feud and dealing with farm workers below his dignity, sent an administrator known as *campiere* [field supervisor] to defend and oversee his property. The stipend of the *campiere* was provided half by the owner and half by the farm hands. He also received a share of the land that he either tilled for himself or sublet to another party. His privileged position allowed the *campiere* to accumulate a capital and, as a consequence, to become part of a small group of landowners. Yet, how could the *campiere* who was, after all, little more than a farm hand achieve, stabilize and increase his newly acquired social status? By the use of violence. What was needed to advance from plain farm hand to *campiere* was not intelligence or education, but physical courage, open criminal tendencies and, most of all, the ability to suppress the rebellion of others like him. In conclusion, to be a guard for a landowner was to be a Mafioso. In the feudal system, violence was the supreme ruler. It is here [in feudal land] that we find bandits, thieves, along with farm workers. The *campiere* strikes a deal with the bandits, stipulates an agreement with the thieves and kills the rest.”¹

This is only the beginning of a social system that from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century led to a tax known as *gabella*, a form of taxation paid to the state for merchandise brought in from another territory. It was enforced by the *gabelloti* (“tax collectors”) who worked for the Barons exploiting the farm hands and appropriating the largest share of the income for their own use. The *gabelloto* (singular form of *gabelloti*) was not officially a criminal. By recycling stolen cattle and other merchandise, however, he made huge profits gaining prestige and consolidating his powerful hold on the economy. It is a chain-link of

exploitation prompted by the accumulation of goods or *la roba* that becomes an end in it.

Amassing riches and passing them on to the family is the object of every Mafioso who reaches his goal by embracing *omertà* (“code of silence”), and following the rules prescribed by the *padrino* (“godfather”) in charge of the *cosca* (“family”). By the way, *cosca* in Sicilian dialect means ‘artichoke’—in Italian the vegetable is called *carciofo*. When Italian newspapers refer to *politica del carciofo* (“politics of the artichoke”), they are referring to politics of the Mafia. Henner Hess² relates that Antonino Cutrera, in his early work *La Mafia e I Mafiosi, Origine e Manifestazioni*,³ explains:

“Each group of Mafiosi is allegorically represented by an artichoke whose trunk stands for the leader while its leaves stand for his followers. In fact, it is quite common to describe a man regarded as a valuable person as *lu trunzu ri l’omini* (“the trunk of the man”). The name *cosca* likens the Mafioso leader and the men grouped around him to the leaves of the artichoke.”

Because of its unique system of reciprocal dependency, the Sicilian Mafia calls for a special set of references marked by secrecy and minimal vocal communication or what Sicilians call *mezza parola* (“half a word”). Glances and intuition are the most effective means to reach mutual understanding. A progressive evolution of the means to secure *la roba* shows the Mafia’s exceptional adaptability to the passage of time. The role of the Mafioso in Sicily’s history links the Mafioso way of life to the traditions of the Sicilians so as to make the Mafia an indisguisable cultural manifestation; however, the Sicilians insist there is a distinction between Mafia and mafia. The Mafia refers to Mafioso as “the people who belong to organized crime,” and the second distinction is of a mafioso a “person who is proud to be Sicilian.”

Giovanni Cucinotta points out: “once more today we hear a distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Mafia. It’s difficult to know, however, or to explain where the ‘old’ starts and where the ‘new’ begins.”⁴ In spite of necessary adjustments to differing economic, political circumstances “the soul” of the Mafia has not changed. Cucinotta explains that there has been “an evolution” not a “revolution”

which has increased its power. Machiavellian to extremes and thus profitably opportunistic, the Mafia's motto all along has been "change with continuity,"⁵ which points to the necessity of flexibility according to the situation. Such attitude demands a closer collaboration with the government in Rome and extensive agreements with other European countries including the American Mafia. Although it is simplistic to reduce the Mafia to a formula, the latest definition given by the Italian government is "multinational of crime." The fulcrum of operations today is in Naples, where the *Camorra* (Neapolitan counterpart of the Sicilian Mafia) creates constant problems with drug trafficking and gang murders.⁶ Rome is actively contributing to Mafia power through a solidly installed bureaucratic system where the Mafia operates within a legal framework that occasionally includes the Vatican. Regions in central Italy do their part by transferring Mafia money through bank transactions. Thus *denaro nero* ("black or dirty money") is deposited and becomes quietly absorbed by banks uninterested in the provenience. Ironically, there are times when large amounts of this money are assigned to public buildings such as schools, hospitals, and sport arenas, even churches. Milan, one of Italy's foremost centers of business transactions, is pivotal to Mafia interests and has become a prosperous target for mob operations since the end of World War II.

Understanding this common Mafia jargon helps to achieve a closer perspective in the activities of the *onorata società* ("honorable society") while gaining more familiarity with the assorted blend of historical and cultural factors that rule Sicilian life. These particular terms give further insight into the structural, and the cultural counterparts that make the Mafia unique. Terms defining the Mafioso's behavior offer important clues about how the Mafia assigns roles to its members. *Pizzu*, for instance, is a tax prison inmates impose on newcomers to secure protection from dangerous surprises. Today, Italy and the United States still use *Pizzu*. *Cadavere eccellente* ("excellent corpse") indicates a prominent victim of the Mafia such as a *cornuto* ("cuckold")—the worst insult for a Sicilian—is occasionally used as a pretext to eliminate rival Mafiosi falsely accused of illicit relations with the murderer's wife. *Ngiuria* ("a blemish in the features") is an unmistakable mark of identification in the appearance of the individual that makes him recognizable. *Vendetta trasversale* ("vengeance across the line") implies

the slaughter of every member of the Mafioso's blood family regardless of its innocence, while its opposite, *vittoria trasversale* ("victory across the line") refers to victory over a rival *cosca* ("family"). *Commissione* is the name of the Mafia's high command. *Baccaglio* is Sicilian criminal jargon used in prison; *annacari* ("swaggering") is a Mafioso-style walk they use in religious processions. *Colletti bianchi* ("white collars") is someone with a desk job who leads a life within the law; bank employees working with the Mafia qualify for this category. A *Combinato* ("combined") is someone who has been initiated into *Cosa Nostra* ("Our Thing") as compared to its opposite *dissociato*. *Galantuomo* ("honest man") is a respected, well to do citizen who uses his power to increase his wealth and oversees business deals. *Malacarni* (Sicilian for "evil flesh") is someone who will commit any kind of evil or a betrayer. *Omu de panza* ("man with a belly") is a man who knows how to keep quiet and a *Pentitò* is a repentant Mafioso who "sings" to the cops to save his skin. *Picciottu* is a boy who aspires to become a *picciottu onoratu*, a 'boy with honor,' also called *soldato* ("soldier"). The boy must prove his courage by committing a murder before he becomes a "made man," a full member of the Mafia. Because of its system of promotions within the organization, the Mafia retains a collegiate structure advancing those candidates who show aptitude to succeed. As a rule the Sicilian family disposes of fifty members ranked in military order. The *soldato* can be promoted to *capo decina*, literally 'commander of ten,' and eventually to *capo-mandamento* a further step toward the summit of the Mafia, the Commission or Cupola. A *consigliore*, a trustworthy man of honor with exceptional mediating skills, functions as an advisor to the *padrino* ("godfather") and is not usually a lawyer as often surmised in American Mafia fiction. *Uomo d'onore posato* is a 'man of honor put down' and is expelled from *Cosa Nostra*. *Sbirro*, 'jailer' in archaic Italian, in Mafia jargon means 'policeman.' *Uomini qualificati* (also known as *specialisti*), are Mafia members assigned to specialized tasks such as money laundering. *Uomo rispettato* translates into 'a Mafioso who holds a high post in the hierarchy of power.'

To understand fully the Mafia's hold on the imagination of the public, it's useful to examine the way Italian cinema has approached the problem after World War II, often making the Mafioso a symbol of

resistance against government intrusion. Some of these pictures have been inspired by government indifference to the economic and social plight of Sicily and of southern Italy. Yet, in contemporary cinema, the direction seems to be changing. Courageous movie producers and directors are exposing risky endeavors that were staged by the Mafia. One of them, Michele Pantaleone, has had several unpleasant encounters with the Mafia because of their substantial investments in commercial films. Pantaleone has authored various reports on the subject, his best known,⁷ *Mafia e droga*, exposes the danger of producing a film on the Mafia. It is not rare for a producer to run into unusual complications. Sometimes, a producer is offered protection and, on occasion, is forced to hire collaborators or interpreters who are under the protection of *amici* ("friends"). When a movie concerning the real Mafia—as portrayed in Benigni's comic film, *Johnny Stecchino*—the producer has a reason to be nervous. Pantaleone explains that there are two scenarios that follow the proposal: either the producer ends the conversation with a quip aimed at his collaborators, "What if they shoot us?" or he considers the project but refuses to give an answer until the Italian Ministry of Entertainment has assured the distribution of the film through an agency that only on occasion grants a minimal income guarantee for risky ventures called *Italnoleggio*. Pantaleone speaks from experience. In order to finance a film based on his book *Mafia e droga*, he postponed filming until the government agreed to subsidize the project.

Don Masino Buscetta, the most reliable *pentito* (a man who "sings") in recent years, explains that a great deal of the mystique surrounding the organization of Mafia is a literary creation. The real Mafiosi, Buscetta explains, are simply "honorable" men. In big cities like Palermo each man of honor belongs to a *borgata* ("neighborhood") while in smaller centers the *cosca* ("family") takes its name from the locality—Corleone, for example. Although these terms are important in understanding Mafia cultures, readers of Sicilian literature should keep in mind that the above terms are rarely introduced in a narrative context, but present by implication. Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia relies on *omertà* ("code of silence") as stylistic device challenging readers to discover the truth hidden in the text. According to Sciascia, prerequisites for the reader eager to gain a full understanding of the plot are knowledge of Sicilian history and the ability to recognize and solve the clues often planted in

his novels. For instance, in *The Day of the Owl* a dog's name *Barricieddu* or *Bargieddu* is a corrupted form of *bargello*. These names refer to an officer in the Republic of Florence who is the commander of the police and, chief of the *sbirri* ("jailers") who is responsible for torturing the prisoners. Thus, the name of the officer becomes a symbol of persecution, while the owl in the title is another symbol of betrayal, this time via Shakespeare.⁸

Sciascia suggests *La Mafia*, a comedy by Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo staged in Sicily during WWI for readers interested in finding the best indicator of *sentire Mafioso* ("Mafioso feeling"). In the play the local *capomafia* ("head of mafia") Don Rasconà, a powerful *cacicco* ("mediator"), gives a point-by-point explanation of this historical-cultural paradigm. The arguments he presents are essential to the understanding of the resentment Sicilians feel for mainlanders (Italians from the peninsula), a sentiment largely responsible for the persistent identification of the Mafia with *Sicilianità*, an insular patriotic response to the oppression of Italy's central government dating from Sicily's annexation from the mainland in 1861. *La Mafia* is the classic story of love and parental disapproval. The boy's influential father, Baron Montedomini, will not consent to his son's marriage with the daughter of an Italian government official. The young people elope, and the solution to the crisis is brought about by Don Rasconà, seemingly eager to reconcile the two parties but looking out for his personal gain. The implied reward for his services will be the cooperation of the father of the bride who, in his position of government representative in Italy, will find himself forced to carry out Mafia policies. Don Rasconà's position as mediator is revealed in the play by his explanation to the hapless father of the girl. Sciascia suggests that the points he makes are a guide to the Mafia's mediating skills and its use of this ability to gain financial and political clout. Don Rasconà agrees that someone should intervene to stop the stubborn baron from perpetrating an injustice against the two lovers. In a soliloquy meant to illustrate his main argument, he poses a rhetorical question: who should act as intermediary between the stubborn baron and the dejected father? The reply is self-evident. The father of the girl cannot. The law cannot. He is the only one who can. Unlike the law that brings justice only to a few, he is force, and force is everyone's law. Don Rasconà goes on to explain that when the weak, the

oppressed and the betrayed found out that justice meant treachery and violence, they agreed to make violence and betrayal their justice. He goes on to say: "You call this Mafia. Actually what it is, is a revolution of the social order...since the law is unjust and a liar, I place myself above the law." Don Rasconà ends his peroration with an allusion to the coming elections emphasizing that he alone is the one who elects the new representatives to the Italian Parliament in Rome; thus his power, although invisible, is present in every aspect of Italian life.⁹

Sciascia explains that the comedy makes the following points: due to its language and its unique characteristics Sicily is one nation, the Mafia is the invisible government that operates behind the visible but ineffective government of central Italy, which in turn is often outmaneuvered by clever godfathers. If Sciascia's reasoning is followed to the end, it is easy to see why the organizing principle of the Mafia follows other sovereign governments by relying on a military procedure where personal status and degrees of authority are carefully adjudged. Yet, the Mafia is a government in itself, with its own staff and its own unequivocal judgment.

Mafioso-style behavior can be detected in certain characters of Sicilian literature. Often it is introduced in the narrative to give readers a clue to their future actions. In Giovanni Verga's 1881 book titled *The House by the Medlar Tree* or *I Malavoglia*, Toni Malavoglia back home from the Navy is shown strutting, *annacari* (the traditional walk of the Mafioso). Toni's growing dissatisfaction with the hard labor and the meager income from fishing prepares the reader for the attempted robbery. At the trial Toni, who is caught in a lava field with two companions ready to steal, will be accused of contraband and the attempted murder of Don Michele, the local customs sergeant whom he stabbed in the melee that followed the robbery. Toni will get by with a light sentence because Dr. Scipioni, a lawyer, cleverly turns his stabbing of Don Michele into an attempt to defend the family honor, compromised in this case by Don Michele's advances to Toni's youngest sister, Lia. Dr. Scipioni makes clear that Toni was determined to save the honor of the family, an understandable duty that lets Toni get by with a minimum sentence of five years in prison.

Indirect implications of Mafioso behavior can be found in the plays of Luigi Pirandello as well. In his novel *I Vecchi e i Giovani* (*The Old and*

the Young), Pirandello invites readers to scan the murky waters of the Sicilian political quagmire to discover the scandalous behavior of people in charge of government posts. It is useless to look for direct references to the Mafia in Pirandello's work, they are not there, still allusions are woven within the texture of the narrative and the psychology of his characters. In a way Pirandello shares *sentire mafioso* with many of his personages who are compelled to live on the fringe of society in order to come to terms with relentless human curiosity threatening their privacy. What seems paradoxical in Pirandello's characters is largely a reaction to the historical scars Sicily has sustained throughout the centuries. Law and order is seldom compatible with the welfare of the people. Centuries of foreign rule, territorial abuses, and extreme poverty rendered more poignant by feudal lords' display of opulence and the brutal repression of popular uprisings explain, even justify, Sicilian distrust of authority. Traditionally the family has been the only institution capable of resisting outside pressures. It is not surprising if the Mafia claims that the family is the chosen bond of honored friends brought together by shared interests and reciprocal protection. *La roba* and *omertà* function in perfect symbiosis.

The complexities of Sicilian culture, however, do not end here. In Sicilian tradition the drive for power and the accumulation of riches are considered a prelude of death. The Mafioso acts with the finality of someone running a race he knows he is destined to lose. Giovanni Falcone, Director of Penal Division in the Ministry of Justice, *cadavere eccellente*,¹⁰ in his last interview with French journalist Marcelle Padovani referred to the Mafia as the "culture of death," insisting that this qualification applied not only to the Mafia, but also to everything Sicilian. He went on to say:

"Solitude, pessimism, death are the themes of our literature from Pirandello to Sciascia. It is as if we were people who have lived too long and all of a sudden feel tired, drained, emptied, like Don Fabrizio in Tomasi di Lampedusa [*The Leopard*]. Affinities between Sicily and the Mafia are many. I surely am not the first to say so. If I do it is not to incriminate all Sicilians. On the contrary I do it to make clear what is the battle against *Cosa Nostra*. It requires not only a specialization in the subject of

organized crime, but also a special interdisciplinary preparation.”¹¹

The interdisciplinary preparation to which Falcone refers is the understanding of typical manifestations of Sicilian life and of political intrigue difficult for an outsider to decipher. Once more Sciascia points to a likely solution to the problem as he writes:

“To face a people and catch its characteristics as if being confronted by just one person is practically impossible especially when the intention is to give an admonition... or suggest a way to govern it. It is much safer to rely on literature, on the way writers have represented her [Sicily’s] life, her way of being, the constant mobility of her reality and the variety present in the characters described.”¹²

Sciascia goes on to name writers who have unveiled the secrets of the Sicilian people. There are several but Verga, Pirandello, Tomasi di Lampedusa dominate his choice. What Sciascia is suggesting is that in order to find out what the Mafia is really like readers must go to Sicilian literature. It is here that they will discover the importance of Mafioso behavior that animates characters and situations as presented by Sicilian writers.

Mafia scholar Vittorio Frosini goes even further than Sciascia. He sees much of Sicilian literature as a spy on fundamental attitudes of the society it represents. Even more pointedly he calls it “a spiritual reactor that allows the reader to identify the presence of otherwise undetectable feelings of unrest, crises in need of resolution that must be understood within the context in which they appear.”¹³ As the Mafia informs Sicily, Sicily informs the Mafia. Thus the reader is called to be a detective, hopefully more fortunate than prosecutors in Mafia trials constantly besieged by misinformation and a wall of *omertà* impossible to crack. In spite of these drawbacks apparent from the start, the 1987 Palermo maxi-trial of 465 indicted Mafiosi delivered 342 convictions with sentences adding to a total of 2655 years in prison, not including the nineteen life terms adjudged to members of the *cupola*. It was not long, however, before business as usual resumed. As recently as August 2003 the Italian

government admitted the impossibility of eliminating the Mafia from the national scene and suggested some form of *convivenza* ("cohabitation") to ease the tension and stabilize the situation which notes the ability of the Mafia's adjustments to changing social and economic conditions (a factor constantly present in Sicilian literature), mix with ordinary people without creating specific problems for the Mafiosi, rely on intimidation and violence, and be faithful to oneself regardless of the circumstances. In short, to be and to remain *la stessa cosa* ("the same thing") at all times.¹⁴ Even if frustrated, Italians have kept their sense of humor. They call *Cosa Nostra*—*Casa Nostra* ("Our House").

Punning, however, does not solve the problem. In an effort to reduce Mafia activities to a minimum Law 646 the legislative edict of the Italian Republic issued September 13, 1982, asserts that the Mafia is no longer considered a mere criminal association since it has specific goals it can achieve through legal means. The legislation, mainly designed to stab Mafiosi in the pocketbook, specifies:

"An association can be called Mafioso when the members avail themselves of intimidation, of close associative ties with each other, of obedience and *omertà* in order to commit crimes, acquire directly or indirectly the administration or the control of economic activities, of concessions, of authorizations, of public contract work and utilities in order to realize unlawful profits and [obtain] privileges for themselves and others."

Law 646 is based on testimonials and the experience of judges who often have paid with their lives for their role as Mafia prosecutors. Rocco Chinnici, who would become one of these victims on July 28, 1983, left a definition basic to the understanding of the Mafia and, as a consequence, to the formulation of the new law:

"The Mafia has always been reactionary, conservative, always defending, and therefore, accumulating wealth. At first it was to safeguard the feud, now [to protect] large, public contracts, the richest markets, the smugglers who travel all over the world and have control over millions and billions. *Mafia then, is a tragic, relentless; cruel vocation to get rich* [italics mine]."¹⁵

Florentine scholar, Leopoldo Franchetti inquired into the nature of the Mafia in 1875 with the help of his friend, Sidney Sonnino, while in Sicily. Franchetti 's definition is still valid today; he stated:

“The Mafia is the union of people in different social status, of all professions, who, without apparent display, or evident relationship, always unite to promote their reciprocal interest devoid of any consideration for law, rules or public interest. It is a medieval feeling of someone intent to provide for the care and the safety of his person and his belongings through his ability and his influence without the need to depend on the authorities and the laws.”¹⁶

In over a century the profile of the Mafia has not changed substantially. The only noticeable progress is that Law 646 has been approved by the procrastinating Italian legislature.

The fight against Mafia power had a perceptive witness, Giuseppe Fava, who would become a victim of the Mafia in Catania, September 5, 1984. In his brief career as a playwright and journalist Fava, founder and editor of the monthly *I Siciliani*, fearlessly exposed Mafia abuses becoming a spokesman for the poor and the dejected. His campaign against the exploitation of minor members of the *onorata società* who have no option but follow orders, were important factors in determining his murder. Fava's plays are peopled with various types of humanity pleading their case in trials far too realistic to be considered sheer fiction. Fava is mainly concerned with hopeless, ignorant Sicilians who testify to the inefficiency of the government and the cowardice of powerful Mafiosi who use them only to abandon them when they no longer need their services. It is a calamity that has plagued Sicily for centuries and even today shows no sign to subside. On one side are the godfathers, skillful exploiters of human weakness, on the other useless parasites who live on the fringe of society and carry out their murders in constant fear of reprisal. The godfathers have the advantage of understanding their victims and, strange as it may seem, to empathize with them. It is not

only their wealth, but the insight they have into the way Sicilians think and act, that gives them the ability to outwit legal procedures.

Fava's *La Violenza* (1969) is a drama in three acts that takes place in a Sicilian courtroom during one of the many Mafia trials predating the 1987 maxi-trial in Palermo. The play presents the case of Giacalone, an illiterate, helpless Mafioso who is accused of committing two politically motivated murders he has been ordered to carry out by the Mafia. Facing the judge, Giacalone allows that his political record is hazy. He has switched his allegiance from one party to another with no seeming reason. His ignorance of political issues is abysmal since he cannot read or write. He wonders what the judge's words have to do with his murder of two men in prison. In a candid moment he even admits that he was trying to understand which political party was most useful to his needs. "At first I thought the Monarchic, then the Communist, then the Christian Democratic Party...What was I supposed to do?"¹⁷ Giacalone does not understand how his politics relate to the murders he has committed. Unruffled by the sudden revelation, the judge points out that in the last ten years Giacalone has been known to belong to four different parties. Giacalone explains that since WW II all parties wanted to be in charge. Since the Fascists had mysteriously disappeared at the end of the war, each party was trying to get its share of members. Giacalone asks the judge: "Excuse me, your Excellency, where have you been all this time?" Scared by his daring, he quickly adds:

"What I mean, your Excellency, is that I have seen men like you have a change of mind from evening to morning: 'you must vote for the king Giacalone, have you lost your mind?' and a month later, 'jackass you don't even have a *lira* but you want to vote against the Communists.' I can't read or write! I was trying to understand which party was most useful to me. At first I thought the Monarchist, then the Communist, then the Christian Democratic. It seemed to be the favorite...what has this got to do with the murders anyway?"

Feeling that the questions are getting nowhere, the judge motions Giacalone back to the *gabbione* ("the cage") where other Mafia members are waiting their turn to be questioned. But he insists:

“Do you want the real truth *Signor Procuratore*? I am nothing. I’m not protected by anyone. I have no crooked amici on my side. I am not even a crook...You can’t understand what it is to be a man who has no protection, who is not even able to rebel when they kick his ass while he crosses the public square...He is worth less than a dog.”

Giacalone’s tirade is greeted by laughter from the cage where the other Mafiosi are waiting their turn. He knows he must leave the stand but feels a desperate urge to be heard. He appeals to the judge: “Can’t you see what they are doing to me? They are capable of killing my children. If I ever get out I hope to have the courage to hide by their house and shoot them in the face, one by one...” After shouting a Mafioso’s worst threat—the disfigurement of a man’s *omo* (“facial features”)—Giacalone turns away. As the first act ends, Giacalone sees a guard walk toward him. He backs to a bench where other prisoners are seated. Fava’s stage directions read: “In the shadow all are still. Silence.” *Omertà* freezes the Mafiosi in a fog of half-truths making the law’s attempt to distinguish facts from lies an impossible goal.

La Violenza strikes a balance between victim and victimizer. Later in the play, a second confrontation occurs between the presiding judge and another defendant who is more important than Giacalone. A friend, a lawyer colleague, who pleads the cause of his innocent client by using a standard excuse in Mafia trials, poor health, represents Crupi, a lawyer and a powerful godfather. Crupi proves to be a reasonable man. He even agrees with the judge claiming if he were in his place he would behave with the same distrust. He admits that the dam he was supposed to build with public funds had never been built. As for the thirty thousand votes he usually got from the electorate, he was entitled to use them the way he wanted. He recognizes that the judge has every reason to believe him guilty of the twelve murders for which he has been indicted. He even admits it’s entirely possible he ordered them himself. The problem for the law, however, is to find the evidence. All witnesses that could testify against him are dead.

Caught by surprise by the unexpected confession, Crupi’s lawyer interjects that his client is sick. Accustomed to such tactics the judge

points out that the accused party was about to make an important statement to the court. Crupi resumes his testimony. He even admits that he might have ordered two other murders. "Why not?" he interjects, "they were crooks, two sons of bitches, always cheating, stealing, cursing." He concludes by motioning toward the cage, where the other Mafiosi wait to be sentenced. "You brought me here and placed me with those men. I want to be with them to the end." The judge points out that those men he values so much are thieves and murderers. Crupi is unimpressed. "*Signor procuratore* can't you see what is going on in the outside world? Can't you see how men relate to each other? The same is happening all over. Some men are lucky, some evil, some corrupt...on the other side of the coin there are those who are defenseless, weak, stupid." As the *Procuratore* objects that according to this evaluation all murderers should go free, Crupi replies:

"You never can tell, *Signor Procuratore*. In the outside world the powerful kill a man day by day by denying him a job, a school for his children, respect from other people, honor, happiness... they make him beg for forgiveness and pity, they make him vote for a political party he knows nothing about, for candidates he despises, they make him say *sissignore* [yes sir] and *nossignore* [no sir] on command and destroy his conscience. They even deprive him of his dignity as a man, which is worse than being dead...*Signor Procuratore*, to drive a man to such extremes is worse than killing him!"

Crupi motions toward the men locked in the cage insisting that by killing men who were their enemies they only took from them something they did not deserve—the right to be alive. At least they gave them the satisfaction of dying like men. Crupi sits down. The defense comes forth arguing that since there is no assurance that Crupi will be able to attend another session since he is not well, Luciano Salemi, brother of the murdered mayor, should be questioned now. His testimony will shed light on the moral and human stature of the indicted man. Salemi is ushered in the courtroom and shown a seat facing the judge. The Defense says "Allow me to pose my question to someone holding an opposite point of view." He turns to the bench where Crupi is seated and

asks: "Defendant Crupi what is your opinion of this man?" Crupi rises slowly from the bench. "For all I know...he is a man who is not worth very much." The Defense replies, "And in your opinion, when is a man not worth very much?" Crupi answers, "When he sells out cheap." Thus the problem is not selling out, but selling out cheap. *La roba* casts its shadow on Crupi's evaluation. If the bribe does not come up to expectations then the end does not justify the means. Crupi's harsh realism is rooted in his negative opinion of human nature. Paradoxical as it may seem, his view coincides with Giacalone's, even if their perspectives are conditioned by the different place they hold in the Mafia. While Crupi gets respect because of his powerful role as godfather and his vast wealth, Giacalone is vilified by what his peers consider cowardice aggravated by poverty. Thus Giacalone is despised, Crupi respected. Yet it is Crupi who best describes Giacalone's plight by insisting with the judge that there are many ways to kill a man. In fact Crupi understands Giacalone's situation much better than the judge. He is not moved by pity, but by a clear perspective of the problem that has plagued Sicily for centuries: the poverty of the *bassa Mafia* ("low Mafia") often forced to carry out criminal practices in order to survive. This is in obvious contrast with the *alta Mafia* ("high Mafia or ruling Mafia") who are able to find a way out through highly placed connections and inscrutable alibis. It is probable that in a real life scenario Crupi would have ordered a hit on Giacalone since his presence could mean an eventual indictment for him and his associates.

Fava, a reformer with humanitarian ideals, is primarily concerned with social changes in Sicily by requesting a more equitable distribution of wealth. Targeted for his relentless accusations against the Mafia, Fava became another *cadavere eccellente* in the long list of the honorable society. Another victim of the mob, Judge Rocco Chinnici, shortly before he was killed on July 28, 1983, expressed sentiments similar to Fava:

"The Mafia seems to have popular consensus because it gives work to thousands of people, to thousands of families. This is simply not true. It is not a consensus. To make a living wage, a person must work, so he will take work from [anyone including] the Mafia."¹⁸

The paradox of the Mafia, its indomitable race to accumulate *la roba*, the way it protects undercover operations through *omertà* are peculiarly symbolized by Sicily's logos, the *Trinacria*. The *Trinacria* is a grotesque arrangement of three bare legs adorned with Mercurial wings spinning around a snake-infested head of Medusa whose wide-open eyes stare fixedly into space. Speed, accuracy, and relentless engagement seem to emanate from this mysterious symbol. By ironic coincidence the vision of constant motion and perfect stillness that are combined in the *Trinacria* seem to express Judge Giovanni Falcone's definition of the Mafia as *contropotere* ("counter power") in constant motion aiming to take over the economy of the entire country. To be entirely fair Falcone, himself a Sicilian, granted the Mafia some redeeming values such as courage, friendship, respect for tradition. These virtues, however, had been perverted by the acquisition of *la roba* and reliance on *omertà* as the means to gain access to Italian industry, commercial enterprises, and various forms of popular entertainment—certainly the cinema. The ability of communicating through silence is one of the Mafia's greatest assets. Mobster Joe Bonanno, an expert in the art, explains in his biography:

"All men have eyes, Machiavelli says, but few have the gift of penetration. I fully realize that for an outsider the gift of penetration is a difficult one to attain when considering my world, because we of that world are normally silent, and when we do speak we use terms of an alien culture."¹⁹

Bonanno's description of his parting from cousin Stefano Magaddino who held him prisoner under mysterious circumstances is a telling example of the importance of eye contact in a world where words remain unspoken. "With our eyes only we said to each other: You know what I know. I know what I know. And no one else will really know as we know."²⁰

The gift of penetration, so essential to mob communication can be illustrated by some of the evidence introduced by government lawyers in the 1987 Palermo maxi-trial. To demonstrate *Cosa Nostra's* use of codes in misleading police investigators, Don Tommaso Masino Buscetta, one of the witnesses, told the following story. Two Mafiosi sharing his prison

cell told him that they were caught by surprise by police officers that stopped their car. Before the agents could start a search and find the gun they had concealed in the glove compartment, they exchanged a glance reaching a silent agreement that while one knew where the gun was, the other was completely unaware of its presence. Another incident, still reported by Buscetta, dealt with the murder of Salvatore Cappiello. Members of the Partanna-Mondello family were arrested for the crime and brought to the *Ucciardone*, Palermo's prison. One of them, Salvatore Davì, greeted Buscetta with the words *nui consumammu*, Sicilian for the phrase "we are ruined." By using the plural, Salvatore signaled to Buscetta that the entire Mondello family had approved the murder he had committed.

Leonardo Sciascia in his tale "Death and the Knight" tells the story of a journalist who had sought political secrets in the trash of Henry Kissinger and compares it to the American police trying to find "the secrets of the Sicilian American Mafia in the refuse of Joe Bonanno. Although a popular slogan insists, "the garbage never lies," such was not the case with officer Ehrmann. The message he found in the garbage was "CALL TITONE WORK AND PAY SCANNATORE." Nothing could be clearer for Ehrmann; in Italian *scannare* means 'to slaughter' and a *scannatore* is 'one whose job is to slaughter.' Sciascia correctly points out the feeling of inferiority many Sicilians experience once they start comparing the island's dialect to Italian proper and suggests that for this reason the Sicilian word *scanaturi* had been italianized to *scannatore* in the Bonanno household. "The jotting was no more than a note to remind the writer to pay a Sicilian-American joiner, Titone by name, for one of those huge, meticulously planed tables of strong wood on which women knead bread, make lasagna, tagliatelle, pizza or focaccia...Scannaturi is the definition given in the year 1754, by the Jesuit Michele del Bono. Had Bonanno naively italianized the word, or had he set out to play a joke, a joke for his own benefit, on Ehrmann?"²¹

Words are indeed deceptive. Since *mezza parola* is sufficient to deliver a message, the half word chosen for the occasion must be deliberate and appropriate. Most Mafiosi are shrewd psychologists and never use a word unless they are sure to be on target. Prosecutor Giovanni Falcone explains that the use of *Signore* in front of a person's name, a sign of courtesy in Italian, is used merely to indicate someone who has no right

to be named with the forms used to address important Mafia members Zio or Don, or called with the university degree they earned: doctor, lawyer, engineer. Falcone points out that *pentito* Salvatore Contorno, a witness in Palermo's first maxi-trial in 1986, addressed Michele Greco, considered even then the boss of *Cosa Nostra*, as "Il signor Michele Greco" showing by his greeting the extent of his spite. The language of Sicilian men of honor is sealed in silence. According to Falcone the reason is simple. A real Mafioso does not lie. When he can't answer questions he remains silent.

In most Sicilian literature, unless the author purposely chooses to share information with the reader, Mafioso behavior must be discovered through character motivation or through personal feelings that reveal Mafioso tendencies. Clues may emerge in the way a character speaks, in his philosophy of life, even in his obsession with death. Often conclusions can be only tentative since the parlance of the Mafia, fictional or otherwise, goes beyond the boundaries of conventional speech as Mafiosi are unwilling to take risks by expressing in words or motions information only members are called to understand. When dealing with writers as subtle as the Sicilians, the Mafioso's discretion in communication can lead to careful stylistic choices that ask the reader to decipher not what the author says but what the author means. Shortly, the writer's technique becomes similar to the Mafia's, as it demands intuition on the reader's part to detect and decode the message. As is to be expected, the challenge in selected Sicilian writers is meant only for individuals willing to go along. Other readers will be absorbed by the content but will remain unaware of Mafia machinations in the literary labyrinths of *Trinacria*. The history of Sicily seems indispensable to determine why Sicilian Mafiosi behave the way they do and even more why they still operate convinced of the right of their actions—bribery, conspiracy, murder—as they deal with a government unwilling or unable to confront the dangerous situation facing the Italian Republic. Thus the Mafia continues to prosper in a society that prefers to circumvent danger rather than face it.

The triangular shape of Sicily with its sunny, open shores is an invitation to stop and enjoy what the island has to offer. Throughout its history inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin and Europeans from the frozen lands of Scandinavia have taken up the invitation and have

occupied the island. As a result, Sicilian history is a vivid reminder of occupation, poverty, futile revolutions and frustrated resignation that often broke in bloody confrontations. The beginning and development of the Sicilian saga are essential to the understanding of the Mafia. Literary works ranging from folk tales to plays, to thematic recurrences will be examined to determine the presence of Mafioso behavior in the literature of the island. Closer analysis of textual evidence will be devoted to selected works by Giovanni Verga, Luigi Pirandello, Federico De Roberto, Tomasi di Lampedusa and Leonardo Sciascia. This is skimming the surface of Sicilian writers who have cast light on the psychology and the behavior of the Mafioso. Hopefully other writers will approach the subject and show how the Mafia fills an important role in Sicilian literature.