

## CHAPTER II

### FROM NATURALISM TO 'VERISMO'

#### 1. *The Impact of French Naturalism*

In *Profili di donne* contemporary scientific thinking persuaded Capuana to look very concretely at human emotions and suggested materialistic interpretations for them. But the volume also made ample concessions to the concept of 'drawing-room literature' (*letteratura amena*), and the scientific approach was therefore somewhat coy and apologetic. Capuana was still a 'curioso' for whom science was merely an interesting additional instrument of psychological analysis, not a total approach to reality. The second half of the seventies, during which he was profoundly influenced by French naturalism, was to change all this. His novel, *Giacinta*, which appeared only two years after *Profili di donne*, in 1879, seems to thrust the stories into a remote past. It is the most 'naturalist' of Capuana's fiction, the most consistently inspired by the kind of scientific determinism favoured by the Goncourt brothers and Zola.

Between 1877 and 1880 Capuana stayed for long periods in Milan, sometimes in the company of Verga. From December 1876 he wrote regular reviews for the *Corriere della sera*. A first collection of some of these articles, entitled *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea: prima serie*,<sup>1</sup> reveals an avant-garde Capuana seeking to elaborate the theory of a 'scientific' art which will condition the narrative techniques and aims of *Giacinta*.

'Ho trovato molte e molte persone', Capuana wrote home during a brief visit to Rome in the late autumn of 1875, 'che ricordano ancora le appendici della Nazione'.<sup>2</sup> It was natural that after a seven-year parenthesis he should return to journalism as the drama critic so many people remembered. But he did so only briefly and only to reassert the negative verdict on the theatre of the preface to *Il Teatro italiano contemporaneo*, earning from fellow journalists the title of 'Geremia'. Once again he contrasted drama and narrative to the disadvantage of the former: 'si scorge sul palcoscenico la mancanza di quei passaggi e di quelle gradazioni che rendono piani, naturali, commoventi i casi più arrischiati del romanzo'.<sup>3</sup> The significant emphasis falls on the way narrative opens up a new dimension in subject-matter, a reality hitherto unexamined because 'arrischiata'. Other critics, Giorgio Arcoleo for instance, were conscious that not all material lent itself conveniently to 'l'ottica del teatro' and stood in need of 'analisi' and

'svolgimento'.<sup>4</sup> But Capuana's particular stress recalls the relatively uninhibited treatment of sexuality in 'Iela' and even more the future author of *Giacinta*.

Capuana dismissed the theatre, he claimed, in the name of 'i più indiscutibili principi di arte che la scienza moderna abbia fissati'.<sup>5</sup> These principles are, of course, the evolutionary ones he drives jointly from Hegelianism and positivism. Literary form, he writes, using the word in De Meis's sense 'non è un accidente, è una necessità creativa. La sua evoluzione somiglia su per giù a quella che si riscontra nella creazione delle forme naturali, [. . .] Le forme si seguono ma non si rassomigliano, e soprattutto non si ripetono' (p. 303).

It seemed to Capuana and his contemporaries that all branches of knowledge were united under the banner of evolutionism; and while scientific research now had the patient task of elucidating individual evolutionary patterns and studying those crucial areas where the physical became spiritual, where biological life became mental life, it could be sure that behind each observed phenomenon there lay the great unity of a material universe. If science crushed the pride of metaphysical man by reducing him to matter, it compensated him, as Claude Bernard had said, with the power of understanding his universe. This sense of power gave the period its scientific optimism, and Capuana shared it throughout his life, but never so enthusiastically as in this period when he first 'discovered' science and could not yet know that its progress would be slow and undramatic.

One of its immediate effects is to suggest to him that literary scholarship may be undertaken with 'una precisione di metodo da non invidiar nulla a quello delle scienze naturali':

Portare nella storia della letteratura il metodo di osservazione positiva già adoperato per le scienze naturali ed ora anche per lo studio delle religioni, non è un tentativo pericoloso e di semplice analogia. I tre mondi umani della sensazione, del sentimento e della ragione corrispondono ai tre mondi minerale, vegetale ed animale della natura. (p. 305)

Following the work of Taine such an achievement seemed far from impossible; and it occurs to Capuana that Gaetano Trezza's *Critica moderna* has in part fulfilled his desire. Trezza, professor of Latin at the Istituto Superiore di Florence, had indeed brought evolutionary criteria to bear on literary studies. 'E' a punto', he wrote:

questa relazione dell'antichità colla modernità, questo considerare non come parti che stiano ciascuno per sè, ma come gradi diversi di una 'evoluzione medesima', che ha fatto della critica una scienza, della scienza una storia. E' l'organismo che ora si cerca, non il frammento.<sup>6</sup>

And the articles of this period constantly acknowledge the concept of literature as a developing 'organismo'. Such a concept almost predestines Rapisardi's poem *Lucifero* to oblivion as an example of the epic form which 'la riflessione scientifica ha già distrutto' (p. 156); or it rescues the modern lyric, as created by Fontana, from extinction because it bodies forth a sense of the infinite, and approximates to

the pure abstraction of music, the most contemplative and 'advanced' of the arts. It ensures too that Capuana's perspective is European. For any nation may at some time produce the definitive example of a given form of literature and so point out the way for writers of other nations. Thus it was not only his passionate interest in science but his desire to surpass by emulation that made Capuana so responsive to the naturalist avant-garde of France.

Both before and after March 1877, when Capuana reviewed *L'Assommoir*, Italians had given Zola a chilly reception. There were exceptions, prominent among them Felice Cameroni. But Treves's *Illustrazione italiana* attacked Zola on moral grounds (though the editor, as Cameroni indignantly informed Zola, 'ne croyait pas s'encanailler faisant de l'argent avec les traductions');<sup>7</sup> and Pasquale Villari reminded him that to ignore 'la parte più nobile dell'uomo' was to betray that same total 'verità' he was concerned to purvey.<sup>8</sup> De Sanctis had not yet written his *Studio sopra Emilio Zola*, so that it was with considerable courage that Capuana spoke of the 'poesia', the 'sentimento elevato' of *L'Assommoir* (p. 64).

The chief appeal of the novel was for Capuana its directness of impact, the impression of a 'diretta realtà' emerging from Zola's exuberant description (p. 51). Capuana notes that in *Le ventre de Paris* and *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* Zola's descriptions sometimes run riot; but in *L'Assommoir* there is none of that gratuitous dwelling on externals which had clearly given 'realism' as popularly understood the reputation of pandering to debased appetites:

Giacchè il *realismo* dello Zola (diciamo pure questa brutta parola) non è precisamente quale l'intendono i *realisti* di progetto. Del particolare, del colore, delle minuzie egli non si serve per uno scopo puramente esteriore, ma soltanto perchè gli giovano a far penetrare il lettore nell'intimo spirito dei suoi personaggi. (p. 63)

It is interesting that Capuana should choose to emphasize the psychological dimension of the novel, the 'intimo spirito' of creatures such as Gervaise and Coupeau. Remarkable too—for Capuana must have known the preface to *La Fortune des Rougon* of 1871, where Zola spoke of the overall plan of the *Rougon-Macquart*—is the absence of any comment on how *L'Assommoir* fitted into the general scheme of an 'Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire'.<sup>9</sup> The significance of both the emphasis and the omission will become clear as we examine the nature of Capuana's own 'realism'.

By the time Capuana reviewed Zola again in June 1879 (*Une page d'amour*) De Sanctis's long study of Zola had been published.<sup>10</sup> It provides a useful yardstick against which to explore Capuana's own response to naturalism.

In Zola's cycle of novels De Sanctis sees nothing less than a society on trial, accused of corruption and materialism:

Qui è una nazione che comincia a riflettere e a impensierirsi, e fa la faccia scura. Zola è l'anima di questa nazione. [. . .] Mentre gli uomini imbestiati gazzavano, ci è

intorno a loro non so che di glaciale che li accusa. E' il tono di Zola, la sua idealità.

He acclaims Zola's realism as evidence of a severe moral energy that can regenerate society; but he also stresses its limitations. Zola's work, with its deliberate stress on 'animalità', has the character of a moral reaction to 'uno spiritualismo esagerato e a un ideale diventato rettorico'.<sup>11</sup> This reaction is salutary but necessarily transitional—two years later in fact De Sanctis calls Zola not a 'precursore del nuovo' but a 'becchino dell'antico'.<sup>12</sup> Nor can the scientific framework of *Les Rougon-Macquart* have any artistic significance for De Sanctis, the champion of art's autonomy. He considers Zola's discovery of the laws of heredity valuable only as a creative stimulus: 'gli ha aguzzato l'invenzione e gli ha aperto le piaghe più occulte delle azioni umane.'<sup>13</sup> Throughout the essay runs that tone of moral elevation which in De Sanctis always makes literature a force of ethical awareness, not an act of gratuitous aestheticism.

Capuana's Zola is by contrast much less a propagandist or a moralist, more a scientist striving after 'pure' truth. 'I *Rougon-Macquart* sono un trattato di fisiologia in azione', its key 'l'influenza ereditaria', the 'infiltrarsi dell'elemento scientifico' is 'un vero *segno del tempo*' writes the enthusiastic Capuana (pp. 66-7). But he does not entirely forget De Sanctis and 'la libera natura dell'arte': È ridicolo il credere che lo Zola voglia dare al carattere scientifico del suo lavoro un'importanza maggiore di quella che gli se ne può accordare in un'opera d'arte' (p.73). Nevertheless there are moments when the autonomy of art is at least threatened. In the following passage for instance Capuana sees art and science functioning in fundamentally similar ways:

Nella vita reale la legge ereditaria spesso vien attraversata dall'accidente; o vi si attua a sbalzi; o non compie sempre il suo processo. In questo caso è innegabile la superiorità dell'arte. Raccogliendo attorno ad un individuo tutte le possibili circostanze per produrre inesorabilmente lo scoppio della forza fatale dell'eredità, l'arte non mentisce rimpetto alla scienza. La sua possibilità diventa quasi più vera della stessa *realtà*. Eliminando il cieco accidente, creando una serie di circostanze simili a quelle che in altri *casi reali* hanno prodotto questo o quel risultato, l'arte raddoppia di valore, acquista un valore scientifico. (p. 71)

Indeed the work of art, conceived in this rigorously demonstrative way, is a form of 'scienza'. And Capuana clearly feels, unlike De Sanctis, that Zola's scientific inspiration has helped him to shape a truer, less arbitrary reality, a reality having 'valore scientifico'. The aesthetic respectability of this argument lies entirely in the implication that scientific knowledge merely makes conscious and deliberate what are normally more or less instinctive processes of artistic selection; in the implication that science, in short, provides a superior artistic *method* without demanding that literature be substantially based in its discoveries. But this was an aspect of the discussion to which Capuana returned only when the whole conception of the experimental novel was under attack. In the meantime it is

difficult to distinguish between scientific and artistic truth, and science and literature seem to pursue the same cognitive ends. Their alliance is symptomatic of the times, but also, in Capuana, limiting.

These limits we can see in an article on Edmond de Goncourt and Jean de la Rue, where Capuana pursues the discussion of scientific realism. He responds readily to the programmatic statements of the preface to *Les Frères Zemganno* which anticipate a progress from the realism of the 'canaille' to the realism of the refined Parisian salon. This progression Capuana finds written into the natural order of things. It is natural that 'si va dal più materiale al più spirituale, allo stesso modo che da una forma più semplice e inferiore ad una forma più ricca e superiore' (p. 86). Capuana explains the preference of modern authors for the 'parte più animalesca' of man exclusively in terms of a necessary scientific and technical apprenticeship (p. 85). A man of the lower classes, he writes, 'ha dell'animale':

L'organismo del suo sentimento, l'embrione dell'organismo del suo spirito sono di un'estrema semplicità e *possono afferrarsi facilmente.* (Underlining mine.)

But meanwhile:

In cima alla scala sociale le differenze dall'uomo del popolo sono così enormi che può dirsi addirittura si tratti non di un'altra razza, ma di un'altra umanità. (p. 85)

This was not the first time a writer had looked at society in terms of an aesthetic hierarchy—Francesco Dall'Ongaro thought that fellow writers would find more that was 'poetic' and 'picturesque' in the provinces than in sophisticated cities<sup>14</sup>—but it can seldom have been done with such startling social insensitivity. The fact is that Capuana's vision of society is *abstractly* mechanistic. He partitions society in conformity with what his science has taught him of the psycho-physical nature of man, but there is little social awareness, only an aesthetic-scientific attraction to his human material. The appeal of the pathological character is of the same order:

quello che pel volgo è unicamente una stranezza o una mattezza, per l'artista, per lo scienziato (che oggi sono sul punto di confondersi in uno) diventa un *caso* artistico o scientifico di grande importanza. C'è in esso del rigoglio, dell'esuberanza di forze e di vitalità [. . .] errori, colpe, illogicità di sentimenti e di passioni che per l'arte e per la scienza hanno un immenso valore. (p. 88)

The scientific vision, the pathological character, give back to chaotic reality its true shape, they reveal its fundamentally organic nature, its hidden links of cause and effect. But in Capuana they also impoverish it, for it becomes the object of a neutral gaze, concerned only with the 'purity' of a truth which in fact is never pure. This attitude explains why Capuana pays no attention to the social dimension of *L'Assommoir* and stresses its internal, psychological aspect; he may be compared to the scientist, who, with microscope in hand, conducts his analysis without thought for the impact of his work outside the laboratory; and the abstractly scientific quality of his realism is one of the weaknesses of *Giacinta*.

## 2. *The Practice of Naturalism: 'Giacinta'*

It was during his visit to Rome in 1875 that Capuana conceived the idea of *Giacinta*. In the course of an evening's stroll with Senator Lorenzo De Luca Capuana learnt the story of Marchesa Maria Cesare Di Bourbon Del Monte, which was to become, with modifications and additions, the story of Contessa Giacinta Grippa Di San Celso. Describing the genesis of the novel in the preface to its third edition (1889), Capuana also tells how in fear of public outcry he abandoned a work called *Adriana*, the story of a woman whom 'un difetto fisico impedì di amare interamente'.<sup>15</sup> Clearly the Senator's 'human document' produced a shock of recognition in Capuana: Adrianna's 'difetto fisico' which was to have been the 'perno dell'azione' became the episode, half rape, half seduction, involving the child, Giacinta, and the young manservant, Beppe. The early trauma was to determine the rest of Giacinta's behaviour, was to become another 'pernio d'azione'.

The comments of the preface, though written a decade after the first appearance of *Giacinta* and overlaid with a faint air of apology, harmonize with the views on art and the evolution of Form expounded in the seventies. To Capuana the France of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola seemed the terrain where the most modern form of literature, the novel, was best developed. But to have identified the 'addentellato' from which Italians must start out only resolved Capuana's problems in part. In Italy the modern novel seemed to Capuana to have no tradition. Manzoni no longer served in a world of 'idee nuove, complicatissime, da esigere sfumature d'ogni sorta'. Tommaseo (whose cultural *formazione* was, significantly, French) had gone some way in *Fede e Bellezza* to assimilating the 'forma narrativa francese', but his achievement was isolated and went unrecognized. In Italy there were only 'imitazioni feuilletane'. Thus *Giacinta* was a tentative effort to transplant a form of literature and to found a modern tradition. It was a 'primo saggio di romanzo contemporaneo italiano, dove si tentava l'analisi d'un carattere, lo studio d'una passione vera, benchè strana, anzi patologica'. This is a large claim and Capuana, as an author, doubtless has an interest in stressing Italy's narrative barrenness and his own literary pioneering. But the clear supremacy of the French novel must have created genuine problems. Many other writers, along with Capuana, complain that the Italian novel has a French flavour (Luigi Gualdo even took to publishing in French), and that Italian writers, lacking a malleable, analytical style capable of representing 'un mondo esteriore e interiore molto particolare, molto individuale, come prima non usava', pepper their prose with gallicisms. Capuana mentions his own failure to escape from the precedent of Balzac 'dove l'autore interviene e giudica e riflette', even though he preferred a narrative form where 'l'autore si sforza di nascondersi'.<sup>16</sup>

Giacinta, as one of Capuana's characters comments, is 'un caso di patologia morale',<sup>17</sup> and the novel is an attempt to explain the genesis and the consequences of her 'neurosis'. Writing this time several months after the completion of *Giacinta*,

Capuana approvingly quoted Dumas  *fils*: 'Una situazione non è un'idea. Un'idea ha un principio, uno sviluppo e una conclusione. Tutti possono trovare una situazione drammatica, ma convien prepararla, farla accettare, renderla possibile, soprattutto, scioglierla'.<sup>18</sup> In *Giacinta* Capuana deliberately set himself a hard task: for his heroine, because of the childhood scandal and the persistent gossip it arouses, refuses the redemption of marriage to the man she loves, preferring instead to give herself freely outside the bounds of legal constraint. For form's sake she marries an aristocratic non-entity, and in the same day becomes Andrea's mistress. This is the central aberrant choice which Capuana must make 'possible' and 'acceptable' The rest of the narrative traces the history of the extra-legal 'marriage', through its development, fulfilment, and decline, sealed by Giacinta's suicide. The challenge of *Giacinta* lies not in emphasizing the pathological, but in presenting the heroine's abnormal reactions as comprehensible and inevitable reactions to the difficulties of her situation. Following Zola's example, and in the light of contemporary scientific thinking, the novel presents a highly organized world-view, a rigorous interlocking of cause and effect, and the confident assumption that the impulses behind human behaviour can be accurately analysed and quantified, as in this exemplary passage, describing the growing discontent of Andrea, who is maintained by Giacinta:

In fondo a quell'apatia morale, che le passione aveva ricoperto di un involucro nuovo, erasi prodotta una *lenta fermentazione* per via di *tante circostanze* che, *sebbene disgregate*, erano all'ultimo riuscite ad un *effetto quasi per ragioni di meccanismo*. *Picchia oggi, picchia domani*, le cento umiliazioni dovute ingollare avevano scosso quel-po' di generosità spontanea, innata. [. . .] L'uso, la monotonia *bastarono* quindi per resto. (pp. 185-6). (Italics mine.)

Multiple but specifiable circumstances aggravate the genetic datum of 'apatia morale' to produce a given result. A work of art, Capuana had repeatedly said, is a model reality with no room for accidents, and in *Giacinta* his long and conscientious psychological analyses show gradual mutations of feeling and are slanted to stress that the events they provoke are inevitable. Giacinta's decision not to marry Andrea elicits the following 'Balzacian' gloss which is also a key to Capuana's inspiration:

Le conseguenze di una falsa premessa non si sfuggono mai; nemmeno quando ci si è accorti di aver commesso uno sbaglio. La violenza dei fatti s'impone alla umana volontà come il Fato degli antichi, e la commedia o la tragedia della vita, spesso tutte e due intrecciate insieme, precipitano ruinoso alla loro trista catastrofe. (p. 96)

The book undoubtedly owes much to the literary models of France, and recalls Capuana's admission that 'la ricerca critica di quello che prima è stato fatto dagli altri'<sup>19</sup> has always stimulated his own creativity. Capuana has not entirely forgotten Dumas  *fils*. His influence appears where Capuana, succumbing to his old, cherished notion that the fair sex is inexplicable, sees in Giacinta 'un misto [. . .] di semplicità, d'ingenuità, di pudore di vergine con qualcosa di esperto, di maturo, di

crudo, di quasi nudo proprio di chi abbia molto bevuto alla gran tazza della vita' (p. 14)—an example of that modern womanhood which so fascinated the author of *Profili di donne*. There are Dumasian generalizations, again reminiscent of the stories, on the 'pudori, le castità della donna' (p. 145).<sup>20</sup> And Giacinta like her predecessors is given to bewailing the universal gullibility of women in affairs of the heart. A poignantly cheerful consumptive named Elvira, who appears towards the end of the novel to distract Andrea from Giacinta, may be modelled, as Capuana claims, on the '*Dea loci*' of his Milanese lodgings in Via Dogana.<sup>21</sup> But she seems to spring less from the 'human document' than from the tradition of Marguerite Gautier. Though the '*curioso del cuore umano*' is no longer the 'sultan of a harem' but a scientific anatomist of feminine psychology, the links with a literary past are obvious.

One of the fundamental themes of the novel—a fact which has escaped even those critics who question the innovatory value of *Giacinta*—is the dissolution of the romantic myth of Eternal Love. It was a theme explored by both Verga and Constant. In *Una peccatrice*, *Eva* and *Adolphe* Capuana would have found a discussion of how passion may isolate its 'victim' and preclude any possibility of normal self-realization in society.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in *Giacinta* Andrea agrees to resign his post in order to stay with Giacinta, though conscious that his resignation '*distruggeva il suo avvenire*' (p. 162); and in moments when he feels '*proprio uomo*' he will dream of the broader commitments which romantic passion denies him: '*perchè non andarsene in Francia a cercar la morte fra i volontari di Garibaldi che combattevano i Prussiani?*' (p. 196). The motif is more peripheral than in Capuana's models. Nevertheless Giacinta's own realization that '*la loro passione non sarebbe durata eterna nel medesimo grado d'intensità*' (p. 173) is one cause of her mental derangement. And the parabola of the book, from passion indulged in defiance of social law, to emotional satiety, and the choice of death, has a backward-looking air. Capuana himself referred to the suicide as '*una concessione allora fatta alla pretesa idealizzazione ritenuta necessaria in un'opera d'arte*', and intended to excise it (though he never did) in future editions.<sup>23</sup>

One critic traces Giacinta's wedding and suicide to Emma Bovary and remarks on the recurrence of a *fiacre* episode.<sup>24</sup> A generic derivation is undeniable and there are other possible reminiscences of *Madame Bovary*. In both novels there are stolid husbands who do nothing to impede their wives' adultery and sometimes facilitate it; and prosaic lovers secretly exasperated at the indiscrete behaviour of their excitable mistresses. A less superficial similarity is the period of religious exaltation, with all its false emotion, which affects Giacinta and Emma after a debilitating illness. And something of Emma and her attitudes to her child, neglectful and sentimental by turns, may have filtered into the treatment of Giacinta's mother, Teresa Marulli. The connexion is oblique since Capuana is interested not in the mother but in the effects of emotional deprivation in the child. Yet the visits of Teresa, accompanied by a 'cousin', to the wet-nurse in charge of her unwanted

daughter recall strongly Emma's and Léon's country walk to the 'nourrice'. Léon's presence at the cradle strikes a faint note of depravity which Capuana, pledged in the name of science to face the morally reprehensible ('è il suo concetto scientifico che gl'impedisce di esser *prude*', he wrote of Zola),<sup>25</sup> may have found worth remembering. Giacinta, like Emma, wants a male child, but gives birth to a girl.

By far the greatest influence was Zola. The novel was dedicated to him, and bore as epigraph Capuana's statement of good faith:

Ho la coscienza di avere scritto un libro nè ipocrita nè immorale.

Così fossi egualmente sicuro di aver fatto, com'era mia intenzione, una vera opera d'arte!

This defensive statement together with the name of the 'immoral' Zola invited the conclusion that 'chi si scusa si accusa'.<sup>26</sup> *Giacinta* was consistently reviewed against the background of *L'Assommoir* and moralists had a field-day. The bookseller Casanova, in Turin, removed the novel from display, and Emilio Treves lashed out at Capuana as a 'sotto-Steccchetti', a 'vice-Tronconi', a 'quarto di Zola'.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand Felice Cameroni defended *Giacinta* as 'un défi aux adversaires du naturalisme'.<sup>28</sup> The rationalistic, analytical texture of the writing is the product of an age of materialism. The emphasis on heredity derives more particularly from Zola.

Teresa Marulli is a domineering, cold woman who by dint of carefully calculated adulteries (the last with the director of a bank) has raised her family to a position of power and financial pre-eminence in the provincial town where it lives. Giacinta's elderly father is dull-witted and affectionate. He is a man 'con la barba nerissima, cogli occhi prominenti, iniettati di sangue' (p. 24); all suggestive of a violent temperament, Capuana tells us, which however never manifests itself. The independent spirit of the mother and the latent violence of the father combine in Giacinta to give her capacity for devotion a ruthless and obsessive quality. Conte Giulio, Giacinta's husband, is the degenerate product of generations of aristocratic inbreeding. Intellectually befuddled by this process as he is, he none the less reveals from time to time traces of the 'squisita gentilezza che deriva dal sangue, la legge dell'eredità naturale', Capuana interpolates, 'non valendo soltanto per le malattie' (p. 103).

The author of *Profili di donne*, in the era of the 'studio fisiologico dell'uomo morale', was already fascinated by the idea of the nervous system as a storehouse of memories and sensations. The rape in *Giacinta* is nicely situated in an area where the physical and the psychological mingle. Given Capuana's interest in these areas of ambiguity, it is natural that the novel should show some response to Zola's view that the first sexual experiences are crucial (Gervaise, in *L'Assommoir*, remains an easy prey to Lantier even after thirteen years of separation because it is as though 'cet homme eût laissé là, sous la peau, quelque chose de lui').<sup>29</sup> At puberty Giacinta's faded memories of Beppe emerge with a new precision, as though 'i

nervi, il sangue, le fibre' (p. 47) had received an indelible imprint. Similarly Giacinta feels that even when she no longer cares deeply for Andrea she still belongs permanently and exclusively to him ('rimarrebbe sempre nel mio organismo un'impronta di lui che non si può scancellare' (p. 185)); and Andrea in his turn regards the long relationship as having left 'in tutto il suo organismo come un marchio indelebile'. And this, runs Capuana's gloss, is an 'attaccamento animale dove la riflessione non entrava punto' (p. 201). Zolian too, though often over-written in Capuana, are the portraits of the characters, conceived in rigid conformity to the laws of race and environment. Thus Beppe, who has undertaken every 'basso mestiere', is a 'ragazzaccio dall'aria quasi minchiona, un po' tarchiato, con la testa grossa, gli occhi pieni di malizia e di voglie animali' (p. 33), and represents the corruption and the bestiality of the 'canaille'. At each presentation of a character there is a similar resumé of his or her past experience, stressing its impact on personality; and a similar, 'categorizing' physical portrait. Capuana clearly intends to establish a Zolian chain of causality which will impinge on the way events are understood and evaluated by the reader. But he is sometimes over-eager. Thus Andrea's weakness and superficiality is so firmly and frequently stressed that the reader not only foresees their consequences, but has difficulty in remembering that Andrea is, after all, supposed to be faced with a moral dilemma. Capuana's analysis, Verga said tactfully, was 'too conscientious': 'se avessi sacrificato qualche volta la verità dell'analisi all'effetto drammatico, avresti forse avuto più largo consenso di pubblico grosso'.<sup>30</sup>

Capuana had been particularly interested in the 'intimo spirito' of Zola's characters from *L'Assommoir*. In *Giacinta* he aims to show the *necessità* of his chosen series of events by analysing their psychological causation: the novel has a strictly linear plot whose movement depends exclusively on the reactions of Giacinta and Andrea. Secondary characters could be allowed to live only in the shadow of the couple. But the naturalist canon meant that Capuana had to show the influence of 'milieu', the decisive pressure exerted on Giacinta by the opinion of other characters, however minor. Here were two imperatives, one concerned with the allocation of narrative space, the other with naturalist ideology, which tended to be mutually contradictory. Capuana seems to have decided that if he was obliged to be brief, he would at least be forceful. The result is caricature (to which no doubt the unflinching, demystifying stance of the naturalist made its contribution). Giacinta's husband, who declines into veritable dementia, becomes a grotesque, sub-human creature (the centre of a single touching scene in which Giacinta, on the verge of suicide, begs his forgiveness and elicits only an automatic 'Va bene, va bene' (p. 228)—a scene which presages the last encounter of Agrippina and the demented Marchese di Roccaverdina). Brevity has made the *habitués* of the Marulli drawing-room mere gesticulating symbols of small-town hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness. Caricature is particularly evident in the opening chapter where Giacinta is set in her social context:

La moglie del procuratore del re, una bionda grassona, che sembrava volesse far scoppiare il busto del vestito e sudava come una spugna; la sorella del ricevitore del registro, magra, stecchita, capelli grigi sur un faccione da mula e l'occhio destro di traverso [. . .] La stridula sorella del ricevitore, zitellona sarcastica e maldicente, rompeva spesso la conversazione come una stonatura di violino. Rimpetto a lei, ritto in piedi, col piglio vivace e canzonatore di uno scimmiotto, l'avvocato Ratti si dimenava e gesticolava raccontava una storiella, che interrotta a ripresa più volte, provocava un'ilarità chiassona. (p. 11).

The presence of such a grotesque and trivial humanity may highlight Giacinta's own integrity and refinement (which is what Capuana is bent on proving), but it cannot at the same time convincingly weigh upon her actions. On one occasion Capuana strives to dramatize the conflict between Giacinta and her social 'milieu'. After illness, when Giacinta is still confined to her sick-room, she begins to receive regular visits from a decrepit gallant named Mochi. Soon it is revealed that in view of her past he is aiming to secure a mistress and not a wife. The episode is intended to be representative, and to mark a stage in Giacinta's increasingly defiant attitude towards society. But we have heard too much of the mystery of Mochi's age, his suspiciously raven hair and youthful figure for his advances to be anything more than absurd. Giacinta's 'revenge' on society, the 'victories' and 'truces' of her struggle, exist only on the level of verbal assertion; and when society and parents have done their worst, they fade from Capuana's purview or are allowed to die.

Capuana is by temperament a psychological novelist and not a novelist of *ambiente*. It is arguable that some of his best work is to be found in psychological short stories, and the reader of even his most successful novel, *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, will sense occasionally that the peripheral characters who represent society at large have become cyphers whose only role is to impart motion to the central psychological drama. In Zola society conditions the individual, but also reflects him: theirs is a reciprocal and developing relationship. Its exclusive office in *Giacinta* is to perpetuate the trauma of the rape at an identical pitch of intensity. In so doing it becomes merely one more datum in a psychological or pathological 'problem', with the same value as Giacinta's genetic make-up and physiology. Hence society as Capuana depicts it through minor characters is *uniformly* grasping and hypocritical (Mochi, Teresa). And where it might be expected to modulate Giacinta's existence differently (in a husband or in a kindly father) there is the *trouville* of Giulio's imbecility and the perfect ineffectuality of Signor Paulo. Events of social magnitude are almost absent from the book. The lively scene of the failure of the Banca Agricola which opens Chapter VII peters out into an oblique comment on the financial astuteness of Teresa; Giacinta's visit to the 'veglione' is no more than an 'illustration' of her masochistic desire for self-abasement.

In view of Capuana's predominantly psychological interests it is not surprising that he shows to best advantage when he is 'setting-up' the problem from which the rest of the action will evolve. The opening chapter of the novel describes an evening

in the Marulli drawing-room, and comes to a climax with Giacinta's mysterious refusal to marry Andrea. We have been warned that Giacinta is a woman 'un po' diversa dalle altre' (p. 21). The following four chapters are a long 'flash-back' intended to elucidate this, and to demonstrate the rationale behind the refusal. Capuana describes Giacinta's lonely childhood, her disgrace at the hands of Beppe followed by her banishment to a boarding-school, the disillusionment of her social *début*. Chapter V describes the early history of her relationship with Andrea, and brings us in time to the point of her announcement in Chapter I. The *antefatto* is over.<sup>31</sup> In the closing lines of the chapter the name of Conte Giulio points to the future course of the novel.

With an unloving mother, a father who believes that daughters are best left to the womenfolk, abandoned to the care of indifferent servants, Giacinta grows up 'come una povera pianticina spuntata per cattiva sorte in luogo umido e ombrato' (p. 31). Capuana describes with delicacy and perception the long hours of solitude, the private fantasies and games, the periods of 'tristezza precoce' of the child (p. 31). While Giacinta is still too young for introspection she can draw none of the psychological conclusions which proliferate in later sections of the novel, and make Capuana's intentions over-explicit. Capuana's method here is cumulative and descriptive. The garden, for instance, with its ornamental stream, its great, shady trees, and the hidden plot with its canopy of perfumed convolvulus behind the covered walk, is not merely backdrop, but a unique, indispensable condition of Giacinta's disastrous friendship with Beppe. Capuana perhaps recalled the luxuriant vegetation of le Paradou from *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* where Serge and Albine make love in primaeval innocence, but Giacinta's garden with its secret recesses and rank growths hints at a lurking corruption. The Capuana of these descriptions reminds us of the critic who noticed how the unique 'passaggi' and 'gradazioni' of the novel could pave the way for scenes which would be unacceptable in other genres.

Giacinta is lonely enough to tolerate Beppe's whims for the sake of the only friendship she has. The gradual degeneration of their games is skilfully set against the psychological background of Giacinta's emotional needs and the physical background of the secluded garden where the two are left to their own devices. The combination of innocence and curiosity in Giacinta, and her friendless dependence on Beppe, are handled so convincingly that the intermittent reminders of Beppe's innate corruption seem superfluous. More courageous and more effective than Capuana's Zolian annotations is his refusal to ignore Giacinta's 'compiacimento malsano' experienced in 'quel nuovo genere di chiasso a cui Beppe l'invitava' (p. 41). In the whole of the episode the spirit of realism has the dignity of accuracy (though this will not always be so: the maid's comment on the rape, 'Accidenti! [. . .] La comincia anche prestino' (p. 43), or Giacinta's on the consummation of her marriage, 'Oh! . . . credevo peggio!' (p. 134), show how the shock effects of realism can be tastelessly abused). The culminating scene is not represented

directly, but through the intuitions of a servant girl who sees Giacinta emerge, bewildered and crying, from the covered walk, followed by Beppe who, 'confuso, pieno di rabbia, la scuoteva brutalmente pel braccio dicendole sottovoce: 'Stai zitta!' (p. 42).

The combination of audacious subject-matter and restraint of treatment produces a uniquely satisfying passage. The role of Beppe in the rest of the novel, however, is worth examining for the light it sheds on an originality of psychological intuition for which Capuana has not had full credit. Faithful to his mechanistic view of society, Capuana seldom lets us forget that Beppe's is fundamentally a 'natura bestiale' (p. 42). Yet, alongside the Zolian Beppe, there is the Beppe who is ingenious, humorous and entertaining, a willing servant and a precursor of Capuana's attractive orphans, Scarpiddo and Cardello. And perhaps the boldest and most persuasive psychological *aperçu* of the book occurs when, at boarding-school before Giacinta has absorbed society's view of sexual sin, she remembers Beppe with 'un sentimento di postuma gratitudine', for having loved her 'a modo suo'. The garden, in this awakening of memories assumes 'proporzioni grandiose e splendori abbaglianti' (p. 48). Four years later, when she returns home, Giacinta finds the garden, recently refurbished with wrought iron work and terracotta statues, pretentious and artificial. At the same time the innuendo of servants and the knowing glances of Teresa's friends corrupt and coarsen the image of Beppe: 'La figura di Beppe [. . .] non le si presentava più quella di prima. La irrideva sguaiata' (pp. 58-9). Henceforward Capuana adheres to a view of Beppe as the first link in a fatal chain that will bring Giacinta to suicide. Beppe's last appearance, as the coachman who drives her to the 'veglione', coincides with the moment of Giacinta's maximum self-degradation to stress the chain of causality initiated by him. Yet more eloquent than all Giacinta's explicit reactions of disgust, is her final unadorned vision of him: 'In tredici anni aveva cambiato poco o nulla nell'aspetto. Solamente era più muscoloso e più aitante e la sua divisa di cocchiere gli stava bene' (p. 208). In the novel Beppe is a minor character, introduced to serve a purpose. Thus it is almost in spite of Capuana that he emerges more appealingly sane and vigorous than any other character, possessed of a kind of animal innocence which jauntily ignores the plans made for him.

But if Beppe seems to defy Capuana's own conscious intentions, the sense of his 'innocence' is insidiously supported by Capuana's treatment of the relationship between mother and daughter. It is curious that images of violation are associated with Teresa ('Giacinta alla presenza della propria mamma sentivasi violentare, snaturare, spogliare di qualcosa di intimo e di essenziale alla sua vita che, tolta una volta, capiva che non le si sarebbe potuto restituire mai più' (p. 48)), and not with Beppe. Though Beppe is the ostensible source of all Giacinta's evils, Capuana seems to suggest that emotional deprivation is much more responsible for her subsequent eccentricities than any single action by Beppe. There is the hint of a psychological scheme far more modern than anything Zola cared to offer. The misery of

Giacinta's tortured relationship with her mother is well brought out, making it intermittently much more than a mere illustration of her unhappy involvement with the outside world. There is Giacinta's guilt at her own inability to feel affection for her mother ('provava orrore di sè stessa accorgendosi che [. . .] arrivava alla enormità di odiare la sua mamma' (p. 49)), her emotional exhaustion after each confrontation with Teresa, and her remorse (and Teresa's rejection) when at last her long-repressed anger is released and momentarily silences her mother: '“Mamma! Mamma! ” esclamò, accorrendo e prendendole la mano. La Signora Marulli, muta, abbattuta, respingendo da sè la figliola, torceva il volto dall'altro lato' (p. 156). In the rest of the novel there is a good deal of sophisticated psychological patterning: Capuana makes Teresa a continuing source of emotional frustration, for it is she who attempts to have Andrea posted to Sicily; Capuana sees the exaggerated emotional needs and the possessiveness of the adult Giacinta as proportional to the deprivation of her feelings in childhood; he shows her reproducing the parental pattern of dominator and dominated in the relationship with Andrea; and he convincingly demonstrates the principles of emotional self-compensation which are at work when Giacinta turns first to Mochi as a consolatory father-figure, and then, deluded, to religion. It is interesting that Giacinta's only friendships are with servants, with Beppe and later with the sharp-tongued Marietta. She is *declassée* as well as rejected. To be 'rehabilitated' she must not only dominate socially (marry a nobleman, give successful *soirées*), but 'reject' society in her turn (become openly Andrea's mistress, defy her mother).

Many of Capuana's intuitions in *Giacinta* (and later, conspicuously, the Oedipal relationship in *Profumo*) presage developments in psychological theory. Unfortunately their illumination is usually brief. They are not pursued beyond a single episode, and the episodes themselves, which correspond all too clearly to well-marked stages in Giacinta's mental development, stand side by side but not, as it were, in direct communication. True to his materialistic inspiration, Capuana tends to evaluate the events of his heroine's life *quantitatively*, as fractions of a final total, rather than as moments which may condition and modify each other. There is little sense of *durée*.<sup>32</sup> Yet there are a few exceptions as in Giacinta's school-girl recollections of Beppe, or when in the course of a bitter argument with Teresa the misery of the past permeates the present ('tutti i dolori, tutti i rancori, tutti gli sdegni della sua giovinezza le irrupero nella memoria come una banda sfrenata' (p. 156)), or after the 'veglione', when her mind is involuntarily filled with memories of a lonely but innocent childhood ('le ore solitarie della sua fanciullezza trascorse in un monotono, interminabile soliloquio' (p. 212)). In these rare moments there is imaginative participation, not programmatic intent, on Capuana's part, and Giacinta's story briefly acquires emotional density and conviction.

Capuana conceived *Giacinta* as the analysis of a personality in the processes of formation, development and disintegration. The structure of the book corresponds to this tripartite movement. After five chapters of preparation, there follow four

more in which Giacinta succeeds in imposing her irregular *ménage* on society and attains a measure of happiness. She buys a house, sets Andrea up as her 'amministratore', bears his child. The events reflect a phase of psychological ascent, at the end of which Capuana says that the lovers have reached 'il colmo della loro felicità: non potevano andare più oltre' (p. 168). The final three chapters of decline show the death of Giacinta's child (previously a 'chain' uniting the couple), Andrea's dawning interest in the consumptive daughter of his landlord, Elvira, Giacinta's growing mental unbalance and suicide. Capuana's realism, but even more his concern with internal values, makes for a choice of deliberately commonplace, undistracting events related closely to the stages through which Giacinta passes on the path to suicide.

In terms of narrative procedure Capuana's desire to assert the logical progression from one stage to another means that passages of action and dialogue alternate regularly, and rather monotonously, with lengthy analyses of their psychological repercussions. The narrative tends to break down into scene and commentary, and the effect of a fragmented, congested movement is increased by other elements in the narrative. In the whole of *Giacinta* the model for descriptive passages is Zola. Capuana aims to exhaust the possibilities of the observed object through a superabundance of detail. But he never again achieves the density of the opening chapters where dominant notes, motifs with a bearing on action, emerged from the description. Giacinta lives out most of the rest of her drama in an anonymous interior, and when Capuana pauses, rarely and abruptly, to describe places where the lovers find refuge (the port at night in Chapter VII, or the countryside just beyond the town in Chapter VIII), the description is merely backdrop, a decorative, 'literary' interlude which interrupts the flow of the narrative. There are still traces of the linguistic stratification which marred *Profili di donne*. Manzoni, as the preface attests, was no longer an adequate prose-model (though Capuana's 'fiorentinismo' persists: the definite article before Christian names, words and phrases such as 'grullo', 'vo' for 'voglio', 'la comincia anche prestino', 'O che quelle eran stanze?' (pp. 99, 96, 43, 148)); and the search for a 'new' language, flexible, detached and precise enough to capture infinite modulations of feeling is not always successful. Capuana is capable of being flabbily approximate: 'La Giacinta infatti resisteva fino a un certo punto, insomma esteriormente. In fondo in fondo, ripagava l'Andrea di un affetto uguale se non più forte del suo' (p. 89), and his prose tends to oscillate between several stylistic registers. As in *Profili di donne* (but now less dissonant because of the naturalist conception of the novel), there is at one extreme the jargon of positivist science ('cellule intormentite del cervello', 'delicato organismo', 'rassegnazione animale' (pp. 84, 41, 53) etc.), at the other what is essentially the ripe idiom of sentimental literature (though Capuana has made efforts to revitalize it with an admixture of deliberately 'original' imagery and precise or 'realistic' touches). Giacinta, seated in an armchair, recalls 'l'idea di un gioiello, del suo scatolino di raso azzurro e della fine bambagia color di rosa' (p.

10), or her voice 'un gorgheggio intessuto di frammenti di melodie' (p. 61). Andrea at one point is cast—but with naturalistic elements—as the darkly brooding romantic hero: 'bruno, un po' magro, dagli occhi alquanto infossati, ma pieni di fuoco, dalle labbra grandi, sensuali [. . .] dalla testa intelligente stupendamente pettinata, dall'aria signorile che l'eleganza dei vestiti faceva meglio spiccare' (p. 12). But Giacinta is normally the beneficiary of Capuana's lyricism and the reason is plain. Such language invokes a tradition of sentimental literature (*letteratura amena, per donne*) which invited the reader's total emotional collusion. In doing so it signifies to the reader that he is intended to sympathize with Giacinta, despite her failure to embody the values of the traditional heroine. There are passages, too, which seek to reanimate or vary the narrative with an increased intensity of linguistic tone. Zola is the model in the following attempt to capture the collective frenzy of the crowd, the Bank's creditors:

Visi pallidi di terrore, occhi rossi dal pianto, bocche urlanti bestemmie e minacce; mani e braccia che si alzavano in mezzo a quel fiume di gente scuotendo rabbiose cartelle e libretti [. . .] facce pensose e tuttavia incredule del disastro che le colpiva; teste di indifferenti e di curiosi che stavano a guardare a bocca aperta [. . .] per lungo tratto della via, di qua e di là del portone, non scorgevasi altro. (p. 135)

Zolian too are the animistic notations in Capuana's description of the countryside where the lovers meet:

La campagna sorrideva, beata dei primi tepori dell'aprile, sotto un cielo filettato qua e là di nuvolette bianche e diafane dagli orli color di rosa. Dietro i muriccioli e dietro le siepi dei campi, gli alberi affacciavano le loro teste inghirlandate dalle frondi novelle; e l'onda d'oro versato dal sole sui mille toni di verde, diventava, a un alitare del vento, un brulichio, un sorriso delle foglie prese da fremiti di amore. [. . .]. (p. 139)

We have already noticed the caricatural, sarcastic language of Capuana's social portraiture. The juxtaposition of these various registers makes *Giacinta* somewhat stylistically heterogeneous. By far the most important problem for the novel was its visual angle; and here it becomes impossible to separate Capuana's style from his ideology.

Capuana rightly says in the preface that he wanted, but failed, to make his narrative impersonal: the novel shows that he is uncertain of his means and of the degree to which he can rely on the responses of the reader. The first chapter demonstrates a remarkable but not entirely successful attempt at total dissociation from the narrative material. Capuana places himself in the same relation to the characters as the reader, a procedure which in the end merely calls attention to itself. He is patently reluctant to probe beneath the surface appearances of his characters (but was perhaps insufficiently aware of how obtrusively his choice of adjectives betrayed his attitudes) and so is forced into elaborate conjecture about their emotions on the basis of facial expression and gesture. He entrusts intuitions

on Giacinta's perplexing character to Colonnello Ranzelli in a clear attempt to deny his own omniscience, and is even unwilling to 'overhear' all the conversations taking place in various corners of the Marulli drawing-room. Standing 'among' his characters, Capuana reduces some sections of this chapter to a species of mime:

La Giacinta ora accennava di sì o di non con un movimento del capo [. . .] ora aggrottando le sopraciglia atteggiava le labbra ad una espressione di corruccio [. . .] Il sorriso [. . .] della Giacinta, accompagnato da un lungo abbassarsi delle palpebre e da un lieve dondolare del capo, dava benissimo a capire come spesso il colonnello avesse o modificato, o spiegato meglio il suo concetto. (p. 10)

Tell-tale phrases of the kind: 'sembrava', 's'indovinava', 'si vedeva', 'le si leggeva in viso', 'il suo aspetto mostrava' (pp. 11, 13, 14, 19), abound in this chapter. Clearly, these techniques were too unwieldy and contrived to be sustained. Capuana soon assumes a more normal stance, and the signs of his intervention in the text will range from the frequent underlining of intentions ('Questa donna [. . .] che le circostanze della vita avevano reso un'adultera' (p. 206)) to irony (Mochi, truthfully denying that he has been Giacinta's lover, 'ebbe un sublime movimento di nobilissima indignazione; così sublime che passò il segno, e volendo provar troppo, non provò nulla' (p. 100)) and the kind of generalization made familiar by *Profili di donne* ('Noi non sogliamo ostinarci tanto a voler fatta ragione come nel punto che abbiamo la coscienza di trovarci dalla parte del torto' (p. 195)). But Capuana's major intervention is in the figure of dottor Follini. Follini is both a projection of himself and a portrait of Capuana's ideal scientist, a 'medico filosofo' (p. 174) on the pattern of De Meis, for whom the practice of medicine consists not only in diagnosing and curing illness but is also a philosophical activity. Indeed Follini's observations of 'fatti individuali provati' are merely the raw ingredients of a 'gran lavoro sull'uomo' (p. 175). Like Capuana and De Meis himself as Capuana understood him Follini is an idealist only in the measure permitted by a positivist age: 'Non credeva all'anima immortale; però credeva all'anima ed anche allo spirito' (p. 174). Follini keeps his options open, as this ingenuous homage to the men whom Capuana saw as the luminaries of the period proves: 'combinava Claudio Bernard, Wirchoff e Moleschott con Hegel e Spencer; ma il suo Dio era il De Meis della Università di Bologna' (p. 174).<sup>33</sup> This abstract, composite figure enters the story at a point when Giacinta's reactions to the languishing relationship with Andrea are becoming truly pathological. In the final three chapters Capuana's success in describing the alterations in Giacinta between self-induced hope and despair, nervous exaltation and miserable apathy, is considerable. Yet the 'objectivity' of the novel at this stage seems undermined by two related misgivings, first that Giacinta's nervous reactions may seem highly improbable to the uninitiated, non-'scientific' reader, and second that her behaviour (especially her hankering after 'emozioni eccessive' and her use of sexual 'espedienti' (p. 204) to retain Andrea's

interest) may seem repulsive and immoral. Follini exists to rectify these interpretations, and his attitude to Giacinta exactly reproduces Capuana's. If Giacinta is to be studied with the 'fredda curiosità dello scienziato' (p. 187), she is also to be regarded with compassion ('la compativa come una vera ammalata (p. 185)) and respect. It is now Follini who notes the 'phases' in Giacinta's degenerating mental state, and who, reinforcing the central idea of an inevitable sequence of events, notices the 'sintomi precursori di una catastrofe [. . .] infallibile e vicina' (p. 184). When Giacinta exclaims that she was born to be a virtuous wife and mother, the fact that Follini has arrived at the 'stessissima conclusione' (p. 185) reminds the reader that Giacinta's perverseness is not fundamental to her nature.

It is clear that though the novel breaks new ground in sexual outspokenness and the extent to which it reflects the prevailing positivist ideology, it is nevertheless respectful of an existing moral code. The remark, for instance, that Giacinta's adulterous relationship retains an 'indefinibile castità' (p. 174), derives not from a taste for moral paradox but from moral scruples. Similarly, the 'tanta abnegazione e tanto coraggio' (p. 204) shown by Giacinta, the 'buone qualità del suo cuore e del suo spirito sviate in un'attività affatto contraria alla loro natura' (p. 203) are far from being objective notations. It is in the light of Capuana's moral caution that we must interpret the platonic attraction that develops between Giacinta and Follini. The characteristic of this relationship is its 'idealità'. Follini represents something that Giacinta 'avrebbe potuto scoprire nel suo passato [. . .] l'ideale' (p. 203). He proves the survival of her moral sense, and his own disinterested love is a further guarantor of her fundamental worth. The episode was perhaps too a concession to the kind of criticism that found realism tendentious if it did not deal with noble aspirations as well as instincts and passions.

The dualism between objective enquiry and moralistic reserve which is *Giacinta's* chief defect is not merely a problem of 'forma', of impersonality or not, as Capuana suggests in the preface. Nor is this dualism ascribable merely to Capuana's consciousness that his public was unprepared for the audacities of scientific realism. Its roots lie much deeper in his whole conception of the scientific novel.

*Giacinta*, as we have remarked before, displays little interest in the complexities of social living. Capuana, for instance, waves away the potential hindrance of the lovers' modest economic standing with a bequest to Giacinta from an unknown Parisian relative, and he subscribes in perfunctory style to the idea that society affects Giacinta: 'L'onta di cui sapevasi macchiata era un'onta incancellabile. Il pregiudizio della società voleva così; nè sarebbe stata lei che sarebbe riuscita ad abolirlo' (p. 82). The idea is simply a convenience of the plot, and Capuana is content to re-assert it at intervals in revealingly similar terms.<sup>34</sup> Society in its multiformity fires his imagination so little that its representatives, as we saw, are enveloped in a universal blanket of scorn, and provincial behaviour is the butt of satirical 'asides': 'in provincia la maldicenza è innalzata alla dignità di pubblica

istituzione (non vi si ammazza il tempo altrimenti)' (p. 100). In effect *Giacinta* 'isolates' an abnormal psyche from the outside world. It also constantly measures the heroine's 'pathological' behaviour against an implied norm:

ella volava ai convegni [. . .] con una leggerezza di cuore, che *in altra persona* sarebbe stata sfacciataggine; (p. 145)

il suo carattere *profondamente* sincero ribellavasi spesso contro l'*equivoca* situazione; (p. 158)

questa donna che *la natura aveva fatta casta*, che le circostanze della vita avevano reso un'adultera nella quale l'idea di un secondo amante produceva delle *insormontabili ripugnanze*. (p. 206)

The impulse behind such a procedure is a defensive, moralistic one, and it indicates that we are to accord Giacinta not approbation, but compassion and above all understanding. Capuana identifies himself not with Giacinta nor with her grotesque, provincial environment, but with an all-comprehending, 'scientific' stratum of humanity—an intelligent, superior society represented by Follini. But this same society preserves intact entirely conventional standards of behaviour. Capuana examines his 'caso patologico' within the framework of established values which he has no intention of subverting or questioning: Giacinta remains a 'vera ammalata', and she lives out her drama in the vacuum of her own obsessions, leaving society unchanged by her passing.

Thus the novel offers little radical protest at the way life is arranged, but primarily an opportunity to observe the interesting 'logic' of pathological behaviour. Scientific awareness, as the articles on Zola and Edmond de Goncourt indicated, is for Capuana a pure intellectual acquisition which does not alter (and here the departure from Zola is crucial) his existing views on society. It is not, as for Zola, the means of understanding society so that its functioning may be modified. This limited view of the implications of science accounts for a sense of fundamental conservatism in *Giacinta*. Capuana believed that the 'caso patologico' was artistically valuable for being, as it were, a concentration of life, reality functioning at a pitch of frenzy. As it turned out, the devaluing in *Giacinta* of those factors which lay beyond the mental realm (social, economic, local factors: the name and whereabouts of Giacinta's home town remain deliberately shrouded in mystery)<sup>35</sup> made the 'caso patologico' a partial, abstract conception. At the same time it is Capuana's close psychological analysis and his sense of a 'necessità' in events which give *Giacinta* claims to being a new departure, a reaction against the 'arbitrariness', the *romanzesco*, of earlier imaginative works. The first edition of *Giacinta* was sold out within six months of publication, and Capuana was long to be known as the 'autore di *Giacinta*'. But the book had something of a *succès de scandale*, and it never became, as Capuana had hoped, a point of reference for future writers. The cause lies in his vacillating attitude to the material of the narrative: on the one hand the desire to let the facts speak for themselves, on the

other the urge to build into the novel the criteria which he felt were needful for its proper understanding.

### 3. *A Changed Allegiance: Verga v. Zola*

Capuana's second series of *Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea*, consisting of articles written between October 1879 and May 1881, was published in 1882.<sup>36</sup> The courageous but sometimes problematical attempts of the earlier volume to elaborate the theory of a scientific art are over. The second series of *Studi* is a more confident work, and a coherent one. It shows the same belief in what Capuana now calls after Trezza 'la critica moderna', in a scientific approach to all branches of knowledge, and demonstrates clearly the limiting character of Capuana's scientific faith as we have seen it in *Giacinta*. But it also shows a greater spirit of independence in relation to the literary avant-garde of France, determined in part by the impact of Verga.

Capuana's own brand of evolutionism, his Hegelian positivism, is by now all-pervasive, and the term 'organismo' which suggests to him not only growth over a period of time, but the idea of a collection of parts making a functioning whole, applies not simply to the forms assumed by literature, but to the lives of nations, 'organismi che nascono, crescono, muoiono seguendo, al pari di qualunque essere vivente, le leggi supreme della natura' (p. 331), and to philosophy itself: 'la speculazione filosofica ha la sua legge, il suo organismo, e i sistemi non si ricostruiscono a piacere, nè si rimettono in onore dopo la loro temporanea funzione nel mondo della scienza' (p. 349). Nor can what Capuana calls, with the lofty impartiality of the modern researcher, 'il fatto religioso' escape the same scientific scrutiny: 'anche nelle religioni la teoria positiva e naturalistica delle forme ha trovato la giusta applicazione. Per la scienza, le religioni si sieguono ma non si somigliano. La loro vita, la loro successione è un elevarsi di forma, un perfezionarsi di organismi' (p. 367-8). Through all these pronouncements there echoes a sense of Hegelian morality, and Capuana never quite forgets that De Meis considered the future of art highly problematic: 'se il sentimento artistico vivrà eterno, la forma . . .', writes this modern 'Geremia', leaving suspension dots to hint at bleak expectations (p. 157). And it is clear that poetry seems to Capuana a cultural activity even more peripheral and threatened, perhaps, than it seemed to De Meis. Though Capuana reviews poems by Betteloni and Cannizzaro with generosity, their achievement is insidiously undermined by the image, which Capuana skilfully extends through the whole article, of a poetic muse once divinely and naturally beautiful, but now 'una vecchia dama galante' (p. 227), skilled in cosmetic arts, and inspiring not 'un vero inno della giovinezza e dell'amore' (p. 224), but the minor pleasure of 'interminabili bavardages' (p. 228).

It is important to bear in mind this Hegelian aspect of Capuana's positivism for it engenders in him a species of fatalism which has repercussions on his conception of art. It was Hegelianism with its belief in the upward curve of History towards pure

philosophical Truth, rather than Darwinism or positivist materialism, which authorized the view that the historical series of artistic forms was irreversible (Darwin indeed 'explicitly rejected the view that the phenomena of life were to be explained by a law of progressive development'<sup>37</sup>). And it is the law of irreversibility that invests Capuana's calls for modernity in art with authority, and allows him to condemn all those literary forms which do not correspond to the 'positive' nature of the age. In an article entitled 'A proposito del dramma storico', a final elimination of the genre, Capuana argues that to attribute to men in togas or doublets a sensibility which cannot be other than modern is to be inadmissibly untruthful since: 'Il positivismo, l'esigenza della verità storica nell'esterno e nell'interno del personaggio sono un modo di vedere e direi quasi un modo d'essere dello spirito moderno' (p. 263). Of the writer only 'la realtà presente, la realtà del suo spirito, la realtà vivente del suo tempo' should be asked (p. 265). The same sense of an inexorable development justifies a somewhat cerebral quest for modernity on the part of the artist: 'che volete si pensi' Capuana asks 'd'un artista il quale ignora la storia della propria arte e non sa fin dove sia arrivata, e da qual punto spetti a lui d'incamminarsi per proceder innanzi?' (p. 267). This is the theoretical vindication of Capuana's attempt in *Giacinta* to create a modern, scientific work of art.

Capuana's Hegelian 'fatalism' allows him, despite all De Sanctis had to say on the 'indifferenza del contenuto',<sup>38</sup> to prefer a contemporary subject-matter and a realistic treatment (in Neera he finds too much reverie: 'si vorrà vederle aprir la finestra perchè in quel suo studiolo entrasse la *luce sfacciata* delle vie [. . .] e il rumore assordante della vita' (p. 156)); it also insinuates itself into a variety of observations on politics, religion and science. These observations help us to discover a more complete rationale for Capuana's attitudes to realism, and in particular for the limited, purely aesthetic value he attributes to it, than has been possible earlier.

The conclusion reached through reading *Giacinta*, that Capuana is anxious to understand abnormality but only in the context of a broader, established normality, is confirmed by these *Studi*. Here we shall find the boundaries of his view of 'scienza' clearly laid out. The study of history, for instance, has in his opinion no practical application, no message for the present:

La critica moderna non domanda alla storia insegnamenti di sorta. Sa che la esperienza di questa non serve a nulla; e, convinta di non esserci al mondo cosa che si ripeta, ha già scancellato dalla sua mente il vecchio detto *historia magistra vitae*. Vuol sapere soltanto per sapere, per un elevato bisogno della ragione, non già, come prima, per un secondo fine di pratica utilità che un'accurata osservazione ha dimostrato illusorio. (p. 332)

'La critica moderna' is an end unto itself, a pure activity of the mind which observes but does not, because it cannot, seek to interfere with the development of mankind in history. Precisely because this development is 'fatal', Capuana can hold himself aloof from society and yet be concerned with all that is most advanced in

scientific discovery. In practice his aloofness amounts to conservatism and his concern for science is elitist.

These pages distinguish at many points, tacitly or explicitly, between the cultured few, the practitioners of 'la critica moderna', and the 'grosso pubblico'. Capuana's fear is that positivist science, materialism, scepticism—valuable stimulants of reason where his peers are concerned—may produce dangerous results when they leave responsible hands. He sees the misappropriation of the new intellectual freedom into the realms of mass politics as responsible for the 'orgia comunarda di Parigi' (p. 351). By constitution and education incapable of sympathizing with 'il popolo' ('la parte che mette più paura e dà più a pensare nelle presenti condizioni sociali' (p. 354)), and insensitive to the socio-economic impulse behind what he sees as the socialist threat, Capuana is inclined to view it as an unfortunate by-product of a positivist climate, and wonders: 'col problema sociale che si rizza terribile in mezzo alla società moderna, il materialismo, lo scetticismo, il pessimismo dove ci faranno approdare?' (p. 351). Forced to confront the fact that the science to which he himself ardently subscribes may subvert religious and moral thinking—and therefore the social order—Capuana is somewhat reassured, at least where Italy is concerned, by thoughts of the divide between intellectual elite and uneducated masses. If he himself is liberated from religious needs by science, the populace, he is confident, will never embrace its 'concetti nudi di ogni ornamento fantastico' (p. 355); it will always be better persuaded by the 'concetto semi-materiale del paradiso cattolico' (p. 356), or perhaps, in time, by the less ritualistic religion of spiritualism. At all events it will tend to create its own system of restraints. It is De Meis's Hegelianism, which orders phenomena in relation to Philosophy, setting sentiment and imagination 'lower' than reflection, art and religion lower than philosophical speculation, 'female' practicality lower than 'masculine' cerebration, which sanctions this conservative, hierarchical view of society. And it is De Meis who gives Capuana the equanimity of the fatalist as he contemplates the worst that the future may bring: 'la storia [. . .] quando sarà passata oltre, non si ricorderà dei nostri terrori e dei nostri guai; anzi si rallegrerà d'aver acquistato un qualche bene a prezzo degli orridi incendi delle stragi comunarde e di quello che vi potrà essere di peggio nelle future rivoluzioni sociali' (p. 360). That 'qualche bene' will be a more 'philosophic' society, a society which has progressed.

Capuana 'scienza' is able only to analyse society, not to be operative in it. The scientist's consolation in his clairvoyance and the superior intellectual joy of seeing society move inexorably forward. Thus Capuana salutes as a 'colpo di genio' the Law of Guarantees which allows religion to flourish freely and no longer in opposition to the State as in the later years of the struggle for unity (p. 374). The Law seems to him 'tutto altro che un accomodamento empirico' because it actuates, consciously or not, a philosophy which divides a superior 'attività dello spirito umano' from practical, political concerns (p. 365). And the conservative in Capuana who believed so strongly in the mission of the new ruling classes has

reason to be satisfied now that the Church is 'impotente a turbare la libera funzione del nostro Stato' (p. 364).

The inevitability of the evolutions prognosticated by De Meis's system were, then, an additional reason for the ostensibly neutral, but in reality conservative, connotations of Capuana's 'scienza'. It was natural that Capuana, for whom Italy's unity had been a high youthful ideal, and who had since worried over her internal fragmentation, should identify with the symbol of unity which was Italy's constituted government, and should wish to see Italy continue on its path undisturbed and undisrupted. This clinging to a reassuring idea of normality had been evident in *Giacinta*; it now becomes evident in his response to a polemical Zola.

In the late seventies the *Bien Public*, the *Voltaire*, and the *Messenger de l'Europe* of Saint-Petersburg published articles of Zola's (reprinted subsequently in such works as *Le Roman expérimental* and *Le Naturalisme au théâtre* of 1800 and 1881) which established clearly the theoretical, scientific bases of *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Zola's republican sympathies, and ambitions for the experimental novel: 'être maître du bien et du mal, régler la vie, régler la société, résoudre à la longue tous les problèmes du socialisme'.<sup>39</sup> The emergence of Zola the campaigner, the man with a reputation for being a socialist, would perhaps have been sufficient to put Capuana on his guard. There were, however, additional reasons for Capuana's detachment from the theoretical Zola. De Amicis had interviewed him in Paris during the summer of 1878, and published his impressions in a volume entitled *Ricordi di Parigi* (1879). There he reveals Zola's confession that the theory of the experimental novel (in Capuana's words) was nothing more than a 'bandiera che lo Zola inalbera arditamente, a suoni di grancassa, per attirar la folla che altrimenti passerebbe via' (p. 140).<sup>40</sup> An entry for February 1877 in the Goncourts' diary makes a similar revelation.<sup>41</sup> No doubt De Amicis and the Goncourt brothers had simply caught Zola in moments when his artistic pride rebelled against the perpetual self-justification and explanation to which his controversial novels condemned him. But the aristocratically detached Goncourts, like Capuana, had an interest in minimizing the importance of the theoretical, political Zola. Capuana had reminded himself, even in the midst of his enthusiasm for the 'scientific' Zola, that his work must be judged by the criteria of art alone. And now, just as Zola himself seemed to encourage his critics to discount the importance of his theoretical premisses, came the publication of *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia*, causing Capuana to re-think his attitudes to the novel in general.

The period of the *Studi* was one of particularly close contact with Verga. When Capuana and Verga were not together in Milan, letters flowed to and fro between Catania and Mineo showing how close was the harmony of literary aspiration between the two Sicilians. Capuana was able to claim, in his review of *Vita dei campi*, that he had pointed out to Verga the original of *La Lupa*, a peasant woman who lived at Santa Margherita where the Capuana family spent its summers.<sup>42</sup>

Later, in 1894, he claims to have provided the 'spunto' for 'L'Amante di Gramigna' too, and even more particularly for its obsessive motif of thirst.<sup>43</sup> But the influence functioned in both directions, and Capuana, perhaps surprisingly in view of the widespread opinion that Capuana 'aiutò il Verga a ritrovarsi',<sup>44</sup> absorbed much from Verga. Only a month after Verga had expressed his bitter disappointment at the cool public reception of *I Malavoglia*, and had confided to Capuana that it needed all the strength of his artistic convictions not to 'ammannire i manicaretti che piacciono al pubblico per poi ridergli in faccia',<sup>45</sup> Capuana in his review of the novel echoed disapproval of a public 'assuefatto a manicaretti pepati di rettorica e di romanticismo', unable to savour the 'semplicità quasi nuda' of Verga's prose-style (p. 134). His review of *Vita dei campi* paraphrased a section of Verga's theoretical statement addressed to Farina at the beginning of 'L'Amante di Gramigna' and called it, with the simplicity of total conviction, 'la teoria dell'arte moderna' (p. 123). In view of the intensity of their literary exchanges (of which the letters of the period can only give a dim idea), it is perhaps not surprising that Capuana was the first to acknowledge Verga's genius. What is more surprising is that, given the opportunity to discuss *I Malavoglia*, Capuana devotes most of his energy to a general discussion of the tradition of the novel and Verga's place in it. One reason for this is that 'l'accoglienza freddina' given the novel seemed to Capuana attributable to the lack of a narrative tradition in Italy (p. 135). The achievement of *I Promessi sposi* was isolated and linked to the present only through the execution of certain 'parti secondarie' (p. 136). Thus Italians were ill-prepared to understand Verga's work. But Capuana was also obliged, following the emergence of this new and perplexing Zola, to re-define his attitudes to the novel and at the same time to accommodate the greatness of Verga within them. Though he himself resisted such classifications, we may speak, for convenience, of a *poetica del verismo* in connexion with this second series of *Studi*, not simply because they coincide chronologically and occupy themselves with two great works of *verismo*, *Vita dei campi*, and *I Malavoglia*, but because their aesthetic arguments are now different from those associated with French naturalism, and correspond to a cultural situation which is purely Italian.

The Capuana who emerges from the reading of Verga's masterpieces is involved in some specific re-interpretations. Only recently, in the first series of *Studi*, it has seemed to him that the 'metodo scientifico' outlined in the Preface to the *Comédie humaine* of 1842 'avvertivasi appena' in Balzac's novels themselves.<sup>46</sup> All the more credit had therefore been due to Zola for actuating the mere intuitions of his predecessor. Now, in contrast, Capuana declares his opinion that 'tutto il romanzo moderno sia già nel Balzac, anche il *naturalista*, anche lo *sperimentale*' (p. 76). Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers and Zola become simply his continuers. And if the 'elemento scientifico' has become increasingly important for these descendants of Balzac, this is inevitable since art always reflects the climate in which it flourishes. 'Ma', Capuana continues, in accord with a change of emphasis in his attitude to

science, 'la vera novità non istà in questo. Nè sta nella pretesa di un *romanzo sperimentale*'. For 'un'opera d'arte non può assimilarsi un concetto scientifico che alla propria maniera, secondo la sua natura d'opera d'arte' (p. 140). Though Capuana admires *Nana*, his former ardour for the scientific novel has disappeared, and he comes to a crucial aesthetic turning-point. He had written once that scientific realism was a process; now, developing this idea, he contends that 'il positivismo, il naturalismo esercitano una vera influenza nel romanzo contemporaneo ma *soltanto nella forma*, e tal influenza si traduce nella *perfetta impersonalità* di quest'opera d'arte' (p. 140). Impersonality becomes the cornerstone of Capuana's post-naturalistic realism. In the light of it he re-assesses the tradition that links Balzac to Zola, and now culminates in Verga, and it is perhaps not surprising that the exuberant (and politically vocal) Zola strikes Capuana as less impersonal than the Sicilian:

Nei romanzi del Balzac [. . .] egli si mescola ogni po' all'azione, spiega, descrive, torna addietro, fa delle lunghe divagazioni prima di lasciar i suoi personaggi a dibattersi soli soli colle loro passioni [. . .] e l'onnipotenza del suo genio non si mostra mai così intera come quando le sue creature rimangono libere, abbandonate ai loro istinti, alla loro tragica fatalità. I suoi successori intervengono assai meno di lui nell'azione o non intervengono affatto. Si può dire che la loro opera d'arte si faccia da sè, piuttosto che la facciano loro [. . .] *I Malavoglia* si riannodano agli ultimissimi anelli di questa catena dell'arte [. . .] e conterranno per qualcosa nella storia generale dell'arte. Giacchè finora nemmeno lo Zola ha toccato una cima così alta in quell'*impersonalità* ch'è l'ideale dell'opera d'arte moderna. (p. 141-2)

The uncongenial knowledge that Zola's theoretical pronouncements had associated his novels with practical and social (if not socialist) aims, and at the same time the confusing news that the scientific, political Zola had merely been questing after publicity, and perhaps even a chastening memory of De Sanctis, were sufficient to make Capuana view his recent sympathy with the idea of a scientific art in a critical manner. The contacts with Verga described earlier had prepared him to give importance to the concept of impersonality once his gaze had turned back from novels with scientific ambitions to the problem of 'forma'. But there were other less external reasons for his emphasis. Capuana had long since felt that artistic 'vitality' could be achieved only where authors allowed their characters to function autonomously. More recently he had applied the terms 'organismo' to the work of art. In the 'organismo' each separate, inter-related component was necessary to the whole, and the whole unfolded with its own special logic, the logic of an artistic reality purged of the accidents of ordinary existence. Where the author intervened the sense of an autonomous whole was compromised. If there was any parallel between the scientific and the impersonal stance, it lay not as may be expected in the fabled detachment of both, but in their common concern with an 'organismo' and in their common resolution to register a course of events which is logical and necessary. Thus, referring to the playwright, Marengo, Capuana wrote that he

dovrebbe restar spettatore, lasciar che i personaggi operino da per loro, e che la commedia si faccia quasi da sè. Non dovrebbe far altro che seguirla, come il chimico segue il processo d'una cristallizzazione, come il fisiologo l'esercizio di una funzione messa in esperimento. Quando l'autore interviene col suo capriccio, colle sue idee, coi suoi sentimenti non può che guastare. E' un elemento estraneo, un elemento accidentale, una cosa assolutamente contraria all'arte che s'infiltra, s'insinua, ed altera le proporzioni, mette lo squilibrio nelle varie forze, sovverte la logica della natura umana in questi individui così diversi da lui, toglie loro la libera personalità, li fa diventare dei burattini. (p. 280-1)

When Capuana finds space to speak directly of *I Malavoglia*, it is to see the novel as a self-contained, self-generating reality, 'un congegno di piccoli particolari, allo stesso modo della vita, organicamente innestati insieme' (p. 143).

The predominant reason for Capuana's approval of *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia* appears at first sight to be the sheer enjoyment of their fidelity to a Sicilian original. The peasants of *Vita dei campi* are indeed not merely Sicilian 'ma più particolarmente di quella piccola regione che sta [. . .] fra Monte Lauro e Mineo' (p. 123). Their lives, their modes of speech and thought are recorded with a supreme care for accuracy and a total effacement of the author's own personality:

L'artista gli ha presi nella loro piena concretezza, nella loro più minuta determinatezza, facendosi piccino con loro, sentendo e pensando a modo loro, usando il loro linguaggio semplice, schietto, e nello stesso tempo immaginoso ed efficace, fondendo apposta per essi, con felice arditezza, il bronzo della lingua letteraria entro la forma sempre fresca del loro dialetto, affrontando bravamente anche un imbroglio di sintassi, se questo riusciva a dare una più sincera espressione ai loro concetti. (p. 123-4)

Yet clearly Capuana is not as preoccupied with the documentary veracity of these tales as with the integrity of Verga's artistic 'organism'. The reality of the 'organismo' indeed is not the reality of ordinary existence, and Verga's *Lupa* is 'più vera della vera quand'era viva'. Verga's imagination may not have been involved in creating adventurous intrigues—'non ha inventato nulla'—but it has intuited and turned to account the only proper manner in which to express the subject: 'ha trovato, ha indovinato la forma, che è quanto dire: ha fatto tutto' (p. 139). The 'linguaggio semplice' or 'forma' employed by Verga is generated by his subject, and is at the same time the unique, the only adequate vehicle of that subject. Capuana's 'forma' now has different connotations from De Sanctis's: 'quando dico forma, non intendo soltanto la frase, lo stile, ma qualche cosa di più elevato: la concezione, tutto l'organismo dell'opera d'arte, che funziona colla pienezza della vita, libero e indipendente dalla personalità che lo credè' (p. 132). The discovery of this 'organismo-forma' as the indispensable prerequisite of aesthetic excellence has consequences for Capuana's artistic theory and practice. As a young critic his artistic ideal had been the classical type. In *Profili di donne* and even in *Giacinta* he had been wary of giving his background too much specific detail in case it rose up to form barriers beyond which his message could not pass. The generalizations on

human psychology which punctuated both works were perhaps designed to build a general relevance into the particular situation Capuana was analysing. The 'organismo', however, demands the precision of life itself, for where it is lost and the illusion of reality fails, there stands the author, his personality and his intentions exposed. 'Per retorica alterigia', Capuana writes of his compatriots 'preferiamo *inventare* un sentimento, invece di esprimerne uno *realmente* sentito: preferiamo annegarci entro vaste generalità, piuttosto che circoscriverci fra i limiti d'un piccolo *fatto*' (pp. 30-31). Henceforward he would not be afraid to present to his readers the 'piccoli fatti' of his native Sicily.

It is clear from the preceding remarks that Capuana's *verismo* depended on the triple, inter-related, and overlapping considerations of 'organismo', 'impersonalità', 'linguaggio', and that each of these was calculated to potentiate the sense of an immediate reality. Capuana lays much stress on the literal veracity of Verga's subjects, yet accuracy of observation was not the final aim of the writer; and though the climate of the times suggested to Capuana that the novelist could not do other than proceed realistically and impersonally, it is obvious that his *verismo* aspired to transcend the limits of the age in which he lived. He clung to his *verismo* long after its hour of triumph was past, and what he wrote of it even in the early days of these *Studi* proves that for him it was not a transient set of concepts or a reaction to the literature of the first half of the century which he came to dismiss, somewhat simplistically, as conventionally Arcadian or motivated solely by politics: the tenets of *verismo*, he felt, were permanently capable of enhancing the probabilities of aesthetic success.

What is now known as the *verista* movement has come to be associated with a regional subject-matter (and this is another feature which differentiates *verismo* from French naturalism) and with the agricultural classes more than with the urban proletariat. Writers such as Matilde Serao and Remigio Zena (in *La Bocca del lupo*) deal with the poorest sector of the population scraping a living in the slums of large cities like Naples and Genoa. But in the historical balance Verga's and Capuana's Sicilian peasantry, Fucini's Tuscan *mezzadri* and countryfolk, weigh more heavily than these. Yet, in view of the durable validity of *verismo* in Capuana's eyes, it is interesting to note that he himself envisaged no such limitations for his method. He did not ignore the manifest originality of Verga's subject-matter (*Nedda* opened up a 'nuovo filone nella miniera quasi intatta del romanzo italiano' (p. 117)) but he assumed, mindful probably of what Edmond de Goncourt had revealed about his eventual aspirations for realism, and justified by the Preface to *I Malavoglia* itself, that Verga would proceed from Aci Trezza to 'la borghesia e le alte classi delle grandi città' (p. 144). To frequent the world of the peasant constituted for Capuana, as we have already remarked, something of a technical apprenticeship. It was perhaps not only because by temperament he was attracted to the most complex manifestations of the human psyche, but also because he contemplated a natural extension of the narrative techniques he prescribed to a higher order of

reality, that his own novels preferred to focus on characters from the upper echelons of society.

Capuana never said, and perhaps never felt, that there was a hierarchy of artistic difficulty and therefore of excellence which attached to a particular subject-matter. He did, however, warn his readers that Verga might seem less original and less colourful (because of the levelling effects of education described in the *Malavoglia* preface) when he left Aci-Trezza for the 'grandi città', and in years to come he continued to await eagerly Verga's promised migration from country to town, from *contadino* to bourgeois. This eager expectation is a valuable pointer to a particular quality of Capuana's own theoretical and creative approach to regional *verismo*.

*Nedda* opened up a new 'seam' in the novelist's 'mine', but the 'seam' was only one among many which invited exploitation, though for the moment it had the additional appeal of novelty. Capuana had, in short, no decided preference for a particular subject-matter. The Sicily he depicted in imitation of Verga imposed itself upon him not with the force of an imperative, but as an interesting, even piquantly exotic, option. Just as the 'connubio' of Hegelianism and positivism allowed for radical shifts in the ideology which supported his creative work, so his *verista* aesthetics and the definition he gave to 'forma' ('vuol dire in gran parte processo, tecnicismo', he wrote at this time)<sup>47</sup> left the way open to multiple choices of subject in his future career as narrator.

Capuana later rejected any application to himself of what he felt was the barren formula of 'art for art's sake', and he was fiercely opposed to the aestheticism of D'Annunzio and his followers. In a sense his repudiation was justified. He had commended Verga not only for creating an autonomous reality, but for provoking the reader into feeling and thought ('un sentimento d'immensa tristezza si diffonde da ogni pagina e penetra il cuore e fa pensare' (p. 124)). And as Gaetano Trombatore has seen, a 'profonda esigenza morale' lay at the roots of *verismo*,<sup>48</sup> with its serious-minded *studio dal vero*, its curbing of the imagination, and its denying the reader his 'manicaretti pepati di rettorica'. In Verga the 'esigenza morale' is translated besides into a bitter denunciation of man's egoism as it manifests itself in the struggle for economic survival. In the more easy-going Capuana, determined to believe in and to promote the 'magnifiche sorti' of modern Italy, the artist's protest is diverted exclusively into aesthetic channels, becoming the discipline of 'forma', the repudiation of literary 'rhetoric' and subjectivism, a life-long search for a prose that was not only precise and correct, but simple and accessible. So it is that his creative work (and particularly, as we shall now see, his regional short stories), while the product of undoubted aesthetic seriousness, still seems, in the broadest sense, a gratuitous activity. Nor should one be misled by the fact that Capuana was again becoming concerned over Italy's apparent inability to produce works which did not seem imitative of France, works which captured 'il punto di colore italiano'. The old undercurrents of chauvinism are by now of course dissipated, and it is vital that Italy absorb the artistic achievements of other

nations:

finchè non studieremo in che modo l'organismo della forma del romanzo sia giunta a perfezionarsi fuori d'Italia, finchè non sapremo assimilarci tutto il processo tecnico che è una buona parte di ogni lavoro artistico, non sarà facile vedere un romanzo italiano contemporaneo che sia vero specchio della nostra vita in ogni condizione sociale.<sup>49</sup>

But here the order of priorities is important. It so happens that once art is conceived as 'organismo', as a 'congegno' with the autonomy of real life, a local specificity is implied as a matter of course, and is itself, as we have seen, the indispensable guarantee of the 'organismo's' existence. Thus the argument never really leaves the circle of purely artistic considerations. Capuana's regional *verismo* is a gratuitous aesthetic act, not, as Verga's, the vehicle of a protest, nor an invitation to the readers of Italy, as Vittorio Spinazzola writes, to 'prendere atto delle sue contraddizioni interne'.<sup>50</sup> 'I nostri costumi, i nostri sentimenti, i nostri vizii, le nostre virtù son lì che aspettano ancora il loro storico', writes Capuana; and we have seen that Capuana's *storico* 'vuol sapere soltanto per sapere'.

#### 4. Capuana's 'novelle rusticane'

If *Giacinta* had been purposely vague in location in order to be more easily universal, *Vita dei campi* and *I Malavoglia* in teaching Capuana that narrative 'progressed' only in terms of 'forma' also taught him not to despise the specific. Verga's work disclosed a vast new area ready for artistic exploration, and it was one which Capuana had in fact been contemplating unsuspectingly for years. He had collected *canti popolari* for Vigo since 1857, and more recently the two editions of poems by the seventeenth-century dialect poet, Paulo Maura, proved the continuity of his concern with regional, Sicilian culture.<sup>51</sup> As mayor, his *Comune di Mineo*, a history of the town from the point of view of its finances, and an account of his own labours in putting them to rights, revealed the extent of his commitment to local affairs, and his impulse to delineate the inhabitants of Mineo collectively:

ingegni fini, arguti con una dose di ironia che non rispetta proprio nulla, più che gli agi e le ricchezze amiamo la tranquillità spensierata e fannullona, e in mancanza di oppio ci stordiamo cogli sbadigli, pur di sognare ad occhi aperti, immersi in una prostrante apatia che intacca il corpo e lo spirito e ci rende quasi inetti all'azione.<sup>52</sup>

Following Verga's two masterpieces Capuana's *Mineoli* were to become the subjects of a series of short stories. They have much the same characteristics as here, and Capuana treats them with much the same affectionate indulgence.

Even before 1880 Capuana was apparently experimenting with regional short stories. Among papers in the Biblioteca comunale of Mineo Croce Zimbone has recently discovered a story entitled 'La figlia del sindaco', written out seemingly in Capuana's own hand about 1875.<sup>53</sup> But portions of the story, which tells of Lazzaro's absurd and tragic passion for a woman who is socially unattainable, is

related with a sobriety, a suggestive reticence, less characteristic of Capuana than of Verga; Zimbone himself supposes that the two authors worked in collaboration on the story. Two further stories, 'L'ideale di Piula' and 'Storia fosca' (both included in the volume of short stories, *Un bacio*, of 1881) are set in Sicily and were written before the publication of *Vita dei campi*. Yet neither is essentially Sicilian. 'L'ideale di Piula' tells of a young man whose regular, yearly projects for matrimony are repeatedly thwarted by the chilling financial calculations of his future wives' relations. Piula, perpetually convinced that he has discovered his ideal mate, finally admits that his ideal would be to marry the dowry without the wife. Later, without directly figuring in his stories, Capuana will assume a similar stance to that of the interlocutor in 'L'ideale di Piula', an anonymous first-person whose wry vision of Piula, and capacity to channel the story towards a final *battuta* are essential to the reader's perception of its comedy. Capuana will always, as in *Profili di donne* and even in *Giacinta*, find it difficult to resist a clinching, ironic close. Though not essentially Sicilian, 'L'ideale di Piula' is a model for the humorous, caricatural vein of many of Capuana's rustic tales. 'Storia fosca', the best of the stories in *Un bacio* (and consequently to provide the title for a republication of all but one of the stories in 1883), may similarly be seen as the model for stories where the logic of passion is worked out with primitive, 'Sicilian' violence. Yet equally it continues the line of inspiration which produced *Giacinta*. As in the novel, Capuana makes use of a human document, a 'memoria legale' in this instance, and the story, which tells of the incestuous relationship between a young stepmother and the son of a Sicilian baron, betrays Capuana's familiar interest in socially abnormal sexuality. Accused of imitating Zola's *La Curée*, Capuana was moved to comment on the nature of modern narrative:

Oggi che il romanzo e la novella son diventati un vero studio psicologico, i caratteri dei personaggi, l'ambiente dov'essi vivono, le circostanze che li fanno agire occupano talmente il posto del *fatto*, prima creduto l'essenziale, che lo stesso fatto può esser ripreso e studiato con varietà indefinita. Da essi, trasposto in altro ambiente, come da invisibile nucleo, si svolge e si forma un nuovo organismo di caratteri e di sentimenti non più vaghi e indeterminati, ma concreti, determinatissimi, del tal posto, del tale anno; ed è il completo trionfo dell'individuo vivo sull'individuo astratto, sul *tipo* classico, insomma una cosa perfettamente moderna.<sup>54</sup>

For all this emphasis on the concrete and the individual the background of Sicily is not vital to the drama of 'Storia fosca'; and while, as Enrico Ghidetti remarks, the incest in *La Curée* 'è uno dei sintomi della decadenza del costume e della degradazione morale della società borghese del secondo Impero',<sup>55</sup> in 'Storia fosca' as in *Giacinta* Capuana aims primarily at demonstrating the inevitability of the event. The gradual transformation of the baroness's sisterly feelings is tactfully and believably handled, and 'Storia fosca' also improves on *Giacinta* by suppressing all moralistic comment. The story becomes spontaneously a celebration of natural

instincts: 'E avean continuato, insaziabili, come due esseri senza coscienza, come due bruti belli e giovani che tracannavano la coppa della vita, per esaurirla. Nulla era venuto a turbarli: nè cura del presente, nè pensiero dell'avvenire.'<sup>56</sup> The dark shadow of the Baron, glimpsed at the beginning of the story as he makes his discovery, falls across their innocent sensuality, but there is no Sicilian crime of passion to end the story, merely the stealthy entry into the bedchamber of 'il pretore' and 'il brigadiere dei carabinieri', accompanied by the law-abiding husband, to catch the pair *in flagrante*.

Thus the truly Sicilian stories come only after 1880. Five of ten stories in the collection entitled *Homo!* of 1883 are Sicilian, and reminiscent of Verga in style (Capuana uses proverbs, a colloquial narrative tone, is occasionally ungrammatical) and in the exploitation of the 'Sicilian' themes of home, honour, and possessions. As in Verga there is a 'choral' village presence. But similarities in content and style are less important than the divergencies of inspiration. While Verga's work is concerned with the harsh laws of survival which govern the lives of his peasants, Capuana looks rather to the end result of the Sicilian condition, to the characteristic Sicilian personality. Indeed, he is just as inclined to describe the whole course of a character's existence with its succession of minor, typifying incidents, as to isolate a single dramatic event. A vital pointer to Capuana's attitude, and one that distinguishes him from Verga, is that though each of his stories ends with a death (even if it is only the death of a valuable mule) the predominant tone is not tragic but ironic or humorous.

Where Capuana, following Verga's example, takes a subject that might well illustrate how cruel economic exigencies dominate and crush natural affections, he succeeds only in delineating a stereotype of peasant avarice. In 'La mula' the expendability of a wife (especially when her death brings with it a bequest to her husband) is contrasted with the 'real' disaster of losing a mule worth 'quarant'onze'. Capuana plays with a reversal of values—the sick wife is left to die like a 'cagna' while the husband, Don Michele, whispers encouragement to his dying mule 'come a una cristiana'—and ends with a deliberate and simplistic harshness. The wife survives and Don Michele gives vent to his exasperation: 'Sua moglie, che avea avuto tutte le cose della Santa Chiesa, campava! E la mula che pareva dovesse guarire, se la mangiavano i cani dietro il Castello.'<sup>57</sup>

Don Peppantonio (in a story of the same name) continually defers unspecified but ambitious matrimonial projects for his cherished adopted daughter until she impatiently elopes and he dies of the shock. Despite this (tenuous) story-line, Capuana is much less concerned with Peppantonio's unreasoning protectiveness or with the economic objections he may have to the shoemaker's son than with his habitual state of 'comic', blustering anger. When Verga's characters rail at forces they cannot understand or control there is a sense of their shared destiny of tragic impotence; when Don Peppantonio 'manda accidenti al sindaco, agli assessori, all'esattore, al ricevitore, a tutti! . . . Anche a Vittorio Emanuele', the whole village

delights in his indiscriminate irascibility and treats him, as Capuana does, as a comical eccentric to be taunted for amusement's sake. Capuana tends also to present his characters as examples of a quaintly primitive mentality. After a day of blaspheming, at the hour of the Angelus Peppantonio reverts to superstitious piety. In 'Lo sciancato' the town-crier has a proud (but also, in the author's intention, touchingly absurd) sense of vocation for his humble profession. The comic possibilities of sheer physical appearance are exploited too. Peppantonio is scarcely ever presented without a grotesque 'tuba di felpa cinericcia, della foggia di cinquant'anni fa';<sup>58</sup> and there is a carefully constructed contrast between the 'vocione' of the town-crier and his frail, jaundiced physique ('Donde lo cavava quel vocione? Se lo sapeva lui!').<sup>59</sup>

'Comparatico' is the most successful of these Sicilian stories. It was adapted from the false *canto popolare* which Capuana gave Vigo for his *Raccolta amplissima di canti popolari siciliani*.<sup>60</sup> The tale of Janu, betrayed by his wife and the godfather of the child he once believed his own, moves quickly to its violent conclusion without descriptive or analytical pauses. The simple psychology of the characters is fully realized in dialogue and action. Janu kills the 'compare's' child and, returning home from the fields, feigns drunkenness in order to catch the lovers off their guard. The final brief chapter opens with the news that Janu has 'scannato moglie e compare, e poi era andato a presentarsi al brigadiere'. It is here that Capuana concedes something to the convention of the meridional *delitto d'onore*. The population of the village is 'tutta a favore di compare Janu, poverino, che aveva fatto benissimo', and Janu himself is handcuffed but 'sorridente e a testa alta'. And the final exchange between Peppe Nasca, 'un po' parente del morto' and Janu—

'Assassino! Vi punsero ora le corna, dopo quattr'anni?' 'Meglio di te', rispose Janu guardandolo in faccia, 'che quelle di tua sorella col pastaio non ti pungono ancora!'<sup>61</sup>

—sacrifices all sense of Janu's grief, and trivially exploits the cliché view of southern honour in order to provide an arresting close. Capuana must have become aware of the damaging effects of this facile and unfeeling humour, for in republishing the story he added a few clumsy words of attenuation: 'E passò via con un sorriso di sfida su le labbra. Avea però la morte nell'anima, pensando al povero bambino, morto innocente come Cristo in croce!'<sup>62</sup>

The horns of the cuckold and the blasphemies of Capuana's peppery village eccentrics are sufficiently prominent in these stories (and one cannot fail to note the contrast provided by Verga's restrained treatment of religious and sexual themes) to suggest that Capuana views his Sicilians from the vantage-point of an 'ex'-Sicilian intent on encapsulating the distinguishing features of a people for the benefit of a 'continental' reading-public. This conclusion finds support in 'Bagni di sole', a story in the form of a letter addressed to a Milanese lady-friend by a 'continentalized' Sicilian, which characterizes the island as hopelessly cut off from

the rest of civilization, immobile in its superstitious ignorance. Capuana views his characters with affectionate humour, but the affection is tinged with indulgent condescension and the humour derives from detachment. It is a detachment which allows him, for example, to see the worldliness of the priesthood as a potential source of comedy. His priests are no better and no worse than the rest of humanity, men of worldly passions and appetites, differentiated from the members of their flock by a veneer of piety which deceives no-one and is expected of them by all. This is how Capuana has a priest react to a particularly sacrilegious outburst from Peppantonio:

‘State zitto! Non bestemmiate più, se no vi si profonda il terreno sotto i piedi!’, gli diceva il canonico che intanto rideva con tutti gli altri.<sup>63</sup>

This mixture of the sacred and the profane (represented here in ‘Don Peppantonio’ and ‘Mastro Cosimo’) continues to furnish Capuana with comic material. ‘Il prevosto Montoro’ which replaces ‘Bagni di sole’ in a new edition of *Homo* (now deprived of its exclamation mark) in 1888, transports the language of the altar to the card-table, deliberately stressing the incongruity of the cleric’s dominating passion with its attendant superstitions:

Un’altra fisima del prevosto la *cabala*; a cui *prestava fede* come al cattivo influsso di don Filippo e al buon influsso del piccolo Nino [. . .] che pareva un *angioletto* [. . .], il suo Nino che avea ordine segreto di stargli dietro [. . .] a *pregare pel nonno* prevosto, il quale, ad ogni vincita, gli avrebbe regalato uno scudo.<sup>64</sup> (Italics mine.)

Canonico Salamanca, in a story of the same name from *Le Appassionate* of 1893, is equally taken with hunting (and with the material comforts provided by a certain Donna Totò besides), and this passion gives rise to a *bravura* comic passage where whispered asides to a fellow enthusiast on the indisposition of a favorite gun-dog and the excellence of English rifle-powder alternate irreverently with the responses of the mass.

The attitude assumed by Capuana in these stories (where the last residue of liberal anti-clericalism dissolves in bland good humour) is worth comparing with the sense of repulsion and outrage he once felt when contemplating the superstitiousness of Sicily’s religious customs. Under the pseudonym of Aloy Cefalenus, Capuana had provided the readers of the *Nazione* with a spine-chilling catalogue of sanguinary and simoniacal practices, and had concluded indignantly:

Una religione che non ha per effetto la morale è un arnese inutile e pericoloso alla società che la possiede. Quali sieno in Sicilia gli effetti morali della religione (e dovrei dire della superstizione) fra le classi inferiori del popolo lo mostrano le stragi e i furti di Palermo commessi in nome di Gesù e di S. Rosalia.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, the current view of Sicilians as drolly and incorrigibly uncivilized contrasts with the progressive campaign for improved education which Capuana

waged in the seventies as inspector of schools and which emerges in a speech, *Il bucato in famiglia*, delivered at a prize-giving ceremony.<sup>66</sup> Here are two opposed images of Sicily—the writer and the citizen caught in contradiction. But the Capuana who strongly identified with all that was progressive in the new, united Italy was always tempted to regard his island with superior bemusement. He wrote again of Sicily for the *Nazione*, but this time it had become Arcadian. The future writer of *fiabe* for children is absorbed by the folklore, the myths of his native soil: ‘i più volgari fenomeni fisici vi pigliano aspetto di arcane rivelazioni provenienti dagli esseri soprannaturali che ivi governano’; a belief in witches, spirits, ‘mercanti’—guardians of the treasure of ‘la Grotta dalle sette porte’—fascinatingly permeates the ordinary consciousness of the peasant. No doubt an element of self-defensiveness, a sense of Sicily’s inferiority to the mainland, insinuated itself into Capuana’s intellectual excitement and coloured his idyllic descriptions of ‘graziose villanelle che canterellando filano il lino’, or of the ‘intera e schietta allegria’ of peasant festivities.<sup>67</sup> At all events the nation was to become acquainted through Capuana with a picturesque, ‘literary’ Sicily alone; and Capuana resented and resisted the suggestion that there was a darker side to the picture, which was moreover peculiarly Sicilian. When he had occasion to comment on the Franchetti-Sonnino report of 1876 he was more stirred by the insulting implication that Sicily stood in need of special attention than by the thought of the objective benefits that might accrue to her from an awakening of governmental interest. He reminded his readers that besides Sicily’s mafia, there was the ‘teppa’ of Milan, the ‘camorra’ of Naples, and the ‘bagherinaggio’ of Rome.<sup>68</sup>

His resentment probably had a bearing on the way Sicily filtered through his fiction to his readers. There were also elements in his artistic theory that encouraged the selection of what was, in the popular mind, most characteristic of Sicilians—their superstition, violent passions, sense of honour, attachment to hearth and home. As we have seen, Capuana was concerned that his country should have works of art that were unmistakably Italian, and he believed that art became a ‘living organism’, an ‘ideal’ mimesis of nature, only through accuracy of detail. He believed too that the artistic was the involuntary historian of his times. All these motifs flow together in a passage from his essay, ‘La Sicilia e il brigantaggio’, where he explores the rationale of his own Sicilian tales:

Per trovare un filone nuovo, inesplorato, noi avevamo dovuto inoltrarci nella grande miniera del basso popolo delle cittaduzze, dei paesetti, dei villaggi, interrogando creature rozze, quasi primitive, non ancora intaccate dalla tabe livellatrice della civiltà, talvolta afferrando qualche fatto eccezionale, residuo di un passato non lontano, ma sparito per sempre, lieti di fissarlo, per la storia, prima che se ne perdesse ogni significato e ogni ricordo; talvolta curiosi di rendere, più che analizzare, la sfumatura di un sentimento, la bizzarra modalità di una passione, l’atteggiamento di un carattere eccentrico che prendeva maggiore risalto per l’ambiente, pel paesaggio, per una rara combinazione di luce e d’ombra.<sup>69</sup>

As far as Capuana is concerned the selection of a particular subject-matter is absolutely devoid of personal or ideological significance. It involves a purely artistic quest for originality, a disinterested impulse to record 'for history' what is on the point of extinction. Verga, though preoccupied with much the same themes as Capuana, seldom provides merely picturesque documentation. But Capuana's attitude at the outset is one of faintly amused curiosity, his aim to produce an aesthetic entertainment. He is interested not, like Verga, in Sicily's becoming, but in her being, and his art encapsulates the characteristic finished product of a process which itself is not communicated. The phrase in the passage just cited beginning 'curiosi di rendere, più che analizzare' and the *penchant* for the 'fatto eccezionale' and the 'carattere eccentrico', are particularly revealing. Just as the 'caso patologico' is deemed to cast light on the normal functioning of the psyche, so the exaggerated personalities of a Don Peppantonio or a Don Michele are held to epitomize the Sicilian condition. Motivated in part by Capuana's awareness that he is initiating his public into an unfamiliar environment, the impulse towards generalization, rather than being revealed through the work itself, is already written into the author's plan before he sets pen to paper, and the stories that emerge are in the main caricatural and conventional.

The sense of Capuana's detachment in these stories, however, was not only 'scientific', nor entirely due to a self-identification with the 'continental' ruling classes which precluded Sicily's 'barbarous' inhabitants from eliciting the author's intimate sympathies: it was also the element of Hegelian fatalism in his thinking which, curtailing the power of 'scienza' to act upon society, caused Capuana to gaze on his island with such a superficial eye.