

CHAPTER V

THE TRIUMPH OF IMPERSONALITY

1. *The Cultural Context of 'Il Marchese di Roccaverdina'*

In almost all Capuana's narrative we have been forced to note a discontinuity of inspiration which had formal repercussions. In its alteration of courage and conservatism his work was less the vehicle of a stimulating and new vision of society than a faithful reflection of its infatuations, contradictions and scruples. Well might Troilo note how before the 'rinnovamento umano' of positivism had tempered men's minds against all eventualities it was undermined by the resurgence of 'vecchie credenze'; and well might a modern reader, seeing in Capuana's neutral realism a bourgeois alibi, complain that once his characters were removed from their social and historical setting 'it becomes impossible to see what on earth they are supposed to document'.¹ On the whole, however, the kind of reading which makes Capuana's limits as a writer coincide with his ideological cautiousness is inadequate in the case of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. The novel presents a unity of stylistic tone and a constancy of intention seldom achieved in previous works. Its meanings, rather than being entrusted to a message-bearing character who substitutes the author, lie within the text itself, and the text, in its various aspects from style to story-line, generates an authentic, individual world. Though the novel lacks the originality of psychological insight that produced the best portions of *Giacinta* and *Profumo*, it has long been acknowledged as the most successful of Capuana's fictional works, a judgement which in essence remains valid.

Yet for Carlo Madrignani (as for Geno Pampaloni) *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is merely a 'frutto fuori stagione', 'un ritorno, non senza forzature, ai temi dell'ispirazione naturalistica'.² Capuana's own literary gaze ranging in the two volumes of criticism of the late nineties over the psychological, the 'intimist', novel, over the literature of European symbolism, and the devaluation of reality at the hands of the 'aesthetes', headed by D'Annunzio, seems a sufficient gauge of the 'anachronistic' nature of the coming novel. In those same pages had appeared the name of Bourget, author of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1882) in which Enrico Nencioni had already, in 1889, found a 'preoccupazione della vita morale [. . .] in un campo che pareva ormai tutto invaso trionfalmente dalla fisiologia';³ and if Verga, unable to extend the cycle of his *Vinti* beyond its second episode, and now unmistakably sliding the arid slope into relative artistic

impotence, called the psychological Bourget a 'scocciatores'⁴ (recalling Capuana's own 'iniezioni sottocutanee di psicologismo' and their fatal 'inflation' of the patient), he also allowed that the naturalistic and psychological 'methods' were 'ottimi tutti e due', and remarked, like Maupassant, that 'gli psicologi in fondo non fanno che ostentare un lavoro che per noi è solo preliminare'.⁵ This was a measure of the temporizing discomfiture now experienced by the leaders of *verismo*, and it was echoed by Capuana in the desire that *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* should 'contemperare i due metodi del naturalismo fisiologico e psicologico'.⁶ The new religious interests and the Utopian socialism of Zola's own trilogy, *Les Trois Villes*, and the conversion of the ex-naturalist, Huysmans, were other phenomena which Capuana was obliged to confront. From Russia, via France and the propagation of Vogüé, came examples of an evangelical moral commitment (in Tolstoy) and of a preference for introspection and spiritual struggle (in Dostoyevsky), already reflected (as Capuana noted) in *Giovanni Episcopo* and *L'innocente*.

In Italy Fogazzaro's Catholic modernism and the spiritual conflicts of his characters were indicative of a return to 'idealistic' values. Matilde Serao marshalled her 'Cavaliere dello spirito' and made a journey to the Holy Land out of which sprang *Nel paese di Gesù* (1899) (whose 'sentimento religioso' Capuana unstintingly admired⁷). Convinced like Capuana that 'la scienza non è bastata',⁸ she abandoned the genuine inspiration of a novel like *Il paese di cuccagna* (1889) for unbearable, but fashionably psychological, works like *Castigo* (1893). In the Manzonian De Marchi pessimism and compassion for human miseries now erupt in the open, moralizing ironies of *Giacomo l'idealista* (1897), and especially in the sentimental humanitarianism of its conclusion. D'Annunzio, as we saw, with *Le Vergini delle rocce* has finally taken his leave of naturalism, opening up new autobiographical and expressive possibilities for the novel. Even Pirandello, whose criticism in the nineties owes much to Capuana's, admitted in an article entitled 'Il neo-idealismo' (1896) that 'il concetto materialistico del mondo e della vita non appaga più lo spirito moderno'.⁹

That there was mutual incomprehension between the 'neo-idealists' and the exponents of *verismo* is obvious. The publication of Verga's plays by Treves in 1896 was an opportunity for Ugo Ojetti to display highly symptomatic disapproval of an author who 'non si è mai curato di *pensare* che cosa è e che cosa debba essere la vita, che cosa ella valga oltre il fenomeno'. If the public applauded *La Lupa*, this Ojetti accounted for in terms of the 'curiosità malsana che spinge ogni più quieto burocratico a guardare da dietro gli occhiali su l'altro marciapiede la rissa forse mortale di due popolani nel mezzo della via, in attesa dei reali carabinieri'.¹⁰ Here, clearly, the moralism is no longer that which informed so many discussions of drama at the time of Capuana's contributions to *La Nazione* (and which sprang from the patriotic and pedagogic notion of Italy's National Theatre), but a sign of aspirations to a life and a literature whose pattern and significance was anchored to something higher than and beyond the interplay of 'phenomenological' forces.

Capuana in his turn was capable of ignoring the sense of futility and spiritual void of which many thinking men gave evidence in the post-positivistic era—he was capable for instance of seeing in Butti's *L'Automa* merely the 'traditional' story of weak hero and *femme fatale*.¹¹

Verismo became in addition the target of liberal socialism. In the eighties regional works had been acceptable to middle-class critics, readers and spectators alike: *Cavalleria rusticana*, for instance, first performed in January 1884, had been vigorously applauded. The spectator was in all likelihood indulging a taste for the exotic, finding comfort in the survival of certain moral absolutes often absent or disputed in works of bourgeois subject, as well as discovering the unknown regions that constituted the unified nation. By 1890, however, the situation had changed. The quiescent masses of the South whom Capuana had so often portrayed in humorous vein were beginning to stir into violence. The scientific optimism, the urge to document, the confidence of earlier decades in progress began to reveal themselves out of step with reality, incapable of providing a lasting ideology for Italy's intellectuals who now, indeed, went in search of other more 'spiritual' solutions. By now socialism was a significant force, agrarian strikes in the South were becoming more frequent and at the beginning of 1894 Crispi laid a determined hand on the 'Fasci siciliani' in the form of martial law and military tribunals, thereby unequivocally exposing the failed assimilation of remote territorial outposts into the unified fabric of the nation. It is under the impact of these 'tristi casi' that Edoardo Boutet, writing in the January of 1894, mounts his attack on the *verista* authors of Sicily. Contrasting the 'true' conditions of Sicily with a 'folklorismo amabile e sentimentale' (and singling out the by now notorious 'morsetti all'orecchio' of *Cavalleria rusticana*), he attacks *verista* literature for its consoling moral implications ('piccole sventure di persone, non tragedie di popolo, anzi gente di buon augurio in fondo'), and condemns the literary exploitation of a 'popolo che soffre tutti gli strazi e tutti i soprusi', calling it a 'giocarello arcadico' destined 'pe' salottini rococò'.¹² Capuana's reply, published two days later, hinges predictably on Boutet's ignorance of Sicily ('avete voluto parlare di cose che ignorate affatto') and on the absolute freedom of art (generated 'senza preoccuparsi dei Fasci e dell'onorevole De Felice') and the artist ('Chi vi ha detto che il Verga ed io, per esempio, abbiamo voluto dipingere la Sicilia sotto tutti i suoi aspetti?').¹³ That Boutet should see in *verista* Sicily a species of timeless Arcadia frivolously neglectful of political realities is undoubtedly exaggerated, ignoring particularly Verga's 'discovery' of the economic law which governs the world of the Malavoglia and Mastro-Don Gesualdo, and his sensitivity to the ruthless assault of progress and nationhood on the agricultural communities of the South: Capuana justifiably counter-attacks with a long quotation from 'Libertà'. None the less Boutet's politically oriented attack and his complaint that Capuana and Verga live 'insensibili del loro tempo, senza vederne e senza sentirne le angosce e le convulsioni' presents an aspect of contemporary thinking which now invades the

territory once occupied by naturalism and *verismo*.¹⁴

In *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* Capuana's lively rebuttal of the two lines of attack represented by Ojetti and Boutet is the familiar 'aesthetic' one originally derived from De Sanctis. Indeed more than ever in the context of the threatening 'ismi' Capuana insists that the writer is never at the service of a system. Replying to Boutet he even repudiates a recent 'political' reading of his *Paesane*, unashamedly declaring that 'appunto in tutto il volume delle *Paesane* è il lato comico della vita siciliana, o meglio il lato comico di certi carrettieri siciliani quello che vien messo in maggiore evidenza'. But he also insists that the concrete representation of character and passion, however detached, always assumed the pre-existence of a guiding thought: in Verga's case 'rappresentare così vivamente è pensare: è dare forma al pensiero però, cioè far opera d'arte. Shakespeare [. . .] fa forse altrimenti?'.¹⁵ A few years later, writing in a Sicilian journal, Capuana can withstand the pressure of new cultural exigencies no longer, and we discover him coming to a species of compromise, and unusually preoccupied with the impact of the writer on his society. His remarks are deliberately replete with politico-moral implications. Taking the contemporary French novel as point of departure, he claims to discover in:

ogni volume una scaramuccia o una battaglia, qualcosa che trascende l'arte, o che riduce l'arte funzione elevata di pensiero e non passeggero divertimento di sfaccendati. Colà non esce libro che non rinnovi un problema sociale, un problema morale.

He refers enthusiastically to the:

prove e riprove di giovani forze intellettuali che non si appartano dal popolo ma gli parlano a voce alta e lo scuotono e lo infiammano, aiutandosi con la bellezza della forma per uno scopo che redime fin gli eccessi dello stile e le esagerazioni e incongruenze della fantasia.¹⁶

The attempt to come to terms with what Capuana has long felt are excesses of style and 'fantasia' is a curiously political one (though a presage of this position in regard to the function of art and in particular to the 'estetisti' is contained in the preface, 'Nuovi ideali d'arte e di critica', to *Cronache letterarie* where, though he still resists the idea that art may contain a specific teaching, Capuana remarks that 'gli stessi esagerati partigiani della teorica Bellezza si fondano su l'influenza, vera o supposta, della bellezza nella educazione del cuore e dello spirito'¹⁷). The subordination of art to some 'scopo' is surprising, and presents us transiently (for the article ends on a Crispean note, with Capuana looking toward the 'alto destino preparatoci dalla Storia') with a 'socialist' Capuana.¹⁸ The apologia which follows for authors like Verga, Serao, De Roberto, Deledda (and even, in non-partisan spirit, for Fogazzaro and D'Annunzio) turns no longer upon their efficacy of 'representation', upon their ability to fuse form and content, but upon the message for society contained in their work. Capuana defines Verga 'un formidabile socialista', considers Matilde

Serao's 'inchieste' into Neapolitan life 'più profonde che forse non saranno quelle di tutti i commissari governativi presenti e futuri', and refers to the 'problemi morali e religiosi' raised by Fogazzaro and the 'problemi morali ed economici' revealed in Grazia Deledda's Sardinia. It is obvious, however, that the political slant of the article is generic, and the extra-artistic effects of literature unspecified (the 'popolo' may be 'shaken' and 'inflamed' but to what end?). In fact the extremest aim of the article is only, once again, to prove that even the *verista* writer is, in his way, a thinker; but that aim is in itself a significant homage to an age where the existence of a novel like *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* needs justification.

That its regional subject-matter might seem anachronistic in the context we have described is probable (but an evaluation on such a basis risks condemnation for being narrowly concerned with content); and one may allow that the spiritual drama of the Marchese, especially in its resolution, harks back to the pathological case of naturalism. The novel was, however, an effort to inject new life into the narrative structures of *verismo*, and it offered, if nothing else, an instructive exemplification of their strengths and limitations; and the novel, unlike so many of Capuana's regional stories, seemed at last capable of distinguishing—to use Boutet's terminology—superficial 'folklore' from a deeper 'truth'. On this account it is one of the least 'gratuitous' of Capuana's narrative works.

2. '*Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*': Towards a 'Theatrical' Mimesis of Reality

In 1900 Palermo's *L'Ora* published twenty-two instalments of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* corresponding to twenty-two of the thirty-four chapters forming the volume, which appeared in the succeeding year. On 15 November an announcement in *L'Ora* 'listato di nero, ironico e pungente quanto mai' (according to A. Navarria) 'fa sapere ai lettori che il marchese di Roccaverdina è morto', and without much mincing matters accuses Capuana of 'leggerezza [. . .] per aver venduto al nuovo giornale palermitano il romanzo bell'e compiuto mentre era ancora da scrivere'. The anecdotal value of Capuana's misdeed is to present us once again with an aging figure, ever more financially embarrassed and constrained to keep up the rhythm of his production, responsible in addition (since 1896) for his *angelo di casa*, Adelaide Bernardini, whose meagre artistic talents he will from now on hawk on the literary market with a peevish assiduity suggesting material need as well as protective affection (and one of the saddest results of this situation was to be a vicious personal attack on the couple contained in Francesco Biondolillo's *Macellatio Capuanae Bernadinaeque* of 1913). The more pertinent aspect of Capuana's irresponsible dealings with Vincenzo Morello's publication is, in Navarria's view, to reveal the rapidity with which the concluding chapters were written: 'La data, 23 dicembre 1900, posta in fine dell'opera, fa sapere che l'ultima parte di essa, dal capitolo XXII al XXIV, fu scritta in poco più o poco meno di un mese', that is between the middle of November and Christmastime. But if these facts dispel any possible impression that Capuana always worked slowly they cannot, however,

cancel the existence of a 'meditazione a lungo'.¹⁹ The novel, under the title of *Il Marchese di Donna Verdina*, was germinating in Capuana's mind as long before as 1881; and if, to judge by the information contained in letters to Verga at that period²⁰ and by Capuana's assurance to Ojetti in 1894,²¹ the original conception had undergone considerable modification, in this, precisely, lies 'meditazione'. The novel contains strongly autobiographical material which would have been searingly recent in 1881, but time, passing over them, detached them from Capuana.

These biographical components are easily singled out. Most important of them was Capuana's relationship with a former household servant, Beppa Sansoni, 'married off' to a Mario Speranza in 1892, after having borne the author several children subsequently relegated (in accordance with the feudal practices of the Sicilian 'signorotto' of those times) to the orphanage at Caltagirone. This liaison is the source of the relationship between the Marchese and Agrippina Solmo (Agrippina, in comparison with her real-life model, 'aveva anche il gran pregio di non fare figliuoli!').²² The jealousy and possessiveness which characterize the fictional relationship and motivate the murder of Agrippina's *pro forma* husband, Rocco Criscione, were part of Capuana's lot with Beppa. Except for one brief and bewildering period in Milan, she remained in Mineo, and from his literary base on the 'continent' Capuana addressed to her dialect letters of an anguished suspiciousness, threatening to extract the truth of certain worrying rumours (deliberately put about, in fact, by a member of his family which in general strongly disapproved of the affair) by subjecting her to hypnotism: 'haiu un mezzu simplicissimu di putiriti fari rivilari li cosi senza ca tu non potrai diri: su 'nfamitati, su calunii, pirchi sarà la to stissa vucca ca parrirà, comu quannu unu è 'mbriacu e rivela li so segreti.'²³ This dabbling in the affairs of 'lu diavulu', recalling Capuana's interest in spiritualism which began with the experiments on Beppa Poggi and continued as a source of both fiction and non-fiction throughout his life, now finds expression in the slightly sinister figure of Don Aquilante, the lawyer, whose seances threaten the superstitious Marchese's peace of mind. A contemporary witness of Capuana's insatiable appetite for the subject is an article on Dr Visani Scotti's *La medianità*.²⁴ Certain of the Marchese's forbears, particularly his father and grandfather in their passion for hunting, and his uncle, don Tindaro, an eccentric amateur archeologist, are images, placed under the magnifying lens of the novelist, of members of Capuana's own family.²⁵ The present Marchese's involvement in local politics clearly draws on Capuana's experiences as mayor of Mineo; and his interest in the modernization and industrialization of a primitive agricultural economy harks back to the days of *Il Bucato in famiglia* when improved farming methods seemed to Capuana of immeasurable importance ('non si tratta più semplicemente di migliorare la terra col mezzo dell'uomo, bisogna di più migliorare l'uomo col mezzo della terra!'),²⁶ and when he was capable of interrupting his literary pursuits in order to recommend to the readers of *Don Chisciotte* a newly invented and ingeniously simple seed-sower.²⁷

The literary sources of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* are more problematical. *Mastro Don Gesualdo* and *I Vicerè* have been mentioned by critics, and among other superficial similarities with De Roberto's novel, the Marchese's aunt, the Baronessa di Lagomorto, with her strong sense of caste may pallidly recall the fearsome *zia* Ferdinanda. It has not been seen that, like De Roberto, Capuana is concerned with the decline of feudalism. References to Dostoyevsky, and particularly, for the obvious reasons of a generic resemblance in subject-matter (murder and remorse), to *Crime and Punishment*, have been plentiful, and despite Capuana's own opinions on D'Annunzio's Russian assimilations, the Russian novel in general may be responsible for Capuana's effort to widen the social bases of his narrative, to demonstrate the dynamic interaction of various social groupings. The achievement of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in this direction marks an advance on *Profumo* where in the last analysis the town-bred, 'neurotic' couple are 'intruders' in a rural normality, which is peopled by jovial, semi-caricatural figures and documented in its indigenous rituals (from the 'flagellanti' to the characteristic elopement). The ideological crises which afflict the Marchese, his religious doubts, his fear of spiritualism, his bewildered realization that Truth may lie beyond the traditional teaching of his Church, belong (rather than to the current 'idealist' debate) to a sphere of interest which is Capuana's own.

If to any significant model, it is to Verga's major novels that we must initially turn, and not so much for the content of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* (where De Roberto and Dostoyevsky may have their relevance), but for certain of its stylistic aims and its effort to create a meaningful continuum between the psychological data of the main character and his environment in all its connotations, ideological, geographical, of custom and belief. The psychological problems which Capuana has dealt with to this date, as we saw, tended to be isolated from their *milieu*, the significant revelation of a surrounding and contributing social reality being either effectively absent because of its over-deliberate connotations of hypocrisy and corruption (as in *Giacinta*), or still anchored to a 'folklorismo amabile' because exploited almost exclusively as a reassuring contrast to the central tensions of the work (as in *Profumo*). In preceding novels the protagonists' 'problems' derived from a negative and highly personal psychological *antefatto* (the rape of Giacinta and her lonely childhood, Patrizio's maternal fixation and obstructed affections, Giorgio Montani's depressing family life even, or Dario's timid subjection to a vigorous father) to which the reader is introduced by a series of more or less skilfully positioned 'flash-backs'. Here by contrast the Marchese is not dependent on Capuana's sombre psychological naturalism: his 'problem' is explained by his social (feudal) position with its fixed behavioural patterns, its traditionalism and assumptions of absolute privilege.

The minor characters constituting the social dimension have often been a weak point in Capuana's past work because the roles they played were confined to combining (in various ways and proportions) the polemical, the demonstrative and

the decorative. In *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, they are improved, not only through a maturing of the artist's skills, but through their relationship to the hierarchical structures from which the crime and its consequences essentially devolve. These characters, from the Marchese's servants and dependants to his peers, illuminate crucial facets of a social situation which conditions the Marchese's behaviour. Mamma Grazia, once his wet-nurse, now a senile family retainer, invariably refers to her master as 'il marchese figlio' (pp. 5, 42, 248 etc.) and illustrates the coexistence of devotion and total respect which is repeated with appropriate tonal variations in the peasant-mistress, Agrippina, and in her murdered 'husband', proud to be known as '*Rocco del marchese*' (p. 229). The dependence of the individual *contadino* on his feudal overlord is expressed in Santi Dimaura, the peasant persuaded to sell a treasured strip of land which lies in the centre of the Marchese's *tenuta*, Margitello. But in Dimaura's case the dangerous dependence, (which the Marchese exploits to his own ultimate disadvantage as indeed is the case with Rocco and Agrippina) exists only to be questioned and eliminated, for in hanging himself on that same patch of land Dimaura breaks the atavistic 'laws' of feudal submission and directly precipitates the Marchese's insanity. Representing the other extreme of the hierarchical scale is the Marchese's paternal aunt, relic of a declining nobility, who survives amid dusty portraits, tarnished mirrors, and the faded elegance of 'stile impero' furniture, mulling over the past grandeur of the house of Roccaverdina: she too reminds the Marchese of the privileged position he enjoys but which will prove disastrous. The noble but impoverished Mugnos family (into which the Marchese will marry rather as Gesualdo marries Bianca Trao) disguises its misfortunes with a ferocious pride of race which confirms the ostensibly unalterable structures of the feudal community. Between these two extremes are the professional men and the minor nobility, the *rami cadetti*, all members of the society of the Casino which in its political manoeuvring promotes not the man but the name of Roccaverdina.

Instead of fulfilling the 'decentralizing' function of *Profumo* these minor characters in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* tend to be subordinated to its major themes without in general forfeiting their autonomy. This subordination is not always achieved: there are discursive passages in Capuana's comic vein (the card-players at the Casino), and the procedure may impoverish the narrative: there is for instance a recurrent sense of Capuana's manipulating events which are intended to activate the internal conflict between the Marchese's assumption of illimitable inherited rights and his fear of discovery (Pergola and don Aquilante lose some of their autonomy in stimulating this conflict). The conscious choice of a single 'primo piano', that of the Marchese, occasionally suggests that Capuana's material should properly have produced only a *racconto*. But in comparison with Capuana's narrative past there is a skilful dove-tailing of leitmotifs which produces moments, if not of poetic density, at least of dramatic tension.

The distinct social demarcations outlined above revolve about a feudal situation

which also finds its expression in gesture and language. Here a distinction is to be made between the gesture which externalizes an internal emotion in the individual (through facial expression or physical action) and which, as we shall see, derives from Capuana's efforts to maintain a perfectly impersonal stance, and the gesture which has a public, ritualistic significance and thus purveys the spiritual values of a society; and, in so doing, helps to resolve the potential conflict between society and individual into a homogeneous unity. Examples of public gesture predominantly involve the kissing of hands, which becomes more than an indigenous figure of speech (the priest don Silvio with the Baronessa, Agrippina with the Marchese, Neli's widow with the new Marchesa di Roccaverdina, Zòsima); kissing the ground as a sign of exorcism (don Silvio faced with the religious heterodoxy of don Aquilante, Mamma Grazia upon the entry of the legitimate wife into the Roccaverdina household); and the kneeling position (the crowd in the alley which leads to the house where don Silvio is dying, Agrippina, repeatedly, before the insane Marchese). These gestures are devoid of a true individual (psychological) significance. Nor are they gratuitous touches of 'local colour', but symbols of a collective existence orientated towards superstitious piety and unquestioning respect for the social hierarchy. The environment displays the peaceful co-existence of these two sentiments and provides a bridge to the individual mentality of the Marchese, where, however, because of his crime, superstition and arrogance of race have come into conflict.

From the values expressed in gesture it is a short step to what may be called the language of *ambiente*. Again predominantly religious or superstitious, it includes the *folkloristico* (Agrippina who on the death of Rocco is compared to 'la Madonna Addolorata', or the repeated salutation, 'Santa notte' (pp. 10, 227, etc.)), but goes beyond it to reinforce the sense of those same social norms, or, more interestingly, departures from them, which have been noted already. The feudal quality of life is consistently underlined not only in the conventional religious terms of submission of a Santi Dimaura ('Voscenza mi benedica!' (p. 15)), but more pertinently and powerfully in the aristocratic appropriation of the Deity by the Baronessa di Lagomorto: 'Dio non può permettere certe enormità; non può volere che la figlia di una raccogliatrice di ulive diventi marchesa di Roccaverdina. *Pares cum paribus*, ha detto il Signore' (p. 27). The same appropriation is made by the Marchese. The invitation to participate in local politics presents a threat to the political indifference and immobility of the landlord (and by extension to his omnipotence), and is thus viewed by the Marchese as the work of the devil ('Venivano lassù, come il diavolo, per tentarlo' (p. 45)). Here we may note, in passing, how the perennial motif of political indifference which in the past had been an intrusive message emanating from the author, now becomes integrated within the text. In this quasi-metaphorical, conventionalized language, the Godhead becomes a reactionary force which preserves the established structures of society. Even in more literal contexts, he is indisputably the ally of the nobility. The Marchese, in his position of privilege,

persistently views the justice of God as less terrible than the justice of men, and has no doubt that Pope Pius IX, God's vicar, would readily absolve him of his crime (p. 93).

It is in the context of the cumulative suggestiveness of these patterns of social language that Agrippina's 'cult' of the Marchese ('L'ho adorato come si adora Gesù sacramentato!'; 'Dinanzi a lei, il marchese di Roccaverdina era Dio!' (pp. 39, 186)) assumes its full contradictory relief. It is 'correct' in its feudal submission, 'incorrect' in its religious and human connotations, and Agrippina turns the sacrament of marriage into a mockery. In her relationship with the Marchese, she is both victim and culprit, and the sense of her culpability finds expression in the language of superstition, centring on the idea of 'malia', in the repeated assertion that the Marchese is 'stregato' (pp. 36, 62, 92, etc.). But Agrippina and her husband as individuals deprived of the right of self-determination are also victims, objects to be possessed, used and discarded, and as such they ('correctly') see themselves. Rocco on a hypothetical order from the Marchese to throw himself off the church tower '[si sarebbe] buttato a chiusi occhi!', 'Rocco non poteva dirgli di no; si sarebbe fatto squartare pel suo padrone' (pp. 20, 266); Agrippina '[si sarebbe] fatta polvere per essere calpestate dai suoi piedi!', 'rimpetto a lui' she is 'un verme della terra' (pp. 40, 30). The masochistic view of self as object on the part of the peasant is amply justified by the social structures of Ràbbato (Mineo) where the upper classes unanimously view him as 'avaro', 'ladro', 'imbecille' (pp. 282, 283). But in another more crucial sense, as reflections of contradictory attitudes in the Marchese, Agrippina and Rocco are both guilty and innocent. In submitting to the pretence of their marriage, they prolong the association between Agrippina and the Marchese which society outlaws, but at the same time they are merely acquiescing in the wishes of their master. The Marchese himself lives at the centre of this contradiction. Intimately ambiguous about his feudal station, he both observes and transgresses its laws—he does not marry Agrippina, but neither does he treat her 'feudally' as a replaceable mistress. Thus Agrippina and Rocco are the twin centres of a language of depersonalization, but to them also, contradictorily, adheres the terminology of *padronanza*. The Marchese has treated his mistress 'meglio di una signora', for ten years she has been the 'vera padrona' in his house (pp. 20, 36), feared by his reactionary peers as the next Marchesa di Roccaverdina. Rocco is not only the Marchese's 'mano destra' (p. 19) (a person appropriated and instrumentalized) but the Marchese's equivalent. The privileges of the master devolve upon the inferior in his special situation: Rocco 'era un altro padrone' (p. 18). The Marchese's real infringement of the laws of his society lies not in the murder of Rocco, but in his inability to embody thoroughly the frequently evoked tenets of his race. The murder is mere consequence.

The interaction of society and individual, with the Marchese stationed at the critical point of their conjunction, also expresses itself historically. There are subtle pointers to the changing of the times, to the 'razza [che] si adattava ai tempi' (p.

173). The present Marchese, trembling at the prospect of Neli Casaccio's trial for the murder of Rocco, is contrasted with his grandfather, the 'marchese *grande*', whose feudal assertiveness knew no limits ('Occorrevano prove? E scriveva al suo agente, in paese: "Manda subito, subito, un'altra carrettata di testimoni!" [. . .] Falsi s'intende!' (p. 50)). The old race of Roccaverdina expressed itself in aggressive sexuality, in hunting, in the maintenance of a species of private army, 'campai armati fino ai denti e con certe facce da metter paura' (p. 245), whereas the present Marchese Antonio, though he acts generally with a harsh obstinacy which connects him firmly to his race and has regarded the appropriation of the young Agrippina as a birth-right, in essence 'è uscito di razza' (p. 266). The promiscuous sexuality has given way to a monogamous constancy, the aggressive destructiveness of the hunt to the creativity of the modern farmer. Pressured externally by the declining of the feudal system, it is no accident that the contemporary representatives of Ràbbato nobility assert themselves in harmless eccentricity (the Baronessa's devotion to her dogs, don Tindaro's archaeological interests) rather than in the brutalities of the past. If the murder of Rocco reflects an inner conflict, the Marchese's internal ambiguity is translated on a wider plane, with the social collapse which ends the book: the death of Mamma Grazia and the Baronessa, staunch partisans of the established social system, the incipient financial troubles of the agricultural association, and Zòsima's desertion of the Roccaverdina house, a symbolic (as well as individual and psychological) protest against the Marchese's contravention of the norms of behaviour still clinging to acceptability in that hierarchical society.

Giacinta and at least the core of *Profumo* are inspired by a naturalistic psychophysiology where the analysis moves by preference on a 'vertical' plane. The present novel invites the same treatment, for Capuana is tracing the progressive *deepening*—with due remissions and relapses—of a spiritual conflict culminating in mental disorder; and he takes up his story at a point when the murder of Rocco belongs to the realms of *antefatto*, so that the substance of the work (in harmony with preferences already displayed in Capuana's narrative) involves the psychological repercussions of an event. But we discover instead a clear effort—corresponding to the 'horizontal' social extension of the novel—to avoid the 'in depth' block of psychological analysis. *Giacinta* alternated the narration of events with the examination of their inner significance for the character, and *Profumo* psychological analysis with blocks of provincial material: here Capuana has attempted to avoid this tendency to fragmentation and to achieve a tonal unity in which the expressive distance between the description of events, the relation of conversations, and the introspection of the characters is minimized. It was a task he undertook, as we shall see, in the name of that severe impersonality preached in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*. His problem, in fact, was made more acute by his choice of subject-matter. In *Giacinta* and *Profumo* (as in other works of a 'bourgeois', or 'urban' character) the setting itself diminished the stylistic divergence between the narrating 'voice' and the introspection or the speech of the characters. In the case

of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, following Verga's precedent, Capuana declines the role of the bourgeois author and entrusts his story to an anonymous representative of Ràbbato, and yet (and here was the difficulty) the guide-line of the narrative remains psychological and pertains to a character who is noble, and at least in theory educated and capable of introspection. It will perhaps not be a surprise to discover that Capuana's protagonist is very much a 'marchese contadino' (p. 311), a particularly rough-hewn representative of his class, little given to scrutinizing the secret recesses of his soul. The treatment given to him could not be extended, and *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is the *caso limite* of Capuana's particular 'naturalismo psicologico'.

The main expressive obstacle to be confronted, then, is the same as that which Verga encountered in *Mastro Don Gesualdo*, and which faced impersonal writers in general: a complex psychological reality was to be translated into gesture, action and speech, and narrative procedures aligned, according to Capuana, with those of the dramatist. The impasse which the strict impersonality of *verismo* tended to meet is already clear (even before the attempt to write *La Duchessa di Leyra*) in Verga's treatment of the relationship in *Mastro Don Gesualdo* between Corrado and Isabella which oscillates between destructive irony and romantic complicity. Only when Isabella has joined the mutely suffering ranks of the 'vinti' does Verga once again find his genuine voice for her. It is significant that what is probably the most dissonant passage in the general tone of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* hinges on the romanticizing introversion of Zòsima, the closest figure in the novel to Isabella. While Verga's sarcasm is missing, Capuana failed to avoid sentimental clichés and signs of authorial participation:

Aveva pianto nella sua cameretta, si era chiusa nell'ombra discreta con nel cuore sempre vivissima l'immagine di colui che l'aveva fatto palpitare la prima volta; e si era votata a quel ricordo nell'isolamento, senza nessuna speranza, non osando neppure lamentarsi della sua cattiva sorte, sopportando con mirabile rassegnazione tutte le umiliazioni della miseria; consolata unicamente dal ricordo di quei giorni lontani. (p. 243)

In the novel passages such as this are rare: in the case of Zòsima Capuana found himself without alternatives, for she is too passive a character to reveal herself in action. Elsewhere his efforts to avoid such meditative pauses which betrayed him into omniscience are strenuous; but the divergence between what he called in *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei* 'representation' and 'narration' continued to constitute a problem.

The opening four chapters of the book, which appear to embody the concept of the 'theatrical' novel are worth particular consideration: they offer illustrations of the use of 'external' techniques ('narration' becomes 'representation') which are directly opposed to the procedures adopted in the passage concerning Zòsima. They also begin to suggest the inadequacy for the purposes of psychological enquiry of

the purely 'representational' mode, where inner realities may be evinced only in as far as they offer external signals: throughout the narrative Capuana will continue to have recourse to these 'external' techniques (and indeed to prefer them) but the fact that they are present in concentrated form only in the opening chapters is a significant indication of their lack of flexibility.

These first chapters involve several dramatic confrontations, their predominant mode is dialogue, and there is conspicuous use (declining progressively—and significantly—from one chapter to another) of characteristically theatrical devices. The opening chapter presents itself as a 'scene' with a servant (Mamma Grazia) introducing a visitor (don Aquilante) into a drawing-room which is already occupied by a character (the Marchese) who has been 'miming' his state of mind to the spectator. The room remains the chapter's constant setting and it is described (if we disregard verb tenses) in its essentials much as the dramatist gives bare instructions for a stage-set.²⁸ The 'stage directions' which indicate worried preoccupation in the Marchese are almost excessive: 'il Marchese non si voltò nè rispose', 'sembrava assorto', 'si riscosse', 'parve percepisse soltanto dopo alcuni instanti il suono della voce' (p. 5): they are followed by the signals of an inner tension: 'All'infoschirsi del viso, si sarebbe detto che quella visita [. . .] non riuscisse molto gradita', 'Rimasto in piedi, accigliato, mordendosi le labbra, affondando le dita tra i folti capelli neri' (p. 6). The 'scene' which follows between the Marchese and don Aquilante, bearer of the news that Neli is about to be arrested for Rocco's murder, is in effect a cunningly devised exposition of the *antefatto*, dramatized by continuous sound and lighting effects: the rolling of thunder and the spattering of rare drops of rain, flashes of lightning, the whistling of the wind, clouds (viewed from the balcony) scudding across the luminous disc of the moon, the room in semi-darkness, and the angular, black-clad figure of the lawyer 'ritagliata sul fondo dell'altra stanza rischiarata dal lume' (p. 7). This is the visual and aural context of a conversation whose content is intrinsically dramatic, and whose tension is increased by the mystery of the Marchese's laconic remarks. The sense of the room as stage-set, as a window on the world of Ràbbato (which includes the impression that Capuana is using, even abusing, one of those devices allowable to the playwright) emerges particularly at the end of the chapter. We hear 'off-stage' the mad *zia* Mariangela's curses on the noble houses of Ràbbato, followed by the broken-hearted cries of 'Figlio! . . . Figlio mio!' (p. 14) from Neli Casaccio's wife as the *carabinieri* in Piazzetta delle Orfanelle, which is visible to the occupants of the room, carry off the supposed murderer. This is a skilled chapter where the psychological dimension of fear and foreboding is fully translated into 'representational' devices, and where Capuana is able to introduce several motifs which he will build on or refer back to in the rest of the novel. The cry of Neli's wife is taken up by Agrippina, in a satisfying symmetry, before the mad Marchese at the end of the book; Mariangela's curses will be used as a sinister, haunting refrain throughout the novel; the theme of rain, or rather the lack of it (for the

storm in this chapter never breaks and precedes an eighteen-month period of drought) becomes intimately allied to the sense of an unpunished guilt which infects Ràbbato. Later in the novel processions of its starving population headed by don Silvio (sole recipient of the Marchese's guilty secret) regularly pass in front of the Roccaverdina *palazzo*, praying for rain. Zòsima, whom the Marchese sees as the bearer of a 'vita nuova' (p. 112), which will obliterate the errors of the past, piously vows not to marry until the drought has ended. At the end of Chapter XVII the news of Neli's death in prison is tellingly juxtaposed with comment on the famine, the drought, and the traditional eccentricities of the Roccaverdina family. This kind of achievement in a writer whose natural tendencies and acquired habits of mind (the cause-effect sequences of positivistic thinking) both lead him to over-explicitness is remarkable and attributable in the last analysis to Capuana's determination not to intervene in the text.

As the early chapters unfold, we find Capuana pursuing his theatrical course with a series of exits and entries and dramatic clashes which use, as in the first chapter, the convention of the character who introduces another (don Aquilante introduces Dimaura in Chapter II; don Carmine, the Baronessa's manservant, introduces Agrippina in Chapter III), and the closed interior or stage-set. The interior of Chapter II is identical to that of the preceding chapter, and the Marchese is to be heard 'off-stage' in an antechamber irritably arguing with his tenants, before once again appearing 'on-stage'. Chapter III is set in the Baronessa's 'salone' where she is first visited by don Silvio and then by Agrippina. It is in Chapter IV that the theatrical structure of the narrative begins to yield: the unifying function of a single interior is replaced by that of the 'personaggio' (Agrippina) who is followed through the streets, through a series of rooms in the Roccaverdina *palazzo*, until she finds the Marchese in the room that used to be hers. For the first time in the novel Capuana devotes appreciable space to the psychological and reflective dimension of the character, to that aspect of the novel which will demand all his ingenuity as an impersonal writer. The rest of the novel, from which these chapters tend to detach themselves because of their technique, proceeds less theatrically, though the dramatic appearances of Agrippina in the second chapter (standing unexpected and motionless in the doorway, dressed in her widow's black, disappearing soundlessly) and in almost identical manner in the fourth (though the scene is recollected by the Marchese only in Chapter XIII) are projected verbally through the length of the novel by constant reference to her as a 'fantasma' (pp. 21, 36, 255, etc.). It is worth noting before leaving the subject that there is one isolated return to the theatrical mode, and it re-utilizes the specific effects of Chapter I. This is the occasion of the Marchese's nocturnal visit to don Silvio (Chapter IX) where again Capuana exploits the dramatic resources of a howling wind which rises and falls in sinister accompaniment to his confession, and the atmospheric possibilities of lighting: the Marchese's shadow threateningly projected by the lamp 'si disegnavo nera e ingrandita su la parete bianca', the confession is made in a mysterious 'penombra'

(p. 80). Capuana also plays on the visual contrast between the towering figure of the unrepentant Marchese and the 'magro corpicino del prete' (p. 79) (in an ironic, perhaps too obvious, underlining of the moral obtuseness of the one and the spiritual authority of the other).

Capuana's subject, however, rotates about an inner conflict, and from Chapter V on, with the exception of this confession chapter (itself a species of *colpo di scena*), the author must fully confront the problem of integrating the two planes of action (dialogue, gesture) and psychological investigation. As in *Giacinta* his tendency is to alternate in a somewhat mechanical manner illustrative incident with its inner repercussions—*Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* is still a novel which proceeds in psychological 'stages' though Capuana is of course anxious to avoid ostentation of the cause-effect succession of the type entrusted to Follini. Free indirect speech is the predictable vehicle of the internal dimension of the character and it aspires to form a unity with the voice of an anonymous narrator, while the narrator attempts to function as an attentive, but not privileged, spectator of events. From this attempt springs a set of typical locutions which contribute to a general climate of what we may call authorial *disimpegno*.

One such device, predominant in the early part of the novel, is the mediation of a collective awareness between the author's delivery of essential facts and the reader's reception of them: hence we find phrases of the type 'A Rabbato, nessuno ignorava che Agrippina era stata fin a tre anni addietro la *femina* del marchese' (but here Capuana undermines his own aims by justifying the pseudo-dialect—'femina' instead of 'fimmina'—with the phrase, 'come colà si esprimono con vocabolo poco indulgente' (p. 20)), 'Nessuno ignorava [. . .]', 'sapevano quasi tutti [. . .]', 'A Rabbato si era già saputo [. . .]', '(Così correva voce)', 'si sapeve [. . .]', '[. . .] lo vedevano tutti' (pp. 20, 45, 52, 111, 152, 190). A further indication of Capuana's aspiration to dissociate himself from psychological 'intimismo' is a plethora of clauses introduced by 'quasi' (with the rarer, but equivalent, variants of 'pareva', 'sembrava'): the Marchese 'stava lì, con gli occhi fissi, quasi il sogno che avrebbe dovuto presto avverarsi si allontanasse rapidamente' (p. 184); 'ogni sua sicurezza di coscienza svaniva, quasi si fosse potuto trovare daccapo col processo riaperto' (p. 188); 'parlava a voce alta quasi per stornarlo dal leggergli su la fronte il pensiero' (p. 212); 'Il Marchese non rispose, e continuò un bel pezzo ad andare su e giù per lo stanzone [. . .] quasi per trattenere le parole che gli si agitavano su la lingua' (p. 280); Zòsima 'fu meravigliata di vederli fare un gesto, quasi volesse scacciare con le mani qualche tristo pensiero' (p. 295); 'parlava basso, quasi avesse paura' (p. 315). Alongside this use of 'quasi'—clauses, which unfailingly invest the inner dimension of the character, seeking unobtrusively to trace the sources of gesture to their emotional sources, we may place 'quasi' adopted as a form of attenuation, rarely contributing to semantic precision, but rather deriving from the self-imposed 'ignorance' or reluctance to commit himself of the narrator. Thus: 'quasi smarrito', 'quasi sbadatamente', 'quasi diffidente', 'quasi sfiorito' (pp. 24, 61, 74, 244).

In this same 'dangerous' zone lie the Marchese's inner reactions to the succession of events which precipitate his madness; and here it is worth pointing out an abundant phraseology dependent on the idea of the reactor's surprise or lack of self-understanding, which allows the narrator to register psychological repercussions without, as it were, taking responsibility for them ('*strana* fiacchezza di volontà' (p. 60), 'egli stesso si *maravigliava* di questo *strano* fenomeno della sua memoria' (p. 99), 'si *meravigliava* di stare ad ascoltarlo' (p. 105), 'si *sbalordiva* di *sorprendersi* a pensare così' (p. 106), 'sentiva venirsi addosso un'*inesplicabile* tristezza' (p. 146)).²⁹

The occasions when such mechanisms give way to authorial intrusion of a more direct nature are rare. They involve either 'disallowable' assumptions about an inner reality, and so call attention to the failed coincidence of the two planes of the narrative ('Ma, nel suo interno [. . .]' (p. 153), 'non era *davvero* nello stato normale' (p. 161)); or they embody an understanding of the character not shared by him ('In fondo in fondo il marchese era un po' borbonico' (p. 199)); or they underline the processes of cause and effect in an attempt to prepare the reader for future events ('stupiva [. . .] di quella sorda agitazione [. . .] presagio di sinistri avvenimenti' (p. 217)). Very occasionally a remark that belongs to the observer of local folklore escapes Capuana (ceremonial visits by relations and close friends on the occasion of a death are a 'costume forse orientale tuttora vivo in Sicilia' (p. 283)).

Capuana's most constant concern is to confer upon passages containing introspective free indirect speech the characteristics of direct speech, first so that the disparity between the typical vehicle of the narration which is dialogue and the reflective passages should be less discernible; and secondly so that the free indirect speech begins to assume the quality of something overheard (and here one may legitimately perceive a parallel with the dramatic monologue) rather than something arbitrarily perceived by an impermissibly omniscient author. The techniques which Capuana uses are repetitive, so that two examples will serve to illustrate them. Here Agrippina reflects on the harshness of the Marchese towards her:

'Perchè? Perchè?'

Non sapeva spiegarselo. Sospettava dunque anche lui quel che dicevano le male genti?

Era impossibile!

E affrettava più il passo.

Gli occhi le si velavano di lagrime, il cuore le batteva con violenza, come più ora rifletteva intorno allo strano contegno di lui.

Era cangiato dalla mattina alla sera, pochi giorni prima della disgrazia. Una volta, appena vistala entrare e mentre ella stava per togliersi la mantellina, le aveva gridato: 'Vattene! Vattene!'

L'aveva quasi scacciata. Poi, richiamatala addietro, si era rabbonito tutt'a un tratto. E quante domande! 'A che ora Rocco è tornato da Margitello? Perchè è venuto ed andato via senza farsi vedere da me?' Quasi lo facesse spiare o lo spiasse.

Ripensando alcuni particolari a cui non aveva mai badato, sentiva un turbamento profondo, una specie di smarrimento. E affrettava ancora il passo.

‘Perchè? Perchè?’ tornava a domandarsi. ‘È possibile? Sospetta anche lui? Ah, Signore!’; (p. 35)

and the Marchese recalls a conversation with his cousin Pergola, an atheist:

‘E se ha ragione lui? . . . Non è solo nel pensare così . . . E se ha ragione lui?’ [. . .]

In quanto alla religione . . . No! No! Il cugino Pergola, con quei libri proibiti, aveva dato l’anima al diavolo. Era protestante, frammassone, ateo; bestemmiava peggio di un turco . . .

Bestemmiava anche lui, ne conveniva, ma per cattiva abitudine, perchè aveva da fare con gente che non capiva le ragioni, ma le parolacce. E poi, una cosa era il praticar poco la religione, un’altra negare l’esistenza di Dio, della Madonna, dei Santi!

Intanto, quando si era fortificato, per un poco, contro l’impressione dei discorsi del cugino, la pulce cominciava a ronzargli dentro l’orecchio:

‘E se ha ragione lui? E se ha ragione lui?’ (pp. 101-2)

In both passages the transition to free indirect speech is through a thought presented as direct speech, and the rest of the passage attempts to preserve the rhythms and characteristics of direct speech, utilizing (with a frequency that elsewhere amounts to abuse) exclamation marks, question marks, and suspension dots to render the pauses, the hesitations, and the immediacy of speech. Nowhere here do we find, and rarely in the rest of the novel, conditional clauses (of the type ‘avrebbe voluto’) which introduce an unactivated desire and so put the reader in possession of a hidden psychological reality. It is typical of Capuana’s determination to avoid dense meditative passages that, as in the first example, the thinker should evoke some event not so much in terms of its impact upon himself at the time of recollecting, but as a ‘scene’ to be conveyed in direct speech. Capuana in fact creates a species of narration which is as near to the favoured medium of dialogue, and as far from abstracted meditation as possible, allowing the natural insertion of brief ‘didascalie’—indications of gesture or action which reinforce thought-content by translating it into external terms. Thus Agrippina’s eyes fill with tears, her inner agitation causes her to increase her pace. The typographical appearance of the page, with its half-lines and multiple *a capo*, is a reflection of his desire to break up, even to disguise, blocks of introspection, rendering them visually indistinguishable from the rest of the narration. Indeed the first passage is subordinated to a scene (which is as much ‘about’ the Marchese as Agrippina); and the second takes on the character of a dialogue with the self (or, in imagination, with cousin Pergola), whose logical advance is marked by ‘ma’ and ‘E poi’. The importance of both passages is not ascribable to an ‘in depth’ revelation of personality, but to the obsessive and repetitive nature of the thought, thought which fails to progress. In the first passage we find the succession: “Perchè?”, ‘Non sapeva spiegarcelo’, ‘Era impossibile’, ‘sentiva [. . .] una specie di smarrimento’,

“Perchè?” tornava a domandarsi”; in the second: ‘E se ha ragione lui?’, ‘Intanto [. . .] la pulce cominciava a ronzargli dentro l’orecchio’, ‘E se ha ragione lui?’, with this last phase echoed three pages later in the words: ‘Se fosse così come diceva il cugino?’ (p. 105). The repetition of the opening tag at the close of the passage renders the circular movement of perplexed thoughts in both characters, but only at the expense of an internal development; the purely verbal dynamics of thought-content may be rendered by the repetition of phrases (in the second passage: ‘In quanto alla religione’, ‘il praticar poco la religione’; ‘bestemmiava peggio di un turco . . .’, ‘Bestemmiava anche lui’), but there is in general an unwillingness to allow thought processes their head, or to sensibly deepen awareness of an inner, psychological reality.

It is noteworthy how often memory presents itself as spectacle, the past with its attributes intact surging into the present and replacing it (‘gli sembrava che quegli occhi semispenti *continuassero a guardarlo* a traverso la spessezza del muro’ (p. 76); ‘qualcuna di quelle figure gli *si rizzava improvvisamente davanti* e lo faceva sobbalzare, *quasi apparizione reale*’ (p. 99); ‘gli sfilavano quasi *davanti agli occhi* [. . .] Rocco Criscione, Agrippina Solmo [. . .] Rocco [. . .] *in atto* di ripetergli le parole di quel giorno: “Come vuole *voscenza*” ’ (p. 229); ‘ebbe, lungo la strada, sempre *davanti agli occhi* la visione della cupa notte in cui la gelosia lo aveva spinto ad appostarsi dietro la siepe’ (p. 212)). The tidy overlapping of incidents and experiences as they occurred in the past and the memory of them in the present leaves no intervening space for the subjective reaction of the Marchese: the past becomes the exact equivalent of the present, and time operates no change on the quality or intensity of the jealousy and the guilt. This coincidence of past and present is another aspect of Capuana’s *disimpegno*, and while it affected negatively his capacity to convey an *intensification* of feelings that would justify the Marchese’s madness, it created a powerful sense of a mind subject to a species of hallucination and compensated in part for the absence of a more delicate and detailed psychological analysis.

If by free indirect speech is meant ‘quello in cui il colloquio fra lo scrittore e la sua creatura non si risolve a vantaggio esclusivo del primo e diventa veramente scambio costruttivo dei risultati di due esperienze umane’, we may say that Capuana actually avoids it.³⁰ His own variety of free indirect speech serves simply on those occasions when direct speech would be an unnatural vehicle for the narrative, and even when he uses it (as we have seen) his free indirect speech strains towards direct speech. Capuana constantly impels his characters towards a form of soliloquy, towards total autonomy. The idea of the theatrical novel may perhaps be re-proposed along with the reflection that Capuana’s most mature artistic statement, though conditioned in its aspiration towards a tonal unity by Verga, veers away from the solutions Verga found to the limits of impersonal *verismo* in the free indirect speech of *Mastro Don Gesualdo*, towards a prefiguring of ‘theatrical’ narrative as found in the novels and short stories of Pirandello, the author who was

to discover the path out of the impasse of objective realism.

To the use of punctuation in order to indicate the nature of *heard* speech, we may add the incoherent exclamations of *zia* Mariangela and the insane Marchese which, faintly absurd on the page, clearly need the collaboration of an 'actor'. We are dealing, it is true, with a timid rejection of the convention of an intelligible and orderly literary language simply because the utterances of the insane may properly be represented as meaningless and chaotic. Nevertheless it is part of a general impulse, appropriate to the stage, towards an aural and visual translation of written emotions and speech. Though the connexion which Capuana consciously and critically made between narrative and drama was confined to those remarks discussed earlier in the course of examining his criticism, there is much evidence to suggest that he was increasingly attracted to a form of art which could provide a *total* mimesis of life. The attraction emerges in unexpected places. The preface to *Cronache letterarie*, for instance, retails a 'friend's somewhat fantastical 'improvvisazione' on the subject of the future of art, paying extraordinary attention to the persuasiveness of his gestures ('[. . .] e il mio amico entusiasmato dalla sua idea, mi stringeva forte il braccio') and to the sound and the flow of his words ('la magia della parola e dell'espressione')³¹ which for the time being secured Capuana's assent. In the same year as *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* was published in volume, *Il Decameroncino* appeared. In the last of its stories, 'Conclusionone', Capuana professes his reluctance to transcribe a tale told him by his narrator-figure, Dr Maggioli, because 'il maggior pregio di essa non consisteva tanto nel soggetto e nella forma, quanto, e soprattutto, nell'espressione del viso, nell'efficacia dell'accento, del gesto, che avevano trasformato il narratore in attore'.³² In *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* facial expression frequently assumes the value of a 'stage-direction' and verb accumulations (perceptible actions) associated with the Marchese may serve as substitutes for an enquiry into a troubled psyche: 'si affacciava, rientrava, tornava ad affacciarsi'; 'rideva, si muoveva per la stanza, stirando le braccia, tendendo le gambe' (pp. 141, 162).

All Capuana's efforts in the direction of 'representation' are attributable to his continued search for impersonality. Two slightly cumbrous episodes will serve to show how impersonality for Capuana presupposes the 'scene', the dramatization of events. The first of these involves the engineer who describes an interchange between certain malevolent villagers who wish to provoke Agrippina by suggesting that the Marchese has treated her unfairly, and Agrippina herself who defends him for having done 'più di quel che doveva'. The 'scene' of this confrontation is rehearsed for the benefit of the Marchese and is rendered characteristically in direct speech in the form of a dialogue; and to justify such knowledge and such accuracy of recall in the engineer Capuana has him add: 'Me l'ha raccontato mia moglie, che l'ha sentito proprio con i suoi orecchi, senza esser vista. . .' (p. 186). This is an improbably contrived and 'theatrical' situation which once again displays Capuana's tendency to avoid the mediation of personality (the engineer's or his wife's) in order to preserve

'l'autenticità dell'accaduto'. The second episode relates to the *massaio's* tale of Rospo *gessaio*, who stole consecrated silver, became his daughter's lover, and hanged himself. Again the account makes use of direct speech, and to retain the drama of these incidents and yet explain how the *massaio* has intimate knowledge of words spoken before his birth, Capuana invents for him a spectator-father ('Io non so *raccontarla bene* questa storia [. . .] ma la ho udita tante e tante volte da mio padre, che posso *ripeterla con le sue stesse parole*' (p. 275)). To the father's 'performance' the *massaio* is as faithful as to register its accompanying gestures—'mio padre *qui* si faceva sempre il segno della santa croce. . .' (p. 277).

The same attitude of *disimpegno* explains why passages of relatively protracted description regularly present themselves as 'spectacle' and are 'attributed' to particular viewers, and why on occasion the measured scansion of the describing, ordering author disappears. In the following passage there is an attempt to transmit stylistically the visual simultaneity of the components in a religious scene:

Uno spettacolo! Tutti a piedi scalzi, e con corone di spine in testa; una sfilata che non finiva più, a dispetto dei canonici di Sant'Isidoro! . . . E pianti e colpi di discipline! . . . E, mescolati insieme, preti, frati, confraternite, signori, maestranze, massai, contadini! . . . Tutta Ràbbato per le vie! E padre Anastasio che accorreva da un punto all'altro. (p. 140)

Apart from the phrase 'a dispetto dei canonici di Sant'Isidoro', there is a pure accumulation of visual images, correlated by 'e', in which the rhythm and the use of suspension dots communicates the variegation and the confused movement of the scene with an immediacy that precludes the mediating function of the author. The much-praised description of the coming of rain after the drought, where Capuana is unusually attentive to the melodic possibilities of his prose (the rain 'irrompeva con impeto, rumoreggiando su le tegole, riversandosi dai canali, formando rigagnoli e gore dove si sgonfiavano e scoppiavano mille bollicine, quasi l'acqua ribollisse' (p. 181)), is a uniquely sustained piece of writing. Here Capuana averts the danger of his own literary intrusiveness into the self-sufficient texture of the writing by turning the description into a spectacle viewed by the populace of Ràbbato. Throughout the passage there are phrases calling attention to the fact that the rain-clouds are not simply described but *watched* ('la gente [. . .] affluiva nei punti da dove avrebbe potuto *accertarsi coi propri occhi*', '*spettacolo* nuovo e inatteso', 'tutti erano intenti a seguire con *gli occhi ansiosi*', '*quegli occhi* che stavano a *spiar*', 'la gente si era riversata per inebriarsi dello *spettacolo*' etc. (pp. 179, 180, 181)); and the literariness of the passage is punctuated by generalized exclamations from the crowd and by snatches of 'local' phraseology ('Viva la divina Provvidenza!', 'quella *grazia di Dio*', 'le colline *non sapevano che farsi* dell'acqua' (p. 181)). This establishment of a relation between spectacle and spectator is a constant feature of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*. The various pieces of faded, dusty furniture (indications of nobility in decline) in the Baronessa's 'salone' cannot, for instance,

be documented without the agency of don Silvio who casts a sweeping 'rapida occhiata' about him before the surrounding objects are itemized (p. 24). It is first the Marchese's and then the collective gaze of the villagers which transmits a view of the parched countryside and cloudless sky:

Guardava un po' scoraggiato anche lui quelle campagne dove non *si scorgeva* un fil d'erba, quel cielo che, da mesi e mesi, non *mostrava agli occhi* ansiosi l'ombra di una nuvoletta all'orizzonte. Soltanto l'Etna fumava, quasi volesse ingannare *la gente* facendo scambiare per nuvole le dense ondate di fumo del suo cratere, che il vento disperdeva lontano. (p. 93)

And, prefacing a description of the landscape, finally in flower, by the Marchese's words to his cousin: 'Guardate. Le campagne sembrano un giardino', Capuana makes the Marchese 'responsible' for what follows:

Un'immensa distesa di verde, di mille toni di verde, dal tenero al cupo che sembrava quasi nero; un trionfo, una follia di vegetazione fin nei terreni più ingrati, che non avevano mai prodotto un fil d'erba! [. . .] E i seminati! Un tappeto di velluto verde che non finiva più [. . .] E qua i papaveri dilagavano in larghe chiazze sanguigne; là, i fiori di lino coprivano liste e quadrati. (p. 208)

The prepositions ('qua' and 'là') belong not to the author but to the spectator; and even here Capuana has preserved elements characteristic of direct speech (exclamation marks, nominal style, the tendency to self-correction: 'verde, di mille toni di verde', 'un trionfo, una follia') as though the vision had found a voice.

Capuana uses nominal style notably when memories of Rocco, Agrippina, and Neli well up involuntarily in the Marchese's mind ('Rocco che maneggiava un arnese rusticano', 'La Solmo, coi capelli disciolti, quando si pettinava' (p. 99), 'ecco Rocco, a cavallo della mula, nell'oscurità [. . .] E il tonfo del corpo! . . . E lo scàlposito della mula che fuggiva spaventata! . . . E il gran silenzio nell'oscurità', 'ecco Neli Casaccio che dal gabbione dell'Assise [. . .] gridava: "Sono innocente!"' (p. 135)). The immediacy thus achieved gives Rocco and Agrippina in particular a species of autonomous existence underlined by the repetitive phrases which invariably accompany their apparition. The motif, for instance, of the hedge of 'fichi d'India' from where Rocco was shot returns repeatedly, and while (as we have had occasion to observe) this contributes nothing new to the psychological examination of the Marchese, merely confirming the obsessiveness of his thoughts, it confers upon Rocco a feeling of sinister, independent existence, as though he is present at the place of the murder not only in the Marchese's guilty mind, but literally, and is visible to those (like the superstitious peasant who claims to have seen him) who pass on the road to Margitello. Similarly, as we have seen, Agrippina's untimely literal appearances, as well as those which take place in the recollecting minds of the Marchese, Zòsima, Mamma Grazia, and don Aquilante, have the character of apparitions. The recurrent references to her widow's dress, her dark 'mantellina', to her silence and stillness ('Vestita a *lutto*, avviluppata nell'ampia mantellina di panno

nero [. . .] *la donna non fece un passo nè un movimento*' (p. 19), '*senza un motto nè un gesto*, lentamente volse le spalle e *sparì* come se avesse avuto le suole delle scarpe foderate di ovatta', '*“Vestita di nero, col viso pallido, gli occhi intenti e le labbra scolorite, essa deve sembrargli una fantasima di mal augurio”*, pensava don Aquilante' (p. 21), '*al vedersela improvvisamente davanti, avvolta nella mantellina nera e vestita a lutto, nell' andito del portoncino* [. . .]' (p. 124) etc); the fact that she so consistently appears, unexpected, on the threshold of a room suggests that Agrippina, like Rocco, has become a ghost, free to come and go at will, tormenting the Marchese. The psychological depths of the two characters are not investigated (their individuality expressing itself almost exclusively in the public, social dimension discussed earlier), but they possess a suggestiveness in the novel which depends on the powerful visual images which attach to them, in their autonomous ability to 'haunt' the pages of the book. This ability of theirs, while it is ascribable like everything else to Capuana's impersonal method—the protagonist's obsessions must be externalized—confirms the conclusion that the final destination of the novel as Capuana conceived it is a visual medium.

This preoccupation with directly communicating the aural-visual components of an event (even at the expense of verisimilitude) explains why this novel, ostensibly psychological, fails to convince precisely in its inner unfolding. The story of a conscience, it none the less rejected the tools of psychological investigation, preferring to create a 'theatrical' autonomy in the characters. More than one contemporary reviewer found the Marchese's madness inadequately motivated and it is certainly arguable that this portion of the novel in particular lacks preparation (and as a solution may even owe something to De Marchi's *Il Cappello del prete*, whose vagaries of plot, and feudal assumptions about the 'right' to kill, are susceptible of as yet unexplored comparisons with Capuana's novel).³³ Ferdinando Giannessi, reviewing a modern republication of the novel, regrets that the drama of Rocco's murder which might have constituted a hypothetical first volume becomes mere *antefatto* in the novel;³⁴ unaware perhaps, he puts a finger on the central contradiction of *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* where an 'intimate' subject is given external, theatrical treatment. Though the novel has won itself a place of honour in the narrative of the late nineteenth century, its failure to be any more than Capuana's personal masterpiece lies in the voluntary restricting of the novel's psychological dimension to what can be 'represented'. Capuana's methods undoubtedly had their strengths, but it is the choice of a predominantly external treatment of the subjects which accounts, for instance, for the mechanical succession of events in the novel. To purvey an inner reality only in terms of what is perceptible to the onlooker (which is Capuana's intention) is necessarily to forego a sense of psychological nuance which belongs exclusively to the meandering of private thoughts. In his efforts to make events translate a state of mind which is variable, Capuana managed to do no more than to choose incidents which were propitious and unpropitious to the Marchese in alternation, so that the reader might

at least see his hopes of fighting free of guilt raised and crushed by turns. It was not a flexible method and the pattern of events became predictable. Thus don Silvio fails to give absolution, but then dies with his secret; Pergola temporarily allays the Marchese's fears of divine retribution, but is converted on his death-bed; the lurid crucifix with its life-size, reproving figure of Christ the Marchese donates to a convent, but the mark left on the wall continues the terrifying offices of the original; the innocent Neli dies, but don Aquilante who has established spirit contact with Rocco begins to doubt his guilt; the Marchese envisages his marriage to Zòsima as a fresh departure, but it evokes comparisons with Agrippina and founders through jealousy and nostalgia; the Marchese becomes involved in politics and in an agricultural project but these enterprises soon reveal themselves as hollow distractions for a troubled mind or result in financial disaster. All this activity is merely repetition of the same data, and the characters in the novel, though efficiently individualized, are in essence psychologically static. The Marchese's insanity seems as much the product of an enduring and unbearable jealousy (Agrippina has remarried) as that of remorse. Capuana's impersonality, however, was valuable in compelling him to create the sense of a social reality through which individual but at the same time representative behaviour became intelligible. Though his 'method' was destined to betray its inadequacy in the psychological dimension, in forcing Capuana's characters to live in a species of eternal present and in propelling them towards soliloquy it pointed forward to the work of Pirandello.

This is not the place to discuss fully the relationship between the two Sicilian authors. It is worth, however, recalling that Capuana was responsible for Pirandello's conversion from poetry to prose ('Devo a Luigi Capuana la spinta a provarmi nell'arte narrativa in prosa'³⁵); and that Marta Ajala's paradoxical position in *L'Esclusa* closely resembled that of Giustina Rosati in 'Ribrezzo'; while the short story, 'Conclusionè', mentioned earlier, has a strangely Pirandellian theme. The story is less a narration than an account of the difficulties Dr Maggioli encountered in the course of its composition. The perverse failure of two living models chosen by him to provide a suitable drama for the fiction elicits gentle satire on the 'maledettissima teoria dell'osservazione diretta', but the core of the story concerns the half-created characters whom Maggioli has despairingly abandoned 'nè in cielo nè in terra'. Waking the narrator from his sleep, they bitterly complain: 'Una fine dobbiamo farla, non possiamo rimanere perpetuamente innamorati, e nelle circostanze in cui ha avuto la crudeltà di abbandonarci!'.³⁶ The fiction of the totally autonomous character which Pirandello was to use in stories like 'Colloqui coi personaggi' and 'La tragedia di un personaggio' and finally in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* found its first expression in Capuana. Aside from this theme, a logical fictional extension of the narrative strategies employed in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina*, there was also a remarkable harmony of artistic aspiration in the two writers: Capuana might well have been the author of Pirandello's reflection that the 'tendenza analitica è sana fin dove è preparazione all'opera d'arte; e viziosa

quando invece vi usurpa il posto della schietta rappresentazione', and the remark fits Capuana's novel well enough.³⁷ Leone de Castris has found in Pirandello's early stories 'una insopprimibile dimensione scenica e teatrale', a 'tendenza al dialogo, alla immobile misura della rappresentazione e dell'azione diretta, tutta esaurita nella concreta visività e immediatezza del gesto e della parola', and finally (an opinion confirmed by Marziano Guglielminetti in connexion with Pirandello's novels) 'la quasi assoluta assenza di discorso indiretto'.³⁸ Though these findings might well have been stimulated by *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* instead of Pirandello's stories (and though Capuana's influence on Pirandello as a critic is indisputable, if still in need of full investigation), we do not intend to imply a direct relationship between Capuana, discoverer of a 'theatrical' narrative which he himself was unable to bring to coherent artistic fruition, and the work of Pirandello; but rather to suggest that the urge towards a total (theatrical) mimesis of reality expressed in *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* might lead to a modification of the verdict that it was an anachronistic work which *merely* reproduced outdated novelistic models. This view in essence contemplates the content of the novel only (its regional 'brutality') and its relationship to the then current 'ismi' (from Bourgetian 'psicologismo' to the stylistic and structural experimentation undertaken by D'Annunzio in the name of the 'superuomo') which are felt to have directly supplanted the declining tradition of naturalism and *verismo*. It fails to take account of Capuana's narrative techniques which in our opinion place *Il Marchese di Roccaverdina* in another, divergent, literary current which was to revitalize and supersede the naturalistic tradition, that of Pirandello.