

# THE PICTURESQUE IN GIOVANNI VERGA'S SICILIAN COLLECTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

JESSICA TURNER NEWTH GREENFIELD: The Picturesque in Giovanni Verga's  
Sicilian Collections  
(Under the direction of Federico Luisetti)

Giovanni Verga's Sicilian short story collections are known for their realistic portrayal of the Sicilian peasant farmers and their daily struggles with poverty, hunger and injustice. This study examines the way in which the author employs the picturesque in his Sicilian *novelle* and argues that there is an evolution in this treatment from picturesque to non-picturesque. Initially, this study will examine the elements and techniques that Verga uses to represent the picturesque and how that treatment changes and is utilized or actively destroyed as his writing progresses. For the purposes of this dissertation, a definition of the picturesque will be established and always associated with descriptions of nature. In this study, the picturesque will correspond to those descriptions of nature that prove pleasing for a painting. By looking at seven particular *novelle* in *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane*, I will show that Verga's earlier stories are littered with picturesque elements. As the author's mature writing style, *verismo*, develops, Verga moves through a transitional phase and ultimately arrives at a non-picturesque portrayal of Sicily in his short stories.

To Granddaddy, with love.

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## Chronology of Verga's Works

- 1857 – Verga finishes *Amore e Patria*, although he never publishes it upon the advice of his teacher, Mario Torrisi
- 1861 – The literary magazine *L'Italia contemporanea* publishes Verga's first *novella*, "Casa da te." Verga pays for the publishing of his novel *I carbonari della montagna*.
- 1863 – Between January and March the Florentine periodical *Nuova Europa* publishes the novel *Sulle lagune* which is modeled after the romantic elements Verga acquired in his admiration of Ugo Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis*.
- 1866 – The Torino based Editore Negro publishes the novel *Una peccatrice*, written the previous year.
- 1869 – Verga begins *Storia di una capinera* and *Rose caduche*.
- 1870 – *Storia di una capinera* is published episodically in the fashion magazine *La ricamatrice*.
- 1871 – *Storia di una capinera* is republished in epistolary form by Lampugnani.
- 1873 – *Eva* is published by Treves.
- 1874 – "Nedda" is published in the magazine *Scienze lettere ed arti*.
- 1876 – Brigola of Milan publishes the *Primavera ed altri racconti* collection, which is republished the following year with the addition of "Nedda."
- 1878 – The magazine *Il fanfulla* publishes "Rosso Malpelo" and Verga begins to write "Fantasticheria." Verga announces in a letter to Salvatore Paola Verdura his intention to write a series of five novels that will comprise the *Marea* series (which is later retitled the *Vinti* series). The initial plan for the five novels are *Padron 'Ntoni* (later titled *I Malavoglia*), *Mastro don Gesualdo*, *La duchessa delle Gargantas* (later titled *La duchessa di Leyra*, which was



never finished), *L'onorevole Scipioni*, and *L'uomo di lusso* (these last two were never begun).<sup>1</sup>

1879 – *Il fanfulla della domenica* publishes “Fantasticheria.”

1880 – Treves publishes a collection of stories that have appeared in magazines between 1878 and 1880 entitled *Vita dei campi*. The magazine *Minima* publishes “L'amante di Raya.”

1881 – Treves publishes *I Malavoglia*, which initially receives a very cold reception by critics. Verga also begins to plan out *Mastro don Gesualdo* and publishes “Malaria” and “Il reverendo” in magazines which were proposed as replacements for “Il come Il quando e Il perché” in a republication of *Vita dei campi*.

1882 – Treves publishes *Il marito di Elena* while Giannotta, a Catanese editor, publishes “Pane nero.” Verga continues to work on the *Novelle rustiche* collection, which is published at the very end of 1882 and beginning of 1883 by Treves.

1883 – Verga continues work on the stories of *Per le vie*, which he publishes in several magazines including *Il fanfulla della domenica*, *Domenica letteraria* and *Cronaca bizantina*. The *Per le vie* collection is published by Treves later that year while Verga returns to Sicily to finish *Mastro don Gesualdo* and to adapt “Cavalleria rusticana” for the stage.

1884 – The *Drammi intimi* collection is published by Il Sommaruga of Rome.

1885 – Verga’s successful theatrical adaptation of “Il canarino del numero 15” from *Per le vie* is produced as *In portineria*. Verga is also struggling with the successive novels in the *Vinti* series of novels.

1891 – Treves publishes the *Ricordi del capitano d'arce* collection.

1894 – Treves publishes the *Don Candeloro e compagni* collection.

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<sup>1</sup> In his letter Verga wrote: “Ho in mente un lavoro che mi sembra bello, e grande, una specie di fantasmagoria della lotta per la vita, che si estende dal cenciainulo, al ministro ed all'artista, e assume tutte le forme dell'ambizione all'avidità del guadagno, e si presta a mille rappresentazioni del gran grottesco umano, lotta providenziale che guida l'umanità, per mezzo e attraverso a tutti gli appetiti, alti e bassi, alle conquiste della verità! [...] Il realismo, -- io lo intendo così, come la schietta ed evidente manifestazione dell'osservazione coscienziosa, la sincerità dell'arte in una parola -- potrà prendere un lato della fisionomia della vita italiana moderna, a partire dalla classi infime, dove la lotta è limitata al pane quotidiano, come nel *Padron 'Ntoni*, e a finire nelle vaghe aspirazioni, nelle ideali avidità dell'*Uomo di lusso* (un segreto), passando per le avidità basse alle vanità del *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, rappresentante della vita di provincia, all'ambizione di un deputato” (De Vito, “Struggle for Existence” 179).

1896 – Treves publishes the theatrical works of *La lupa*, *In portineria*, and *Cavalleria rusticana*.

1897 – The magazine *Le grazie* publishes “La caccia al lupo.”

1901 – Treves publishes *La caccia al lupo* and *La caccia alla volpe*, which had been performed earlier that year.

1905 – *Dal tuo al mio* comes out episodically in the magazine *La nuova antologia* and is subsequently published in full by Treves.

1919 – Verga writes his final *novella*, “Una capanna e il tuo cuore,” which will be published posthumously.

1922 - Among Verga’s works that are published posthumously are *Rose caduche* in *Le maschere* and the sketch “Il mistero” in *Scenario*.

## **Introduction:**

### **Background and Historical Preamble**

Giovanni Verga is one of the most important and influential short-story writers in Italian literary history. Some critics have even referred to him as “the greatest short-story writer between Boccaccio and the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Verga, *Sicilian Stories* v). A native Sicilian whose literary prowess took him to the most respected salons of Paris, Florence and Milan, Verga wrote many works, which helped to establish a new literary movement in Italy called *verismo*. Among his numerous short-story collections, Verga’s two Sicilian collections use nature as an omnipresent, yet passively important element of his stories.

In this study, I will explore the role of nature in *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane* to show that there is an evolutionary element to Verga’s treatment of it, with respect to the picturesque. While his earlier collection reveals an extremely picturesque representation of nature, that treatment evolves and eventually becomes a non-picturesque representation. To illustrate my theory, I will analyze several stories from his Sicilian collections, giving examples of the evolution of the picturesque as manipulated by the author.

## Biography

Giovanni Carmelo Verga was born on September 2, 1840 to Caterina Di Mauro and GiovanBattista Verga Catalano, wealthy landowners living in the province of Catania, on Sicily's eastern coast. While the family owned a city home in Catania, they also possessed several estates located in and around the hillside village of Vizzini, southeast of Catania proper. Verga's exposure to the peasant workers of his family's farms provided the experiences on which the young Verga built his Sicilian collections many years later, much removed from, and in what I will argue, a very nostalgic yet un-romanticized view of his home.<sup>2</sup>

As the oldest of five children,<sup>3</sup> high hopes were established early on for Verga, who was enrolled in a traditional private school as early as age six. Attending the school of Antonino Abbate, a patriot and strong supporter of the Italian republic, patriotic ideals and an appreciation for Romantic literature were ingrained in the mind of the young student from quite an early age. These elements would manifest themselves in Verga's early works, then would later fade as the author developed what would become his signature mature style, known as *verismo*.

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<sup>2</sup> Verga makes no attempt to romanticize or even detract from the burden of growing up in poor Sicily. Rather, he is completely loyal to the difficulty, the injustice and the despair that pervades the populations that his stories highlight. He does this, however, with an undertone of pride for the homeland and nostalgia that the reader can sense through the stories themselves.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Carmelo Verga was, in fact, the second child born to Caterina Di Mauro and GiovanBattista Verga Catalano. Their first son, Giovanni, died prematurely. Therefore, Giovanni Carmelo inherited the family's home at number 8 Via Sant'Anna in Catania after his parents' death. Following the author's death, the Verga home in Catania was turned into a museum in honor of the writer and his family.

By 1857 Verga had already written his first literary work, *Amore e patria*,<sup>4</sup> which, based upon the advice of his teacher, Mario Torrisi, was never published. Instead, Verga continued his studies and eventually moved on to university, following the urgings of his father, by enrolling in law school. Much preferring political journalism and literary endeavors to his law courses, Verga abandoned his studies in 1861 and published his first book, *I carbonari della montagna*, with the money his father had given him to pay for his coursework.

The arrival of Garibaldi in Sicily in 1860 prompted Verga to serve in the National Guard where he remained for about four years.<sup>5</sup> However, his lack of enthusiasm toward military discipline spurred Verga's split from the military in 1865, at which point he made his first trip to Florence.<sup>6</sup> During the following seven years, Verga frequented the salons of important writers until 1872, when he settled in northern Italy.

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<sup>4</sup> This work contains specific examples of the patriotic ideals and love for the homeland that are characteristic of Verga's earliest phase of writing.

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi arrived in Sicily on May 11, 1860 in response to the uprisings in Messina and Palermo in the Kingdom of the two Sicilies. After conquering the island, he named himself dictator of Sicily and advanced toward Naples. Garibaldi played an integral role in the *Risorgimento*, the unification of Italy.

<sup>6</sup> Verga's writing is closely tied to the historical and political situation in Italy. As Tullio Pagano explains: "Verga's artistic and ideological itinerary is closely related to the process of Italian unification, which Verga experienced from the marginal perspective of a Sicilian *rentier* whose main source of income came from the land. Historically, his class was in the process of losing economic and political importance within the new national configuration, in which the Northern bourgeoisie had achieved a hegemonic position. Therefore, the literary production of the Sicilian novelist should be examined in relation to the transition from Romantic idealism that dominated Italy during the *Risorgimento* and the Positivism that characterized Italian culture after unification" (49). Verga's patriotism is evident in his early work and his enthusiasm after Garibaldi's successful campaign in Sicily. The reader, however, must remember that Sicily is far removed from the political and historical developments that are centered in northern and central Italy.

When Verga moved to Milan to frequent the salons of some of the most important writers and thinkers of the time, he made an important discovery about the northern elite:

Verga had discovered the powerful and symbolic charge that rural Sicily had for the Italian bourgeoisie while working in the Milanese orbit of the publisher Emilio Treves and his magazine, *Illustrazione italiana*. . . . From that point on, Verga's works offered a nuanced exploration of the many faces of southern difference . . . . (Moe, *View from Vesuvius* 250)

In fact, in a review of "Nedda" Eugenio Torelli Viollier wrote that never before had an Italian author shown Sicily with so much truth in so few pages.<sup>7</sup> Through his story, explained Torelli Viollier, the reader was exposed to the popular Sicilian traditions and able to imagine life on the island. This realization is what helped to shape Verga into the important writer that he has become. Although he was not appropriately appreciated during his lifetime, the contributions Verga made to the literary world and his ability to represent Sicily and its citizens is unique among his contemporaries.

By 1879, however, Verga had grown tired of the northern bourgeoisie and returned to his hometown in Sicily.<sup>8</sup> He did, however, make regular trips back to the northern salons he had frequented for the next nine years. At this juncture, his writing turned away from high-class sophistication and instead focused on the lives of the townspeople he had observed as a small child in the Catanese countryside.

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<sup>7</sup> Eugenio Torelli Viollier was the principal mind behind the co-founder of *Il corriere della sera* in 1857. He reviewed "Nedda" in the July 12, 1874 edition of the newspaper.

<sup>8</sup> This nostalgia is visible in Verga's writing, specifically in "Nedda," written in 1874, and is discussed in chapter 1 of this document.

This new subject matter was accompanied by a new writing style, which came to be known as *verismo*, and would influence all of Italian literature in the successive years.

Verga's two Sicilian short story collections, *Vita dei campi* published in 1880 and *Novelle rustiche* published in 1883, will be the focus of this study. The two collections contain eight and twelve short stories respectively, and allow the reader a glimpse into the lifestyle of the Sicilian countryside and its lower class inhabitants. All of the stories in these collections are written from the point of view of the south; that is, they are written in Sicily and about Sicily, and bring to the light the struggles and injustices of the peasant farm workers among whom Verga grew up.

Verga spent the next phase of his life dedicated to literature, producing numerous short-story collections, and also initiated a series of novels that would be referred to as *I vinti*. The series, which was to focus on the common man's struggle for existence and progress, was never completed. Had they been completed, the novels would have allowed the reader a glimpse of life in Sicily starting with the lowest rungs of society and working their way up the ladder of social class. Of the initial five novel series, only the first two novels, *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro don Gesualdo*, were ever written to completion. The third novel, *La duchessa di Leyra*, was drafted, but was never edited or published, and neither of the final two components, *L'Onorevole Scipioni* and *L'uomo di lusso*, was ever begun. It was also during this period that Verga turned his attention toward theatrical presentations as well as publishing his literary works. Verga is now remembered not only as a novelist, but a short story writer as well as a playwright.

In 1888, Verga moved his permanent residence back to the family home at Via Sant'Anna 8 in Catania, and by 1920 had been elected a senator. Settling back into life as an upper class Sicilian citizen, Verga enjoyed the last years of his life, and still made regular trips to the peninsula and northern cities to visit with friends and colleagues. In January of 1922 the writer suffered a fatal cerebral thrombosis, ending the life of the man who would become one of the most important authors in Italian literary history. Despite several long-term affairs, Verga never married, and, having no children, opted to leave the majority of his estate to the children of his brother. The family home in Catania still stands and is open today as the Verga Museum.

### **The Sicilian Works**

Romanticism and literature that celebrated nature dominated nineteenth-century Italian literature. Giovanni Verga was no exception to this rule; however, his approach to literature was much different from other contemporary authors. As one critic notes:

The nineteenth century on the whole was long-winded and slow-paced, descriptive, achieving its masterpieces by a fullness (often fatness) of exposition. That is one way. Verga's was the way of brevity, an intense abruptness<sup>9</sup> striving for absolute impersonality -- because any trace of the author's presence was "the mark of original sin." (Greenberg 19)

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<sup>9</sup> When considering abruptness in Italian literature, one will most likely consider the *colpo di glottide* technique used by Dante in the *Commedia*, most notably at the end of *Inf.* V. The technique, an abrupt stop at the end of a story, is also used by Verga in *La lupa*.



While influenced by and situated among the late Romantic writers of his time, Verga emerged from them and created his own style that would come to characterize his mature writing style.

Verga's life can be studied according to his diverse and numerous literary achievements, as well as by the style of his writing. Until the 1880s, Verga's writing was characterized by themes of romantic love, patriotism and bourgeois love stories set in posh northern salons.<sup>10</sup> Verga's early literary career was highly influenced by the Romantic ideals of the *Risorgimento*. Particularly influenced by writers such as Ugo Foscolo, who is known for his representation of nature, it is easy to see how Verga became such a master at his representation of nature. However, as Pagano notes:

After unification, the main concern for both writers and critics is the development of a "new novel," which would break with the Manzonian tradition. The focus of attention, once the *Risorgimento* is concluded, centers on contemporary society, which needs to be explored in all its aspects. (54)

For Verga, this approach meant taking the characteristics for Emile Zola and the French Naturalists and adapting them to fit his literary style.<sup>11</sup>

Naturalism, whose principal author was Emile Zola, included a sterile, scientific observation of the lowest and most grotesque classes of society. For the Naturalists, the most important technique was to keep the author's opinions out of the text and write what read as a lab report of what had been observed. The works

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<sup>10</sup> According to Tullio Pagano, Verga's chief romantic influence was Ugo Foscolo. His influence can be seen in the themes treated by Verga in his early literary phase of writing.

<sup>11</sup> From this point forward I will refer to French Naturalism by using the term Naturalism or Naturalist (capitalized).

produced from this movement lacked distinctive plots and elaborate character development. Instead, they chronicled the basest rungs of society with scientific specificity and sterility.

The arrival of the 1880s, however, signaled the beginning of a new phase of Verga's writing. Beginning with "Nedda," which was written in 1874, and most often included in the short story collection *Vita dei campi*, Verga shifted to a style that grew out of the Naturalism movement and would come to be known as *verismo*. *Verismo* is a movement that he is credited with having significantly influenced and of which his work is one of the definitive example. This mature style of Verga's was characterized by a truthful representation of the lower classes in which the author's voice is purposefully absent from the story. No longer is the story dominated by national patriotism, the idealism of the *Risorgimento*, or themes of Romanticism, but the daily struggle for survival, the life of peasant farmers and fishermen, and a focus on life on the slopes of Mount Etna. By returning to his own homeland, the slopes of Etna, and the plains surrounding Catania, Verga was able to find inspiration in his own experiences and observations growing up among the workers on his parents' lands.

Italian *verismo* shares many elements with Naturalism, but goes a step farther to reveal the real life customs and events of the stories. Like Naturalism, *verismo* often lacks a definite plot but does not seek to expose the most horrific and unjust elements of society. While Naturalism sought out these elements, *verismo* only portrayed them if they played an integral part in the story that the author meant to portray. A critic writes: "Herein lies the difference in literary perspectives

of Zola and Verga. Zola sees society from above. For him it is a monster destroying everything good in a man. . . . Verga on the other hand, sees society from within" (Manente 23). While Zola is a passive observer, Verga is working to lift the veil on certain societal groups so that others may observe their life. Furthermore, Zola looks at society as a whole while Verga explored the individual and his relationship to his neighbors. Verga, however, goes a step further in utilizing stock characters that represent the Sicilian farm, the typical landowner and the orphaned peasant girl. Verga's characters, which lack any substantial character development, are representative of the people around whom Verga grew up.

While one can read Verga's Sicilian writings as a record of practices and traditions of the Sicilian peasant farmers, there is also an element of warmth in Verga's writing that is absent from the works of the Naturalists. As Horatio Clare writes:

The fiction of Giovanni Verga is a prime manifestation of a keen interest in the south that emerged in Italian bourgeois culture during the second half of the 1870s. . . . A striking feature of Verga's literary representations of Sicily is their engagement with the areas of cultural practice and modes of representing the south . . . . (250)

This phenomenon, the myth of Sicily, is prevalent in the bourgeois world of northern Italy. This myth of Sicily is what made Verga's Sicilian works so appealing to the northern elite and contributed to the continued success of Verga's Sicilian stories.

For the northern bourgeois, Sicily was a far away place that certainly most had never visited. Furthermore, it was a fantastical place that had been appearing in literature since the time of Homer's *Odyssey*. While the reality of life in Sicily was

much different than any wealthy northerner could fathom, the mystical element to the literature appealed to the northern readers. One must remember that it is

not only how the imagination makes the place, shaping it, but how place and location participate in the construction of cultural representation. As both Verga's letters and fiction make clear, it is "from a certain distance," from the greater cities of the north and from the perspective of the bourgeois subject, that Sicily becomes evocative, alluring, picturesque. (Moe, *View from Vesuvius* 294-95)

The distance between Sicily and the northern audience is important because had these wealthy northern readers really experienced the harsh, unfair, difficult life about which these stories were written, their shiny, alluring, picturesque reception would be quite different. It is, in large part, the distance that makes Sicily so mythical and appealing.

While "Nedda" was Verga's first story to address the issues of peasant farmers living in Sicily, he published an entire collection of short stories in 1880 based on the workers he had met and observed working on and around his parents' farms. *Vita dei campi* is often published in conjunction with "Nedda," and allows the reader a glimpse into the life of the peasant farmer in the Catanese countryside. Three years later, Verga published a second Sicilian collection of short stories, *Novelle rustiche*. The stories contained in these collections had been published individually in literary magazines before being compiled into these collections. While the setting is similar in this second collection, the tone is much different. *Vita dei campi* focuses on the stoic confrontation of the world's struggles and injustices by the lowest classes of Sicilian farm workers, while the characters in *Novelle rustiche* are fully aware of those injustices and attempt to rebel against them.

Furthermore, the first collection lacks any bourgeois sentiments and focuses on the lower class, while the second collection not only focuses on, but also attacks, those bourgeois sentiments that are not extended to the Sicilian working class.

While some of Verga's works were instant successes and appreciated during his lifetime, his most famous works of *verismo* were not appropriately recognized until the 1920s and beyond. As Tullio Pagano writes:

In the beginning, there was silence. During Verga's life, his experimental works received little critical attention. The Italian reading public was not prepared for the radical innovations pursued by Verga and his Verist narrative masterpieces, beginning with some of the short stories in *Vita dei campi* and further developed in *Malavoglia*. Except for some important reviews written by those few critics and friends who like Verga, struggled to innovate the Italian novel by establishing contacts with the French Naturalist fiction, Verga's narrative experiments result in a "fiasco." We have to wait until 1919, when Russo's first monographic study of Verga was published, to gain an in-depth analysis of his literary production, which resulted in the rediscovery and subsequent "canonization" of a body of work that had been almost completely forgotten. (25)

Now, of course, Verga is considered not only the most well-known writer of Italian *verismo*, but also one of the most important writers of the century. As Stanley Applebaum writes in the introduction to a bilingual edition to the Sicilian stories:

His greatest achievement as a writer -- both his concern for the lowly and the downtrodden, and the colloquial, unrhetorical style of his best Sicilian stories -- were not always appreciated in his lifetime, but the critical tide turned in his favor in the 1920s, and at the present time it seems safe to say that he is an imperishable classic in Italy, if still not universally recognized elsewhere. (vii)

Verga's mature writing style changed the way in which Italy was represented in literature and allowed the reading public a true, realistic, and unbiased glimpse into

the life of the Sicilian peasant farmers about which so many of his most important works were written.

As Anthony De Vito explains in his article "The Struggle for Existence in the Work of Giovanni Verga," the author managed to include elements of struggle in all of his Sicilian works. De Vito writes:

. . . in his first realisted work "Nedda" (1874), [Verga] had already revolved about the struggle for living. "Nedda" was followed by *Vita dei campi* in 1880, *I Malavoglia* in 1881, the *Novelle rusticane* in 188[3] and *Per le vie* in 1883. In these stories, the characters, whether peasants of Sicily or burghers of Milan, have to face the realities of life, though the all-importance of the struggle varies according to Verga's interest in presenting provincial customs and character, as in *Vita dei campi*, or the rise of the bourgeoisie, as in *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, or the *miseria* and the hard life of the people, as in *I Malavoglia* and in the *Novelle rusticane*. (179-80)

Verga was able to incorporate the daily struggle of his characters into each of his stories, allowing the reader not only a glimpse into the real life of the characters but also into the struggles that might have been passed over by other authors.

From a literary point of view, one must keep in mind that Sicily holds a special place in history.<sup>12</sup> As Clare states:

From a writer's prospective, Sicily is an island of ineffable magic dating back to the time of the Greek myths. Sicilian myths are based on the island's life cycle, and tied to the goddess who gave humans wheat. Therefore, Sicilian myths deal with the return of life, spirit, and sustenance from peerlessly bountiful soil. (7)

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<sup>12</sup> The common perception of Sicily as the land of myth and mystery dates as far back as recorded history, but changed dramatically as Italy moved toward unification. Following the unification of Italy, "the glorious south of ancient times, was stuck fast in semi-feudal sloth and squalor" (Greenberg 19). Furthermore southern Italy was viewed as significantly removed from the rest of the peninsula and Sicily even more so; so foreign, so far away and so different from the industrially revolutionized cities of the north.

This idea is clearly visible in Verga's writing. Although Verga's stories represent the lower class Sicilian workers as a whole, the settings of his stories are not representative of the island as a whole. Rather, as Applebaum explains in the introduction to his translation, Verga's stories are set within a thirty-mile radius of Catania, and most occur southwest of the city that coincides with the location of the Verga family property. Furthermore, Verga does not attempt to recount the past, but sets his stories at the time of their publication, or perhaps slightly before. Within this setting, Verga "unobtrusively, but skillfully, [...] reveal[s] the social classes, a wide variety of occupations, home life, popular amusements, religions and superstitions – the entire life of the people down to their characteristic sayings and gestures" (Applebaum ix). The elements that Verga uses to create his stories are experiences and memories from his childhood. The characters are often based upon (or perhaps actual portrayals of) peasant farmers who worked on the Verga family properties around the Catanese plain. Furthermore, Verga often places a version of himself in the stories (for example as the farm owner's son in "Nedda" or the wealthy don Alfonso in "Jeli il pastore").<sup>13</sup>

In this study I will devote my attention to Verga's representation of Sicily and the change in that representation from picturesque to non-picturesque. I will argue that certain elements of nature are used as indicators of the picturesque, while the elimination of those elements signals the opposite, and the evolution from

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<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Cecchetti discusses the material upon which Verga's stories are based in his study of Giovanni Verga, with the same title. For Verga, the arrival at this new writing style is based more upon nostalgia for his homeland and a desire to represent his memories than anything else. Inspired by the style of the Naturalists, Verga created his own solution for conveying reality and narrating from his memory. This compromise is *verismo*.

picturesque to non-picturesque is evident from the earlier to the later collection of Sicilian short stories. Those elements include various elements of nature, but the presence of the sea is the most characteristically picturesque natural element that will indicate the picturesque, as will be discussed in chapter one.

Just as the characters of *Vita dei campi* seem to be unaware of the social injustices held against them, while those in *Novelle rusticane* rebel against those injustices, so also does the picturesque representation of the island fade into a non-picturesque representation. By analyzing such literary devices and descriptions of nature and the landscape used by Verga, I will show the correspondence between the representation of the island and the disillusionment of the characters.

In presenting a realistic image of Sicily, Verga also introduces his readers to an array of struggles that are common among the Sicilian peasant farmers on which his stories are focused. The struggles presented range from weather to sickness to the arrival of technology. The weather plays a role in almost all of the stories in one way or another, but is of particular consequence in “Nedda.”<sup>14</sup> As noted by De Vito in “The Struggle for Existence in the Work of Giovanni Verga”:

The weather is of the greatest importance in the life of the country-folk who populate the *piana di Catania*, the setting for a number of the short stories and for *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. A day or a period of rain will force the laborer to be idle. It is to be observed that workmen are paid only for what they actually do. (180)

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<sup>14</sup> The struggle against the weather and the importance it plays in the lives of peasant farmers can also be seen in “Guerra dei santi,” “Pane nero,” “La storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe” and “I galantuomini.”



While weather presents one of the greatest struggles for the farm workers, sickness also appears in “Nedda,” as well as “Malaria,” which is titled for the sickness itself.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the arrival of technology in “Malaria” also poses a decisive struggle, particularly for the innkeeper, Ammazamogli, whose well being is threatened by the arrival of the train and what it brings to Sicily.

Although Verga has written novels, plays and works for opera, I believe that it is his short stories that best demonstrate the depth of the author’s brilliance. This particular study focuses on two of the author’s nine short story collections,<sup>16</sup> those that are set in Sicily. The specific purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Giovanni Verga’s Sicilian short stories and the author’s treatment of nature within them.

The presence of nature and the way it is treated by the author plays an integral role in Verga’s Sicilian *novelle*. Furthermore, the author uses nature to shape the story and deepen the meaning of the events that unfold in the few pages of each *novella*; that is: “The author controls the environment and the environment controls the characters” (Manente 4). As will be discussed in the body of this study, Verga’s treatment of nature is linked to an illustration of the picturesque, where the term picturesque is something that proves suitable for painting. Therefore, the stories in which lush green fields and cheerful animals dominate the setting are

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<sup>15</sup> Malaria also strikes in “Pane nero.” Verga returns to the struggle against malaria in the *Vagabondaggio* collection, *I Malavoglia* and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In his writing, malaria is not the only sickness that appears, as he includes the struggle with the cholera in *La storia di una capinera*.

<sup>16</sup> Verga’s nine short story collections include: *Primavera e altri racconti* (1876), *Vita dei campi* (1880), *Novelle rusticane* (1883), *Per le vie* (1883), *Drammi intimi* (1884), *Vagabondaggio* (1887), *I ricordi del capitano d’Arce* (1891), *Don Candeloro e compagni* (1894), *Racconti e bozzetti* (a collection of works 1880-1922).

considered picturesque whereas the stories that feature burned out fields, unbearable heat and a lack of anything living are non-picturesque.

### **French Naturalism and *Verismo***

Characterized by the movement's most well known author Emile Zola, the Naturalists were known for approaching their subjects from a scientific standpoint in which they attempted to preserve the sterility of the subject by omitting their own participation in the literature.<sup>17</sup> Naturalists worked to seek out the lowest, most grotesque levels of society, looking for the most squalid living conditions they could find.<sup>18</sup>

According to the principles of [N]aturalism, the writer must study his human subjects with the scientific objectivity of a psychologist or physician, and must present them with equal detachment. It was, in fact, a treatise on experimental medicine by Claude Bernard that Zola said he had derived this theories on the novel. Human reality must further be viewed from the standpoint of its own irreversible deterministic laws of heredity and environment. In practice this is done by seeking out the people of the city slums, the corrupt and the degenerate, by observing how their degeneracy passes from generation to generation. Being the results of this observation, the novel almost writes itself through the characters' actions and reactions. (Cecchetti, *Giovanni Verga* 47)

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<sup>17</sup> Emile Zola was first and foremost a lover of science. To him, "the idea that science and art might, by their very nature, be incompatible was blasphemy" (Manente 2). For Zola science and scientific observation were an integral and inadmissible element of art.

<sup>18</sup> Not only did this new movement highlight the lowest rungs of society, but it also removed the element of mystery that was characteristic of the Romantic writers. As Pagano writes: "Naturalism is obscene because it openly reveals the process of literary production, which is supposed to be surrounded by a veil of mystery" (15). Whereas Romanticism promoted the creative process as a result of divine inspiration, Zola and the Naturalist writers are allowing the reader to see that the narrative process comes from nothing more than a series of scientific observations compiled into one product.

Rather than a literary endeavor, the result of this scientific analysis often reads more like a scientific observation untainted by the author's opinions, or so the Naturalists believed.<sup>19</sup> However, as many critics have noted, it is impossible to observe a subject and avoid any authorial influence. The mere decision of what to include and exclude, the order of presentation, the adjectives selected to describe the scenes are all influenced by the author, and therefore bear his imprint on the work. In any case, the scientific sterility and passive observer standpoint are characteristic elements of Naturalism.

In her book *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*, Millicent Marcus discusses the most general elements of realism and [N]aturalism and, more importantly, how they relate to *verismo*. She writes: "Practitioners of realism in literature, from Dante to Zola, have sought to render humanity in the context of the material world in such a way that its innermost workings are revealed" (8-9). It is the goal of the author to reveal to the reader the thoughts and feelings of their characters in the setting of a story. Furthermore, although this technique spans more than five hundred years, certain aspects remain unchanged: the author attempts to remove (or at least veil) his own opinion from the story, he narrates from the standpoint of a passive observer within the setting of the story, and he employs an almost scientific analysis of the story, recording all of the elements of the environment as he narrates the story.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> From this point forward I will refer to French Naturalism by using the term Naturalism or Naturalist (capitalized).

<sup>20</sup> Marcus also details how Italian realism derives from centuries of literary movements throughout the rest of Europe. She writes: "Nineteenth-century Italian realism reveals an eclectic mixture of elements drawn from the various, sometimes contradictory manifestations of the theory as it underwent its long history of

Following the unification of Italy, a new set of difficulties emerged among the upper class in Italy. In addition, the ideals of the *Risorgimento* faded and left in their wake a new wave of literature that reflected these changes in the society of the newly unified Italy.

While taking some inspiration from Naturalism, Giovanni Verga separates himself from the guidelines of that movement and eventually becomes the standard on Italian *verismo*.<sup>21</sup> As Giovanni Cecchetti explains, Verga's particular style of writing included placing himself "under the skin" of his characters, in the author's own words, allowing himself to see through their eyes and speak with their words, which he refers to as artistic nonintervention. Furthermore, notes Cecchetti, Verga

omitted all purely descriptive passages as well as what could be suggested between the lines; and, most importantly, he told his stories in the very words of his characters -- that is to say, he had his characters narrate themselves, without apparent intrusions on his part, thereby adopting in embryonic form a technique that years later would grow into the interior monologue. Through the resulting immediacy, directness, and powerful conciseness, his pages acquired an often purely lyrical quality. In the 1880s Verga was decidedly ahead of his time, but some decades later he came to be recognized as a precursor of modern fiction. (*Giovanni Verga* 7)

Whereas Emile Zola and the other Naturalists were fixated on presenting a scientific view of the lowest classes, Verga turns his attention toward his homeland and

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evolution and transformation from the ancient Greek to the contemporary French" (13-14). The chapter continues to explain that the Italian *veristi* were able to retain the most important elements of realism and reject those more restrictive and difficult regulations that did not allow the author to input his own spin on the story.

<sup>21</sup> As Judith Davies explains, Naturalism and *verismo* are both movements that stemmed from realism. According to her, the most important element that is preserved from realism is the objective scrutiny of the lower class, regional Italian life (4).

representing the life of the peasant farmers about whom extremely little was known by the northern elite.

Never, in the Sicilian collections, does Verga attempt to manipulate the events in order to convince the reader of some idea or another. On the contrary, Verga's aim is to present to his readers the life he saw growing up among the peasant farmers of rural Catania.<sup>22</sup> Cecchetti explains:

The subject matter and the characters' environment are quite new. Verga turns his attention to the lowest social levels in Sicily and to characters who are passionate and honest, but who also have great difficulty in winning their battle for survival. The theme of the story will not, then, spring from his personal involvement in, and direct observation of, high society, but from the memories of his own childhood and adolescence – when he had seen the hard life of the peasants, had witnessed the silent dramas of their extreme poverty, and had perceived the elemental force of their passions. After spending years with people who had everything and were actually dying of boredom, he must have longed for those uncomplicated but much more meaningful, human emotions he had once known. (*Giovanni Verga* 32)

So, while his goal is similar to that of the Naturalist writers, Verga's approach to literature differed greatly from the Naturalist approach to literature. Whereas the Naturalists attempted to keep a scientific distance from their subject, utilizing the author as a catalyst to transmit information, Verga aims to represent life, narrating from the standpoint of a passive observer privy to every situation but refraining from participating in it.

The principles of Naturalism call for an author to study his subjects as a physician or scientist would an experiment. Furthermore, the presentation of the

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<sup>22</sup> Raffaele Di Zenzo notes that in Verga's writing, "è la storia che parla. Il verismo riproduce la realtà vivente, come una visione della vita in azione, senza una trama perché la vita è fatta di circostanze . . ." (4).

findings are presented to the reader with such detachment that the text reads closer to a laboratory report than a work of literature. In *Giovanni Verga*, Giovanni Cecchetti explains that many of the Italian *veristi* did indeed believe in the principles of Naturalism, but opted not to apply them to their literature. The exception here was the use of the detached or removed author. Rather than searching out the most corrupt or degenerate subjects, the *veristi* looked to represent real human emotions and the ever-present struggle to achieve one's aspirations. Cecchetti continues:

They looked for the reality of human passions in the simple, and eternal, interplay between man's actions and man's aspirations. They did not go to the slums in search of characters, but to the faraway provinces, where they thought man to be more genuine, not yet psychologically complicated, or deformed, by the "civilization" of the cities. They stressed the inner world of their people by bringing to light their strong impulses for life and their innate morality. . . . Yet we cannot forget that the *veristi* kept finding their characters in the regions of their youth. This would have made it impossible for them to look at those characters with the clinical eye of the scientist, even if they had chosen to adhere to the letter of [N]aturalism. Their acceptance of the theory of impersonality, on the other hand, helped them to keep in check any possible intrusion of sentimentality. Thus we may conclude that *verismo* can be defined as the offspring of the marriage between preexisting realism and [N]aturalism. As with all offspring, it soon showed its independence from the parents, even if its personality continued to be marked by some of the most conspicuous characteristics of both. (*Giovanni Verga* 47)

So, while both Naturalists and *veristi* often write about those who comprise the lowest classes, their reason for doing so is quite different. Whereas the Naturalists seek out those who live in squalor and are constantly faced with struggle and hardship, the *veristi* seek out those whose lives are genuine and representative of the most basic human emotions. The result, then, is also quite different. *Verismo* allows the reader a glimpse into the life of a class with which they are not familiar

and, at the same time, expresses the struggles and hardships from the viewpoint of those who suffer them.

Verga's literary career spanned many years and evolved dramatically as he situated himself among the other writers of his time. The author's pre-*verismo* writing style differed greatly from that of his more mature writing style as has already been discussed.<sup>23</sup> While he originally dealt with refined love, women as sirens, and set his stories in the northern bourgeois salons, his more mature style deals with elemental passions, the simple country girl and farm boy, and the stories are set in the countryside where peasants' huts dominate rather than fancy apartments. His declaration of this new style was first made public in "L'Amante di Gramigna," originally published in 1880 and included in the *Vita dei campi* collection.

"L'Amante di Gramigna" commences with a letter to Salvatore Farina<sup>24</sup> that serves as a manifesto on the methods and aims of Verga's *verismo*.<sup>25</sup> He writes:

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<sup>23</sup> The critic De Sanctis is known to have mourned the elements that disappeared with the arrival of *verismo*. The patriotism that was characteristic of the Risorgimento and the focus on high society were replaced with a realistic representation of the lower classes, which the critic found to be distressing.

<sup>24</sup> Salvatore Farina was the editor of the literary periodical in which the story was originally published. Verga's letter to Farina, notes David Woolf, "is the principal document marking Verga's transition from his earlier to his later style of writing" (*Art of Verga* 115). The letter outlines the elements that are most important for *verismo*, specifically the author's attempt to recount the story just as he heard it, recording bare facts, and allowing the characters to speak for themselves rather than an interpretation by the author of the events.

<sup>25</sup> In his article "Giovanni Verga's *verismo*," Martin Greenberg discusses Verga's *verismo* as a type of realism, with particular respect to Erich Auerbach's modern mimesis. According to Auerbach's theory, there must be three particular elements: 1) the serious treatment of everyday reality, 2) the serious representation of the socially inferior, and 3) the previous two elements must be shown against the background of contemporary historical change. Greenberg points out, however, that Verga's *verismo* only satisfies the first two elements. He writes: "[Verga's] Sicily is eternal, essentially the same under the Piedmontese as under the Bourbons. The peasantry he paints [is] engaged in the eternal struggle to live of a beset humanity, not Sicilian slowly emerging into the modern world, emigrating to America, forming into parties, soon to die in a world war, etc. etc. (24)." It is also important to note that Greenberg chooses the term "paints" as it relates back to the picturesque considering that the working definition for the picturesque in this document is that which is suitable for a painting.

“eccoti non un racconto ma l’abbozzo<sup>26</sup> di un racconto. Esso almeno avrà il merito di esser brevissimo, e di esser storico -- un documento umano, come dicono oggi . . .”

(Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 137). The author’s new style requires a true depiction of life, free from embellishments or stretching of the truth. Whereas his contemporaries are writing in a style that favors high society and wealthy characters, Verga turns towards his roots in the Sicilian countryside and aims for an accurate representation of the life of a Sicilian peasant farmer. His letter continues:

Io te lo ripeterò così come l’ho raccolto pei viottoli dei campi, press’a poco colle medesime parole semplici e pittoresche della narrazione popolare, e tu veramente preferirai di trovarti faccia a faccia col fatto nudo e schietto, senza stare a cercarlo fra le linee del libro, attraverso la lente dello scrittore. Il semplice fatto umano farà pensare sempre; avrà sempre l’efficacia dell’*essere stato*, delle lagrime vere, delle febbri e delle sensazioni che sono passate per la carne . . . (137)

Verga has made his opinion clear that the author who meddles with the story and interjects his own ideas and opinion is distorting the story. Clearly, Verga highly values a true representation of daily life without any alterations on the part of the author. In this declaration of *verismo*, Verga is promising to remove himself as a contributor to the story and to act as nothing more than a catalyst to relay the events to the reader as they originally occurred. His goal, as stated in the letter to Farina, is to help the reader to react to and reflect upon simple human events rather than create fantastic, embellished fiction.

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<sup>26</sup> All of Verga’s Sicilian *novelle* will be referred to as abbozzi or sketches because Verga is less concerned with character development, an intricate plot or any other element of short story development than his predecessors. On the contrary, Verga’s characters are very loosely described in order to allow them to represent the “every man” and the plot of the story is much less important than the representation of the island and the author’s nostalgia for his homeland of Sicily.



Verga goes on to explain that he is embarking on a new way of storytelling. No longer is he searching for the most dramatic climaxes or the most unexpected twists of fate, bourgeois romances or high-class drama; rather, the author intends to pay more attention to the details of life and the day-to-day occurrences that may or may not include twists of fate, but nonetheless shape the lives of the characters that live those events. He explains:

Noi rifacciamo il processo artistico al quale dobbiamo tanti monumenti gloriosi, con metodo diverso, più minuzioso e più intimo. Sacrifichiamo volentieri l'effetto della catastrofe, allo sviluppo logico, necessario delle passioni e dei fatti verso la catastrofe resa meno impreveduta, meno drammatica forse, ma non meno fatale. Siamo più modesti, se non più umili; ma la dimostrazione di cotesto legame oscuro tra cause ed effetti non sarà meno utile all'arte dell'avvenire. (137)

For Verga, the measure of a successful story requires that the reader be unable to determine the line between the author's creation and the real life occurrence that he recounts. He strives to make the real life events and his own interjections so seamless that the story will seem to have written itself. Verga continues to lay out his new plan for storytelling, adding that he believes the story will triumph when

l'affinità e la coesione di ogni sua parte sarà così completa che il processo della creazione rimarrà un mistero . . . avrà l'impronta dell'avvenimento reale, l'opera d'arte sembrerà *essersi fatta da sé*, aver maturato ed esser sorta spontanea come un fatto naturale, senza serbare alcun punto di contatto col suo autore, alcuna macchia del peccato d'origine. (137-38)

For Verga, the work of art shall stand alone, "throbbing with life" as it recounts real occurrences.

One aspect of Verga's *verismo* that is new and unique is the author's allowance of his characters to speak as they would in their daily lives in Sicily; the "overriding aim [of *verismo*] was to present an object presentation of life, usually of the lower classes, using direct, unadorned language, explicit descriptive detail, and realistic dialogue" (Lombardi 31). The problem, however, is that if Verga allowed his characters to speak in their rural Sicilian dialects, the stories would be indecipherable to the general audience.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, like Manzoni,<sup>28</sup> Verga opted for a more standardized version of the Italian his characters would use in their natural setting. In order to keep the realistic element that was essential to *verismo*, Verga included elements of the Sicilian dialect (such as syntax, sayings, and cadences) to help the reader imagine the characters speaking in their own tongue. Cecchetti explains:

[Verga] knew that every writer has to create for himself a language perfectly suitable to the world of his characters. He looked for this language in the environment and in the lives of the characters themselves. However, as he could not find what he was seeking, he immediately discovered that he had to invent a language, which was to be ideally their natural medium – not an expressive optical illusion, but a profoundly alive, and natural, instrument of communication,

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<sup>27</sup> Clearly, "l'uso di sicilianismi converge su questo obiettivo ultimo verghiano di infondere realismo nelle sue opere, questa volta non con lo stesso successo. La realtà è che gli umili siciliani di fine Ottocento parlano solo ed esclusivamente un dialetto la cui incomprendibilità è direttamente proporzionale alla lontananza dal paese di origine, tantoché spesso bastano solo pochi chilometri per far emergere sostanziali diversità di espressione. Per restare veramente fedele alla parlata di questi umili, lo scrittore dovrebbe usare il dialetto stretto che solo essi conoscono e che quindi limiterebbe la comprensibilità del testo alle coordinate geografiche del luogo dell'azione.

L'uso di una lingua ibrida che incorpori elementi locali nell'italiano letterario può rivelarsi un'arma a doppio taglio in quanto può portare all'effetto opposto, cioè a una perdita di credibilità. Ciò non si verifica nelle novelle dove la fusione, quando avviene, è armonica e piacevole all'orecchio; ma nei romanzi, con l'ulteriore aggregazione di toscanismi e settentrionalismi, si corre questo rischio e non si può fare a meno di restare interdetti nel sentire un catanese come pardon 'Ntoni dire: 'Alla mia età l'è dura andare a giornata'" (173).

<sup>28</sup> Alessandro Manzoni was forced to rewrite *I promessi sposi* in a more standardized Italian so that more than just more than just the Milanese public could read it. Verga also had to standardize his characters' speech so that it would be accessible to his readers.

even though it was different from the external reality of their speech. His fishermen and his peasants did not know standard Italian at all. Had he translated them into shallow bourgeois idiom of the time, he would have destroyed the intensity of their feelings. And since it would have been impossible to clothe them in Sicilian dialect, he was indeed forced to create a language in which they could fully place their personal implications. It was a most fortunate coincidence. For his purpose Verga adopted a great many local expressive patterns and grafted them onto the old trunk of standard Italian. With very few exceptions, every word of the mature Verga can be found in a common Italian dictionary. Not always standard Italian, however, are certain cadences and certain rhythms which evoke an environment and a way of life belonging to Sicilians. (*Giovanni Verga* 49-50)

Just as Manzoni has come to be known for his struggle with and adaptation to the *questione della lingua*, so did Verga devise a creative and unique solution to the issue of dialect and standard Italian.

In addition to preserving as closely as possible the language of his characters, Verga also refers repeatedly to the landscape that is particular to Sicily. There is no room for doubt of the setting because Verga makes sure to refer to elements specific to Sicily: the sea, Mount Etna, the plain of Catania and the small towns and villages outside of Catania. The picturesque landscape of Sicily is tied to certain elements, the most prominent of which is the sea. In *Vita dei campi* the sea will play a prominent role in the *novelle* and occupy its role as an indicator of the picturesque. In *Novelle rusticane*, on the other hand, the sea is noticeably absent and often contradicted, which corresponds to the non-picturesque nature of the second collection of Sicilian short stories. Nelson Moe writes:

What is most obvious after all the other landlocked *Novelle rusticane*, in which the sea was either removed or disfigured, is the presence of the sea itself, repeatedly described in terms of 'unexplored abysses' and 'mysteries.' It is the sea that provides the specific, moody

atmosphere for the set of reflection on Sicily in the novella [*“Di là del mare”*]. (*“Representing the South”* 290)

In addition to the abundant water motif, there are other elements such as the wind blowing through the plain of Catania, the sparkle of the stars, budding flowers and wildlife that are also used as indicators of the picturesque landscape of Sicily. On the other hand, the rough, barren lava fields on the slopes of Mount Etna, the lack of water, the dry barren fields and the thirst motif are all associated with an opposing image of Sicily: a very hostile, non-picturesque environment. I will explore these elements further as I analyze particular stories and how they support the picturesque or non-picturesque image that Verga is promoting.

In his dissertation, *“Representing the South in Post-Unification Italy, c. 1860-1880,”* Moe reiterates the idea that “Verga’s contact with French Naturalism helped to guide his attention to those ‘fatti diversi’ heralded in the preface to *‘L’amante di Gramigna’*” (290) as well as the picturesque imagery used to describe the folkloric culture specific to Sicily. Verga’s ability to truthfully represent life in Sicily depends greatly upon his ability to incorporate the landscape into his writing. While at times this inclusion is done in a picturesque manner, there are also instances in which the landscape represents a hostile, brutal, unforgiving force of nature that allows no reprieve for its victims. Just as the Naturalists described their subjects with scientific, clinical detail, so did Verga aim to include elements in his own writing that would allow his readers a realistic, truthful glimpse into the life of a Sicilian peasant farmer.

As the term *verismo* became more and more well known, it came to be known as the Italian counterpart to Naturalism; not the same, yet not so different that the links are deniable. Verga and his mature writing style played an integral role in the evolution of Italian literary history. Verga and his *verismo* changed Italian literature and played a substantial role in the development of what we now called literary realism.

### **Organization of this study**

Chapter one of this document will discuss three *novelle* in which Verga employs the picturesque in his representation of nature and contains analysis of those three stories from the *Vita dei campi* collection. The three stories discussed in chapter one are “Nedda,” “Jeli il pastore” and “Fantasticheria.” As mentioned above, the sea is used as an element to indicate and draw the reader’s attention to the picturesque treatment by Verga and to underline the sense of homeland pride of not only the author, but also the peasant farmers about whom he is writing.

“Nedda,” although actually published as a stand alone story in 1874, is often included in the *Vita dei campi* collection and fits in perfectly because of the way it presents the Sicilian peasant girl Nedda. While “Nedda” recounts the story of the injustices and unfairness in the Sicilian farming world, it also allows the reader a glimpse of the stoicism that characterizes the lowest classes of the island. In the face of adversity and profound sadness, the author uses nature to juxtapose beauty and happiness with the harsh and unfair situations of the story. The backdrop of the

sea, the olive groves in which Nedda works, and the chirping birds all work to present the reader with a serene, beautiful, picturesque idea of the Catanese plain where the peasant girl lives.

While there are certainly elements that present the harsh reality of life as a Sicilian peasant farmer, the sea and the presence of nature always works to balance out those negative aspects of the *novella*. This story contains the death of the title character's mother, her fiancé and father of her child and ultimately the death of the infant itself. Nedda must also face being shunned for having become pregnant out of wedlock and cannot find work enough to support her sick mother or herself. If one were to consider only these elements, the reader could very easily label this story as depressing and horrific. Yet, Verga very skillfully balances these negative elements with stunning descriptions of nature that function as a reprieve from the harsh reality of Nedda's life.

Similarly, "Jeli il pastore" is a pastoral *novella* about a young herder who lives among his animals, and the picturesque elements of this story are apparent at every turn. Jeli's life is dominated by nature: he lives in it, he communes with it, and he works with it. The herder's entire existence is determined by nature; his entertainment is to weave baskets from reeds and catch grasshoppers. Most of the time Jeli is removed from the townspeople who only see him when he brings his herds in from pasture. In this story, it is difficult for the reader not to see the picturesque representation of nature.

As in "Nedda," "Jeli il pastore" also contains episodes that demonstrate the difficulty of life in Sicily in the late 1800s. Jeli's herd is, for him, family. When *lo*

*stellato* falls into the ravine, suffering until his eventual death, Jeli suffers as if it were a close family member that had passed. Furthermore, the herder's career and the respect he had gained among the farmers of the area were fatally wounded after the accident on the way to the livestock show. The few things that Jeli had in life that provided happiness were taken from him and replaced with sadness, extreme poverty and friendlessness. Jeli's situation only worsened as he learned of the unfaithfulness of his wife. However, all of these events are always juxtaposed with the beauty and bounty of nature, therefore lessening the impact of the tragedy of the situations.

The final *novella* in the picturesque chapter is "Fantasticheria," a letter written by a man (presumably Verga himself) who reminisces to a woman with whom he visited Sicily some time earlier. The story highlights the picturesque elements of the island, particularly the sea. The woman to whom the letter is written is cited repeatedly as being in awe of the beautiful blue water, the sleepy seaside homes, the fishermen mending their nets and spending the day in search of their catch. Furthermore, this *novella* reinforces the myth of Sicily as mentioned above, but goes a step further by deconstructing that myth.

As the man and his companion arrive on the train, she points with her gloved hand admiring the village and the sea. She even states that she wishes she could spend a long amount of time there, yet after a few days she is so bored that she begins to question how the townspeople can live there at all. Once again, it is the distance between the northern woman and the Sicilian seaside town that encourages and renews the appeal of mythical Sicily. When the distance is removed,

and the woman whose existence is defined by fancy salons and northern money, is exposed to the difficult and simple life of a Sicilian fishing village, she can no longer appreciate even the beautiful elements that first drew her there. In fact, she resorts to insults, calling the townspeople *ostriche*, oysters, that live within their tiny shells, never venturing outside during their entire lives. She is right that most townspeople will never leave their hometown and, even if they do, it would only be to travel to the nearest large city to sell their goods or be admitted to the hospital.

These three *novelle* complete the discussion of Verga's use of the picturesque in his Sicilian short stories. All three of these stories contain the sea, lush green fields and abundant, flourishing harvests. As noted, all three of these stories contain such hardship and tragedy that they could never be called happy stories. On the contrary, they are realistic representations of the difficult life of the lower working class in rural Sicily. Verga very skillfully juxtaposes the beauty of nature in such a way that the picturesque-ness of nature helps to balance out the sadness presented in these stories.

In the second chapter two stories are analyzed with respect to Verga's transition away from the picturesque. From the title of this study, it can be deduced that my intention is to trace the evolution of the way in which Verga treats nature in his Sicilian short stories. I very specifically chose the word evolution because the change in treatment was not sudden, but rather very gradual. It is, however, visible by looking at the entirety of his Sicilian short stories that are housed in the two collections *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane*.



“Rosso Malpelo” is the first *novella* discussed in the transitional chapter. While the setting of this story is the polar opposite of the stories of the previous chapter, the treatment of nature is not. The majority of the story is spent underground in the sand mines below the slopes of Etna, but there are moments when the title character emerges from the mines to experience the world above ground. Although Malpelo himself does not appreciate the starry sky or the glittering sea, Verga still includes those descriptions that lighten the ambiance for the reader. Although Verga sets the majority of the story away from the lush fields and sea that borders Catania and the *piana di Catania*, he still allows glimpses of those beautiful elements from time to time. Even though the title character feels that these picturesque elements are against his nature, going as far as to state that his type is meant to be underground, the reader can still appreciate and deduce from Verga’s descriptions that these elements are meant to weave some beauty into the story.

One of the only two mentions of animals comes in the form of Malpelo’s disabled friend, Ranocchio. The relationship between Malpelo and Ranocchio is unique. As a result of Malpelo’s own upbringing and lack of familial nurturing, he is unable to express love in any traditional manner. Instead he beats Ranocchio, as well as the grey donkey (the other animal mention) that carries the baskets of sand out of the mines, claiming that he will either teach them to fight back or kill them quicker. Although most readers would see Malpelo’s behavior as deplorable, it is actually the only way that the boy knows how to express love at all. As backwards as it may seem, this is Malpelo’s attempt to alleviate the difficulty of life for

Ranocchio and the donkey. These episodes, paired with the lack of description of nature, a result of the underground setting of the *novella*, present a very different setting from the stories discussed in chapter one. Here the reader can clearly see that Verga is moving away from his picturesque treatment of literature to a more non-picturesque treatment.

“Rosso Malpelo” is also critically noted as the decisive beginning of Verga’s realistic phase. According to Clare, Verga’s realism begins when he breaks with the picturesque, a moment he equates with the writing of “Rosso Malpelo.” Clare writes:

... the quaintness of the peasants is replaced by the ugliness of rascals and representations of the real grit of Sicilian life. The story also includes a rejection of the sea, which is also a decisive assault of the picturesque. There is one last nod toward the picturesque, when Verga describes the moonshine and the glittering sea, but this actually only underscores the inescapable desolation of Rosso Malpelo . . . . (280)

However, the reader must remember that Verga has not yet completely opposed those elements characteristic of the picturesque. As the cited critic notes, the sea has been strategically eliminated in this story, yet there is also a scene in which the title character observes the sea as it glitters beneath the starry sky. Although this scene, which would normally be considered picturesque, creates a discomfort with Malpelo, the reader can deduce that this story represents a midpoint on Verga’s journey away from the picturesque.

“La lupa” is another story that illustrates Verga’s transition away from the picturesque and toward the non-picturesque. While very different from “Rosso Malpelo,” “La lupa” features some of the more naturalistic elements that, in Verga,

represent the picturesque but with a twist that shows Verga's movement toward the non-picturesque. Pina, who is referred to as *la lupa* by the townsfolk, is an outcast as is her daughter, Maricchia. Since Pina's thin waist, big black eyes, long hair, ample bosom and red lips "devour" men with only one glance, many of the townspeople consider her an embodiment of evil. As a result, Maricchia is completely undesirable as a wife despite the impressive dowry she has to offer a husband. Although Maricchia does not initially love Nanni, nor does she find him attractive at all, Pina forces her daughter to marry him so that she herself can be near him and act upon her own erotic feelings for him.

The story is set in the countryside, where Pina and Nanni work in the fields harvesting grain and olives. However, rather than lush green endless fields, Verga presents dried out fields that are scorched by a sun, so hostile that even the burliest men hide from it at its hottest hour. Furthermore, while "Nedda" featured birds chirping and flowers blooming in the garden, this particular story features a woman that is referred to as a she-wolf: a predator stalking her prey.

While this story does take place above ground in the fields, there is no mention of the sea. In fact, Verga has again negated the picturesque by removing the sea and going a step further by using the hot sun to create a thirst motif.<sup>29</sup> Never does the author allow the reader to see the characters enjoying a drink in the shade as they rest from their work. On the contrary, the characters are repeatedly presented as hiding in ditches during the hottest hours of the day while Pina, *la lupa*, roams the fields in search of Nanni. Although the hot sun and the scorched fields

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<sup>29</sup> The thirst motif is particularly prevalent in "L'amante di Gramigna."

oppose the picturesque, discussed in the first chapter of this document, the abundant and successful harvest represent one last grasp toward the picturesque.

The third chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to two non-picturesque *novelle*, “Malaria” and “La roba.” Both of these stories illustrate how Verga has completed his journey that started with “Nedda” and the picturesque and has finally arrived at a non-picturesque representation of nature. Not only is the absence of the sea representative of Verga’s arrival at the non-picturesque representation of nature, but he goes further to contradict the sea using several different methods.

“Malaria” is set in the lowlands, where the disease by the same name festers and infects those peasants who have to live there. Already from the title, the reader is able to deduce that the picturesque will not play a large part in this story. In fact, Verga takes the non-picturesque a step further in this *novella* by negating the sea, the element used to indicate the picturesque in those stories discussed in chapter one. In this *novella* the only water present is the metal grey water of Lake Lentini. In addition, the author describes small hillside towns that try to scratch their way up the side of the mountain, attempting to insulate themselves by orange groves from the sickly air that infects so many. Finally, even the sun is affected by the pestilential air and therefore reinforces Verga’s arrival at a non-picturesque description of nature.

This *novella* is non-picturesque in so many different ways. Not only does Verga describe the natural elements in a non-picturesque manner, but there are also many other elements that can be considered non-picturesque. For example, the families that live among the malaria-ridden lowlands often lose their children to the

disease, particularly *compare* Carmine, who lost all five of his children to malaria. Negatives immediately contradict all of the positive elements that can be detected in this story; the soil in the lowlands is extremely fertile, but those who have to farm it are often killed by the disease that permeates the area; the arrival of the train, while helpful for transit, only adds discomfort for those living among the malaria-ridden lowlands. In this story, the reader can clearly see that Verga has completely abandoned his grasp on the picturesque and has arrived at a decidedly non-picturesque representation of nature in his *novelle*.

“La roba” is the final story discussed in chapter three and continues the non-picturesque treatment of nature discussed in relation to “Malaria.” Here again Verga negates the sea by replacing it with endless dry fields and the absence of any lush green fields. Furthermore, Mazzarò, the main character, has eliminated the positive elements of his success by focusing on collecting wealth, while purposefully living as cheaply as possible. Mazzarò has no family at all. Not only does he lack an interest in finding a wife or procreation, but the only person he ever provided for, his mother, is dead. For Mazzarò, supporting a family would only present negatives: spending money on clothing, food, maintenance for a family. Instead, he would much rather keep to himself, remain alone and hoard material possessions, yet he never actually appreciates his wealth.

Here again the story is set against the barren slopes of Etna rather than against the sparkling sea or among the successfully harvested fields. This *novella* illustrates, yet again, how Verga has arrived at his non-picturesque phase of writing. Mazzarò’s lands spread as far as the eye can see, blanketing the countryside that is

completely void of water. No longer does the glittering sea serve as a constant backdrop and companion to the countryside, and no longer does the author allow even the most stoic of characters to appreciate the twinkling stars on a clear night or the birds chirping in the garden as they peck at the shrubs outside the window. In the place of those picturesque elements, Verga has littered "La roba" with elements that not only oppose, but actively destroy the picturesque: dried out fields as far as the eye can see, a complete lack of water, a man whose entire existence is built upon collecting wealth and not enjoying anything.

This study will explore the different ways in which Verga treats the picturesque and how he illustrates those picturesque elements as he moves from the picturesque stories to the non-picturesque stories. Beginning with "Nedda," "Jeli il pastore" and "Fantasticheria," Verga presents an extremely picturesque vision of Sicily and also describes the characters of the story as very stoic in the face of the injustices they confront. As Verga transitions away from the picturesque, the second chapter will discuss "Rosso Malpelo" and "La lupa" and how they represent a stop-over on Verga's journey toward non-picturesque. Upon his final arrival at a non-picturesque representation of nature, chapter three will use "Malaria" and "La roba" to illustrate the elements that negate the picturesque in Verga's Sicilian stories.

## **Chapter One:**

### **Verga and the Picturesque**

Giovanni Verga's earliest short story, "Nedda," as well as the majority of the stories in his first Sicilian collection, *Vita dei campi*, share common characteristics that illustrate the author's picturesque treatment of nature during this phase of his writing. This chapter will explore and discuss three of Verga's Sicilian sketches, situating them in relation to the author's treatment of the picturesque. The three stories discussed here, "Nedda" (1874), "Jeli il pastore" (1879) and "Fantasticheria" (1879), are some of Verga's earliest additions to his Sicilian short story collections and also reflect his nostalgic attitude toward his homeland.<sup>30</sup> While all three of these stories deal with themes of struggle for survival and the unfairness of life as a peasant farmer, they still convey a feeling of appreciation for the natural bounty that surrounds the characters and an almost pastoral undertone that pervades these stories with regard to the description of nature and landscape.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In his book *La mano invisibile*, Sergio Blazina addresses "il grande mito del ritorno – sentimentale, morale, linguistico – di Verga alla Sicilia, un mito alla cui suggestione è stato affidato molte volte il compito di risolvere il punto cruciale della svolta letteraria compiuta dall'autore intorno alla metà degli anni '70" (22). This timing then works perfectly with the stories discussed in this chapter that illustrate the nostalgia and picturesque treatment of nature that I have proposed.

<sup>31</sup> In his dissertation, *Realism in Emile Zola and Giovanni Verga*, Elide Manente associates the peasants' struggle for survival with their dependence on nature for survival. For him, this relationship reflects the same struggle that man has faced since the beginning of time. He writes: "Verga's characters are also involved in a struggle. It is a struggle for survival but survival against the mysterious forces of nature, the kind of struggle that man has undergone throughout history because of his primeval fall from the terrestrial paradise" (56).

In the following pages I will argue that Verga's treatment of the picturesque in these stories mirrors the characters' attitudes toward the political and social injustices with which they are faced. One characteristic element of *Vita dei campi* is a stoic approach to the daily struggle for survival in addition to what amounts to a seeming unawareness or obliviousness to the injustices against the characters.<sup>32</sup> As will be analyzed in the forthcoming discussion, the characters in these stories of Verga do not hold any hostility toward the wealthy landowners, the government or the upper class families that create or prolong the injustices to which they are victim. Rather, the characters, who from time to time do acknowledge these injustices, make no effort to right them or even expend any energy on fighting them. On the contrary, in several instances in which the characters actually defend the circumstances in which they live their lives.

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<sup>32</sup> I consider it worthy of note that Verga is writing many of the stories that will fill the pages of *Vita dei campi* at the same time that he is writing *I Malavoglia*. This novel, for which the author is most well known, epitomizes the Sicilian peasant stoicism that characterizes the sketches in *Vita dei campi*. The story of the struggling, then prosperous, and then destitute fishing family of Aci Trezza is thematically compatible with the stories of this collection. Of further note is the city of Aci Trezza itself, which appears not only in *I Malavoglia*, but also in the earlier novel *Eva*. Nelson Moe discusses *Eva* in his book *The View from Vesuvius*, writing of the city: "Aci Trezza is then a picturesque set within a century-old cultural tradition, which Verga introduces into his work in terms of picturesque representation. There are a few other aspects of this scene to consider, beginning with the discursive component of the picturesque. Enrico refers to the group of rocks in the pictures as the 'Cyclops,' evoking their Homeric, mythical association. Most importantly, in response to Eva's question, he identifies their location in Sicily. His last discursive qualification in particular appears to prime Eva's interest, culminating in this exclamation, 'Oh, they're so beautiful!' From this point forward in Verga's fiction the simple identification of a setting or story as 'Sicilian' often serves to announce a more picturesque perspective, whereas the lack of such an identification, beginning with 'Rosso Malpelo,' tends to accompany the darker vision of his more realistic works" (255-56). So, although the picturesque is not making its first appearance in Verga's oeuvre in the Sicilian short stories that are the focus of this study, the idea of Sicily as a picturesque location is quite prominent in the works of Verga. Furthermore, this highlights the nostalgic element that is quite characteristic in Verga's works. Born a Sicilian, raised a Sicilian, Verga never negates his upbringing. On the contrary, Verga returns to his home and becomes a senator at the end of his life and until his return to Sicily, his nostalgia for it is evident in his fiction.



It is important to note as well that while my argument is that the picturesque is represented in these stories of Verga, the author makes no attempt to mask or glorify the island and life on it. As noted in the book *Giovanni Verga*:

... la Sicilia di Verga è veramente la Sicilia, quale si rivela all'occhio di ogni viaggiatore attento e non frettoloso, e al tempo stesso lo specchio della sua dura serietà morale, il panorama della sua stanchezza, della sua desolazione e della sua amara pietà. Attraverso il verismo, Verga tenta insomma, e raggiunge, una sorta di liberazione poetica (voglio dire, lirica) imprevedibile e tutta sua. (130)

That is to say that Verga remains true to *verismo* in representing his home, as it exists, yet still succeeds in creating a nostalgic, poetic picture of the island by highlighting the picturesque elements found in the natural landscape that serves as the backdrop for all of these stories.

### **The Picturesque in Theoretical Terms**

Let me begin by establishing a working definition of picturesque against which I will judge all of the following examples. Picturesque is a term that has been established and employed for quite a long time and has several details which are essential to understand. The Reverend William Gilpin was one of the first to deal with the term picturesque after he composed and published a series of travel observations. Gilpin used the term picturesque in those descriptions of far away places, defining the picturesque as “a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture” (Ross 272). For Gilpin, the term picturesque referred to scenes occurring in nature that would prove appealing to a painter.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the definitive discussion on the picturesque occurred between two gentlemen, Sir Uvedale Price (1747-1829) and Richard Payne Knight (1750-1824), as they discussed Gilpin's contributions on the subject. "William Gilpin had confined his attention to analysing and evaluating the scenes he had encountered on his tours which would look well in a picture . . ." (Batey 122), whereas Price and Knight looked to define the elements that contributed to something being defined as picturesque. Initially, near the beginning of their discussion in 1794, the two men agreed in their judgments of landscape and art. However, as their discussion evolved, so did their opinions. Stephanie Ross explains:

While they may have agreed in their assessments of landscape gardeners and landscape paintings, they did not agree regarding what was picturesque and why. Price singled out the picturesque trio of criteria -- roughness, irregularity, and sudden variation -- yet his theory did not explain why we should find the picturesque agreeable. Knight's account, grounded in a more complex and ambitious theory of perception, attempted to answer this latter question, but his subjective, associationist account of the picturesque did not sit well on this objective, physiological foundation. (278)

Generally speaking, the discussion surrounding the term picturesque in the 18<sup>th</sup> century dealt almost exclusively with landscape and gardening, with the goal to create and landscape a garden so that it would resemble those landscapes discussed by Gilpin in his travel observations; that is, to look worthy of being painted in a picture.

In his article "The Problem of the Picturesque," David Marshall explains that Gilpin used the term picturesque to show appreciation of travel scenes, while others were more concerned with designing and appreciating landscape. Price and Knight,

in particular, discussed the picturesque as it related to landscape architecture and gardening; however, their conclusions can be applied to all forms of art, including literature. In the case of the *novelle* of Giovanni Verga, many of his descriptive passages refer to the Sicilian countryside in which his stories are set.

In his book, *On the Picturesque*, Price named roughness, sudden variation, and irregularity as the three hallmarks of the picturesque. Furthermore, as Ross explains, Price “believed that intricacy and variety were sources of pleasure and that they aroused in us the passion of curiosity” (274). Price is therefore limiting what can be termed picturesque, and also setting some very biased boundaries on the term. Knight, on the other hand, argues that anything can qualify as picturesque if it reminds the viewer of a picture. Whereas Price may have been overly cautious in defining the limits of the picturesque, Knight leaves the term extremely unbounded.

As the movement toward the development of an aesthetic of the picturesque progressed, the term compiled a specific set of requirements. Most importantly, writes Dabney Townsend, “The picturesque requires a dissociation from the actual consequences and realities of what appears. Literally, the picturesque depends on providing views and scenes to a spectator from some privileged vantage point” (370). Furthermore, that privileged vantage point also requires a specific mode of viewing, from outside the scene itself, which lends itself quite easily to the omniscient narrator in literature. Townsend continues:

The picturesque comes to define a relation to nature that is fundamentally aesthetic in the sense of that term that is simultaneously emerging. It is not going too far to say that the view of the aesthetic as an expressive feature of the mind mirrored in nature advocated by Archibald Alison at the end of the century is the direct product of the combination of inclusion and detachment required by

the community of the arts, particularly poetry and painting. In effect, the picturesque places the viewer outside the scene, which must be viewed in the proper way from the proper point of view. (370)

This particular aspect, placing the viewer in a privileged vantage point outside of the scene, quite easily lends itself to the discussion of the picturesque as it pertains to literature (as well as being represented in a painting since the viewer of a painting is always placed at a certain vantage point by the creating artist, and is also removed from the scene itself). Even in the case of Verga, who claims to allow the stories to unfold on their own, the author guides the story in a way that allows him to place the reader in a particular place.<sup>33</sup> This act, whether the author admits to it or not, allows him to manipulate the situation in such a way that he can present picturesque scenes where they might otherwise be overlooked.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the course of his two Sicilian collections, Verga allows his readers different glimpses into the stories he writes, therefore highlighting his treatment of the picturesque.

As time went on, the picturesque became an integral part of the development of art. Christopher Hussey discusses that each type of art passed through a picturesque phase between 1730 and 1830, and served as a prelude to Romanticism.<sup>35</sup> He explains:

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<sup>33</sup> It is necessary, however, to note that all forms of art place the spectator in a privileged vantage point. The author, poet, sculptor, artist cannot create a work of art without selecting the point of view from which the spectator will view it.

<sup>34</sup> “Rosso Malpelo” is a good example of this manipulation. Verga allows the story to progress in such a way that the character cannot see the beauty in the shimmering ocean and starry sky as he sleeps on the lava fields. However, those same elements are quite picturesque to the reader who is removed from the situation, looking into the story from a privileged vantage point.

<sup>35</sup> As noted by Pagano: “The literary models of Verga’s and Zola’s adolescence are Romantic: Ugo Foscolo and Vittorio Alfieri represented for Verga what Alfred de Musset and Victor Hugo symbolized for Zola:

It occurred at the point when an art shifted its appeal from the reason to the imagination. An art that addresses the reason, even though it does so through the eye, does not stress visual qualities. The reason wants to *know*, not to experience sensations. The [R]omantic movement was an awakening of sensation, and, among the other sensations, that of sight required exercising. Thus the picturesque interregnum between classic and [R]omantic art was necessary in order to enable the imagination to form the habit of feeling through the eyes. (4)

He also comments that all poets, and we can therefore deduce all writers, view and describe something visual at some point in their work. According to Hussey:

these poets look at and describe landscape in terms of pictures. Each scene is correctly composed, and filled in with sufficient vividness to enable the reader to visualize a picture after the manner of Salvator and Claude. Picturesque describes not only their mode of vision, but their method. (18)

Therefore, one must attach not only the idea of visual description, but also the manner in which those descriptions are created to his definition of the picturesque and how it applies to literature.

It is important to keep in mind that the picturesque is a notoriously difficult category to define, according to Stephen Copley, who notes that early proponents explained it as a category in addition to the sublime and beautiful. Although there were differing opinions on the definition of the picturesque, all agreed that it had to do with nature and relating nature to a picture. The aesthetic flourishes among literary narratives in the forms of travel journals, written tours and fictional narrative. For the purposes of this study, I have settled on a definition for the picturesque as that which would prove pleasing in a painting -- lush scenery, a

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these authors embody not only a literary model, but also an ethical one" (49). Of particular note is Ugo Foscolo, whose writings are littered with extravagantly picturesque descriptions of nature.

glittering sea, abundance of that which can be harvested; in other words, the bounty of nature. Hussey explains the development of a “habit of viewing and criticizing nature as if it were an infinite series of more or less well composed subjects for painting had been gaining in popularity . . .” (1). He continues on to say:

At moments the relation of all the arts to one another, through the pictorial appreciation of nature, was so close that poetry, painting, gardening, architecture, and the art of travel may be said to have been fused into the single “art of landscape.” The combination might be called “the Picturesque.” (4)<sup>36</sup>

This pictorial appreciation of nature is the definition that will be utilized in this document as I explore a series of Verga's *novelle*.

More recently, S. Bernard Chandler has written an article that discusses very specifically the terminology of painting and Giovanni Verga's writing. In that article, Chandler reinforces the idea of the picturesque as something that proves appealing for a painting. He begins by recapping how the realists and Verga have, over time, applied those terms to literature.

According to Chandler, historical novels of the early nineteenth century commonly made comparisons to specific scenes from specific painters. Conversely, painters also selected scenes from prose literature to illustrate or even illustrated an entire novel all together. With the development of realism and the literary progress of the nineteenth century, the relationship between literary scenes and

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<sup>36</sup> It is also of note that the origin of the Italian word *pittresco*, according to Hussey, is “after the manner of painters” (16) which reinforces yet again this relationship to nature and painting that I am using as the definition of the picturesque. Hussey also claims that the picturesque should “be seen to provide the first step in the movement towards abstract aesthetic values. . . . The picturesque provided the earliest means of perceiving visual qualities in nature. It consists in the education of the eye to recognize qualities that painters had previously isolated” (17). Again, the combination of looking at nature, searching out the elements that are pleasing to an artist and worthy of being painted is exactly the method used in this document for seeking out the picturesque.

specific painters diminished significantly. As the gap between literature and painting grew, so did the prevalence of Naturalism and realism. As discussed in the introduction to this study, Naturalism sought to represent reality in its purist form, free from the author's influence. In doing so, it ventured farther and farther away from a picturesque representation of nature since Naturalism explored the most base and vile levels of society.

Verga's *verismo*, of course, differed from Naturalism and therefore exhibited different elements than those found in the works of Zola and his followers. While Zola searched for the lowest levels of society and the most disturbing imagery, Verga always exploits the imagery in his *novelle*. Initially Verga manipulates the landscape and scenery in order to enhance the picturesque, while in his later collection he manipulates the story to represent the opposite of picturesque Sicily. A friend and contemporary of Verga, Luigi Capuana commented on the "scenic" qualities of "Nedda" in particular, and I believe that one can take scenic to fit into the working definition of picturesque as utilized in this document. In fact, in his praise for "Nedda," Capuana often used words such as "tinte," "intonazione" and "colorito" all of which are words that are associated with painting.

Capuana continued his praise for Verga by commenting on "La lupa," saying that the author had "dipinta superbamente" the figure of the she-wolf wandering alone across the fields at the hottest part of the day when even men and animals sought shade and water. Chandler continues on to explain that Verga's mature works do create paintings. He writes:

For the more mature Verga, the scene and action of a literary work constitute "un quadro," not a photograph which presents reality

impersonally. A picture however, is something deliberately and consciously constructed, formed of several elements which must be arranged and united by the artist. The writer will have in mind a picture, but it must be analyzed and its elements identified before he can express it in literary form, whether as a novel, short story, or a play. This picture, however, will be derived from real life. (37).

So, Verga has methodically and specifically arranged the elements in his stories to create a “quadro” that represents picturesque Sicily. It is important to note as well that Verga shared his creation process with his contemporaries and described it as if he were composing a painting.<sup>37</sup>

### **The *Macchiaioli***

Involvement between artist and writers in Italian history is not uncommon; in fact, it is more the norm than the exception. Many times artists would use a work of literature as inspiration for a new work of art, and often worked directly with the writer to create a visual element to compliment the literary production. On the other hand, authors have also been known to draw inspiration from a work of art. The *veristi* are no exception to this rule. The similarities between a particular group of Tuscan painters, the *Macchiaioli*, and the *verismo* of Giovanni Verga are substantial in terminology, approach and technique.

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<sup>37</sup> Verga wrote a letter to Giuseppe Giacosa about one of his works and stated: “Voglio che tutto concorra al colorito del quadro perché le più piccole cose sono necessarie a darmelo; e sono persuaso che senza una *grande intonazione* di colori, di disegno e di suoni, sarà un fiasco colossale” (Chandler, “The Terminology of Painting” 37). In this particular letter he is referring to a work composed in 1883; however, it demonstrates nonetheless how concerned Verga was with the picturesque composition of his works.



The *Macchiaioli* were a group of artists who grew out of the Impressionist movement, much in the same way the *veristi* grew out of Naturalism. As Norma Broude explains in *The Macchiaioli*, this group of Italian painters lived and worked in Tuscany in the mid to late 1800s. Broude also points out:

In the late 1850s, these artists united in opposition of the formal and thematic standard of the official Florentine Academy where many of them had been trained. They were also drawn together politically during this period by the *Risorgimento*, and by their shared and fervent support for the ideals of Italian national unification. (1)

This new movement in art was mirrored by *verismo* in the literary world.

Just as Verga was developing a new approach to literature, finding new ways to illustrate and conveying reality through literature, so did the *Macchiaioli* break away from the constraints of the previous school of art. In relation to their predecessors, one critic explains:

The *Macchiaioli* were not concerned, as were the Impressionists, with the dynamics of perception, subjectivity, and the self-aware drama of optics. They were more caught up in painting as a recovery, not a remaking or remastering, of the real, and this persuasion puts them on the other side of the mirror that stands as the passage to modern painting. (Di Piero 10)

The *Macchiaioli*, then, were paving the road to a new movement in the art world.

Breaking away from tradition and rebelling against the constraints of their predecessors, this group of artists was seen as revolutionary in the art world of the mid- and late 1800s.

The technique referred to as *la macchia* developed in the 1850s and became the most popular manner of creating realist art in the 1900s. It is most important to understand the meaning behind the technique. *Macchiare*, as W. S. Di Piero explains

in *Out of Eden*, “means to apply color through direct observation . . . . The *macchia* therefore conveys immediacy, spontaneity, on-the-spot transcription loosened from the definitions of preliminary drawing and studio deliberations” (Di Piero 8). This creation process mirrors Verga’s creation process of his *novelle* since he records exactly what he saw in the fields of the plain of Catania. As he explained in his letter to Farina at the beginning of “L’amante di Gramigna,” he conveys the colors and picturesque scenes that he observed in and around his hometown of Catania. Just as Verga found in *verismo* a new way to shed light on the daily life of Sicilian peasant farmers, so did the *Macchiaioli* find “a critical method for probing in a new way the action of light on objects” (8). Furthermore, these artists were related to the *veristi* in both art and literature. Rosa Trillo Clough writes: “Un altro gruppo contemporaneo a questo è quello dei così detti veristi, i quali, meno affascinati dei [M]acchiaioli dai problemi cromatici, erano intenti a rendere, secondo la loro interpretazione personale, la pura ed austera poesia della natura e della vita” (“La pittura moderna” 329).

This group of painters was a young and rebellious group in the art world.

Clough explains:

Essi reagivano ai canoni accademici di bellezza classica, mettendosi liberamente a cospetto della natura e cercando di riprodurre le sensazioni cromatiche che ne ricevevano mediante riassuntive macchie di colore. . . . L’opera dell’artista, essi sostenevano, deve essere la riproduzione delle sue emozioni personali create dall’ambiente in cui vive. (“La pittura moderna” 329)

The *Macchiaioli*’s preferred landscape to illustrate was the Maremma, the plain and shrubland on the coast southwest of Florence. While these artists were portraying

an area in Tuscany, it is certainly similar to the Plain of Catania where Verga's Sicilian stories are set. The closeness to the sea as well as the shrubbery that litters the *Macchiaioli* paintings is present in the setting of the stories in both *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane*.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most important links between the *Macchiaioli* and *verismo* is the approach to the subject matter. In an article, Broude explains that for the painters, "The choice is free, the *subject, reality*; the *aim, truth*" ("Macchiaoli as 'Proto-Impressionists'" 405). In comparing the *Macchiaioli* to the revolutionary authors of Italian literature, an art book explains:

The chief merit of the *Macchiaioli* (the major exponents of Italian Realism) lies in their ability to reform the current means of expression (true also of Manzoni and Leopardi in the field of literature) and to have secured a leading position in the new artistic developments of their country. . . . *Macchiaioli* paintings are an exceptional product of those middle class values which still manage to preserve the essence of peasant wisdom in a new urban context. (11)

Not only did they create a new and successful movement in the art world, but they also merged, just as Verga did, the world of the bourgeoisie and the world of the peasants.

On aspect of *verismo* that sets it apart from so many other movements in literature is its true representation of its subject matter. While the Naturalists purposefully sought out the lowest most decrepit members of society and aimed to

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<sup>38</sup> It is also of note that the *Macchiaioli* were *plein air* students, meaning that they took their inspiration from nature, painting most often outside. This is similar to Verga whose Sicilian stories are set among the plain of Catania. Broude writes: "The idea that the word *macchia*, for the *Macchiaioli*, referred originally to a mode of sketchlike execution has been fostered in our century by the increasing popularity of a certain group of these artists' works – their *plein air* studies – and by the stylistic qualities which these studies display" ("Effect and Expression" 11). Not only, then, does the *plein air* technique mirror Verga's works, but also the sketchlike nature of the works.

represent the most disgusting and wretched details of a situation, Verga's aim was to represent reality. The *Macchiaioli* shared this approach in their creations. Clough writes: "Inoltre, dicevano i [M]acchiaioli, la pittura e la scultura non devono rappresentare una sola forma, un solo aspetto delle cose: il bello, ma tutte le forme della vita, anche il brutto" ("Cecioni" 36). In this aspect of representation, one can clearly see the similarities between the *Macchiaioli* and the *veristi*.

Although there is a very large geographical distance between the setting of Verga's *novelle* and the setting of the *Macchiaioli* paintings, the similarities between the two are numerous. As Albert Boime explains, there are many parallels between the Tuscan landscape pool and the landscape descriptions in Verga's Sicilian collections. Furthermore, Albert Boime writes:

Verga, although born in Catania, Sicily, comes even closer to the formal character of the *Macchiaioli* in his work. He lived during the years 1865-67 [in] Florence . . . . Espousing an approach that later put him in the camp of *verismo*, his peculiar sentence structure and rhythm have some of the qualities of the *macchia*. Like the *Macchiaioli*, he was fascinated by the topographical exactitude set in a nationalist framework. (72)

Verga, then, is a very interesting author because while his background and upbringing are Sicilian, he was also quite familiar with the northern bourgeoisie and the literary salons of Florence and Milan. His writing, then, reflects not only his upbringing in Sicily, but his experiences in central and northern Italy are visible in his manner of writing and expression.

Boime's book *The Art of the Macchia and the Risorgimento* dedicates much of its discussion of Verga to the syntax and expression used by the author in his Sicilian collections. The author writes:

Although much of Vergas's syntax derives from the Sicilian dialect, the [N]aturalist context and effect in prose are often equivalent to the plain expression of *Macchiaioli* painting. There is a steady run-on of thoughts and spare landscape description with little emphasis, a flow of subordinate clauses in chain fashion . . . . Occasionally, the prose has the matter-of-fact, undramatic characterization typical of *Macchiaioli* works, its factual and topographical concentration written as a verbal equivalent to the *macchia* of the countryside. The lack of elaboration of psychological and descriptive filler corresponds to the elimination of detail and uninflected scenes of the *Macchiaioli*. (73-74)

Clearly the similarities between *verismo* and the *Macchiaioli* type of painting are numerous. From modes of representation to a strict adherence to reality, Verga and the Tuscan painters are unique in their fields yet similar to each other.

Both painting and writing are modes of interpretation and creation for a particular audience. Although an artist or author may attempt to remove his mark from the final product, there is always some element of the creator left upon the creation. "While the painting, then, cannot be a precise visual recording of what the artist has seen at any given moment, it can be a recording of what the artist has felt at a given moment as the result of what he has seen" (Broude, "Effect and Expression" 15). Just as Verga's stories are known to be partially autobiographical, the same important factor appears in both Verga's writing and the *Macchiaioli's* paintings. While Verga often veils his own appearance in the story with a particular interaction between characters (the farm owner's son in "Nedda" for example), he cannot help but include his own feelings, opinions and experiences in the unfolding of his *novelle*. Similarly, the painter is unable to remove himself completely from the painting. Just as the author effects how a certain scene is portrayed, so does a painter invest his own thoughts and feelings into his work. "The *macchia* is the

result of the first remote impression, either of an object or a scene; the first and characteristic effect which imprints itself upon the eye of the artist, whether he physically views the object or scene, or perceives one of the other by means of imagination or memory" (Broude, "Effect and Expression" 19).

The late 1800s were a time for change in many different aspects of Italian culture. Not only was Italian unification in full swing, but the entire cultural world was experiencing a revolution as well. In the art world, the young Tuscan painters were rebelling against the standards and restrictions of their predecessors while in the literary world Verga and his followers were breaking out of the restriction of the Naturalists who came before them. Keeping in mind these changes in Italy's national identity, culture and art world, let us now turn to Verga's contributions to this revolutionary change in the literary world.

### **Verga's Treatment of the Picturesque**

In the process of analyzing the way in which Verga manipulates his descriptions of nature and landscape to reinforce the disillusionment of his characters, the picturesque will play a very important role in the analysis of his Sicilian collections.<sup>39</sup> My argument, that nature and landscape mirror and

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<sup>39</sup> It is not only in *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane* that Verga dives into the picturesque. Chandler discusses the *Vinti* series of novels and their relationship with the picturesque. He explains that Verga addressed the different social classes that each novel would represent and how to best illustrate his characters. He writes: "Each [novel] would have its own colour. . . . he states regarding the whole series: 'Lo stile, il colore, tutte le proporzioni del quadro devono modificarsi gradatamente in questa scala ascendente, e avere ad ogni fermata un carattere proprio. Questa è l'idea che mi investe e mi tormenta e che vorrei riuscire ad incarnare.' Verga will paint a picture of each class, but the elements composing these

complement the attitude of the characters to the injustices against them, will be justified by Verga's inclusion of picturesque elements in his descriptions of nature and landscape.

As stated above, there are a variety of different stories that present a variety of different themes to the reader. Whereas some of Verga's stories present the characters as stoic, seemingly unaware of the injustices against them and more focused on their plight for survival, others show the characters as disgusted with the unfairness and inequality in which they live their lives. Furthermore, the stories in *Novelle rusticane*, which showcase the peasant farmers' rebellion against the social and political injustice of the South, allow the reader a glimpse into the daily struggle not only for life, but also for justice and equality.

My study is divided into chapters that trace the presence of the picturesque in Verga's writing. This chapter focuses on the picturesque and analyzes three stories in which nature and landscape are presented in a picturesque manner. In "Nedda," "Jeli il pastore" and "Fantasticheria" I will explore the way in which Verga, while not ignoring the harsh daily struggles of Sicilian peasants, highlights the more positive aspects of the land and life in the Catanese countryside. My analysis of these stories will highlight the way in which the descriptions of nature utilize elements that are considered picturesque and how they mirror the characters' attitude toward life.

The following chapter will highlight the transitional stories in which there is a shift from being completely unaware or uninterested in the injustices and

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pictures though of the same type, will be modified at each step, since the originals become progressively more complex" (38-39).

unfairness of life in Sicily to an awareness of those difficulties. In analyzing “Rosso Malpelo” and “La lupa” I will show how Verga is starting to move away from a picturesque representation of Sicily to a more balanced and polarized representation in which nature can both be picturesque and beautiful as well as harsh and hostile.

Finally, chapter three will showcase “La roba” and “Malaria,” stories in which the characters have become aggressive and rebellious against the injustices that they face and no longer live in stoic and ignorant bliss. In these stories nature and landscape are completely non-picturesque. All of the elements that contribute to the picturesque representation of Sicily are replaced by harsher, more abrasive and severe elements that threaten rather than complement life on the island. Once again, this representation of nature and landscape mirrors the disillusionment of the characters and reinforces the attitude of those characters toward the struggles they face.

While referring to his creation of *I Malavoglia*, Chandler explains how Verga and so many other realist writers achieved the picturesque:

. . . relying on his memory, Verga has imagined himself at Aci Trezza with his characters, has painted the scene, but, naturally, as it was observed and remembered by him with his own technique and interpretation. The colours of a scene can exist only in the mind of the observer and no two observers are identical in their vision and outlook or in their memory of a scene. By comparing themselves to painters, the realists admit the personal element in both observation and technique, even if they are not always aware of it. (Chandler 40-41)

So, for Verga, the link between the picturesque and creating a scene that proves appealing for a painting are linked. The colors, the landscape and the author’s



memory of a certain place are essential to the way in which Verga creates an image that I call picturesque.

In *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane* Verga employs the use of the sea as a constant indicator of the picturesque. The stories discussed in this chapter, those characterized as picturesque, all feature the sea. In fact, the sea is so present that it almost occupies the role of a character itself. Whereas in Verga's novels the sea is the most dominant force in the story, in both a positive and negative way, the sea in the short stories always represents beauty and serves as a reminder that no matter how hard life is there is always an element of serene beauty. In *Vita dei campi*, the sea is much more prevalent than in *Novelle rusticane*. In fact, the word itself only appears seven times in the whole collection, reinforcing why the stories discussed in chapter three, considered non-picturesque, come from the second Sicilian collection.<sup>40</sup>

### **"Nedda"**

Verga's life changed dramatically in 1872 when he moved to the northern metropolis of Milan. Frequenting the salons of wealthy aristocrats and establishing relationships with some of the most influential writers of the time, Verga began to

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<sup>40</sup> Another difference between the two short story collections set in Sicily is the presence and attention to the struggle for survival. In *Vita dei campi*, the struggle is evident in all of the stories, but it is not the most important element in the stories. In *Novelle rusticane*, on the other hand, the struggle is the focal point and will continue to be in *I Malavoglia* and Verga's successive collections *Per le vie*, *Vagabondaggio* and *Don Candeloro e compagni*.

develop as an author, and in 1873 published the novel *Eva*, which, as Moe explains in *The View from Vesuvius*, marked a new phase in his writing. He writes:

*Eva* marks a turning point in Verga's career: it is the first work he completed in Milan; it is the first of many works he published with Emilio Treves; and, finally, it constitutes his first exploration of the nature of bourgeois society and specifically of art's function within what he calls an "atmosphere of banks and industries." This is the context in which Verga briefly, yet significantly, introduces the problematic of picturesque Sicily. (253)

This new phase of writing eventually came to represent Verga's mature style of writing: *verismo*. In addition, this new treatment of Sicily, and the treatment of the picturesque, allows the reader to observe an element of nostalgia and pride for his homeland that is subtly yet constantly present in the *Vita dei campi* stories.

"Nedda" marks Verga's official transition from his youthful to his more mature writing style, as noted by many critics. It will serve as the benchmark work that shows the differences between the cultures of northern and southern Italy that become the foundation of Verga's work from that point forward (Moe, *View from Vesuvius* 306). As the beginning of this new type of writing, "Nedda" is not the perfect example of this new style, but rather an introduction to what would soon be perfected. As Carmelo Ciccia explains in *Il mondo popolare di Giovanni Verga*, the author is learning to break away from the romantic influences that characterized the previous years.<sup>41</sup> Ciccia states:

Il bozzetto *Nedda* è considerato da tutti come il primo saggio della grande arte verghiana. In esso, però, il Verga non è riuscito del tutto a mettere in pratica le nuove teorie. Le immagini sono ora rusticane e

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<sup>41</sup> Pagano discusses the romantic influences of Verga and Zola citing examples such as Ugo Foscolo, Vittorio Alfieri, Alfred de Musset, and Victor Hugo. Although Verga's *verismo* drew influences from Emile Zola's Naturalism, the Romantic writers who preceded them heavily influenced both authors.

ora letterarie; e questo perché lo scrittore siciliano non ha potuto liberarsi dall'influsso del Manzoni, che – in maniera più o meno diretta – agì su gran parte della produzione verghiana. Il lungo ritratto di Nedda (ad esempio) è fatto secondo i modelli manzoniani. (41)

One of the most notable elements is Verga's unique fusion of language used by the author. While Verga could not allow his characters to communicate in their native Sicilian dialect because it would have been incomprehensible to most readers, he does allow the lexicon, syntax, and morphology of the Sicilian dialect to penetrate the standard Italian in which he is writing.

"Nedda," which is considered Verga's breakthrough work and one of the pillars that supports his stature as the most important veristic writer, is said to have been written over three days as Verga contemplated his return to Sicily. In addition, the prologue mirrors the author's own situation as a Sicilian living among the northern bourgeoisie. While the story follows Nedda as she continually finds herself on the losing end of a battle to provide for her family, there are an abundance of elements that contribute to a picturesque image of the story's setting. If nothing else, although the story itself is rather roughly developed, Nedda is "intensely human" despite her "unrefined, somewhat primitive" (Ciccia 57) nature in the story that, according to Olga Melaragno Lombardi, contributes to its simplistic brilliance.

"Nedda" is unique for many reasons, including the employment of several distinctive literary elements, as well as a glimpse into the life and customs of the peasant farm workers living in rural Sicily, as portrayed by the author. Following a prologue in which the narrator allows himself to be transported from his northern salon to the fields surrounding Catania, the story begins to follow Nedda, a peasant

girl working in the fields to help earn money to pay for her ailing mother's medication. Verga allows a look at the gritty reality that is the life of a peasant farm worker. In no way does Verga attempt to lessen the harshness of the conditions or injustices of life as a peasant farmer, nor does he represent Sicily in anything other than a realistic manner; there is never an attempt to mask or manipulate the story to suit his purposes. On the contrary, Verga allows his readers to see and understand the struggles of the farm workers who live on the slopes of Etna as those who live there experience them. While allowing his readers a seemingly unaltered view into peasant life, the author has already placed the reader at some particular vantage point, as discussed above. All artists present their work from a particular point of view, which best illustrates the image they are trying to portray; in this case a glimpse of picturesque Sicily.

As noted by Moe, "Nedda" thus contains two perspectives on Sicily, one folkloric and picturesque, the other full of hardship and misery" (*View from Vesuvius* 261). Verga employs two particular literary devices as he manipulates the picturesque in "Nedda": framing and narrative distance.<sup>42</sup> Framing is a literary device in which Verga uses an element from the narrator's present to transport him,

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<sup>42</sup> One of the best examples of Verga's employment of framing and narrative distance occurs in "Nedda." The narrator begins with a description of the fire burning in his northern, and presumably Milanese, salon. The fire itself is the element that allows the narrator to transport himself to Sicily. The fire is the "link" which places him among the protagonists of the story and sets him within the plot of the story; "... it is the frame of the fireplace that enables the narrator to 'traverse vertiginous distances,' to 'travel far away,' to Sicily. It is, in other words, through an act of framing and imagination that Sicily comes into view" (*View from Vesuvius* 260). Following an incredibly detailed description of the fire itself, the narrator shifts from a discussion of the fire to a memory that it evokes. It is that particular memory, brought forth by the fire, which transports the narrator, and therefore the reader as well, to an olive farm in Sicily where the story actually begins. The narrator's notice of the fire and his fascination with it is the element that allows him to frame the story within his own life. Here, the narrator is not just recounting a fable, but retelling a story which he seems to have experienced himself. In addition, the fire allows the narrator to traverse the narrative distance from his own salon to the setting of the story, "the Pine farmhouse on the slopes of Etna." As the narrator states, it is the fire that reminds him of that olive farm, the place where the story begins.

covering the distance from his present to the time and location of the story he is telling. Narrative distance goes hand in hand with framing; the framing is the device used to cover the distance between the narrator and the story's setting. If there were no distance between the narrator and the story's setting, there would be no need for Verga to employ the use of framing. Reflecting Verga's own life at the time of publication, the narrator is most often in the north, presumably Milan where Verga resides during the publication of these sketches, reminiscing about life in Sicily, just as the author himself does. The framing goes hand in hand with the narrative distance because it allows the reader to be transported along with the narrator to the setting of the sketch: rural Sicily. These techniques reiterate the fact that the picturesque is removed from where the narrator is, but exists in his memory as he retells the story.

The preamble is quite unique among Verga's *novelle* and furthermore addresses the difficulty the narrator finds in the distance between his northern salon and the rural Sicilian landscape. Here again the reader can sense the nostalgia on the part of the author that is manifested through the frame of the fireplace.

Cecchetti writes:

The extra-long opening paragraph of the novelette is intended to be a preamble, and as such it repeats the modes and methods of Verga's earliest works. It reflects his state of perplexity regarding both the environment and the characters. Apparently the new heroine and her Sicilian countryside exert a profound attraction on him, yet he still feels partly bound to a bourgeois world and to its psychological adventures. As he is pulled in two directions at once, he decides to solve his problem by resorting to an explanation -- to himself, of course, much more than to his readers. (33)

Hence, the preamble reads as if it is a stream of thought observation on the part of the narrator rather than an address by the narrator to the reader. This is because the narrator, which we understand to be Verga (or a reflection of Verga) the Sicilian living in Milan, is reconciling with himself the distance between his homeland (the setting of this story) and his current place of residence in northern Italy, which differs so greatly from the story that will follow.

In “Nedda” the picturesque is represented, as expected, by the landscape. The fields, the olive groves, the slopes of Etna that lie beneath the majestic volcano, the birds that chirp happily in the vegetable garden all contribute to the picturesque setting in which the sketch plays out. Verga, however, very skillfully manages to unite the picturesque elements with Nedda’s reality. The reader is constantly aware that Nedda has left her sick mother at home to find work. While the setting may provide a beautiful backdrop, Nedda is repeatedly presented with hardships: traveling alone across the lava fields in the dark, losing money as a result of the rain and bad weather, and not earning enough money to pay for the medication needed by her mother.

Reality and the picturesque come together yet again, following the death of Nedda’s mother. As the girl listens to a robin chirping in the garden and a group of magpies pecking at olives, she mourns her mother’s passing. The bounty of nature that exists outside of her window is a bitter reminder of what her mother no longer enjoys. Often in Verga’s work, the elements that cause the most hardship for the characters are simultaneously the most picturesque elements. In “Nedda” the

landscape serves as both a beautiful backdrop and a source of hardship and pain for the main character.

The slopes of Etna, which serve as the source of livelihood for the farmers of the region, are, at the same time, one of the most beautiful elements of the island's landscape and one of the obstacles for the inhabitants of the region. While the slopes of Etna provide a lovely backdrop, they also determine the amount of crop that will be harvested, and therefore, the amount of work available for the local peasant farm workers, and in the end, the amount of money that will be distributed among the workers. Verga has found a way to concurrently represent the picturesque and the historically accurate elements in a manner that allows the reader to understand and appreciate both of them equally.

The first three words of "Nedda," "Il focolare domestico" (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 81), exemplify the feeling that Verga is trying to create through his story and evoke in the reader. The household hearth is an element associated with warmth, happiness and even family. Therefore, from the first words Verga has managed to set a tone for his readers that will continue throughout the rest of the story. The remainder of the preamble employs the literary technique of framing to cross the distance between the narrator, who appears to be in a northern salon, and the setting of the story. The fire within the hearth becomes the element that transports the narrator, and therefore reader, to "un'altra fiamma gigantesca che avevo visto arder nell'immenso focolare della fattoria del Pino, alle falde dell'Etna" (82). The initial flame that danced in front the of the narrators face and hypnotized him has

now transported him back to what seems to be a memory that takes place along the slopes of Etna and will become the beginning of Nedda's story.

The scene opens as if it were a film. One can imagine the camera zooming in on a regal fire in a fancy bourgeois fireplace, and then panning out to a haphazard fire built in the midst of a raucous group of Sicilian women, some drying their wet clothes, others babbling happily about their loves and still others complaining about the day's bad weather and the repercussions on their wages. As the chatter and merriment continue, the group suddenly begins to question where *la varannisa* is, the girl from Viagrande. It is then that the audience is introduced to Nedda, the story's main character, who sits alone in a corner atop a pile of wood.

It is quickly revealed that Nedda's mother is fatally ill and that Nedda has left her to find work despite her feelings of guilt for being away. In fact, this is the first glimpse the author provides into the stoicism and sense of duty that Nedda feels and that is also a common characteristic of the peasant farm workers that are the main characters in many of Verga's Sicilian short stories. Nedda explains:

E il medico? e le medicine? e il pane di ogni giorno? Ah! si fa presto a dire! -- aggiunse Nedda scrollando la testa, e lasciando trapelare per la prima volta un'intonazione più dolente nella voce ruda e quasi selvaggia: -- ma a veder tramontare il sole dall'uscio, pensando che non c'è pane nell'armadio, né olio nella lucerna, né lavoro per l'indomani, la è una cosa assai amara, quando si ha una povera vecchia inferma, là su quel lettuccio! (83)

And so Nedda stays away from home, earning what little she can to help pay for her ailing mother's medicine. Almost as if she is paying penance for leaving her mother, Nedda waits to be the last served when the common dinner is called and it is at this point that her physical description is revealed.



Era una ragazza bruna, vestita miseramente, dall'attitudine timida e ruvida che danno la miseria e l'isolamento. Forse sarebbe stata bella, se gli stenti e le fatiche non avessero alterato profondamente non solo le sembianze gentili della donna, ma direi anche la forma umana. I suoi capelli erano neri, folti, arruffati, appena annodati con dello spago, aveva denti bianchi come avorio, e una certa grossolana avvenenza di lineamenti che rendeva attraente il suo sorriso. Gli occhi erano neri, grandi, nuotanti in un fluido azzurrino, quali li avrebbe invidiati una regina a quella povera figliuola raggomitolata sull'ultimo gradino della scala umana, se non fossero sembrati stupidi per una triste e continua rassegnazione. Le sue membra schiacciate da pesi enormi, o sviluppate violentemente da sforzi penosi erano diventate grossolane, senza esser robuste. . . . Nessuno avrebbe potuto dire quanti anni avesse cotesta creatura umana; la miseria l'aveva schiacciata da bambina con tutti gli stenti che deformano e induriscono il corpo, l'anima e l'intelligenza . . . (84)

While some very distinct details contribute to the description of Nedda, she is also a caricature of every peasant farm worker who labors along the slopes of Etna. Nedda, therefore, is representative of a whole generation and class of people; she is not Nedda from Viagrande, she is every poor peasant girl who fights tooth and nail to eke out a living for her family.<sup>43</sup>

As the story progresses, each moment of happiness is associated with nature's bounty or set in the midst of a beautiful landscape. When Nedda realizes that Janu intends to marry her, when they set off together to find more work, and when they consummate their relationship for the first time, there is always a presence of picturesque nature that mirrors the characters' happiness.

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<sup>43</sup> It can be argued that Verga inserts himself into this story when he describes the day on which the peasant farmers receive their pay. In an uncharacteristic move, the son of the landowner argues that Nedda should receive more pay than is given to her. Many critics argue that this character represents Verga and the scene itself may even be autobiographical. It is quite clear that Verga had a very personal relationship with many of the people who worked on his parents' properties. It can also be deduced that Verga felt dismay on their behalf, and it was for that reason that he felt it necessary to write this collection of stories.

When Nedda discovers Janu's intentions to marry her, the harsh reality in which she lives seems to melt away and reveal a giddy, shy, excited young teenager who has found her first love. At no point, and especially not at this juncture, does Nedda hold any hostility toward the unfairness that is constant and growing against her. Verga masterfully manipulates his description of nature to match Nedda's outlook on life at this point in the story. He writes:

Ella non disse altro e guardò l'orticello al di là del muricciolo. I sassi umidicci fumavano; le gocce di rugiada luccicavano su di ogni filo d'erba; i mandorli fioriti sussurravano lieve lieve e lasciavano cadere sul tettuccio del casolare i loro fiori bianchi e rosei che imbalsamavano l'aria . . . . (93)

Although Nedda's mother has passed away and she is alone, penniless and friendless, none of that seems to matter. Never does Nedda question the hand that she has been dealt. In fact, she actually rationalizes the situations that confront her and is resigned to the fact that she will never have money. The description of the nature that surrounds her mirrors her attitude toward her life at this moment in time: the coming of a new season, the beauty of dew in the morning and the condensation evaporating from the ground as the sun rises and a new day begins.

Once Janu and Nedda have ventured together to find work and have settled into their rural courtship, another scene unfolds in which the description of nature reflects the happiness that Nedda and Janu are feeling. Yet again, they are unaware, or perhaps more accurately, unmoved by the menial wages they are earning for backbreaking work. They seem to accept their horrid living conditions with unwavering faith and forge ahead without any feelings of ill will toward anyone. One Sunday afternoon the pair wanders off into the woods to share a lunch of dark

bread and onions together and also embark on the first physical expression of their love for each other.

That entire episode is encapsulated in a description of nature that cannot be viewed as anything other than picturesque. Verga describes a scene in which most people would be happy to have a picnic lunch: “. . . c’era per l’aria una calma, un tepore, un ronzio di insetti che pesava voluttuosamente sulle palpebre. Ad un tratto una corrente d’aria fresca, che veniva dal mare, fece sussurrare le cime più alte de’ castagni” (*Tutte le novelle* 95-96). Once again, Verga references the sea, which as previously indicated, is his “old faithful” of picturesque-ness. Furthermore, Verga actually associates the sounds of nature with love, in this instance. Just before Janu asks Nedda if she loves him and wants to marry him, he explains that the donkey braying in the background at the smell of fresh grass is doing so because he’s in love: “. . . ragliano perché sono innamorati” (96). One can assume, and with certainty, that the sound of donkeys braying would be a common sound in and around the farms where these peasants are working (which implies that the peasants have a harvest to reap). For Janu to associate that sound with love, quite possibly the most positive of all emotions, the reader cannot help but see the happiness that is mirrored in the picturesque nature of this scene.

The conclusion to this first Sicilian sketch is anything but a happy ending. Nedda’s fiance falls ill for the second time in the story, presumably with malaria, but returns to work despite his illness in order to earn some money and be able to marry Nedda. Janu’s luck only deteriorates as he falls from a tree while picking olives, and upon returning home, dies, leaving Nedda alone and expecting. Nedda

turns to the church, but happens upon the priest who knows of her transgression, and returns home without any guidance from the clergy. Although she tries to look for work, no one is willing to hire a pregnant peasant woman, and so she withdraws into herself, becoming a hermit, spending what is left of her savings and relying on Zio Giovanni to keep her from starving to death. When Nedda does give birth, she is distraught over the fact that her child, a girl, will follow in her same footsteps, just as she followed in those of her mother who followed in those of her mother before her. Suffering from malnourishment herself, Nedda is not able to provide any milk for the baby and she too dies, leaving Nedda alone yet again. Although difficult to understand upon the initial reading, Nedda is thankful that her child has been taken by the “Vergine Santa” so that she doesn’t have to suffer as her mother does: a sentiment that can be appreciated only after considering the difficult life faced by the unwed, shunned, penniless mother.

“Nedda” contains the array of elements that will eventually come to characterize Verga’s Sicilian sketches. From the picturesque representation of nature, the presence of the sea as a constant beacon of beauty, to the stoic battle for survival fought by the peasant farmers on the Catanese Plain, this story allows the reader a glimpse of what comes to represent Giovanni Verga as one of the greatest writers of his time.

## **“Jeli il pastore”**

Verga wrote “Jeli il pastore” in 1878, and published it in his first collection of Sicilian short stories, *Vita dei campi*, in 1880. This particular sketch is the most pastoral of all the sketches that make up the collection and follows a young herdsman who lives in the countryside alongside the horses for which he is responsible. This sketch, which is more than twice as long as the other stories in the collection, contains Verga’s most vivid and detailed descriptions of nature. Just as in “Nedda,” the actual events of the story are far from happy, yet the descriptions of nature lead to a picturesque image that serves as the backdrop against which the “plot” can unfold.<sup>44</sup>

In this sketch, rural, and in this case pastoral, life is characterized as being peaceful, simple and natural. In addition, Verga’s nostalgia for his homeland and appreciation for the life of the peasant farmer is illustrated by a rich boy’s jealousy of Jeli’s simple pleasures that are a direct result of his lack of money. Verga himself seems to admire the skills and knowledge acquired by Jeli through his life in and among nature. Already from the first line of the sketch, Verga uses nature to describe Jeli’s stature and then continues with a juxtaposition between the lives of Jeli and don Alfonso explaining that Jeli “si vedeva sempre di qua e di là, pei monti e nella pianura, dove pascolavano le sue bestie, ritto ed immobile su qualche greppo, o accoccolato su di un gran sasso” (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 103). He continues with a

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<sup>44</sup> One of the most characteristic elements of *verismo* is the lack of a traditional plot. Rather than vivid character descriptions and the linear unfolding of events leading to a climax, Verga’s stories most often use caricatures that represent the working class peasant farmers of Sicily and lack a clear timeline or sequence of events. Again, the reader must remember that Verga claims to observe and record Sicilian life rather than reinvent and manipulate it.

description of don Alfonso's life, completely different from anything that Jeli would ever know. "Il suo amico don Alfonso, mentre era in villeggiatura, andava a trovarlo tutti i giorni che Dio mandava a Tebidi, e divideva con lui il suo pezzetto di cioccolata, e il pane d'orzo del pastorello, e la frutta rubata al vicino" (103). To assist in highlighting the differences between the two boys' lives, Verga turns to nature to emphasize the elements that set them apart from one another:

Jeli insegnava al suo amico come si fa ad arrampicarsi sino ai nidi delle gazze, sulle cime dei noci più alti del campanile di Licodia, a cogliere un passero a volo con una sassata, e montare con un salto sul dorso nudo delle sue bestie mezze salvaggie, acciuffando per la criniera la prima che passava a tiro, senza lasciarsi sbigottire dai nitriti di collera dei puledri indomiti, e dai loro salti disperati. Ah! le belle scappate pei campi mietuti, colle criniere al vento! i bei giorni d'aprile, quando il vento accavallava ad onde l'erba verde, e le cavalle nitrivano nei pascoli; i bei meriggi d'estate, in cui la campagna, bianchiccia, taceva, sotto il cielo fosco, e i grilli scoppiettavano fra le zolle, come se le stoppie si incendiassero! il bel cielo d'inverno attraverso i rami nudi del mandorlo, che rabbrivivano al rovalo, e il viottolo che suonava gelato sotto lo zoccolo dei cavalli, e le allodole che trillavano in alto, al caldo, nell'azzurro! le belle sere di estate che salivano adagio adagio come la nebbia; il buon odore del fieno in cui si affondavano i gomiti, e il ronzio malinconico degli insetti della sera, e quelle due note dello zufolo di Jeli, sempre le stesse – iuh! iuh! iuh! che facevano pensare alle cose lontane, alla festa di San Giovanni, alla notte di Natale, all'alba della scampagnata, a tutti quei grandi avvenimenti trascorsi, che sembrano mesti, così lontani, e facevano guardare in alto, cogli occhi umidi, quasi tutte le stele che andavano accendendosi in cielo vi piovevano in cuore e l'allagavano! (104)

Here Verga not only highlights Jeli's familiarity with nature, but also illustrates don Alfonso's distance from it. Jeli, the uncivilized country boy who lives alone in the countryside among half-wild horses, has to teach don Alfonso how to climb trees and ride bareback. While one might consider climbing trees and riding horses normal activities for a young boy, the reader must remember that modern standards

cannot be applied to the culture of Sicily in the 1870s, and must also keep in mind the different social classes to which Jeli and don Alfonso belong. Don Alfonso, part of the wealthy land owning class, may have been familiar with horseback riding but never would he ride bareback on unbroken horses.<sup>45</sup> Jeli, on the other hand, is the far extreme of don Alfonso, for he belongs to a peasant farm worker class. Not only is he a peasant, but he also has no stable home. Jeli lives with his animals, away from human contact; all of the boy's belongings can be placed in a small sack that he carries around on a stick, and his idea of home is completely different from what other peasants would consider home.

Yet another difference described by the author between the lives of don Alfonso and Jeli, is that Jeli never feels the melancholy that comes from thinking of Christmases past or other great events because he has never experienced any of them. Rather, Jeli lives with his horses out in the fields and they are the only ones with which he shares his days. Jeli is completely self-sufficient despite his young age.

The author writes:

Insomma, purch  ci avesse la sua sacca ad armacollo, non aveva bisogno di nessuno al mondo, fosse stato nei boschi di Rescone, o perduto in fondo alla piana di Caltagirone. La gn  Lia soleva dire: Vedete Jeli il pastore?   stato sempre solo pei campi come se l'avessero figliato le sue cavalle, ed   perci  che sa farsi la croce con le due mani! (104)

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<sup>45</sup> Again here, one can argue that Verga has placed himself in the story. Just as in *Nedda*, Verga may very well be representing himself in this story. It is quite possible, from what we know about Verga and his relationship with his parents' employees, that Verga wrote the character of don Alfonso in his own image. Knowing that Verga wrote sketches rather than intricate plots and that his characters often represent entire social classes it would not be out of the question to suggest that Verga wrote don Alfonso to mirror him and his peers and Jeli as a representation of the young peasants that Verga encountered as a child of wealthy landowners.

Here the reader can see the spirit of generosity that Verga uses to characterize the peasants of the plain of Catania. Sharing in that same spirit, Jeli reciprocates the kindness of his friends by providing them services as well. While Signora Lia baked him bread, Jeli made her small objects from natural elements like egg baskets and reed wool-winders. Since Jeli has no family, he has become part of the nature that surrounds the town.

Era piovuto dal cielo, e la terra l'aveva raccolto come dice il proverbio; era proprio di quelli che non hanno né casa né parenti. La sua mamma stava a servire a Vizzini, e non lo vedeva altro che una volta all'anno quando egli andava coi puledri alla fiera di San Giovanni . . . .  
(105)

His existence is settled into the nature that surrounds the town rather than participating in the human interaction that occurs within the town itself.

More importantly, however, is the way in which Verga associates Jeli's contentedness with the presence of nature. Jeli, whose life is the ultimate in pastoral description, is happiest when he is among the horses, far away from civilization, out in the fields where all he can see is nature's bounty. The only time he feels any sadness, explains Verga, is when he is removed from nature.

Dove soffriva soltanto un po' di malinconia era nelle lande deserte di Passanitello, in cui non sorge macchia né arbusto, e ne' mesi caldi non ci vola un uccello. I cavalli si radunavano in cerchio colla testa ciondoloni, per farsi ombra scambievolmente, e nei lunghi giorni della trebbiatura quella gran luce silenziosa pioveva sempre uguale ed afosa per sedici ore. (105-06)

Jeli's entire existence is harmonious with nature. He knows how to utilize the elements to replicate what he cannot have away from civilization, and he learns to appreciate things that others would not necessarily even know existed. When his



herd of horses is happily grazing on green grasses, Jeli occupies himself with carving tobacco pipes, building cricket cages, and roasting acorns to simulate chestnuts. Even in the winter, when he might not see a soul for weeks on end, he toasts his bread to more easily scrape off the mold, doing so happily, without any inkling of resentment or loneliness.

Don Alfonso, who envies Jeli's relationship with nature, is surprised to find out that Jeli is in love with Mara, a farmer's daughter. Mirroring Jeli's emotion when he meets Mara, the meeting is set in a field where blackberries and chickens are found only a few feet away. Here nature is abundant, just as Jeli's love for Mara. And so their relationship grows, and Verga uses natural elements to reinforce the emotions that surround their growing attraction. As they become closer and closer, Jeli and Mara settle farther into the natural elements of the Sicilian countryside: prickly-pear thickets and almond groves characterize their time together, while their time apart corresponds to winter: the lack of vegetation and the stark whiteness that characterizes winter on the slopes of Etna. As Mara reemerged from her seeming hibernation, so Verga describes the return of the birds, flowering bushes and trees beginning to grow bushy with green leaves. Consequently, Jeli's happiness grows as well. Bunnies and robins dominate their summer, and Jeli only grows melancholy when the sun sets, Mara returns home and he can no longer see the beauty that surrounds him, the sounds of the crickets and cicadas subsiding.

When Jeli learns that Mara and her family are moving away, he says to her: "Ora che tu sarai via, non voglio venirci più qui; ch  mi parr  di esser tornato l'inverno a veder quell'uscio chiuso" (111). Jeli's happiness is tied to nature and its

bounty. If he cannot see Mara, he is unhappy; unhappiness for Jeli is a lack of nature. It was only a few pages earlier that Verga described the barren fields, the lack of green or flourishing plants that Jeli associates with winter. Just as Jeli was unhappy then, so he will be without Mara and to him it will seem that winter has returned. Similarly, when *lo stellato* falls and breaks his back in the gorge on the way to the *fiesta di San Giovanni*, Verga omits any description of nature to emphasize the negative emotional effect the event has on Jeli. Furthermore, it is nighttime when the accident occurs, and the reader knows from earlier on in the sketch that nighttime already brings a melancholy to Jeli that he does not feel during the day. Even still, as the steward arrives and discovers the situation, there is no inclusion of any descriptions of nature.

As Jeli learns of the “understanding” between Mara and don Alfonso that subsequently results in the cancelation of the engagement of Mara to Neri’s son, he equates his happy memories of himself and Mara and don Alfonso with nature.

Mentre conduceva al pascolo le pecore tornò a pensare a Mara quando era ragazzina, che stavano insieme tutto il giorno e andavano nella *valle del Jacitano* e sul *poggio alla croce*, ed ella stava a guardarlo col mento in aria mentre egli si arrampicava a prendere i nidi sulle cime degli alberi; e pensava anche a don Alfonso il quale veniva a trovarlo dalla villa vicina e si sdraiavano bocconi sull’erba a stuzzicare con un fuscellino i nidi di grilli. Tutte quelle cose andava rimuginando per ore ed ore, seduto sull’orlo del fossato, tenendosi i ginocchi fra le braccia, e i noci alti di Tebidi, e le folte macchie di valloni, e le pendici delle colline verdi di sommacchi, e gli ulivi grigi che si addossavano nella vale come nebbia, e i tetti rossi del casamento, e il campanile “che sembrava un manico di saliera” fra gli arandi del giardino. – Qui la campagna gli si stendeva dinanzi brulla, deserta, chiazzata dall’erba riarsa, sfumando silenziosa nell’afa lontana. (120)

Here the juxtaposition between Jeli's feelings of contentment as a child in the fields surrounding Tebidi and his current dismay is mirrored in the barren, bleak and dying landscape of his present situation. Verga very cleverly reminds the reader that Jeli is very much in tune with his surroundings, and those surroundings are an essential supporting character in this story.<sup>46</sup> When Jeli is happiest, he is among his horses in the green fields with flowering trees and bushes around him, birds and insects chirping. On the other hand, when he is least happy, the landscape is either barren and bleak or dead and covered in snow with all living elements noticeably omitted from the description.

On the day that Jeli meets don Alfonso again as an adult, it is a beautiful day in the country while the *padrone* of the farm hosts don Alfonso and some of his friends.

Era una bella giornata calda, nei campi biondi, colle siepi in fiore, e i lunghi filari verdi delle vigne, le pecore saltellavano e belavano dal piacere, al sentirsi spogliate da tutta quella lana, e nella cucina le donne facevano un gran fuoco per cuocere la gran roba che il padrone aveva portato per il desinare. I signori intanto che aspettavano si erano messi all'ombra, sotto i carrubi, e facevano suonare i tamburelli e le cornamuse, e ballavano colle donne della fattoria che parevano tutt'una cosa. (125)

Although this scene does not hold with the rest of the story where Jeli's attitude is reflected in his surroundings, it does hold with Verga's treatment of nature in his other early Sicilian stories. In his early Sicilian stories, Verga describes Sicily as a pastoral, beautiful, peaceful place despite the poverty and injustices faced by the peasant farmers that are the subjects of his stories. The reader can sense the

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<sup>46</sup> Nature is a constant yet subtle character that plays its role by being constantly yet unobtrusively present or noticeably absent in any given moment of this story.

nostalgia and pride that Verga feels for his native island, which is manifested through his picturesque descriptions of the island and its people. I will conclude this chapter by analyzing another sketch from the same collection that further demonstrates this trend of nostalgia and picturesque representation of the island.

### **“Fantasticheria”**

“Fantasticheria,” written in 1879, was published as part of Verga’s first Sicilian collection, *Vita dei campi*, in 1880. This sketch, however, differs from the rest of the collection because it is written as a letter to a woman reminiscing about a trip taken at some point in the past, hence the English title of the story (borrowed from the French) “Reverie.” Just as the previous two stories used nature to reinforce the beauty and bounty of Sicily, Verga incorporates elements of nature into this story as well. Once again, he creates a very picturesque<sup>47</sup> image of his homeland, even if the woman in the story does not view the island as he does.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Verga seems to be defending his homeland in this story, demonstrating the same cultural pride that can be found in the peasant farmers of the other stories

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<sup>47</sup> In *The View from Vesuvius*, Moe argues that the entire sketch is a “demystification of Sicilian picturesqueness” (275); however, I disagree. I believe that Verga is drawing attention not to the deconstruction of the picturesque but to the unrealistic and mythical view that the northern elite have of Sicily: the myth of Sicily. I believe that here again Verga marries the picturesque with the reality of life in rural Sicily quite successfully, that is, without losing the integrity of the picturesque island.

<sup>48</sup> One element that Nelson Moe elaborates upon in *The View from Vesuvius* is Verga’s way of highlighting the gap between the northern bourgeoisie and the Sicilian working class. Moe suggests that Sicily contains an almost mythological interest for the northern elite, as is exhibited in the description of the woman’s idea of Sicily, but is shattered after a day in the small coastal town. Again, the reader can observe a nostalgic undertone in these picturesque descriptions of Sicily and perhaps even sense the author’s difficulty in fitting in with the northern elite.

discussed above. With respect to the guidelines of the picturesque outlined above,

Moe writes:

[Verga] grants a distance and distant slant of vision that are main preconditions of the picturesque. Watching from the train window, the lady is enthused by the sight of the village below . . . . The distance between here and the village now eliminated, the charm of Aci-Trezza quickly vanishes, revealing to her eyes a tedious and ridiculous reality . . . . (*View from Vesuvius* 276)

Although Verga never names himself as the narrator of “Fantasticheria,” the reader can assume that he is speaking from his own memories. Just as the characters in “Nedda” and “Jeli il pastore” were versions of the peasant farmers that probably worked for the Verga family, here again Verga includes autobiographical elements in this story.<sup>49</sup>

The story begins with the narrator reminding the female character how she once wanted to spend an entire month in Sicily as she watched through the train window as they passed by Aci Trezza.<sup>50</sup> He continues, however, stating in the next line that “Noi vi ritrovammo e vi passammo non un mese, ma quarantott’ore . . .” (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 98). The reason for the abnormally short stay, writes the

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<sup>49</sup> In “Nedda” the farm owner’s son, who appears on payday and attempts to give Nedda more money, is assumed by many critics to represent Verga himself. In “Jeli il pastore” some critics agree that don Alfonso’s character is based on Verga and his experiences as the son of a wealthy land owning family. Therefore, it is not out of the question for the reader to try and place the author in each of Verga’s stories, either directly or indirectly. In this case the reader assumes that this story, written in first person, is written from Verga’s own experiences. Writes Applebaum of the sketch: “It serves as a manifesto for Verga’s new *verismo*. Basically a plotless meditation that refers to the decline of a fisherman’s family, it reflects Verga’s own tensions between his Sicilian roots and his deep involvement with the haughty, disdainful, and exploitative high society of northern Italy in a glamorous sweetheart. He treats the woman here with open sarcasm, his sympathies clearly going to the Sicilian characters” (xii).

<sup>50</sup> Aci Trezza would become, arguably, the most important site in Verga’s writing as it was the setting for *I Malavoglia* published in 1881. Aci Trezza was also used for Luchino Visconti’s film *La terra trema* (1948), which was based on *I Malavoglia*, but focused rather on the son, ‘Ntoni Valastro, and his struggle rather than the role of the patriarchal leader, Padre ‘Ntoni, as in Verga’s novel.

narrator, was the eternal green and blue. For the woman, her mythical image of Sicily did not match the reality of the island.<sup>51</sup> As in the case of Nedda, this woman represents a stereotype or rewriting of the northern elite rather than a particular, specific woman. In her, Verga draws attention to the gap that is not only geographical between the northern bourgeoisie and the Sicilian working class. Perhaps the eternal green and blue were annoying for the woman, but Verga describes an picturesque scene in Aci Trezza, underlining his pride for his homeland and the woman's mythical misunderstanding of the everyday Sicilian life. He writes:

La mattina del terzo giorno, stanca di vedere eternamente del verde e dell'azzurro, e di contare i carri che passavano per via, eravate alla stazione, e gingillandovi impaziente colla catenella della vostra boccettina da odore, allungavate il collo per scorgere un convoglio che non spuntava mai. In quelle quarantott'ore facemmo tutto ciò che si può fare ad Aci-Trezza: passeggiammo nella polvere della strada, e ci arrampicammo sugli scogli; col pretesto d'imparare a remare vi faceste sotto il guanto delle bollicine che rubavano i baci; passammo sul mare una notte romanticissima, gettando le reti tanto per fare qualche cosa che a' barcaioli potesse parer meritevole di buscare dei reumatismi; e l'alba ci sorprese nell'alto del *faraglione*<sup>52</sup> un'alba modesta e pallida, che ho ancora dinanzi agli occhi, striata di larghi riflessi violetti, sul mare di un verde cupo; raccolta come una carezza su quel gruppetto di casuccie che dormivano quasi raggomitolate sulla riva, e in cima allo scoglio, sul cielo trasparente e profondo, si stampava netta la vostra figurina, colle linee sapienti che ci metteva la vostra sarta, e il profilo fine ed elegante che ci mettevate voi. -- Avevate un vestitino grigio che sembrava fatto apposta per incontrare coi colori dell'alba. -- Un bel quadretto davvero! (98-99)

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<sup>51</sup> "Fantasticheria" is one of the first instances of Verga's treatment of the myth of Sicily. As Greenberg explains: "with gentle mercilessness he exposes her bourgeois blindness to the humanity of the Sicilian poor, her triviality of mind and occupations" (19).

<sup>52</sup> The *faraglioni* (large outcroppings of rocks in the ocean) are a recurrent image in Verga's writing. They will appear several times in his Sicilian collections, are referenced often in *Eva* and will serve as an important motif in *I Malavoglia*. By referencing these *faraglioni*, Verga is reinforcing the geographical reality of Aci Trezza and his familiarity with it.

All of these images and descriptions are examples of picturesque elements: the sun rising on the water, the lovely colors of dawn, the sleepy cottages on the shore. Here, the reader can clearly detect a sense of pride on the part of the speaker and can clearly understand the beauty experienced by the duo during their short sojourn in Aci Trezza. Most importantly, perhaps, is the presence of the sea, the most important element of Verga's picturesque with respect to his Sicilian short story collections.

Even still, the narrator does not ignore the difficulty of life in rural Sicily. When his companion declares that she does not know how someone could live their whole life in Aci Trezza,<sup>53</sup> the narrator responds by explaining the difficulty that the inhabitants of the town face on a daily basis. However, at the same time, he draws attention to the picturesque-ness of the place when he writes:

Eppure, vedete, lo cosa è più facile che non sembri: basta non possedere centomila lire di entrata, prima di tutto; e in compenso patire un po' di tutti gli stenti fra quegli scogli giganteschi,<sup>54</sup> incastonati nell'azzurro, che vi facevano batter le mani per ammirazione. Così poco basta perché quei poveri diavoli che ci aspettavano sonnecchiando nella barca, trovino fra quelle loro casipole sgangherate e pittoresche, che viste da lontano vi sembravano avessero il mal di mare anch'esse, tutto ciò che vi affannate a cercare a Parigi, a Nizza ed a Napoli. (99)

Here Verga establishes the "us and them" barrier that exists even today between the rich and the poor, northerners and southerners, Italians and Sicilians, rich

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<sup>53</sup> Later in the story the people of Aci Trezza will be referred to as *formiche*, ants, as well as *ostriche*, oysters, who live and die in the small coastal town. Animal imagery is not uncommon with Verga, specifically with respect to the picturesque. Animal imagery will be discussed again in chapter three when I discuss "La lupa" and the other non-picturesque stories of *Novelle rusticane*.

<sup>54</sup> Here is yet another reference to the *faraglioni* that are scattered along the shoreline of Aci Trezza. These *faraglioni* are an element that defines the shoreline of Aci Trezza and have become geographical indicator of the southeastern Sicilian coastline.

landowners and peasant workers. In doing so, Verga reinforces the harsh reality that is the life of a Sicilian fisherman.<sup>55</sup> In highlighting the low pay, poor living conditions, and lack of those bourgeois amenities to which the female protagonist is accustomed, Verga further stresses the differences between the classes.

Verga deepens his discussion of the "us and them" barrier explaining that the *gente di mare* have

la pelle più dura del pane che mangiano, quando ne mangiano, giacché il mare non è sempre gentile, come allora che baciava i vostri guanti . . . . Nelle sue giornate nere, in cui brontola e sbuffa, bisogna contentarsi di stare a guardarlo dalla riva,<sup>56</sup> colle mani in mano, o sdraiati bocconi, il che è meglio per chi non ha desinato; in quei giorni c'è folla sull'uscio dell'osteria, ma suonano pochi soldoni sulla latta del banco, e i monelli che pullulano nel paese, come se la miseria fosse un buon ingrasso, strillano e si graffiano quasi abbiano il diavolo in corpo. (99)

Life for these people is not easy, nor is it necessarily fun. On the contrary, their lives are about survival, each day presenting a different battle. And though the sea can be harsh and cruel, it still represents that element of the picturesque that cannot be erased, no matter how angry or spiteful it may become. The sea, just like the weather, always settles down. While there exist moments of what seems like Hell, the sea always settles into a placid, beautiful blue backdrop that cannot be removed

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<sup>55</sup> This theme will be further developed in Verga's novel *I Malavoglia* which follows the life of a fishing family in Aci Trezza. Luchino Visconti would create a film adaptation of the novel and produce *La terra trema* in 1948, which is loosely based on Verga's book and follows the Valastro family as they deal with the hardships that face the poor fishing class in Aci Trezza.

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most iconic scene in Visconti's *La terra trema* is the scene when the Valastro women stand motionless on the *scogli* waiting for their men who have ventured out to sea during a storm. Their black ragged robes whip around them in the wind as their bare feet grip the jagged rocks on which they are perched. This stirring scene ends with the women slowly turning, helping the youngest sisters off the jagged rocks and returning home without any news of their men.



from the coast of Sicily and therefore always provides that element of ever present picturesque-ness that characterizes these particular stories.

In an attempt to help the reader understand the mindset of the *gente di mare*, Verga employs the use of a simile about ants impaled by a young woman writing her love interest's name in the sand. He explains that the people of Aci Trezza can be compared to these ants: "Voi non ci tornereste davvero, e nemmeno io; ma per poter comprendere siffatta caparbia, che è per certi aspetti eroica, bisogna farci piccini anche noi, chiudere tutto l'orizzonte fra due zolle, e guardare col microscopio le piccole cause che fanno battere i piccoli cuori" (100). The opportunities available for these people are not nearly as abundant as those available to the upper class. For them, life is Aci Trezza. The sea, whether calm or stormy, provides sustenance and therefore must always be returned to no matter how it may have treated someone the previous day.

The picturesque elements that dominate this sketch are not diminished by the poverty that always characterizes the Sicilian inhabitants on which these *novelle* are focused. For example, Verga describes the impenetrable divide between the rich and the poor as he describes the foreignness of a "big city" hospital ward to someone from Aci Trezza.

Ora è morto laggiù all'ospedale della città, il povero diavolo, in una gran corsia tutta bianca, fra dei lenzuoli bianchi, masticando del pane bianco, servito dalle bianche mani delle suore di carità, le quali non avevano altro difetto che di non saper capire i meschini guai che il poveretto biascicava nel suo dialetto semibarbaro.

Ma se avesse potuto desiderare qualche cosa egli avrebbe voluto morire in quel cantuccio nero vicino al focolare, dove tanti anni era stata la sua cuccia "sotto le sue tegole", tanto che quando lo portarono via piangeva guaiolando, come fanno i vecchi. Egli era vissuto sempre fra quei quattro sassi, e di faccia a quel mare bello e traditore col quale

dové lottare ogni giorno per trarre da esso tanto da campare la vita e non lasciargli le ossa . . . . (101)<sup>57</sup>

The clean, white hospital ward, so far from anything the poor old man had ever dealt with during his life in Aci Trezza, illustrates the impenetrable divide between the bourgeoisie and the poverty that dominated the rural Sicilian fishing town. The comforting elements to the townspeople, the difficult dialect, the dark houses, the warmth of the hearth are picturesque elements that cannot be understood by the white-handed nuns who make beds in white linen and who eat white bread while running the hospital in the city.

Yet again, Verga has managed to portray the reality of life for a poor fishing village while still allowing the pride and picturesque elements of that life to shine through. The sea, as stated earlier, is an important indicator of the picturesque. It may be violent and it may be beautiful, but in the short stories by Verga, the sea is a representation of the picturesque. The absence of the sea will be consistent with the non-picturesque *novelle* that will be discussed in chapter three of this document.

In this chapter I have selected three stories, “Nedda,” “Jeli il pastore” and “Fantasticheria” to illustrate the way in which Verga uses elements from nature to portray the picturesque in his writing. All three of these stories, while written between 1874 and 1879, were included in the collection *Vita dei campi* published in 1881. Within the same collection are two other stories, “Rosso Malpelo” and “La lupa,” which demonstrate the initiation of a change in Verga’s writing, a shift away from a picturesque representation of nature to a more transitional portrayal on his

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<sup>57</sup> This is one of the best examples of the duality that the sea presents to the peasant fisherman of Aci Trezza. That “beautiful, treacherous sea” provided both life and death. It was, for him, both good and bad.

way to a non-picturesque representation. Following the publication of these stories, the reader can follow Verga's evolving treatment of the picturesque, moving from a picturesque to non-picturesque treatment of nature, mirroring the characters' attitude toward the injustices with which they are constantly faced.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Verga's Transition Away from the Picturesque**

Verga's short stories experienced an evolution, from collection to collection, as Verga moved away from a picturesque representation of nature and the Sicilian countryside toward a more non-picturesque representation. This change, however, was an evolution; it was not immediate, but rather gradual. Distinct elements disappeared while others remained, and, overall, Verga's treatment of nature adopted a new attitude as it moved forward.

One of the elements that *verismo* adopted from Emile Zola and the Naturalists was the observation that so characterizes these stories. As Manente explains:

[The scientist] is totally impartial in his observations and he can remain such because the experiment is taking place completely outside the realm of his own personal experience. The novelist, however, imagines everything in his own mind. It is impossible for him to be objective since he alone has the power of life and death over his experiment. Even assuming that he was impartial in his observations, as soon as he begins to place these observations in a novel he loses that objectivity because he becomes the one who decides which of the gathered facts will affect his characters and which will be discarded. (5)

Verga, however, is different from either of the categories laid out by Manente in the quote above because he writes from his own memory and experiences, whereas the Naturalists wrote from pure observation of the lowest classes. For Verga, however,

character development was not such an important element because he wrote for the everyman. For Verga, “the characters not only become symbols of their social class but, what is more significant, they lose all sense of individuality both for the reader and for themselves. They lose the very human sense of *moi*. The self becomes objectified” (Manente 13). Verga turned the characters into objects that represented his memories.<sup>58</sup>

As part of Verga’s newly altered attitude toward nature, no longer is nature represented in a pastoral, happy, reminiscent manner. Rather, the inclusion of the sea, which, as previously discussed, represents beauty, ebbed out of his writing only making rare appearances and only in brief glimpses. Furthermore, in this new treatment of nature, the lush, green, colorful descriptions of nature and its bounty as well as animals and their keepers are present less and less often. In its place appear starker backdrops, dry and dying harvests and elements of nature that reflect the less contented peasant worker. This new treatment of nature can be seen most clearly in two *novelle*: “Rosso Malpelo” and “La lupa.” In this chapter I will analyze these stories in connection with my idea of Verga’s changing treatment of nature.

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<sup>58</sup> Manente also notes: “Zola is more concerned with the reactions of large groups thrown together in a man-made social structure. Verga, however, in his basic concern for the individual, searches within those individuals for an understanding of the fundamental truths of life” (29-30). Here again the reader can see that Verga is not merely an observer but is searching to reveal certain truths to his reader by allowing them a glimpse into the lives of the Sicilian peasant farmers of his childhood.

## **“Rosso Malpelo”**

Giovanni Verga’s “Rosso Malpelo” was first published in 1878 under the title “Scene popolari,” but was released as a small book in 1880, and later that same year, became the third story of Verga’s first Sicilian collection, *Vita dei campi*. The title itself translates to Red Evil-hair or Nasty Red-head, which highlights the superstition that red haired people are evil. Many critics argue that this is the most successful of Verga’s stories.<sup>59</sup> This opinion, however, stems from a misconception that Verga wrote stories; he did not. Verga wrote sketches and presented caricatures of the peasant farmers he met growing up in and around Catania. Verga never had any intention of creating neat, clean, well-organized stories. On the contrary, Verga’s goal was to present reality in literary form, allowing his readers a glimpse into the daily life of rural Sicilian workers. “Rosso Malpelo” is one of few of Verga’s *novelle* that has a rather intricate plot, a large amount of character development, and reaches beyond the superficial level to allow the reader a deeper understanding of the series of events.

Critics do agree, however, that “Rosso Malpelo” is one of Verga’s most important *novelle*. Critic Giuseppe Bonghi writes:

È indubbiamente la novella più celebre e per molti aspetti rappresenta il culmine dell’arte verghiana non solo sul piano della espressione linguistica ma anche sul piano della visione della vita e del mondo. Nella novellistica verghiana mai viene descritta una condizione di solitudine più amara e desolata di quella che stringe qui

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<sup>59</sup> Applebaum writes in his introduction to a bilingual edition of Verga’s Sicilian stories: “As far as plot cohesion and continuity are concerned, this may be Verga’s most successful story; the sandpit locale, which even has a mythology of its own, creates a microcosm symbolic of human existence, while the author employs detached irony perfectly to cloak his enormous sympathy with his character” (xiii). Most of Verga’s *novelle* lack any clear plot or progression that develops and moves the story forward. Instead, they focus on characters that represent the everyman and allow the reader a glimpse into the life of a Sicilian peasant farmer rather than a fictitious, contrived, subjective view of the events of the story.

i personaggi, una solitudine in cui tutti gli ideali, tutti gli scogli ai quali l'uomo si può aggrappare per sollevarsi dalla tempesta della vita (come la famiglia, l'amore, la religione) risultano come disintegrati, senza più valore. Manca una parola di pietà e di comprensione, ma proprio in questa mancanza sentiamo una partecipazione profonda e amara ai vari casi della vita e dell'uomo . . . . (95)

In this *novella*, critics believe that Verga best represents the elements of Sicilian society in the best way possible in his Sicilian phase. From his representation of the language to the revelation of the treatment of the main character by both his family and his bosses, Verga has allowed the reader to see what life really was for Rosso Malpelo.

This sketch is particular for several reasons. First and foremost, the majority of it takes place underground. Gone are the endless fields and seaside villages at the foot of Etna. Instead, the dominant backdrop are the tunnels of the sand mine in which Rosso Malpelo works. The few scenes that take place outside are not in lush pastoral settings like those in the first chapter of this document, but on the barren, rough lava fields of Etna at night. Not even the sunlight finds its way into this story. However, there are several instances in which the character sees the ocean and the narrator allows the reader a vision of the beauty that surrounds the story. The title character does not appreciate beauty; in fact it is actually upsetting to Malpelo, which situates this story as a transitional work in the spectrum of Verga's stories with respect to his treatment of nature.

I have chosen to discuss "Rosso Malpelo" because it illustrates my point that Verga is transitioning away from a picturesque representation of Sicily, and that this is one of several stories that were composed during his move toward a definitively

non-picturesque view of the island. When looking at the setting the reader can clearly see that Verga has selected a non-picturesque backdrop against which to place the story of Rosso Malpelo. Moe writes:

Verga has not only moved away from the sea,<sup>60</sup> but in a sense, underground, into the infernal world of a Sicilian sand quarry, where first Malpelo's father and then Malpelo himself meet their deaths. The major scenes in the story take place underground; the setting thus lacks the natural features that would make the location as picturesque according to any traditional perspectives. (*View from Vesuvius* 278-79)

The reader can easily see that the picturesque setting from the stories discussed in the previous chapter is markedly absent.

Furthermore, Verga has not yet turned completely negative even with some of the darkest elements. For example, death is not necessarily a negative element in Malpelo's life. Salvatore Mesiti explains: "La morte è un'immagine onnipresente in *Rosso Malpelo*, ma senza la negatività, il mistero e il timore che generalmente la circondano. Per Malpelo, essa è semplicemente il nulla e la libertà dalle sofferenze" (39). As will become evident with Ranocchio and eventually Malpelo himself, death can be a relief and savior from the most difficult life struggles.

The introductory paragraph sets the tone that will permeate through the sketch. Verga writes:

Malpelo si chiamava così perché aveva i capelli rossi; ed aveva i capelli rossi perché era un ragazzo malizioso e cattivo, che prometteva di riescire un fior di birbone. Sicché tutti alla vaca dell'arena rossa lo chiamavano Malpelo; e persino usa madre col sentirgli dir sempre a quel modo aveva quasi dimenticato il suo nome di battesimo. (126)

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<sup>60</sup> The sea, of course, is the element that most represents the picturesque, as described in the introduction and first chapter of this document. In "Rosso Malpelo" Verga has moved to the most opposite point possible from the sea: underground. Yet, there is still a moment when Malpelo observes the sea as it glitters, reflecting the stars that shine above the Catanese plain.



The light-heartedness that characterized the *novelle* discussed in the first chapter of this document and the stoic reaction to life's difficulties are already absent from this story. Rosso Malpelo seems to be doomed to a malicious destiny before the reader can even get a feeling for the character himself. Even the boy's mother has given up on him, nearly forgetting his given name and allowing herself to see him as his nickname rather than the boy he really is. Furthermore, the element of community that bonded the peasant farmers in the previously discussed stories is missing here. Instead, Messiti writes, "Malpelo è uno di questi bambini costretti a lavorare come schiavi alla catena, ma la sua condizione è aggravata dall'oscurismo degli stessi compagni di sventura e dall'essere rimasto orfano di padre, il che lo rende più vulnerabile alle angherie" (32-33). The narrator explains that on Sundays, the only day when Malpelo sees his mother, he is greeted with hostility and violence. He states: "... siccome era *Malpelo* c'era anche a temere che ne sottraesse un paio di quei soldi [quello che guadagnava al lavoro]; e nel dubbio, per non sbagliare, la sorella maggiore gli faceva la ricevuta a scapaccioni" (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 126).

The elements of nature that were associated with the picturesque in the previous chapter, such as the fields that line the countryside and, most importantly, the sea are notably absent from this story. Only at one point will the narrator allow the reader a glimpse of the sea and a brief respite from this otherwise non-picturesque story; hence the transitional nature of this story. Rather than allowing

nature's beauty to seep into the story, the narrator further highlights the lack of beauty and happiness by comparing Rosso Malpelo to a donkey.<sup>61</sup> He writes:

Egli era davvero un brutto ceffo, torvo, ringhioso, e selvatico. Al mezzogiorno, mentre tutti gli altri operai della cava si mangiavano in croccio la loro minestra, e facevano un po' di ricreazione, egli andava a ricantucciarsi col suo corbello fra le gambe, per rosicchiarsi quel suo pane di otto giorni, come fanno le bestie sue pari; e ciascuno gli diceva la sua motteggiandolo, e gli tiravan dei sassi, finché il soprastante lo rimandava al lavoro con una pedata. (127)

A complete lack of compassion for another human being is presented in place of any appreciation for another living being.

Amidst an explanation of how Malpelo's father died in a mining accident, the lack of nature is again reinforced. The narrator reinforces the delineation between picturesque and this story by reminding the reader that while the beauty of nature exists, the setting and characters of this story are far removed from it. He writes: "Fuori della cava il cielo formicolava di stelle, e laggiù la lanterna fumava e girava al pari di un arcolaio; ed il grosso pilastro rosso, sventrato a colpi di zappa, contorcevasi e si piegava in arco come se avesse il mal di pancia, e dicesse: *ohi! ohi!* anch'esso" (128). In this story not only has the narrator removed many of the elements of nature that were used to highlight the picturesque such as the sea, the stars and the lush green fields, but he has actually moved the setting of the story underground. The narrator still, however, draws attention to the lack of these characteristics by reminding the reader of their beauty and of the distance between the characters and those elements.

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<sup>61</sup> This is the same donkey from the other Verga story, "Storia dell'asino di San Giuseppe" which is part of the *Novelle rusticane* collection.

Whereas in the stories discussed in the previous chapter nature was used as a reminder of the picturesque that surrounded the sorrow or difficulty of life, here there is no reminder of the picturesque. While the death of the mother in "Nedda" was followed by the title character's observance of the birds in the garden pecking at the plants, Malpelo's loss is followed by his everlasting work in the tunnels of the sand mine where his father was buried in an accident. Only sparsely interspersed throughout the story do elements of nature peak through the dark despair that characterizes the rest of the story. For example, when Malpelo returns home for the weekend, his Sundays are spent out in nature, but Malpelo is upset by this pastime. The narrator explains:

Per questo, la domenica, in cui tutti gli altri ragazzi del vicinato si mettevano la camicia pulita per andare a messa o per ruzzare nel cortile, ei sembrava non avesse altro spasso che di andare randagio per le vie degli orti, a dar la caccia alle lucertole e alle altre povere bestie che non gli avevano fatto nulla, oppure a sfioracchiare le siepi di fichidindia. Per altro le beffe e le sassate degli altri fanciulli non gli piacevano. (131)

Here, Verga has not yet eliminated the picturesque completely from the novella, but is drawing attention to the distance between the picturesque elements that characterized the stories discussed in the previous chapter and those here. In fact, the narrator goes on to explain that surely Malpelo would have preferred an occupation among the blue sky, the green fields, the sea as a backdrop and the birdsongs as a companion to his work but that he was not able to enjoy those elements.

Certamente egli avrebbe preferito di fare il manovale, come Ranocchio, e lavorare cantando sui ponti, in alto, in mezzo all'azzurro del cielo, col sole sulla schiena -- o il carrettiere, come compare Gaspere che veniva

a prendersi la rena della cava, dondolandosi sonnacchioso sulle stanghe, colla pipa in bocca, e andava tutto il giorno per le belle strade di campagna; -- o meglio ancora avrebbe voluto fare il contadino, che passa la vita fra i campi, in mezzo al verde, sotto i folti carrubbi, e il mare turchino là in fondo, e il canto degli uccelli sulla testa. Ma quello era stato il mestiere di suo padre, e in quel mestiere era nato lui. (131)

Can the reader then assume that Malpelo possibly could have appreciated nature?

Perhaps, had he been born to a father who had a different job, Malpelo could have learned to appreciate nature rather than detest it.

As expressed in the introduction to this chapter, the stories discussed here are those that are transitional stories between Verga's picturesque and non-picturesque treatment of nature. While Verga makes his way toward that non-picturesque treatment of nature, he has still included elements of nature that contribute to the picturesque representation of his native island of Sicily. The sea, lush fields and birds are all elements that were present in the picturesque stories in the previous chapter. While Malpelo's story has been moved partially underground, the sea and fields have been replaced by endless sand mine tunnels and the constant darkness of the underground, Verga has not yet completely abandoned his picturesque treatment of nature.

Verga has, however, started to present a non-picturesque treatment of nature that will characterize the stories discussed in the following chapter. Malpelo is the first of Verga's characters to personally reject his picturesque treatment of nature. Malpelo belongs underground, far away from chirping birds and the sparkling sea. Instead, Malpelo's nature is sand mines and the barren lava fields.

La *sciara* si stendeva malinconica e deserta fin dove giungeva la vista, e saliva e scendeva in picchi e burroni, nera e rugosa, senza un grillo che vi trillasse, o un uccello che venisse a cantarci. Non si udiva nulla, nemmeno i colpi di piccone di color che lavoravano sotterra. . . . Pure, durante le belle notti d'estate, le stelle splendevano lucenti anche sulla sciara, e la campagna circostante era nera anch'essa, come la lava, ma *Malpelo*, stanco della lunga giornata di lavoro, si sdraiava sul sacco, col viso verso il cielo, a godersi quella quiete e quella luminaria dell'alto; perciò odiava le notte di luna, in cui il mare formicola di scintille, e la campagna si disegna qua e là vagamente -- perché allora la *sciara* sembra più brulla e desolata. (133-34)

This scene could be argued as the only one that fits completely in with the picturesque descriptions found in the stories of chapter one. Moe writes: "This is in essence the one glimpse of the picturesque in the novella, and Malpelo hates it. It clarifies the antithetical and antagonistic relationship between 'the moonlit nights, when the sea swarms with sparks' and the barrenness and desolation of Malpelo's world" (*View from Vesuvius* 280). Here again the reader can clearly see Verga's movement away from the picturesque, while he has not yet arrived at his non-picturesque presentation of nature.

Throughout the story, Malpelo's relationship with Ranocchio is troubling, yet heartwarming at the same time. Although Malpelo has been mistreated and exiled from the possibility of love, he is still able to love even if it is manifested in strange ways. One critic explains: "Il fatto che Malpelo sia ancora capace di amare è però segno inequivocabile che il processo di abbruttimento causato dalla società in cui vive non è giunto a compimento" (Mesiti 33). If the reader were not aware of the mistreatment of Malpelo himself, he would not understand the reasoning behind the way that Malpelo treats his crippled friend. "È vero che picchia Ranocchio, ma lo fa per il suo bene affinché egli impari che la legge del più forte è quella che conta in

questa vita e di conseguenza apprenda a difendersi colpendo più duramente degli altri” (Mesiti 33). Although the reader may see these actions as the opposite of friendship, Malpelo is trying to do what is best for his friend.

The story concludes with Malpelo disappearing into the labyrinth of tunnels when the quarry has need of someone to explore an unknown tunnel. Malpelo’s death mirrors his father’s death. As the main character’s father was buried in a mine collapse and was never found, so does Malpelo disappear never to be seen or heard from again. Most striking about Malpelo’s death, then, is the way in which his death serves as a reflection of his life. Just as he lived, Malpelo dies underground, removed from nature, alone, unmissed by his family or coworkers.

### **“La lupa”**

Similar to many of Verga’s other stories “La lupa” was first released as a stand-alone story in an Italian literary magazine, most likely the same magazine in which “Nedda” first appeared.<sup>62</sup> Shortly thereafter, “La lupa” became the fifth story in *Vita dei campi*.<sup>63</sup> It is one of the most concise, yet also well known stories of his Sicilian collections Verga that also adapted into a play in 1895 and even tried to

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<sup>62</sup> Although “Nedda” and “La lupa” are quite different in tone, some similarities are also visible: a single woman who works as hard as a man to eke out a meager living. Nedda had a daughter who did not survive, and Pina has a daughter who hates her as a result of her love for Nanni. Therefore it is not surprising that these stories would have made their first appearances in the same literary journal.

<sup>63</sup> “La lupa” shares some elements with the other stories of *Vita dei campi*, particularly Verga’s use of animals. In “Rosso Malpelo” Verga has drawn comparisons between dogs, donkeys and frogs. Of course the donkey from “La storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe” is a recurring character in several of the *novelle* in the collection and “Jeli il pastore” is dominated by animals as well. While Pina is already an animal personified, Verga reinforces her animal nature by using verbs such as “consuming” and “devouring.”

entice Giacomo Puccini into creating an operatic adaptation of the story. Although he was unsuccessful in his attempts with Puccini, a Sicilian company did perform the opera based on this story in the early 1900s.<sup>64</sup>

Reminiscent of Sicily's classical history, as well as Verga's Romantic influences, "La lupa" follows some of the classical tragedies of ancient literature. "Behind the She-Wolf hovers the shadow of the classical-romantic figure of the Fatal Woman: Clytemnestra, Vittoria Corombona, La belle Dame Sans Merci" (Lucente 20). The characters can easily be compared to the mothers presented by classical Greek authors and poets and therefore remind the reader of the Sicilian mystery. As Gregory Lucente writes: "Nineteenth-century Sicily remained one of the places in Europe where in the minds of the populace as well as in the image presented to the outside world even the old myths seemed to retain a measure of their power" ("Ideology of Form" 105). Here again, is the reinforcement of the myth of Sicily.

There is, however, another, more contemporary element that Verga has worked into his story as well. As Judith Ruderman writes: "'La Lupa' is Sicilian slang for 'prostitute' and in the title refers simultaneously to the main character's promiscuity and to her destructiveness: her sexual appetite is insatiable, and her fresh red lips 'seem to eat you'" (155). This mix of the historical and contemporary is what makes this story so poignant.

Another element that Verga has borrowed from the ancient Greek writers is the idea of a chorus, which in "La lupa" is manifested through the townspeople. In his article, Giovanni Cecchetti explains:

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<sup>64</sup> Gaetano Cipolla wrote the libretto for an operatic performance on *La lupa*, which premiered in New York in 1992.

Verga introduce il discorso del coro. Si può ricordare, a questo proposito, il secondo capoverso de *La lupa*, che è tutto detto dagli abitanti del villaggio, mentre la loro presenza rimane nascosta fra le pieghe della narrazione e noi la scopriamo soltanto attraverso le parole che essi pronunciano. (“Aspetti della prosa” 32)

Cecchetti, in the same article, discusses the indirect discourse that is characteristic of

Verga's *verismo*. He notes:

Le migliori novelle del Verga, come anche i due romanzi maturi, son tessute sulla trama delle parole pronunciate dai personaggi e dal coro, e danno così al lettore l'illusione del racconto che si produce e si sviluppa spontaneamente. Il discorso indiretto libero, adoperato in quella forma particolare, è certo una cosa notevolissima; però non si posson trascurare gli altri elementi che si fondono con esso per crear quel fatto inconfondibile che è la prosa verghiana. (“Aspetti della prosa” 32)

At the same time, Verga has written the *Vita dei campi* stories as though they are

folk stories told in the popular tradition. Cecchetti notes that in doing so:

Il raccontare con le parole dei personaggi o di un coro di spettatori, l'adoperare una lingua povera di vocaboli ma ricca d'echi dialettali, e il ricorrere a una sintassi e a immagini dall'apparenza antiletteraria, possono essere stati inizialmente originati dalla volontà di dare un andamento popolareggiato al racconto. (“Aspetti della prosa” 33)

The use of popular language brings an element of contemporary realism while still allowing the mythical Sicilian-ness to seep through.<sup>65</sup>

The narrator of this story places himself both inside and outside of the story.

There are instances in which the narrator is familiar with the customs and

murmurings of the townspeople and there are other times when the narrator is a

mere observer of Pina's actions as she spins her web and traps Nanni in it. The

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<sup>65</sup> The language in which Verga is writing is not Italian, nor is it Sicilian, but a translation of popular Sicilian into Italian for his reader, as noted by Cecchetti in his article (35).



character development, however, is very elementary in this story as in so many other stories of Verga's *novelle*.

This brief sketch tells the story of Pina, mother of Maricchia, who is referred to as the she-wolf.<sup>66</sup> This story also illustrates quite clearly Verga's transitional treatment of nature. Lucente writes: "Whereas physical and material details are not lacking in the story, there is only a trace of the photographic accuracy that linked *verismo* to the other European realist programs like Zola's Naturalism and late nineteenth-century schools of European painting" (106). Nearly all of the scenes are set in the Sicilian countryside in the shadow of Etna, yet never once is the sea mentioned. Furthermore, the reader can observe Verga moving away from his lush bountiful description of the fields to the opposite extreme. Just as Rosso Malpelo lived among sand, despising the natural beauty that was evident to others and actively opposed the natural beauty that was present in the stories of the first chapter, so does *la lupa* actively destroy the nature and beauty surrounds her. In fact, she herself often reflects the scorching sun, the lifeless field, the burned out hay that permeates this story.

The sketch opens with a description of Pina: tall, thin and pale with bright red lips. Already, with a description of a woman who reflects the she-wolf that blocks Dante's pilgrim's way in the *Inferno*, one can see that the picturesque will not be the most prevalent element of this story. Although character descriptions are

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<sup>66</sup> The figure of the she-wolf is quite popular in Italian literature and appeared as far back as the 1300s in Dante's *Commedia*. In the first canto of *Inferno*, Dante's pilgrim writes "Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame/sembiava carca ne la sua magrezza,/e molte genti fê già viver grame,/questa mi porse tanto di gravezza/con la paura ch'uscita di sua vista,/ch'io perdei la speranza de l'altezza" (49-54). Representing avarice and greed, the she-wolf has appeared many times since Dante's encounter with her in the dark wood.

rare in Verga's *novelle* because his characters are caricatures of the Sicilian everyman, he takes particular care in describing Pina and her appearance. Her thinness alludes to a lack of sustenance, and her pale skin juxtaposed with her bright red lips indicate not beauty, but rather sinful desire. Pina's appearance is a direct reflection of the nature that will be used to illustrate the transition of Verga away from picturesque toward non-picturesque.

When Pina falls in love with Nanni, her desire is juxtaposed with the fields that the pair is clearing. Not only are they working under the hot sun, but also they are alone in a field of dry hay where they work without stopping for water.

Una volta la *Lupa* si innamorò di un bel ragazzo che era tornato da soldato, e mieteva il fieno con lei nelle chiese del notaro; ma proprio quello che si dice innamorarsi, sentirsi ardere le carni sotto al fustagno del corpetto, e provare, fissandolo negli occhi, la sete che si ha nelle ore calde di giugno, in fondo alla pianura. . . . Nei campi immensi, dove scoppiettava soltanto il volo dei grilli, quando il sole batteva a piombo, la *Lupa* affastellava manipoli su manipoli, e covoni su covoni, senza stancarsi mai, senza rizzarsi un momento sulla vita, senza accostare le labbra al fiasco, pur di stare sempre alle calcagna di Nanni, che mieteva e mieteva . . . . (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 78-79)

Rather than a long description of the bountiful harvest that Pina and Nanni are gathering, Verga opts to describe the sweltering heat, the fields so empty that only the crickets can be heard, and the overwhelming thirst of anyone who labors in those lowlands.<sup>67</sup>

When Pina declares her love for Nanni, he not only laughs at her, but also goes on to express his desire to marry Pina's daughter, Maricchia. Pina initially

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<sup>67</sup> Thirst is a motif that pervades the stories of Verga, particularly in the story housing the manifesto of *verismo*, "L'amante di Gramigna."

retreats into a hermit-like existence, which the townspeople attribute to the evil that resides within her, while she was really mourning the rejection of the object of her affection.<sup>68</sup> After several months of reclusive living, Pina makes the decision that she would rather have Nanni around than not, even if it means that he is Maricchia's husband.

Bringing olives to Nanni, who was working at the oil press with a mule, Pina drags her daughter outside and offers Maricchia in marriage, adding her very own home to sweeten the dowry. Maricchia, who has absolutely no interest in marrying the greasy and grimy Nanni, is finally threatened into accepting the proposal. As Pina's dissatisfaction with the situation grows, so does the distance between her and nature. Whereas initially she had been in the fields every day, working among the men, surrounded by animals and plants, she is now removed from nature as she mourns Nanni's rejection of her love.

Upon her return, she is depicted among scorched fields, without any animals in the hot afternoon sun. No longer does the narrator describe lush green fields on the slopes of Etna, birds chirping or small animals running through the grasses. Again here the reader can observe this transitional depiction of nature away from the picturesque toward a more non-picturesque depiction. The narrator writes:

Maricchia stava in casa ad allattare i figliuoli, e sua madre andava nei campi, a lavorare cogli uomini, proprio come un uomo, a sarchiare, a zappare, a governare le bestie, a potare le viti, fosse stato greco e levante di gennaio, oppure scirocco di agosto, allorquando i muli lasciavano cader la testa penzoloni, e gli uomini dormivano bocconi a ridosso del muro a tramontana. *In quell'ora fra vespero e nona, in cui non ne va in volta femmina buona, la gnà Pina era la sola anima viva*

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<sup>68</sup> Just like Rosso Malpelo, Pina is considered to be evil. While Pina certainly contains more wickedness than Rosso Malpelo, this idea of evil seems to be popular in Sicilian literature.

che si vedesse errare per la campagna, sui sassi infuocati delle viottole,  
fra le stoppie riarse dei campi immensi, che si perdevano nell'afa,  
lontan lontano, verso l'Etna nebbioso, dove il cielo si aggravava  
sull'orizzonte. (79-80)

As stated above, the lush green fields of the stories discussed in the previous chapters have been replaced with sun baked stones, dried out remnants of the fields, and Etna which resides behind a misty veil, separating the majestic mountain from the peasant workers.<sup>69</sup>

The story finishes somewhat abruptly yet without an explicit resolution.<sup>70</sup> Nanni pleads with *la lupa* to leave him alone, to stop ruining his life, to leave him and Maricchia to raise their family without her in the midst. Pina, however, declines to leave and continues to entice and tempt him. In the final scene, Nanni tells Pina that, if she comes near him again, he will kill her. She openly welcomes this threat, saying "Ammazzami . . . ch  non me ne importa; ma senza di te non voglio starci" (81). The story closes with Pina approaching Nanni in the fields, poppies in hand and temptation in her eyes, as he reaches for his axe. The final line of the story, "Ah! malanno all'anima vostra! balbett  Nanni" (81), allows the reader to decide for himself how the story ends.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The mountain, in the picturesque chapter, indicated majestic picturesque beauty. Here, instead, it is concealed behind a misty layer yet again reinforcing the author's transition away from a picturesque representation of the Sicilian countryside.

<sup>70</sup> This is yet another element that Verga has taken from Dante. Most famously, canto five of *Inferno* finishes with a *colpo di glottide*, that is the author abruptly stops before revealing what the characters do, leaving the reader to speculate on what happens immediately after the last line of the story.

<sup>71</sup> In *Pessimismo e verismo in Giovanni Verga*, Romano Luperini suggests that Verga employs "il mito dell'amore" in this *novella*. He explains: "C'  nel Verga un'ansia romantica d'avvicinarsi ai propri eroi rustici, un senso di piet  per loro che lo spinge a ritrovare in essi una ragione di vita che li riscatti: non per nulla, nei personaggi di queste novelle, il gesto omicida viene ad essere sempre, se si bada bene, una

Whereas the stories in the first chapter of this study explored the way in which Verga uses nature in a positive way to create a very picturesque vision of the Sicilian countryside in which these stories are set, now the author moves to a more transitional depiction. While fields were described as lush, birds and small animals present in the background and the sun and livestock frequented the descriptions of the stories of the first chapter of this document, the sea is the most important factor among those stories. The sea represents the ultimate picturesque element always described as blue and glittering with the power to destroy, but still the calming power to pacify its observers. As Verga makes his transition from a very picturesque representation of nature to the opposite, he systematically removes these elements of the picturesque from his stories, specifically the sea.

Again, it is important to view these stories and the treatment of the sea as a progression. I have divided these stories into three categories (picturesque, transitional, and non-picturesque) in an attempt to illuminate the differences in them. While the reader can observe these changes in the treatment of nature by examining the description of the fields, the inclusion of animals, the abundance of natural bounty and the attention to nature's beauty juxtaposed with the harsh reality of life for Sicilian peasant farmers, the sea is the easiest element to trace in

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rivolta dell'ideale contro il reale, dell'amore contro l'egoismo, del povero contro il ricco (più che della santità del focolare domestico contro i suoi trasgressori, come vorrebbe il Russo).

Ché l'amore rappresenta per questi uomini la possibilità concreta di riscatto dal loro destino di miseria e di abbruttimento; per questo la stessa passione amorosa della *Lupa* non è mai condannata, né dagli altri personaggi (che hanno per lei una sorta di superstiziosa riverenza), né dallo stesso scrittore, che anzi fa della *Lupa* "un'eroina e una martire fermissima del suo stesso peccare" (62-63). For Verga there is a link between love and violence. This can be seen in other stories as well. For example, in "Nedda," the title character is left ruined and pregnant after Janu dies from an injury while working with malaria. In "Rosso Malpelo" the only two people the title character loves die: his father and Ranocchio. This link between love and violence can be seen repeatedly in Verga's Sicilian stories.

this evolution of the treatment of nature. In the picturesque stories discussed in this study, the sea occupies a role in the story itself, particularly in “Nedda” and “Fantasticheria.” While all three stories discussed in chapter one exhibit nature’s bounty and a picturesque representation of nature specifically in the face of adversity and difficulty by the peasant farmer characters about whom those sketches are written, “Nedda” and “Fantasticheria” illustrate that the sea is an integral element of Sicilian life.

In this chapter, I have discussed two stories that are transitional in nature with respect to the idea of how Verga treats nature. “Rosso Malpelo” and “La lupa” both share a very different approach to nature than was seen in the stories of the picturesque category. “Rosso Malpelo” is quite particular among the sketches written by Verga because much of the story itself takes place underground. Furthermore, there is little to no greenery in the story. Rather than working in the fields on the slopes of Etna, Malpelo actually works below those slopes in a sand mine. He spends most of his time in the dark tunnels of the sand mine and actually actively dislikes the beauty of nature, which is clear when he spends the night on the slopes of Etna. The evening that Malpelo spends outside sleeping on a sack under the stars and above the twinkling sea is one of the few moments of natural beauty that appears in that story. In this story the reader can clearly see how Verga is moving away from a picturesque treatment of nature toward the opposite, and how this story occupies a midpoint in that transition, since there are still elements of beauty that cannot be denied.

Similarly, “La lupa” is another transitional story in which the reader can see Verga moving away from his picturesque treatment of nature toward a non-picturesque treatment. Just as “Rosso Malpelo” contains both picturesque and non-picturesque elements, so does “La lupa.” Furthermore, the subject matter of these two sketches is different from the stories of the first chapter. While adversity and injustice are elements that will be visible in all of Verga’s Sicilian sketches, these two stories lack an attempt by the author to juxtapose those difficulties with the beauty of nature. Still here, though, the reader can see that Verga has not yet completely abandoned his representation of natural beauty.

The following chapter will discuss the third category of stories, those that fall into the non-picturesque category, and discusses three stories in particular.

### **Chapter Three:**

#### **Verga and the Non-Picturesque**

In this chapter of my discussion of Verga and his treatment of the picturesque, I will discuss two stories in Verga's Sicilian short story collections that embody the opposite extreme of his embrace of the picturesque. In the first chapter, I explored several stories that illustrate the way in which Verga juxtaposed the harsh realities of the Sicilian peasant farmers' lives with the beauty of the nature that surround them. In the previous chapter I presented an analysis that illustrates the transitional nature of two stories with respect to Verga's treatment of nature and the picturesque. In those particular stories the author was turning away from his picturesque treatment of nature toward a more dark and depressing representation without drawing so much attention to the beautiful elements present. In these transitional stories, Verga moves away from a purely picturesque treatment of nature as seen in the first set of stories, and can be observed as moving toward a more non-picturesque representation of nature. Gone are the lush green hills of the slopes of Etna, which are replaced with underground sand mine tunnels and burned out fields that even the toughest men avoid at the height of the sun.

In this chapter I will look at two stories that epitomize Verga's arrival at a completely non-picturesque treatment of nature. "Malaria" and "La roba" are two stories which are now both published in *Novelle rusticane*, the second of the Verga



Sicilian collections, and include examples of Verga's arrival at this new treatment of nature.<sup>72</sup> In an article, Woolf explains: "[The] *Novelle rusticane* are radically different in form from the stories of *Vita dei campi*. In the earlier collection Verga was concerned with the development of his style but he did not depart from the conventional form of the short story" ("Three stories" 235). He goes on to explain that the *Vita dei campi* stories always include a central character(s) around whom the events of the story revolve. On the other hand, he points out:

The stories of the *Novelle rusticane* do not follow this traditional design. The principal features of the short story are still in evidence but they are not all present in every story and where they are present we find that Verga had used them for a different purpose, thus altering the relationship between them. (235)

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<sup>72</sup> As Nelson Moe notes, *Novelle rusticane*, is Verga's most consistently non-picturesque collection of *novelle*. Interestingly, however, the final *novella* of the collection, "Di là del mare," provides a return to the picturesque and employs the elements seen in the *Vita dei campi* collection. He writes: "'Across the Sea' is a veritable reprise of the various aspects of picturesque Sicily evident in Verga's previous work. The two most important aspects of the picturesque that return here are, on the one hand, narrative framing and distance and, on the other, the sea itself. The perspective in the novella is that of a man and woman sailing on a ship northward away from Sicily. It has been suggested that the novella functions as a kind of pendant to 'Fantasticheria': the earlier novella depicts a man and woman arriving in Sicily. Here, they are departing. Yet 'Across the Sea' may also trace a reversal of the movement we found in 'Nedda,' which staged a form of travel from north to south, whereby the narrator is imaginatively transported, for the first time, into the midst of the rural Sicilian world. 'Across the Sea' begins by emphasizing the distance that separates the narrator (and his partner) from Sicily, a distance that increases until, at the end, he finds himself in a northern city. The loss of proximity engenders the loss of that immediacy and specificity that had characterized the narrative point of view in *Vita dei campi*, *I Malavoglia*, and the previous *Novelle rusticane*. Rural Sicily is presented here instead as a series of commonplaces" (*View from Vesuvius* 289-90). I believe that "Di là del mare" is the *novella* that closes the circular nature of Verga's Sicilian collection. As is discussed in this study, *Vita dei campi* is characterized by a picturesque representation of nature and the island and a stoic presentation of the peasant farmers from Verga's past. The stories of *Novelle rusticane*, on the other hand, are non-picturesque and include the characters' rebellion against the injustices that they face on a daily basis. "Di là del mare" is used to bring the reader back full circle. Not only is it the opposite of "Nedda" (the movement is back northward), but it is also pulling back in the elements of the picturesque so that the reader does not complete the Sicilian series with a stark and depressing non-picturesque image of nature.

Aside from structural differences, the *Novelle rusticane* are much different from Verga's earlier collection in subject matter also.<sup>73</sup>

In these stories the reader will observe the opposite of any picturesque treatment of nature. As one critic writes: "Sicily [has become] the space in which to highlight the meanness and misery of life in contemporary Italy and of the human condition more generally" (Clare 288). Rather than seeking out and drawing attention to the elements of beauty, no matter how small or seemingly unimportant, Verga draws attention to the destruction that can be caused by nature, the remnants of nature's disastrous powers. Furthermore, the characters in this collection suddenly become aware of and rebel against the social injustices that, while present in the earlier collections, did not seem to phase the characters that stoically confronted them.<sup>74</sup>

The unifying element of the sea that consistently represents beauty and the picturesque in the *novelle* of Verga is noticeably absent in these stories. Even present for short bursts in the transitional stories discussed in the previous chapter of this study, the sea will not appear at all in these stories that fall into the non-

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<sup>73</sup> In his article, David Woolf explains that while "La roba" features a protagonist whose character is fully developed, there is not plot which makes the story a portrait whose significance lies in what the subject (the main character) of the story does. Meanwhile, "Malaria" has neither a central character nor a single plot. Instead there is a string of anecdotes that share a common theme, each one uncovering some element of the overall theme (the difficulty of life in the malaria ridden lowlands of the Catanese plain) allowing the story to reveal its theme in the progression through these anecdotes.

<sup>74</sup> The characters in this collections are much different that in *Vita dei campi*. Not all of them are inherently good, caricatures of the "good" Sicilian peasant farm worker. Instead, "Verga's characters are, in a sense struggling against society but it is a society on a small scale composed of very real individuals. These individuals may have evil qualities themselves but those remain their own personal character traits; they do not completely envelop the novel. In Verga there is not the prevailing sense of *evil* that can be found in Zola. For Zola the individual is caught within the huge circle of society. This circle has a force of its own which is evil and dehumanizing. For Verga the individuals are independent forces which contribute to the essence and form of society much as the spokes of a wheel contribute to the workings of the whole, or, as he describes it, as the fingers of a hand work together to make it strong" (Manente 22-23).

picturesque category. Instead, the author describes stagnant water, arid and dusty expanses and burned out fields rather than the sea, green and lush fields, or chirping birds and livestock.

### **“Malaria”**

“Malaria,” originally published as a short story in August of 1881, was later included in the second of Verga’s Sicilian collections. From the title itself, it is clear that this sketch will not trace the happy life of its characters. Rather, it will trace the sadness and disease that occupies one small town at the base of Mount Etna.

From the very first line of the sketch, the tone is much darker than anything that has been presented in the stories discussed earlier. Describing “Malaria” (translated to “Pestilential Air” in the English edition), Verga writes: “E’ vi pare di toccarla colle mani -- come della terra grassa che fumi, là, dappertutto, torno torno alle montagne che la chiudono, da Agnone al Mongibello incappucciato di neve -- stagnante della pianura, a guisa dell’afa pesante di luglio” (*Tutte le novelle* 170). Verga continues on to describe the elements that one might have associated with beauty and links them to malaria, actively destroying even the sea, which was the indicator of the picturesque in the picturesque and transitional stories discussed in the previous two chapters of this document.<sup>75</sup>

Vi nasce and vi muore il sole di brace, e la luna smorta, e la *Puddara*,  
che sembra navigare in un mare che svapori, e gli uccelli e le

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<sup>75</sup> It is important to note that Verga is actively destroying the elements that indicate and represent the picturesque. He is making a conscious effort to tear down the picturesque Sicily, the rolling fields, and the sparkling sea. In addition, his characters too are very different from those in *Vita dei campi*.

margherite bianche della primavera, e l'estate arsa; e vi passano in lunghe file nere le anitre nel nuvolo dell'autunno, e il fiume che luccica quasi fosse di metallo, fra le rive larghe e abbandonate, bianche, slabbrate, sparse di ciottoli; e in fondo il lago di Lentini, come uno stagno, colle sponde piatte, senza una barca, senza un albero sulla riva, liscio ed immobile. (170)

Whereas previously the sun might have been described as glittering upon the surface of the ocean, here Verga describes a sun that is born out of this sickly air, that blazes rather than shines, that dies. Furthermore, the only water that is present, Lake of Lentini, is a metal color rather than blue and is deserted and abandoned.<sup>76</sup> No sandy shores lead up to its edge, but rather irregular rocky shores on to which only the muddled oxen venture.

In *Pessimismo e verismo in Giovanni Verga*, Romano Luperini cites the two characteristics of "Malaria's" landscape as "l'aridità e l'inerzia" (115). These arid and sickly areas created inertia in the lives of the people who live among those richly fertile lowlands that are riddled with sickness and disease and all of it can be traced back to the landscape of the place. Luperini continues to explain how the inertia affects the place.

In questa desolata immobilità impossibile è sfuggire alla propria condizione: se l'imperfetto dei *Malavoglia* e di *Vita di campi* sottolineava la nostalgia della visione da lontano, il presente qui ci fa intuire una condizione umana che "è" così, da sempre: da sempre eguale a se stessa. Il movimento stesso (del cane, della lucertola, delle foglie) non fa che sottolineare l'inerzia, oppure indica un arrendersi della natura, il ceroso da una forza implacabile: il sasso che lentamente si sgretola e si stacca dall'intonaco, l'asino che lascia cascare il capo. Di continuo il Verga sottolinea l'impotenza degli

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<sup>76</sup> Not only, then, is the presence of the sea notably absent, but also actively destroyed and replaced by a sad looking lake that isn't even the appropriate color of water.

uomini e degli animali di fronte alla natura, il ferreo condizionamento esercitato dall'ambiente. (*Pessimismo e verismo* 115-16)

Just as Luperini cites the power of nature here, and man's powerlessness against it, the reader can see how nature is working to destroy the picturesque in this story.<sup>77</sup>

Even the towns try and avoid the *malaria*, scratching their way up the hillside and attempting to insulate themselves with orange groves, vineyards and vegetable gardens, but in vain. Even those well placed groves and fields cannot save the townspeople from malaria's grasp. The sickness reaches even those who live in the hills above the stagnant lowlands and leaves them huddled, shivering beneath all of their belongings. Below, in the lowlands, there are few houses and no greenery, only steaming piles of manure and old nag horses. Those who inhabit those lowlands are doomed to a sickly life that will likely destroy any offspring they might have. Even the idea of the winter, which will bring greener grass and sunshine and blue sky, is tainted by the thought of the sickly children who will likely not live long enough or well enough to enjoy that time.

La sera, appena cade il sole, si affacciano sull'uscio uomini arsi dal sole, sotto il cappellaccio di paglia e colle larghe mutande di tela, sbadigliando e stirandosi le braccia; e donne seminude, colle spalle nere, allattando dei bambini già pallidi e disfatti, che non si sa come si faranno grandi e neri, e come ruzzerranno sull'erba quando tornerà l'inverno, e l'aia diverrà verde un'altra volta, e il cielo azzurro e tutt'intorno la campagna riderà al sole. (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 171)

But before that time can come, even the grown-ups must battle the elements, the air and the disease for their lives.

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<sup>77</sup> Luperini also used the terms "disfacimento" and "impotenza" as he described the landscape of "Malaria."

While the lowlands may be blessed with fertile soil, the disease itself threatens to destroy those who farm the land. Verga writes:

Però dov'è la malaria è terra benedetta da Dio. In giugno le spighe si coricano dal peso, e i solchi fumano quasi avessero sangue nelle vene appena c'entra il vomero in novembre. Allora bisogna pure che chi semina e chi raccoglie caschi come una spiga matura, perché il Signore ha detto: "Il pane che si mangia bisogna sudarlo." Come il sudore della febbre lascia qualcheduno stecchito sul pagliericcio di granoturco, e non c'è più bisogno di solfato né di decotto d'eucalipto, lo si carica sulla carretta del fieno, o attraverso il basto dell'asino, o su di una scala, come si può, con un sacco sulla faccia, e si va a deporlo alla chiesuola solitaria, sotto i fichidindia spinosi di cui nessuno perciò mangia i frutti. Le donne piangono in crocchio, e gli uomini stanno a guardare, fumando. (*Tutte le novelle* 171)

All that can be considered positive is immediately contradicted and overshadowed by the negative consequences or results that stem from that glimmer of hope. If one compares this story to "Nedda," for example, the premise of the story is similar, but this particular sketch lacks the elements of the picturesque that permeated the story of Nedda and Janu. Janu too worked as a peasant farmer in the lowlands and died from malaria, but that story was also littered with imagery that allowed the reader to see elements of the picturesque. The backdrop of the sea, the birds and the flowers in the garden, the olive groves, even the orange groves all allow the picturesque to offset the harsh and unfair life that Nedda leads. In "Malaria," on the other hand, there is no reprieve from the sickness, death, destruction.

Nearly all of the lowland dwellers have lost their families and children to the fevers of malaria. In fact, losing so many loved ones pushed many to value material

possessions and money above the presences of their loved ones.<sup>78</sup> *Compare*

Carmine is a prime example of this value of material wealth in this story. After losing all five of his children to malaria, Carmine turned his attention to accumulating monetary and material wealth.

The town innkeeper is working toward his fifth wife after the previous four had been taken by malaria. This time though, he explains, he wanted a woman who was accustomed to the sickly air so that he wouldn't have to lose another. But in the end, he too suffered not only from losing his wives, but also from the arrival of the train that was stealing his customers away;<sup>79</sup> now there was no one to stop in and buy his offerings.

Nicknamed Ammazzamogli because of his unfortunate lassing of four wives in a row to malaria, the innkeeper suffers mostly from the arrival of the train.

Anthony DeVito explains:

. . . prosperava, giacchè aveva un'osteria sulla strada maestra, dove tutte le carrozze si fermavano e i viaggiatori scendevano a rinfrescarsi o a rinforzarsi. Ma col tempo e col progresso le carrozze cedettero alla ferrovia, e i treni non si fermavano neanche, di modo che a poco a poco *Ammazzamogli* vede diminuire, scarseggiare e poi sparire

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<sup>78</sup> The theme of monetary and materialistic greed will return in "La roba" to an even greater extent. This is another element of the opposition between the stories presented in the first chapter and those discussed here. Whereas the peasant farmers in the first chapter had absolutely no material possessions, the characters in these stories are presented as hoarders of material wealth.

<sup>79</sup> The train's arrival in the more rural and poor areas of the Sicilian countryside was met with much hostility. Although the train allowed for easier transit, it was also affecting the economy of the peasant farm workers and the small town business owners negatively. It also allowed easier access by Calabrese farm workers to arrive at the farther reaches of the fields on the slopes of Etna and the Catanese plain. Furthermore, the train represented the wealthy landowners and northern bourgeois. In "Malaria" when the townspeople could no longer afford their rent, they went to work for the railroad as flag-holders. The old innkeeper harbored a sense of hostility toward the railroad because for those inside, the *pestilential air* could not reach them. Instead, the train passengers enjoyed their trip in comfortable seats, bringing a bit of the city with them as they made their way through the Sicilian countryside, never experiencing the fevers and disease that characterized the area.

addirittura la sua clientela e deve anche abbandonare l'osteria che non può andare avanti senza clienti. ("Roba e miseria" 226-27)

The innkeeper's situation is only worsened by the irony that, in the end, Ammazzamogli is forced to go to work as a flagger for the very railroad that took away his livelihood.<sup>80</sup>

For the people in "Malaria" the sickness not only takes away their loved ones, but it also taxes the other family members, making survival even more difficult for those who are healthy. De Vito explains:

In *Malaria*, a story devoted to the fevers and their devastating results, Ammazzamogli loses four wives, all dying of fever. For him a wife is a distinct necessity in business, since she must aid him in operating his tavern. In the same story Cosimo does not so much lament the death of his daughters as that of his sons, for the latter can work; but they fall victims to the fevers just when they can begin to earn their salt. ("The Struggle for Existence" 181)

Not only does the family then have to mourn their sick and dead, but also the fact that they cannot work enough to support them.

This sketch clearly illustrates to the reader that Vergas has moved away from a picturesque representation of Sicily, and even moved past his transitional phase and has arrived at a non-picturesque presentation. The elements of nature that could even be considered picturesque are immediately destroyed by stark, depressing, sickly images of death and dying.

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<sup>80</sup> In his article, "The Struggle for Existence in the Work of Giovanni Verga," De Vito writes: "Technical progress and the rise of modern industry make the struggle increasingly arduous and deprive men of their living, just as in this age the cry has been raised that machines rob men of work. . . . Further progress also brings hardships, for in *Malaria* Ammazzamogli sees his business dwindle and then disappear because of the railroad: during stage-coach days his tavern was a regular stoppingplace; now instead the train passes through the town without a halt. Ironically enough, in order to earn a living, Ammazzamogli is eventually forced to take a job as a flagman for this very railroad" (182-83).



## **“La roba”**

The original 1880 publication of “La roba” is widely debated among critics. Some believe that the story originally appeared as part of a trio that Verga had proposed to include in a new edition of *Vita dei campi*, but was denied by his editor as he believed the three stories (“La roba,” “Storia dell’asino di San Giuseppe” and “Cos’è il re”) to be too important to be introduced in such an inconspicuous manner (Applebaum xvi). In any case, this particular story did appear in the 1881 edition of *Vita dei campi* and then was adopted as the seventh story in *Novelle rusticane* along with the other two stories that were contemporary with “La roba.” Set in the area south of Catania where “Jeli il pastore” was also set, the differences in the treatment of nature and the degree of picturesque or non-picturesque description will be apparent.<sup>81</sup> Whereas nature’s bounty in “Jeli il pastore” was magnified, enhanced and the attention of the reader drawn to those descriptions, “La roba” will treat nature in the same manner, and yet emphasizing the exact opposite. While “Jeli” focused on the bounty and beauty of the fields at the foot of Mount Etna, “La roba” will focus on those same fields, but highlight the opposite characteristics and elements that are found in “Jeli il pastore.”

This story, whose English translation is “Possessions,” records the events that surround a rich but lonely southern landowner. As Woolf explains:

The true significance of this tale is revealed in its title. Ostensibly the story deals with the great achievements of Mazzarò but it is really

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<sup>81</sup> While we know that “La roba” is set south of Catania because all of the stories are set there, Mesiti points out that linguistically, Verga purposefully does not select a Sicilianism or Italianized Sicilianism to situate this story. He writes: “A differenza di *Cavalleria Rusticana* e altre novelle o romanzi verghiani, nella *Roba* non compare neppure una parola dialettale e la stessa sintassi si stacca sensibilmente da quella della parlata siciliana, per cui, se si togliesse il paragrafo introduttivo dove vengono menzionate specifiche località geografiche, si avrebbe l’impressione di trovarsi in una qualsiasi regione d’Italia” (27).

concerned with property, material wealth, the place it holds in men's minds, the difficulty of getting it and keeping it, and the popular attitude towards a man who has succeeded in doing this. (*Art of Verga* 32-33)

So not only has Verga moved away from a picturesque description of nature, he has turned his attention away from nature and toward society's evils. In this story Verga passes judgment on the wealthy northerners while using a southern setting and context. The society he depicts in this story is one where poverty dominates the daily life of the peasants to the point that each day is a new struggle for survival. As a result, writes Woolf, it is "typical of this society that the commonest form a man's ambition can take is to amass property, for it alone can give him some stability and certainly in life" ("Three Stories" 238). It is for this reason that Mazzarò amasses so much wealth but is so resistant to part with it, even in death.

"La roba" is the only story in this particular collection that, while lacking a definitive plot, follows Mazzarò on his unending search for wealth. In his dissertation, Mesiti writes:

Tramite questo memorabile personaggio, Verga evoca suggestive immagini di una lotta accanita e senza scrupoli che alla fine si rivela fatua in quanto il protagonista, pur raggiungendo i suoi scopi materiali, vive un'esistenza unidimensionale in cui perde la cognizione dei veri valori e della sua stessa mortalità. (25)

That is, Mazzarò is incapable of anything other than amassing ever more wealth.<sup>82</sup>

His entire existence revolves around gaining wealth and expending as little as possible, therefore leaving his life flat and empty.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> According to Mesiti, "Mazzarò rimane la personificazione dell'avidità senza freno, e certamente non vi è nulla di spirituale o poetico nella sua figura che, anzi, è più che mai materialistica e prosaica" (29).

One must remember that the majority of the Sicilian population worked as peasant farmers for the very few wealthy landowning families of the island. The dichotomy between life in the south and life in the north was never more distinct than in this period of Italy's history. While in the north industry flourished and many southern Italians left their homes to make a better life for themselves and their families, the majority of Sicilians were born, raised, and died on the island working for the wealthy landowners.<sup>84</sup> It was extremely rare that a working class Sicilian would rise to the ranks of the landowners, but "La roba" chronicles the story of Mazzarò and his unending focus on material wealth.<sup>85</sup>

Set, as always, in the Plain of Catania, "La roba" is situated geographically in its first line. Verga writes: "Il viandante che andava lungo il Biviere di Lentini, steso là come un pezzo di mare morto, e le stoppie riarse della Piana di Catania, e gli aranci sempre verdi di Francofonte, e i sugheri grigi di Resecone, e i pascoli deserti di Passaneto e di Passanitello . . ." (180). While the author has situated the story, he has also introduced to the reader that this sketch will follow in the footsteps of the

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<sup>83</sup> Mesiti also notes: "Verga, però, aggiunge una dimensione umana a questo nuovo personaggio, dotandolo della capacità di amare le persone a lui vicine, e di capire che i beni materiali non possono mai arrivare a sostituire le carenze affettive in una famiglia che non lo comprende e lo detesta; Mazzarò invece è talmente presso dalla sua angosciata fissazione per la "roba" da restare impassibile innanzi alla morte della stessa madre, evento che per lui acquista significato solo in termini monetari per le spese d'inumazione" (26).

<sup>84</sup> This idea of southerners, and Sicilians in particular, can be seen over and over in the evolution of Italian literature. Consider books such as *Conversazione in Sicilia* by Elio Vittorini that chronicles one Sicilian's return to his homeland of Sicily after many many years in the north. Seen as a foreigner and feeling as much during his train ride down Sicily, the distance between himself and his mother becomes ever more apparent as the story unfolds.

<sup>85</sup> As is explained in the introduction to one of the bilingual editions of this *novella*: "Again, this is not a story with a plot (unless Mazzarò's career is considered to have a story line). Instead, it is an elaborate character sketch, and, as such, an important "rehearsal" for Verga's second great Sicilian novel, *Mastro-don Gesualdo*. In both cases, a poor lower-class man pulls himself up by his own bootstraps and becomes rich through his overpowering acquisitiveness" (Applebaum xvi).

previously discussed story and be presented in a non-picturesque manner. First and foremost, the author has contradicted and negated the element that worked as the marker of the picturesque in the stories discussed in the first chapter of this document: the sea. He describes the Lake Lentini as a dead sea, in direct contradiction to the sparkling, endless sea that the reader experienced in the picturesque stories.<sup>86</sup> He continues on to describe the parched Plain of Catania, green oranges, and the deserted fields of the two small towns of Passaneto and Passanitello. Rather than finding any positive natural elements, Verga has highlighted the negative elements and drawn the reader's attention to the negatives that are present. Furthermore, there is absolutely no sense of nostalgia that can be seen in the *novelle* discussed in the second chapter of this study.<sup>87</sup>

All of the surrounding area, as far as the eye could see, belonged to Mazzarò, and all was still described in a non-picturesque manner:

E cammina e cammina, mentre la malaria vi paesava sugli occhi, e vi scuoteva all'improvviso l'abbaire di un cane, passando per una vigna che non finiva più, e si allargava sul colle e sul piano, immobile, come gli pesasse addosso la polvere, e il guardiano sdraiato bocconi sullo schioppo, accanto al vallone, levava il capo sonnacchioso, e apriva un occhio per vedere chi fosse: -- Di Mazzarò. -- Poi veniva un uliveto folto come un bosco, dove l'erba non spuntava mai, la raccolta durava fino a marzo. Erano gli ulivi di Mazzarò. E verso sera, allorché il sole tramontava rosso come il fuoco, e la campagna si velava di tristezza, si incontravano le lunghe file degli aratri di Mazzarò che tornavano adagio dal maggese, e i buoi che passavano il guado lentamente, col muso nell'acqua scura; e si vedevano nei pascoli lontano della Canziria,

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<sup>86</sup> This is the same body of water (always negating and opposing the sea) that appeared in "Malaria."

<sup>87</sup> Woolf's article also points out that while the landscape in this story is not described in a picturesque manner, it is still manipulated by Verga to make a point. He writes: "Some critics have seen the opening paragraph of this work as a transformation of landscape into the property, but it is perhaps more fruitful to consider it as magnifying property until it appears as an entire landscape, for the point of the description is not to diminish the landscape but to enlarge the extent, the impact and the significance of Mazzarò's possessions" (239).

sulla pendice brulla, le immense macchie biancastre delle mandre di Mazzarò; e si udiva il fischio del pastore echeggiare nelle gole, e il campanaccio che risuonava ora sì ed ora no, e il canto solitario perduto nella valle. (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 180)

And so, while there is a man who owns all of this, who has worked his way up from poor Sicilian peasant to wealthy southern landowner, there is a constant negative element, which, when associated with nature, can be called non-picturesque. Here seems to be endless nature, but all of this carries negative traits: sickly air, vineyards weighed down by dust, an olive grove in which no grass ever grows, tired and dirty oxen returning from the fields, Mazzarò's flocks in the distance on the barren slopes of Etna, and, constantly permeating all of this, a loneliness that seems to remove all positive sounds (such as the ringing of the flocks' bells or the singing of the herders). This is the epitome of non-picturesque Sicily.

The story continues on to explain that Mazzarò owned so much that it seemed he owned everything, even the setting sun and the chirping insects. But as rich as he was, he never offered anything to anyone; in fact, although he had a fat belly, no one knew how since he was so stingy with his money. Perhaps his behavior was a result of rising from poor peasant worker to wealthy landowner, but Mazzarò never learned to enjoy or share his money.

Era che ci aveva pensato e ripensato a quel che vuol dire la roba, quando andava senza scarpe a lavorare nella terra che adesso era sua, ed aveva provato quell che ci vuole a fare i tre tarì della giornata, nel mese di luglio, a star colla schiena curva 14 ore, col soprastante a cavallo dietro, che vi piglia a nervate se fate di rizzarvi un momento. Per questo non aveva lasciato passare un minuto della sua vita che non fosse stato impiegato a fare della roba; e adesso i suoi aratri erano numerosi come le lunghe file di corvi che arrivano in novembre . . . . (*Tutte le novelle* 181-82)

Mazzarò has spent his entire life stockpiling money, land and material wealth. The story describes that he has innumerable acres of olive groves, vineyards and grain fields. So vast were his fields that the property taxes alone were almost crippling. Everyone was aware of his possessions: the fields, the livestock, the endless fields of grapes, olives and grain, yet no one ever witnesses Mazzarò enjoying his abundance.

One of the most interesting elements of this story is the admiration of the farm workers of Mazzarò's accomplishment in accumulating wealth. Woolf writes:

The most revealing fact about this society that emerges from the portrait is not that Mazzarò is so universally admired but that the admiration persists in the face of a general awareness that he achieved his great success by lying, cheating, stealing and trickery, and consolidated it by being constantly selfish, miserly and callous. ("Three Stories" 240)

This is not the same society Verga depicted in *Vita dei campi*, where values and tradition were among the most important moral elements. The peasant farm workers whose stoicism characterized the stories in Verga's first collection are not the same farm workers who admire Mazzarò for his deceit and untruthfulness.

Since Mazzarò did not have a family, he was meant to amass all of that wealth only for himself. Rather than enjoying nature and the abundance of the harvest, Mazzarò labored under a hot sun in a dry and dusty atmosphere.

Tutta quella roba se l'era fatta lui, colle sue mani e colla sua testa, col non dormire la notte, col prendere la febbre dal batticuore o dalla malaria, coll'affaticarsi dall'alba a sera, e andare in giro, sotto il sole e sotto la pioggia, col logorare i suoi stivali e le sue mule -- egli solo non si logorava, pensando alla sua roba, ch'era tutto quello ch'ei avesse al mondo; perché non aveva né figli, né nipoti, né parenti; non aveva altro che la sua roba. Quando uno è fatto così, vuol dire che è fatto per la roba. (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 182)

Mazzarò could find no beauty in any familial relations, in the nature that surrounds him, or in the actual amassing of his wealth (since he was just as distressed over the property taxes and paying and feeding his workers as he was at gaining more wealth). Instead, his entire life was dedicated to working through the most adverse of conditions in order to always gain more and more and more. So cynical was he that he was known to say: “la roba non è di chi l’ha, ma di chi la sa fare” (Verga, *Tutte le novelle* 183).

This sketch is particular in that it allows the reader a glimpse into the non-picturesque in different forms. Not only is nature illustrated in a non-picturesque manner, but so is Mazzarò’s life. With no family, no friends, no money (as it is all tied up in maintaining his land, paying his help, or in product to be sold or auctioned off), Mazzarò has nothing but his land. In fact, he had become so greedy that when he was told that his life was ending, he began to destroy his own fields and kill his livestock. “Sicché quando gli dissero che era tempo di lasciare la sua roba, per pensare all’anima, uscì nel cortile come un pazzo, barcollando, e andava ammazzando a colpi di bastone le sue anitre e i suoi tacchini, e strillava: - Roba mia, vientene con me!” (184). If he couldn’t have it, he did not want anyone to have it.

While the non-picturesque can be manifested in many different way, as is evident from the story “La roba,” I have chosen in this study to focus on the representation of nature in Giovanni Verga’s Sicilian short story collections *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane*. In this chapter I have focused on two stories from the second collection of stories that illustrate the non-picturesque representation of nature that proves my point. While in the first chapter I explored how nature was

juxtaposed with the harsh reality of life as a Sicilian peasant farmer, these stories use nature to enhance and reinforce the difficult life of the poor struggling Sicilian peasants. While in the earlier stories elements of nature were used as a reprieve from the injustices faced by the characters, nature in these stories is just another element that works against those who are struggling to eke out a living.

If we return to the foremost element of the picturesque, the sea, there is not only a lack of presence of the sea, but also an active negation of that element. In “Malaria” the author described a dried up Lake of Lentini that lay among the lowlands, under the layer of bad air that brings malaria to so many of the people in that area. In “La roba,” on the other hand, there is not one mention of water at all, let alone any glimpse of the sea. Rather the descriptions of nature are dominated by the “pestilential air,” the hot sun or soaking rain, the struggle to work in the fields while being followed and beaten by their master.



## **Conclusion**

In this study I have looked at seven different *novelle* in Giovanni Verga's Sicilian collections of *Vita dei campi* and *Novelle rusticane*. In looking at these particular stories I have analyzed the way that the author has represented nature. My aim has been to illustrate through the analysis of these different *novelle* that Verga made a clear move from a picturesque representation of nature toward a non-picturesque representation of nature.

In the three main chapters of this document I discussed the three phases of Verga's evolutionary journey from a picturesque to transitional to a non-picturesque representation of nature. As discussed in the introduction and first chapter, the working definition of picturesque for this document is something that proves pleasing enough to be in a painting. I then used that definition and applied it to "Nedda," "Jeli il pastore" and "Fantasticheria," all of which contain elements that would prove pleasing for painting. From the olive groves to the glittering sea, the endless grazing fields and gentle rolling hills, and finally the sleepy seaside villages that line the coast of Aci Trezza, these three *novelle* embody Verga's picturesque phase.

The transitional chapter focused on "Rosso Malpelo" and "La lupa," both of which exhibited flashes of the picturesque sparsely interspersed with stories that clearly were moving away from the picturesque phase of Verga's writing. Rather

than the constant backdrop of the sea and animals grazing calmly on lush green hills, these *novelle* feature a mixture of arid scorched fields and endless underground sand mine tunnels. The sea and bountiful fields can be seen in these stories, but are balanced with a thirst motif, scorched fields and a negation of the sea.

The non-picturesque stories, “Malaria” and “La roba,” feature a lack of the sea which is often negated by the presence of sickly looking lakes or a complete absence of water, replaced by a thirst motif. In addition, there is a lack of green and bountiful harvest, replaced with scorched fields and a sun so hot that it forces the people to seek shade and shelter from its rays.

By looking at the seven *novelle* of this study I have been able to show that Verga’s treatment of the picturesque can be traced through his treatment of nature. Beginning with “Nedda” and the other *Vita dei campi* stories and moving forward chronologically, ending with the *Novelle rusticane* stories, I have illustrated how Verga’s treatment of nature moved from picturesque to non-picturesque.

As I continue my studies of Giovanni Verga and Sicilian literature I would like to explore two particular areas. First of all I will expand my analysis to other Sicilian short-story, such as Luigi Pirandello. I would also like to expand my study and include a reverse study of the picturesque. That is, I have explored some of the painterly strategies used in Verga’s literature, and now I would like to explore ekphrasis and the possibility of literary strategies used in painting.

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