

THE ACCUMULATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE FAMILY UNIT

THE ACCUMULATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE FAMILY UNIT IN

ZOLA'S LA TERRE AND VERGA'S MASTRO-DON GESUALDO

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this comparative study is to examine the family unit-private property relationship in Émile Zola's La Terre and Giovanni Verga's Mastro-don Gesualdo, as related to France and Italy.

Part I looks at the critical reactions sparked by the works of Zola and Verga in order to get an historical understanding of the role the two writers and their narrative perceptions have played in their national literary histories. Much attention has been given to the development of Marxist and Idealist criticism from the 1880's to the 1970's, centering on the socio-political and cognitive aspects of naturalistic expression. The specific study of the family structure is examined in Part II. The material interests that consolidate family ties and influence the way in which the family functions in a society based on the division of labour and private property, the explicit and implicit mechanisms of hereditary laws, the role of the woman as commodity object, the role of the father, and the presence of the family structure within the state are the specific contributions of this study. Part III attempts to deal with the fictional worlds of the authors in relation to the social praxis of European society.

Methodologically this study limits itself to a historical and dialectical analysis of both the critical materials and the novels and advances from the premise that literature is not an autonomous area of man's human activity.

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PRECIS

Cette étude comparative se propose d'examiner la relation entre l'unité familiale et la propriété privée dans La Terre de Zola et Mastro-don Gesualdo de Verga.

Afin d'inscrire les travaux de Zola et Verga dans leur traditions littéraires nationales respectives, la première partie donnera un aperçu historique des réactions critiques à leurs oeuvres. L'accent a été mis sur le développement de la critique marxiste et idéaliste entre 1880 et 1970, particulièrement sur les aspects socio-politiques et cognitives d'expression naturaliste. L'étude détaillée de la structure familiale est examinée dans la seconde partie. Cette étude va évaluer sur les intérêts matériels qui consolident les liens familiaux et leurs influences sur les fonctions familiales dans une société fondée sur la division du travail et la propriété privée. De même les mécanismes implicites et explicites des lois héréditaires, le rôle de la femme comme objet de commodité, le rôle du père, et la présence de la structure familiale au sein de l'état seront examinés. La troisième partie de cette étude tâchera d'élucider les relations complexes entre les mondes fictifs de ces deux auteurs et la praxis sociale de la société européenne de la fin du siècle dernier.

Sur le plan méthodologique cette étude se limite à une analyse tant historique que dialectique des romans et de leur études critiques. Le postulat de base de cette thèse est que la littérature n'est pas un domaine autonome de l'activité humaine.

If the family were to be swept away, the world would become a place of regimentation, chaos and desolation. Why? Because the family fulfills at least three vital functions: it provides sustenance and trains its members in the art of surviving; it provides the earliest group association, teaching and art of social living; and it is the primary place where the values and knowledge of culture are passed from generation to generation.

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Les philosophes ont fait de la pensée une réalité autonome, ils ne pouvaient faire autrement que d'attribuer au langage une réalité autonome pour en faire leur domaine réservé. Voilà le secret du langage philosophique où les pensées ont en tant que mots un contenu propre. Le problème: descendre du monde des idées dans le monde réel, se ramène au problème: passer du langage à la vie.

Karl Marx
L'Ideologie allemande

INTRODUCTION

In the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy Marx outlines the materialistic concept of history in an attempt to deal with the relationship of the social praxis to the superstructure:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.¹

This relationship between base and superstructure--with the implication that ideology is a form of reality--is at the basis of a Marxist historical interpretation of art. The idealist position of the autonomy of art then becomes a mystification within the concept of historical materialism, a concept that considers art to be an ideological form conditioned by the governing economic structure. Marx continues:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.... With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic--in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.²

Carlo Salinari interprets this passage by stating the following:

La verifica della validità delle forme culturali (ivi comprese le manifestazioni artistiche) si ha holtando nel confronto con le posizioni del mondo reale. Se esse non servono ad acquistare consapevolezza di tali posizioni, sono semplicemente "ideologia", cioè falsa coscienza, consapevolezza contraffatta della realtà. Il lettore tenga presente che Marx ad Engels usano il termine "ideologia" solo in questo significato deteriore, mentre oggi alla stessa parola è stato data il senso generico di "concezione del mondo" (l'ideologia marxista, l'ideologia liberale, cattolica e così via).³

Romano Lupérini adds, in a position consistent with that of Salinari, that:

la validità delle forme culturali consiste nella loro capacità di essere un momento di conoscenza del mondo reale; conoscenza, come vedremo, precaria, perchè in un'opera d'arte, come nelle altre forme di coscienza che l'uomo ha di se medesimo, i rapporti reali fra gli uomini vengono in varia misura camuffati ideologicamente e per Marx, come è noto, "nell'intera ideologia gli uomini e i loro rapporti appaiono capovolti come in una camera oscura". Disviluppare le opere d'arte dal loro involucro ideologico, svelarne la loro concreta sostanza--il nocciolo concreto di conoscenza del reale che esse contengono--è, a nostro avviso, uno dei compiti fondamentali della critica marxista.⁴

In other words, the critic's attempt should be directed at trying to reveal, or give insights into, the concrete knowledge contained in the works of art;

a Marxist approach in demystifying a work of art necessarily implies the singling out of the "content" of which the work is the form and then evaluating the work's cognitive capacity of the praxis from which it originated.

If art is to^{be} considered a form of consciousness, then the historical genesis of the work of art must be looked at to determine the conditions that gave rise to that particular form of expression, since the work does not have an autonomous development--as many idealist critics still maintain to be true.

De ce fait, la morale, la religion, la métaphysique et tout le reste de l'idéologie, ainsi que les formes de conscience qui leur correspondent, perdent aussitôt toute apparence d'autonomie. Elles n'ont pas d'histoire, elles n'ont pas de développement; ce sont au contraire les hommes qui, en développant leur production matérielle et leurs rapports matériels, transforment, avec cette réalité qui leur est propre, et leur pensée et les produits de leur pensée. Ce n'est pas la conscience qui détermine la vie, mais la vie qui détermine la conscience. Dans la première façon de considérer les choses, on part de la conscience comme étant l'individu vivant, dans la seconde façon, qui correspond à la vie réelle, on part des individus réels et vivants eux-mêmes et l'on considère la conscience uniquement comme leur conscience.⁵

It would appear to be inconsistent with the above statement to try and delineate an autonomous development of art. Rather, much attention should be given to the ideological reflexes and the concrete development of the production relationships that are implicitly present for every artistic manifestation.

The production of art--and culture in general--appears to be historically dependent on a particular taste that is organically linked not only to the division of labour but most of all to the forms of reproduction of industrial organization. These concepts touched upon by Marx in

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and elucidated by Benjamin in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction⁶ have not always been considered by Marxist critics. Such a case is evident within the modern Gramscian historicism current which is based on the concept of history as a Continuum--an uninterrupted progress. Little attention has been given to the Marxian moment of rupture--explicitly stated in the Manifesto--as a symptom of transformation and change in going from one form of society and consciousness to another.

In L'Idéologie allemande, Marx and Engels enunciate the following:

Les pensées de la classe dominante sont aussi, à toutes les époques, les pensées dominantes, autrement dit la classe qui est la puissance matérielle dominante de la société est aussi la puissance dominante spirituelle. La classe qui dispose des moyens de la production matérielle dispose, du même coup, des moyens de la production intellectuelle, si bien que, l'un dans l'autre, les pensées de ceux à qui sont refusés les moyens de production intellectuelle sont soumises du même coup à cette classe dominante. Les pensées dominantes ne sont pas autre chose que l'expression idéale des rapports matériels dominants, elles sont ces rapports matériels dominants saisis sous forme d'idées, donc l'expression des rapports qui font d'une classe la classe dominante; autrement dit, ce sont les idées de sa domination. Les individus qui constituent la classe dominante possèdent, entre autres choses, également une conscience, et en conséquence ils pensent; pour autant qu'ils dominent en tant que classe et déterminent une époque historique dans toute son ampleur, il va de soi que ces individus dominent dans tous les sens et qu'ils ont une position dominante, entre autres, comme êtres pensants aussi, comme producteurs d'idées, qu'ils règlent la production et la distribution des pensées de leur époque; leurs idées sont donc les idées dominantes de leur époque.

It can be deduced from the above citation that criteria of taste and value in literary production have always been the exclusive patrimony of the dominant classes that have expressed the dominant ideas of a given historical moment--including those ideas of the aesthetic domain. This suggests quite convincingly that artistic value judgements are explicit

class judgements, as chapter one of this study will ~~attempt~~ to show.

It is within the perspective of an ongoing developing Marxist approach to art that this study proposes to look at the two novels in question and the critical materials concerning these novels and their authors. A work of art can be said to have an implicitly "innovative" capacity not inasmuch as it offers preconstructed solutions or explicit political indications, but rather in the opposite way. In other words, not only in what the art work affirms but also what it negates in the form of consciousness and social change--within the society and ideology implicitly referred to within the artistic representation. In this way a work of art imposes itself not only as ideology, but also as a critique of the ideologies and those real conditions that give birth to ideologies.

Consciousness in a work of art can be evaluated as being more than just an act of intellectual expression; rather, it can be seen as a tool of liberation--as a means of expressing new consciousness that corresponds to the historical necessities of the period in question. Zola's La Terre and Verga's Mastro-don Gesualdo appear to be two instances of such attempts of liberation.

We are less interested in Zola's influence in Italy or in the "verista" Giovanni Verga, than to illuminate, as completely as possible, relationships found within the texts and national cultures of these writers. This of course demands that we give considerable attention to cultural and historical evolutions.

Literature can be said to concern itself with human activity fictionalized. Without getting into a much too complicated debate on literature and communications, this study advances from the premise that literature is

a socio-political phenomenon. This position does not intend to negate a most important variable in the creative process which is the realm of the imaginary, but to affirm that relationships and interactions exist between the internal organization and ideology of a work's structure (creation) and the historical reality from which it was created and of which the work will become an integrated part. This position condemns the notion of art as pure mechanical reflection of society and advances the concept of art as an activity of the superstructure that does not necessarily repeat a photographic image of the world but rather a carefully worked-out system of relationships--at times ideologically alternative in nature--that are solicited from a changing social reality. Art is an active, explosive, energetic content, says Caudwell⁸, since it can produce reality--in the form of consciousness--contemporarily as it is being produced. This leads to the conclusion that the activity of art belongs within the sphere of social and political communication.

This study will analyze the relationships and structures within the "family unit" as represented by Zola and Verga, and see how each writer's concepts of the family and the accumulation of private property casts insights both on these immediate national cultures and on the relationships and structures governing the family in Italy and in France during the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Literary criticism can only answer the questions it asks of the works of art. This study proposes to ask a few questions with the intent to contribute, in some small way, to the development of a Marxist perspective of the arts.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, vol. 1 (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973), p.503.

² Ibid, p.503-504. (my italics)

³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Scritti sull'arte, a cura di Carlo Salinari (Laterza, Bari, 1973), p.33.

⁴ Romano Luperini, Marxismo e letteratura (De Donato Editore, Bari, 1971), p.96.

⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, L'Idéologie allemande (Editions Sociales, Paris, 1968), p.51.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations (Cape, London, 1970).

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, op. cit., p.75-76.

⁸ Christopher Caudwell, Illusion and Reality (International Publishers, New York, 1970).

It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics. On the contrary, the need for food and warmth creates economics. It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why.

Leon Trotsky
Literature and Revolution

I

The vast amount of critical writings available both on Émile Zola and his monumental opus, from the 1860's to the present, seen through the critical perspective of the early Marxists and Anarchists, Impressionists, Academics, Idealists, the Marxists of the III International, Freudians, Historicists, Geneticists and post-war Marxists, and the delayed yet nevertheless prolific criticism on the less abounding work of Giovanni Verga, sparked by the tempestuous decline of Idealist criticism orbiting around Benedetto Croce in post-war Italy and leading to the explosion of "Il caso Verga"¹, is infinite in titles and abounding in methodology. An exhaustive synthesis of-

these critical materials is an ambition that lies beyond the immediate intention of this study, and therefore calls for a selection of both critical approaches and critics. The parameter guiding this selection is congruent with the basic premise that literature is a socio-political phenomenon, whose mediation and complex relationships to the social praxis from which place it was produced is an intricate formative and transformational cultural tool² within the much larger and complex field of communications³. Thus, the importance of coming to terms with the "rapporto tra gli intellettuali e il mondo della produzione" as Gramsci believed, and this not only to measure their "organicità" with the fundamental social group, but also to understand further the place ideology occupies, as an hegemonic organizational and connective function, within a society that was slowly becoming divided into private and public sectors.⁴

The diachronic evaluation of the criticism referred to in this synthesis confirms and reinforces the premise of the present analysis, i.e. that active subjects, working within the cultural sphere of a given society (whether they be critics or creative writers), express a variety of particular interests, both historically and ideologically time-bound, organized and expressed through specific cultural, psychological, sociological and political forms and activities. The choice of critical materials delineates the critical evolution of the methodological matrix this thesis attempts and claims to be a continuation of, with the hope of contributing to this on-going development.⁵

The immediate appreciation of Zola by the Impressionist and Anarchist critics, as well as the early Marxists, founded on the epic dimension of the novels, the criticism of the bourgeoisie of the Second

Empire, the ideological and political opposition to the bureaucratic machine created by Napoleon III, and the somewhat later visionary style of certain novels, backlashed quickly on all sides; a reaction encompassing both the hostility of bourgeois "public opinion"⁶ and a combination of over-critical and dogmatic considerations on the part of the left. Thus, what seemed to be then a systematic two-fold attack on Zola's specific manipulation of form and content contemporary to Zola was in reality a complementary ideological criticism. This criticism appears to be linked very much to what Marx called the uneven development of art, i.e. as a new form (artistic conception) of humanizing reality in order to come to terms with it⁷, and secondly as the strategic predominance of a specific ideology within the global social discourse, as normative criteria delimiting the world-view. The condemnation of Zola, under the guise of artistic criticism, for being over-zealous in the crude descriptions of repeated cases of fornication, incest and manslaughter in his fictional creation, or politically for not having espoused or fallen under the banner of socialism within the capitalist society of his times (an attitude later fossilized with the concept of "socialist realism"), can be reduced ultimately to the same attack. This attack, originated from Zola's underestimated revolutionary artistic and political "effronteries" towards the antagonistic, yet established norms regulating the role of the artist in society and as a producer of culture in both right and left-wing camps.

Impressionist and Academic right-wing critics, while refusing to accept Zola's concept on "matter" and on human bestiality, did underline however the epic, lyrical and visionary dimensions of the novels,

attributes that safely permitted one to deal with and see the author within the much larger development of the romantic tradition, then very much embedded within French literary expression. This conciliatory attitude towards Zola decreases hastily with the latter's increasing concern and reportage of the happenings centered around the Paris Commune and the subsequent involvement with "l'Affaire Dreyfus". The reaction appears to be motivated by the deep conviction that the social and agitational role Zola had assumed was in flagrant contradiction with the traditional, autonomous, apolitical role attributed to the man of letters both by "tradition" and by the intelligentsia.

Left-wing criticism recognized the antagonism and aversion Zola manifested towards the bourgeoisie but also read in his fiction a certain contempt for the growing proletariat. Attributing this negative point of view to the descriptive and ideological presuppositions of positivist creed, from which Naturalism had sprung, the first generation of Marxists reproached Zola for not having criticized in his fiction their political and ideological arch-enemy--the bourgeoisie--from the point of view of the proletariat. This reproach led the critics to underestimate the potential revolutionary way of producing literary works advanced by Zola. Regardless of whether or not Zola's final point of view remained within the confines of the same bourgeoisie he simultaneously was attacking and part of, for the first time in fiction the worker and labourer acquired a specific reality in non-popular fiction, a radical transformation of identity as the result of the direct uncompromising artistic intervention of the Republican fighting against the

Republic. Hugo's concept of man as un miserable and Balzac's portrayal of the dynamic isolated outsider or extraordinary individual (a Rastignac or a Lucien de Rubempré) had slowly given way to the worker perceived as a specific member of a social class whose "conscience possible", rendered more acute by both class interest and inter-class clashes, constituted a revolutionary break-through in the French novel.

Zola's revolutionary debut as a creator was less evident to the early Marxist critics than were the differences between the former's work and that of Balzac. Engels' definition of realism in the letter to Miss Harkness in 1888 sets a negative critical optic⁸, later to be taken up by Lukács⁹, that not only influenced but eventually distorted the evaluation of Zola's artistic contribution to society and literature, a contribution profoundly eclipsed by the Balzac model. Engels' belief that the ideology of the artist did not necessarily influence or rather had no transformational function within the work of art, furthered by the insistence that the ideas of the creator should remain hidden, are both convincing presuppositions to his having evaluated Balzac as the greater "realist" of the two, but are insufficient grounds in underestimating Zola's contribution to art as the narrator of a world that had experienced the abortive revolutions of 1848 that benefited ultimately the capitalist class¹⁰, and had contributed to the slaughter and atrocities of the Commune of 1871.¹¹ Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, an ex-member of the Bordeaux Commune, deals with Zola at length. Although Lafargue affirmed that the artist is tied to his social milieu¹² in a complex way, he nevertheless criticized Zola as partisan to the positivistic doctrines of Taine, Bernard, Lucas, and to Lombroso's theories on criminal

man. Lafargue too reproached Zola for not having achieved the narrative virtuosity and greatness of Balzac because of Zola's unstructured descriptions and insistence on the particular and not on the entirety of the work.

The lack in Zola's work of a central structure (a criticism that Auerbach¹³ and della Volpe¹⁴ will argue to be false), and the presence of non-functional objects and descriptive scenes not useful to the central action, subordinate Zola's creation to the Balzac model; thus the argument of later critics that see in Zola a continuator of Balzac and not an innovator. In his studies on Hugo and Zola, Lafargue tried to identify the structure of bourgeois culture. Contrary to Lassalle, who wanted to centralize everything under the state, Lafargue sees in a position consistent with that of Marx and Engels an inherent contradiction in such a concept of centralization, since the power of the state lies precisely in the control of the complex bureaucracy and its ramifications. Thus, Lafargue gave Zola credit for having attempted the analysis of the immense and complex structures of power, labour exploitation, and class differentiation (as in Germinal) in modern society. Lafargue is not in agreement with the artist's role as an observer of the external world; he would prefer the creator to be an active participant in the class struggle, since Lafargue believed that class struggles could best be described by the active militant. This position, poles apart from that of Engels, raises questions relating to Balzac's realism. Lafargue's invitation to the artist to engage in revolutionary political militancy, as also suggested by Renzo Paris¹⁵, necessarily re-evaluates Balzac, who was never engaged in an active

progressive revolutionary role. If anything at all, Balzac's militancy inscribed itself ideologically within the most conservative and anti-revolutionary ideas and practice. Both Engels' concept of "riproduzione fedele di caratteri tipici in circostanze tipiche"¹⁶ and Lafargue's idea on the method of description as a lived narration closely linked to the action (where the action itself becomes the living structure of the novel), will be taken up by Lukács.

Contrary to the position of those critics that disregarded entirely Zola's artistic merits, the reaction of other prominent men of letters is both quite varied and indicative of Zola's creative abilities. Flaubert, though stressing the absence of a central structure in the works of Zola, nonetheless praised this same work as being of profound insight and observation, almost attaining the qualities of the fantastic tale through the fear it projects out to the reader.¹⁷ Maupassant saw Zola as a romantic, in spite of the latter's hostility towards Hugo; he stressed the epic and poetic nature of the opus (which shall be reaffirmed by Jules Lemaitre), and pointed out Zola's ultra-conservatism, a circumstance, Maupassant claimed, resulting from the contradiction of Zola's being both against and within the romantic tradition.¹⁸ Mallarmé gave an overall positive evaluation to Zola, admiring most of all the historical audacity and the grandeur of the Rougon-Macquart project, and stressing its solid architecture. Pungent political criticism came from d'Aurevilly, who saw in Le ventre de Paris (1873) the birth of Zola's realism--which was the direct result of materialism and democracy, two monsters awaiting to pounce on the old French society. Hugo on the other hand was appalled by L'Assommoir (1877), while the letters of the Goncourt reveal their

acute envy of Zola's success, and by consequence they accused him of having copied their work.¹⁹

In Italy, with the slight exception of Giovanni Verga, writers such as D'Annunzio, Fogazzaro and Capuana²⁰ were swimming in a sea of coarse provincialism marked with heavy political overtones. These writers' individual effort in the evaluation of Zola's art was aimed at showing their own individual minute differences towards the Naturalist movement rendered notorious by the success of the Republican against the Republic. This attitude of differentiation on their part was less a result of a fervent desire to innovate and advance the movement than it was the direct consequence of ideological pressure within the cultural sphere and the socio-political scene of a recent unified Italy, frantically waiting to affirm that "italianità" that was a basic symptom of Italian nationalism (and would later become the organic propaganda of the fascist state).²¹ A complex relationship between ideology (and consciousness) and critical and artistic creation becomes evident, by subordinating the attitude of the critics to the historical moment of its becoming. In other words, the phobia of being associated with an artistic movement beyond the Italian national boundaries, or even admitting to one's parentage in a foreign artistic movement, was in disagreement with the ideology of the ruling classes. In other words, xenomania was associated with infamy in this specific nationalist cultural environment.

It seems clear that positivistic criticism was not very positivistic towards Zola, as one can deduce from the ideology uniting the various critical positions. Ferdinand Brunetière's accusations that Zola lacked literary education and philosophic culture cannot be understood against

the former's taste for an ordinate literature within a rigid canon of rules and literary genres. Rather a much more substantial argument can be built around Brunetière's manifest aversion to Zola's proletarian subjects. Full of value judgements and conservative ideological a-priori concepts, Brunetière attacks Zola for having depicted the miseries and sufferings of the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat in a specific and different way, since, according to Brunetière's idealist conception, suffering is the same for all classes. His argument, often tinted with racism and class hatred, finally falls on its face when he proposes, as an alternative, a positivistically more precise and valid area that should occupy the novelist's energy--nothing less than the honest petit-bourgeois, numerically more representative in the streets of Paris.²²

Taine encouraged Zola not to limit himself and become too much of a specialist in his method. Unlike Lafargue, Taine does not see the producer of culture as a partisan of the class struggle, a situation that might lead the artist astray and cause him to lose sight of the global reality he is to deal with. Taine however did urge Zola to represent the whole of society in its several distinct classes; he did not attack the author's point of view, as did Engels. The Impressionist criticism of Saint-Beuve and Jules Lemaitre tried to come to terms with Zola by neutralizing his crude bestial realism; they delimited their analysis to the epic and visionary dimensions (as Maupassant), a tactic that would permit them to link Zola to the late romantics.²³ Saint-Beuve's criticism of Zola for not being exact in the topographical descriptions of the locations in Thérèse Raquin, and thus stating that the novel was made with the head, not only throws into doubt the old argument which challenges

Zola for his method of static photographic reproduction; it also indicates that the art in question was fiction mediated by, and in a complex relationship to, the social reality--it was not the result of a mechanical assembly line, processing empirical data and factual happenings. Lemaitre's concept of a Zola who was both an epic and pessimistic poet led him to *reject* Zola as a novelist of social circumstance. It is altogether evident that these critics tended to progressively reject naturalist Zola in favour of the poetic one, while simultaneously Zola was assuming publicly and symbolically an ever-increasing political and non-conformist role. Gustave Lanson too saw in the Republican the epic and lyric poet whose creation was monstrous and symbolic.²⁴

During this very same period, the Italian critic and politician Francesco De Sanctis, having lived in a European context the historical crisis of liberal culture (amidst German, French and Italian exiles),²⁵ was among the few, both in Italy and France, to present more than a superficial understanding of Zola. De Sanctis' critical understanding, linked to a more progressive world view and reacting to a narrow nationalistic perspective, brushed aside the accusations of pornography launched by bourgeois critics, seeing clearly in this attack a symptomatic reaction to a carefully guarded "Weltanschauung" subsisting "malgré" the changing social reality (a similar tactic was used against Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover). The vulgarity that had been attributed to Zola was justly counter-attributed by the Italian critic to the bourgeois society of the Second Empire. The law of heredity and the positivistic vision of reality were indeed rejected by De Sanctis, and yet this rejection did not lead him to evaluate Zola negatively nor to identify a

dimension of the naturalist writer thus far left aside. De Sanctis affirmed, against Engels' position, the role of the artist in the creative process within a society by stating that Zola expressed his own particular point of view, his own ideological tendency, and not a mere application of an absolute positivistic ideology outside himself. This statement eliminates, ex abrupto, the picture of a mechanical Zola, totally objective and without ideals, without consciousness and (therefore) without ideology. Zola's descriptions are not secondary, but are seen by De Sanctis as correlative to educational ends; thus, he asserts the pedagogical nature of literature as a formative, transformational and ultimately functional human activity.²⁶ For De Sanctis, both the ideal and the real are present in Zola's art; the birth of the work of art is conceived as a dialectic relationship between the creative imagination and the chunks of reality associated with it. It is evident that there are traces of idealist thought in this position; nonetheless De Sanctis' idealism did not prevent him from asserting materialistic positions marked with idealism. True art, De Sanctis claimed, should always return to its base (praxis), to the reality from which it was born.²⁷

Crude reality alone cannot produce art if it is not accompanied by the representative imagination, De Sanctis' human ideal, or rather the "conscience possible" (Lucien Goldman's terminology) which is potential transformation in the process of man's historical becoming. De Sanctis' criticism on the mechanical aspects of certain descriptions; anticipating the Engels-Lafargue-Lukács attack, is founded precisely on the missing human ideal in Zola's descriptions; De Sanctis sees this as a consequence

of the incompatibility of human ideals with the positivist creed or for that matter its literary expression, Naturalism. Thus, while bourgeois criticism overcame the scare of the beastly in Zola by neutralizing and aestheticising the more blatant political themes with the invention of a romantic and visionary Zola (a tactic exemplary of class devices for maintaining the hegemonic position when that class is faced with a contradictory or oppositional element), De Sanctis, on the contrary, attempted to deal directly with precisely that same ideology and deducible socio-political embarrassments of naturalist realism that the bourgeoisie, under attack, tried to divert in the name of Art. The socio-political presuppositions behind the closing paragraph of Le Manifeste des Cinq, published in the Figaro of August 18, 1887, is a fine example of the process by which the righteous "non-political" intellectual intervenes politically and socially, and perhaps even consciously, as the lackey of the dominant class in his pre-established subaltern function in the maintaining of social hegemony.

Il est nécessaire que, de toute la force de notre jeunesse laborieuse, de toute la loyauté de notre conscience artistique, nous adoptions une tenue et une dignité, en face d'une littérature sans noblesse, que nous protestions au nom d'ambitions saines et viriles, au nom de notre culte, de notre amour profond, de notre supreme respect pour l'Art!"²⁸

Little critical work was devoted to Zola during the two decades following his death, due in part to the aversion avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism felt towards Naturalism. Whatever positive criticism the work of Zola had attained during his lifetime now came under attack by right-wing critics such as Barrès²⁹,

reacting to Zola's attack on the morality and the economic earnings of the catholic bourgeoisie. The nationalist ideology of Monsieur Barrès and the implicit underlying class interests he upheld appear historically dated. During the period of the insecure peace following the World War I catastrophe, there was a return to Zola in France by left-wing writers such as Gide, Céline, Nizan, Barbusse and Romain. This "ecumenical" left came back to Zola at a time when the novel was becoming the verifying tool of the progressive and revolutionary ideas of an entire generation, actively participating or indirectly concerned with the debate on "socialist realism" given priority in the period's agenda by the U.S.S.R. While Céline favoured Zola's activity over that of the Surrealists and Symbolists, Barbusse saw in Zola the awakening of an Anarchist. He writes:

Zola vedeva la rivolta operaia soprattutto da drammaturgo soltanto come un empito di furore e di rappresaglia dell'uomo sfruttato spinto all'estremo. In ogni intellettuale che si risveglia alla realtà del mondo vivente, l'anarchico è il primo a svegliarsi.³⁰

Once again Naturalism seemed to be unable to gain recognition due to its provoking vulgarity and political and social scandalous nature instigating bourgeois reaction. To a great extent the literature of the 30's had become scandalous for those who were in power³¹, and Naturalist literature, most of all, was seen by traditional conservatives and republicans as a subversive poetic. Gide tried to rehabilitate Zola during this time. Younger progressive intellectuals, like Paul Nizan³² saw Zola as a great writer who had described the working class even if from the outside. J. Romain was attracted to Zola's powerful architecture, that

constructive capacity à la Hugo.³³ This second period of criticism ending with World War II provides an interesting phenomenon: the major critical contributions to Zola's criticism came from non-French critics.

Plekhanov in 1912 criticized Naturalism because of the faith it bestowed on the positivistic method and in physiology. Zola was thus to be condemned since he had little in common with dialectical materialism.³⁴ Such vulgar Marxist statements have made both Zola and Naturalism a major negative point of reference in the comprehension and critical development around the realism controversy. In the Quaderni del carcere, Gramsci however evaluated Zola and Naturalism quite differently than had Plekhanov; at the same time, Gramsci was working out the concept of a return to De Sanctis. Naturalism is evaluated by Gramsci as a progressive movement (populismo) reaching out to the people, attempted by some intellectuals "dopo il tramonto della democrazia quarantottesca e l'avvento delle grandi masse operaie per lo sviluppo della grande industria urbana".³⁵ Gramsci sees Zola as a great writer who had taken up the political role of filling and closing the gap between the intellectuals and the people, a necessary historical stage preceding the appearance of an "organic intellectual".

Benjamin suggests, from a different yet nevertheless progressive angle, that the importance and greatness of Zola is in having founded his work (as a creative writer) on a theory, even if this theory is not directly political. This aspect of Zola becomes clearest when set against overtly populist novels of the 30's that were not founded on any one general theory.³⁶ Céline, according to Benjamin, lacked perspective and had no theory. Zola's capacity in describing the France of the

Second Empire was due mainly to his rejection of this society. This re-evaluation of Zola, through the debate surrounding "proletarian literature" and the populist novel was soon to be further enriched by Auerbach and della Volpe, both critics stressing the importance of Zola's romanesque construction denied by so many critics during Zola's lifetime.

Lukács, contrary to Benjamin, took up the issue of Zola and Naturalism in accord with the Engels-Lafargue critical perspective, with some occasional support of the Plekhanovian stand. Naturalism is made out to be the black sheep of realism--a superficial realism, not as profound as that of Balzac and Stendhal. The Hungarian critic sees in Zola's incapacity to narrate à la Tolstoy³⁷ and the failure in not having constructed a "typical and proverbial hero"³⁸, all the consequences of an artist having participated in the life of his times as a spectator and not as an actor. Zola's world-view was condemned by Lukács to a fatal stagnation precisely because the prescriptive revolutionary point of view on reality, inherent in the dialectical materialism of both Lafargue and, to a greater degree in Plekhanov, was not espoused by the artist. The interaction between the individual and society, a basic factor presupposing the Lukácsian "deep realism", was not evident in Zola. Lukács is also led astray by the notion of the photographic point of view, held as valid by earlier critics, which was external, abstract and superficial. For Lukács Zola had not been able to create artistically the dialectic between the "type" and the "individual", thus portraying only the average, the mechanical. Instead of the epic dimension, Zola abounded in descriptions and analyses. Lukács seems to underestimate

Zola's realism because paradoxically the latter remained more coherent than Balzac in both the theory, and the method, and in the application of these in his creative process. The Lukácsian evaluation of Zola as a "different" Republican, limited in the fictional representation of reality by his bourgeois creative method, lacks both originality and depth and critical social analysis. Lukács wrongly plays the immobile photographic creation of Zola off against the creative activity of Balzac. This not only allows Lukács to underestimate the new fictional presence of the working class fighting against the bourgeoisie and bourgeois businessmen against the proletariat in Les Rougon Macquart, but also the subsequent development Zola took realism through after Balzac. The presence and development of photography as a revolutionary element within the arts is not considered historically by Lukács in the Balzac-Zola relationship, an important relationship, in my opinion, in determining how the perception of reality was conceived of and altered in the 1870-1880 decade. Finally it would be presumptuous to use the adjective "photographic" always negatively, in the sense of immobile, static, lacking interaction and dialectic, after the revealing contributions in Benjamin's The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction³⁹ and later John Berger's Ways of Seeing.⁴⁴ Attacks charging mere crude descriptions of reality were dissipated in this period by the contribution of Auerbach⁴¹ carefully distinguishing between Zola's descriptions and those of the Goncourts; where description was intended as unpleasant sensual activity. Zola is for Auerbach a "sociologist" concerned with the social problems of his time; more precisely he sees the author of Germinal as the sociologist of the struggle between capitalist industry and the working

class. Zola's perspective is not that of a revolutionary militant of any particular political school, but rather of a demystificatory nature. Auerbach sees Zola's perspective bearing a certain affinity to the style of the historical tragedy where, in the "mélange" of the humble with the sublime, the latter prevails; a similar evaluation can be extrapolated from Valéry's reflections on Zola.⁴²

In Italy this same period was dominated by Idealist criticism. Benedetto Croce's incapacity to understand the movement of the poetics (in their becoming and not in their static synchrony) contemporary to him is evident in both his critical evaluation of Zola and later of Verga. His position basically stated that the writer should not preoccupy himself with philosophy, politics or science, since art is neither philosophy nor politics nor is it a science. Evidently Croce did not understand nor share the idea that a work of art is not "à l'abri" of the different vectors interacting in the complexity of the social discourse at the base of the creative process. One might raise the question as to why the condemnation of Zola's method and not that of Balzac or for that matter Stendhal or Manzoni. Croce tried to explain the lack of attention Zola received in France in the 20's, by noting that the France of those days did not like to recall the period of the Second Empire⁴³, the social and political ideology of those days acting as a cultural censorship board. The concept underlying this statement is interesting, and is also the most acute point in the paper, since Croce, according to Renzo Paris⁴⁴, not only denied the novelist in Zola but also the symbolic visionary as Zola had been seen by Jules Lemaitre, and this because the Republican's symbols and hallucinations "avvenivano a freddo". Croce did

not consider De Sanctis' theoretical stand on Zola as a "pedagogo" even if he tried to see in himself a follower of the latter. If Zola's artistic negation by Croce cannot be proven on naturalistic or political grounds, it can be at least seen as a curious idealist negation. Zola, according to Croce⁴⁵, was not a poet (even though many critics and poets considered him as such--Appolinaire, Valéry, etc.), and therefore could be neither an artist nor a novelist. Such a stance, in regards to Zola and the artistic nature of a project attempting to deal with or represent both social and natural history--with heavy political and social implications for the bourgeoisie--is comprehensible within the aesthetics of Croce. His aesthetics, which was heavily based on the idealist tradition, situated the critic in a definite position in regards to the development of cultural theory. Politics, society, philosophy and ideology were all negative aspects within a work of art and thus could only harm art, which for Croce was an activity placed beyond and away from the praxis. Besides Croce, other Italian critics dealt with Zola, also in an attempt to come to better terms with his Italian counterpart Giovanni Verga. Russo had already established, in Giovanni Verga⁴⁵, a dichotomy between the two artists by attributing the scientific-medical qualities to Zola and his art and the humanistic attributes to Verga, a dichotomy all too comprehensible within the humanist-idealist and positivistic Italian critical legacy:

Zola è medico, Verga è l'uomo; Zola è uno spirito scientifico, Verga un sofferente; l'uno si compiace della lucidità della sua diagnosi, l'altro pare che sfugga alla pungente angoscia delle sue analisi e delle sue rappresentazioni, aborrendo da ogni prolissità di descrizioni e di racconti e scorciando la sintassi dei suoi periodi, come fossero dei lamenti soffocanti e disviati. 46

Others such as Lucini saw in Zola a free moralist; Ambra sensed a nationalist tone of expression, Trompeo compared Zola to Renoir while Carlo Bo linked committed proletarian literature to Zola.⁴⁷

In the 30's the critical activity of Bachelard with the doctrine of the four elements and the various complexes he finds in Zola is to be pursued by F.W.J. Hemmings and Butor.⁴⁸ Of interest is Thibaudet's comparison of Zola's opus to that of Balzac.⁴⁹ Although Thibaudet valued Zola, his preference for Balzac was obvious, since Balzac knew to perfection the world he was describing, as opposed to a Zola, who was not an "active member" of the good society of the Second Empire. This slight altered position, à la Lafargue, still condemns indirectly the scientifico-positivistic mediation at the heart of Zola's creative process and fiction. It also allowed Thibaudet to make certain trivial comments such as, that Zola did not possess that real experience which mondane women gave Balzac, or that the world of the State remained a mystery to Zola, as did the worlds of business and commerce. Zola is brushed off as an elementary novelist whose relative pessimism leads ultimately to that very same social idealism and faith in progress underlined by many other critics. Here again the Second World War serves as the dividing line not only for the return to Zola but also for changes in critical perspectives linked to the changes in the socio-political climate of post-occupied France and fascist Italy.⁵⁰

In the 1950's, fifty years after Zola's death, the novelist became institutionalized within the university framework and was given an honorable place near Balzac, a clear case of a figure from a once oppositional culture, as Raymond Williams would say, being integrated

by certain mediating forces to become at one with established norms-- as if to do away with the subversive and unaccepted Zola. This comeback sparked once more the debate about realism, following other developments in the field of culture during the immediate post-war years. In the militant ambiance of a France having experienced the Resistance and the rapid expansion and acceptance of the P.C.F., critics as well as novelists were searching for a socio-political "role" the artist was to assume in society, one radically different from the traditional norms established by the bourgeoisie. Sartre theorized "l'engagement"⁵¹, while other critics re-evaluated the whole discussion of realism.⁵² It is both indicative and curious that the whole of the literary world en bloc was in search of social significance, at a time immediately after the episode that shook humanity and replaced that blind faith in Idealism and eternal truths by the more temporal and social doctrines of Existentialism and Marxism. It is in a position consistent with this development that new demands were placed and made aware of in the domain of the arts. Thus the need for an urgent, in-depth study and search for greater harmony and less contradiction between literary structures, themes, and the contemporary political structures of a society, proposed by some; such a consideration cannot be simply stated as the concept of the novel as a tool or a means, a language perfected and masked intended for political and social propaganda.

The widely accepted demystification of the concept of the neutrality of the social sciences and science in general also permitted a new critical horizon to emerge. The "Bulletin de la Société Littéraire des amis d'Émile Zola" that had ceased publication in 1939 came back to life

in 1955 under the name "Cahiers Naturalistes", where many new left-wing critics such as Fréville, Wurmser and Zeraffa reaffirmed the orthodox Engels-Lafargue-Lukács position. Fréville, in Zola sèmeur d'orages⁵³, in the shadow of Lukács, denies Naturalism the potential to depict the objective contradictions found in capitalist society and the interaction of social forces or classes within society. Fréville justified the Lukácsian notion of superficial realism with Zola's failure to express the ideology of the opposing camp (Plekhanov--a clear case of orthodox blindness), of not creating perspectives (Lukács), finally for not having been a materialist. Fréville thus led Marxist analysis--in relation to Zola--down a critical cul-de-sac which made the return to a more open critical methodology a necessity. The sloganistic criticism used by Fréville, as underlined by Paris, condemning Zola for what he was not, i.e. a Marxist militant (a role that would have then been condemned by both Engels' and Lukács' position), not only had little to do with dialectics and Marxism but made all future attempts to work with Zola sterile in that direction.

Guedj sees both Zola and his fiction as victims of the same alienation the latter was denouncing, since the author of Germinal did not go to the limits of reality but rather wanted to remain an observer expressing a point of view from the outside, a kind of photographer of bourgeois society. Guedj too, evidently, did not reflect on the critical suggestions advanced by Benjamin and the whole development of the notion of photography as a dynamic, dialectic process. Guedj also stated that it was the scientific nature of Zola's art that prevented him from thinking revolution possible. The world of Zola shows a divorce between the "temperamento

solare del popolo e il temperamento neurotico"⁵⁴ of the revolutionary intellectual. The vitality of the people and the neurosis of the revolutionary intellectual are values that remain antagonistic and prevent a reconciliation between these two forces; thus the writer is suspected of treason by his own class. Wurmser, no less orthodox, attributed to Zola a progressive nature in his effort to describe and bring to light the lower classes of the Second Empire. In the chapter "Ecriture et révolution" in Le degré zéro de l'écriture Barthes attacks Naturalist art as "écriture petit-bourgeoise", a far less neutral method of expressing oneself than that of Camus⁵⁵ or Robbe-Grillet. Barthes' criticism is full of misconceptions on Marxism, reacting as it does against the notion of "social realism" propagated during the period of the personality cult. It seems that he fails not only to historicize Naturalism, but also to evaluate within a historical framework the creative ventures of both Camus and Robbe-Grillet.

Paris notes in his anthology that a more different critical approach is the historical and genetic criticism of Guy Robert and H. Mitterand. Robert's contribution is in the establishing of nature as the centre of the Zolian universe; nature here means both the earth, whose motor is work, and the sexual instinct. He thus sees in La Terre the myth of the eternal return linked to the idea of fecundity. Mitterand states that Zola did not fully comprehend the revolutionary importance of the Commune and therefore denounced its excesses from the point of view of a solid full-fledged Republican. Ripoll, developing a similar position, states that Zola did not (as Marx was able to see from London in May 1871)⁵⁶ recognize the first proletarian administration of Paris in the episode of

the Commune.

Psychoanalytic critics such as Deleuze attributed to Zola's symbols of the machine and the locomotive (La Bête humaine) the death instinct; death seen as an epic symbol. Hemmings underlines the anguish of the novelist in front of sexual desire (other critics have also tried to link Zola's problems with his mother and mistress) while J. Lapp tries to deal with the notion "ventre"-graveyard. Jean Borie, with the notion of "l'anthropologie mythique"⁵⁷, takes off from the mythical images of the unfaithful woman and the primitive man who destroys her in the fury of his desire to possess her completely, a situation depicted in La Terre.

He stresses patricide as a means of getting property--here, sexual property--from Freud's Totem et Tabou, and also sees the death instinct in the locomotive. Borie states, contrary to Benedetto Croce, that it is precisely the richness of the mythical poetry in Zola that eclipses the power and strength of Zola's social accusations directed against the ruling classes. Michel Zeraffa sees the social accusations in Zola's novel as being the product of an interior poetry (and thus one can deduce from this position that the accusations were not linked to social consciousness), and that the ultimate condemnation and social political rejection of Zola by left-wing critics and public needs no further analysis, since Mallarmé's esteem for Zola's writings is sufficient ground for a "refus global".⁵⁸ Such a position is full of certain ideological implications which this study will attempt to disprove.

Borie and the Marxist critics arrived at similar conclusions by taking different roads. Both the Freudian and Marxist critical evaluation of Zola express an "immobile" vision of things and society. The fictional

world is dealt with as a unique closed artistic entity deprived of oppositional and contradictory movements and characters. Borie does not consider in any way the revolutionary nature of the Republican against the Republic, since the latter denounces, by means of the obsessive attention to the human body, his complicity with the very same bourgeoisie he was hitting at.⁵⁹

In post-war Italy, Zola was reconsidered critically by the Italian Marxist della Volpe, whose work was based on the elaborate criticism of Zola as writer and stylist as was previously asserted by Auerbach. Della Volpe linked Auerbach's observations to the much earlier and first acute critical observations on Zola by De Sanctis, analyses completely overlooked by both Croce and Lukács. Della Volpe goes as far as admitting the presence of objects in their neutral descriptions in Zola's opus, but adds that there is present also an obvious criticism of these objects, the criticism of the bourgeois society represented. The specific choice of positivism and scientism in the Zolian poetic, together with limitations of this choice, are obvious for della Volpe, and yet it is also obvious to him that Zola is a "maestro" of realism. Della Volpe's basic reaction to Lukács' criticism of Zola's realism rests on his disagreement with the Lukácsian definition of the "typical". R. Barilli states that it was:

uno dei torti della cultura marxista, guidata dalle vigorose ma sterili indicazioni di Lukács, aver steso un velo di silenzio e di incomprensione su tutto quel clima narrativo, che pure ebbe il merito di far toccar con la mano, di acquisire alla sensibilità media, borghese, le sofferenze e le prostrazioni cui l'ingiustizia sociale costringeva molte zone della classe operaia.⁶⁰

It is precisely because Zola's fictional world gives us the possibility to

touch a sensitive area of bourgeois society, that at times this work has been neglected or attacked, especially between the two World Wars. If Zola has been given a place next to that of Balzac in post-war years, a place I would claim he rightly deserves, this inclusion in the canon does not eliminate the revolutionary nature of his work; the revolutionary aspect of Zola's art is a central issue of the study.

Naturalism or "Verism" in Italy, as an artistic offshoot of positivistic creed, was not entrenched in the cultural life of the nation due to the economic and social backwardness of the country. Nevertheless, the Naturalist movement was organically interconnected with its French counterpart, as it proposed to deal with the study of social life in a blunt, direct and impersonal manner, i.e. the Zolian "tranche de vie". Italy, then undergoing her rise to nationhood, was led by a relatively novice social force, a bourgeoisie that had won its respectability during the wars of independence, and opposed to the socio-economic betterment of the southern peasantry and workers. The crisis of these years is visible in Verga's work, even if only as the beginning of the writer's global social awareness of Italian society. He writes in the often cited 1873 preface to Eva:

La civiltà è il benessere, e in fondo ad esso, quand'è esclusivo come oggi, non ci troverete altro, se avete il coraggio e la buona fede di seguire la logica che il godimento materiale. In tutta la "serietà" di cui siamo invasi, e nell'antipatia per tutto ciò che non è positivo--mettiamo pure l'arte scioperata--non c'è infine che la tavola e la donna. Viviamo in un'atmosfera di Banche e di Imprese industriali, e le febbre dei piaceri è la esuberanza di tal vita.⁶¹

The historical novels Verga wrote at the beginning of his career

seemed in profound agreement with the traditional "problematica romantico-sociale" of the artist's role. That is, the writer's civil duty was indisputably linked to, and directed towards, a specific public and social class, the bourgeoisie, which stood behind the ascendant nationalist movement.⁶² The bourgeoisie was rather kind to the Verga frequenting the "scapigliati" cenacles in northern Italy, home of the economic and political elite. His involvement there secured and guaranteed the writer a noticeable fame--an attitude to be truncated later as Verga began to assume an evermore provoking and oppositional cultural role. This masked political move against a Verga, identified as an emergent avant-garde force that refused to be organically linked to the values and aspirations of the national bourgeoisie, recalls structurally the dialectics around the bourgeois opposition toward Zola in France. As Adriano Seroni⁶³ points out, the "iter" of Verismo is to be seen first of all in the identification of "una società italiana reale" which the bourgeoisie tried to disregard; in order to understand Verism, the regionalisms in Italy, the elementary lifestyles of the rural southern masses, and the dialects as "l'unico l'linguaggio vivo di fronte ad una lingua letteraria morta, astratta e stantia" of the ruling class must be taken into account, as well as the diffusion of the theories of the Zolian experimental novel in literature and the beginnings of the Italian worker's movement. This situation sheds light on the difficult attempt, even if at times populist in nature, that Gramsci attributes to a small strata of progressive intellectuals and artists in Gli Intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura, in the attempt to narrow the gap between "quella frattura tra letteratura e vita, tra borghesia e masse

popolari, che aveva signoreggiato incontrastata nella società italiana ed europea."⁶⁴ A brief digression is necessary therefore to indicate that the rise of the "modern novel" within the Verism experience or rather "naturalismo risorgimentale" as some prefer to label it, emanates from specific relationships of historical and socio-political phenomena, then present in Italy, influencing, and causing a disequilibrium within, the dominant official culture.

The Risorgimento (1820-1849) and its aftermath (1849-1870), as well as the sudden flux of scientific thought, altered the socio-political nature and traditional cultural perspectives of a unified Italy. The once ardent, passionate and spiritual romantic lyricism in art that had urged so many youths to fight the enemies on the Italian soil gave way to experimental emergent methodologies in general. Darwin's and Taine's discourses, linked to social and human problems, had done away with the importance of metaphysics as the major determining force in man's awareness of his destiny:

Il positivismo, movimento culturale che spinge le scienze della natura a sconfinare nella filosofia, si risolve nel dominio della scienza sulla filosofia, riducendola ad una categoria matematica e negando ogni sorta di metafisica.⁶⁵

The universal ideals upholding the ideology "risorgimentale" of Mazzini and Rosmini⁶⁶ became obsolete shortly after the unification as a new cultural context focused on the particular and specific, the materialistic nature of man and society, rather than on the abstract and the universal. In this changing climate literature began to express the immediate particular and materialistic aspirations and feelings of the "real" man of the period. By adopting an objective impersonal narrative,

prose writing differentiated itself from the romantic subjectivist art. It is in this general development that Verga's insolent insistent intent on clear factual matter, apparently void of personal and religious interpretations and comments, can be interpreted as the most acute critic of Verism, Luigi Capuana, stated. Consequently, literary subject matter also took a shift from the prescriptive to inquiries concerning the socio-existential conditions of a materialistic man. The great new emphasis was on history, not as the becoming of the Hegelian Universal Spirit but rather as the expression of man's concrete participation in the attainment of his aspirations as Italy enters fully into the generation of materialism.

Verga's poetics developed, and constituted itself historically, with the crisis of post-unified Italy, within those very same conditions that favoured the decay of the romantic movement. De Sanctis had justly pointed out at the time that Naturalism, and therefore "il verismo", were fundamentally linked to a specific moment of the development of Italian culture and society. Consequently, as in the case of Zola, a considerable part of the attack on Verga and his art can be seen as political. It is in the light of the interconnection between the traditional romantic movement and the national bourgeoisie--the former being the latter's ideological expression and manifestation--that Verga's fiasco with his first verist novel, I Malavoglia, can be clearly understood. Already years before, in 1869, Dall'Ongaro wrote to the critic Treves stating, "Il Verga sarà, credo, il migliore dei nostri romanzieri sociali."⁶⁷

This early acute recognition of creative talent had no chance of

survival within a decadent cultural atmosphere "improntata a valori conservatori e accademici, derivati da un convenzionale recupero dei modelli letterari greci e latini."⁶⁸ The linguistic prejudice most critics limited themselves to in their analysis of the works of Verga is indicative of symptoms of a socio-political phenomenon--class struggle or class power--present on the purely linguistic level. This prejudice was popular, since Verga's regional dialectal Italian was now going against the dominant concept of an aristocratic and abstract language, such as that used by Carducci. Since that time Scarfoglio has touched upon the nature of this linguistic revolution, and it was finally given its proper merit by the critical works of Giacomo Devoto and Leo Spitzer. It is evident that Verga's linguistic insolence had its roots within Positivism, the principal contribution of which, as Pullega points out:

fu di produrre una generica Weltanschauung che comportò da una parte un determinismo materialistico che restò in superficie, dall'altra una mentalità socialmente progressista, ma ancora in forme approssimative ed eclettiche.⁶⁹

Verga conceived his art as a "documento umano" or "cronaca", where the artistic development would necessarily follow the logic of the real world in order to give the impression that the work of art was created by itself (objective impersonality). Left-wing critics agree (e.g. Luperini, Seroni and Uzzo) that the passage from Manzoni to Verga was not an artistic revolution but rather the result of historical, political and economic factors. The introduction of a dialectal language--including the expressions and aspirations of lower class characters--into literature coincided with social conditions of the historical moment: popularly based citizen groups beginning to take an active role in their politico-

historical development, a circumstance demanding a social re-orientation to both politics and culture. Thus, the manifest negative attitude of critics upholding an archaic literature--a literature expressing nationalistic patriotic sentiments and bourgeois aspirations by means of mythical characters and heroes from out of the clouds--was politically comprehensible in opposition to, and reacting against, the verist school expressing "con arte impeccabile, quel particolare momento storico, politico e sociale, rievocando la triste misera condizione economica di larghi strati della società."⁷⁰

The followers of Manzoni, that upheld a static and abstract concept of the language of the "modern novel", were not the only ones creating obstacles for Verga. Even critics⁷¹ that had given a positive evaluation of Verga's first novel often failed to see the revolutionary novelty of the art.⁷² Verga's position as an avant-garde writer, polemically opposed both to the literary taste of the bourgeois public and to current artistic production still deeply rooted within the national romantic tradition led by the poet Carducci and espoused by Fogazzaro and soon after D'Annunzio, appears evident. Verga seemed aware of the rupture he was accused of creating. In a letter to the Sicilian critic and novelist Luigi Capuana (11 April, 1881) he writes:

in Italia adesso non abbiamo che te ed io... I Malavoglia hanno fatto fiasco, fiasco pieno e completo... Il peggio è che io non sono convinto del fiasco, e che se dovessi tornare a scrivere quel libro lo farei come l'ho fatto. Ma in Italia l'analisi più o meno esatta senza il pepe della scena drammatica non va e, vedi, ci vuole tutta la tenacità della mia convinzione, per non ammannire i manicaretti che piacciono al pubblico per poter ridergli poi in faccia.⁷³

If Zola, aware of the predominant artistic innovation and notoriety

of the Stendhals, the Balzacs and the Flauberts, had to affirm himself forcefully, Verga on the other hand had to assert himself against a static half-century-old Manzonian tradition that had done little more than perpetuate the same sing-song of phrases. Verga's ambitious project was to create a serious work of art--the modern novel--within an emergent/oppositional cultural trend that would go against--both artistically and ideologically--the tradition associated with the ruling classes of post-unified Italy. This desire was mistaken by some as an attempt, on Verga's part, to affirm himself on strictly literary and formal grounds. And yet, the very choices of an apparently impersonal and scientific method of narration à la Zola, the rural or plebian settings, and the language used, are linked to the Weltanschauung brought about by Positivism and thus do not appear to be mere formal devices. Rather, these choices show much affinity to Zola's project, rendering highly dubious the assumption that Verism assumed quite different social values in Italy than Zola had given his art in France.⁷⁴ As Uzzo suggests, Verism was a particular privileged moment of social consciousness in Italy.⁷⁵

Both Naturalism and Verism profoundly challenged their respective national bourgeois audiences since the movements had transformed the brilliant creative synthesis esteemed of earlier novelists into the, at times, ugly, revealing and shocking synthesis of social evils. Indirectly these literary movements put to question and helped to reject bluntly the universal-abstract aspirations and myths created by the romantic bourgeois tradition that had developed freely since the French Revolution.

The first positive critique of Verga's art came from Luigi Capuana, who began his article on I Malavoglia by asserting that:

Scritti in francese, a quest'ora I Malavoglia avrebbero reso celebre il nome dell'autore anche in Europa, e toccherebbero, per lo meno, la ventesima edizione. In Italia, intanto, pare che pochi se n'accorgano o vogliano mostrare d'essersene accorti."76

The Sicilian critic identified Verga's anti-literary language as the most valid element in the new art: the form brilliantly upheld and englobed the content, and the impersonal and scientific mode of narration was void of the moral and religious preoccupations evident in the traditional writings of the time. As Luperini points out, Capuana saw, in the literary fiasco of I Malavoglia, the breakthrough and affirmation of the avant-garde "modern novel" in Italy linked to Zola. Disregarding the romantic rhetoric, Verga's bravura was to have experimented with the simple crude and harsh social reality, and at the same time making good use of revolutionary formal, linguistic and stylistic devices of a newly created language dialectically identified with the social reality being presented. Verga's "effronterie" was, as Seroni indicates:

la possibilità per la nuova narrativa italiana di uscire dall'ideale di convenzione, per calare, ancora con De Sanctis, l'ideale nella realtà.77

Capuana, in opposition to bourgeois critics, took into consideration the comparative development of Naturalism in France, and so made explicit the underlying historical conditions leading to Verga's artistic cultural revolution:

Forse sarebbe troppo strano che accadesse diversamente di quel che accade. Il romanzo, da noi, è una pianta che bisogna ancora acclimare. Non ha tradizioni, nasce appena, quando è già grande e glorioso altrove, in Francia e in Inghilterra. In Francia, specialmente, si può seguire passo a passo tutto lo svolgimento di questa modernissima forma dell'arte che ha un colosso, il Balzac, tra i suoi cultori, uno di quei geni

che fanno fare all'arte i passi del Giove antico. In Italia, quando avremo nominato i Promessi Sposi, non potremo citare che degli scarsi tentativi lodevoli, forse, meglio per le buone intenzioni che per altro. Anzi gli stessi Promessi Sposi s'abborbicano soltanto con poche parole nel suolo dell'arte moderna, più per una meravigliosa esecuzione delle parti secondarie, che per tutto l'insieme. Il quale s'attacca a Walter Scott, secondo una naturalissima necessità di circostanze che nessun ingegno, per grande che sia, potrà vincere mai intieramente.⁷⁸

Capuana did nevertheless slight an important element in Verga regarding the relationship between Verga's artistic representation of Italian society with the "real" contemporary Italy, intimate bourgeois literature ignored, and would continue to ignore, as Seroni stated, basing himself on a Gramscian analysis. This important relationship was later to be identified by a positivist critic, Francesco Torraca, whose socio-political pre-suppositions were those of a "meridionalista convinto".

Torraca sees Verga making use of literary expression as a means to expose the infamous reality of the social differences and abuses current in Sicily. For Torraca, Verga was the representative of an authentic cultural movement; his art depicted (and expressed) the social reality of Sicily rather than presenting a pseudo socio-cultural context around creative experience, such as the work of a D'Annunzio, producer of sterile myths. Yet, if in the one hand Torraca stressed Verga's work to be a "studio sociale" à la Zola, he nevertheless affirmed that Verga was directed only by his artistic logic in the process of creation and in no way was out to demonstrate a thesis of a Zolian sort. He writes in his 1881 article on Verga:

Io mi rallegro di vedere il Verga, primo forse fra gli scrittori italiani di novelle e di romanzi, cercare le sue aspirazioni al di fuori d'un'aristocrazia e d'una borghesia di convenzione, pallidi riflessi subbiettivi dell'arte straniera, società e personaggi foggiate faticosamente a priori, piuttosto cosmopoliti che italiani, assai più artificiali che reali. Mi rallegro di

vedere alla fine ritratta quale è la bassa borghesia e la plebe delle nostre provincie. So che il Verga non ha scoperto l'America; so che in Francia, in Inghilterra, in Germania e fino in Russia egli ha gloriosi precursori e maestri. Ma in Italia, dove le marionette del Carcano e compagnia han tanto contribuito a impedire la cognizione precisa delle classi povere; dov'è ancora frequente la meraviglia di non trovare, usciti dalle città, un Renzo in ogni montanaro e una Lucia in ogni villana; dove i lazzaroni e i camorristi del Mastriani somigliano così poco ai lazzaroni e camorristi veri d'Abbasso Porto e tanto agli eroi dei Mystères de Paris; io saluto come prova di vigore intellettuale e di ardimento non comune i Mala-voglia, che aiuteranno, al pari degli scritti dei Franchetti e dei Sonnino, a far conoscere le condizioni sociali della Sicilia. Però il Verga non ci ha dato né considerazioni, né statistiche; non ha dimostrato nessuna tesi: esse sono il presupposto, non certo il romanzo.⁸⁰

'Art and society still appeared as disconnected entities even if Verga's creative process aimed towards a "studio sociale".

Verga's art came forth just when Italy was faced with its first real socio-political problem, the Mezzogiorno, or the "questione meridionale", as Gramsci shall put it. Verga was dealing in his art with a subject matter contemporary to his day, and if he had no thesis to demonstrate, as Torracca believed, he nevertheless hit on the most urgent problem concerning Italian unification--a problem still unresolved a century later. The Capuana-Torracca insights were lost by subsequent idealist critics and nationalist poets and men of letters, those comprising "i commessi del gruppo dominante per l'esercizio delle funzioni subalterne dell'egemonia sociale e del governo politico."⁸¹ These critics appear to have been influenced by the Nietzschean myth of the superman and the will to power, unmistakable cultural symptoms of a nationalistic racist ideology, as the history between the two wars will confirm. Both Capuana and Torracca were aware of Verga's attempt to create the "modern novel" in Italy. This they saw in Verga's blunt rupture with the romantic tradition, the adoption of

the positivistic Weltanschauung, the adherence to the impersonal method of narration of the Zolian "tranche de vie" as a cognitive tool of Sicilian society, and finally in the dialectal language that was to bring out that local colour as Zola did with the novel l'Assommoir. In these critical observations reside precisely those elements that had disturbed bourgeois criticism for decades. The attack--orchestrated by Accademic critics upholding a decadent classic taste with regards to literary language, and by the exponents of the official culture engaged in discrediting positivistic and avant-garde literary creation--can be understood in relation to the programmatic role and delimited political space the national bourgeoisie allotted to the writer, and thus should be seen in the perspective of an overtly political reaction and censorship in Verga's attempt to fight oppositional/emergent cultural expression, a reaction that in the final analysis is an evident form of hegemonic ideological repression and control.

Edoardo Scarfoglio, exponent of the official culture, expresses just this type of negative criticism. In Il libro di Don Chisciotte, the critic states that Verga's greatest sin is his form:

Solamente in una cosa pecca il Verga, ed il peccato è grave: nella forma. Egli non pecca di sciatteria, o di lambiccatura: ma si affatica a farsi uno stile proprio semplice e colorito e vivo insieme. Però lo sforzo è così grande e così chiaro, che questo stile diventa come un lungo singhiozzo senza riposo che fa pena; e la semplicità e la vivezza e il colorito si perdono in una contorsione faticosa e fastidiosa. La prosa deve avere il suo periodo come la poesia, ma la prosa del Verga non ha periodo: essa pare tutta una gran tirata monoritma, rotta qua e là da versi tronchi e da pause inaspettate.⁸²

Suffering from xenomania (a symptom common to exponents of both the official and oppositional cultures), Scarfoglio attacked Verga for a lack of culture and of philosophic background (the same argument had been used against

Zola), as well as severely chiding Verga for imitating Zola's superficial technical narration. Scarfoglio preferred Capuana's novels to those of Verga due to the former's cultural preparation.⁸³ The young Cesareo⁸⁴ also attacked Verga as if the former were the arch-enemy of the high Italian language, so well guarded by Carducci and used by the same in depicting the Italy of immemorial Latin tradition. (It is interesting to note that Carducci believed in Mazzini's vision of the third Rome.) For example, here is a moment from D'Annunzio's funeral oration on the occasion of Carducci's death:

Giosue Carducci--il quale credeva e affermava esserè la civiltà italiana elemento necessario, come fu già primo, alla vita della civiltà mondiale--lega agli Italiani d'oggi l'orgoglio di stirpe e la volontà di operare.⁸⁵

It appears that Carducci and the high Italian language he so vigorously upheld or associated with the traditional concept of civilization were based on race and national cultural aggression.

Verga, so fully misunderstood by critics of official culture, together with the blunt identification of the artist as the enemy of the Italian language, can be understood in socio-political terminology as "Verga, enemy of the national bourgeoisie". This is the underlying ideological presupposition in Scarfoglio's and Cesareo's thought, since the Italian language was the social, economic and political symbol of unity to the bourgeoisie of an Italy that had been liberated by two different powers and united by force. The symptoms of this forced marriage between north and south--the socio-economically backward agrarian masses of the south and the landed nobility and economic bourgeoisie of the north--are still being lived through today. The social validity of Verga's artistic

project--Verism --was being confirmed simultaneously by the primary research of two politicians, Franchetti and Sonnino, on the conditions in which the Sicilians lived. Their statement not only indicated but also made an appeal to the youth--evidently a generation that had little to do with the unification--to find out by means of personal research the problems so often masked by pride as well as the true face or reality of Italy. This critical position in regards to Italy appears to be linked to the ideological presuppositions inherent in the artistic movements that emanated from positivist philosophy:

La discussione non sarà mai utile, se prima non ci liberiamo da quella svolta vergognosa che spesso, a noi Italiani, ci fa celare le nostre piaghe per parere da più o altrimenti di quel che siamo. Dalla verità, la libertà; dalla libertà, la verità. Il nostro voto più caldo è quello d'invogliare qualcuno a rifare le stesse nostre ricerche, e a verificare i risultati; e vorremmo specialmente indirizzarci ai giovani per incitarli a studiare da vicino nelle varie sue regioni quella terra incognita che è per gli Italiani l'Italia tutta.⁸⁶

Some critics point out the individualistic optic and feelings prevailing in Verga's opus in order to lessen the progressiveness the implicit socio-political world the author revealed. But this is due less to a world-view constantly being upheld by Verga than to the "malaise" within the society of a post-unified Italy in which everyone was out to affirm himself individualistically, before social ranks could be consolidated.

With the downfall of the positivist Weltanschauung and the rise of D'Annunzio (with his superhuman and egocentric literary models of easily digestible myths, as Saroni and Luperini suggest), Verga's artistic insolence and audacity was put aside. The well-to-do ruling classes continued to acclaim the artistic merits of the young Verga of Storia di

una Capinera, and tried to ignore the pessimistic materialist of Mastro-don Gesualdo. Soon after the euphoric historical moment of D'Annunzio, a successful attempt was made to officially canonize Verga within the lyrical-arcadian national tradition of Italian literature.

The positivistic-materialist Verga was suppressed in a most diplomatic way to give rise to a nationalist Verga, a phenomenon soon followed by a Verga "cristiano" à la Manzoni. Verga's links to the French naturalist school were considered insignificant, and external or formal in nature, as was the author's attempt radically to break away from the romantic tradition; it was the purpose of these critics to show a definite continuity between Verga and the venerated father of Italian prose. All this, when seen in broad retrospect, clarifies the extent to which the dominant classes of society contemporary to a writer go to in order to retain credibility and power, even if this means making room within the traditional system of values for oppositional/emergent culture. This process of incorporation is complex and requires complex mediations. As was the case with Zola, Verga's work was dealt with on neutral grounds by being classified as lyrical-symbolic expression by "les chiens de garde" of the Italian bourgeoisie. These critics did not wish to deal with the author on more tangible grounds for obvious socio-political reasons. The realism identified by earlier critics was not given recognition and replaced by more manageable elements, those of mythical remembrances of the author's youth and the yearning for eternal return, myths poetically exalted by and exalting the bourgeois public. Once the crudities, the social contradictions implicit in the unity of Italy had been placed aside by a conscious and programmatic process by which to edulcorate Verga's art, the works were

admitted into school curricula--this after the Gentile educational reform at the end of the Great War. Verga's works were on a suggested list; Manzoni appeared on the compulsory list. All of a sudden Verga was seen as incarnating the nationalist aspirations of a victorious Italy. Federigo Tozzi, a catholic and reactionary writer states this view of Verga (17 November, 1918) only days after the end of the war, in an attempt to recuperate Verga: "Tutto ciò che il nostro popolo ha di più sano, di più vivo, di più spontaneo, è anche nell'arte del Verga".⁸⁷ The century closes with D'Annunzio and Fogazzaro as the "borghesia italiana si ubriacava di miti e di facili illusioni, la realtà italiana batteva ancora inutilmente alle porte dei salotti letterari."⁸⁸

It is interesting and at the same time ideologically significant that the more interesting criticism on Verga at the turn of the century came from non-Italian critics. Critics such as Rod, Kahn, Gillet and Crémieux pointed out Verga's originality. Rod affirms that "Verga réalise à la perfection" the "doctrine de l'objectivité" while retaining the human dimension in his art. Gustave Kahn, in the "La nouvelle revue" of 1903 asserts Verga's artistic superiority on D'Annunzio. He states:

Verga s'attaque à cette grande difficulté; traduire des âmes silencieuses, des personnages économes de paroles et de gestes, lourds, décidés, bien autrement difficiles à figurer que les héros lyriques superficiels et déclamateurs de son rival D'Annunzio... Comme Tolstoï, Verga a la présentation des personnages brusque, très brusque. Il les évoque, au coin d'une phrase, sans préparation... L'impression de beauté antique, simple, sobre, continue, réduite à la plus faible extériorisation nécessaire qui est la marque de l'art classique, Verga, qui ne la cherche point, la possède, D'Annunzio, qui la cherche, ne l'obtient que rarement, et se sauve par les paillettes, au plus; par des jolies pages.

Gillet sees the development of Verismo in relationship to the European

naturalist movement. He indicates the social nature of inspiration as an attempt to "peindre la vaste transformation sociale qui résulta, pour la Sicile, de la création du royaume d'Italie". Crémieux sees the pessimism of Verga as directly connected to the national content of Verga's art, as a reaction towards the abstract and mythical Italy of Dante, Macchiavelli and Alfieri, an attempt to visualize a concrete Italy, one which can be found in the reality of the regions⁸⁹--a new concrete Italian reality that the dominant class was not willing to recognize. At this point the fortune of Verga's reputation takes an affirmative turn by virtue of the strong personality of Benedetto Croce and his neo-hegelian critical ideology, and the idealist manipulation of Verga begins.

Luigi Russo's statement that the Croce phenomenon had so important an impact on Italian cultural life--so as to substitute Naples for Florence, as the capital city of cultured Italy--calls for a critical analysis that should be explained within the Gramscian perspective of the role played by the intellectual and not as most critics (including some historicists and Marxists) assert, as the manifestation and affirmation of a strong exceptional personality in the cultural battlefield. At the turn of the century, Benedetto Croce's Estetica had attempted to construct and delimitate in a climate of cultural restoration⁹⁰ the principles of a modern humanist system built on the cultural legacy of De Sanctis and Carducci.⁹¹ The practical application of such a task was the revision of the literary production of the "nuova Italia". The 1903 article on Verga, advancing new proposals in regards to the Sicilian writer, inscribed itself in this project of cultural revaluation and rested on an updated liberal conception of culture: a cultural theory negating and reacting to a

positivistic view of life. In other words, the Croce episode is a conservative withdrawal from the former official perspective that openly attacked Verism socially and politically, to an attitude where the movement was considered within an a-historical context--a position that will be at the base of the idealist reading of Verga for many decades. Croce's ideological cultural profile, while expressing and representing the socio-political values of the dominant classes after "l'Unità", nevertheless gave some attention to the function of non-conformist revolutionary practices within the Italian historical evolution. His world view, organically linked to the classic and "risorgimentale" national tradition, clearly established itself within the strong ethical conception of life exemplified by Carducci and Mazzini, and thus was polemically in contradiction with the D'Annunzio rhetoric. Verism was not stamped by Croce as a renovating social or cultural force and thus seen merely as the liberating function that influenced the conventional bourgeois-aristocratic ideals of young Verga. Never for a moment does Croce abandon that tenor to embark on a more critical historical analysis as De Sanctis had done, by questioning the ideals and aspirations of the Risorgimento and give a more-in-depth account of Verism within the wider socio-cultural European perspective. Croce synthesizes the Verist movement within history as:

una parola riassuntiva, un'etichetta, per indicare un moto storico, di storia dell'immaginazione, svoltosi nella seconda metà del secolo decimono e correlativo allo svolgimento delle scienze naturali, psicologiche e sociologiche. L'arte anteriore versava più volentieri sugli ideali dell'umanità: l'arte della seconda metà del secolo decimonono ha guardato più volentieri ai fatti che possono chiamarsi brutali o materiali: all'uomo e agli uomini in quanto non raggiungono, e quasi non sospettano, ciò che nell'uomo è d'ideale, in quanto non sono davvero, o non sono più uomini. L'arte anteriore considerava, nella passionalità

quel che v'ha di intellettuale, di morale, o almeno di squisito e raro: il verismo, invece, quel che v'ha di misero, di egoistico, di comune, di stupidità e di meccanismo. L'arte anteriore considerava più volentieri l'uomo delle classi superiori, o in quelli delle classi inferiori cercava quasi soltanto ciò che risponde agli ideali di cultura e di vita etica: il verismo più volentieri si volge alla borghesia affaristica, a quella meschina e magra, agli operai, ai contadini, alle plebi abbruttite, agli irregolari e ai rifiuti della società. Ripeto, le caratteristiche anzidette sono da intendere storicamente e perciò con discrezione.⁹²

The structural development of this thought takes with one hand what it pretended to give generously with the other. The historical necessity of the artistic movement is undermined by definite class statements--as

Seroni points out--in the position of the bourgeois critic that sees Italy, past and present, divided in upper and lower classes.⁹³ Verga's experience becomes "soltanto una spinta literatrice"⁹⁴ that helped Verga to rid himself of values that were not of his lived southern experience.

The implications of such a stand are interesting to note, since Croce transformed Verga's artistic revolution into a spiritual movement, a revelation, a phase of liberation of a Verga no longer to be associated to the social praxis or positivistic Weltanschauung underlined by the first critics. By cutting the umbilical cord linking Verga's art to a wider European movement and world-view and thus discrediting the socio-historical and cultural conditions that gave birth to the particular expression, Croce prepares the necessary grounds for an a-historical perspective in the reading of Verga. This he does by doing away with the pivot point of Naturalism, the impersonal or objective artistic representation of life. "L'arte è sempre personale", says Croce, "l'impersonalità è un concetto impreciso per asserire un'esigenza giusta, che cioè l'opera d'arte debba avere la sua interna logica o necessità e non possa accogliere arbitrari e

capricci."⁹⁵

By reducing Verga's experience on a "personal" level, Croce is indirectly accusing himself of doing the same in his own criticism, i.e. not being objective but rather consciously engaged in a critical process of destruction and reconstruction of cultural perspectives and demands in harmony with his own socio-political allegiance and cultural class prejudices. The most important consequence of this move, however, is to emancipate Verga from Zola, so as to build a criticism entirely on the nature of the artistic object, the text, and not on the entirety of the socio-political discourses permeating the work of art:

Il Verga per sua fortuna non ha avuto mai programmi da attuare, idee da dimostrare o inculcare, e neppure idee rivestite d'immagini; ma pure e semplici immagini.⁹⁶

This conception of a Verga (or for that matter any author) without ideas, without ideology, is not only hard to imagine but is a most naive statement, almost an absurdity. For Croce either could not seriously have asked himself the question: for whom does one write? or he saw the writer's role as being confined to an isolated ivory tower.

As some critics pointed out, Croce's analysis is lucid and qualitatively superior in parts to those of other critics reacting to a movement that defined itself in opposition to that "national tradition"; still, the implications of his efforts to eliminate the historical factors around the birth and necessity of Verism, linked to precise historical and socio-cultural necessities, must be explored. His preference for I Malavoglia to Mastro-don Gesualdo is an indirect political statement inscribing itself within the Italian literary tradition; the first novel was reducible to a

mythical-arcadia tradition, whereas the second portrayed an Italy that was only too aware of the mechanisms of trade, of demand and supply, of property accumulation by marriage, of economic pressures, class exploitation and protective tariffs. In other words, the Verga seen as the corrupter of the Italian language by early official critics or as the crude social writer à la Zola had been transformed radically by Croce. This quite intricate process of oppositional culture being incorporated into the dominant culture is the historical meaning of Croce's paper. As Pullega suggests, Croce's revision aimed precisely at presenting a Verga that was compatible to the new cultural situation.⁹⁷ Verga, the narrator of the social, was too problematic and necessarily called for the acceptance of a taboo subject the bourgeoisie was not willing to admit the existence of--that deep crisis the Italian liberal society was experiencing. Croce has the credit for opening the Verga polemic; yet to him must also be attributed certain negative critical positions later critics associated with Verga. It is clear however that the cultural atmosphere of Croce's times was bitterly opposed to artistic "realism", preferring a petit-bourgeois rhetoric.

If Croce was not able to implement fully an accepted reading of Verga within the petit-bourgeois rhetoric that prevailed, even less can be said of Tozzi's testimony on Verga (17 November, 1918) at the end of the war. Not only did this intervention remain isolated and misunderstood, but it was to be picked up a decade or so later by fascist critics in agreement with the development of a rhetoric based on "race" and "manhood", rhetoric proper of the new official ideology. In 1920, Pirandello dealt with the already polarized Verga-D'Annunzio case, i.e. the realist narrative versus

the poetic-rhetoric.⁹⁸ The antithesis was summed up as "la parola che pone la cosa" of the Dante-Macchiavelli-Manzoni-Verga line in opposition to "la cosa che non tanto vale per sé quanto per come è detta" attributed to the Petrarca-Guicciardini-Monti-D'Annunzio current. Pirandello accepts Croce's position, the impossibility of an impersonal art, while refusing the concept of "spinta liberatrice". Pirandello's official adherence to the Partito Nazionale Fascista in September 1924⁹⁹ explains clearly the modifications of the 1931 talk on Verga as well as his attitude to recuperate the latter in the national Manzonian tradition: a clear case of the servile role the fascist intellectual undertook to uphold.

Luigi Russo's contributions open up a new period of criticism. Santangelo¹⁰⁰ considers Russo's 1919 monography on Verga as the meeting point of the previous criticism on Verga as well as the point of departure for post-Crocean criticism. In the spirit of Croce's Estetica, Russo perfected the attempt to transform Verga from an anti-traditional artist to a canonic writer. Attacking the opus in its totality, Russo developed the element of "religiosità" in Verga's art, a "cristianesimo" of national imprint that rendered possible Verga's link to the romantic and Manzonian novel. Like Croce, Russo attempted to isolate Verism from its counterpart across the Alps on the grounds that the Italian experience was animated by memories of nostalgic rural living and youth, as opposed to scientific presuppositions. Russo's basis for such a statement rested on the differences between the conditions of Italian society as opposed to those of France. Russo sees Zola's motherland as being unified and centralized around Paris, whereas Italy was characterized by a lack of unity, as Russo could verify in Italy's regional varieties and disparities: hence the provincial nature

of Verism. As Uzzo and Seroni point out, Russo identified two major causes explaining the silence around Verga. The first was that Verism, portraying a lower life positivistically documented, was a mode of expression of another country, reminding one of and identified with Zolian immorality. In other words, Verism was seen as the art of an atheist democracy. The second cause rested in the fact that Verga did not have the essential requisite to enter the "coro della grande Weltliteratur".

Russo's exaltation and implantation of the religiosity of the family nucleus, of the secular patriarchal hearth, along with the idea that Verga's characters are resigned to a greater force and thus accepting their fate passively, are important aspects. These factors end up transforming and labeling the verist experience as provincial literature, resting on sentimentality rather than on realism--on idealist and religious aspects instead of on the materialist and atheist values more proper of Verga's art. This interpretation of Verism as the sign or rather the fruit of Verga's moral crisis helps destroy the deterministic and coherently naturalistic life-view Torraca, Capuana and Gillet had identified in Verga. This perspective was slightly modified by Russo in his 1933 and 1941 re-examination of Verga's art due to a progressive abandonment of Crocean aesthetics for the more historical line of De Sanctis. Thus he gave some thought to the cultural conditions of the times hostile to "realist" literature, as well as the inherent particular nature of Verga's provincial art. Nevertheless, the Crocean thesis of Verism as a personalized individualistic expression remained intact. Russo's idea of a Verga "poeta di un mondo provinciale" influenced many critics not to link Verga to the great European realist narrators of the last century. It is

appropriate that the link between Verga and canonized European novelists was to be noted in 1923 by D.H. Lawrence.

Russo oversaw the deep historical reasons of the Verist narrative within a cultural climate guarded by an idealist superstructure: thus his opting for the Verga of I Malavoglia as the expression of the "poema del focolare domestico e della religiosa fedeltà alla vita, agli aspetti semplici e patriarcali" and not for Mastro-don Gesualdo, portraying the crisis of the family and the affirmation of a new world-view linked to the new economic bourgeoisie. Russo does speak of a "vigoroso grido sociale" in respect to Verga but only to conclude that it suddenly "cede davanti all'inesorabilità di ciò che è reale, e si abbassa di tono, o meglio assume un tono d'impassibilità che non è indifferenza, ma, sublima sofferenza. Questo atteggiamento etico genera appunto quell'arte."¹⁰¹ Russo is saying that Verga's artistic technique has its roots not in cultural-historical conditions but rather in the moral world of the artist. The thesis of Verga's art seen as the result of a moral drama is not acceptable since it divorces Verga's experience from history and the Italian crisis of post-unified Italy. Croce and Russo avoided asking direct socio-ideological questions in regards to Verga and his art. This gap in their critical assessment of Verga is nevertheless an ideological statement.

Following Russo's monograph, most critics used him as a positive or negative point of reference.¹⁰² It is difficult to trace the development of the criticism on Verga after Russo, since, as Seroni writes:

erano gli anni in cui si veniva preparando l'avvento del fascismo, che dopo la sua affermazione avrebbe cercato di elaborare certe linee direttrici della vita culturale nazionale; l'idealismo crociano si stava affermando, ma attraverso gravi e profonde contraddizioni;... il positivismo sconfitto dal neohegelismo italiano, operava sotteraneo... l'estetismo dannunziano non

disarmava."¹⁰³

The hegemonic function of Russo's intervention within the Verga debate is evident during this period as it delimited the future critical perspective towards Verga's art. Nevertheless, a more generic "moralistic" current, loosely linked to fascism, made its presence felt.

A. Momigliano gave himself the task in 1923 of conducting an in-depth study of Verga.¹⁰⁴ Momigliano agreed with Russo on the limited nature of Verga's art and at the same time opposed the Croce-Russo position on the superiority of I Malavoglia over Mastro-don Gesualdo,¹⁰⁵ although he did see a much weaker composition in the second novel. Like Russo, Momigliano saw Verga as not being able to compete with canonized European realists. That same year, after having translated Mastro-don Gesualdo, D.H. Lawrence consecrated an important essay on Verga. He labeled I Malavoglia as a novel much in style with the times, as was Madame Bovary. Mastro-don Gesualdo, on the other hand, is seen as being superior precisely for portraying a new hero, without the soul--due to the Sicilian setting--common to the characters of Chekhov and Dostoyevsky. In other words, Lawrence was asserting that in Verga's art there existed that very same realism Italian critics failed to see. Verga's new soulless hero was the realist expression, for Lawrence, of a poor, underdeveloped and socially closed Sicily. Lawrence's non-conformism and wider European artistic view was probably at the base of this evaluation of Verga, linking the author to the family of great European realists.¹⁰⁶

Verga's Verism was still being attacked in 1940. Flora, in his first edition of the history of Italian literature, still tried to cope with the now traditional polemic over the limits of Verism and the debate con-

cerning the objectivity or impersonal narration à la Zola. Working within the Crocean model of "poesia e non poesia", Flora saw Verga's art as a poetic experience, while Verga's world was still seen as being upheld by a strong religiosity¹⁰⁷ (the Croce-Russo-Momigliano line) that Flora naively identified with the Christian religion.

A more interesting and contrasting case can be made of Garrone's thesis, published after his death by Russo.¹⁰⁸ Taking up the Verga-D'Annunzio antithesis, Garrone sees in Verga's experience the authentic expression of the human soul and of the Italian race. Garrone's position, taking off from Tozzi, is a good example of a progressive involution that began as a reaction to an anti-cosmopolitan world-view and ended up being transformed into an implicit ethic--and in the worst cases to a nationalistic and racist Weltanschauung appropriate to fascist folklore. The idea of a holy or Christian writer in both Russo and Garrone is a kind of "misticismo fascista".¹⁰⁹ The abstract and non-committed criticism of a Verga seen as a moral writer and Verism as a technical-literary expression was bound to be hailed by Mussolini's cultural experts. The regime, given its inclination not to want any type of opposition, preferred to deal with cultural materials that expressed themselves on an abstract level, rather than having to confront any kind of ideological opposition, even in the cultural field. Thus Verga's art, which had described (as Torraca and others believed) the conditions of the subaltern classes, became the ideal point of reference for the demagogic propaganda the fascist regime had embarked on.

These attempts can be seen in the critical analysis of Giuseppe Bottai, where the process of demagogic transformation is noticeable almost in point

form. Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of Corporations in 1929-32 and Minister of National Education in 1936-46, developed a general party line on culture using Verga as a model. The Verga case gave him the possibility to stress three main points: Verga's anti-Gallicism, his nationalistic sympathies, and most of all his anti-socialist position. The construction and development of Bottai's essay is indicative of a forced political transformation of Verga for propagandistic ends. Recognizing the novel as the most adequate literary form for expressing contemporary social conditions¹¹⁰, Bottai identifies Verga as example and so proper influence for the new generation. He detaches Verga from Zola by stating that with Verga "rinasce il sano realismo italico e terrigeno, così contro gli eccessi del vero, inteso alla maniera di Zola e dei zoliani."¹¹¹ Bottai's concept of "healthy realism" is an a-historical a-political realism, which inscribes itself within the romantic Italian tradition since it is a "realismo, che si manifesta e si afferma, quando l'artista osserva il suo mondo con occhi puri e ingenui... e lascia che le sue creazioni si stacchino da lui e vivano liberamente, secondo una propria legge."¹¹² The exaltation of the "pure and naive" technique of observation, so bitterly fought by Croce, is consistent with the critic's next statement, that the artist does not intervene or try to include his personal "preferenze o le sue avversioni" throughout the process of creation. This qualifies Verga's art as "pure" creation (without ideology), which Bottai then links to Flaubert's impersonal form, "schiava della intrusione degli effetti pratici dello scrittore, in contrapposto ad un'arte rotta, enfatica, romantica."¹¹³ This last comment can be seen as part of the attempt to delimit the type of artistic expression the regime was trying to establish: a coherent, non-practical, non-

oppositional, non-ideological art. Bottai then links Verga to the popular artistic tradition in order to affirm an awkward populist position; that is:

eminentemente aristocratico, essendo le cose popolari la quintessenza dello spirito aristocratico di un paese che dall'anima e dalle inclinazioni naturali del popolo sappia trarre stimoli di vita, di operosità, di dominio."¹¹⁴

The rhetoric is self-explanatory.

Having established Verga within the popular nationalistic tradition, Bottai moves to destroy the oppositional image of a Verga linked to the progressive concept of the so-called "arte sociale". Bottai states, like Croce, that Verga never had "una tesi particolare" to demonstrate, nor was he out to portray cases that would "suscitare ribrezzo o disprezzo" of the Italian reality, since his characters "soffrono e gioiscono con umiltà (influence of Russo) e disinvoltura, in una piena realizzazione, che io definirei autarchica."¹¹⁵ All this was necessary to affirm that Verga was divorced:

dall'astrattismo come dal materialismo, lontanissimo dagli atteggiamenti languorosi dei francesi, non nevrotico, non impaziente né irrequieto, Verga portò dalla sua Sicilia nel continente un sentimento profondo dell'onore familiare, che redense la sua arte dai peccati del suo tempo. Il focolare fu il centro della sua vita di scrittore."¹¹⁶

"Family honor", "sins of his time" and "the hearth" all belong to the fascist mythology being propagated. Bottai feels that on a certain level Verga had to exalt politically "la più caratteristica e innegabile delle realtà politiche" the reality of the "Nazione". This he accomplishes "senza perdersi tra la astrusità e i giochi sofisticati delle ideologie."¹¹⁷

* A Verga, pure creator, without ideology, who in return exalts politically

the Italic Nation?

Bottai warms up as "l'encre coule" advancing to deny the association of Verga with socialist doctrine. He affirms that the documents in the possession of the State (evidently not a socialist state) show that Verga "non ha mai aderito al socialismo." More important, according to Bottai, is that Verga reacted against the socialists "in nome del popolo fra cui egli viveva e a cui si è ispirato per le sue creazioni artistiche."¹¹⁸ Bottai is not afraid to disclose the presupposition of such a blunt populist statement; he states that Verga isolated himself by opposing intellectuals and pseudo-cultured bourgeois (read: socialists) in the name of the people. The fascist class-ideology and pseudo-populism are made evident when Bottai, recalling Russo's judgement, states that while Verga seemed to take from socialism an economic if strictly positivistic side, he refused the theories "moralì livellatrici e egualitarie."¹¹⁹ In other words, Verga had adopted from the socialist doctrine those very same aspects that "oggi il fascismo ha ereditato, superando dottrinalmente e praticamente, conferendogli il crisma della tradizione nazionale e conciliandolo definitivamente con la nazione e con il concetto del divino."¹²⁰ Verga became a battle cry. Bottai admits here that Verga was conscious of class struggle, but not in the perspective of socialist demagogy. For Bottai, Verga identified "la classe umile con l'Italia umile." Verga's

socialismo diveniva così nazionale, e la nazione acquisiva per converso un contenuto e una ragione di vita profondamente sociale. Questa è, fino a prova contraria, la linea tracciata dal fascismo, e che dovrà essere seguita e percorsa con giovanile baldanza fino alla meta; questa è la prassi politica fascista."¹²¹

Verga's ideological position is seen as being anti-democratic and anti-

liberal, since Verga upheld "la causa del pane contro quella della libertà." Appropriately "la causa del pane contro quella della libertà" and the anti-democratic tradition of Verga, correspond so nicely to the main pre-supposition of fascist ideology.

Bottai ends up by trying to identify certain precursors of fascism. He strongly urges that this process should be heavily documented so as to make sure that those designated as pre-fascists do not sway away from the "direttive e dalla maggior parte dei postulati su cui la dottrina fascista si basa."¹²² It is from the perspective of social renewal and national reconstruction of the regime's political orientation that Bottai canonizes Verga:

Cio premesso, pare a me che non sia illegittimo nè assurdo parlare di autentico prefascismo nei confronti del grande scrittore siciliano, la cui gloria, ostinatamente misconosciuta o per lo meno mantenuta in penombra nella tramontata età democratica, viene oggi per merito nostro (fascist state) messa in luce e il cui pensiero rivendichiamo (because of its usefulness to fascist propaganda) come quello che fedelmente interpreta l'anima generosa del nostro popolo assetato di giustizia (but strongly anti-democratic) e pronto ai più ardui cimenti (expansionist risk in Africa) per amore della giustizia."¹²³

This program of cultural autarchy was recuperated from the sterile, delimited, idealist perspectives of the Croce-Russo line. Croce's idealism was certainly adversary to the regime's program of cultural autarchy, and yet, it was an idealism extricated from the socio-political reality and thus reconcilable with the regime. The deep transformations brought about by the fall of fascism made themselves felt both in literature and literary criticism. The pre-war rhetoric did not survive the historical contradictions it had to face and consequently most art forms, especially the narrative and the film¹²⁴ were centered on "realism" or rather "neo-

realismo". Gramsci's work was being published in the midst of a left-wing renaissance and making of new contacts with Marxist thought: these events influenced the development of a new perspective of literary criticism.

Luperini writes:

La nuova critica marxista è in realtà una critica storicista, profondamente influenzata dalla linea della tradizione romantica Vico-De Sanctis-Croce, anche se in essa già fermentano indicazioni gramsciane (seppure di un Gramsci letto attraverso un'ottica idealista-storicista) e anche lukacsiane e persino zdanoviane (la questione de "realismo" e la ricerca degli elementi "progressisti" dell'opera di uno scrittore).¹²⁵

Another important factor in this development, as Pullega¹²⁶ points out, was the voicing of an alternative position in regards to cultural hegemony-- that is, a negation of the cultural superstructure, the property of the dominant classes, in total agreement with their aspirations and values. But most important of all was the acceptance of the role of the critic within the system and his research concentrated on elements of ideological rupture even within the system itself. From Sapegno to Trombatore, Petronio and Seroni, the polemic around Verga left the academic milieu and took on the dimensions of a much larger complex debate, one found in the newspapers in certain cases, the newly privileged medium of communication. Guarnieri qualifies this sudden returned popularity of Verga as a reaction to the transformations Italy had seen and felt:

Si può affermare senz'altro che questa recente, dal 1945 ad oggi (his essay dated 1955), è stata la stagione più propizia al Verga, per quanto riguarda l'indagine critica sulla sua opera, e non tanto e non solo per il numero di saggi, e neppure per il valore dei critici fatti attenti di essa, quanto appunto per la volontà di questi di rendere attuale Verga, di immetterlo nel più vivo filone della nostra letteratura, di toglierlo insomma da quella posizione, che sinora pareva gli fosse caratteristica e necessaria, d'isolamento, per porlo invece come esemplare,

elemento urgente singolare non tanto e non solo nel suo tempo quanto appunto nel nostro."¹²⁷

The attempt to identify in Verga both the poet of the poor and the proponent of a progressive ideology haunts the critics of this period, because of the small number of cases in Italian literature of a major author taking as the subject matter of his art the socio-economic and existential conditions of the lower classes.

Sapegno gives, in his 1945 Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana, a close look at the art-life relationship in regards to Verga and Verism, an area of study that had been denied in different degrees by the followers of Croce. Sapegno replaces Verga within the Italian verist movement and thus considers Verga as a social writer (as had been affirmed earlier by Torraca and Capuana) and takes up the delicate question of Verga and ideology, an area considered as void of issue by the Croce-Russo line. And yet, Sapegno cannot do away with Russo's monograph since he too sees Verga's conversion as a human crisis: individual weariness and resignation before a cruel unjust world.

Sapegno's criticism is based precisely on the verist phenomenon earlier critics tried to deny. He sees the necessity of linking Verga's formation as a writer and his opus to the verist movement and its theoretical presuppositions, stating that the movement was neither artificial nor a purely imported phenomenon. He was aware of De Sanctis' work on Zola, which helped him delineate this new perspective of an art built on anti-literary and anti-humanistic motives, an art reacting against the Manzonian romantic revolution. Sapegno identifies two historical forces here at work; first, the advent of positivism and secondly, the urgency with which the

social question was making itself manifest in both the political and cultural realm:

In Italia, in particolare, il verismo doveva proporsi come il frutto più maturo, in letteratura, del ripiegamento riflessivo che tenne dietro al moto del risorgimento, nell'ora in cui si rendevano chiare agli occhi di molti le insufficienze della rivoluzione testé compiuta, il parziale fallimento delle speranze vagheggiate, l'instabile equilibrio dell'unità raggiunta con mezzi in gran parte esterni, provvisori, effimeri; la sopravvivenza, sotto la vernice della democrazia e della libertà, di una struttura politica essenzialmente burocratica e poliziesca, inetta a produrre una vera solidarietà delle forze sociali diverse, a sanare il conflitto fra il nord e il sud della penisola (making reference to the Gramscian "Questione meridionale"), a immettere nella vita dello stato, come elemento attivo e partecipe, le plebi meridionali soffocate dalla miseria, dall'ignoranza e da un'inveterata consuetudine di rapporti feudali."128

Verga, according to Sapegno, would have been more popular had the masses in Italy been less backwards culturally. But more important, Verga's lack of popularity is linked to those same historical and political forces that worked against a resolution of the linguistic problem in Italy, i.e. the economic ruling class. As Luperini points out, Sapegno unites old and new. He characterizes Italian Verism and Verga's social ideology historically and politically, but cannot rid himself of some earlier idealist positions of Croce and Russo regarding the nostalgic look, search and expression of a childhood mythical past:

Attraverso il verismo Verga tenta insomma e raggiunge una sorta di liberazione poetica, lirica, imprevedibile e tutta sua. Ma la forza di questa poesia è proprio in quel suo attingere e aderire a una materia reale, densa di contenuto morale e di esperienza concreta, con un suo sapore terrestre e riconoscibile, con il suo peso di umana sofferenza, di mortificato lavoro, di lotta quotidiana per il pane, che le conferisce, oltre l'arte, un valore di documento insostituibile per la storia di un popolo. 129

This essay will have the same hegemonic role for Marxist critics for the next twenty-five years as Russo's monograph had between the wars for idealist criticism.

Petronio too tries to place the Verga experience within a historical context. His analysis excludes the religious and Christian presuppositions of Verga's art, defining it as a "commedia sociale" heavily rooted within the "realist" tradition. Petronio shows some contradictions as he re-proposes the old opposition between Verga and Zola. By qualifying Verga's artistic experience as personal and subjective and opposing it to Zola's cold and scientific methodology, he asserts Verga's poetic dimension. The Crocean concept of "spinta liberatrice" is still very much alive even as a left-wing current among historicists. He writes, "la poetica s'incontra con la morale".¹³⁰ For Petronio, Verga had no precise philosophy of life or coherent and conscious vision of the world (position that Asor-Rosa, Luperini and Masiello will disprove); therefore he says that Verga's naturalism "è tutto quanto letterario". Bothered by the absolute pessimism deducible in much of Verga's art, the critic searches for a "progressive" Verga and thus ends up exalting labor in Mastro-don Gesualdo as a morality, a positive work ethic. As Luperini states, Petronio's work ethic is an affirmation:

ben difficile enucleabile da un romanzo come il Mastro, la cui conclusione batte proprio sull'assurdità del lavoro, della fatica umana, della stessa accumulazione della roba: chi segue le leggi della roba è del lavoro necessario per affermarsi, individualmente e arricchire non può che essere un vinto, sconfitto non già dall'ambiente ma dalle scelte stesse che ha dovuto compiere per improvvisi e che lo depauperano, lo alienano, lo condannano alla solitudine e all'esclusione da qualunque comunità umana (perché la classe di provenienza non lo riconosce più come proprio, ma neppure lo accetta la nuova classe in cui ha tentato di inserirsi).¹³¹

Against Croce, however, Petronio does affirm Verga's art as being a poetic revolutionary language that functioned in opposition to the conventional literary language of his days.

There seems to be a general discontent amongst the left of post-war Italy that Verga had not been more explicitly "progressive" or "optimist" in his art; therefore their criticism was limited to the social-content aspects, or (more traditionally) to the poetic nature of Verga's art. Beginning with the explicit ideology of such art, they tended to see Verga as always more alienated, distant from the popular masses. And yet, the attempt to make of Verga a socialist was to continue not only from several leftist positions but also by a transformed idealist, Luigi Russo.

G. Trombatore tries to deal with Verga's expression as social art, seeing in Verga not a socialist but a sympathizer of Socialism. But strangely enough, for him the social aspects of Verga's art are born out of a moral position of the writer that is not a "polemica sociale"--for Verga lacked a clear and coherent social ideology. "Insieme con la dolente simpatia per le tribolazioni degli umili, nasceva nel suo cuore un moto di indignazione, di protesta, di rivolta."³² The lack of a social ideology, according to Trombatore, was due in part to Verga's personal temperament, but even more had to be attributed to historical conditions, that is, to the lack of a solid ideological line within the Italian worker's movement and also to the weakness of the Socialist International.

Ma occorre aggiungere anche il particolare aspetto della propaganda socialista di allora, i suoi più accesi miti politici, il suo materialismo, l'esaltazione della lotta di classe, la celebrazione dell'Internazionale dei lavoratori con la conseguente irrisione degli idoli patriottici e nazionali; tutte cose che dovevano profondamente ferire il sentimento unitario e risorgimentale del Verga, allontanandolo inesorabilmente non

pure dal socialismo come partito, ma perfino dal socialismo come movimento di idee.¹³³

The lack of a social ideology led Verga to see the "sorte dei miseri come immobilmente fissata ab aeterno e per sempre. Il loro destino era di lavorare e patire".¹³⁴ Verga's *Weltan chauung* is thus linked to his incapacity to see any solution for the exploited masses of Sicily. A few years after Trombatore's essay, Seroni¹³⁵ deals with the realism of Verga in *I Malavoglia*. Seroni's position that in the economy of the novel "tutto si fa per amor della roba" reveals the same fundamental pre-suppositions as that of Mastro-don Gesualdo. In this respect, these critics belong to a more or less historicist line in their attempt to come to terms with the "reality" of Verga's art.

The focusing on the social aspects of Verga's art is present even in the old idealist critic Russo; trying to give an account of a populist and potentially "socialist" Verga in the 1952 newspaper article in the P.C.I.'s daily, *l'Unità*, "Verga, il poeta della povera gente", Russo offers a position radically modified from his earlier Crocean perspective, and seems to have some affinities with the Trombatore position of a Verga "poet of resignation". In both critics there is present the underlying sense of a Verga incapable of finding an alternative option, faced with the given social reality--as Pullega suggests.¹³⁶ The closing of the article explicitly affirms this:

E da quella solitudine si parte un grido di protesta, un grido di libertà della miseria per tanta povera gente oppressa, oppressa non dalle loro gentilissime persone ma da tutto un ordinamento anacronistico che dà troppo sollievo alla gentilezza di quelle loro persone. Verga ci viene incontro quale scrittore, simile ad altri scrittori, simili ad alcuni scrittori russi dell'Ottocento, che non profetizzano un nuovo assetto sociale, ma lo preparano intanto e ne suggeriscono dolorosamente la fatale necessità.¹³⁷

In other words: Verga the anticipator of Socialism. Once again Russo opens up an interesting perspective that would be debated critically by Marxist critics in the '70's.

The Marxists of the post-war period brought into the open the questions of "realism" and "engagement" as an attempt to negate the previous idealist tendencies, which had evaded ideological questions in relation to art.

The Marxists gave birth to an alternative current of critics, primarily linguists and philologists.

This current, labeled "critica stilistica", focused on the modes of narration and therefore dealt with the problem of Verga's style. Giacomo Devoto was at the head of this current, publishing an article in 1954 on the narrative levels of I Malavoglia that the critic sees as being different from the attempts of Proust and Svevo. Devoto's article is followed by Leo Spitzer's contribution¹³⁸, partly in polemic with Devoto, proposing the theory of the "erlebte Rede" and the collective chorus of speakers. Other critics of this school are Wido Hempel who worked on the element of "repetition" (Wiederholung) in Verga as a means of expression, and Bruno Migliorini who looked at "i costrutti dialettali del tessuto narrativo."¹³⁹ This alternate criticism, while interesting in its own way, also assumes--by its very relativistic and a-historical methodology--that there is no consciousness in art. In other words, the art work becomes once again cut off from reality, from the praxis that gave it life.

In the midst of the general crisis of the years 1956-7, a process of revision began in Italy. Verga was often the object of political manipulation by both left and right-wing critics. Disregarding totally the new perspectives advanced by the late criticism of Russo and Sapegno, the idealist line returned to debate on the Croce-Russo distinction between

"poesia" and "realità sociale". The attempt to indicate a Verga "maggiore" linked to the romantic, and therefore poetic, tradition had many followers. Others, more organically linked to Croce and Momigliano in methodology, returned to the distinction "poesia e non poesia". G. Cecchetti¹⁴⁰ refuses to see Verga in relation to the poetic nature of his art, giving priority to the sociological aspects, while on the other hand a critic like A. Navarria refuses the least historical consideration since he believes that in a work of art, the historical events or references to these events are lyrical words and expressions and nothing more. Therefore, for him, it would be vain to investigate their meaning and value historically.¹⁴¹ E. Giachéry,¹⁴² working on the "periodo lungo" in Verga's art links it to the conflict between the Verist methodology and technique and the romantic tradition in Verga, so as to indicate in Verga's art the historical continuity. The refusal to place Verism, naturalism and decadentism within a historical context is derived from Croce.

The '60's show a polarization of critical positions and trends in relation to the two major schemas developed during the 1945-55 period. Verga seems to be the most popular writer in both Marxist and stylistic camps, due in part to the contradictory nature of his art. Leonardo Sciascia denied the possibilities of a Verga "progressista" that the post-war Marxists were searching for.¹⁴³ Vitilio Masiello indicated the socio-political ideology of a Verga "reazionario" and exponent of the agrarian right-wing camp.¹⁴⁴ Both these attempts were out to discredit the revolutionary value of Verga's art, a value Gramsci had defined as belonging to the Manzonian and romantic tradition, at least in respect to the detachment these authors showed in respect to the popular masses.¹⁴⁵ Alberto Asor Rosa¹⁴⁶ and Romano Luperini¹⁴⁷ on the other hand dealt with

Verga by pointing out precisely the absence of a populist attitude and the presence of a total pessimism. Unlike earlier critics, Asor Rosa and Luperini see these factors as the distinctive and determining elements of the verist poetic. Asor Rosa and moreover Luperini develop the concept of the impotence of Verga's art within a bourgeois system. This implicit Marcusean concept of art alienated by capitalism and therefore impotent, leads Luperini to see Verga as a "revolutionary" artist. Luperini builds his argument on the absolute negation underlying Verga's artistic experience and poetic. As Seroni suggests, Luperini's position is to be seen in the light of the 1968-1970 student revolt which led to the theorization of the concept of negation in relation to social and cultural values, and to the concept of the death of art in aesthetics. But regardless of this new impetus, Asor Rosa's, Masiello's, and Luperini's criticism do not break away radically from the previous critical orientation. As Pullega suggests, these critics didn't really put to question, by means of a radical Marxist analysis, the perspective delineated by Russo. The idealist terminology in their "Marxist" analyses, such as "pessimismo", "crisi morale", "pietà paternalista" etc. is a clear indication of a persisting idealist critical conditioning and cultural orientation still subsisting in the cultural superstructure. True, the explosion of the "caso Verga"¹⁴⁸ between 1968 and 1970 did orientate the examination of Verga's art towards an ideological criticism of the opus as a cognitive moment in the development of the history of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, too many idealist ideological factors persisted, preventing a more rigorous Marxist analysis. These cultural factors are to be found within the socio-political and cultural development and options available to the critic both within and without the

dominant system of values.

Most critics denied the art-reality relationship in Zola's and Verga's creative works. I find such a position highly reductionist, and will attempt to show in the second and third parts of this study that, and in this instance how, art works are related to reality no matter how great the complexity of the relationships between the art object and the praxis.

FOOTNOTES

I

¹ A. Asor Rosa, Il caso Verga (Palumbo, Palermo, 1973). This debate on Verga developed during the 1968-70 events in Italy in a climate of political tension and ideological reevaluations within Italian society, and caused analogous tensions and reevaluations within the cultural milieu. The newly felt urgent cultural needs in this period of radical "contestazione" influenced a great deal the critical perspectives of the contributors of the debate, i.e. Asor Rosa, Masiello, Petronio, Luperini, and Biral.

² The concept is developed at length both in Angelo Broccoli's Antonio Gramsci e l'educazione come egemonia, (La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1974) and Luciano Gruppi's Il concetto di egemonia in Gramsci, Editori Riuniti (Roma, 1977). This concept also appears in Raymond Williams' recent book, Marxism and Literature (Oxford University Press, 1977).

³ Lucien Goldmann makes some interesting points concerning the mediation of cultural phenomena in the area of communications in relationship to the notion of "conscience possible" in La création culturelle dans la société moderne (Editions Denoël, Paris, 1971). The concept of cultural production as a transformational and formational tool is analyzed politically as a necessary condition transforming immediate social needs in Cultura, comunicazioni di massa, lotta di classe (Savelli, Roma, 1976), by M.G. Lutzemberger and S. Bernardi.

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, Gli Intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura (Einaudi, Torino, 1966).

⁵ The introduction, selected critical anthology and bibliography of Renzo Paris' Interpretazioni di Zola (Savelli, Roma, 1975) were used extensively to determine the choice of critical materials made reference to in this section of the thesis.

⁶ Goldman, op. cit., The role of "public opinion" before the advent of the mass media.

⁷ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, Art and Society (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973), ch. III of pt. I.

⁸ "Balzac, che io ritengo un maestro del realismo di gran lunga maggiore di tutti gli Zola del passato, del presente e dell'avvenire, ci dà nella Comédie humaine un'eccellente storia realistica della società francese, poiché, sotto forma di una cronaca, egli descrive quasi anno per anno, dal 1816 al 1848, la spinta sempre crescente della borghesia in ascesa contro la società nobiliare che, dopo il 1815, si era ricostruita ed era ritornata a inalberare, nei limiti delle sue possibilità, il vesillo della *vieille politesse française*." K. Marx and F. Engels, Scritti sull'arte, edited by Carlo Salinari (Laterza, Bari, 1973), p. 161.

⁹ Georg Lukács, Studies in European Realism (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1964).

¹⁰ In Engels' 1893 poem to the Italian reader of the Communist Manifesto in Marx-Engels, Manifesto del partito comunista, with an introduction by Palmiro Togliatti (Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1973), p. 50.

¹¹ P.O. Lissagaray's relation of the Commune days in his 1876 edition of the Histoire de la Commune de 1871, reprinted by Maspero, 1976, gives a good account of this tragedy and the atmosphere of those days.

¹² Predrag Vranicki, Storia del marxismo, vol. I (Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1973), pp. 265-272.

¹³ Erich Auerbach, Mimésis (Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1973), ch. XIX.

¹⁴ Galvano della Volpe, Storia del Gusto (Roma, 1971).

¹⁵ Renzo Paris, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁶ Letter to Miss Margaret Harkness in Carlo Salinari, op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁷ Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance, édition du Centenaire (Librairie de France, 1928), tome III, p. 173.

¹⁸ Renzo Paris, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²⁰ D'Annunzio sees in Zola the attempt to idealize a moral conception of life in the symbols he has created, such as the "locomotiva che corre senza freno". Zola is relegated, with other French novelists, to a category defined by the "pessimismo occidentale (J. Lemaître--Les Contemporaines--sees Zola as a pessimistic poet), formulato da Arturo Schopenhauer" and opposed to that "morale evangelica" D'Annunzio attributes to the slavic novelists Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. The accusation of having built his opus on an imperfect scientific law without value is stressed. He concludes that, although vast, the work of Zola "non è multilaterale come quello di Balzac".

Fogazzaro states that although he reads and admires Zola, he is basically motivated by a feeling of mysticism in his writings which he links to the vicissitudes of his childhood and not to an ideology or world view. Luigi Capuana's reaction can best be synthesized with the following quote: "Io naturalista? Ma quando e perché? Perche quasi vent'anni fa ho dedicato un mio romanzo allo Zola? E in che modo, di grazia, le mie Paesane, concepite e scritte con metodo che si può dire l'opposto di quello usato dallo Zola, debbono appartenere allo zolisimo travestito da siciliano?... (then to elevate Italy in opposition to France, a statement that clearly indicates a nationalistic position and reaction in the arts) In un certo paese (Italy) di questo mondo, la questione è stata capita direttamente: i novellieri e i romanzieri di quel paese non hanno infatti parlato di naturalismo e di sperimentalismo; e poiché pareva occorresse che mettessero fuori una bandiera anche loro (in fact another ismo, verismo), per avere un segno attorno a cui raccogliersi durante la mischia, inalberarono il vessillo (standard) del verismo, il quale accennava particolarmente più al metodo che non alla maniera di cui l'arte loro si serviva." (my italics). In the anthology of Renzo Paris op.cit. pp.137-139, p.146, pp.148-150.

²¹ The role of the intellectuals as the "commissi" of the dominant group in exercising subaltern functions of the social hegemony and of the political government, to paraphrase Gramsci, is quite evident and constitutes a valid argument against the position that art and the socio-political are separate spheres of activity, in Gli Intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura, op. cit., A similar argument is evident in Paul Nizan's Les chiens de garde (François Maspero, Paris, 1974); the title is indicative of the role a certain strata of intellectuals exert vis-à-vis the class or authority in power.

²² F. Brunetière, Le roman naturaliste, Calmann-Lévy, éditeurs, (1896), pp.123, 285-7, 293-4, cited in Renzo Paris, op. cit., pp.117-121. Brunetière's admiration for Balzac on the other hand as the inventor of the "roman social" is curious. A criticism of Brunetière's admiration of Balzac can be found in Benedetto Croce, Poesia e non poesia (Laterza, Bari, 1955), pp.240-251.

²³ Renzo Paris, op. cit., pp.53-55, 126-127, 129-132.

²⁴ Gustave Lanson, Histoire de la littérature française (Hachette, Paris, 1977), pp.1084-7.

²⁵ Francesco De Sanctis, Storia della letteratura italiana, with an introduction by Carlo Muscetta and Natalino Sapegno (Einaudi, Torino, 1971).

²⁶ This position stressing the didactic role of literature in a given society will be taken up by Gramsci in his prison notes while he is reviewing the work of De Sanctis as writing at a given historical moment in Italy.

²⁷ Francesco De Sanctis, Saggi critici, a cura di Luigi Russo (Laterza, Bari, 1963), pp.248-296.

²⁸ Integral text in Emile Zola, Les Rougon-Macquart, presented by Armand Lanoux and Henri Mitterand (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1966), vol. IV, pp.1526-1530. (my italics)

²⁹ M. Barrès, Mes Cahiers, Tome III, mai 1902, nov. 1904 (Plon, Paris, 1931), p. 273.

"Zola plaft par son ordre et sa brutalité (et par ses ignominies). Très bon manoeuvre littéraire, n'a d'ailleurs qu'un type de roman, toujours le même. Il est difficile de voir une intelligence moins enrichie par la vie. Et comme il était resté à soixante ans le même qu'à vingt ans, et qu'ainsi il n'a rien acquis, on peut dire qu'il est mort plus bête qu'il n'était né."

³⁰ H. Barbusse, Zola (Gallimard, Paris, 1931), pp.161-2, in Renzo Paris, op. cit., p.181.

³¹ L.-F. Céline, Apologie de Mort à Credit (Denoël, Paris, 1936).

³² P. Nizan, Pour une nouvelle culture (Grasset, Paris, 1971).

³³ "Sa grandeur, Zola la détient à plusieurs titres. Il est banal de louer sa puissance de constructeur; mais si l'éloge est banal, le motif de l'éloge ne l'est pas. Depuis l'achèvement des Rougon-Macquart, c'est-à-dire depuis bientôt un demi-siècle, nous avons appris combien le génie de la construction est rare, combien--en littérature et ailleurs--il y a peu de grands architectes." Citation from Zola et son exemple, in M. Bernard, Zola par lui-même (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971), pp.179-180.

³⁴ G.V. Plechanov, Scritti di estetica (Savelli, Roma, 1972).

³⁵ Antonio Gramsci, Marxismo e letteratura, a cura di Giuliano Manacorda (Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1975), pp.59-60.

³⁶ W. Benjamin, La posizione sociale dello scrittore francese, in Renzo Paris, op. cit., pp.187-189.

³⁷ G. Lukács, Il marxismo e la critica letteraria (Einaudi, Torino, 1964).

³⁸ The Zola Centenary in G. Lukács, Studies in European Realism, with an introduction by Alfred Kazin. (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1964), p.85-96.

39 W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Réproduction", in Illuminations (Cape, London, 1970).

40 John Berger, Ways of Seeing (B.B.C. & Penguin Books, London, 1975).

41 E. Auerbach, Mimésis (Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1973).

42 Renzo Paris, op. cit., p. 181 "C'è qualcosa di Bach e Wagner in questo mestiere bestiale. Il "vero" e l'ignobile stesso in concubinage con il "bello". Valéry, Cahiers, XV, 1932.

43 Benedetto Croce, Poesia e non poesia (Laterza, Bari, 1955), pp.87-99, 131-149, 240-251, 280-291.

44 Renzo Paris, op. cit., p.25.

45 Luigi Russo, Giovanni Verga (Laterza, Bari, 1970).

46 Ibid, p.58.

47 Renzo Paris, op. cit., p.25.

48 G. Bachelard, La Psychanalyse du feu (Gallimard, Paris, 1949). Also references of Hemmings and Butor in anthology of Renzo Paris.

49 A. Thibaudet, Réflexions sur la littérature (Gallimard, Paris, 1940).

50 A good case for those that insist that the social and political do not influence aesthetic and critical evaluations of cultural works.

51 J.-P. Sartre, What is Literature? (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1967).

52 Many interesting articles found in this collection of essays; Lee Baxandall, Radical Perspectives in the Arts (Penguin Books, 1972).

53 J. Fréville, Zola semeur d'orages (Editions sociales, Paris, 1952).

- 54 Renzo Paris, op. cit., p. 29.
- 55 Roland Barthes, Le degré zéro de l'écriture (Gonthier, Paris, 1965), p.59.
- 56 Roger Ripoll, like Guy Robert, stands firm on Zola's sexual obsession, of the woman being caught in the act. "Fascination et Fatalité, in Les Cahiers Naturalistes, No.32, 1966.
- 57 J. Borie, Zola et les mythes du de la nausée au salut (Editions du Seuil, 1971), pp.43-75.
- 58 Renzo Paris, op. cit., p.33.
- 59 Ibid, p.33.
- 60 R. Barilli, La barriera del naturalismo (Mursia, 1964), p.154 cited in Renzo Paris' anthology on Zola, p.34.
- 61 Giovanni Verga, Opere (a cura di Luigi Russo), Riccardo Ricciardi, Editore (Milano, 1965), p.3.
- 62 R. Luperini, Interpretazioni di Verga (Savelli, Roma, 1975), p.7.
- 63 A. Seroni, Verga (Palumba Editore, Palermo, 1973), pp.8-9.
- 64 G. Uzzo, Critica verghiana (Renzo Mazzone Editore, Palermo, 1975), p.7.
- 65 Ibid, p.11.
- 66 Fathers of Italian nationalism.
- 67 Uzzo, op. cit., p.28.
- 68 Paolo Pullega, Leggere Verga: antologia della critica verghiana Zanichelli, Bologna, 1973), p.53.

69 Ibid., pp.56-57.

70 Uzzo, op. cit., p.22.

71 Carlo Del Balzo admired the structure of Verga's first novel but reproached him on the language the latter used. Evidently Del Balzo was still too attached to the official bourgeois culture. Ibid., p.37.

72 Verga's retort to Del Balzo shows just to what extent Verga saw his art as the living expression of the dialectic between the chosen subject and the adopted form. "Se dovessi tornare a scrivere I Malavoglia, li scriverei allo stesso modo, tanto mi pare necessaria e inerente al soggetto la forma". Cited in Romano Luperini, op. cit., p.8.

73 Giovanni Verga, Lettere a Luigi Capuana, a cura di Gino Raya (Le Monnier, Firenze, 1975), pp.167-168.

74 Luperini, op. cit., p.8.

75 Uzzo, op. cit., p.15.

76 Luigi Capuana, Verga e D'Annunzio, a cura di Mario Pomilio (Cappelli Editore, Bologna, 1972), p.82.

77 Seroni, op. cit., p.18.

78 Capuana, op. cit., p.84.

79 Seroni, op. cit., pp.19-20.

80 Pullega, op. cit., p.66.

81 Gramsci, op. cit., p.9. (Gli Intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura).

82 E. Scarfoglio, Il libro di Don Chisciotte (Milano, 1925), cited in Seroni, op. cit., p.102.

83 Ibid, p.101.

84 Uzzo, op. cit., p.36.

85 Edmund G. Gardner, The National Idea in Italian Literature (Manchester University Press, London, 1921), p.35.

"Giosue Carducci--who believed and declared that the Italian civilisation is a necessary element, even as it was of old, in the life of the civilisation of the world--bequeathes to the Italians of today the price of race and the will to act". (my italics)

86 Uzzo, op. cit., p.41.

87 Luperini, op. cit., p.11.

88 Seroni, op. cit., p.23.

89 All the citations are from Ermanno Scuderi, Verga: la condizione storica ed esistenziale (Tringale Editore, Catania, 1976), pp.196-199.

90 Pullega, op. cit., p.76.

91 Seroni, op. cit., p.24.

92 B. Croce, La letteratura della nuova Italia, vol. III (Laterza, Bari, 1922), pp.12-13.

93 Seroni, op. cit., p.26.

94 B. Croce, op. cit., p.18.

95 B. Croce, op. cit., p. 18.

- 96 Ibid., p.17 (my italics)
- 97 Pullega, op. cit., p.76.
- 98 Pirandello gave two talks on Verga: the first in Catania in 1920, and the second at the Reale Accademia d'Italia in 1931. Both talks are published in Luigi Pirandello, Saggi, Poesie, Scritti Varii, a cura di Manlio Lo Vecchio-Musti (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Verona, 1965), pp.390-426.
- 99 "Eccellenza, sento che questo è il momento più proprio di dichiarare una fede nutrita e servita in silenzio. Se l'Eccellenza Vostra mi stima degno di entrare nel Partito Nazionale Fascista, pregierò come massimo onore tenervi il posto del più umile e obbediente gregario--Luigi Pirandello." G.F. Venè, Capitale e letterature (Garzanti, Milano, 1974), p.271.
- 100 Giorgio Santangelo, Storia della critica verghiana ("La Nuova Italia" Editrice, Firenze, 1965).
- 101 L. Russo, Giovanni Verga (Laterza, Bari, 1959), p.72.
- 102 Emilio Cecchi reviewed Russo's essay as follows: "E un libro a imbuto, che pagina dietro pagina si restringe inesorabilmente, e finisce a fondo cieco". Cited in Ermanno Scuderi, op. cit., p.200.
- 103 Seroni, op. cit., p.46.
- 104 A. Momigliano, Dante, Manzoni, Verga (Casa Editrice G. D'Anna, Firenze, 1965), pp.215-274.
- 105 Ibid., p.267 "Ma i Malavoglia sono inferiori."
- 106 D.H. Lawrence, Mastro-don Gesualdo, in Selected Literary Criticism, (London, 1955).
- 107 Luperini, op. cit., p.15.

- 108 D. Garrone, Giovanni Verga, con prefazione di L. Russo (Firenze, 1941).
- 109 Seroni, op. cit., p.55.
- 110 Giuseppe Bottai, "Verga Politico", in Studi critici su Giovanni Verga (Roma, Bibliotheca Edit., 1934), cited in Pullega, op. cit., pp.144-148.
- 111 Ibid., p.145.
- 112 Ibid., p.145.
- 113 Ibid., p.145.
- 114 Ibid., p.145 (my italics)
- 115 Ibid., p.145.
- 116 Ibid., p.146.
- 117 Ibid., p.146.
- 118 Ibid., p.147.
- 119 Ibid., p.147.
- 120 Ibid., p.147 (my italics)
- 121 Ibid., p.147.
- 122 Ibid., p.148.
- 123 Ibid., p.148.
- 124 This movement was reacting against a literature of evasion common during fascism. In literature the earliest model for the new current were Gli indifferenti of Moravia, out to portray aspects of contemporary social

reality. Elements of this movement are seen in the works of Jovine, Pavese, and Pratolini. In film, the most important exponents of this current were Rossellini and De Sica.

125 Luperini, op. cit., p.17.

126 Pullega, op. cit., p.155.

127 Silvio Guarnieri, "L'opera di Verga sino ai Malavoglia", in Galleria, (Anno XV, 1965), p.72.

128 Natalino Sapegno, Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana, vol. III "La Nuova Italia" Editrice, Firenze, 1969), pp.297-298.

129 Ibid., p.309.

130 G. Petronio, Dall'illuminismo al verismo (Manfredi, Palermo, 1960), p.283.

131 Luperini, op. cit., p.19. (my italics)

132 G. Trombatore, Riflessi del Risorgimento in Sicilia (Manfredi, Palermo, 1960), cited in R. Luperini, op. cit., p.98.

133 Ibid., p.96.

134 Ibid., p. 97-98. (my italics)

135 A. Seroni, Da Dante a Verga (Editori Riuniti, Roma, 1972).

136 Pullega, op. cit., p.157.

137 First published in the Unità of 27 January, 1952. Now in L. Russo, Giovanni Verga (Laterza, Bari, 1959), p.394. (my italics)

- 138 L'originalità della narrazione nei "Malavoglia", in Belfagor, 1965, n. 1, pp.37-53.
- 139 Scuderi, op. cit., p.211.
- 140 Giovanni Cecchetti, Verga maggiore (Firenze, 1968).
- 141 Aurelio Navarria, Lettura di poesia nell'opera di Giovanni Verga (Firenze, 1962).
- 142 Emerico Giachery, Verga e D'Annunzio (Silva, Milano, 1967).
- 143 Leonardo Sciascia, "Verga e la libertà", in the Contemporaneo, n. 58, 1963.
- 144 Vitilio Masiello, Verga tra ideologia e realtà (De Donato Editore, Bari, 1975).
- 145 Antonio Gramsci, Letteratura e vita nazionale (Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1966), p.179.
- 146 Alberto Asor Rosa, Scrittori e popolo (Savelli, Roma, 1975).
- 147 Romano Luperini, L'orgoglio e la disperata rassegnazione, Savelli, Roma, 1974, and Giovanni Verga (Laterza, Bari, 1977).
- 148 Alberto Asor Rosa, Il caso Verga (Palumbo Editore, Palermo, 1973).

La Terre a paru. La déception a été profonde et douloureuse. Non seulement l'observation est superficielle, les trucs démodés, la narration commune et dépourvue de caractéristiques, mais la note ordurière est exacerbée encore, descendue à des saletés si basses que, par instants, on se croit devant un recueil de scatologie: le Maître est descendu au fond de l'immondice.

Le Manifeste des Cinq

II

The reaction of most critics, as reported in the first chapter of this study, clearly indicates a negative position towards the poetics upholding the artistic creations of both Zola and Verga. These judgements have often been misleading in the past, but need not be if Zola and Verga are dealt with in relation to their artistic intent within a wider positivistic world-view. As naturalistic political writers, Zola and Verga appear to have dealt with a number of essential economic and socio-political questions in their art, questions that often launched accusations to the ruling classes of the artists' respective countries. I will deal with one of the questions--property and family structure--in the analysis of La Terre and Mastro-don Gesualdo.

La Terre, one of the many novels of "l'histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire", synthesizes the conditions, activities and aspirations of the French rural masses. Living like insects on their land, their existence is directly related to, and directed towards, possessing it. The title alone suggests a colossal theme of analysis,

traceable--as is suggested by the story of "Jacques Bonhomme" read by Jean Macquart towards the end of the first part--to the origin of the family and of private property. The fictional narration takes place between 1859 and 1870.

The central role played by land, or private property in general, seems evident at the opening of the novel. The solitary figure of Jean, impregnating the fat earth with seeds that shall yield food the following summer, clearly establishes a natural relationship of dependency of the man to the land. The possession of land and property is the standard that not only establishes the place of the individual in the social hierarchy, but also promises and legally permits the acquisition of yet more land and commodities--an acquisition which provokes a further upward mobility in society.

In the first chapter, a scale of ownership is progressively established with the introduction of the characters. Jean, nicknamed "Caporal", is at the base of the pyramidal social structure with reference to wealth. Zola offers ample information concerning Jean's past history, which allows one to establish his social position in the hierarchy. Working in the Beauce and being of "provençal" origin not only explains why he is considered a foreigner (*métèque*) by the local population but also reveals indirectly that he has no property whatsoever. Jean's only possession is his past history--which took a turning point after *Solférino*. A former soldier, he now works for his keep and an insignificant wage, hardly sufficient for his physical subsistence, designed to chain him down permanently to his present strata of society. Since he will never be his own "maître" in the Beauce--due to his "*métèque*" nature, and because he is alienated from a society that is built on belligerent class antagonisms--Jean's only

alternative at the end of the novel is to re-enlist as a soldier and serve the interests of the ruling classes.

Françoise is better off than Jean since she is a native of the Beauce and co-owns a parcel of land, a house and a cow. She does not work for wages. Nevertheless, her still inadequate material situation indicates a relationship of dependency towards wealthier proprietors; the episode of the cow she brings to the Hourdequin's farm suggests this relationship. Jacqueline owns nothing, yet holds a potentially more advantageous social position in relation to Jean since her status as "servante-maitresse", an unpaid prostitute, gives her the illusion of co-owning or at least managing and protecting the property of her master M. Hourdequin. Prostitution is the price Jacqueline must pay in order to entertain the illusion of possessing material wealth. M. Hourdequin, the last character in the introduction of this partial hierarchy, is a member of the most privileged social strata of the Beauce. Owning the largest accumulation of property amongst the characters so far mentioned, H. Hourdequin is objectively better off and freer socially and existentially. He is also at an advantage since he benefits from the servile relationship of smaller proprietors towards him, a relationship that accompanies his position on the vertical social structure, a structure valid for all of the novel's characters, whose social status is empirically weighed and measured according to their private possessions. Consequently, each character is respected socially according to the sum-total of his or her material value. The episode in maître Baillehache's office (chapter two) can serve as example of this social attitude: Delhomme is respected by the notary since he owns twenty hectares of land, a servant and three cows; Jésus-Christ, who owns nothing and therefore deserves no respect according

to this particular social ethic, is the object of the notary's reprimands.

The event that gives impetus to a development of the various themes in La Terre is old Fouan's decision to hand over his land to his sons. The attachment to his land is sacrosanct. He becomes aware of his social impotence as the thought of renouncing the claim on his land becomes a reality. This ritual--witnessed twice during the lifetime of every man, once when he receives property, a second time when he hands it down to his heirs--becomes, as the novel implicitly makes apparent, the symbolic castration of the individual who lives within the social values of bourgeois civil society. Fouan's decision takes a turn when the notary reminds him of the possibility that his children might leave him to starve once they take possession of his land. Having awakened in Fouan social man's eternal fear of economic insecurity, the old cultivator agrees to divide his property only on condition that he receive a "rente" from his children. Fouan adopts a logic similar to that of old Séchard in Balzac's Illusions perdues, consistent with the class concept of exploitation. Fouan tries to secure an annual salary for himself without participating actively in any of the labour the land requires. This appears to be a clear case of feudal-aristocratic landlord consciousness adopted by the serf, striving and living according to the model and social consciousness of another class.

Fouan's son Buteau can hardly be compared to the peaceful hard-working David Séchard¹; Buteau welcomes the idea with an antagonistic reply, labeling socially and politically his father's intention: "C'est donc que vous allez vivre comme des bourgeois?... Ah bien!"² An alternative proposal, calculating the sum for the lease of the land, established in accordance with the amount of money the parents would need annually to live

comfortably, does not appease Buteau's antagonism towards Fouan. Buteau attacks Fouan for wanting his children's blood. Fouan counter-attacks his son, first for refusing to approve the yearly allowance as originally calculated by the notary (here, the structure of the father-son conflict is mediated and instigated by a third party, in this case a judicial institution), secondly out of fear, since Buteau has somehow discovered that Fouan has cash savings hidden away. In what seems to be a case of pathological antagonism to survival between the old and new generation, common to late 18th century and 19th century European literature, Fouan takes on the pathetic cry similar to that of old Grandet in Eugénie Grandet. Seeing the gathering of the storm ahead, Fouan tries to reassure himself by hiding behind and making use of the traditional authoritative parental role, as head of the family. "Ah! ça, nom de Dieu! vous fouillez dans mes poches, maintenant! Je n'ai pas un sou, pas un liard de placé. Vous avez trop coûté pour ça mauvais bougres!... Mais est-ce que ça vous regarderait, est-ce que je ne suis pas le maître, le père?"³ Fouan's attempt to resort to paternal authority is useless and implicitly foreshadows a tragic consequence, since he is neither faced with an angelic Eugénie (as is the relationship of old Grandet and Eugénie) nor with a humble David always bending from his own position in relation to his father (as is the relationship of David Séchard and his father)--both of which antagonists are living in a romantic world of their own making, alienated from the immediate aggressive egotistical material world. Rather, Fouan is faced with a son hungry for his father's hard-earned savings, willing to go to any extreme in order to possess property.

It is important to note that this whole debate was sparked by the objective intervention of the notary, whose institutionalized social role

is directly linked to a social structure based on the principle of private property. One can assume that the portrait of the Fouan family was relatively harmonious before the division of the family's patrimony became an issue. After this episode the family is no longer constituted or held together by natural blood relations, these being replaced with new relationships feeding on egotistical calculated interests.

Although the Fouan family dates back many centuries, the cardinal points of its rise as small landowners are identified with the conflicts and consequences of 1789 and 1793. During this fluctuating period of social change, the Fouan family, like those of the Séchard and the Grandet, gathered twenty-one "arpents" of land. The rise of the family could have been economically more spectacular had Joseph-Casimir Fouan not hesitated in buying state appropriated lands. The hesitation before this type of investment venture can be attributable to Joseph-Casimir's service consciousness forged under the Ancien Régime. This man's reluctance towards land acquisition is antithetical to that of his contemporary bourgeois rival Isidore Hourdequin, father of M. Hourdequin, who did not hesitate the least to speculate, and so bought the Borderie piece by piece, at one fifth of its real value. Since the sale of new available Church land was quickly exhausted by bourgeois speculation (Balzac's Paysans also deals with this transformation at work, as discussed by Lukács in Studies in European Realism) and since properties became tightly consolidated within families through heredity and marriage, the division of small property half a century later (1860's) led inevitably to economic ruin unless the heir of a piece of land was able to marry a person who also possessed some property. The division of land was looked upon as an extremely delicate matter, a situation

often being the necessary pre-condition for marriage and family life; that is, the main force constituting the family nucleus or unity became more and more associated with the propertyed base that would ensure its survival.

In this perspective, since property is seen as the prime condition in engendering respect and fear⁴, the desire to own land becomes a basic need for everyone participating in any way within the society of the Beauce, including the pariah Jésus-Christ. Buteau, whose anger feeds on his grandfather's blindness in not seeing that social mobility was the direct result of land appropriation, is affected intensely and transformed socially and existentially by the desire to own property. This character is interesting to look at since the accusation he directs towards the bourgeois, together with his own appetite for land, are indicative of a class contradiction resting on the interaction of two different world views or implicit ideologies--that is, the serfs' hate for the landlord, clashing with the social climber's desire to be like the landlord. "Est-ce qu'il ne faut pas que les bourgeois nous mangent toujours!"⁵ Buteau, more than anyone else, seems to be quite clear about what a bourgeois represents; therefore, the egotistical aspirations that lead to his sudden burst of anger cannot be interpreted as an expression of class-hatred since everything indicates that he aspires to the bourgeois social position.

M. Charles, Fouan's brother-in-law, portrays the typical bourgeois opportunist risen from the lower strata of small proprietors. With the purchase of the "maison publique", he not only rapidly attains upward mobility in society but can afford to live an idyllic old age surrounded by nature in all its splendour and innocence; here is a life-style in flagrant opposition with the means (house of ill fame) used to attain it.

The Charles' contradiction is constant, exemplified in their daughter who is locked away (from the ugly evils of the world) in a "pensionat" till the age of maturity, "pour raffiner sur son innocence."⁶ The bourgeois contradiction between public and private morality or ethics, which Marx identified, becomes apparent in the character of Estelle when, in all her "innocence", she assumes the running of the "maison publique" and proves to be the ideal candidate for such a task. The presupposition underlying this episode quickly becomes explicit and can be spoken of in terms of ethic of material gains. A good business should never be abandoned on account of questions of immorality, especially when the lucrative gain derived from it takes on a value superior to simple morality. "Pourquoi l'affaire serait-elle sortie de la famille, puisqu'elle était si sûre et si belle."⁷ Similarly in this strata, the family is reduced to an economic unit whose principal activity is lucrative self-interest; to be sure, solidarity seems more evident within the immediate family circle, but only in order to protect the family wealth. The Charles' contradictions are evident even for the social outcast Jésus-Christ, living at the margins of the economic interactions of the Beauce. Jésus-Christ is conscious that the good bourgeois image exemplified in M. and Mme. Charles with their granddaughter in church, all dressed up in fine clothes, is an illusion created with "l'argent à putains". The outcast is able to pierce through the conventional façade of this bourgeois couple. Buteau is incapable of verbalizing such a statement precisely because his aspirations force him to adopt and protect the same general Weltanschauung as the Charles'.

The fundamental interest of the bourgeois entrepreneur--to accumulate

wealth with any activity he undertakes--seems to be a constant, even as the old question of building a road in the locality comes up. The project is advanced by Macqueron "le bourgeois" and M. Hourdequin, both of whom would derive financial advantages from a so-called public work. Lengaigne, who apparently has no interest in seeing the road built, passes judgement on the party that is proposing the road:

Ah! ces bourgeois d'aujourd'hui, c'était pis encore que les seigneurs d'autrefois: oui, ils avaient tout gardé, dans le partage, et ils ne faisaient des lois que pour eux, ils ne vivaient que de la misère du pauvre monde! Les autres l'écoutaient, gênés et heureux au fond de ce qu'il osait dire, la haine séculaire indomptable, du paysan contre les possesseurs du sol.⁸

Land, the central question, is "an issue of consequence to everyone, and especially Buteau who is unsuccessful in the drawing of lots.

The First Part concludes with a winter evening gathering where Fouan synthesizes, in his own way, how war (fought by the peasants and brought about by conflicting ruling classes for economic reasons) is detrimental to small scale farming; here Jean reads the story of Jacques Bonhomme. The story, paradoxically narrating the tale of the eternally exploited worker, is structurally placed here by Zola, a placement foreshadowing the end of the novel and also reminding the reader that the endless exploitation of the labourers by the economic and political ruling classes is still very much an ongoing phenomenon. The inserted narration comes to a peak with the revolt of Jacques in the apotheosis of 1789, when he apparently became equal to his "seigneur". Fouan intervenes, presenting his personal testimony of Napoleon I who (after centuries of exploitation) gave freedom and land to the labourer. The tale ends by explicitly warning the labourer to stay away from the cities, indicating that the real goal in life is peace of mind.

"Dis-toi bien Jacques Bonhomme, que l'argent est une chimère. Si tu as la paix du coeur, ta fortune est faite."⁹ This philosophy, which is the product of the 1789 aftermath and so of a newly dominant bourgeois culture, provides the rural masses with the illusion that they should be happy in their financial and social misery now that they are free;--free, that is, to starve and to sell oneself in order to survive. This structure reinforced the rule of the dominant classes by consolidating one of the antagonisms upon which their supremacy was based, i.e. subjecting "the country to the rule of the towns."¹⁰ Since the 1789 illusion, the exploited and subjected condition of the happy rural labourer had not changed. Regardless of the colours of the subsequent revolutions, Jacques Bonhomme had not ceased to be manipulated in the interest of those that ruled. This was the case in 1848, in 1851 and shall repeat itself again at the end of the fictional narration of the novel, an end coinciding with the Paris Commune.

The Second Part of La Terre expands the themes that have already been indicated in the First Part. Although Hourdequin is seen as economically superior to Fouan, he suffers basically from the same social ailment, being "étroitement le prisonnier de sa terre". Owing his fortune to the ability of his father, M. Hourdequin is no less a slave of his land than Fouan. Hourdequin's refusal to marry Jacqueline has little to do with the deep love and respect he still feels for his dead wife. Rather, this refusal lies on a more egotistical foundation. M. Hourdequin cannot conceive sharing his property with a "woman" who had nothing to do with his "land" and who would bring him no "capital" of any nature. "Oh! cette terre, comme il avait fini par l'aimer!... comme s'il l'eut prise des lors en légitime

mariage, pour la féconder."¹¹ Hourdequin is married to his land, as is La Grande, Fouan and almost every other character of La Terre.

The death of Mouche brings further to light the central question of heredity, a fundamental principle of private property and an indisputable right of bourgeois society.¹² Zola presents death as the necessary condition for triggering the hereditary mechanism. The basic postulate holds throughout the novel; it is exemplified in the natural death of Mouche and the provoked deaths of Françoise and Fouan. Without leaping ahead in the present analysis, it already begins to appear as though the Darwinian concept of the survival of the fittest is not only explicit in certain episodes, but seems to govern the structure of the novel. The complex mechanism of handing down private property becomes the regulating paradigm of La Terre. Mouche's death is the necessary pre-condition that makes Lise available for marriage. Although already with child, the patrimony she inherits--which also in part belongs to Françoise and therefore creates a further future antagonism in regards to the division of Mouche's property--makes her a good party to marry, especially for a property-less labourer such as Jean. However, Jean is incapable of carrying out this project, for Buteau's interests get in the way. Marriage in Zola's fictional universe goes beyond sentimentality or love; it rests on more concrete socio-economic conditions and necessities. Zola appears to propose a particular historical social law similar to the analysis of Marx in the Manifesto of the Communist Party.¹³

The events in the novel function as a kind of chain reaction. The building of the road, made possible by the "intérêt commun" certain members of the local bourgeoisie had in seeing it built, gives the Mouche daughters

five hundred francs, and so elevates slightly their economic social value in the eyes of the community. This sum is the decisive element that lures Buteau to marry Lise, already the mother of his child. Had Mouche lived, it is probably safe to assume that the structure of the novel would have led Lise to marry Jean, since Buteau's intervention between Lise and Jean appears stimulated entirely by Lise's rapid financial betterment.

Two important patterns conclude this Second Part. The first is the episode of the Charles' maid Honorine, who loses her position because of her "attentat aux moeurs". Zola here portrays that contradiction in bourgeois morality which tolerates the lucrative employment of young girls as whores, and yet condemns a woman who gives herself sexually to a man out of physical passion.¹⁴ It was precisely for putting into fictional evidence such contradictions that Zola was both ridiculed and attacked by official bourgeois critics. It seems evident from Honorine's being fired, that the ethical/social value of the sexual act is seen indeed as a dichotomy within the bourgeois system of values. For if sex, including prostitution in this case, earns money, it can be socially accounted for and ethically accepted; if it is the result of sheer passion, if it grows out of natural self-gratification, it is to be condemned and castigated in order to prevent the collapse of the moral integrity, the façade with which the bourgeoisie pretended to associate itself. And the second point, closely associated, is Jean's lack of success in forming a family, the economic unit of stability, respect and survival.¹⁵

The Central Part of the novel portrays the rise of Buteau as proprietor. His determination to challenge the other members of his family until both the Fouan and Mouche properties are united under his dominion

knows no measure. Jealousy, ambition and possession are the regulating forces of his universe. Once he has the Mouche's property under his grip by marrying Lise, he cannot allow Françoise, a free agent of the family circle he administers, legally to claim her half of Mouche's property. By imposing the decision to divide the patrimony only on the day of Françoise's marriage, Buteau buys time to see in what way he can prevent the fragmentation of his recently acquired property. His intention is to give himself enough time and the right occasion to take Françoise sexually, by force, making her his woman, thereby giving him a legitimate claim to her part of the patrimony.

Françoise, as a female the weaker of the species in the animal world, is constantly forced to fight off Buteau's aggressive sexual attacks. She succeeds for a while, but falls prey to Jean only moments after an exhaustive struggle with Buteau. On this occasion she loses not only her virginity but also her social independence.¹⁶ The similarity of the structures regulating the human and animal world appears clearly stated in the fifth chapter, where Lise and la Coliche (the cow) are both in labour. Not only does Buteau consider the cow to be more important than his wife at that moment, but he tries anew to take Françoise by force at the foot of the bed where Lise is in labour. The desire to dominate Françoise sexually conforms with Buteau's goal to possess her share of the property. Since the end justifies the means in this mad race to possess, Buteau refuses Jean's proposal to marry Françoise for if "elle se mariait, il la perdait, il perdait la terre."¹⁷ This Third Part also ends in symbolic defeat. Buteau receives a broken arm from Jean whom he had menaced for trying to interfere with his aspiration of a "ménage à trois".

Buteau's role as aggressive dominant figure is restored in the Fourth Part, when Fouan comes to live under his roof. Buteau needs no invitation to try and make the most out of the situation, up until the moment when Françoise takes on an aggressive stand against him. Buteau is suddenly confronted by Françoise claiming her share of her land, Fouan who goes to live with Jésus-Christ, and by Jésus-Christ who allows a piece of land to leave the family circle. Buteau, who had contradicted the established bourgeois norms of society and was ready to continue to live in polygamy in order to prevent the parcelling or loss of land and property, cannot accept his brother's sacrilege. Jésus-Christ had violated that fundamental secular law demanding that property remain in the hands of the "gens". Buteau's anger and antagonism is intensified in chapter four by the assured conviction that his father has money hidden away. In the economy of the society portrayed, hidden money is synonymous with lost or non-money. Therefore, Buteau is impelled to begin the search for the hidden lot so that it can become real and accounted for in a society where money and what it can buy (property) is the main tenor of social recognition. The antagonistic situation exasperates the father who fears more than ever to be robbed of his life savings, the only remaining proof of his material existence.

Buteau's position is again in danger with Françoise's coming of age. He feels again the obsessive fear of losing both woman and land with Françoise's decision to marry Jean. It is important to note that Françoise's decision to marry is also integrated with and instigated by the desire to possess. "Elle aussi aurait un homme à elle."¹⁸ Françoise accomplishes her project with the indispensable aid of La Grande--who

becomes an accomplice in the whole affair only to provoke the destruction of Buteau.

La Grande's hate can also be linked to property and ownership. Her participation in the family feud, in Françoise's favour, not only gives Françoise her share of her father's land, but also secures one hundred eighty-six francs for the latter as payment for the work she did while living with the Buteau family. La Grande's desire to destroy Buteau is categorical and therefore obtains for Françoise half the payment received for the construction of the road. Finally, Buteau feels the blade of Damocles Sword when La Grande secretly solicits the help of a third party to bid for Mouche's house in Françoise's favour.

The discussion dealing with the preference of economic policies-- whether to favour the worker in factories or the agricultural labourer-- is of particular importance to the narration as a whole, giving it a macroscopic national, and later international, dimension. The microscopic structural situation of the community is linked to the complex exchange relationships of commerce at the international level:

Tous deux, le cultivateur et l'usiner, le protectioniste et le libre-échangiste, se dévisagèrent, l'un avec le ricanement de sa bonhomie sournoise, l'autre avec la hardiesse franche de son hostilité. C'était l'état de guerre moderne, la bataille économique actuelle, sur le terrain de la lutte pour la vie.

M. Rochefontaine, friend of the Emperor (Nap. III, 1852-1870), discloses his theory of progress, advocating the rapid construction of roads, railroads and canals for irrigation. These means of transportation, developed with the rise of a national business class during the industrialization of France, was to provide the necessary link between production (investment)

and consumption (market), as Eric Hobsbawm suggests.²⁰ M. Rochefontaine does not have a solution to the problems at hand, the problems facing the masses. Rather, his perspective is limited, clearly directed to making higher profits by advocating a policy of free exchange on the international level. M. Hourdequin's position, like that of his rival, appears to be masking very egotistical personal interests directed towards profits and is antagonistic towards the proletariat and small land holder.

The alternative solution is expressed by Canon, Jésus-Christ's guest, who proposes the socialist alternative of the "Commune révolutionnaire de Paris". But Canon, who like the biblical figure is preaching and preparing the new way, is misunderstood and feared, by owners and labourers alike. Canon's aggressive cry of justice for all men is a concept that the rural population confuses with past ideals and history. This can be seen when Jésus-Christ calls out the motto of the 1789 pseudo-popular revolution. This provocation destroys Canon's previous image of a wandering tramp as he reacts to the implicit ideology of the motto, assuming the lucidity of a revolutionary who is well aware of class struggles and exploitation:

Vas-tu me foutre la paix avec ta liberté, ton égalité et ta fraternité!... Est-ce qu'on a besoin d'être libre? une jolie farce! Tu veux donc que les bourgeois nous collent encore dans leur poche? Non, non, on forcera le peuple au bonheur, malgré lui!... Alors, tu consens à être l'égal, le frère d'un huissier? Mais, bougre de bête! c'est en gueulant ces âneries-là que tes républicains de 48 ont foiré leur sale besogne!²¹

The utopian society Canon foresees is not real, or for that matter even plausible, for his audience--which has unconsciously accepted the eternal exploitation of the traditional social order. They cannot see themselves as active participants in the "fameux nettoyage" Canon is preaching, since

they are unable to see a positive gain coming out of a mass revolt against the upper classes. Rather, they fear the loss of the little they have. The people of the Beauce see revolt through a bourgeois perspective,-- that is, negatively. Hence their participation in reinforcing the continuation of their ongoing miserable condition as fully exploited workers. Canon denounces the new economic force of imperialism (in this particular case, American Imperialism; a Zola as visionary of a phenomenon in full expansion or perhaps a Zola as a fine analyst of an historical phenomenon). He urges the workers to take control of the economic and political powers of France in order to be saved from this menace. But such a task is far too complicated, and completely outside the "conscience possible" of this closed world, a world kept at the margins of active society, away from the ideas (consciousness) and practices (actions) of social revolution.

Living within a different system of ideological values, Canon cannot relate to such labourers, avid to become a part of the bourgeoisie. The typical reaction is that of Buteau, angry for having spent his time with politics "lorsqu'il avait des affaires sérieuses" to conclude. The basic condition of social "emarginati" together with the unconscious refusal of political "engagement" constitutes the base of these labourers' misery. This situation is possible because the exploited characters of this social community fail to see that their whole life, the organization of society, of production, distribution, exchange and consumption are regulated by the very same politics they dismiss as being a waste of time. This phenomenon is linked to the spheres of influence which the bourgeoisie retains exclusively for itself through the processes of education and cultural

hegemony. Not only are these characters cut off from the mainstream of a progressive culture, but worse, indirectly delegate their political responsibility to the bourgeois class, a class quite ready to control this crucial area of social life. Otherwise, as Marx explained, the bourgeoisie would have been unable to maintain its uncontested position as the dominant economico-political force in a society where the greatest part of the population was made up of proletarians and land labourers--especially at a time when they had "nothing to lose but their chains" and "a world to win".²²

The Final Part of the novel concludes the struggle in the contesting race of appropriating wealth. Buteau finds Fouan's savings and appropriates them legally, before the eyes of the society, by accusing his father of senility (a practice which still exists today). Being no longer a land owner or having any liquid wealth, Fouan loses all respect and prestige within his immediate society (just as La Grande had predicted when Fouan had disclosed to her the idea of dividing his possessions while still being alive). "Quand on n'a plus rien, il n'y a pas de justice, il n'y a pas de pitié à attendre", says he. Fouan feels betrayed by that very same land to which he had devoted sixty years of his life. This pathetic thought reminds him that he too "avait souhaité la fin de son père. Si, à leur tour, ses enfants désiraient la sienne, il n'en ressentait ni étonnement ni chagrin. Ça devait être!"²³ This humble resignation and degradation before the power of private property (and money) is characteristic of most of La Terre's protagonists.

Jean too feels he will never become a real farmer. His existential condition is no happier than it had been at the beginning of the novel,

since his wife now expects a child, which no one really desires. Worse is the alienation he feels towards Françoise, "le sentiment qu'il demeurerait un étranger pour sa femme: un homme d'un autre pays."²⁴

While Jean is prisoner of this feeling of estrangement, the Franco-Prussian conflict explodes. This episode is linked to the Jacques Bonhomme narration in the First Part of the novel where Fouan had declared wars to be the direct causes of the destruction of the poor labourer's sacred land. Fouan's reflection, that of an old man who has witnessed a long period of history, is important in pointing out a major contradiction within the structure of his society. Wars are called upon by the ruling classes in answer to their particular politico-economical interests; the exploited labourers are the ones called to fight these wars, unless of course they can bribe the recruiting officers with enough money. Such is the case of Nenésse, son of Delhomme; Delphin who does not have the "cash" to bribe the recruiting officer, resorts to the maiming of his index finger in order to avoid conscription.

The Prussian conflict is left aside by Zola in order to focus the attention on a more microscopic struggle for survival. There is an equivalent relationship between the two; they exist almost in tautology. Françoise, in advanced stage of pregnancy, is raped and murdered by Buteau and Lise. The violation of Françoise is premeditated and conducted rationally, with the definite goal of depriving her of Jean's child. Jean is terrified by the accident, fearing to lose land and house along with Françoise. In vain he tries to force the latter to sign a paper making him beneficiary. Françoise prefers to protect her aggressors and assassins instead of favouring Jean; she sees him as a stranger who by chance gave

her a child. The aggressors, on the other hand, are her family, even if authors of her death:

La terre, la maison, n'étaient pas à cet homme, qui venait de traverser son existence par hasard, comme un passant. Elle ne lui devait rien, l'enfant partait avec elle. A quel titre le bien serait-il sorti de la famille.²⁵

To prepare for the final catastrophe, one which goes beyond the narration of La Terre, and to set the mood for the macabre murder of Fouan, chapter four portrays an ideological conflict. Canon, the exponent of a socialism that seems always utopic in the context of the real conditions France is undergoing, continues to advocate his paradisiac society. He is attacked by Lequeu the schoolmaster, who predicts a human disaster where the land will become a bank exploited by financeers, and man's role shall be reduced to that of a machine attendant.²⁶ Lequeu envisages the coming phenomenon, an imperialism which is both the natural child of past historical and present social conditions of production, and the legitimate cousin of nationalism. Delhomme, whose world-vision coincides with that of the government of Napoleon III, insists that Napoleon shall see things through. Lequeu, on the contrary, is aware that class interests do not take into consideration the conditions and aspirations of other classes--in this case the exploited proletariat which is to sacrifice its lives to conquer new world markets for the bourgeoisie.

Through the lucid (and Marxist) analysis of the schoolmaster, Zola implies that the bourgeoisie of one country has acquired the right, the monopoly, to exploit the proletariat of another, and vice-versa. Canon, faced by the threat Lequeu sees, calls for the organization of the masses; but the quasi-anarchic Lequeu, whose anger has been cultivated by class

antagonisms and ignorance, sees total destruction as the only solution.

"Je suis pour qu'on foute tout par terre!"²⁷ Lequeu's vision of what lies ahead inspires fear; Hourdequin sees the coming storm as the end of the antagonism between small and large property. Being able to imagine only a society run by the present ruling classes, with their values, interests and aspirations, Hourdequin foresees the end of the human race and the barrenness of the land, a notion certainly of biblical inspiration.²⁸ Change is conceived of, and permitted, only if it does not rock the general structure of the establishment.

The chapter is sealed with Françoise's death. Leaving no heir, Françoise's property is legally claimed by the Buteaus, hence Jean ceases to have any claim in the territory of the Beauce. With no money or land, Jean, like Fouan, loses all respect and the little rank he had attained in society, becoming once again a social intruder, a non-entity. "Pauvre il était venu, pauvre il s'en allait".²⁹ Jean is not the only victim of someone else's desire to possess. Hourdequin is assassinated by Trou, one of his farmhands, so that he might possess Jacqueline for himself.

The new generation, represented by Nenésse, has not overcome the obsession of their parents, but rather tends to promise a more solid continuity of the formers' aspirations. Nenésse's decision to marry Eloïde is a clear-cut business venture "à la bourgeoise". When M. Charles tries to exclude the gold mine, 19 rue aux Juifs, from the deal, Nenésse is very explicit about his intentions: "ça ne fait plus mon affaire... Je veux ma cousine et la maison."³⁰ Eloïde complements Nenésse:

on ne peut pas lâcher ça, répéta-t-elle. C'est trop bon, ça rapporte trop... Et puis, une maison que vous avez faite, où vous avez travaillé si fort, est-ce que ça doit sortir de la famille?... Je veux être comme maman. Ce qu'elle a fait, je peux le faire.³¹

Zola's irony to this comment is blatant:

Alors, tout fut emporté, les Charles ruisselèrent... Sans doute, ils ne l'avaient pas élevée dans cette idée; seulement, que faire, quand le sang parle? Ils reconnaissent le cri de la vocation. Absolument la même histoire que pour Estelle."³²

The Charles are in ecstasy now that their masterwork, their lives' total effort, will be carried on. "Eloïde et Nenésse, avec la belle flamme de la jeunesse, y continueraient leur race."³³ Jean, who witnesses this scene, tries to ask M. Charles to garden. The latter refuses him on account of a fundamental law: "On ne retire rien de bon d'un parent, on ne peut pas taper dessus."³⁴ This, it seems, is the law of business that shall be constant even in Mastro-don Gesualdo: the exploiter must have no moral scruples when he comes down on those that serve him. M. Charles' efficient bourgeois etiquette forces him to dismiss a subject that cannot be taken advantage of. The members of the modern working class are, according to Zola, condemned to find work only in so far as their work ensures gains and augments the capital of the employer. The essence of the scene exemplifies the other side of this basic postulate: "a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work."³⁵

The desire for private property and interest serve as constant motivation in the characters' actions, and their attitudes towards other people. Thus Buteau and Lise commit patricide, in the presence of their children, in order to steal Fouan's money. Jean, aware of the truth concerning both Françoise's death and that of Fouan, does not feel up to denouncing the criminals, preferring to leave things as they were, for fear of becoming Buteau's next victim. He will let out his frustrations against the Prussians--other men, frustrated like himself, who have no say

about the course of events but rather are engulfed by them, often becoming their mortal victims.

The novel ends with a highly pessimistic outlook, portraying man in a deplorable social state. His significance on earth seems to be less than that experienced even by Dostoevsky's sick and spiteful man in Notes from Underground (1864), since the former cannot see the direct relationship of his traumas to the traditional conventions and social political institutions of his immediate and global community. Zola sees man as an insect earning his daily privilege of existence by participating, each and every day of his miserable life, in a terrible duel against both nature and other men. Man has no value since he has no eternity, eternity being reserved only to the earth (land, as basis of private property) from which he emerges, toils and returns. It is with this vision of man that Jean, a member of the wandering masses, sets out to fight a new war, to kill his brother labourers defined "enemy" by geographical barriers and nationalistic class interests. Property-less, he will defend "la vieille terre de France", a land owned by the instigators of the Franco-Prussian conflict.

Zola's narration comes to an end, but the tragedy of the proletariat continues to repeat itself in the less fictitious narration of history. The eternal exploitation of Jacques Bonhomme has not changed; rather, it has been disguised in order to be perpetuated.

Mastro-don Gesualdo, the artistic epilogue³⁶ of Giovanni Verga, is the Four-Part economic tragedy of an individual's attempt to climb the social ladder, a fiction built on the collapse of the moral and spiritual world of the past--that is, on the empty ideals of the Risorgimento after

Italy's unity, and on a strong belief in a world held together by the Almighty as exemplified by Manzoni's art. The fictional narration moves from the years prior 1820 that saw the birth and activities of the Carbonari sects (revolutionaries inspired by the French events) to the years immediately following the 1848 liberal revolutions that saw the elimination of socialist thought and the re-establishment of police states throughout Europe. 1848, then, becomes a fundamental date to the understanding of a much larger and complex historical phenomenon: it was precisely the failure of the 1848 revolutions that provoked the historical socio-political and cultural situations in which the authors of La Terre and Mastro-don Gesualdo lived and wrote and developed their artistic worlds.

Mastro-don Gesualdo has been defined as the Italian epic of "la roba" (literally translatable as "stuff" or "things"); but the closest equivalent in English would be "ensemble of things owned" or simply, "private property". Unlike Manzoni's long elaborated beginning to I Promessi Sposi presupposing the explicit presence of an almighty God, Verga gets the action moving in no time at all and provoked by a natural phenomenon. Gesualdo's entry in the novel is marked by the alarming cry for his property threatened by fire. "Ci ho la mia casa accanto, capite? Se ne va in fiamma tutto il quartiere!"³⁷ Gesualdo's reaction is directed entirely towards the possible danger to his property. This same reaction is noticeable at the Trao's household, where the fire originated. Don Diego, a relic of 18th century aristocracy, remembers that he must save extremely important family documents. "Le carte di famiglia! Le carte della Lite!"³⁸ The documents, drawn up hundreds of years earlier, represent the whole future existence for the Trao, who hope to re-establish the family's socio-economic status

with this case against the early lords of Sicily. All of the action's development and future themes are directly or indirectly tied up to the expedient of the fire. As a destructive force the fire provokes Gesualdo's cry for his property--property which shall remain as a constant leitmotiv of the novel. Indirectly, it allows the constant presence of the crowd to be felt--with explicit comments concerning money, property, patrimony and the law-suit (Lite) of the Trao family. As an element of surprise, the fire leads don Diego Trao to find his younger sister Bianca in bed with her cousin don Nini Rubiera. Writing in the perspective of the romantic literary tradition established by Manzoni and at the same time negating this very same movement through the adoption of a naturalist Weltanschauung, Verga does not go into the details of the surprise as Zola might well have taken great care to do. There is no place, or rather little space, in this Verist narrative for explicit lustful or provocative imagery and descriptions "à la Zola" (e.g. episode of the Bull and the Cow, rape of Françoise by Jean, incest of La Grande's grandchildren, activities of la Trouille, rape of pregnant Françoise by Buteau, etc.) The episode of the fire, which shall indirectly determine the destiny of Gesualdo till his death, has the same structural value in this novel as Fouan's decision to hand over his lands in La Terre.

19th century Sicilian society, a very closed moral world (even if only in appearance), did not tolerate the presence of unwed mothers such as appear frequently in Zola's naturalistic universe. Therefore the compelling duty to save one's honour, an honour resting on morality³³, appears as an externally imposed ideological structure in the novel. In reality, there are numerically more unwed mothers in Mastro-don Gesualdo than in

Zola's novel. This seems to be linked to a lack of social emancipation of Sicilian society. This morality complex is the social force that pushes don Diego Trao into leaving his ancestral house and into directing himself to his rich cousin, the baroness Rubiera, in order to resolve the Bianca-Nini scandal. The old gentleman, patiently awaiting his cousin's attention in order to discuss the serious matter (while the latter is busy running her stores) not only indicates their different status but seems to point at the importance for at least one social class of commerce over morality. The baroness explains that it has been impossible for her to come see the fire, since all her time has been devoted to the administration of her property. Don Diego cannot disclose the reason of his visit due to the presence of Pirtuso, a client who is secretly acting as grain-buyer on the behalf of Gesualdo. This secondary character not only affirms Gesualdo's economic presence in absentia but also creates an indirect tension here. The business-oriented Rubiera is aware of Pirtuso's role as a go-between man in this transaction. Indirectly she is instigated by Pirtuso's presence to disclose, both out of fear of the power Gesualdo is accumulating and out of respect for a man who incarnates the spirit of the business ethic, the personal ambitions of Gesualdo.

Originally a brick-layer, Gesualdo came up in the world aided by the rapid expanding industrial revolution; which brought changes even to the remote feudal society of Sicily. Gesualdo does not accumulate wealth within the prescribed limits of his trade, as tradition and society would have it; rather, it is the possible lucrative profits attainable in any business transaction that establish the limits of his speculative activities. These are the underlying reasons in his becoming a grain-buyer and to his

future intentions to bid for the "gabella delle terre comunali"⁴⁰, which had been under the control of baron Zacco's family for over half a century. The baroness, representative of the economic bourgeois-aristocracy, cannot approve of the labourer's insolent affront towards the landed nobility and explicitly formulates the law that governs the present rapidly changing society:

Oggi non si ha più riguardo a nessuno. Dicono che chi ha più denari, quello ha ragione,... Adesso non c'è altro Dio.⁴¹

Rubiera is consciously contrasting the present world she lives in with the sacred past, by comparing Gesualdo, who rose from the scum of society with the help of the "God among commodities", to the gentlemen and ladies of yesteryear whose names and landed property alone promised them a good and happy fortune.

The evocation of the past, allowing her to relate the hard work it took to accumulate her present fortune, is a device used here by Verga in order to create a greater impact with the scene that follows this digression. The sentimental odyssey stops short with the petrifying news that Rubiera's son Nini took advantage of Bianca sexually. The sly woman soon realizes that her cousin's presence is not a social visit; rather it is for the purpose of don Diego's demanding reparation to save his family's honour in the eyes of society. Thus, the eyes of the baroness betray "la inquietudine del contadino che teme per la sua roba."⁴²

Trapped, the blood ties between Rubiera and Trao disappear, giving way to the aggressive defensive lust of ownership. Rubiera's fear that Bianca gave herself to her son in order to trap Nini into a marriage of convenience provokes an explicit reflection on the situation of the woman that is also

present in Zola, that the woman is considered to be the responsible party in such circumstances, since she is, as a rule, the provocative element (as in the case of Françoise and the Trouille in La Terre). This archaic prejudice, reinforced by the other secular myth--still subsisting in today's Latin cultures--that "l'uomo è cacciatore", allows the baroness to renounce all social and moral responsibilities in the scandal. The motive behind this defensive attitude appears elementary after the analysis of La Terre.

Bianca, though of noble birth, has no dowry (except for the "Lite"), and consequently cannot add anything to the carefully accumulated wealth the Rubiera family has gathered for generations. Rubiera's logic, like that of Buteau and the daughter and granddaughter of M. Charles, is fundamentally based on the principle that "la roba" remain in the family:

Eh, caro mio! la nascita... gli antenati... tutte belle cose... non dico di no... Ma gli antenati che fecero mio figlio barone... volete saperlo quali furono?... Quelli che zapparono la terra! Col sudore della fronte, capite? No si ammazzarono a lavorare perché la loro roba poi andasse in mano di questo a di quello... capite?...⁴³

The hostile resolution in protecting property can be associated with Françoise's obstinate attitude in La Terre--to leave her property to her assassins through her categorical refusal to draw up a will to favour Jean. It is interesting to note that the episode ends with Rubiera promising to do her utmost to help Bianca; implicit is the condition that this help shall not cost her anything.

Much more successfully than Zola, Verga gives an explicit yet subtle perception of class differences and antagonisms. In chapter three, Gesualdo goes up one step in society when invited to the Spanci's house. The class

difference is portrayed in a naive yet distinct way by allowing the "fiore della nobiltà" to watch the procession of the patron saint from the huge comfortable front balcony, while Gesualdo, along with second class relatives and landless nobility, gaze through the side balcony of the house. This "imbroglio", carefully prepared by Rubiera and her relatives--together carefully scheming out of personal interest to find a good man to marry for Bianca--is filled with class contradictions, noticeable in the attitudes of the guests towards Gesualdo. Not only in the dialogues but also in the cold shoulders and silences are class judgements explicit.

Signora Sganci is hospitable towards Gesualdo in order to lure him into solving her family problems, the case of interest; the marquis Limòli is polite out of gallantry and respect for a man who has come along in society. The "imbroglio" is openly betrayed by the notary Neri (representative of that parasite class of bourgeois-functionaries that plagued Italy) who crosses himself upon seeing Gesualdo, saying: "Questa è la più bella di tutte!... Com'è vero Dio!"

Peperito, another character of this élite, openly expresses his disapproval regarding Gesualdo's union with Bianca (class antagonism in Verga, as opposed to that in Zola, is still deeply entrenched with a sense of dignified superiority probably linked to the fact that Sicilian society was socially more closed and archaic). The question of the lands of the commune comes up again pushing baron Zacco to say that Gesualdo shall possess them, "quando saran morti tutti quelli che sono nati prima di lui!... e meglio di lui!"⁴⁴ Zacco, a successful entrepreneur, not lacking any of his class' prejudices (but who can push them aside if it means doing business, as

can be seen in his future economic relationship with Gesualdo), reminds the reader that the motor of the universe is not family (blood) ties, but, rather, lucrative gains:

Che diavolo! Ciascuno fa il suo interesse... Al giorno d'oggi l'interesse va prima della parentela... Io poi non ci tengo molto alla nostra... 45.

The conversation between Bianca and Nini reveals yet another law of Verga's literary universe (a law similar in implications to one which governs Zola's), in that Nini's reply to Bianca's plea of love, that he is helpless and property-less if he dare go against his mother's principles, recalls the attitude of La Grande towards her children. Rubiera is ready to disown anyone who goes against her wishes (the power here of money), especially if it concerns marriage and consequently the division of the family's acquired property. Just as La Grande disowned her daughter because of the latter's wish to marry a man La Grande did not approve of, Rubiera is ready to act accordingly with Nini. What limits Nini's choice is therefore the fear of losing potential future property. The only solution to this lies in his mother's death, but old Rubiera, who like La Grande loves and lives for her "roba", will not give in to this demand even when paralyzed in bed. Taking into account Zola's novelistic structures, one can thus synthesize in the following manner: (I) Death is usually the pre-condition for division or inheritance of family property; (II) Available family property is the pre-condition for marriage which in turn is the pre-condition for a further appropriation of private property. This mechanism is explicitly evident in both novels.

Chapter four narrates the socio-economic rise of Gesualdo. Gesualdo

realizes a fundamental law in this process; not only is he aware that both nature and his workers go against his personal interests, but also he becomes conscious that the parasite members of his family tend to draw advantages and lucrative gains from his solid hard work. Alienated by such reflections, Gesualdo is easily led to believe by Lupi, the community priest, that his marriage with Bianca is the only way to secure the backing of the nobility, or at least to neutralize their opposition, in the acquisition of the commune's lands. Gesualdo does not suspect that Lupi is the instigator and principal lackey of the ruling class. Once again Verga subtly presents social details of the structure of Sicilian society--the close ties between landed property and the clergy.

Gesualdo's life knows no rest; his ambition to reach the summit, a sphere of activity previously reserved for the traditional bourgeoisie, nobility and country gentlemen, leaves him little time to savour the life of a man living in a social community--that community which Marx sees as being in opposition to civil or bourgeois society. The little time of rest he has is spent with Diodata. Diodata has a similar role in the economy of the story, as the unpaid prostitute, as Jacqueline in La Terre, but without the vices of the latter in wanting to possess her man's property; she is clearly less materialistic and more spiritual or romantic. Like a servile slave she satisfies her master's sexual desires and faithfully protects his interests, demanding nothing in return save the possibility of staying near him. Obligated to defend his "roba" against everyone and anyone in order to protect his interests, Gesualdo both recognizes and welcomes Diodata's useful objective value, a simple microscopic version of her master:

Sempre all'erta come tuo padrone! Sempre colle mani attorno...
 a far qualche cosa! Sempre l'occhio attento sulla mia roba!...
 Fedele come un cane!... Ce n'è voluto, sì, a far questa roba!... 46

Gesualdo tells her of the plans the others have to marry him into the nobility and thus indirectly the reader finds out that Diadata not only slaves away in the interests of her master without complaining, but moreover had children from him without claiming any rights whatsoever for them in return. Gesualdo, in order to protect himself and appease his moral guilt, has no choice but to marry her off to one of his farmhands to rid himself of both a social and moral responsibility.

The incident at Fiumegrande, from which Nardo the labourer remains crippled, portrays the unfavourable conditions under which the labouring class works, barely ensuring their survival, and how they enrich their bosses by risking their own lives. When Gesualdo goes into a rage, blaming his father for the mishap, Nardo calmly tells Gesualdo, who meanwhile raves about money and time lost on this work, that he, Nardo, is the one who lost everything because of the incident, since he can no longer help produce capital and therefore cannot continue to earn his living. This episode indicates that Nardo is conscious of his servile position of labourer, belonging to the class of labourers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work, as Marx notes, only so long as their labour increases capital.⁴⁷ Never does it occur to Nardo to ask for compensation, since in this universe a worker cannot yet conceive taking anything from his boss unless earned by hard sweat.

Needy of the consensus and backing of the nobility (or rather the public opinion of his immediate society), Gesualdo is persuaded to marry Bianca. Two factors influence him in accepting this marriage of convenience.

First, since relatives are prime enemies, he should not consider their opposition to the marriage; secondly, and more important, that money is the only viable partner for a man who aspires to rise in society. Consequently, Bianca's and Diodata's weddings follow. Both are seen as good economic transactions by Gesualdo: the first in order to secure for himself social and economic prestige, the second to neutralize Diodata from breaking up his marriage with Bianca, should she feel cheated in any way. Gesualdo, conditioned by the values of the bourgeoisie he is slowly assimilating, spends large sums of money for the preparations in order to show that he knows how to spend money when necessary--for in this world money is man's greatness. The ceremony, acting as the element of rupture between Gesualdo and his family and friends, does not assure Gesualdo a definite place within the class into which he has married. Gesualdo is convinced of having concluded a deal and not a marriage; he is pleased in having acquired good merchandise: "tu sei buona e bella!... roba fine!...roba fine sei!"⁴⁸

Because of the coldness of the nobility towards him in the Second Part of the novel, Gesualdo is determined to win over the lands of the commune, thus enraging his rival, baron Zacco, and alienating himself completely from his own father, Mastro Nunzio, who would still like, according to the traditional family way of life, to be the one to approve business ventures. Gesualdo's reaction to the pressures of Zacco, Rubiera, his own family, and priest Lupi, the business agent between the nobility and Gesualdo, is expressed in the phrase, "Ciascuno fa il suo interesse"⁴⁹, synthesizing the philosophic essence of this age of materialism and social individualism.

More important is the episode of "la Carboneria" in 1820. In Sicily a revolutionary force was becoming popular, spreading fear and concern amongst the middle and upper classes of a relatively static feudal society, literally cut off from the main socio-political turbulences of recent continental history. The Carbonari demanded their share of the land and the wealth, which had hitherto been concentrated in the hands of a few. Of particular interest is Gesualdo's reaction to this phenomenon that can be verified within the process of incorporation--the making and remaking of an effective dominant class hegemony.⁵⁰ Gesualdo's fear in losing his property, along with the precautions taken to avoid the loss, brings forth the general mechanisms by which a dominant group incorporates an oppositional emergent ideology or practice in order to remain in control and appear as champions of the newly aired social demands. At first, Gesualdo is not responsive to the threat of revolution (revolution seen as change, especially in respect to social demands) until he becomes conscious that:

Rivoluzione vuol dire rivoltare il cesto, e quelli ch'erano
sotti salire a galla: gli affamati, i nullatenenti..."⁵¹

Gesualdo does not approve of making an open counter-revolution (as had the dominant classes in previous centuries); rather, he instructs the priest Lupi to inform himself on the Carbonari and to assure them of the solid support of the nobles, land proprietors and bureaucrats. The Carbonari's revolutionary movement is in this way infiltrated and subsequently directed by the very same phenomena of the society which had indirectly brought about its existence--that is, the social injustice of the ruling classes. Gesualdo is thus saved on both fronts. His economic interest

is the force that allows him to function. His move rests on a clear-cut analysis: if the Carbonari win they will be indulgent towards him (and thus spare his property) since he fought on their side for the righteous cause; if they lose, he has the power and prestige of his property, the judicial essence of the state in bourgeois civil society, to save him. Verga portrays this episode as a farce, a "commedia buffa". By a series of misunderstandings, always within the theatrical spirit of the "commedia buffa", Verga portrays the social climber Gesualdo as a marionette controlled by social forces. The implicit message of this episode, i.e. that his money and property become Gesualdo's passport to safety, is full of socio-political implications.

Fearing that the freshly-arrived troops are after the Carbonari, Gesualdo goes into hiding at Diodata's house where her husband, a former hand of Gesualdo, enters suddenly and, with some rapid calculations, is able literally to steal land from a scared Gesualdo. Nanni's logic is:

La roba serve per queste occasioni... carceri, malattie e persecuzioni... Voi l'avete fatta, don Gesualdo, e serve per salvare la vostra pelle...⁵²

These words help to explain a phenomenon that can be seen in the development of Italian and other histories up to the present. The controlling classes have rarely suffered from revolution, sickness, or more recently, before bourgeois "justice", since they possess "la roba", the necessary wealth that is the guarantor of their safety and the calculated end of the bourgeois judicial system.⁵³ Morgan, in his Ancient Society, generalizes this observation when he notes that wealth constituted itself, in the face of the people, as such a powerful force that it permitted the haves always

to be in the right.⁵⁴ The ruling classes (especially the bourgeoisie) have had no difficulty in surmounting crises and reestablishing its rule and exploitation at the expense of the working class.

The section ends with Ninì's financial difficulties, caused by an aging mother who does not want to die and is too attached to her worldly possessions. The old Rubiera had "sotto il guanciale le chiavi del magazzino e della dispensa."⁵⁵ This recalls the fear of old Fouan for his life-savings; both characters are afraid of being robbed of their capital by children who had not worked to accumulate it and worse, who lack respect for it.

The Third Part narrates the growth and romance of Isabella Trao, supposed daughter of Gesualdo. Wanting to give Isabella the best education money could buy--a typical symptom of a social climber (refer to the Charles family in Zola)--which meant educating her away from the proletariat class he was born out of, Gesualdo takes his daughter at the age of five away from her mother, to send her to a college and later to a convent to receive a good solid religious education. Isabella must necessarily have everything Gesualdo never had. Otherwise what good was his money to him if he could not buy his daughter a correct education and allow her to be surrounded by the best people in society. The similarity in the ideological structures of Gesualdo and M. Charles' social consciousness is not a mere coincidence. Rather, it is the explicit confirmation of a class phenomenon that can be associated with the social climber in the middle decades of the 19th century.

In spite of all his money, Gesualdo's way of life is divorced from the life-style of the class he married into. This contradiction is at the

base of the complete rupture of both the human and intellectual spheres between him and Isabella. Conscious of this, Gesualdo is mortified by that lack of continuity that in M. Charles' case became reality. Isabella's insistence in utilizing her mother's noble name and not Gesualdo's and the hatred the latter generates in his daughter by his visits to the "pensionat" (where she is constantly reminded of her father's humble birth by her friends), demonstrates the failure of his marriage and his attempted integration into the nobility. Isabella rejects her father in a total way. Gesualdo, as most of Verga's characters from the cycle "I vinti" ("the defeated" or "the vanquished"), accepts the pessimistic Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest, in which the offspring rejects the parents:

Vedi, noi ci ammazziamo per fare il suo meglio, ciascuno come può, ed essa un giorno non penserà neppure a noi. Così va il mondo.⁵⁶

This pessimistic view and resignation of "Così va il mondo" plagues most of the characters of the two novels: Gesualdo, Bianca (her resignation not to marry Nini), Diodata (her resignation not to marry Gesualdo), old Fouan's "ça devait être", Jean Macquart's sense of the impossibility of forming a family and his resolution to fight in the war, Hourdequin's vision of the end of the world, etc. This ideological frame of thought is the result of certain social conditions that shall be looked at below. The cholera events of 1837 is the episode that will precipitate the moral and material defeat of Gesualdo. During the epidemic, Gesualdo, who appears to have found the good side of his heart, makes his country possessions available to his relatives and friends (class solidarity and nepotism). The episode leads to the meeting between Isabella and Corrado La

Gurna. La Gurna, a social climber of the younger generation, tries, with the aid of his aunt, to get close to Isabella, since the latter would make an excellent person to marry, especially since he owns nothing. This reinforces that principle in Engels' The Origin of the Family where marriage in modern society is seen as a business venture from the perspective both of the haves and the have-nots aspiring to rise into another social class. La Gurna's unsuccessful attempt is basically the repetition of the attempts made by Gesualdo, Nini Rubiera, Buteau and Nenésse to secure a good match. Gesualdo, with too much to lose by this union of souls built on poetry rather than property, intervenes to destroy La Gurna's plans. These chapters indicate the extent to which the concept of continuity is valued above that of change.

Gesualdo's father refuses to go to the country in order to escape the pestilence. Through Mastro Nunzio, Verga reinforces the ideology of continuity evident even within the lower classes, a series of values depicted through the concept of tradition. Mastro Nunzio reminds Gesualdo of his personal failure by indicating that the name of Gesualdo's mother was Rosaria, while his granddaughter's name is Isabella--an obvious rupture in the accustomed southern peasant tradition of naming grandchildren after their grandparents. Menaced by cholera, the marquis Limoli does not leave for the country since he would not be able to live in the habitual traditional way. These tragic figures, like those of old Fòuan and the Trao brothers (who can't seem to adapt themselves to the new changing times) are doomed to die out. The members or aspiring members of the bourgeois class are destined to survive the pestilence; members of a class that in theory is "open" to all and whose chief asset is being able

renew and remake itself constantly.⁵⁷

With the death of Gesualdo's father, the aggressive hereditary mechanism already seen in La Terre comes to the surface. Death is the pre-condition for the division of property, the pretext for family antagonism. The death of this obstinate proud patriarch, nourished by lower class pride, provokes an unexpected conflict between Gesualdo and his sister. Speranza (her name indicates her character, i.e. hope) speaks of a testament and therefore heredity; she implies that the fortune Gesualdo carefully accumulated be split amongst the children of Mastro Nunzio. The situation is intensified with the sudden claim of Diodata's husband, who wants his share of the fortune for the children he has been feeding, children who in reality are the offspring of Gesualdo and Diodata.

The personal existential tragedy develops parallel to the systematic attack against Gesualdo's private property. His family's antagonistic pretence to Gesualdo's property, his natural children's claim, and Isabella's insistence in marrying La Gurna, mark the initial phase of the downward thrust that will characterize Gesualdo's remaining days. Gesualdo tries to open Isabella's eyes to La Gurna's calculated interests which he sees masqueraded in the love La Gurna professes for his daughter:

Il mondo, vedi, è una manica di ladri... Tutti che fanno: levati di lì e dammi il fatto tuo... Ognuno cerca il suo guadagno... Vedi, vedi... te lo dico?... Se tu non avessi nulla, nessuno ti seccherebbe... E un negozio, capisci?... Il modo d'assicurarsi il pane per tutta la vita. Uno che è povero, uomo a donna, sia detto senza offendere nessuno, s'industria come può... Gira l'occhio intorno; vede quello che farebbe al caso suo... E allora mette in opera tutti i mezzi per arrivarci, ciascuno come può... Uno, poniamo, ci mette il casato, e un altro quello che sa fare il meglio... le belle parole, le occhiate tenere... Ma chi ha giudizio, dell'altra parte, deve badare ai suoi interessi...⁵⁸

In spite of this protective warning from Gesualdo based on self-interest, love impedes Isabella from seeing things as her father does--another recurrent event supporting the ideological structure of negative continuity in the novel, here from Gesualdo's perspective. This seems apparent when Isabella becomes pregnant in spite of her father's constant observation. Gesualdo ruins La Gurna's plans with the friendly collaboration of the law⁵⁹ and contracts a formal wedding of convenience with the duke of Leyra. The similarity characterized between Isabella and her mother--wedding of convenience--reinforces the structure of continuity inherent to the general development of events in the novel.

The Final Part of the novel, the total defeat of Gesualdo, is analogous to that of Jean in La Terre, whereby the efforts of both protagonists, in attempting to establish a secure family life, fail. Isabella tries to commit suicide because of the intolerable amorphous life she leads with the duke. Gesualdo, on the other hand, constantly reduces his wealth (by sending money to the duke) so as to buy his daughter's happiness. The ever-growing trauma that accompanies the diminution of his property is artistically expressed in a phrase synthesizing this process and reducing it to a blunt naturalistic description:

Due o tre volte, in circostanze gravi, era stato contretto a lasciarsi cavar dell'altro sangue. Tutti i suoi risparmi se ne andavano da quella vena aperta, le sue fatiche, il sonno della notte. E pure Isabella non era felice.⁶⁰

These family problems occur amidst the unsuccessful series of revolts and revolutions that begin in Sicily and spread throughout Europe in 1848. The personal drama of Gesualdo is thus fused in with a much larger historical

upheaval recalling the expedient already successfully used by Zola at the end of La Terre--the parallel development of personal and historical events. The solidarity of the nobility, in keeping the peasants from taking possession of lands of the commune, recalls the schemes of the bourgeoisie pointed out by Lukács' analysis of Balzac's Les Paysans⁶², i.e. the plots of the rising bourgeoisie to remain in total control of the newly available property.

The 1848 revolt finds its equivalent in Gesualdo's household situation, a microcosm of society. With a dying wife to take care of (the past), Gesualdo even with the help of his money is unable to find people to assist her. He is bluntly told by a once faithful woman servant that her own skin is as valuable as is the life of a rich lady. An inevitable cancer, resulting from the historical development of the masses (even if partial), has set in Gesualdo's empire and slowly gnaws away at its entrails--at his private property.

The alarming liberal revolt is seen by Verga as another comedy much in the way of the Carbonari's insurrection of 1820. The upper classes once more choose to pledge their solidarity to the liberal instigators in order to retain their privileged position within the social structure:

S'ha da far la dimostrazione, capite? Gridare che vogliamo Pío Nono e la libertà anche noi... Se no ci pigliano la mano i villani. Dovete esserci anche voi. Non diamo cattivo esempio, santo Dio.⁶³

The constant ideological structure--constant change and adaptation in order to retain hegemony--of the ruling classes repeats itself to absurdity. Gesualdo is lucid and does not want to play games, "Ah! La stessa canzone della Carboneria?"⁶⁴ says he. In the confusion created by the mob

claiming equality and freedom (an anachronism of 1789) gathered before his house, Gesualdo is stopped from being with his wife on her death bed.

The economic ruling classes' sudden enfeverishment in defending liberty in the name of the masses is 1789 all over again. The empty idealistic concepts of "liberté, fraternité, égalité" designed to calm the angry masses ignorant of similar previous betrayals, at home and abroad, in the name of a similar ideology, assures the continuity of bourgeois rule.⁶⁵ Some notables try to calm the masses at the expense of a confused Gesualdo, more dead than alive, but the latter regains his vitality when he realized that his property is in danger: "Voglio ammazzare prima una dozzina! A chi ti vuol togliere la roba levagli la vita!"⁶⁶ is his angry retort.

The force behind class solidarity is mutual interest. The landowners want to protect Gesualdo only to protect themselves, while Speranza protects the latter to receive some material reward out of the pseudo-sisterly gesture. The term "sanguisuga" (leech) becomes frequent in Gesualdo's language, together with the phrase "succhiarli il sangue" which is directed both to the doctors who are treating his illness and to his son-in-law who uses Isabella to rob Gesualdo of his "roba". Gesualdo is aware of the catastrophe that is becoming ripe by the day. "Il mondo andava ancora pel suo verso, mentre non c'era più speranza per lui."⁶⁷ Having realized this: "avrebbe voluto distruggere d'un colpo tutto quel ben di Dio che aveva accumulato a poco a poco. Voleva che la sua roba se ne andasse con lui, disperata come lui."⁶⁸

Gesualdo is in a similar situation, as are the characters of La Terre. His lands, which existed before his birth, will remain, while he shall die.

Driven by the appetite of possession, this thought intensifies and furthers his agony. Like old Fouan and other "personaggi verghiani", such as Padron 'Ntoni in I Malavoglia, Gesualdo shall not have the possibility as his forefathers did, to die in his own home--a phenomenon now seen as rupture with a secular tradition, and family alienation. These people appear as isolated figures in history, having broken with an old secular tradition, while not having become fully part of the new current (to be compared and contrasted to those who want to die in their own home at all cost, such as La Grande, Mouche, the baroness Rubiera, Mastro Nunzio, masquis Limoli and the brothers Trao). They are in a kind of limbo, belonging nowhere. Dying not in one's home but in some strange place is regarded, in the traditional criticism of Luigi Russo, as the direct consequence of sinning against the sacred traditional temple of the family; this is an analysis that must however be considered ideologically within the cultural practices and effective dominant culture of Italy. Rather than insisting on such moral consequences, it seems more acceptable that this episode be linked with the general "Weltanschauung" of the naturalistic universe of both Zola and Verga: a man dies outside his traditional environment not for having sinned against the traditional family temple (as idealist criticism would have it), but because in his struggle for survival he is overcome by more powerful individuals and economic forces; these do not allow him the traditional death.

Gesualdo speaks an economic language and will retain a pessimistic vision of the world till the end, the logic of his universe not differing much from that portrayed by Zola.

Così va il mondo, pur troppo, che, passando il primo bollore, ciascuno tira innanzi per la sua vita e bada agli affari propri.⁶⁹

It appears at first that Gesualdo is not murdered for his money, as was Fouan. And yet he is, indirectly. He dies alone in a strange house without even having the benefit of making a will to dispose as he wishes of that sacred property to which all his energy had been devoted. The pessimistic resignation to the world order, "Così va il mondo, pur troppo", has the same ideological value as the pessimism of old Fouan's "Ça devait être!"⁷⁰

Both novels end with a major historical crisis, Mastro-don Gesualdo with the liberal counter-revolutions of 1848, and La Terre with the Franco-Prussian War. These were periods of crises and wars that were conducted at the expense of the land labourer and proletariat, to reconstruct and reconsolidate the bourgeois domination in a society that had begun to show signs of social, political and economic deteriorations.

A look at the social mechanism of the family unit as well as the family-state relationship--within the wider European historical perspective--will help advance this analysis and arrive at certain preliminary conclusions. These conclusions should be matched up--in a more in-depth study--with more novels of this same period, produced in different European countries on their way to industrial development and, consequently, social change.

FOOTNOTES

II

¹ Honoré de Balzac, Illusions perdues (Garnier frères, Paris, 1961).

² Émile Zola, La Terre (Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1973), p.54.

³ Ibid, p.57.

⁴ Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1948).
Engels deals with the police-state relationship indicating how the police is the guardian of both the state and of private property, the state being founded on private property.

⁵ Zola, op. cit., p.67.

⁶ Ibid, p.70.

⁷ Ibid, p.70.

⁸ Ibid, p.83.

⁹ Ibid, p.104.

¹⁰ Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, in K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, vol. I (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973), p.112.

¹¹ Zola, op. cit., p.122.

¹² Discussions by Marx in Grundrisse and Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.

¹³ Marx-Engels, op. cit., p.111. "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation."

¹⁴ The whole question of the phenomenon of prostitution in bourgeois society is centered around this problem, i.e. "women" as commodity value.

¹⁵ Laura Balbo, Stato di famiglia: bisogni privato collettivo (Etas Libri, Milano, 1976), pp.9-32.

¹⁶ In many societies the loss of virginity calls for marriage. Therefore the loss of virginity may result in a gain of property for the man.

¹⁷ Zola, op. cit., p.275.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.363.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.354.

²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution (Cardinal, London, 1973).

²¹ In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx narrates how the republicans (bourgeois and aristocrats) and the Lumpenproletariat joined forces under the "Party of Order" against the proletariat, the "Party of Anarchy." Every social and political reform asked by the masses, associated with Socialism by the ruling classes, was castigated as an attempt against bourgeois society.

Zola, op. cit., p.359.

²² Marx-Engels, op. cit., p.137.

²³ Zola, op. cit., p.408.

²⁴ Ibid, p.410.

²⁵ Ibid, p.428.

²⁶ Karl Marx, Grundrisse (Penguin Books, 1974); the role of division of labour in production. Marx in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte associates Napoleon III and Co. with the financiers of France.

²⁷ Zola, op. cit., p.442.

²⁸ It is interesting to see how Hourdequin related the end of the human race and fertility of the land directly to the fall of the bourgeois concept of society.

²⁹ Zola, op. cit., p.451.

³⁰ Ibid, p.459.

³¹ Ibid, p.460.

³² Ibid, p.460.

³³ Ibid, p.460.

³⁴ Ibid, p.461.

³⁵ Karl Marx - Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, in K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, vol. I (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1973).

³⁶ Luigi Russo, Giovanni Verga (Editori Laterza, Bari, 1959).

³⁷ Giovanni Verga, Mastro-don Gesualdo (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Verona, 1973), p.40.

³⁸ Ibid, p.55.

³⁹ Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, L'Idéologie allemande (Editions Sociales, Paris, 1968).

"La production des idées, des représentations et de la conscience est d'abord

directement et intimement mêlée à l'activité matérielle et au commerce matériel des hommes, elle est le langage de la vie réelle. Les représentations, la pensée, le commerce intellectuel des hommes apparaissent ici encore comme l'émanation directe de leur comportement matériel. Il en va de même de la production intellectuelle telle qu'elle se présente dans la langue de la politique, celle des lois, de la morale, de la religion, de la métaphysique, etc., de tout un peuple." p.50.

⁴⁰ Verga, op. cit., p.64.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.64. The statement of the baroness can be compared to a statement by Marx in the Grundrisse. "The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket. Money is therefore the God among commodities. Since it is an individuated, tangible object, money may be randomly searched for, found, stolen, discovered; and this general wealth may be tangibly brought into the possession of a particular individual." Literature is full of such examples starting with the characters of Molière.

⁴² Verga, op. cit., p.69.

⁴³ Ibid, p.72.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.82. Only death can engender yet another distribution of power and/or property.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.86.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.116.

⁴⁷ Marx-Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, p.114.

⁴⁸ Verga, op. cit., p.169.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.184.

⁵⁰ Raymond Williams, Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory, revised text of a lecture given in Montreal, April 1973. Now in *NLR*, 82.

⁵¹ Verga, op. cit., p.184-196. It is essential to note that the initiative was not taken by the old ruling class, but by Gesualdo, a "nouveau riche". (my italics)

⁵² Ibid, p.197.

⁵³ Karl Marx, La Question juive, introduction by Robert Mandrou (Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, 1975). The criticism of droits de l'homme and constitutions of the political state and related law.

⁵⁴ This is reported by Engels in The Origin of the Family. The harm provoked by wealth to the lower classes is best illustrated today by the flight of capital and brains from countries becoming politically emancipated.

⁵⁵ Verga, op. cit., p.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.255. (my italics)

⁵⁷ Gian Franco Venè, Capitale e letteratura (Sugar Co. Edizioni, Milano, 1974). An acute analysis of the complex and contradictory relationships of literature to capital and ideology.

⁵⁸ Verga, op. cit., p.288. (my italics)

⁵⁹ Engels states in The Origin of the Family etc. that in mostly all forms of the State, in the period he calls civilization, the rights accorded to its citizens are moreover graduated according to this wealth. This fact alone testifies that the State is an organization to protect the class of owners against the class without property (last chapter). Also Marx in Grundrisse.

⁶⁰ Verga, op.cit., p.306. (my italics)

61 G.D.H. Cole, Storia del pensiero socialista, V.volumi, vol.I "I precursori, 1789-1850" (Laterza, Bari, 1973).

62 Georg Lukács, Studies in European Realism (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1964), pp.21-46.

63 Verga, op. cit., p.327. (my italics)

64 Ibid, p.327.

65 Karl Marx, Early Writings, Introduction by Luccio Colletti (Penguin Books Ltd, Middlesex, 1975). Colletti writes: "society is invoked in order to render asocial interests sacred and intangible; the cause of equality among men is defended, so that the cause of inequality among them (private property) can be acknowledged as fundamental and absolute". p.37.

66 Verga, op. cit., p.337.

67 Ibid, p.361.

68 Ibid, p.361.

69 Ibid, p.374.

70 Zola, La Terre, p.408.

Men are not wicked, but subject to their interests. One must not, therefore, complain of the wickedness of men but about the ignorance of lawmakers who have always put private interest in opposition to the general interest.

Karl Marx
The Holy Family

III

The history of ideas demonstrates that the dominant ideas of any society, in any epoch, are always only the ideas of the dominant class, writes Marx in the Manifesto. In other words, the class that owns the means of material production disposes also of the means of intellectual production. It follows that the ideas of those who do not participate in the intellectual production of a nation are subjected and conditioned by the rule of the dominant class. Raymond Williams¹ arrives at the same conclusion as Marx, stating that constitutions, theories and ideologies, which are claimed as natural, or having universal validity or significance, have to be seen as expressing and ratifying the domination of a particular class. The present analysis will proceed by linking what can be called for the purposes of this analysis--the ideology of the family--to the state, and the latter to other states in general.

Years of marxist analysis and discussions on cultural theory have dismissed the idea of isolating an object or phenomenon and then proceeding to the discovery of its components. On the contrary, the analysis of man's relationships in the advanced stage of social organization defined

as bourgeois society is the practice the nature of which is under examination here.

Bourgeois society is not an abstraction, but rather the ensemble of material relationships of individuals in a definite stage of socio-economic development, determined by the productive forces. It is the relationship of law to private property that is fully expressed within the state. Bourgeois society is the rule of private property; its nature appears to be founded on egotistical class interest.² In order to arrive at the relationship of private property and the bourgeois state on the European scale, the families as economic unit in both Zola's and Verga's novels will serve as my point of departure.

The family structure as we know it is a constructed social product of western civilization by which means individual wealth is accumulated in the hands of few, and justified in the name of universal progress. As early as 1845-46, Marx states in L'Ideologie allemande, speaking of the division of property: "elle implique donc la propriété, donc la première forme, le germe, réside dans la famille où la femme et les enfants sont les esclaves de l'homme".³ Engels in The Origin of the Family gives a general definition of the family that complements the previous statement. The family is not the result of sexual love, since sexual love was the basis of communal life before western civilization. The family in civil society is a convention, the first form of the family based not on natural but rather social conditions, particularly on the triumph of individual property over primitive spontaneous communism.⁴

The consolidation of the family unit was meant also to secure the faithfulness of the woman to her man and thus ensure the male of the

paternity of his children, beneficiaries of his property. Considering the alterations the family underwent in civilization up until the 19th century, a basic postulate still holds, i.e. that marriage, the pre-condition of the family, is always a marriage of convenience closely tied to class interests. This type of marriage therefore engenders the question of prostitution that Marx attaches to the bourgeois family. Monogamy and prostitution are therefore created out of the individual's desire to appropriate wealth and transmit this wealth, through inheritance, to his sons. This process indicates that the decisive element in forming a family is not based on the individual's natural desire for procreation or sexual need. On the contrary, the family unit appears to be solidly dependent upon a case of material self-interest. If the family presupposes economic interest as the basic requirement for its existence, it will attempt to influence necessarily the future of the families its individual members, its children, are to form, in the name of family interest. One can conclude that the family appears to have arrived at its furthest stage of development as an organic economic unit, resting on private property, and whose basic organizational structure aspires to a further accumulation of wealth.

The organization and relationship of the family as such, multiplied many times over, in all the complexities one can imagine, lays down the necessary conditions and relationships that give rise to a society divided in property and property-less classes. Just as for the efficient running of the tight economic unit of the family a home is needed, similarly the running and controlling of a class must necessarily result in the tight control of an area usually delimited by territorial boundaries and eventually run by the efficient machinery called "state". This state subsequently

becomes the practical expression of the powers and aspirations of the dominant class or classes.

In criticizing the concept of state in Hegel, Marx demonstrates at length the flaws of the idealist tradition that conceived the state as the collective unity of a people, as distinct from civil society where man is conceived as having an individualistic nature. In reality, the division of man into citizen (species-being or communal being) and member of civil society (individual) is the:

contradiction entre l'intérêt particulier et l'intérêt collectif qui amène l'intérêt collectif à prendre, en qualité d'Etat, une forme indépendante, séparée des intérêts réels de l'individu et de l'ensemble et à faire en même temps figure de communauté illusoire, mais toujours sur la base concrète des biens existant dans chaque conglomérat de famille et de tribu, tels que liens du sang, langage, division du travail à une vaste échelle et autres intérêts... 5

It was by declaring the state independent of the individual's egoism that the ruling classes were able to continue their domination (hereditary wealth and property) and exploitation (newly accumulated wealth) over the masses in the name of universal principles and rights of man. From this perspective it can be understood how the modern bourgeois state was able to deceive the working masses and small land-labourers with great mastery and therefore perpetuate the secular antagonisms and illusions upon which the former classes thrived.

This limited and oversimplified description of the modern state suggests that the state is a power that is neither imposed externally on society nor is it the manifestation of Hegel's "moral ideal". Rather, it is an historical constructed product of a society that has reached a certain stage of development in production, thereby securing--through the

mediating powers of state institutions such as police and law--the advantageous social position of the classes it represents by perpetuating social antagonisms within the established constitutional limits of Law and Order.

In this progression, the family has always been indirectly present. The transition, or rather, the organic relation of the family to the state, remains evident. In communal societies, clans and tribes had a form of government based on the individual members of the tribe or clan. Thus, if the whole clan moved to another area, the state moved with them; for socio-political power was based on the people of the tribe and not on specific territorial demarcations. The very foundation of the modern state, on the other hand, is based on territorial divisions safeguarding the rights of the citizens within its pre-established area of political and social jurisdiction. This suggests explicitly that the socio-political entity of the state is no longer the universal expression of a people but rather only of those constantly living on land delimited by boundaries. At first the situation seems no different than the division of power in pre-civilized communities, until it becomes clear that the states within the development of Western Civilization, especially after the fall of the feudal system, were always controlled by those directly owning the land and wealth.

The structural similarities between state and family become apparent since the family too is an economic entity whose rule guarantees the rights of the individual members within the specific area of its control, its private domain, the home. The early family seems therefore to have projected its organization and aspirations into the state, relinquishing part of its authority to the state. This, far from being the subordination

of the family to the state, suggests the confirmation of the family's essence, including familial hierarchies, immortalized within the state structure.

The supposedly modern independent state, being the expression of the most intricate phase of social organization in man's history, necessarily develops, in harmony with its historical development, special institutions organic to the family structure in order perpetually to protect the owning classes from the property-less masses, and to directly control the distribution of wealth produced by the nation. The most blunt and effective expression of these institutions has been the "gendarmerie" or "police", the custodian of state Order (episodes of this are reported in La Terre, and more explicitly in Mastro-don Gesualdo and Germinal). The role and efficiency of the police can be understood structurally within the basic power structure of the family.

The role of the father in the family also appears to be equivalent to that of the bourgeoisie in society. Having already suggested how the Law and Order of the state is the perfected expression of the bourgeoisie's nature, it follows that the police's role in the state is equivalent to the role of the father in the family. The state appears to be the macrocosmic expression of the family; the running of the state seems then consistent with the aspirations of the family unit.

Recent Marxist critics have attempted to deal with works of art in relation to the complex explicit or implicit ideological components in an attempt to bring out the concrete substance--the concrete "noyau" of consciousness (Goldmann: conscience possible) the work of art contains about the world we live in. Consistent with this critical perspective the task

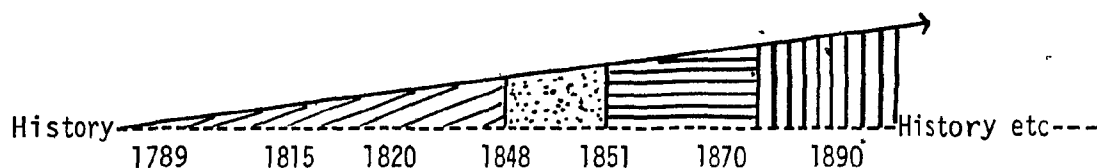
ahead consists in pointing out the specific content or "ideology"--as Marx would probably say--present within the work, and subsequently, evaluate this cognitive content, socially, politically, and existentially. This can be undertaken regardless of the polemic centered around the concepts of "real" and "false" class-consciousness or progressive and reactionary point of view à la Zdanov. The finding of any knowledge whatsoever is extremely useful in a Marxist analysis even if this knowledge be "real" bourgeois knowledge. What is at stake here is ideology as a tenor or vehicle of socio-political consciousness--potential ideological transformation or value judgements that help indicate contradictions more clearly.

Interpreting the novels of Zola and Verga in this perspective required a general understanding of each novel's internal mechanism--as attempted in Part Two of this study; the analysis can proceed to examine the internal relationships the two works appear to have in common.

Two basic relationships appear to be present in the novels, between the textual structures, and the apparent ideologies of the contents. These mechanisms can be related to a citation of Engels in The Origin of the Family, where he states that the whole of civilization's evolution moves in a constant contradiction, i.e. in relation to the opposing interests of the classes engaged in perpetual antagonistic warfare. The first relationship shows an increasing direct development between the growing conscious aspiration of accumulating wealth and the reactionary ideology of continuity as opposed to revolution--the revolutionary ideology intended as radical change in the social mechanisms of production and distribution. From the opening of the novels in question to their endings, the major preoccupation of both property and property-less classes is focused on the

PROGRESS & REACTIONARY INDICATOR

Progress & Reactionary Ideology in bourgeois society

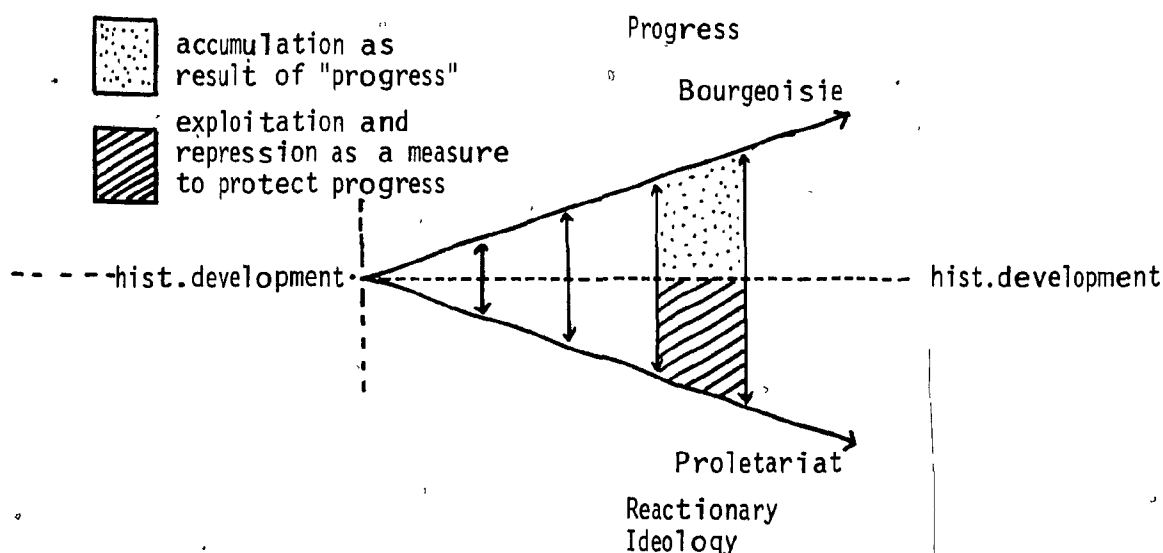


-  period of social upheaval
-  bourgeois consolidation
-  nationalism
-  imperialism

systematic consolidation and accumulation of private property. This is seen in the attitudes of Buteau, M. Charles, M. Charles' granddaughter, Françoise, Jean, Gesualdo, baroness Rubiera, Nini Rubiera, baron Zacco, Nanni, etc. As the accumulation of wealth (or potential perspectives for social upward mobility) increases--and this can only increase with the systematic exploitation of the property-less and small owners in bourgeois society, according to Marx--the reactionary ideology of social, political and ideological continuity as opposed to social, political and ideological revolution increases and assumes a more violent and controlling nature.

What appears as a direct relationship represented on the above graph is in reality an inverted direct relationship when an additional variable (i.e.

the proletariat and land labourer class) is considered within this mechanism. The latter class participates to some insignificant degree in the overall accumulative progress of appropriating private property and wealth, but is at the receiving end of the reactionary ideology of the state (the ideology in all its physical and mental manifestations, including violence).



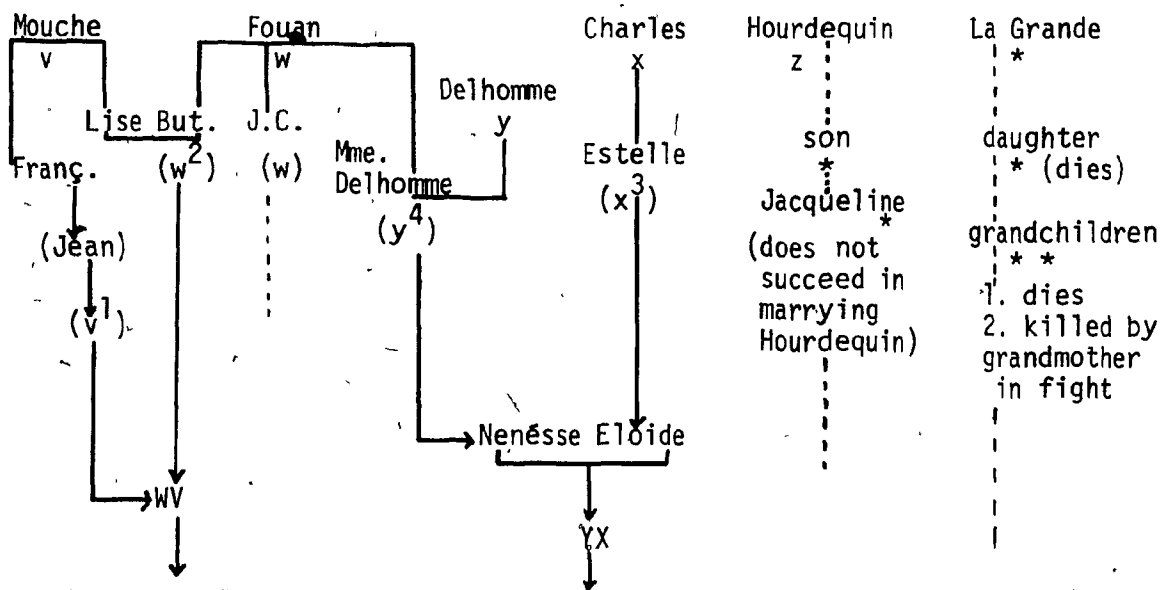
Progress and reaction act as complementary elements in this specific relationship. For the bourgeoisie, progress and bourgeois reaction are two positive variables out to perpetuate and safeguard a social system of inequality based on social status derived from the accumulation of private property. For the proletariat, these same variables act as negative forces, since they lead towards the progressive impoverishment and exploitation of the working classes. The proletariat participates fully in the production of national wealth but not so equally in the re-distribution of the wealth he has produced entirely with his labour. Furthermore, the

proletariat becomes the direct object of bourgeois reactionary ideology that is out to impede or at least slow down the proletariat's socio-economic-political emancipation.

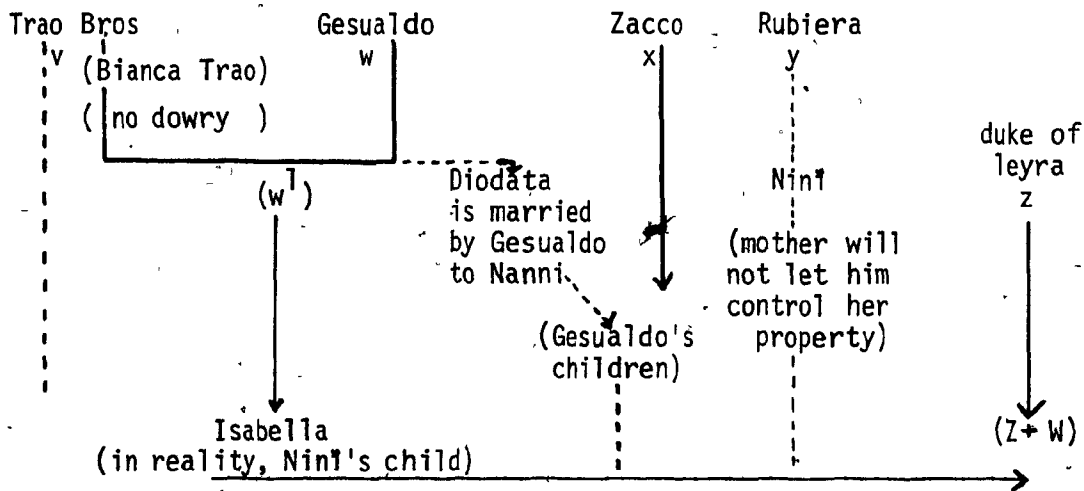
The second relationship in the novels La Terre and Mastra-don Gesualdo concerns a mechanism of open structures, a situation where individual v, w, x, y, or z in a given society has different possibilities of socio-economic development and betterment, and the consolidation or closing structures, again a situation where v, w, x, y, or z form family units v^1 , w^2 , x^3 , etc. to ensure survival and accumulate property; and finally closed or static structures (where again v^1 , w^2 , x^3 , etc. become antagonistic towards other similar units in order to appropriate their property, or unite with other units of the same kind for specific interest and thus forming frozen forms V, W, X, Y, and Z. As the novels proceed towards the end, the possibilities of each individual succeeding in attaining his or her respective goals become fewer and fewer as strong individual family units take control or integrate with others first to further the process of accumulation and then to hold fast (in their hands) political and economic influence.

The more efficient mechanism in handing down property in La Terre appears to be related to the more efficient and developed French capitalism as compared to its more relative naive Italian counterpart. Nevertheless, the process still holds true in both cases.

LA TERRE: (5 family units of property)



MASTRO-DON GESUALDO: (5 family units of property)



....* (no continuity possible; no children, or children are dead.)

It appears evident that in this particular type of social mechanism, progress--seen as the accumulation of wealth--becomes possible only insofar as many other family units or individuals are reduced to a position of disadvantage by the re-distribution mechanism of wealth in the bourgeois system of production and by the state laws and institutions of the ruling classes. These structures of social organization--as represented within the two novels of Zola and Verga--are the artistic expressions of an ideological Weltanschauung orbiting around a socio-political consciousness that has come to be known as Nationalism. This central feature within the development of modern capitalism, along with the key optimistic belief in the progress of steady on-going accumulation of property, appears to be clearly expressed in both the structures and the ideological consciousness of the contents of La Terre and Mastro don Gesualdo.

FOOTNOTES

III

¹ Raymond Williams, Base and Superstructure, N.L.R., and reworked in Marxism and Literature (Oxford University Press, London, 1977).

² Marx develops this idea in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.

³ Karl-Marx - Friedrich Engels, L'Idéologie allemande (Editions Sociales, Paris, 1968), p.61.

⁴ Friedrich Engels in chapter II of The Origins of the Family.

⁵ Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels, op. cit., p.61. (my italics)

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.

Karl Marx
Manifesto of the Communist Party

CONCLUSION

Halfway through the last century, Marx and Engels made a rigorous socio-political analysis of capitalist society. They concluded that the basis of social living was constituted by the relationships men established amongst themselves in view of the production of material goods necessary for their existence. It was precisely on this production base relationship that institutions such as the family, beliefs such as the myth of "progress", theories and opinions such as those concerning the "private" or "individualistic" side of man, and ideologies--including aesthetic and experimental artistic expressions--have developed; each of these social aspects reflecting in its own way the material conditions and necessities of the society in question at a given stage of development. Both Marx and Engels gave considerable attention to the formation and the internal and social mechanisms of the traditional family which they considered to be the fundamental cell of past societies; nevertheless, the bourgeois family network was never considered as being a natural or static social mechanism, since it too rested on a material base and was governed by a specific ideology or superstructure. In other words, the family structure and the corresponding ideology of Marx's and Engels' analysis was the basic social unit on which the capitalist system was built; a family--centre of

security--governed by the father whose social and hegemonic role was to assure the security of the family group and consequently to conserve and expand the family possessions. In this family framework reigned the pre-dominant economic importance of the male child; male children usually inherited the family wealth and ensured a continuum of the former family by forming another family with the same name.

The social structure and role of the family along with the mechanism in appropriating property as presented in Zola's La Terre and Verga's Mastro-don Gesualdo appear to coincide closely with the observations exposed by Marx and Engels. The presence of a capitalist economy is evident both within the development of the narrative structure and the ideological consciousness of the novels. This is of no surprise mainly because both authors lived in class societies based on private property and participated as producers of culture within a culture that was dominated by the capitalist work ethic and myth of "progress". It is working within the possible perspectives of consciousness delimited by such a world-view that the lack of a socialist (or "socializzante") perspective--either as a philosophic theory or social action of change in opposition to capitalist society--can be understood.

Zola and Verga were unjustly accused by both left and right-wing critics. The left argued that the authors' class prejudices prevented them from portraying open class clashes between the two opposing forces contending the right to rule, while the right attacked Zola and Verga on grounds of morality and artistic incompetence; accusations that were meant to divert attention from the implicit revolutionary content of their art. These authors were unpopular especially with regard to official critics because--

with the help of their positivistic based aesthetics--they had stumbled on the key social institution--the pivot point--of capitalist society. Both Verga and Zola presented a fictional society that was not a harmonious entity--as bourgeois political economists wanted to believe--nor a society actively engaged in class antagonisms--as leftist critics expected. It is precisely the lack of a coherent one-sided world-view that makes the content of these novels revolutionary--or rather culturally oppositional--in nature.

Instead of focusing on the general and at the same time more complex macrocosmic process of a production-distribution relationships of capitalist organization both novelists concentrate their analysis on the smallest reducible microcosmic social component of modern society, the family. It was by closely looking at this social institution interacting within a larger social conglomeration that the authors revealed certain fundamental mechanisms and rules inherent to the family structure and thus directed pungent criticism towards the institution of the family as well as the ideology governing this particular social cell. Interestingly enough, Zola and Verga do not attack the institution of the family within the confines of a particular class, rather, they deal with the family structure and its relationship to private property as a frozen, almost transcendental static social form; a man-made institution more powerful than man. The novelists' socio-political criticism is ever the more striking by having associated negative values to the institution of the family, mainly those of egotistical self-interest, of exploitation, of dominance and finally aggressive destructive competition.

The essence of the family institution is condemned throughout La Terre and Mastro-don Gesualdo and yet the family still prevails as the privileged

functional social unit at the closing of the works. This position is significant on both the ideological and social levels of consciousness. Ideologically the artists are working within a cultural sphere built on the ideological structure of continuity even if their specific method of expression--Naturalism--appears to be built on an ideology of rupture. Socially the message is more severe; the institution is stronger than the people who live within it and consequently the family can break the individual but the contrary is not possible. The human being comes and goes within the naturalistic universe; he is a temporary visitor, while the family structure--with its traditions--is capable of surviving eternally. The apparent father-son antagonism between old Fouan and Buteau and Gesualdo and Mastro Nunzio are personal struggles to determine who will head the family and administer the property. Never for one moment is there any question of going against the "sacred institution" of the family. The individual members within a family cell kill one another to gain control of it, but the family is always protected. Buteau and Gesualdo go against the family cell governed by their fathers only to the advantage of their own family cell. The best example showing the socially built-in system of safeguarding the family is seen in La Terre. On her death bed, Françoise can only think of securing her property to Buteau and Lise--her assassins; it would have been unthinkable for her to go against Buteau and Lise and let her property leave the family and go to Jean.

The consciousness behind a world-view demanding to uphold the social constitution of the family--at all costs--is meaningful both socially and politically. The family is seen as the stable element or point of reference within a fast changing industrial society governed by the bourgeois myth of

constant change and progress. While professing unlimited progress and constant change (or adaptability with the times) as a social philosophy, the family structures appear to remain frozen. This contradiction seems to indicate that the notions of change and progress are empty ideological categories since the hegemonic social structure of society is built on the socio-political stability of the ruling classes--which implies frozen social structures.

Verga and Zola could not express an utopian communistic society as left-wing critics pretended. Their poetics deduced and built on a positivistic and materialistic world-view could not indicate a utopian form of social organization within a society built on classes and private property. In other words, the social reality which inspired their art showed little or no signs of betterment for the masses. Thus their conservative withdrawal at the end of the novels. The lack of an alternative perspective in La Terre and Mastro-don Gesualdo should not be seen as an attempt to uphold the bourgeois system of values; if Verga and Zola do not portray socialism or socialist man, they nevertheless denounce the social evils associated with a capitalist economy.

Regardless of Zola's and Verga's personal and artistic limitations, their novels are of key importance within the prolific "realist" narrative production of the nineteenth century. As critiques of society, La Terre and Mastro-don Gesualdo are part of that continuous line of masterpieces of bourgeois literature that denounce--with the knowledge of the world they carry--the horrors and injustices of the social conditions contemporary to them. The absence of solutions in both these writers is an early confirmation of the crises that Europe was to undergo at the turn of the

century. By associating a world in transformation with a world in rapid decomposition, Verga's and Zola's attitude towards the concept of progress that prevailed in bourgeois society was like Walter Benjamin's angel of history:

His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Walter Benjamin
Illuminations

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