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Rewriting the Limits between History and Fiction: Jorge Luis Borges in the Work of Leonardo Sciascia

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PhD Comparative Literature



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Declaration

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

Clara Martínez Nistal

Contents

Abstract.....	5
Note on primary texts, translations and abbreviations	6
Acknowledgements.....	10
INTRODUCTION	11
1. Politics and literature	14
2. History and literature	20
3. Methodology.....	23
4. Project outline.....	29
CHAPTER 1. The Detective Story and the Search for Truth.....	35
1. Sciascia on the detective story	37
2. Borges on the detective story	38
3. The detective fiction genre.....	40
4. Borges's detective fiction.....	44
5. Sciascia's detective fiction	50
5.1. Detective fiction and mafia	52
5.2. Detective fiction and universal mafia	57
6. Conclusion.....	69
CHAPTER 2. <i>L'affaire Moro</i> and Borges: Circularity between Literature and Life.....	72
1. Historical context: the Moro case.....	73
2. The <i>inchiesta</i> form.....	74
3. <i>L'affaire Moro</i> and <i>Pierre Menard</i> : a methodology for reading	79
4. <i>L'affaire Moro</i> and <i>Herbert Quain</i> : an invitation for the perspicacious reader	87
5. The historian and the detective: fiction and narrative history.....	89
6. Sciascia's Aldo Moro and Unamuno's Don Quijote	95
7. <i>L'affaire Moro</i> and <i>Tema del traidor y del héroe</i> : literature prefiguring reality.....	103
8. Conclusion.....	108
CHAPTER 3. <i>Il teatro della memoria</i> and Borges: Memory and the Mutability of History... ..	110
1. The art of memory	112
2. <i>Il teatro della memoria</i> and <i>Funes el memorioso</i> : language and memory	118
3. Memory and identity	123
4. Identity and authorship	127
5. Willingness to believe and the willing suspension of disbelief	130
6. <i>Il teatro della memoria</i> and <i>La busca de Averroes</i> : life as imitation of art.....	134
7. <i>Il teatro della memoria</i> , <i>Tema del traidor y del héroe</i> and <i>L'affaire Moro</i>	137
8. Collective memory and history.....	139

9. Conclusion.....	144
CHAPTER 4. Literature Taking the Place of History: <i>Il Consiglio d'Egitto</i> as Historiographic Metafiction	146
1. The past as a space for fiction	148
2. <i>Il Consiglio d'Egitto</i> and <i>Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius</i>	152
3. Literature as mirror	157
4. Mise en abyme	161
5. The historical novel.....	164
6. <i>Il Consiglio d'Egitto</i> as historiographic metafiction	169
7. Three versions of Vella.....	172
8. Conclusion.....	177
CONCLUSION	180
WORKS CITED.....	188

Abstract

This thesis examines the preoccupation with the relationship between history and fiction present in the work of Leonardo Sciascia and Jorge Luis Borges. By means of different narrative strategies, both authors underscore the narrative elements that underpin any reconstruction of the past, and in this way they link the process of reconstruction of past events to the process of rewriting of a literary work. They emphasise, however, that whereas the literary work can be enriched by multiple rewritings, multiple reconstructions of the same real past event risk threatening its truthfulness.

This thesis investigates the different ways in which Borges's and Sciascia's works intersect, across three narrative forms: the detective story, the historical essay (*inchiesta* or 'enquiry' for Sciascia) and the historical fiction. The analysis of Sciascia's texts starts from a focus on the structural similarities with the work of Borges in the detective story, paying particular attention to *Il contesto* (1971), *Todo modo* (1974), and *Il cavaliere e la morte* (1988). It then moves on to Sciascia's inclusion of fragments of Borges's texts in two of his *inchieste*, *L'affaire Moro* (1978) and *Il teatro della memoria* (1981). The last chapter of the thesis proposes a metafictional reading of Sciascia's historical novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* (1963), in the light of the comparisons with Borges's work undertaken in the previous chapters.

The two key aims of this thesis are to show (1) that studying the ways in which Sciascia integrates Borges's texts in his own writing allows a deeper understanding of Sciascia's texts, but also underscores traits in Borges's which might have been downplayed by previous criticism of his work, and (2) that reconsidering in the light of this understanding a number of Sciascia's other texts where Borges's influence is not explicit allows us to identify a preoccupation with regards to the relationship between history and fiction shared between both authors.

Note on primary texts, translations and abbreviations

References to primary texts

All titles for Sciascia's and Borges's works will appear italicised in the body of the text for consistency's sake, instead of being formatted differently depending on whether they have been published as books, articles, part of an anthology, etc. For ease of reference, publication dates and English translations for all of Sciascia's and Borges's works cited in this thesis are listed below, instead of in the main text of the thesis.

Sciascia's originals will be quoted from Paolo Squillaciotti's *Opere*, edited by Adelphi. Since not all the volumes of this new edition of Sciascia's complete works have been released yet, some quotations will refer to Claude Ambroise's *Opere*, published by Bompiani. References will be abbreviated as follows:

Opere Bompiani [OB]

- Volume I (1956-1971): [OB vol. I]
- Volume II (1971-1983): [OB vol. II]
- Volume III (1984-1989): [OB vol. III]

Opere Adelphi [OA]

- Volume I: narrativa, teatro, poesia: [OA vol. I]
- Volume II, tomo I: inquisizioni e memorie: [OA vol. II, t. I]

Borges's originals will be quoted from RBA's edition of his complete works. References will be abbreviated as follows:

- Obras completas volumen I RBA: [OC vol. I]
- Obras completas volumen II RBA: [OC vol. II]

Sciascia's and Borges's texts that are not contained in any of these editions will be referenced directly from the relevant books or newspaper articles, also listed in the works cited section at the end of the thesis.

Translations

Translations from the original Italian and Spanish sources into English are taken from the published translations available, as listed in the works cited list at the end of the thesis. For published translations, I have included in brackets the translated title of the volume and a page reference to the pertinent edition. All other translations are mine, in which case this is also indicated in brackets. Quotations from Sciascia's and Borges's works appear in the original Spanish or Italian in the body of the text, and the translation in a footnote. Secondary

sources originally in a language other than English appear translated in the body of the text, and the original in a footnote.

All titles cited in this thesis, with English translations and publication dates

Leonardo Sciascia

Pirandello e il pirandellismo [Pirandello and Pirandellism] (1953)

Gli Zii di Sicilia [Sicilian Uncles] (1958; including *L'antimonio* 1960):

- *L'antimonio* [Antimony] (1960)

Pirandello e la Sicilia [Pirandello and Sicily] (1961):

- *Con Cervantes* [With Cervantes] (1960)

- *Verga e il Risorgimento* [Verga and the *Risorgimento*] (1960)

- *Il gattopardo* [The Leopard] (1959)

Il giorno della civetta [The Day of the Owl] (1961)

Il Consiglio d'Egitto [The Council of Egypt] (1963)

Morte dell'inquisitore [Death of the Inquisitor] (1964)

A ciascuno il suo [To Each His Own] (1966)

La corda pazza. Scrittori e cose della Sicilia [The Mad Rope. Writers and Things of Sicily] (1970):

- *Note Pirandelliane* [Pirandellian Notes] (1968)

Il contesto [The Context; published in English translation as *Equal Danger*] (1971)

Il mare colore del vino [The Wine-Dark Sea] (1973)

Todo modo [One Way or Another] (1974)

L'affaire Moro [The Moro Affair] (1978)

Nero su nero [Black on Black] (1979)

La Sicilia come metafora [Sicily as Metaphor] (1979)

Il teatro della memoria [The Memory Theatre] (1981)

La palma va a nord [The Palm Tree Moves North] (1981)

La sentenza memorabile [The Memorable Sentence] (1982)

Cruciverba [Crosswords] (1983):

- *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco* [Brief History of the Detective Novel]

- *Storia della colonna infame* [History of the Infamous Column]

Cronachette [Little Chronicles] (1985):

- *Don Mariano Crescimanno*
- *L'inesistente Borges* [The Non-Existent Borges]

Il cavaliere e la morte [The Knight and Death] (1988)

Ore di Spagna [Hours of Spain] (1988)

A futura memoria (se la memoria ha un futuro) [To Future Memory (If Memory has a Future)] (1989)

Intervista impossibile a Napoleone Bonaparte [Impossible interview with Napoleon Bonaparte] (1989)

Jorge Luis Borges

Discusión [Discussion] (1932):

- *Las versiones homéricas* [The Homeric Versions]
- *La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga* [The Perpetual Race of Achilles and the Tortoise]
- *El escritor argentino y la tradición* [The Argentine Writer and Tradition]

Historia universal de la infamia [A Universal History of Iniquity] (1935):

- *El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro* [The Improbable Impostor Tom Castro]

Ficciones [Fictions] (1944):

1. *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* [The Garden of Forking Paths] (1941):

- *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*
- *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote* [Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*]
- *La lotería en Babilonia* [The Lottery in Babylon]
- *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain* [A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain]
- *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* [The Garden of Forking Paths]

2. *Artificios* [Artifices] (1944):

- *Funes el memorioso* [Funes, His Memory]
- *Tema del traidor y del héroe* [Theme of the Traitor and the Hero]
- *La muerte y la brújula* [Death and the Compass]
- *Tres versiones de Judas* [Three Versions of Judas]

Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi [Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi] (1942). In collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares, published under the pen name of Honorio Bustos Domecq.

La fiesta del monstruo [The Monster's Party] (1947). In collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares, published under the pen name Honorio Bustos Domecq.

El Aleph [The Aleph] (1949):

- *Los teólogos* [The Theologians]
- *Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)* [Biography of Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)]
- *La otra muerte* [The Other Death]
- *La busca de Averroes* [Averroës' Search]
- *Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto* [Ibn-Hakam al-Bokhari, Murdered in His Labyrinth]

Otras inquisiciones [Other Inquisitions] (1952):

- *Magias parciales del Quijote* [Partial Magic in the Quixote]
- *El enigma de Edward Fitzgerald* [The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald]
- *Nathaniel Hawthorne*
- *Nuestro pobre individualismo* [Our Poor Individualism]
- *Kafka y su precusores* [Kafka and His Precursors]
- *El idioma analítico de John Wilkins* [John Wilkins' Analytical Language]

El hacedor [The Maker] (1960):

- *Borges y yo* [Borges and I]
- *Arte poética* [Art of Poetry]

El informe de Brodie [Brodie's Report] (1970)

El oro de los tigres [The Tigers' Gold] (1972):

- *El pasado* [The Past]

Borges, oral (1979):

- *El cuento policial* [The Detective Story]
- *El libro* [The Book]

Nueve ensayos dantescos [Nine Dantesque Essays] (1982)

La memoria de Shakespeare [Shakespeare's Memory] (1983)

Textos Cautivos [Captive Texts] (1986):

- *Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción* [When Fiction Lives in Fiction]

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INTRODUCTION

The vast literary production of Leonardo Sciascia (1921-1989) covers a great variety of genres. The Sicilian author is perhaps best known for his detective fiction; his writing, however, also covers the historical essay, poetry, plays, historical fiction, and an extensive collection of journalistic articles. Despite the heterogeneous nature of his works, the recurrent trait that connects them to each other is that they explore the problematic nature of truth and its relationship to literature. For Sciascia, as he expresses in an often quoted statement in *Nero su nero*, literature is “la più assoluta forma che la verità possa assumere” (OA vol. II, t. I 1113).¹ His works are always in close relation to reality and engage with issues in contemporary Italian society, but these are presented in the form of literature. His detective fiction tackles the problem of the mafia in Sicily and the political situation in Italy during Sciascia’s time. Also his historical essays and historical fiction take as a starting point actual events that Sciascia rigorously researches. By portraying the political situation of his country and actual historical events in the form of literature, Sciascia establishes a relationship between literature and reality in which the former serves as a tool to investigate the latter. Analysing reality within the complexity of the work of art is the method that Sciascia finds most effective for coming closer to truth.

For Sciascia’s conception of literature, the dialogue with other authors and their works is essential. In his writing, he integrates references to other authors and establishes correspondences between their literary creations and the subject about which he is writing. His writing relies on the ideas he borrows from other writers to such an extent that Gaspare Giudice asserts: “[i]f we tried to remove from Sciascia’s text the literary cross-references, the explicit and the cryptic quotations, we would see his pages, his stories, come apart as if deprived of skeleton and cartilage” (My translation).² Sciascia’s literary referents are as varied as his literary production. Among the Italian influences, Luigi Pirandello and Alessandro Manzoni are key names. However, Sciascia’s writers of reference are not limited by any means to Italian authors. Many of them are French, such as Stendhal, Voltaire, Denis Diderot and Blaise Pascal. Some of them belong to German literature, like Franz Kafka. The influence of Spanish authors is also prominent, from Miguel de Cervantes to Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset. When writing about Sicily, Sciascia often highlights the common history of Spain and the Italian island, and the similarities he finds between the two. However, the author in the Spanish language who has the most decisive influence on Sciascia is the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). Furthermore, Borges is also one of

¹ “The most absolute form that truth can take” (My translation).

² “Proviamoci a portar via dal testo di Sciascia i rimandi letterari, le citazioni scoperte e le criptiche, vedremo le sue pagine, i suoi racconti scollarsi come private di scheletro e cartilagini” (Giudice 103).

the very few contemporary authors with whom Sciascia establishes an explicit dialogue in his work. Sciascia considered Borges one of the seminal writers of the 20th century, together with Kafka and Pirandello. He considered these three authors not only to have influenced the literary trends of the century, but also to be responsible for unique ways of thinking. In a conversation with Domenico Porzio, Sciascia points out what sets these three authors apart from other predominant names of 20th century literature:

[Q]uando si usa l'aggettivo che deriva dal nome di Proust, si intende un modo di *scrivere* più che un modo di *esistere*. [...] [I]n questo secolo la nostra esistenza è vorticante attorno a tre aggettivi: pirandelliano, kafkiano e borgesiano. Determinano qualcosa di più che una temperatura intellettuale; determinano una situazione, una situazione dell'esistenza (*Fuoco all'anima* 93).³

Indeed, the use of the adjective 'Borgesian' has been widely spread in the cultural imaginary of the 20th century, arguably worldwide. Borges's ideas lend themselves particularly well to abstraction and universal application, and have been taken up by numerous writers and literary critics. Borges manages, in Peter Brook's words, to present "in each case a problem in the nature of fictions reduced to essential outline" (317). Borges's succinct presentation of fundamental issues about the mechanisms of fiction in the form of short stories and essays have made him a favourite choice for numerous critics to illustrate their theories: tropes such as labyrinths, mirrors, alephs, infinite libraries; writers who create their own precursors and rewritings in the manner of Pierre Menard are all part of a Borgesian imaginary that has been incorporated into the language of literary criticism. Beatriz Sarlo observes:

Herein lies Borges's originality: as a writer-critic, a short story writer-philosopher, he obliquely discusses in his texts the major topics of contemporary literary theory. This has turned him into a cult writer for literary critics who discover in him the Platonic forms of their concerns: the theory of intertextuality, the limits of the referential illusion, the relationship between knowledge and language, the dilemmas of representation and of narration (5).

Beyond literature, Borges's work has also inspired seminal reflections on culture in the 20th century, those which would define the 'situazione dell'esistenza' [existential situation] to which Sciascia referred in the above quote. The most remarkable example of this is probably Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966) which, as he admits in the preface, was inspired by reading Borges's essay *El idioma analítico de John Wilkins*, in *Otras inquisiciones*:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other (Foucault XVI).

³ "When we use the adjective derived from the name of Proust, it means a way of *writing* rather than a way of *existing*. [...] In this century our existence revolves around three adjectives: Pirandellian, Kafkian, and Borgesian. They determine something more than an intellectual trend; they determine a state, an existential situation" (My translation).

Borges's writing disturbs Foucault's familiar landmarks of thought by underscoring how the structures that organise our understanding of the world, and on which are predicated the fundamental principles of what we call civilization, are to a great extent arbitrary. In the passage of *El idioma analítico de John Wilkins* quoted by Foucault, Borges describes a random system for classifying animals, highlighting the inability of language to reflect the complexity of reality, yet admitting that it is necessary to resort to this same language in order to write about reality. Borges's work always plays upon this tension between the need to organise the world we live in, and the awareness that this order is somehow arbitrary. Sciascia found precisely in this contradiction the key to the uniqueness of Borges's thought. He stated: "[c]redo sia lo scrittore più significativo del nostro tempo, delle nostre vertigini. Lo definirei un teologo ateo. Che è poi, la teologia atea, il segno delle nostre angosciose contraddizioni" (*Conversazione in una stanza chiusa* 63-64).⁴

Sciascia's and Borges's approach to literature hinges upon this problematic nature of language, which allows us to make sense of reality and yet simultaneously alters our perception of it. This is the conflict embodied in Sciascia's oxymoronic definition of Borges as a *teologo ateo* [atheist theologian]. Literature is Borges's and Sciascia's preferred tool to explore reality, but they are aware that structuring the complex events of life into a narrative in order to make sense of it risks turning the facts into fiction. It is in this sense that the act of writing, for them, constantly plays with the tension between fiction and reality, making their limits unclear. This is also something that Sciascia particularly appreciates in Borges. When he was asked in a 1978 interview about what he liked in Borges's writing, Sciascia replied:

Questo gioco delle coincidenze, questi due piani in cui la realtà diventa finzione, questa specie di circolarità che ha stabilito tra la letteratura e la vita. È veramente strano questo mondo di coincidenze, coincidenze straordinarie... (*La palma va a nord* 109).⁵

From Sciascia's first recollection of Borges, the Argentine author represents this tension between fiction and reality, the circularity between the two. In his aforementioned conversation with Porzio, Sciascia reminisces about the first time he encountered Borges's work, in the 1950s: "[n]on ricordo bene. Forse attraverso Caillois. Borges aveva fatto una volta la battuta: 'Io non esisto, sono stato inventato da Casares'. Deve essere stato in quella

⁴ "I think he is the most significant writer of our times, of our vertigos. I would define him an atheist theologian; atheist theology being a landmark of our distressing contradictions" (My translation). Sciascia borrows this idea of the atheist theologian from Borges's own definition of Omar Khayyam in his essay *El enigma de Edward Fitzgerald*, in *Otras inquisiciones*: "[e]s ateo, pero sabe interpretar de un modo ortodoxo los más arduos pasajes del *Alcorán*, porque todo hombre culto es un teólogo, y para serlo no es indispensable la fe" (OC vol. I 688). ["He is an atheist, but knows how to interpret, in orthodox style, the most difficult passages of the Koran, for every educated man is a theologian, and faith is not a requisite" (*Total Library* 366-367)].

⁵ "This game of coincidences, these two levels on which reality becomes fiction, this sort of circularity that he has established between literature and life. It's really strange, this world of coincidences, of extraordinary coincidences..." (My translation).

occasione" (*Fuoco all'anima* 94).⁶ This first encounter with the writing of Borges took place in the earlier days of Sciascia's literary career, and from that moment on Sciascia continued to read all of Borges's works available to him in Italian translation, and probably others that had still not been translated, since he often makes references to less well known works by the Argentine author and sometimes quotes him in Spanish. It is clear from the familiarity with which Sciascia discusses Borges's work that his exposure to Borges's writing continued all throughout his literary career.⁷ Also right from the first encounter with his work, Sciascia's writings are pervaded by the presence of Borges. Sciascia incorporates Borges's way of thinking, rather than his way of writing, into his own work, either in the form of explicit references to Borges and fragments from his texts, or through indirect allusions to the Argentine writer.

1. Politics and literature

Sciascia's writing differs from Borges's, however, in the fact that it is fundamentally political. Sciascia's work is always on the border between fiction and non-fiction, always engaged with the socio-political reality of his time, or with the history of his country. He wrote detective novels that denounced the criminal activity of the Sicilian mafia, fictionalised historical accounts of the doings of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily, and short stories about the decline of Stalinism. Furthermore, his political involvement was not limited to his literary production. In the Palermo elections of 1975 he ran as an independent candidate within the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI), from which he would later distance himself. Sciascia disagreed with the ever closer relationship that the PCI established with the centrist Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy, DC), the main political party at the time, instead of playing the political role of the opposition. He ran for election again with the Radical Party (Partito Radicale) in 1978, and was an MP in the Italian Parliament until 1983.

Despite his political involvement, Sciascia considered himself first and foremost a writer, and that is why he always approached politics through literature. When he spoke about politics, he often quoted literary writers in order to make a point, and Borges was one of the authors that he quoted the most. A good example is the comparison he made between Borges's

⁶ "I don't remember clearly. Perhaps it was through Caillois. Borges once joked: 'I don't exist, I was invented by [Adolfo Bioy] Casares'. It must have been on that occasion" (My translation).

⁷ An enlightening example of this can be found in the conversation the two writers had the only time they met in person in 1980, when Sciascia asks Borges very specific questions about a series of essays on Dante that at that time he was preparing to edit in a single volume – that would become his *Nueve ensayos dantescos*. Sciascia's familiarity with these and other of Borges's works as he discusses them in this interview show that, almost thirty years after he first read him, his interest in and knowledge of the Argentine writer's work had done nothing but grow.

short story *Los teólogos*, in *El Aleph*, and the relationship between the PCI and the DC, shortly after his break with the Communists. In an interview in 1978, he was questioned about this analogy:

[Interviewer] *Una volta lei ha paragonato la DC e il PCI ai due teologi di cui parla Borges, che si erano odiati tutta la vita prima di scoprire, nell'inferno, che avevano abitato la stessa anima...*

[Sciascia] È vero. Sono convinto che un giorno democristiani e comunisti arriveranno a capire che l'inquisizione, lo stalinismo, abitano la stessa anima (*La palma va a nord* 48).⁸

Even if Sciascia often referred to Borges to illustrate his outspoken political opinions, he was aware of the different approach that the Argentine writer and himself had to politics. He observed:

Parlando di politica, Borges diceva [...] che se ne era occupato il meno possibile, tranne che nel periodo della dittatura. Ma quella – aggiungeva – non era politica, era etica. Al contrario, io mi sono sempre occupato di politica; e sempre nel senso etico (*La palma va a nord* 179).⁹

Apart from his allegedly minor interest in politics, Borges's ideas in this respect were also quite far from Sciascia's on the political spectrum. In a 1978 interview Sciascia was asked about the fact that he often quoted Borges in his work, at a time when among the left-wing Italian intellectuals the Argentine author was considered to be almost a fascist. Sciascia explained thus how he understood Borges's position towards politics:

Io credo che le sue posizioni politiche dipendano soprattutto dal suo temperamento. Una volta lui lo ha dichiarato: 'Ero iscritto al Partito radicale, ma subito ho avuto simpatie per i conservatori. Questo perché i radicali stavano vincendo...' (*La palma va a nord* 109).¹⁰

Indeed, although in his youth Borges supported anarchist ideas and was a member of the Radical Party, later in life he became a member of the Argentine Conservative Party. He ardently criticised Perón, and he often made controversial statements about his relationship with politics, like the one mentioned by Sciascia. He was also involved in events that related him to the far right, of which the most controversial was perhaps his acceptance of a medal from Pinochet.

These political views are present to some extent in some of Borges's works, but it would not be accurate to say that Borges wrote mainly with a political intention. Some of the literary texts where a critique of Peronism can be found, for example, are the collection of detective

⁸ “[Interviewer] *You have once before compared the Christian Democrats and the Italian Communist Party to the two theologians Borges writes about, who had hated each other all their lives before they discovered, in hell, that they had in fact inhabited the same soul...* [Sciascia] That's true. I'm convinced that one day the Christian Democrats and the Communists will eventually understand that the Inquisition, that Stalinism, inhabit the same soul” (My translation).

⁹ “Speaking of politics, Borges said [...] that he dealt with it as little as possible, except during the period of the dictatorship. But that – he added – was ethics, not politics. On the contrary, I have always dealt with politics; and always in the ethical sense” (My translation).

¹⁰ “I think that his political position depends most of all on his temperament. Once he declared: ‘I was a member of the Radical Party, but suddenly I felt attracted to the conservatives. Just because the radicals were winning...’” (My translation).

stories *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, and the short story *La fiesta del monstruo*. Both of these texts, however, were written in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares, and published under the pen name of Honorio Bustos Domecq. It is therefore problematic to assert the presence of political criticism in Borges's work when the most political fictions he published were in collaboration with another author, and under a pseudonym.¹¹ Borges himself stated that he did not allow his political opinions to be present in his literary work. In the foreword to *El informe de Brodie* he wrote:

Mis cuentos, como los de *Las mil y una noches*, quieren distraer y conmover y no persuadir. Este propósito no quiere decir que me encierre, según la imagen salomónica, en una torre de marfil. Mis convicciones en materia política son harto conocidas; me he afiliado al Partido Conservador, lo cual es una forma de escepticismo, y nadie me ha tildado de comunista, de nacionalista, de antisemita, de partidario de Hormiga Negra o de Rosas. Creo que con el tiempo mereceremos que no haya gobiernos. No he disimulado nunca mis opiniones, ni siquiera en los años arduos, pero no he permitido que interfieran en mi obra literaria (OC vol. I 1021).¹²

The fact that Borges's political opinions were not predominant in his works, and perhaps also the fact that these views as he voiced them elsewhere were often too controversial, has led to most of his critics avoiding a reading that links these works to the socio-political context in which they were written, and favoured instead reading them as metaphysical reflections on the main problems of literary creation. However, reading Borges's fiction as radically separated from its historical and socio-political context implies overlooking important aspects of his work. Critics such as Daniel Balderston and Beatriz Sarlo have argued that his work does need to be considered in relation to its context in order to be interpreted in depth. Sarlo argues:

His fictions might also be read as a response (no matter how he tried to preserve literature as a space free from direct political opinion) not only to processes taking place in Europe, where the rise of fascism and the consolidation of a communist regime in the Soviet Union gave concern to liberal intellectuals, but also to the inroads of mass democracy in Argentina (53).

An example could be Borges's short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, often read as a reflection on Borges's opinion on fascism. Other critics have gone even further, arguing that there is indeed a political depth to be found in Borges's texts. Emir Rodríguez Monegal argues that most critics of Borges have overlooked this political dimension of his work, judging Borges's views on politics purely by his often controversial public statements. He

¹¹ For an analysis of the collaborative writing projects of Borges and Bioy Casares, see Michel Lafon's "Bioy and Borges: From the Third Man to the World of Bustos Domecq".

¹² "My tales, like those of the *Thousand and One Nights*, are intended not to persuade readers, but to entertain and touch them. This intention does not mean that I shut myself, as Solomon's image would have it, into an ivory tower. My convictions with respect to political matters are well known; I have joined the Conservative Party (which act is a form of scepticism), and no one has ever called me a Communist, a nationalist, an anti-Semite, or a supporter of Hormiga Negra or of Rosas. I believe that in time we will have reached the point where we will deserve to be free of government. I have never hidden my opinions, even through the difficult years, but I have never allowed them to intrude upon my literary production" (*Collected Fictions* 345-346).

notes that critics tend to quickly judge Borges's casual opinions, and that instead they should analyse the ideology contained in his texts: "[t]hey would find not only that Borges has written more about politics than is usually believed, but that his whole oeuvre has a political ideology" ("Borges and Politics" 69).

While it is difficult to think that Sciascia and Borges would have agreed on many issues, had they commented on the same socio-political context, the concerns that they express in their literary work about how power structures that rule society are constructed share the same basis. Sciascia reflects on the mafia-like organisation of power and political parties in Italy in his detective novels and, in a similar way, some of Borges's short stories "offer alternative images of society. In fact they are nightmares that show institutional organization to be based on blind power, arbitrary rulings or myths" (Sarlo 81). A good example of these alternative images could be the dystopian realities presented in stories such as *La lotería en Babilonia* or *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. The danger posed by the State and power structures becoming abstractions can be identified in these short fictions, where the established order is so perfect that it becomes disturbing. This is also a theme central to Sciascia's writing, but the difference is that, although fictionalised, the dystopian portrayals of society in Sciascia's work always have an identifiable referent in the socio-political reality of his time. He focuses on the manipulative power of the church in Italy, or on the corrupt organisation of a particular political party, always stressing how his mistrust towards these institutions comes from the fact that they are destined to become abstractions, and the dangers they pose can therefore be extrapolated to other contexts.

Thus the main difference between the two authors is that Borges's fictions seem to take place in an almost metaphorical realm, whereas Sciascia's can be directly linked to a real socio-political situation. Some critics of Sciascia's work have used this difference to distance them as writers. Giudice, for instance, argues that there is not much both authors have in common, besides the frequent references to the name of Borges that Sciascia makes in his writing:

Sciascia poses moral problems and provides reflection on social phenomena, not on their metaphysical transformation into metaphors [...]. Sciascia's never mislaid instinct of writer of social events always kept him, fortunately, far from fields that were alien to him (My translation).¹³

This argument, however, not only fails to acknowledge the political dimension to Borges's writing, but also the broader scope of Sciascia's. In the case of Sciascia, even though his fiction is inspired by particular events or socio-political situations, his intention was not that it

¹³ "Sciascia pone problemi di morale e ci dà riflessioni il cui corrispettivo si trova nei fenomeni sociali, non nella loro metaforizzazione metafisica [...]. L'istinto mai smarrito di scrittore di eventi sociali lo tiene fortunatamente lontano di campi che non gli erano propri" (Giudice 120-121).

should be read solely in relation to these scenarios. Giovanna Jackson describes Sciascia as “a Sicilian writer committed by his conscience to universal moral problems” (7). Illustrative of this could be what Sciascia said of his first detective novel *Il giorno della civetta*, lamenting that it had been read as a mere folkloristic portrait of Sicilian mafia, instead of a reflection on the mafia as a metaphor of a much broader phenomenon:

Il giorno della civetta è un libro che non amo. Ha avuto troppo successo e per ragioni anche esterne. Non rimpiango di averlo scritto, tutt'altro: ma è irritante accorgermi qualche volta che lo si legge come un ragguaglio folcloristico. Io ho scritto il racconto, invece, come un 'esempio' (direbbe Bernardino da Siena) di quel che la mafia era nel passaggio dalla campagna alla città, da fenomeno rurale a fenomeno urbano (*Conversazione in una stanza chiusa* 55).¹⁴

Ricciarda Ricorda argues that the use Sciascia makes of citations of other writers aims precisely at underscoring the universality of the themes he deals with in his work. By inserting references to other authors, Sciascia frames his work within a network of literary references that expands its meaning much beyond the socio-political scenario from which he writes. Ricorda observes:

Too often this is not acknowledged by the readers who, reading Sciascia's novels almost exclusively from their dimension of socially engaged texts, do not grasp the metaphysical anxiety that they convey, the subtle mysticism that pervades them (My translation).¹⁵

One of the aims of this thesis, therefore, will be to present a reading of both authors' works that underscores the often overlooked importance of the socio-political in Borges, and of the metaphysical¹⁶ in Sciascia. Analysing Borges's presence in Sciascia's writing opens up a broader framework in which to study Sciascia's texts, but at the same time relates Borges's work to a completely different socio-political scenario from that he could have chosen for his own fiction. The fact that Sciascia is able to incorporate elements from the Borgesian imaginary to better understand a specific socio-political or historical situation that would have been alien to Borges, makes visible the underlying ideological and moral aspects already present but frequently downplayed in Borges's writing.

¹⁴ “*Il giorno della civetta* is a book I don't love. It was too successful, also due to external reasons. I don't regret having written it, on the contrary: but it's irritating sometimes to notice that it is read as a folkloristic report. I had written the story, instead, as an “exemplum” (Bernardino of Siena would say) of what the mafia was in the transition from the country to the city, from rural phenomenon to urban phenomenon” (My translation).

¹⁵ “[T]roppo spesso esso non è recepito dal pubblico che, leggendo i romanzi dello scrittore quasi esclusivamente nella loro dimensione di testi impegnati socialmente, non coglie l'ansia metafisica di cui sono portatori, il sottile misticismo che li pervade” (Ricorda 86).

¹⁶ It is necessary to note the limited meaning of the word ‘metaphysical’ as I will use it in this thesis in relation to Borges and Sciascia. In this context, by ‘underscoring the metaphysical in Sciascia’ I mean underscoring the universal ambition present in his work, instead of reading it as a reflection only of Sciascia's immediate Sicilian reality. Whereas ‘metaphysical’ would perhaps not be the best term to describe this feature in Sciascia's work on its own, when it comes to comparing it with Borges's the use of the word ‘metaphysical’ acquires a new significance – some traits that are often referred to as ‘metaphysical’ in Borges's writing and that I will unpack throughout this thesis are traits also present in the work of Sciascia, and they allow to place him in a broader context as a writer, instead of limiting the scope of his writing to his own time and socio-political context.

Perhaps the most evident reference to the link that Sciascia saw between Borges's and his own approach to politics through literature would be the following statement he made in *La Sicilia come metafora*:

Il mio atteggiamento verso la politica è paragonabile a quello di Unamuno verso la religione cristiana. Unamuno non credeva all'immortalità dell'anima, ma viveva come se vi credesse. Per quanto mi riguarda, non penso che la politica sia poi granché, la considero più che altro un'attività mediocre riservata ai mediocri. Ritengo che non si arriverà mai a niente di perfetto, di giusto e di affatto libero, in materia di organizzazione politica e sociale, ma che occorra vivere e lottare come se si fosse convinti di arrivarci. [...] Mi rendo perfettamente conto di essere animato da un certo spirito di contraddizione, ma so anche che ogni essere umano che esercita un'attività intellettuale non può non esserne animato. Diceva Borges: 'Mi sono iscritto al partito conservatore, ma mai come allora la vittoria dei radicali mi ha fatto tanto piacere'. Tale deve essere, penso, la posizione di un intellettuale. Sempreché voglia riuscire a comprendere le cose contro le quali combatte... (116-117).¹⁷

In this statement Sciascia makes reference to a tension that is reflected throughout his work, and which is here explicitly linked to Borges's *spirito di contraddizione* [spirit of contradiction]. Sciascia states that he does not have a high opinion of politics, and still he was an active politician for many years, and most of his texts could be described as political. This contradiction, which he considers to be necessary for any intellectual, is the same that he admires in the work of Borges. These are *nostre angosciose contraddizioni* [our distressing contradictions], as quoted earlier in this introduction, which Borges admirably highlighted in his own work and which made him, for Sciascia, the most significant writer of the century.

This statement sets up, through the reference to Borges's contradictions, an interesting parallelism between Sciascia's attitude towards politics and his attitude towards literature. Borges's work stands out, as discussed earlier, for presenting fundamental problems in the mechanisms of fiction in the form of short stories. His writing style thus reflects a great awareness of all processes taking place in order for such writing to be produced. This is also something that is central to Sciascia's writing, especially when it comes to the relationship between the reality he is addressing and his written portrait of it. Sciascia is aware that the processes of narration will have an impact on the perception of the reality about which he is writing. Nevertheless, his preferred approach to the socio-political reality is still a literary approach.

¹⁷ "My relationship with politics can be compared to that Unamuno had with the Christian faith. Unamuno didn't believe in the immortality of the soul, yet he lived as if he did. As far as I'm concerned, I don't think that politics are such a big deal, I mostly regard them as a mediocre activity reserved for the mediocre. I believe that perfection, fairness and freedom will never be attained in what concerns socio-political organisation; yet I believe it's necessary to live and fight as if we had the certainty of attaining them. [...] I'm perfectly aware of being motivated by a certain spirit of contradiction, but I also know that any human being who undertakes an intellectual activity can't avoid being motivated by it. Borges said: 'I joined the Conservative Party, but then the victory of the Radicals made me happy as never before'. Such should be, I believe, the position of intellectuals. Given that they are willing to understand the things against which they fight..." (My translation).

Jaime Alazraki identifies in this contradiction the essence of the work of Borges, in a statement that could also apply to Sciascia's writing:

The fascination for Borges's work lies, perhaps, in its clarity towards the double condition of the signs of language and the scope and limitations of literature as the art of language (My translation).¹⁸

Both Sciascia and Borges are aware of the limitations that writing imposes on the vision of the world that they are trying to convey, but this does not stop them from writing. So it is fair to say that they also share this spirit of contradiction with regards to literature. In this sense the label of atheist theologian that Sciascia used to define Borges can also apply to Sciascia himself, and emphasise precisely what both authors have in common. As Roberto Paoli observes, Sciascia adopts Borges's definition of the atheist theologian and adapts it to underscore the underlying ethics present in Borges's writing:

[Sciascia] does not fall in love with that definition [atheist theologian] because of its superficial vividness, but because he senses in it an ethical value. This is really one of the greatest accomplishments of Sciascia's literature, not at all conditioned by the prejudices of his time, having recognised and highlighted the ethical intentions of some of Borges's political statements (My translation).¹⁹

Sciascia and Borges do not believe in the limitless power of words, but they write as if they did. On a political level, both consider it necessary to warn against the abstract nature of power structures that control society, and yet they are aware of the necessity of such structures. On a literary level, both authors are aware that language cannot fully reflect the complexities of reality, and that literature cannot reach the absolute truth of events; yet they acknowledge it is necessary to continue writing as if such a truth could thereby be reached.

2. History and literature

It would be too challenging to attempt within the confines of a doctoral thesis an analysis of how two writers as prolific as Sciascia and Borges tackle such a complex issue as the relationship between literature and reality, this *circularità tra la letteratura e la vita* [circularity between literature and life] that Sciascia so admired in Borges. However, an aspect of this relationship that is particularly interesting in both authors, and which provides material for a more feasible project, is their idea of history as related to literature and fiction.

Sciascia wrote about Borges for the first time in a 1955 review in *La Gazzetta di Parma* of *La biblioteca di Babele*, the Italian translation of Borges's *Ficciones*. As Sciascia reminisces in a

¹⁸ "La fascinación de la obra de Borges descansa, tal vez, en su lucidez respecto a la doble condición de los signos del lenguaje y a los alcances y limitaciones de la literatura como el arte del lenguaje" (Alazraki 152).

¹⁹ "[Sciascia] Non si innamora di quella formula [teologo ateo] per la sua brillantezza esteriore, ma vi fiuta dentro una valenza etica. È realmente uno dei meriti maggiori della letteratura di Sciascia, per nulla condizionata dai pregiudizi del suo tempo, l'averne riconosciuto e sottolineato le intenzioni etiche di certe dichiarazioni politiche di Borges" (Paoli 66).

later article, in his review he described Borges as a man of his time obsessed with history (*Un fascinante teólogo ateo* 3). It is striking that Borges's preoccupation with history was the trait Sciascia chose to highlight in his first description of him, since it is one that is not often mentioned by critics of Borges's work. The reluctance on the part of Borges's criticism to acknowledge this feature in his work is due to the apparently unrelated nature of his writing to the socio-political reality in which he wrote it, as discussed above. However, the concerns that can be found in Borges's work about the relationship between fiction and reality are also manifested in a palpable concern about the relationship between fiction and history. Santiago Juan-Navarro observes:

One of the commonplace assumptions in Borges criticism is the presumed lack of historicity of his work. Such an observation should, however, be nuanced. Even though Borges does not share with the new Latin American writers an interest for the immediate reality of their country or of Latin America (or at least not to the same extent), his stories reflect a profound preoccupation with the phenomenon of history and, specifically, with its relationship to literature (My translation).²⁰

The relationship between history and fiction has been debated at length by scholars with respect to both the disciplines of history and literature. These debates have drawn attention to narrative devices that are common to the historical account and the fictional narration, and to how the use of such devices can compromise the claim for truth that the historical account makes regarding the real events that it is reconstructing. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter two of this thesis, critics such as Louis O. Mink and Hayden White have developed a series of theories of narrativism in history that underscore the fact that some narrative devices are necessary in order to make sense of past events from the perspective of the present, reconstructing them in order to generate what collective memory will retain as history.

Borges's fictions often question this same relationship between events of the past and their reconstruction from the present. Stories such as *Tema del traidor y del héroe* or *La otra muerte* present a situation in which two versions of the same past event are set in opposition, thereby questioning their truth and destabilising the limits between history and fiction. In Borges's stories, fiction constantly intrudes into the real world, and often this is due to a process that alters individual or collective memory. In the dystopian scenarios of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* or *La lotería en Babilonia*, a new order is established through the modification of collective memory and the subsequent modification of the whole past of a civilisation. These stories can be read as a metaphor of the dangerous influence that fictional devices

²⁰ "Uno de los lugares comunes de la crítica sobre Borges es la presunta ahistoricidad de su obra. Tal consideración debería, sin embargo, matizarse. Si bien Borges no comparte con los nuevos narradores hispanoamericanos el interés por la realidad inmediata de su país o de Latinoamérica (o, al menos, no en la misma medida), sus cuentos reflejan una profunda preocupación por el fenómeno de la historia y, en concreto, por su relación con la literatura" (Juan-Navarro 23).

can have in the reconstruction of the past, especially when this influence is not acknowledged.

Tom O'Neill sees in Sciascia's first analysis of Borges in *La Gazzetta di Parma* not only a portrait of the Argentine author, but a self-portrait of the writer that Sciascia was going to become in later years of a literary career that at that point in the mid-50s was only starting: "[t]his image of the Argentine writer, as his readers know very well, mirrors the image of himself that Sciascia has left in so many of his books, but at the time of his review these were still to come" (My translation).²¹ Indeed, Sciascia's work is openly concerned with these same issues. He often chooses to investigate an event from the past in order to challenge the version of it that has been retained by collective memory, and as a result he is able to relate it to the present socio-political reality from which he writes. By challenging in his texts the version of history that has been retained as the 'official' interpretation of events, he points at the mechanisms of reconstruction that have been involved in such interpretation. In order to do so he turns to literature, his preferred tool to examine reality, and often to the work of Borges. By examining real events through literature, Sciascia emphasises the fictional features that have contributed to the configuration of the socio-political reality with which he is dealing. His texts become a mirroring fiction in which the reality he explores is reflected in such a way that its fictional elements are underscored. Often it is the references to Borges's literary universe which allow Sciascia to do this, placing a specific socio-political situation or historical event within the framework of Borges's fiction. The use that Sciascia makes of Borges's texts in order to read these historical events allows him to make an interpretation that goes beyond what has remained in collective memory as history, by exploring them from a literary perspective. At the same time, Sciascia's choice to present these events in relation to Borges's work makes even more evident the preoccupations about history and its relationship with literature that are already present in the writing of Borges.

Both writers explore how individual and collective memory are selective, and how every past event has to pass through the sieve of language in order to be reconstructed, which might fail to retrieve its original complexity. This does not mean that they find every narration of the past to be untrue, or that they do not believe that the past can ever be known. However, the fact that we have no direct access to past events from the present implies that our present perception of the past will always be mediated by a process of reconstruction, and this is something that, for them, needs to be acknowledged. Their attitude towards history participates again in the spirit of contradiction of the atheist theologian: language cannot

²¹ "Quest'immagine dello scrittore argentino, lo sanno benissimo i suoi lettori, rispecchia l'immagine di sé che Sciascia ha lasciata in tanti suoi libri, ma che alla data della recensione sono ancora di là da venire" (O'Neill 14).

accurately render the complexity of past events, and what collective memory retains as history cannot reach their absolute truth; yet it is necessary to continue exploring our past, in order to understand how we make sense of it, how it influences the perception we have of our present, and how it might be re-enacted in the future.

3. Methodology

After introducing the main focus and aims of this thesis, it is worth discussing the nature of the relationship that Sciascia and Borges established between their works. As discussed above, Borges is very present in the work of Sciascia. However, this prominent presence of Borges in Sciascia's work does not match the presence of Sciascia in the work of Borges – apart from a conversation between the two from the only time they met in person, in Rome in 1980, there are no records of a two-way dialogue between them, and Borges does not mention Sciascia in any of his works.²² However, defining their literary relationship in terms of Sciascia merely receiving an influence from Borges would fail to reflect the complexity of the link that Sciascia establishes between his own work and that of Borges.

This link is better studied from an intertextual perspective. The term 'intertextuality', first used by Julia Kristeva in 1969, defines an understanding of the way in which texts are related to each other that moves away from the concept of influence. Both 'influence' and 'intertextuality' have been defined in numerous ways since they were first used in the field of literary studies. However, as Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein observe, it is possible to say that, in general, "influence has to do with agency, whereas intertextuality has to do with a much more impersonal field of crossing texts" (4). The idea of influence as it started being discussed in literary studies during the 18th century was juxtaposed to the concept of originality, in terms of which the worth of an author's work was assessed (Clayton and Rothstein 5). Even though the meaning of the term 'influence' evolved throughout the centuries, it preserved the idea that in such a relationship, the 'original' text and author will be in some way superior to those borrowing from them. Some contemporary critics have attempted at updating this idea of influence, focusing instead on the perspective of the authors who borrow from previous texts. Harold Bloom defines the relationship that the authors that are borrowing from others establish with the tradition that preceded them in terms of the 'anxiety of influence'. For Bloom, when writers are confronted with the work of their predecessors, they feel an urge to challenge previous traditions by reinterpreting and modifying, to different degrees, other works of literature. Bloom's theory acknowledges that

²² Their conversation was published by *L'Espresso* in 1986, after Borges's death, under the title "Io, tu, Pinocchio e Proust: colloquio tra J. L. Borges e Leonardo Sciascia".

the meaning of a text will therefore be determined to some extent by the texts from which it has borrowed, but still implies that there is a hierarchy established between authors.

Kristeva's introduction of the neologism 'intertextuality' drove the focus away from the figure of the author – which had dominated previous theories of influence – and towards the text and its readers. Kristeva's work, and also that of Roland Barthes, introduced the idea that a text can never be considered as an independent unit with a closed meaning. The multiple interpretations of a text are tied to the ambiguity of the language that forms it, where each element points at the same time at a myriad of other elements, in such a way that the possible readings that trace back each of these connections multiply ad infinitum. Graham Allen describes this multiplicity of meaning as follows:

The plural meaning of the text involves the play of signifiers, always leading on to other signifiers, and the 'trace' (Derrida's term) of signifying chains which disrupt and infinitely defer the meaning of each signifier. Every text depends on a language within which is inscribed vast histories of meaning (64).

Likewise, when a text establishes an intertextual link with another text, the meaning of this text will be deferred beyond itself. The author no longer determines the univocal meaning of the text, it is now the readers who, as active participants, are able to enrich the meaning of the text from their own perspective, and from their own knowledge of the broader literary universe in which the text is inscribed.

Whereas for Barthes and Kristeva texts that establish intertextual relations with other texts still do so as a form of contestation, other critics such as Gérard Genette and Michael Riffaterre argue that intertextuality is the natural way in which literature works, and always has (Morgan 14). This last idea of intertextuality is arguably the one that comes closer to Borges's own idea of the relationships that literary texts establish between each other. Borges considers borrowing from previous texts, and altering these same texts in any way, as the normal way in which literature is produced. In the essay *La metáfora*, in *Historia de la eternidad*, he stated that it was unlikely that contemporary writers could find original ideas that no other writers had already used in their works in the course of three thousand years of literary tradition (OC vol. I 384). As a consequence, he does not find any reason why an original text should be considered superior to all the subsequent approaches to it. In his essay *Las versiones homéricas*, in *Discusión*, he writes:

Presuponer que toda recombinación de elementos es obligatoriamente inferior a su original, es presuponer que el borrador 9 es obligatoriamente inferior al borrador H – ya que no puede haber sino borradores. El concepto de *texto definitivo* no corresponde sino a la religión o al cansancio (OC vol. I 239).²³

²³ "To assume that every recombination of elements is necessarily inferior to its original form is to assume that draft nine is necessarily inferior to draft H – for there can only be drafts. The concept of the 'definitive text' corresponds only to religion or exhaustion" (*Total Library* 69).

Borges thought that in literature there is no such thing as a definitive work, and that new literary creations are always recreations of previous texts to some extent. He made of these beliefs an essential feature of his own writing, which openly borrowed from other authors and literary works. Rodríguez Monegal observes:

Literature becomes, for Borges, a process of fabrication of a text that is in fact a palimpsest. Each 'original' text points towards other texts by means of more or less explicit allusions, parody, citation, or imitation. The readers, in their role of consumers, 'recreate' the text; that is, they rewrite it once more, interpolating the texts (explicit or implicit) of their own literary experience. There is no original because there is no origin. There is no definitive text either, because there is no end (My translation).²⁴

Sciascia also identified this idea of how literature works in the writing of Borges. In his short article *L'inesistente Borges*, included in *Cronachette*, Sciascia describes the way in which he thinks that Borges understands literature:

Tutti i libri vanno verso 'il' libro, l'unico, l'assoluto [...] e finché non avverrà la confluenza, la fusione, ciascun libro sarà suscettibile di variazioni, di mutamenti – e cioè di apparire diverso ad ogni epoca, ad ogni generazione di lettori, ad ogni singolo lettore e ad ogni rilettura da parte di uno stesso lettore (OA vol. II, t. I 770).²⁵

Ricorda sees Borges's understanding of literature also present in the work of Sciascia, and linked to the idea of literature as a constant process of rewriting to which every book is subjected:

Every book, once published, stops being a personal creation of the writer, in order to exist, instead, as the 'addition of all the points of view' of everyone who reads it [...]. This idea has no doubt numerous referents within the literature of the 20th century, but because of the way it is presented, and perhaps also because of a certain idea in which it is rooted that conceives the work of literature as rewriting, it seems to recall more directly the name of Borges (My translation).²⁶

Sciascia's and Borges's writing opens their texts to this plurality of meaning by the use of intertextual references to other authors and literary works. Each of these references can be unpacked and followed towards other references, offering the readers the possibility to deepen their understanding of their work not only within the text, but also beyond the text. Therefore, Sciascia's choice to use Borges's writing, already rich with references,

²⁴ "La literatura se convierte así para Borges en la fabricación de un texto que es, realmente, un palimpsesto. Cada texto 'original' reenvía, por medio de alusiones explícitas o no, por la parodia o la cita o la imitación, a otros textos. El lector, al ejercer su oficio de consumidor, 'recrea' el texto; es decir, lo redacta una vez más, interpolando los textos (explícitos o implícitos) de su propia experiencia literaria. No hay original porque no hay origen. Tampoco hay texto definitivo, porque no hay fin" (Rodríguez Monegal *Borges por él mismo* 32).

²⁵ "All books are fragments of 'the' book: the one, the absolute book [...] and until such a time as this fusion and confluence takes place, each book is susceptible to variations and mutations – and will therefore appear different to every age, to every generation of reader, to every single reader, and with every re-reading by each reader" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 135).

²⁶ "[C]iascun volume, una volta pubblicato, cessa di essere creazione personale dello scrittore, per esistere, invece, come 'somma dei punti di vista' di tutti coloro che lo leggono [...]. E questo concetto, per il quale sono senza dubbio numerosi i punti di riferimento entro la letteratura novecentesca, per i termini in cui è posto, e forse anche per una certa idea di opera letteraria intesa come riscrittura che ne sta alla base, sembra richiamare più direttamente il nome di Borges" (Ricorda 81-82).

exponentially increases the points of view from which Sciascia's texts can be read. Sciascia immerses his writing in a game of mirrors that reaches far beyond his own text, but also beyond Borges's, and entrusts his readers with the task of exploring these possibilities.

The definition of intertextuality that I have presented so far allows for an understanding of Borges's idea of the way texts relate to each other, and helps to highlight the effect that Sciascia's use of references to Borges will have for his own writing. However, Sciascia's use of Borges's references in his writing is not merely aimed at showing the infinite potential of intertextuality to enrich the meaning of a text. Sciascia's use of references to the work of Borges, as I will argue throughout this thesis, always serves a specific purpose. Kristeva's definition of intertextuality already acknowledged this intentionality implicit in the use of the reference and citation. Thaïs Morgan notes that, for Kristeva, "an intertextual citation is never innocent or direct, but always transformed, distorted, displaced, condensed, or edited in some way in order to suit the speaking subject's value system" (Morgan 13). This is something that Ricorda also detects in the use that Sciascia makes of references to other texts, emphasising how the conscious choice he makes to insert a specific quotation in a specific context adds a connotative dimension that was absent from the original quotation:

The meaning that it conveys is ambiguous, and therefore richer, and intentional. Ambiguous in the sense that it refers, literally, to the thought quoted and, figuratively, it is transposed in order to refer to the text in which it is inserted. It is intentional in the sense that it is not the result of adopting an arbitrary linguistic unit, but of a choice that the writer has made with a specific aim in mind (My translation).²⁷

Even though the use that Sciascia makes of Borges's references allows for a multiplicity of meanings expanding beyond the text, Sciascia's choice of quotations is still intended to point his readers in a particular direction. This is a possibility offered by the use of intertextual references that Riffaterre explores in his work. Riffaterre argues that the ambiguity and apparent obscurity generated by references external to the text we are reading are in fact signalling that there is work the readers will have to do beyond the text in order to completely decipher its meaning. These references are in fact a message indicating to the readers that they "must shift from linear to intertextual reading" (Riffaterre 238). For Riffaterre, unravelling the meaning behind these external references constitutes a second stage of the process of reading, which will lead to the complete understanding of the meaning intended by the author. Riffaterre's view of intertextuality as limiting the meaning of a work of literature instead of opening it up to a myriad of possible interpretations seems at first glance to be at odds with Barthes's and Kristeva's idea of the multiplicity of meaning – and so, by extension,

²⁷ "[I]l significato che individua è ambiguo, e perciò più ricco, e motivato: ambiguo in quanto va riferito, letteralmente, al pensiero citato e, figuratamente, va trasposto e riferito al testo in cui è inserito; motivato in quanto non emerge dall'adozione, necessariamente arbitraria, di una qualsiasi sequenza di unità linguistica, ma è frutto di una scelta che lo scrittore ha operato in vista di uno scopo" (Ricorda 74).

to Borges's. However, this view of intertextuality is based on the same principle: that a text's complete meaning is never to be found confined only within that very text. As Clayton and Rothstein observe:

Talk of restricting the reader's freedom, controlling interpretation, guiding one to *the* proper view of a text seems far removed from the plural, infinitely circulating texts of Kristeva and Barthes, but the potential was there from the beginning (24).

Akin to Riffaterre's idea of the role of intertextuality, Sciascia's use of intertextual references gives his readers the freedom to find meaning beyond his own text, gathering it from a multiplicity of sources. However, the possible meanings that his texts can take are not unlimited. The strength of the socio-political criticism that Sciascia conveys in his literary work resides precisely in his ability to produce a text that allows his readers to decipher it to different degrees. It is up to the readers to decide how far beyond Sciascia's text they want to trace the intertextual references they are given – but the further they go, the stronger the meaning that Sciascia intended for his own text will become.

Keeping this theoretical framework in mind, it is necessary to briefly consider one final aspect of the intertextual relationship between Sciascia's and Borges's texts, which is defined by Borges's own theory of literary influence. As discussed above, Borges understands literary relations of influence as non-hierarchical – for him, an original is not necessarily superior to its recreations. In fact, he believes literary influence to be a reciprocal phenomenon, in the sense that an author borrowing from a text will also modify her or his precursor's work in retrospect. In his essay *Kafka y sus precursores*, included in *Otras inquisiciones*, Borges lists a series of texts and authors previous to Kafka in which he has found common themes with Kafka's work. He notes that, despite the fact that all these texts present similarities with Kafka's, they are not necessarily similar between them; it is their common features with Kafka's work that leads him to consider them together. For Borges, if it were not for the existence of Kafka's work, the present day reader would not perceive the link between all the authors who are considered to be Kafka's precursors.

Borges argues that all writers create their own precursors, thus having an influence on the future, but also on the readers' conception of the past. In his essay *Nathaniel Hawthorne*, in *Otras inquisiciones*, Borges takes this same idea one step further and focuses on how when one author influences another, they both become indebted to each other:

[L]a circunstancia, la extraña circunstancia, de percibir en un cuento de Hawthorne, redactado a principios del siglo XIX, el sabor mismo de los cuentos de Kafka que trabajó a principios del siglo XX, no debe hacernos olvidar que el sabor de Kafka ha sido creado, ha sido determinado, por Kafka. 'Wakefield' prefigura a Franz Kafka, pero este modifica, y afina,

la lectura de 'Wakefield'. La deuda es mutua; un gran escritor crea a sus precursores. Los crea y de algún modo los justifica" (OC vol. I 677-678).²⁸

This, as some critics have observed, is a feature that can be found in the way in which Borges's work impacts that of his own predecessors. Efraín Kristal notes:

Borges does not leave the majority of his precursors untouched the way most writers do when rewriting aspects of literary works that inspired them. When, for instance, he incorporated his rewriting of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' as an ingredient in his own story 'La muerte y la brújula' [...]. Borges is not just rewriting Poe; he is underscoring a possibility in Poe's writings that Poe never explored (xvii).

Some comparative studies have applied this approach in order to discuss the relationship that Borges established between his work and that of other authors that preceded him. For example, in her study of Borges's and Kafka's work, Sarah Roger illuminates her reading of the works of Kafka and Jorge Guillermo Borges, Borges's father, by approaching them through the work of Borges – their successor. The relationship between the work of Borges and that of Sciascia also allows for a similar approach. Paraphrasing Borges's quotation above, it is possible to say that Borges's work prefigures Sciascia's to some extent, but that Sciascia's writing also modifies, and refines, the reading of Borges. Rereading Borges after studying the use that Sciascia made of Borges's texts in his own writing opens up possibilities for interpretation that were in Borges's work all along, but have so far been left unexplored.

As I will discuss throughout this thesis, Sciascia integrates in his writing references, quotations and allusions to the work of Borges in multiple ways. In the above overview, I have tried to isolate the elements from various definitions of intertextuality and influence that I consider to be more relevant in order to grasp the particularities of the relationship between the work of Sciascia and Borges. By means of an approach that is aware of all these perspectives, in this thesis I will show that studying the different ways in which Sciascia integrates Borges's texts in his own writing allows a deeper understanding of Sciascia's texts, but also underscores traits in Borges's which may have not been evident before the comparison. I will also show that reconsidering in the light of this understanding various of Sciascia's other texts where Borges's influence is not explicit allows us to identify a preoccupation with regards to the relationship between history and fiction shared between both authors.

²⁸ "The circumstance, the strange circumstance, of perceiving in a story by Hawthorne, written at the beginning of the 19th century, the same flavour of the stories of Kafka, who worked at the beginning of the 20th century, should not make us forget that Kafka's flavour has been created, has been determined, by Kafka. 'Wakefield' prefigures Franz Kafka, but the latter modifies, and refines, the reading of 'Wakefield'. The debt is mutual; a great writer creates her or his precursors. Creates and somehow justifies them" (My translation).

4. Project outline

Exploring the work of Sciascia and Borges within the field of comparative literature allows for new perspectives that enrich the numerous studies that have considered both authors separately. Sciascia's work has already been studied alongside the work of other authors, but these comparative studies generally explore Sciascia's dialogue with the Italian canon. Sciascia's work needs to be understood in relation to the Italian writers of fiction who initiated the discussion of issues related to history, truth, power and narrative form that Sciascia takes up in his own writing, starting with Manzoni. Sciascia's position within Sicilian literature has also been explored in coimparative studies that encompass his work and that of other Sicilian writers, since many of Sciascia's writings are a response to or establish a dialogue with the work of authors such as Pirandello, Verga and Lampedusa. Other studies have tackled the study of Sciascia's work alongside that of other contemporary writers who discussed in their fiction the socio-political scenario of their time, such as Tabucchi. Even though they do so from three different perspectives, most of these studies on Sciascia consider his work strictly within the confines of the socio-political context from which he wrote and only in dialogue with the Italian and Sicilian literary traditions, rarely focusing on the relationship of his work with that of authors outside his own literary tradition. Studying Sciascia from the broader perspective of comparative literature allows us to take Sciascia out of this context and reinforce the connections that he established with authors foreign to his immediate reality and literary tradition. Exploring the links that Sciascia established in his writing with Borges, often considered a 'universal' writer, shows that the scope of Sciascia's work reaches much beyond his country and time. Borges, on the other hand, is often the focus of studies that compare his work with that of writers who do not necessarily belong to his same literary tradition, due to this same 'universality' of his writing. Reading Borges in the context in which Sciascia's work is rooted opens up a new perspective from which to examine aspects that are vital for both authors – their preoccupation with the relationship between history and fiction – that studying Borges in a different context would not make so visible.

Despite the prominent presence of Borges in Sciascia's work, the relationship between the two authors' work has in fact not been fully explored by criticism. Of course, Sciascia's admiration for Borges is acknowledged, and the references to Borges's works that Sciascia integrates in his own writing are often mentioned. There are a number of articles and book chapters that assess a particular aspect of the Sciascia-Borges relationship. Vicente González Martín makes a brief overview of the incidence of Borges's work in Sciascia's texts in an article dedicated to the influence of Spanish speaking authors in the work of Sciascia. Roberto Paoli comments on the recurrent themes shared by the work of Borges and

Sciascia in a chapter of his book on Borges and Italian writers. Other scholars have studied more in depth the intertextuality between a particular work of Sciascia and its references to Borges. Javier Serrano Puche highlights the prevalence of Borges in the intertextual references of which Sciascia makes use, and focuses his analysis on Sciascia's *Il cavaliere e la morte* and Borges's *Los teólogos*. Enrico Vettore unpacks the quotations from Borges that Sciascia includes in *L'affaire Moro* in order to show how through these quotations Sciascia makes an ethical appeal to his readers. Some critics have made comparative analyses of the works of Borges and Sciascia. In his PhD dissertation, Vettore investigates the influence of Borges and Manzoni on Sciascia's ethics. Susanne Heiler also looks into the influence of Borges on the work of Sciascia and the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun, focusing on Sciascia's detective stories *Todo modo* and *Il contesto*, and drawing similarities between the latter and Borges's *La muerte y la brújula*. Detective fiction is also the focus of Susan Briziarelli, who compares *La muerte y la brújula* and *Il cavaliere e la morte*. David Fairservice traces the motif of the dream in the work of Sciascia and Borges. However, so far no extensive studies have been fully devoted to assessing the relationship between both authors' work as regards their approach to the relationship between literature and history. This thesis will focus on Sciascia's use of Borges's writing in a key selection of texts, and will analyse in depth the references which other studies have merely documented.

The analysis of Sciascia's texts will not progress in chronological order, but will instead group them in three categories. It is difficult to draw definite limits between literary genres in the use that Sciascia makes of them. He did not like to define a particular text as pertaining to a particular genre, and he rejected distinctions that relied on the length of texts, – such as novel versus short story – often referring to the same work with ambiguous or arbitrary terminology. Whilst bearing this in mind, it is nevertheless possible to make a distinction between three main narrative forms in his writing. JoAnn Cannon identifies these main forms as detective fiction, historical essay, and historical fiction (Cannon "The Detective Fiction of Leonardo Sciascia" 524). I will start from this tripartite classification of the works in this thesis in order to analyse the different ways in which Borges's work is integrated in Sciascia's writing.

In chapter one, I will target Sciascia's detective fictions, focusing in more detail on *Il contesto*, *Todo modo*, and *Il cavaliere e la morte*. Afterwards, I will analyse two of his historical essays, often referred to as *inchieste* [enquiry]; *L'affaire Moro* in chapter two and *Il teatro della memoria* in chapter three. In the fourth chapter, I will focus on the historical novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. This progression from the detective fiction to the historical essay and finally to the historical novel intends to show the different levels at which the influence of Borges is present in Sciascia's writing. I will look at Sciascia's texts in this order instead of in

chronological order to allow a deeper analysis of the intertextual relationships that Sciascia establishes with Borges's writing. First, I will analyse the similar take on the detective fiction form shared by Sciascia and Borges. I will then discuss the influence of Borges on the form of Sciascia's *inchieste*, an influence that Sciascia himself acknowledged but has so far not been addressed by criticism, and I will analyse two of his *inchieste* in which references to Borges are very present. Having previously analysed the presence of Borges in these two narrative forms as Sciascia uses them is what allows for a comparative analysis of Sciascia and Borges in Sciascia's historical novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, even if this work precedes the rest of Sciascia's works analysed in this thesis. Drawing from my analysis of their detective fiction and of Sciascia's *inchieste* I will argue that, despite there not being explicit references to Borges's work in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, a reading of this historical novel in the light of Borges's work allows a metafictional level of interpretation that directly addresses issues of historical representation recurrent throughout Sciascia's literary career. Likewise, my choice of texts is not exhaustive of those in which Sciascia makes references to Borges, but those that I considered to be best suited for the analysis of the relationship between fiction and history that is the focus of this thesis. Direct and indirect references to Borges are very frequent in Sciascia's work; however, I consider those I have chosen to analyse in this thesis to be the most prominent.

The narrative forms of the detective story, the historical essay, and the historical novel have in common that they are structured around a process of reconstruction, which results in a double narration: the past as it was, and the story of the past as it is reconstructed from the present. In the case of the detective story, the narration is formed by the story of the crime and the story of the reconstruction of this same crime by the investigator. In the case of the historical essay, the true past events that inspire the narration are reconstructed from the present of the writer. These historical accounts already incorporate the complications of the merging of history and fiction, since whereas the crime and its investigation in the detective story both belong to a fictional realm, the events being reconstructed in the historical account belong to a real past. For the historical novel studied in this thesis, this process of reconstruction is even more intricate. *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* is a fictional account based on a real historical case of imposture in which a priest forged a series of manuscripts that he presented as historical evidence of an, until then, poorly documented period of Sicilian history. It therefore constitutes a fictional reconstruction of a real past event – the imposture – in which another fictional reconstruction of past events – the forging of the manuscripts – took place.

For the different works analysed in this thesis, I will look into the ways in which Sciascia makes use of this double narration to address the troubled relationship between history and

literature, questioning how the narrative structure in these works adds meaning to the narration. I will also analyse how the use that Sciascia makes of this double narrative structure contributes to a reflection on the processes involved in making sense of past events when they are reconstructed through language and from the perspective of the present. I will discuss how the references to the work of Borges that Sciascia includes in some of his works allow him to better explore this relationship between history and fiction, and how a comparative study of some of Sciascia's other texts with Borges's writing provides new insights into this theme, present in both authors' oeuvre. These questions will guide the main line of argument of the thesis, along with the order in which the works will be presented, as outlined above. The thesis will be divided into four chapters as follows:

Chapter one will tackle the analysis of the detective story as a form of investigation into truth in the work of Sciascia and Borges. I will address the similarities between Sciascia's and Borges's approach to the detective genre, paying particular attention to whether or not these detective stories engage with a specific socio-political scenario. In order to do this, I will briefly analyse Borges's *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, which has been identified as a critique of Argentine society (Simpson 37), and I will focus more in depth on *La muerte y la brújula*, which has been read as a metaphysical detective story (Holquist 154). For Sciascia, I will start by briefly considering some of his earlier detective fictions, *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo*, which are overtly related to a specific socio-political scenario. Then I will analyse in more depth *Il contesto*, *Todo modo*, and *Il cavaliere e la morte*, which can still be linked to a particular scenario but are presented as more metaphorical, and for this reason have been considered to be closer to Borges's writing. I will question how Sciascia's and Borges's approach to the genre allows them to engage with their readers and their expectations, and what meaning their subversion of the archetypal whodunit story contributes to their texts.

Chapter two will focus on the *inchiesta L'affaire Moro*. First, I will analyse the particularities of Sciascia's *inchieste*, focusing on the influence that Borges had on this narrative form. For the particular case of *L'affaire Moro*, this influence is not only limited to form. In this text, Sciascia proposes a rereading of the kidnapping and murder of the politician Aldo Moro, and he encourages his readers to do so in the manner of the fictional writer Pierre Menard, the subject of Borges's *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*. Through this reference, Sciascia establishes an intricate network of intertextual relationships that involve not only *L'affaire Moro* and *Pierre Menard*, but can be traced back to Cervantes's *Don Quijote* and Unamuno's commentary of Cervantes's novel *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*. I will explore how Sciascia uses these intertextual connections in order to propose what he considers to be a truthful interpretation of the events in the Moro case. About *Pierre Menard*, Sciascia stated that it

was an “apologo sullo storicismo assoluto” (OA vol. II, t. I 948).²⁹ I will argue that in this statement Sciascia extrapolates the notion of the mutability of literary texts to history, narrowing the distance between the two. In this context, I will consider some of the issues that have been addressed by scholars such as Louis O. Mink and Hayden White, who have pointed out the analogous mechanisms whereby fictional texts are written and historical narratives are reconstructed. I will also discuss similar issues of historical representation as presented in Borges’s *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, questioning how Sciascia and Borges compare the relationship between a text and its rewritings with the relationship between past events and narrative history.

Chapter three will focus on the second of Sciascia’s *inchieste*, *Il teatro della memoria*, a text that so far has received little critical attention. In a similar way to *L’affaire Moro*, the presence of Borges is in this work not only in the use of the *inchiesta* form, but also in the references to Borges’s writing that Sciascia intersperses in his text. These include references to *Funes el memorioso*, and Sciascia’s suggestion that his *Il teatro della memoria* was inspired by the same historical case as Borges’s *El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro*. For the analysis of *Il teatro della memoria*, I will first unpack the references that Sciascia makes to these two texts, and afterwards I will draw similarities between it and Borges’s *La busca de Averroes* and *Tema del traidor y del héroe*. My main focus will be analysing the role of memory in the reconstruction of past events from the present as Sciascia presents it in this text. I will do this within the framework of Frances A. Yates’s studies on the art of memory, from which Sciascia draws and adapts the main concepts on which he bases his text. I will also discuss the relationship between collective memory and history as Sciascia presents it in his text, in relation to the work of a number of scholars in memory studies. Finally, I will explore how a reading of Sciascia’s *Il teatro della memoria* that focuses on its relationship with the work of Borges allows us to relate this *inchiesta* to *L’affaire Moro*, even if they seem to deal with completely different themes, showing the similar ways in which both texts address the role of memory in the reconstruction of the past.

Chapter four will consider Sciascia’s historical novel *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*. For the analysis of this work, I will start by comparing it to Borges’s *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, focusing on the role that the motif of the mirror plays in these texts. I will explore how this motif participates not only in the narration, but also in the structure of the texts, by analysing them in terms of Lucien Dällenbach’s study of the device of the *mise en abyme*. I will consider *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* as belonging to what Linda Hutcheon has termed historiographic metafiction, highlighting a dimension of the novel which is concerned with its own position in relation to the historical record. In order to question to what extent the use of the *mise en abyme* device

²⁹ “Fable of absolute historicism” (My translation).

in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* problematizes this position, in a second part of the chapter I will propose a reading that compares Borges's *Tres versiones de Judas* with three different portrayals of the protagonist of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*: that offered by Sciascia's novel, and by two historical accounts of the same imposture, Domenico Scinà's *Prospetto letterario* and Adelaide Albanese's *Il problema dell'arabica impostura dell'abate Vella*. I will consider how Sciascia's choice to write *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* as historical fiction instead of an *inchiesta* allows him to engage with the problematic relationship between history and fiction through the narrative form of his text, in a way that resembles his approach to the archetypes of the detective story studied in chapter one.

CHAPTER 1. The Detective Story and the Search for Truth

Porzio: *Io vedo la tua opera come un tutto organico, in cui talvolta ti sei espresso in chiave saggistica, in altre narrativa. Questo, come sai, ha un certo rapporto con Borges. E per fare della letteratura etica, 'politica' nel senso più ampio del termine, hai usato il racconto poliziesco, che consideri lo strumento più moderno e attuale.*

Sciascia: E soprattutto più onesto.
(*Fuoco all'anima* 94)¹

This chapter will tackle the study of the detective story, a narrative form that has a considerable relevance in the works of Sciascia and Borges. Much has been written about the individual approach of both writers to detective fiction.² The influence of Borges in Sciascia's detective fiction has been acknowledged by several critics, and a comparative study of particular works has been the focus of a number of brief studies, but no extensive studies have done a comparative assessment of the ways in which the two authors approach the genre of detective fiction.³ The aim of this chapter is not, however, to evaluate in depth the relationship between the detective genre and Borges's and Sciascia's work. Rather, my intention in this chapter is to draw attention to the similar mechanisms that both authors use to manipulate the conventions of detective genre, arguing how these mechanisms contribute meaning to their narrations. It has been argued, in different studies,

¹ "Porzio: I see your work as an organic whole, in which sometimes you have expressed yourself through the essay, others through narration. This, as you know, is to some extent related to Borges. And in order to do ethical literature, 'political' in the broadest sense of the word, you have used the detective story, which you consider the most modern instrument.

Sciascia: And above all, the most truthful" (My translation).

² For studies on Borges's 'metaphysical' detective fiction, see Maurice J. Bennet's "The Detective Fiction of Poe and Borges"; David A. Boruchoff's "In Pursuit of the Detective Genre: 'La Muerte y la Brújula' of J. L. Borges"; Michael Holquist's "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction"; and John T. Irwin's *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges and the Analytic Detective Story*. Alicia Borinsky's "Jorge Luis Borges", in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, analyses in detail Borges's 'metaphysical' detective stories and those published with Bioy under the pen name Bustos Domecq. Philip Swanson's "Borges and Popular Culture" analyses his use of the genre with regards to Borges's ideas of the local and the universal. Clemens A. Franken's, "Jorge Luis Borges y su detective-lector" and Jorge Hernández Martín's *Readers and Labyrinths: Detective Fiction in Borges, Bustos Domecq, and Eco* emphasise the role of the reader in Borges's detective fiction. Most monographs on Sciascia devote chapters to his detective fiction. See Claude Ambroise's *Invito alla lettura di Sciascia*; Aldo Budriesi's *Pigliari di lingua: temi e forme della narrativa di Leonardo Sciascia*; and Joseph Farrell's *Leonardo Sciascia*. JoAnn Cannon's "The Detective Fiction of Leonardo Sciascia" analyses his use of the genre in relation to other narrative forms. The collection of articles edited by Stefano Salis and Marcello D'Alessandra, *Nero su giallo: Leonardo Sciascia eretico del genere poliziesco* includes articles focusing on each of Sciascia's detective stories.

³ See Susan Briziarelli's "Of Valiant Knights and Labyrinths: Leonardo Sciascia's *Il Cavaliere e la Morte*" for a comparison between *La muerte y la brújula* and *Il cavaliere e la morte*; Susanne Heiler's "Jorge Luis Borges chez Tahar Ben Jelloun et Leonardo Sciascia" for a comparison of *Il contesto* and *La muerte y la brújula*; and Javier Serrano Puche's "Formas de intertextualidad en *Il cavaliere e la morte* de Leonardo Sciascia" for a comparison between *Il cavaliere e la morte* and *Los teólogos*.

that Borges and Sciascia overturn the archetypes⁴ of the detective genre in their work, going against the expectations of the readers. Some of Borges's detective stories have been referred to as metaphysical (Holquist 154) and considered as representative of a postmodern take on detective fiction. In the case of Sciascia, his detective fiction reverses the archetypes of the traditional detective story in order to reveal the complexities of the social and political reality behind his work. The effect produced by their detective stories resides not merely in the language of the text, but in how the text is structured and how it responds to the expectations that their readers have towards the genre of detective fiction. In this way, both authors involve their readers in the process of detection, handing over to them part of the responsibility to solve the mystery presented in their detective stories.

Sciascia's extensive production of detective stories, spanning from the early 60s until the late 80s, is ideal terrain for exploring the progression of the presence of Borges in Sciascia's work. Joseph Farrell observes that this presence is increasingly traceable: "Sciascia had been engaged in a dialogue with J. L. Borges over a number of years, [...] but the encounter between the two became progressively more profound" (149). As I will argue throughout this chapter, there are a series of Borgesian motifs which appear with increased frequency in Sciascia's detective fiction. From very specific settings and socio-political scenarios, his detective stories move on to more abstract settings which are reminiscent of Borges's metaphysical detective stories. Often the character of the detective and that of the criminal become each other's alter ego, much like in some of Borges's short stories, for instance *Los teólogos*, *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, or *Tres versiones de Judas*. However, as Farrell also notes, Sciascia "never developed any taste for the purely fantastic, nor does the novel and essay overlap to the extent they do in Borges" (149). Indeed, Sciascia's detective fiction always preserves an element of social criticism, present even in the stories that do not seem to be linked to a particular setting. However, I argue that Sciascia's and Borges's similar approach to the detective story entails an underlying common preoccupation with the ways in which events from the past are reconstructed, and how this reconstruction, tainted with fictional elements, can threaten its truthfulness.

⁴ Throughout this chapter I will refer to the 'archetypes of detective fiction', or the 'archetypal detective story', in the sense of a formulaic narrative structure that develops according to a set of expectations on the part of the readers of the detective genre, and particularly of the whodunit story. Both Sciascia and Borges describe this structure in the essays they wrote about detective fiction that I analyse in the following sections of this chapter. Overall, for both of them this formulaic detective story always begins with a crime that disrupts the normal order of society; the investigator's exceptional intellectual skills will allow him or her to solve the crime, incarcerating the criminals and thus restoring normal order to society.

1. Sciascia on the detective story

In the essay *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco*, included in *Cruciverba*, Sciascia makes a review of the detective genre. He describes the detective story as a narration in which the readers are freed from every effort that is usually required in the act of reading: as if they were cinema spectators rather than readers, Sciascia writes, the readers play a role of intellectual passivity regarding the plot, comforted by the certainty that the narration will lead them to the solution of the crime by the detective in the last pages of the book (OB vol. II 1182). He then carries out an overview of the most important fictional detectives and their authors. He identifies in Poe's Dupin stories the inauguration of the detective genre as such, although he declares the Bible to contain the first detective story, and the prophet Daniel the first investigator (OB vol. II 1183). Sciascia notes, also in relation to other literary detectives, the characteristics that define such characters. They are all exceptionally intelligent; some seem, says Sciascia, to be even more intelligent than the authors that created them, "di una intelligenza suscitata, come in Daniele, dallo Spirito Santo" (OB vol. II 1186).⁵ This exceptional intelligence gives the readers confidence that the investigator will always provide a solution for the crime, and that explains the passive role they play when reading this kind of narration. Instead of feeling identified with the character of the detective, the readers of this kind of story, Sciascia argues, prefer to identify with the sidekick:

Il lettore di 'gialli' non vuole sostituirsi all'investigatore; e la soddisfazione che questo genere letterario gli procura è quella del riposo intellettuale che gli è garantito dalla presenza di un investigatore 'eccezionale', dotato cioè di eccezionali poteri razionali e immaginativi (OB vol. II 1189).⁶

This investigator guides the reader through what Sciascia presents as the four phases of the detective story: posing the problem, presenting the essential evidence necessary to solve it, developing the investigation to reach a solution, and proving, through the evidence, one of the characters of the book as guilty of the crime (OB vol. II 1189). Especially throughout the second and third phases, the readers want, according to Sciascia, a completely passive role regarding the solving of the mystery: "come di chi assiste a una partita di scacchi senza nulla sapere del gioco degli scacchi" (OB vol. II 1189).⁷

From what he writes about the detective story, and especially of the reader of the detective story as a passive reader, it may seem that Sciascia does not have a high opinion of the possibilities that the genre offers to writers. However, when he wrote this essay on the detective story Sciascia had already published several novels that had been read as

⁵ "Of an intelligence inspired, like in Daniel, by the Holy Ghost" (My translation).

⁶ "The reader of detective stories does not want to stand in for the detective; the satisfaction that this literary genre provides is that of intellectual rest, guaranteed by the presence of an 'exceptional' investigator, an investigator with exceptional rational and imaginative abilities" (My translation).

⁷ "As someone watching a game of chess without knowing anything about chess" (My translation).

detective novels, and which were some of the works for which he was best known. It is significant that Sciascia does not mention any of his own works in his thorough review of the detective genre; perhaps proving that he is aware that the use he makes of the conventions of the detective story does not match with the characteristics he attributes to detective fiction in his essay. In fact, his understanding of the genre subverts most of the values he presents in his essay *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco* and expects a quite different role, not at all passive, from his readership. Still, he is aware that his readers will approach his novels with the expectations that the traditional detective novels fulfil, and he uses this in his favour. It is precisely the defined archetypes of the detective story – readers expect, as soon as they believe they are reading a detective story, that the plot will develop in the sequence outlined by Sciascia in his essay – which allows him to convey a more powerful meaning to his detective novels. When these archetypes are completely overturned, the readers of Sciascia's detective fiction are driven out of their role of spectators of the crime and its disentanglement by an intellectually superior investigator. In some cases the criminal is found but never imprisoned, the investigator is defeated or even killed, the narration ends before the criminal is found or, even, a new crime is triggered by following a certain line of investigation.

2. Borges on the detective story

One of the lectures in the volume *Borges, oral* is devoted to reviewing the origins and development of the detective genre, under the title *El cuento policial*. Borges quickly identifies, as Sciascia did in *Breve storia del romanzo poliziesco*, the fictions of Poe as the first manifestation of the genre. He stops at this point, however, in order to question the notion of genre itself first: “los géneros literarios dependen, quizá, menos de los textos que del modo en que estos son leídos. El hecho estético requiere la conjunción del lector y del texto y sólo entonces existe” (OC vol. II 677).⁸ Borges emphasises in this way the role of the reader in determining whether a narration belongs to a certain genre. It is the reader who has been ‘trained’ as a reader of detective stories who will identify a certain narration as such. To illustrate this, Borges uses the example of a hypothetical reader of *Don Quijote* who has been told it is a detective story. Such a reader, Borges says, would be suspicious of all the information provided by the narrator:

Por ejemplo, si lee: ‘En un lugar de la Mancha...’, desde luego supone que aquello no sucedió en la Mancha. Luego: ‘... de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme...’, ¿por qué no

⁸ “[L]iterary genres may depend less on texts than on the way texts are read. The aesthetic event requires the conjunction of reader and text; only then does it exist” (*Total Library* 491).

quiere acordarse Cervantes? Porque sin duda Cervantes era el asesino, el culpable (OC vol. II 678).⁹

In this way Borges places on the reader the responsibility of judging a work as belonging or not to the detective genre. Of Poe, he says that he should be given credit not only for inaugurating the detective genre, but most of all for creating this new kind of reader: the reader of detective stories (OC vol. II 678). Borges therefore focuses his analysis of the detective story, like Sciascia did, on the attitude of the reader towards the narration, rather than on the characteristics of the text itself. The way a detective story is read depends, for both authors, on the expectations with which the readers approach it.

Borges's essay does not communicate, however, the same irony as Sciascia's towards the passive role of the reader of detective stories. In fact, he ends his essay pointing out what he sees as positive in the detective story:

En esta época nuestra, tan caótica, hay algo que, humildemente, ha mantenido las virtudes clásicas: el cuento policial. Ya que no se entiende un cuento policial sin principio, sin medio y sin fin. [...] Yo diría, para defender la novela policial, que no necesita defensa, leída con cierto desdén ahora, está salvando el orden en una época de desorden (OC vol. II 685).¹⁰

The Aristotelian 'classic virtues' of a plot divided into beginning, middle and end, make of such a plot "the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy" (Aristotle 12). Borges considers the defined tripartite structure of the detective story as a way of organising the chaos of reality. However, in his praise of the detective story is also implied the fact that such a narration will never be able to correspond to a true portrait of this same chaotic reality. Borges implies this idea in his short story *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain*, in *Ficciones*. The story reviews the literary career of the fictional writer Herbert Quain, whose detective novel *The God of the Labyrinth* is summarised as follows:

Hay un indescifrable asesinato en las páginas iniciales, una lenta discusión en las intermedias, una solución en las últimas. Ya aclarado el enigma, hay un párrafo largo e introspectivo que contiene esta frase: *Todos creyeron que el encuentro de los dos jugadores de ajedrez había sido casual*. Esa frase deja entender que la solución es errónea. El lector, inquieto, revisa los capítulos pertinentes y descubre otra solución, que es la verdadera (OC vol. I 462).¹¹

Even if *The God of the Labyrinth* follows the structure of the detective story, in this singular work it is the responsibility of the readers to reread the story and find out the truth that the

⁹ "For example, if he reads: 'In a place in La Mancha...,' he naturally assumes that none of it really happened in La Mancha. Then: 'whose name I do not wish to recall' – and why didn't Cervantes want to remember? Undoubtedly because Cervantes was the murderer, the guilty party" (*Total Library* 492).

¹⁰ "In this chaotic era of ours, one thing has humbly maintained the classic virtues: the detective story. For a detective story cannot be understood without a beginning, middle, and end. [...] I would say in defense of the detective novel that it needs no defense; though now read with a certain disdain, it is safeguarding order in an era of disorder" (*Total Library* 499).

¹¹ "There is an incomprehensible murder in the early pages of the book, a slow discussion in the middle, and a solution of the crime toward the end. Once the mystery has been cleared up, there is a long retrospective paragraph that contains the following sentence: *Everyone believed that the chessplayers had met accidentally*. That phrase allows one to infer that the solution is in fact in error, and so, uneasy, the reader looks back over the pertinent chapters and discovers *another* solution, which is the correct one" (*Collected Fictions* 108).

detective failed to grasp. This will also be Borges's intention when writing his own detective fictions. Reversing the expectations of the genre will show how the truth reached by the detective of the traditional detective story rarely manages to reflect all the complexities of reality.

Sciascia shares with Borges the view that the tripartite structure of the detective story is what makes it the most appropriate form to reflect on the chaos of reality:

[Porzio]: *Negli ultimi anni, per descrivere la realtà della Sicilia ricorri sempre più al poliziesco; è perché ormai tutto ciò che riguarda la Sicilia è poliziesco, o perché pensi che questo tipo di schema è quello che meglio ti permette di esprimerti, come formula narrativa?*

[Sciascia]: Credo che il poliziesco sia il genere più chiaro e onesto per fare il racconto, ecco tutto. Non è per via della realtà siciliana, ma per quelle ragioni che adduce Borges; il poliziesco dà uno schema con un inizio, uno sviluppo e una fine. Anche se la città in cui si svolge la storia, senza che se ne sia fatto il nome, è una città siciliana (*Fuoco all'anima* 118).¹²

Both Borges and Sciascia agree that the archetypes of the detective story are reliable and stable, since the pleasure of reading a detective story comes from the certainty the readers have that the plot will always unfold according to their expectations. It is the fact that these archetypes and structure of the detective genre seem to be so solid in the eyes of the readers that both Borges and Sciascia take advantage of in their detective stories.

3. The detective fiction genre

Scholars dedicated to the study of detective fiction almost unanimously agree with Borges and Sciascia in considering the publication of Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841 to represent the birth of the genre. This short story inaugurates the tradition of what will be known as the whodunit story, which in their essays Sciascia and Borges refer to as the 'intellectual' detective story. This kind of story relies on the excellent intellectual skills of the investigator, its protagonist, to provide a solution for the crime. A different form of crime fiction is that which developed mainly in the USA, the so-called 'hardboiled' detective story, which focuses more on action and violence than in the intellectual ability of the main character to solve the mystery. For my discussion in this chapter I will address the whodunit story, since it is the archetypes of this form of detective fiction that Sciascia and Borges

¹² "[Porzio]: In these past years, to portray the reality of Sicily you always resort to the detective story; is it because nowadays all that has to do with Sicily is related to crime, or because you think that this sort of structure allows you to express yourself better, as a narrative form? [Sciascia]: I think that the detective story is the clearest and more truthful genre to deliver the story, that's all. Not because of Sicilian reality, but for the same reasons adduced by Borges; the detective story provides a structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even if the city where the story takes place, the name of which is never mentioned, is a Sicilian city" (My translation).

referred to in their essays, and those they chose to subvert and adapt for their own narrative aims.

One of the seminal essays on detective fiction is Tzvetan Todorov's "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1966). Looking at the structure of the whodunit, Todorov observes that this kind of narration develops on two levels: the story of the crime, and the story of the investigation of this crime. Although the crime precedes its investigation, the first story is unknown to the reader until the end of the second story, since what the investigator has to do is precisely to reconstruct the first story during the course of the second (Todorov 227). Todorov argues that these two levels of the detective story can be extrapolated to all narratives, by relating them to the distinction made by the Russian Formalists between 'story' (*fabula* in the Russian original) and 'plot' (also referred to as 'discourse'; *sjuzhet* in the Russian original), in a key paragraph that is worth quoting in its entirety:

We might further characterize these two stories by saying that the first – the story of the crime – tells 'what really happened', whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'. But these definitions concern not only the two stories in detective fiction, but also two aspects of every literary work which the Russian Formalists isolated forty years ago. They distinguished, in fact, the *fable* (story) from the *subject* (plot) of a narrative: the story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us. The first notion corresponds to the reality evoked, to events similar to those which take place in our lives; the second, to the book itself, to the narrative, to the literary devices the author employs. In the story, there is no inversion in time, actions follow their natural order; in the plot, the author can present results before their causes, the end before the beginning. These two notions do not characterize two parts of the story or two different works, but two aspects of one and the same work; they are two points of view about the same thing. How does it happen then that detective fiction manages to make both of them present, to put them side by side? (228).

Most subsequent studies on detective fiction have taken into consideration Todorov's relevant point about the two-layered detective narration. This observation has also served to draw attention to the special status that detective fiction enjoys among other kinds of narrative. As Laura Marcus notes, the fact that Todorov's two-layered structure of the detective story is related to the Russian formalist idea of the distinction between discourse and story, makes of detective fiction the self-reflective narrative par excellence (245). This aspect of detective fiction has made of it a perfect example to illustrate numerous discussions on literary theory. Peter Brooks emphasises the importance of the twofold dimension of this kind of narrative as enunciated by Todorov:

Todorov identifies the two orders of story, inquest and crime, as *sjuzhet* and *fabula*. He thus makes the detective story the narrative of narratives, its classical structure a laying-bare of the structure of all narrative in that it dramatizes the role of *sjuzhet* and *fabula* and the nature of their relation (Brooks 24-25).

Regarding the work of Borges and Sciascia, it can be argued that this two-dimensional status of the detective story is the reason why both authors recur to it so often. Presenting their stories as detective fictions automatically creates in their readers a set of expectations

about how the plot is going to unfold. This, as Brooks points out, can be said of any kind of narrative, but is most explicit in the detective story:

[W]e read only those incidents and signs that can be construed as promise and annunciation, enchain[ed] toward a construction of significance – those markers that, as in the detective story, appear to be clues to the underlying intentionality of event (Brooks 94).

This is the same point that Borges made about the reader who approached *Don Quijote* being told it was a detective story. The premises of a detective story already anticipate how the readers can expect it to end: the crime that takes place in the first pages of the book anticipates the discovery of the criminal at the end; the disruption of the normal order of society caused by this crime will be restored once the culprits are identified as such. This is only possible because of the two dimensions in which the detective story unfolds: the story of the crime has already taken place by the time the story of the investigation begins, reinforcing this need for an ending of the detective narration that brings both stories together. This is, as Brooks points out, a mechanism that is present in any plotting process:

The sense of beginning, then, must in some important way be determined by the sense of an ending. We might say that we are able to read present moments – in literature and, by extension, in life – as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot (Brooks 94).

This is, however, not what happens in Borges's and Sciascia's detective stories. Being presented as detective fiction, they build up the readers' expectations only to betray them at the end of the story. Borges defends the classical virtues of beginning, middle and end in the detective story to make sense of the world, and Sciascia finds the detective genre the most truthful form of writing, but they do precisely because this is a genre which allows a greater degree of self-reflection on the way its narrative structure is constructed. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this attitude of Sciascia and Borges towards detective fiction is not unique to them, but has been an increasingly common approach to the genre. Although a comprehensive survey of the evolution of the detective story is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will briefly discuss some considerations about the genre in Italy and in Argentina, or more broadly in Latin America, which are relevant in order to contextualise both authors' work.¹³

The development of the detective genre in Italy and Latin America presents many similarities. The first appearance of detective fiction in both Italian and Latin American literature took place in the form of translations of British, American and French novels. In both literatures,

¹³ For a comprehensive survey of the evolution of the detective story in Italy, see Massimo Carloni's *L'Italia in giallo. Geografia e storia del giallo italiano contemporaneo*; Giuliana Pieri's *Italian Crime Fiction*; and Loris Rambelli's *Storia del 'giallo' italiano*. For an overview of the development of the genre in Latin America, with a particular focus on Argentina, see Amelia Simpson's *Detective Fiction from Latin America*. In *Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Detective Fiction: Essays on the Género Negro Tradition*, Renée Craig-Odders et al. provide a more general overview of the hardboiled detective story written in Spanish and Portuguese.

national production of the genre struggled to take off, and in both cases it did so relying heavily on foreign models, both in terms of narrative structure and of setting. Detective fiction also struggled for decades to present itself as a 'valid' literary genre, seen as part of popular culture and therefore not worthy of the same critical attention as 'higher' forms of literature. The initial struggle of the genre to settle in a new literary tradition was regarded by many as a sign of its unsuitability to reflect the reality of a Latin American or Italian setting. In the case of Latin America, the Mexican Carlos Monsiváis stated that:

If the aim of [detective] literature is to be realistic, [in Latin America] the accused would almost never be the real criminal and, unless he or she were poor, would never be punished. [...] The exception, the out-of-the-ordinary, isn't that a Latin American is a victim, but rather that he or she isn't one. We don't have any detective literature because we don't have any faith in justice (quoted in Simpson 21).

Similar views of the inadequacy of the genre to be exported can be found in an Italian context. Alberto Savinio stated that:

The detective novel is quintessentially Anglo-Saxon. The English or the American metropolis, with its sinister overcrowded slums – dark, damp and squalid – its gangs of organised and militarised criminals, its masses as black as sewer water, the ghostly appearance of its buildings, offers the most favourable setting, the most appropriate stage for the scene of the crime. It is difficult to imagine a detective novel taking place within the city walls of Valenza or of Mantua, of Avignon or of Reggio Emilia (quoted in Dunnett 6).

This conception of the detective genre as unfit to reflect real-world criminality progressively drove writers of crime stories to develop a series of narrative strategies to adapt the genre to the perspective from which they wrote, a tendency which continues to this day, not only in an Italian or Latin American context, but arguably worldwide. It is fair to say that to some extent the development of hardboiled crime fiction is one of these responses, since it presents a disenchanting view of justice in order to attempt a critique of society that the archetypes of the whodunit do not allow. Other authors choose to make use of the well-established genre conventions of the classic detective story and subvert them in different ways to serve their individual narrative goals. This is the approach that Borges and Sciascia prefer. With regards to this kind of texts in the Latin American context, Amelia Simpson observes:

[A]ttention is often purposely drawn in the narrative to differences between the model and the new text. In the juxtaposition of these two texts within one narrative framework, a palimpsest is created. The new text is written over the surface of the old (the foreign, imported detective model), which itself remains legible beneath the surface. These two dimensions are, of course, present to a degree in all literature. But they are especially notable in detective writing where norms and models are more transparent than in some other varieties of narrative (23).

Simpson therefore detects another twofold dimension in the detective story, which is combined with that underscored by Todorov: the detective story is not only within its structure the story of a reconstruction of a crime, but is within the genre of detective fiction an (adapted) reconstruction of the familiar archetypes of the whodunit. As a result of the overlap of these two dimensions, the detective story is able to incorporate new meanings:

[T]he two (or sometimes more) layers of the palimpsest are purposefully drawn into an interaction in order to generate new meanings. Such works are all, in a sense, about themselves. They are self-reflective to a degree – literature mirroring literature – and they offer material worthy of serious critical consideration beyond those aspects relating to the detective genre alone. The most distinctive aspect of these works, however, is that, by reflecting back on their detective-fiction models, they make readers aware of features of culture and society (Simpson 23-24).

This is precisely the effect achieved by Sciascia's detective fictions. In a letter to Sciascia after he had read his novel *A ciascuno il suo*, Italo Calvino observes that Sciascia uses to his advantage the inadequateness of the classic detective story to prompt a reflection not only about detective fiction, but about Sicilian reality:

I've read your detective story that is not a detective story, with the passion with which detective stories are read, and on top of that with the enjoyment of seeing how the detective story is dismantled; moreover, how it demonstrates the impossibility of the detective story in a Sicilian setting (My translation).¹⁴

In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss the similar ways in which Borges and Sciascia construct their detective fiction, and I will analyse to what extent this permits them to incorporate an element of social or political criticism in their works.

4. Borges's detective fiction

It has been argued that there are several kinds of detective stories within Borges's literary production, depending on the different approaches he takes to the genre. Michael Holquist identifies two kinds:

[T]he first of which is fairly conventional, at least when compared to the rest of his work; examples of this type would be the tales collected under the title *Six Problems for Indio* [sic.] *Parodi* (1942). His other experiments with the form are probably the purest example of the metaphysical detective story (Holquist 154).

The main difference between *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*, written in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares and published under the pseudonym of Honorio Bustos Domecq, and what Holquist calls metaphysical detective stories, is the element of social criticism that is present in the former and absent in the latter. In this collection of stories, the investigator Isidro Parodi solves a series of mysteries from the prison cell in which he is incarcerated. Written in the pompous prose of the fictional author Bustos Domecq, the stories are perfect examples of intellectual detective stories as described by Borges in his essay *El cuento policial*: a problem is presented to Parodi in the first pages of the story and, using only this information and his intellectual skills, the investigator is able to provide a perfect solution to the mystery at the end of the story. Parodi's ability for deduction is most remarkable,

¹⁴ “[H]o letto il tuo giallo che non è un giallo, con la passione con cui si leggono i gialli, e in più il divertimento di vedere come il giallo viene smontato, anzi come viene dimostrata l'impossibilità del romanzo giallo nell'ambiente siciliano” (Calvino 896).

especially considering that all his investigation takes place without him leaving his prison cell. The crimes in *Seis problemas* can therefore be solved without the detective having any direct contact with the scene of the crime or with any other evidence apart from the story told by his visitors. This emphasises the gap that exists between the purely intellectual solution of the crime and the reality of the crime itself, and can be read as a parody of the way in which the almighty investigator of the whodunit is always able to reach a solution that has escaped everyone else, the reader included. Another reason to consider these stories a parody, besides the extravagant, self-centred personality of its characters, is clearly indicated by the last name of the protagonist, Parodi.

Besides a parody of the detective genre itself, *Seis problemas* also incorporates a critical attitude towards the Argentinean society of the time. Simpson observes that *Seis problemas* is part of a number of detective fictions from that period that “use parody of aspects of the genre as part of the elite’s satirical attacks on the Peronist movement and the changing values and ideological orientation it represents” (35). She identifies a series of cultural references that, for an Argentine reader in the 1940s, would have been understood as representing stereotypes of certain social classes. Borges often stated that he tried to keep his political opinions out of his writing, and that is what could make *Seis problemas* stand out as a rare example of the opposite. However, in order to consider this aspect of *Seis problemas* it is necessary to keep in mind what each of the collaborators brought into the literary relationship Borges-Bioy. It could be the case that the explicit social critique of *Seis problemas* that is absent from the rest of Borges’s detective fiction is the result of Bioy’s individual approach to the detective genre.¹⁵ Another possibility is that both authors chose to include this element of social criticism precisely because the book was published in collaboration with another author and under a pseudonym. As Alicia Borinsky observes, shielding themselves behind the figure of the pretentious writer Bustos Domecq allowed Borges and Bioy to be more incisive in their criticism: “this implicit self-mockery, a recurrent device in Borges, saves the two authors from appearing arrogant in their relentless and punishing humor” (466).

¹⁵ Borges himself admitted that his collaboration with Bioy was so close that he was never sure who had contributed what to their writing: “[a] menudo me preguntan cómo es posible la colaboración literaria. Pienso que exige un abandono conjunto del egoísmo, de la vanidad y tal vez de la cortesía. Los colaboradores deben olvidarse de sí mismos y pensar sólo en términos de la obra. De hecho, cuando alguien busca saber si tal o cual broma o epíteto vino de mi lado de la mesa o del de Bioy, sinceramente no sé decírselo” (*Un ensayo autobiográfico* 80-81). [“I am often asked about what makes literary collaboration possible. I think that it requires both collaborators to give up selfishness, vanity and perhaps also politeness. Collaborators must forget about themselves and think only in terms of the work. In fact, when someone wants to know whether such and such joke or nickname came from me or from Bioy, honestly, I’m not able to answer” (My translation)]. Alicia Borinsky’s “Jorge Luis Borges” and Michel Lafon’s “Bioy and Borges: From the Third Man to the World of Bustos Domecq” analyse this literary relationship more in depth.

The second kind of detective stories written by Borges, and identified by Holquist as metaphysical, do not include this element of social criticism. Borges himself stated in *El cuento policial* that some of his detective stories, including *La muerte y la brújula*, belonged in a symbolic context (OC vol. II 685). Apart from *La muerte y la brújula*, other Borges stories that present features of the detective genre and are frequently analysed as such are *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* and *Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto*. Here I will focus my analysis on *La muerte y la brújula*, since it is, within Borges's production, the text that most explicitly addresses the archetypes of the detective genre, and also the one that presents the most explicit similarities with Sciascia's writing.

La muerte y la brújula starts from the premises of the traditional detective story: it opens with the murder, in mysterious circumstances, of a rabbi, and presents the conflicting lines of investigation of police inspector Treviranus and detective Erik Lönnrot. Treviranus finds it likely that the rabbi was murdered when he surprised a robber who had entered his room by mistake, while trying to reach the room next to his, where the owner of some valuable jewels was staying. However, Lönnrot, of whom the narrator says that "se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin" (OC vol. I 499),¹⁶ favours a more elaborate explanation. Lönnrot replies to inspector Treviranus that his hypothesis is possible, but not interesting:

Usted replicará que la realidad no tiene la menor obligación de ser interesante. Yo le replicaré que la realidad puede prescindir de esa obligación, pero no las hipótesis. En la que usted ha improvisado, interviene copiosamente el azar. He aquí un rabino muerto; yo preferiría una explicación puramente rabínica, no los imaginarios percances de un imaginario ladrón (OC vol. I 500).¹⁷

Borges thus presents his detective as someone who does not accept the straightforward hypothesis of the police investigator, based only on the circumstances in which the crime was committed. Lönnrot prefers a more elaborate explanation, even if this is unrelated to the evidence. He seems to be choosing his line of investigation according to an artistic principle, rather than in order to find the truth. The readers' attention is drawn several times to the fact that Lönnrot is not interested in putting the criminals in jail, but just in finding the solution of the crime. After the first crime, he takes home the books that belonged to the dead rabbi, and "[i]ndiferente a la investigación policial, se dedicó a estudiarlos" (OC vol. I 500).¹⁸ Two more crimes take place, apparently related to the first one, and eventually the police investigator Treviranus receives a letter that provides a geometrical explanation for the crimes: their three locations form the angles of an equilateral triangle. When Lönnrot sees

¹⁶ "[T]hought of himself as a reasoning machine, an Auguste Dupin" (*Collected Fictions* 147).

¹⁷ "You will reply that reality has not the slightest obligation to be interesting. I will reply in turn that reality may get along without that obligation, but hypothesis may not. In the hypothesis you suggest, here, on the spur of the moment, chance plays a disproportionate role. What we have here is a dead rabbi; I would prefer a purely rabbinical explanation, not the imaginary bunglings of an imaginary burglar" (*Collected Fictions* 148).

¹⁸ "[I]ndifferent to the police investigation, he set about studying them" (*Collected Fictions* 149).

the map, he is convinced that he has solved the crime, and that he will be able to catch the criminals at the location of the fourth crime they are planning. At this point, the narrator reports Lönnrot's thoughts: "[v]irtualmente, había descifrado el problema; las meras circunstancias, la realidad (nombres, arrestos, caras, trámites judiciales y carcelarios), apenas le interesaban ahora" (OC vol. I 504).¹⁹ Again, Lönnrot seems to consider solving the crime as a mere intellectual exercise, completely unrelated to the capture of the culprits or the reinstatement of social order.

Up to this point the story has fulfilled all the expectations of the archetypal whodunit. It is when Lönnrot arrives at the supposed location of the fourth crime that he discovers that he has been misled in his investigation. His antagonist, Red Scharlach, acquainted with Lönnrot's love of imaginative solutions, has set a trap for him and is waiting in the estate Triste-le-Roy. Scharlach explains how the first crime was in fact committed by mistake during an attempted burglary, just as the police investigator had suggested. Reading in the papers some days later that Lönnrot was trying to find a more elaborate solution for the crimes, Scharlach decided to set a trap for the detective. The subsequent crimes were devised in such a way that they would lead Lönnrot to his own death, while he was convinced that he had discovered the criminals' intentions and was about to stop them from committing the fourth crime. Faced with the truth, Lönnrot understands that, even if he has correctly solved the mystery, this will not lead to the capture of the criminals; in fact, his investigation will be the cause of his own death. At the end of the story, Borges is betraying the expectations of the genre that until that point he had carefully respected. What turns *La muerte y la brújula* into a parody of detective fiction is the fact that effectively solving the mystery is not the way that leads to the capture of the criminal, but in fact what allows him to commit a new crime. As David A. Boruchoff describes it, this story establishes a new relationship with the detective genre:

[T]here are certain differences in *La muerte y la brújula* which transform it, at least in part, into something new. In short: the genre's characteristic device of inversion – denial of the obvious, traditional and pragmatic logic of common sense in favor of more abstract and analytical, 'elegant' reasoning – is used by Borges to show, ironically, the supremacy of the former over the latter (14).

By opening the story within the conventions of the detective genre, Borges is predisposing his readers to a certain set of expectations. The final 'plot twist' is only such to the extent that in the readers' mind a different ending was already prefigured from the onset of the narration. The effectiveness of the narrative resides in that Borges targets the mental construct of the detective story with which he knows that his readers will approach the story. As Holquist observes: "Borges depend[s] on the audience's familiarity with the conventions of the

¹⁹ "He had virtually solved the problem; the mere circumstances, the reality (names, arrests, faces, the paperwork of trial and imprisonment), held very little interest for him now" (*Collected Fictions* 152-153).

detective story to provide the subtext they may then play with by defeating expectations” (155).

At the end of the story, when Lönnrot realises he is about to die, he says to Scharlach:

En su laberinto sobran tres líneas [...] Yo sé de un laberinto griego que es una línea única, recta. En esa línea se han perdido tantos filósofos que bien puede perderse un mero *detective*. Scharlach, cuando en otro avatar usted me dé caza, finja (o cometa) un crimen en A, luego un segundo crimen en B, a 8 kilómetros de A, luego un tercer crimen en C, a 4 kilómetros de A y de B, a medio camino entre los dos. Aguárdeme después en D, a 2 kilómetros de A y de C, de nuevo a mitad de camino. Máteme en D, como ahora va a matarme en Triste-le-Roy.

– Para la otra vez que lo mate – replicó Scharlach – le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante (OC vol. I 507).²⁰

This straight labyrinth for which the end can never be reached can be identified as an allusion to one of Borges’s favourite philosophical problems, Zeno of Elea’s second paradox, also known as the problem of Achilles and the tortoise. Borges formulates it as follows in his essay *La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga*, in *Discusión*:

Aquiles, símbolo de rapidez, tiene que alcanzar la tortuga, símbolo de morosidad. Aquiles corre diez veces más ligero que la tortuga y le da diez metros de distancia. Aquiles corre esos diez metros, la tortuga corre uno; Aquiles corre ese metro, la tortuga corre un decímetro; Aquiles corre ese decímetro, la tortuga corre un centímetro; Aquiles corre ese centímetro, la tortuga un milímetro; Aquiles el milímetro, la tortuga un décimo de milímetro, y así infinitamente, de modo que Aquiles puede correr para siempre sin alcanzarla. Así la paradoja inmortal (OC vol. I 244).²¹

In *La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga*, Borges does not, however, focus on Zeno’s paradox, but in those thinkers who have tried – for Borges, unsuccessfully – to refute it. Borges marvels on how the paradox, which for him can by now be described as immortal, has remained indifferent to all these attempts at refutation (OC vol. I 244). Those who tried to prove Zeno wrong, that is, arguing that Achilles will always manage to overtake the tortoise, are the same philosophers who got lost in the straight labyrinth that Lönnrot mentions. In *La muerte y la brújula*, Lönnrot’s attempt to solve the crime committed by Scharlach can be understood as an allusion to this race between Achilles and the tortoise:

²⁰ “There are three lines too many in your labyrinth [...] I know of a Greek labyrinth that is but one straight line. So many philosophers have been lost upon that line that a mere detective might be pardoned if he became lost as well. When you hunt me down in another avatar of our lives, Scharlach, I suggest that you fake (or commit) one crime at A, a second crime at B, eight kilometres from A, then a third crime at C, four kilometres from A and B and halfway between them. Then wait for me at D, two kilometres from A and C, once again between them. Kill me at D, as you are about to kill me at Triste-le-Roy.’ ‘The next time I kill you,’ Scharlach replied, ‘I promise you the labyrinth that consists of a single straight line that is invisible and endless.’” (*Collected Fictions* 156).

²¹ “Achilles, symbol of speed, has to catch up with the tortoise, symbol of slowness. Achilles runs ten times faster than the tortoise and so gives him a ten-meter advantage. Achilles runs those ten meters, the tortoise runs one; Achilles runs that meter, the tortoise runs a decimeter; Achilles runs that decimeter, the tortoise runs a centimeter; Achilles runs that centimeter, the tortoise runs a millimeter; Achilles the millimeter, the tortoise a tenth of a millimetre, and *ad infinitum*, so that Achilles can run forever without catching up. Hence the immortal paradox” (*Total Library* 43).

Lönnrot, the detective, who represents the intellect, is following Scharlach's steps in pursuit of the truth of the case, and he is expected to reach it in the end, according to the expectations created in the readers' minds by the use of the detective genre. When he is convinced of having overtaken Scharlach, anticipating his next crime in Triste-le-Roy, he is surprised that Scharlach has in fact still got there before him. The detective's ability to solve the mystery is taken for granted due to his exceptional intellectual skills. These are comparable to Achilles's speed, which should also guarantee he is able to overtake the slowest of animals.

The labyrinth with no end can be understood here, in the context of the detective story, as the problematic search for truth that all detective fiction tackles. In his symbolic story, Borges exposes how the solving of a fictional mystery can only explain reality within the framework of the unrealistic whodunit. Lönnrot distances himself too much from the reality of the crime he is investigating, pushing so far into a fictional realm that he becomes, in a way, the creator of his own murder. This is what Boruchoff has also observed regarding the relationship that Borges establishes between reality and fiction in his short story:

In *La muerte y la brújula* the fictional conventions of the detective story become the bases of reality, and in this transformation we find that we cannot live by the tenets of fiction. When the awareness of literary operation replaces the operations of literature, the function of genres – here the detective tale – changes. The power of reason to provide order gives way to chaos. The logic of the detective is powerless (Boruchoff 22).

This point is also illustrated in this conversation between two characters of Borges's *Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto*:

– No multipliques los misterios – le dijo –. Estos deben ser simples. Recuerda la carta robada de Poe, recuerda el cuarto cerrado de Zangwill.

– O complejos – replicó Dunraven –. Recuerda el universo (OC vol. I 600).²²

The first speaker refers to mysteries that belong to literature, like those in Poe's *The purloined letter* and Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery*, the solvable puzzles of detective fiction; whereas the second reminds him of the complexities of reality, which cannot be solved by the same means as fiction. For Borges, the solutions that literature provides, such as the solutions to a mystery in a detective story, do not correspond to the complexity of the real world. Lönnrot's solution of the crime is flawless from an intellectual point of view, but fails to reach the truth of the real events it investigates. Sarlo finds this an effect of the use Borges makes of paradoxes:

Paradoxes do not deal with inconsistencies or contradictions, but rather, through flawless formal consistency, they display how limited the mind is when it tries, on the one hand, to apprehend the nature of reality, and, on the other hand, to organize an ideal pattern which

²²“Please – let's not multiply the mysteries,' he said. 'Mysteries ought to be simple. Remember Poe's purloined letter, remember Zangwill's locked room.' 'Or complex,' volleyed Dunraven. 'Remember the universe'" (*Collected Fictions* 256).

could conceivably correspond to that reality. Paradoxes have the virtue of displaying the limits against which literature (or philosophy) is constructed (58).

By explicitly parodying the conventions of the genre, as in *Seis problemas*, or by disregarding the expectations of the detective story in *La muerte y la brújula*, Borges invites his readers to acknowledge the role they passively accept when going into a narration that has been presented to them as part of the detective genre. By parodying the detective genre in a similar way, Sciascia presents his readers with issues in his contemporary socio-political context in the form of detective stories. Sciascia also invites his readers first to acknowledge the passive role they adopt before these stories, and then he encourages them to reject a similarly passive role when confronted to crime in their own social reality.

5. Sciascia's detective fiction

In her study of the representation of evil in detective fiction, Mary Evans observes that modern writers of detective fiction often reflect on society, questions of social order and tensions between different social groups, which normally feature as the context for other kinds of fiction, but hardly ever as their main subject. She notes how this is due to detective fiction's main focus on questions of morality (Evans 2). Indeed, the structure of the traditional whodunit story is based around a crime that upsets the moral order of society, and its outcome implies finding the criminal so as to restore this order. However, the modern detective story allows for deeper reflection on the complexities that these concepts of social order and morality imply. She argues:

It is this second argument that can make crime and detective fiction so relevant and so prescient; it is allowed (and it allows itself) the fictional space to explore not just the biography of one person but the biographies of whole groups of people, the people who, for example, run organizations such as the police force or political parties and the people, who may be viewed and interpreted as individuals but who are nevertheless part of a social world (Evans 2).

The detective fiction of Sciascia illustrates perfectly Evans's observation. Sciascia makes use of the structure of the whodunit story, but applies it to a specific socio-political context, contemporary Italy. However, the outcome of the Sciascian detective story clashes with the expectations of the classic whodunit readers, as the responsibility for the crime cannot be placed on one individual only. As the investigation progresses, the detective and the readers realise that the breach of morality that seemed to have upset the social order is indeed at the root of this same social order. Evans also identifies this as a common trait of modern detective fiction: "[n]o longer do writers maintain the comforting view that the guilty party is merely the one rotten apple in the social barrel; now, there emerges a highly sceptical view about the health of the whole barrel" (3). Farrell makes a very similar observation about Sciascia's detective fictions: "[t]he basic social flaw uncovered by the Sciascian novel lies

not in the incidental wickedness of one deviant individual but in a culture and a society which are deviant root and branch” (64). This model of the detective story, which has become increasingly popular in the last decades as a way of delivering social criticism through literature, provided Sciascia in the early 1960s with a literary tool to expose some of the most pressing issues he found in Italian society.

Sciascia’s detective fiction is set in a society whose structure is sustained by crime, and the dissimilarity of this socio-political reality with the setting of the traditional detective story – where justice is restored as soon as the culprit is imprisoned – is what exposes its faults. Sciascia’s earlier detective fictions concern the criminal activity of the Sicilian mafia, focusing on how the power of this organisation resides in the way it permeates all levels of society, to the point that the organisations in charge of prosecuting its criminal activity do also, to some extent, rely on mafia activity. His detective stories, however, progressively move away from a specific Sicilian setting and, without completely losing their link to the socio-political reality by which they are inspired, become a more universal representation of evil and how it can be embedded in power structures. This progression of Sciascia’s detective fiction from the local towards the metaphysical has led critics to frequently associate Sciascia’s later detective stories with Borges. However, Sciascia’s portrayal of the mafia in his earlier detective fiction already shows a vision of the way in which reality and fiction can clash similar to that presented in the form of metaphysical stories in Borges. Sciascia shares with Borges a parodic approach towards the detective genre in order to show its incompatibility with reality, but he makes the focus of his detective stories the fictional quality that society and politics can acquire. As Farrell observes:

One of the reasons [Sciascia] gave for his admiration of Borges was that Borges toyed mischievously with notions of truth and fiction, transmuting the one into the other, shifting levels, having one mirror the other only to reflect the image back in distorted form. A playful quality, which may be a virtue in literature, is a vice in life and in politics (10).

What in Borges appears as a playful reflection on the limited powers of the intellect, as in the case of Lönnrot’s frustrated investigation, is the lens through which Sciascia investigates the issues of contemporary Italy that concern him. Both authors emphasise the dangers of getting fiction and reality confused – as happened to the doomed detective in *La muerte y la brújula*. Sciascia’s focus, however, is placed on the dangers that arise not when the detective follows a literary line of investigation, but when such fictional devices are considered part of the normal functioning of social order.

5.1. Detective fiction and mafia

Il giorno della civetta is the first of Sciascia's works to adopt the form of the detective story. It aims to denounce the existence and importance in Sicily, as well as increasingly in continental Italy, of the mafia. Its publication preceded by one year the creation in Italy of the Antimafia Commission (1962), before which the mere existence of such a criminal organisation was insistently denied by a large number of political figures in the country. In *Il giorno della civetta*, carabinieri captain Bellodi, originally from northern Italy, investigates two murders that he attributes to the mafia in a village in Sicily. Despite the lack of cooperation of the inhabitants of the village, Bellodi manages to follow the chain that links the man who was hired to commit the first murder to the, until then, untouchable *capomafia* Mariano Arena. It is soon obvious, however, that the consequences of Bellodi's inquiry reach far beyond Arena and into political territory:

[O] la catena finisce con Mariano, o Mariano, vecchio com'è, sofferente, comincia a cantare il suo rosario... E in questo caso, mio caro, la catena si allunga si allunga, si allunga tanto che mi ci posso trovare impigliato anch'io, e il ministro, e il padreterno... (OA vol. I 319).²³

When the newspapers make public the friendship between Arena and minister Mancuso, suggesting that he too could be involved in the doings of the mafia, powerful influences start to plot against Bellodi's investigation. Profiting from his absence from Sicily, his investigation is knocked down and the crime 'solved', by explaining it as a case of infidelity:

Dunque, a evitare che [...] questo Colasberna diventi un martire dell'idea comunista... scusate, socialista... bisogna subito trovare chi l'ha ammazzato: subito subito, in modo che il Ministro possa rispondere che Colasberna è stato vittima di una questione di interesse o di corna e che la politica non c'entra per niente (OA vol. I 273).²⁴

A plot that involves a question of interest or a crime of passion, both clichés of classic detective fiction, is much more convenient for those in power as an explanation for the crime than the political plot that Bellodi was in the process of uncovering. In this case, the normal functioning of the society in which the crime takes place is maintained by never uncovering the truth – instead of by imprisoning the culprits, as in the classic whodunit. The official 'solution' for the crime might as well have been borrowed from a literary work, and yet it is much easier to present that as the truth than expose an intricate network of criminality that would compromise the position of a large part of the ruling classes.

²³ "[E]ither the chain ends with Mariano, or Mariano, old and ill as he is, decides to tell his beads... In that case, my friend, the chain gets longer and longer, so long, in fact, that I and the minister and God Almighty get caught up in it..." (*The Day of the Owl* 91).

²⁴ "Now, to avoid [...] this Colasberna becoming a martyr in the communist... sorry, I mean socialist cause, we must find out who killed him. Pretty damn quickly, too, so that the Minister can reply that Colasberna was the victim of a question of interest, or had been after somebody's wife and politics had nothing to do with it" (*The Day of the Owl* 32-33).

Sciascia's intention in writing this story about the functioning of the mafia in Sicily was to raise awareness of a problem that at the moment when the book first appeared was largely dismissed. In a note to the text in a later edition of the novel, he points out how so far other literary works written about the mafia had not only failed to define it as a criminal organisation, since in such a sense it was denied that it existed, but defined it instead as a kind of mentality:

'[I] sentire mafioso': cioè di una visione della vita, di una regola di comportamento, di un modo di realizzare la giustizia, di amministrarla, al di fuori delle leggi e degli organi dello Stato (OA vol. I 1791).²⁵

According to Sciascia, however, mafia means something different:

[U]n 'sistema' che in Sicilia contiene e muove gli interessi economici e di potere di una classe che approssimativamente possiamo dire borghese; e non sorge e si sviluppa nel 'vuoto' dello Stato (cioè quando lo Stato, con le sue leggi e le sue funzioni, è debole o manca) ma 'dentro' lo Stato (OA vol. I 1791).²⁶

This definition, which makes of the mafia something far more dangerous and difficult to dismantle than a mere 'mentality', is the definition that will prevail in Sciascia's work for the rest of his life. In a 1978 interview, Sciascia would expand this definition: "[I]a mafia è uno Stato in cui si vive come nella propria pelle, senza sapere che è uno Stato ed essendone, senza saperlo, perfetti cittadini" (*La palma va a nord* 38).²⁷ It is this ubiquitous characteristic of the mafia which makes it so difficult to identify, and therefore to contest.

This is also the main theme in Sciascia's second detective novel, *A ciascuno il suo*. Sciascia picks up again the topic of the mafia, but a mafia that has expanded further and is lurking within the political institutions. He describes it thus in an interview:

A ciascuno il suo riprende sì il tema della mafia quale lo avevo rappresentato ne *Il giorno della civetta*: ma è ormai mafia urbana e totalmente politica. [...] Vi ho impiegato, come già ne *Il giorno della civetta*, ma più affinata, la tecnica del poliziesco. Ma con esiti paradossali, in un certo senso parodistici (*Conversazione in una stanza chiusa* 57).²⁸

The novel is set in an unnamed Sicilian village, and follows school teacher Laurana's amateur investigation of a crime. After having received a series of threatening letters that he did not take seriously, the village's pharmacist is killed during a hunting trip, together with his friend Roscio. Although everyone considers Roscio's death an unfortunate coincidence,

²⁵ "The mafia mentality', that is, a vision of life, of the rules of behaviour, of a way of delivering justice, of administrating it, outside the laws and the organisation of the State" (My translation).

²⁶ "A 'system' that in Sicily encompasses and rules the economical and power interests of a class that more or less equates to the middle-class; and which emerges and develops not in the 'vacuum' of the State (meaning that the State, with its laws and functions, is weak or missing) but 'within' the State" (My translation).

²⁷ "The mafia is a State in which we live as we live inside our own skin, unaware that it is a State, and being, without realising it, its perfect citizens" (My translation).

²⁸ "*A ciascuno il suo* returns to the theme of the mafia as I had represented it in *Il giorno della civetta*: but it is now an urban mafia and completely political. [...] I have used, as I did in *Il giorno della civetta*, although in a more refined way, the technique of the detective story. But with paradoxical outcomes, in a certain way parodistic" (My translation).

Laurana suspects that he, and not the pharmacist, was the real target of the murderer. This suspicion increases when one of his friends, a Communist MP, reveals that Roscio had come to see him a few weeks before his death, asking if his party would be willing to make public some documents he had in his possession that proved an important person in his village guilty of corruption. Laurana undertakes what he believes to be a careful investigation, leading him towards Rosello, the cousin of Roscio's widow, as responsible for the crime. However, when he is about to obtain a file with the compromising documents from Roscio's widow, Laurana disappears. In the last chapter the readers find out that the whole village had been aware all along that the story of the pharmacist was nothing but a fabrication, and that the reason Roscio wanted to make public the case of corruption in which Rosello was involved is because he had discovered Rosello was having an affair with his wife. When Laurana had started investigating in the right direction, Roscio's widow had led him to believe she had nothing to do with the murder, which Laurana thought to have only a political motive, and so had lured him to his death.

The paradoxical and parodistic outcomes of the novel, as Sciascia described them, are indeed more intricate than those set out by *Il giorno della civetta*. Aware that his readers would already expect a similar, non-archetypal ending to that of his previous detective novel, Sciascia adds an extra twist to the plot of *A ciascuno il suo*. Laurana, like Bellodi, refuses to believe that adultery is the motive behind the crime. The irony is that, in *A ciascuno il suo*, this is in fact the case. The thread of corruption that Laurana starts unravelling is common knowledge for the rest of the village; and of course it involves many others besides Rosello. Laurana's failure to perceive to what extent this network of criminality is embedded in society, and how it is supported by the villagers' complicity, is what gets him killed.

Apart from featuring it in his detective fiction, Sciascia also wrote extensively about the mafia, placing a particular emphasis on the origin of the word. In the short story *Filologia* [Philology], published in 1973 as part of *Il mare colore del vino*, but written at the time when the Antimafia Commission was created, he presents a dialogue between two *mafiosi* who are preparing their answers before being questioned by the Commission. The speakers retrace the different meanings attributed to the term 'mafia' throughout history, picking the ones they like best, and coming back to this distinction between the two ways of understanding what the mafia is:

Il fatto è che ognuno, prima di vedere qual è l'origine della parola, cerca di sapere il significato che in atto ha: e qui cominciano i guai; ché chi ritiene che la parola significhi uno stato d'animo se ne va per una via, e chi invece ritiene significhi uno stato di fatto ne imbecca un'altra... (OA vol. I 775).²⁹

²⁹ "The fact is that everyone tries to establish the current meaning of the word before establishing its origin, and this is where the problems start; someone who maintains that the word refers to a mental state, goes off

The two speakers aim at creating confusion through etymology in order to escape the consequences of being associated with the mafia. For Sciascia, the first step towards dismantling the mafia is making it visible, and to do this the status of the mafia as a criminal organisation must be properly acknowledged.

Apart from its etymological origins, Sciascia also investigates the origins of the word 'mafia' in literature. In a 1986 newspaper article, Sciascia writes about how Manzoni read *Don Quijote* in its original language in order to trace the Spanish words that appeared in Cervantes's novel that were also present in the Milanese dialect.³⁰ Among these, Manzoni records the word 'mafia', which Sciascia has then unsuccessfully tried to find in *Don Quijote*. In the article, Sciascia points out that he wants to find the word 'mafia' in Cervantes's novel also in relation to another passage of *Don Quijote* that he has read quoted by Borges. About this passage of *Don Quijote*, Sciascia writes, Borges commented that before he read it he had believed that Argentina was completely different from Spain:

[M]a ad un certo punto due righe del *Don Chisciotte* sono bastate a convincerlo di essere in errore. Le due righe sono queste: '... che nell'aldilà ciascuno se la veda col proprio peccato', ma in questo mondo 'non è bene che uomini d'onore si facciano giudici di altri uomini dai quali non hanno avuto alcun danno' (OB vol. III 848).³¹

The text by Borges to which Sciascia refers is the essay *Nuestro pobre individualismo*, included in *Otras inquisiciones*. In this text, Borges reflects on the patriotic feelings of the Argentine people. He notes:

El argentino, a diferencia de los americanos del norte y de casi todos los europeos, no se identifica con el Estado. Ello puede atribuirse a la circunstancia de que, en este país, los gobiernos suelen ser pésimos o al hecho general de que el Estado es una inconcebible abstracción; lo cierto es que el argentino es un individuo, no un ciudadano (OC vol. I 658).³²

He then uses as an example how in many Hollywood movies a character pretends to befriend a criminal to later hand them over to the police, and is therefore presented as a hero. Borges notes how such a character would never be considered a hero by an Argentine:

[E]l argentino, para quien la amistad es una pasión y la policía una *maffia*, siente que ese 'héroe' es un incomprensible canalla. Siente con don Quijote que 'allá se lo haya cada uno

in one direction, while someone who maintains that it refers to an actual thing, goes off in another..." (*The Wine-Dark Sea* 79).

³⁰ The article was first published in *L'Espresso* on the 16th of March 1986, and later included in the collection of journal articles *A futura memoria (se la memoria ha un futuro)*.

³¹ "But at some point two lines of *Don Quijote* were enough to convince him he was mistaken. These are the lines: '... may each of us deal with our own sins in the afterlife', but in this world 'it isn't right that honourable men judge other men from whom they have received no harm'" (My translation).

³² "The Argentine, unlike the Americans of the North and almost all Europeans, does not identify with the State. This is attributable to the circumstance that the governments in this country tend to be awful, or to the general fact that the State is an inconceivable abstraction. One thing is certain: the Argentine is an individual, not a citizen" (*Total Library* 309).

con su pecado' y que 'no es bien que los hombres honrados sean verdugos de los otros hombres, no yéndoles nada en ello' (*Quijote*, I, XXII) (OC vol. I 658).³³

Borges sees in this trait of Spanish character portrayed in *Don Quijote* something that until then he had only associated with Argentine character. Sciascia observes:

Credevo anch'io, come Borges, che nella mafia, nel 'sentire mafioso', nell'indifferenza della maggior parte dei siciliani di fronte alla mafia, non ci fosse nulla di spagnolo: ma questo passo di Borges, con dentro le due righe di Cervantes, mi ha convinto che sbagliavo (OB vol. III 848).³⁴

Likewise, Sciascia appreciates in Cervantes's words what he considers to be the original definition of mafia, that is, a criminal system that operates within the State, allowed to exist because of the refusal of people to admit that it has caused them any kind of direct damage. He uses this link with Borges to denounce the fact that this mafia-like organisation is much more spread than is commonly believed, since the concept of mafia seems to be related solely to Sicily:

Voglio dire: quel che oggi, mentre si celebra il grande processo contro la mafia, i non siciliani colgono di sgradevole e di condannabile nei siciliani, ha questa antica radice: il non voler giudicare uomini da cui credono di non aver ricevuto alcun danno (OB vol. III 848).³⁵

What is believed to be a Sicilian problem, the mentality on which the mechanism of the mafia and the *omertà* is based, for Sciascia is something that reaches beyond Sicily and beyond the historical moment from which he writes. This is the idea conveyed in the last pages of *Il giorno della civetta*, where Bellodi compares the expansion of the mafia to the advance of the 'line of the palm tree' towards the north:

Forse tutta l'Italia va diventando Sicilia... A me è venuta una fantasia, leggendo sui giornali gli scandali di quel governo regionale: gli scienziati dicono che la linea della palma, cioè il clima che è propizio alla vegetazione della palma, viene su, verso il nord, di cinquecento metri, mi pare, ogni anno... (OA vol. I 339).³⁶

The idea of the structures of the mafia taking over the structures of the political parties and eventually of the State itself will pervade Sciascia's writing from then on, eventually becoming a metaphor in his writing of the way in which power operates. As Farrell notes, "the mafia provided Sciascia with the fundamental metaphor he employed to describe first all

³³ "[T]he Argentine, for whom friendship is a passion and the police a mafia, feels that this 'hero' is an incomprehensible swine. He feels with Don Quixote that 'everybody hath sins of his own to answer for' and that 'it is not seemly, that honest men should be the executioners of their fellow-creatures, on account of matters with which they have no concern' (*Quijote*, XXII)" (*Total Library* 309).

³⁴ "I thought too, like Borges, that in the mafia, in the 'mafia mentality', in the indifference of most of Sicilians towards the mafia, there was nothing of Spain: but this passage from Borges, with the two lines from Cervantes in it, has convinced me that I was mistaken" (My translation).

³⁵ "I mean: that today, while the big trial against the mafia takes place, the things that those who are not Sicilian find unpleasant and condemnable in Sicilians, still has this old origin: not wanting to judge people who haven't harmed them directly" (My translation).

³⁶ "Maybe the whole of Italy is becoming a sort of Sicily. When I read about the scandals of that regional government of theirs, an idea occurred to me. Scientists say that the palm tree line, that is the climate suitable to growth of the palm, is moving north, five hundred metres, I think it was, every year..." (*The Day of the Owl* 117).

crime, then all power, everywhere” (13). Although his understanding of the mafia comes from his experience as Sicilian, he can recognise the mechanisms of the mafia elsewhere. Its ability to develop in different environments and to function unnoticed is what makes it universal for Sciascia. The observation that Borges makes about *Don Quijote* resonates with Sciascia’s global understanding of the mafia, establishing a link between the context from which he writes and that of Borges. In the idea of the mafia presented in *Il giorno della civetta*, where the responsibility for the crimes is shared by many, we can already foresee the metaphorical mafia-ruled societies that Sciascia will present in later works. No matter the setting, what all of them have in common is precisely the same feeling that Borges detected in Cervantes’s novel, and which Sciascia identified in his own country: failing to denounce the doings of the criminal organisation of the mafia also means becoming complicit with the crime, until the structure of the organisation has pervaded society to such an extent that it has become an essential part of it. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that for Sciascia, even if criminality has become a diffuse concept shared among many members of society, there are still always individual responsibilities that can and should be traced back in the chain of criminality.

5.2. Detective fiction and universal mafia

After *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo*, Sciascia’s detective stories continued to deal with the mafia, no longer as an exclusively Sicilian or Italian phenomenon, but as a metaphor of how power structures are established in any society. *Il contesto*, *Todo modo* and *Il cavaliere e la morte* take place in more uncertain settings, even though in *Il contesto* and *Todo modo* there is still a clear link with the specific political scenario that Sciascia intends to criticise. The absence of names of characters and places, or the use of names that are linked to no identifiable origin, seem to alienate the setting of the stories from the local, and place instead their emphasis on the universality of the problems that Sciascia is denouncing in his detective stories. Sciascia had been disappointed with the reception of *Il giorno della civetta* as a folkloristic portrayal of Sicily rather than a criticism of a phenomenon that he considered to exist also beyond Sicily.³⁷ Matteo Collura observes that the publication of *Il contesto* marks Sciascia’s refusal to continue writing books that might be taken for mere folkloristic entertainment (Collura 211). This new attitude probably influenced Sciascia’s decision to reduce the local elements in his later detective fictions, but in such a way that the connection to the socio-political reality he was addressing was never lost. In fact, eliminating the local elements arguably has the intention of forcing the readers to concentrate on the

³⁷ See page 18 of the introduction of this thesis for Sciascia’s full statement.

criticism that Sciascia makes, instead of getting distracted by the specifics of a particular setting.

In the light of this, it is interesting to consider the setting of Borges's *La muerte y la brújula*, in which names of characters and places do not seem to be linked to a particular origin. In its prologue, Borges states:

[P]ese a los nombres alemanes o escandinavos, ocurre en un Buenos Aires de sueños [...] Ya redactada esa ficción, he pensado en la conveniencia de amplificar el tiempo y el espacio que abarca: la venganza podría ser heredada; los plazos podrían computarse por años, tal vez por siglos; la primera letra del Nombre podría articularse en Islandia, la segunda, en Méjico; la tercera, en Indostán (OC vol. I 483).³⁸

Borges's story seems to take place in a purely fantastic reality, and yet Borges makes a point of the fact that he was portraying Buenos Aires when he wrote it, even if a Buenos Aires alienated from itself. Despite the apparent lack of any sort of social criticism in this metaphysical detective story, Borges still feels the need to warn his readers that *La muerte y la brújula* is inspired by a particular setting – Buenos Aires – but allows at the same time a broader reflection on the issues it tackles.

This ability to address both the local and the universal has been identified as a characteristic of the writing of Borges. The following comment from the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes seems particularly relevant in this context:

The most nationalist author there is, the most identifiable as a Latin American, is Jorge Luis Borges. He once said that the way of knowing that the Koran was an Arab book was that you couldn't find a single camel in it. Well, you can't find a single gaucho in Borges's literature, he has that wild need to create another history, another world, another parallel world to compensate the lack of identity, the shortfalls of Argentina or Latin America (My translation).³⁹

³⁸ “[I]n spite of the Germanic or Scandinavian names in it, takes place in a Buenos Aires of dreams [...] After this fiction was written, I thought it might be worthwhile to expand the time and space the story covers: the revenge might be bequeathed to others, the periods of time might be calculated in years, perhaps in centuries; the first letter of the Name might be uttered in Iceland, the second in Mexico, the third in Hindustan” (*Collected Fictions* 129).

³⁹ “[E]l autor más nacionalista que hay, más identificable como latinoamericano, es Jorge Luis Borges. Él dijo una vez que la manera de saber que el Corán era un libro árabe era que no se veía un solo camello. Bueno, el hecho de que no se ve un solo gaucho en la literatura de Borges, de que tiene esa necesidad salvaje de crear otra historia, de crear otro mundo, otro mundo paralelo para compensar la ausencia de identidad, los déficits de la Argentina o de la América Latina” (Fuentes and Sosnowski 96). Fuentes refers to Borges's essay *El escritor argentino y la tradición*, in *Discusión*, where he states: “Gibbon observa que en el libro árabe por excelencia, en el *Alcorán*, no hay camellos; yo creo que si hubiera alguna duda sobre la autenticidad del *Alcorán*, bastaría esta ausencia de camellos para probar que es árabe. Fue escrito por Mahoma, y Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad, no tenía por qué distinguirlos; en cambio un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe, lo primero que hubiera hecho es prodigar camellos, caravanas de camellos en cada página; pero Mahoma, como árabe, estaba tranquilo: sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local” (OC vol.I 270). [“Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book *par excellence*, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially

In the absence of local colour of Borges's fiction, Fuentes finds the best representation of the reality of Argentina and Latin America. Sciascia's detective fiction after *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo* shares this same ability with Borges's writing: to address a local reality, and to offer at the same time the possibility of extrapolating it to a different time and setting. I will now analyse this aspect more in depth in Sciascia's most prominent detective novels written in the 1970s and 1980s, *Il contesto*, *Todo modo*, and *Il cavaliere e la morte*.

5.2.1. *Il contesto*

Il contesto follows inspector Rogas's investigation of the murders of a series of judges. Rogas discovers that all of them had taken part in the trial of Cres, a pharmacist found guilty of trying to poison his wife. After considering the information about the trial, Rogas believes that Cres was not guilty of the crime, and that after serving his sentence in prison he is now killing all the judges in revenge. Rogas pursues this line of investigation, until witnesses at the scene of one of the murders report having seen two young men with beards and long hair fleeing the scene of the crime. For Rogas this does not diminish his suspicion of Cres – who has vanished after realising he was under surveillance – but now the police, political parties, and the media prefer the hypothesis of a violent group of youths of a certain ideology as responsible for the crimes. Rogas is asked to forget about Cres and focus on this new line of investigation, which now points towards a group of Christian neo-anarchists, led by a former priest. The murders continue and Rogas fears that the President of the Supreme Court might be the next victim. Rogas pays a visit to the President to warn him, and as he leaves he runs into Cres, whom he is certain to recognise even though he has never seen him. He not only recognises Cres, but for a brief moment feels uncannily identified with him: “[c]ome un sonnambulo si ritrovò dentro l’ascensore; e nel rapido aprirsi dei battenti, nell’atrio, ebbe per un momento la sensazione di trovarsi di fronte a uno specchio. Solo che nello specchio c’era un altro” (OA vol. I 687).⁴⁰ Rogas decides not to report that he has discovered Cres is living in the same building as the President, and instead arranges a meeting with Amar, the general secretary of the Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale

Arabian; for him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was unconcerned: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local colour” (*Labyrinths* 215)]. It is also necessary to add that Fuentes's assertion that there are no gauchos in Borges's work is inaccurate, since many of Borges's stories are set in a clearly Argentine setting and feature, indeed, gauchos. However, Fuentes's observation is still relevant as it manages to acknowledge this trait in Borges's writing, his ability to address universal themes from a local setting without getting lost in local colour.

⁴⁰ “Like a sleepwalker, Rogas found himself once again in the elevator; in the entrance hall, as the gates swung quickly open, he had the sensation for a moment of finding himself before a mirror. Except that in the mirror was another man” (*Equal Danger* 93).

[International Revolutionary Party]. The rest of the story is reported to the readers from the perspective of Rogas's friend Cusan: shortly after their meeting, Amar and Rogas are murdered in an art gallery, allegedly by a member of one of the terrorist groups also responsible for the murders of the judges. The same day the President of the Supreme Court is also murdered. Days later Cusan visits the headquarters of the Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale and is informed that, according to the ballistic report, Rogas had killed Amar and that is why he had immediately been shot down by the alleged terrorist, who was in fact an undercover police agent following him. Cusan is baffled and asks why Rogas was shot instead of arrested, and why his and Amar's deaths have been presented as the work of a terrorist organisation. To which the vice-secretary of the Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale replies: "[s]iamo realisti, signor Cusan. Non potevamo correre il rischio che scoppiasse una rivoluzione" (OA vol. I 705).⁴¹

Apart from the uncertain setting of the story in imaginary cities such as Ales, Chiro and Algo, and the names of the characters not linked to a specific origin, there are other characteristic Borgesian motifs identifiable in the story. The most relevant is that of the doubling and mirroring of the characters of Rogas and Cres. Even though this is a motif central to many stories by Borges, such as *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, *La otra muerte*, and *Tres versiones de Judas*, the clearest comparison in this case can be established with *Los teólogos*. The relationship between inspector Rogas and Cres starts off as that of the investigator against the criminal, but gradually becomes an alter ego relationship when Rogas confuses Cres with his own reflection as they meet in the lift. This is easily comparable to the relationship between the two theologians in Borges's story: "en el paraíso, Aureliano supo que para la insondable divinidad, él y Juan de Panonia (el ortodoxo y el hereje, el aborrecedor y el aborrecido, el acusador y la víctima) formaban una sola persona" (OC vol. I 556).⁴²

In the short text inspired by a historical event *Don Mariano Crescimanno*, included in *Cronachette*, Sciascia reflects on the appropriateness of Borges's story for examining the present situation in his own country:

Da quando, molti anni fa, la lessi sulla rivista *Inventario*, questa storia di Borges [...] mi sta nella memoria come la più alta e perfetta parabola sul fanatismo; e frequentemente i fatti correnti me la richiamano [...] La inimicizia dei fanatici è propriamente un fatto speculare (OA vol. II t. I 704).⁴³

⁴¹ "We are realists, Mr Cusan. We cannot run the risk of a revolution's breaking out" (*Equal Danger* 117).

⁴² "[I]n paradise, Aurelian discovered that in the eyes of the unfathomable deity, he and John of Pannonia (the orthodox and the heretic, the abominator and the abominated, the accused and the victim) were a single person" (*Collected Fictions* 207).

⁴³ "Ever since I read Borges's story [...] many years ago in the magazine *Inventario*, it has stuck in my head as the most perfect and profound of parables about fanaticism; and current affairs often remind me of it [...] Fanatics' hatred for each other is a truly fascinating thing" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 90). [The Italian word

Il contesto plays in fact on this mirroring of apparently opposing ideas which, because they have been deprived of value, have now become interchangeable. This is emphasised by a number of incongruences that appear throughout the novel, such as the terrorist group formed by Christian neo-anarchists. It is also incongruent that the representatives of the Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale are trying to avoid, as the vice secretary tells Cusan at the end of the novel, the breakout of a revolution: a party which defines itself as the international revolutionary party is against revolution. However, the relationship that resembles Borges's theologians the most is that between the two political parties mentioned in the novel. One is the aforementioned Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale, and all that the readers know about the other one is that it is in office at the moment. One of the representatives of the latter summarises for Rogas the political situation in the country:

Voi sapete qual è la situazione politica; della politica, per così dire, istituzionalizzata. Si può condensare in una batuta: il mio partito, che malgoverna da trent'anni, ha avuto ora la rivelazione che si malgovernerebbe meglio insieme al Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale (OA vol. I 671).⁴⁴

This fictional political relationship can be understood as a caricature of the real political scenario in the late 60s and early 70s in Italy. The centre party Democrazia Cristiana, DC [Christian Democratic Party], having been the leading party for decades, saw its position endangered by economic instability and social tensions, which also entailed an increase in the activity of terrorist groups. The DC started therefore negotiating a closer relationship with the Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI [Italian Communist Party], in what would come to be called, years later, *compromesso storico* [historical compromise]. This agreement was justified by the need of all democratic forces to unite against the dangers that threatened the Italian democracy.

Sciascia distrusted from the beginning the initiative that would culminate in the *compromesso storico*, as he saw a greater danger for democracy in a political situation in which all democratic political parties joined forces. For him, a healthy democratic system required some of the democratic forces to occupy the role of the opposition, and in his view this was the role that the PCI should fulfil. He expressed his views about the role of the opposition within a democratic system in an interview in 1979:

L'opposizione costituisce, direi, la funzione più delicata dell'apparato democratico, e mi riesce incomprensibile la tendenza del Partito comunista italiano a sbarazzarsi del compito dell'opposizione in nome di non si sa quale *unità di tutte le forze costituzionali di fronte ai pericoli che minacciano l'economia e la democrazia*, e dunque l'unità di tutte le forze che accettano la costituzione e il metodo democratico: sono molte! [...] Perché insomma, se tutti i

speculare means 'specular', not 'fascinating'. The English translator might have misread *spettacolare*, 'spectacular'.

⁴⁴ "You know, what the political situation is – the, so to speak, structured political situation. One can sum it up in two words: it has suddenly dawned on my party, which has been misgoverning for thirty years, that it would misgovern better in collaboration with the International Revolutionary Party" (*Equal Danger* 71).

partiti democratici sono destinati ad andare insieme al governo, chi si incaricherà dell'opposizione? I fascisti? (*La Sicilia come metafora* 106-107).⁴⁵

In *Il contesto* Sciascia exaggerates this situation, presenting a paradoxical scenario in which the party in power – which is not named in the novel, but seems to have a similar position to that of the Italian DC at the time – is going to share its power with the Partito Rivoluzionario Internazionale – which is reminiscent of the PCI. This political scenario, in which two political parties that are supposed to be far from each other in the political spectrum end up being interchangeable, is a critique of what Sciascia considered to be a progressive loss of values and ideology on the part of the main Italian political forces.

However, as Sciascia emphasises in the final note to the text, even though closely related to the political atmosphere of the early 1970s, *Il contesto* aims at being a portrayal of how power structures all over the world can decline into mafia-like organisations:

[L]a sostanza [del racconto] (se c'è) vuole essere quella di un apologo sul potere nel mondo, sul potere che sempre più digrada nella impenetrabile forma di una concatenazione che approssimativamente possiamo dire mafiosa (OA vol. I 708).⁴⁶

Il contesto therefore signals a new approach to the detective story in the work of Sciascia. By eliminating the elements that had pigeonholed his previous detective stories as folkloristic portrayals of Sicily, Sciascia continues to make an incisive critique of the mafia-like organisation of Italian society and politics, which now takes place in a fantastic, parallel world that could also represent other times and places.

5.2.2. *Todo modo*

The following of his detective stories also takes place in a similar setting. *Todo modo* is set in the hotel-monastery of Zafer, for which the precise location is not specified, where the narrator arrives by chance. He decides to stay after being told that during the following days a series of important personalities will gather there for a spiritual retreat: MPs, bank directors, industry owners and newspaper editors, all of them members or supporters of the same political party. The narrator meets don Gaetano, the priest who has founded and runs the hotel-monastery, an extremely well-read man who often seems to hold opinions not in complete agreement with the dictates of the Catholic Church. It is soon clear that most of

⁴⁵ “The opposition plays, I’d say, the most delicate role within the democratic machine, and I find incomprehensible the tendency of the Italian Communist Party to get rid of its duty as opposition in the name of some *unity of all the constitutional forces against the dangers that threaten the economy and democracy*, which means, the unity of all the forces which accept the constitution and the democratic method: there’s lots of them! [...] Because, after all, if all the democratic parties are destined to form a government together, who will be in charge of the opposition? The fascists?” (My translation).

⁴⁶ “[T]he substance [of the story] (if there is any) must be that of a fable about power anywhere in the world, about power that, in the impenetrable form of a concatenation the we can roughly term *mafioso*, works steadily greater degradation” (*Equal Danger* 119).

those attending the spiritual retreat are not there for religious reasons: some of them are taking the opportunity of a few days away from the city to meet their lovers, and most do not even seem to be listening during mass and the other spiritual activities led by don Gaetano. One night, while the group is saying the rosary in the forest, Michelozzi, a former senator, is shot dead. A few days later a second victim, Voltrano, dies after falling out of a window. The police investigator Scalambri, in charge of the case, finds photocopies of cheques signed by Michelozzi to all the members of the party present in the hotel-monastery. This line of investigation, however, does not seem to lead anywhere, since the evidence is enough to charge any of them with fraud, but not directly with Michelozzi's murder. The narrator gets involved in the investigation of the crime, and develops his own hypothesis, as he states, "come il cavaliere Carlo Augusto Dupin sviluppa le sue nei racconti di Poe" (OA vol. I 922).⁴⁷ In fact the solution he finds is, he says, very similar to that of *The Purloined Letter* by Poe; he does not, however, share this solution with the readers. He also fails to report what he does during the following day, at the end of which don Gaetano is found dead, leading the readers to thinking that the narrator might be don Gaetano's murderer. However, this is never confirmed, or the other murders resolved. In a 1978 interview, Sciascia described the ending of his novel as follows:

E qui, alla fine di una spettacolare inchiesta intellettuale, condotta secondo le buone vecchie regole della logica, io lascio al lettore l'incarico di scoprire l'autore dei delitti, e questo per lui è la possibilità di poter sottolineare che, nei meandri del potere, dove è il grande capitale ad armare la mano degli assassini, ha ben poca importanza l'identità di chi è stato delegato a uccidere (*La palma va a nord* 54).⁴⁸

Todo modo, like *Il contesto*, is intended as criticism against the political situation in Italy, but this time directed towards a specific political force, the Democrazia Cristiana. In a 1978 interview Sciascia summarised the central idea of *Todo modo* as "La distruzione, anzi l'autodistruzione della DC" (*La palma va a nord* 19).⁴⁹ The relationship between the fictional group of people gathered for a spiritual retreat in *Todo modo* and the Italian DC is clear from their relationship with the Catholic Church and their social position as members of the elite. The narrator defines them in this way:

Ministri, deputati, professori, artisti, finanzieri, industriali: quella che si suole chiamare la classe dirigente. E che cosa dirigeva in concreto, effettivamente? Una ragnatela nel vuoto, la propria labile ragnatela. Anche se di fili d'oro (OA vol. I 896).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "[A]s Charles Auguste Dupin works out his theories in Poe's tales" (*One Way or Another* 90).

⁴⁸ "And here, at the end of a spectacular intellectual enquiry that follows the good old rules of logic, I leave the readers in charge of discovering the culprit of the crimes. This is a chance for them to remark that, inside the labyrinth of power, where it is the ruling classes who put the weapon in the hands of the assassins, the identity of the person who has been delegated to kill is of little importance" (My translation).

⁴⁹ "The destruction, or better; the self-destruction of the DC" (My translation).

⁵⁰ "Ministers, deputies, professors, artists, business men, industrialists – what we tend to call the ruling class. And what, in fact, does it rule? A cobweb suspended in the void, its own fragile cobweb. Even if the threads are gold" (*One Way or Another* 64).

In a similar way to that in which in *Il contesto* Sciascia criticised the ideological vacuum underlying Italian politics, in *Todo modo* he aims this criticism at the party that had for decades had a greater representation in parliament, and which was supported by most members of this Italian ruling class. The fictional political party in *Todo modo* seems completely estranged from its core values, the values of the Catholic Church. The characters in the novel do not seem interested in the spiritual retreat, their involvement in cases of corruption is well known, and they are even willing to murder each other in order to maintain the privileges they obtain from their position of power. The title of the novel, translated as *One Way or Another* in English, also hints at this willingness on the part of the characters to do anything that is required in order to maintain their social position, even if this involves going against the Catholic values that are supposed to be the cornerstone of their party. The image of the 'cobweb suspended in the void' from the quotation above illustrates this idea that the party exists but only on a superficial level, since all the values it used to stand for have now disappeared, replaced by economic interests.

Don Gaetano seems to be the only one aware of the party's moral and ideological situation, which can be inferred from his conversations with the narrator. An illustrative example is the last conversation they have before he is found dead, where the police investigators and the characters of il Ministro [the Minister] and il Presidente [the President] are also present. They talk about the situation of the party to which il Ministro and il Presidente belong, making veiled remarks about their now delicate role in it. Il Ministro and il Presidente defend themselves from the other speakers' veiled accusations of their involvement in cases of corruption retorting that the State, which they represent, is not a pickpocket (OA vol. I 928). To which don Gaetano replies:

Ma signori [...] spero non mi darete il dolore di dirmi che lo stato c'è ancora... Alla mia età, e con tutta la fiducia che ho avuto in voi, sarebbe una rivelazione insopportabile. Stavo così tranquillo che non ci fosse più... (OA vol. I 928).⁵¹

They interpret don Gaetano's observation as a joke, but it is actually an explicit reference to the idea at the core of Sciascia's criticism. If the political party with the greatest representation in parliament and the majority of the ruling class that sympathises with it have lost all the values that support their ideology, the concept of State will also seem to be reduced to a superficial notion, lacking any significance. This also relates to Sciascia's interpretation of Borges's *Los teólogos* as a parable of fanaticism, since the political party in *Todo modo* has moved so far from the values that were supposed to be at its origins that its

⁵¹ "But gentlemen [...] I hope you're not going to distress me by saying that the state still exists... Considering my age and all the trust I've always had in you it would be an unbearable revelation. I was so sure it didn't exist any more..." (*One Way or Another* 96).

members have become the polar opposites of what they were supposed to be: good Catholics have turned into corrupt politicians, adulterers and murderers.

In a similar way to the other works analysed in this chapter, the presentation of the story in the form of detective fiction serves to emphasise the fact that the society in the novel is devoid of morals and ideology. It is impossible to find an individual guilty of the crimes, since in the setting of the story the absolutes of right and wrong, good and evil, no longer apply. While *Il contesto* played on the ambiguity of apparently contradictory values and ideologies, *Todo modo* emphasises how the responsibility for the crimes can be attributed to anyone: the characters do not have any values and therefore the investigators cannot find any motives to place the responsibility on one of them. Sciascia plays again, as in *Il contesto*, with the Borgesian interchangeability of roles between the criminal and the detective. In *Todo modo*, the narrator, who sees himself as the classic detective of fictions such as Poe's, solves the mystery, only to take on the role of the criminal and murder don Gaetano – or so the readers are led to believe.

However, Sciascia emphasises that, even if the story does not provide a solution for the crimes, there are still individual responsibilities that need to be investigated. In this sense the similarities with Borges can also be detected in the attitude that Sciascia seems to expect from his readers. As Sciascia emphasised in the extract from the interview quoted above, the ending of *Todo modo* does not solve the crimes because it is the responsibility of the readers to find a solution. In *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain*, Borges described the reader who perfectly fulfils this role. After reading Quain's detective novel *The God of the Labyrinth* the readers are prompted to suspect that the solution provided in the book is not correct: “[e]l lector, inquieto, revisa los capítulos pertinentes y descubre otra solución, que es la verdadera. El lector de ese libro singular es más perspicaz que el *detective* [Borges's italics]” (OC vol. II 462).⁵² This is the role that, in *Todo modo*, Sciascia expects of his readers – not only regarding the mystery around the crimes in the novel, but also as a reflection on the socio-political situation that he is criticising.

5.2.3. *Il cavaliere e la morte*

Unlike *Il contesto* and *Todo modo*, Sciascia's last detective story is not explicitly aimed at criticising a particular political scenario or party, but still shares their approach to the detective genre. *Il cavaliere e la morte* starts with the investigation of the murder of lawyer

⁵² “[U]neasy, the reader looks back over the pertinent chapters and discovers *another* solution, which is the correct one. The reader of this remarkable book, then, is more perspicacious than the detective” (*Collected Fictions* 108).

Sandoz. The narration is structured from the point of view of a police investigator who is only named as il Vice [the Deputy], who collaborates in the investigation of the case with il Capo [the Chief]. Their investigation starts by interrogating il Presidente [the President], who sent Sandoz, a few hours before his murder, a note saying "I will kill you". Il Presidente explains that this was a joke between friends, but reveals to the police that Sandoz had been lately receiving threats in the name of a group that called themselves *figli dell'ottantanove* [Children of Eighty-nine]. Il Vice is still not convinced of il Presidente's lack of connection with the crime, but il Capo encourages him to drop that line of investigation and investigate the *figli dell'ottantanove* instead. Il Vice warns him that if they publicise the *figli dell'ottantanove* hypothesis too much, soon people all over the country will start identifying with them and acting in their name, even if they had never heard of them before. This is indeed what happens shortly after, as soon as the media begin to talk about the alleged terrorist group: newspapers start receiving anonymous calls in which the group's claims and objectives begin to take shape. Il Vice points this out to il Capo:

Il punto è che i figli dell'ottantanove stanno nascendo ora: per mitomania, per noia, magari per vocazione a cospirare e a delinquere; ma non esistevano un minuto prima che radio, televisione e giornali ne dessero notizia. Il calcolo di chi ha ucciso o fatto uccidere Sandoz li ha creati, appunto calcolando sul risultato minimo di annebbiarci, ma forse anche sul risultato massimo che qualche imbecille rispondesse all'appello professandosi figlio dell'ottantanove (OA vol. I 1149).⁵³

Il Capo dismisses il Vice's hypothesis, but he decides to continue investigating the relationship between Sandoz and il Presidente with the help of his friend Rieti. They discover it is likely that Sandoz had proof of the implication of il Presidente in cases of corruption, but probably would never have made it public, as the scandal would have also damaged his reputation. When Rieti is murdered some days later, il Vice realises he has been followed and that someone does not want him to continue pursuing his current line of investigation. As he is on his way to the office, he is shot dead, and his last thoughts are about how the newspapers will wrongly report his death on the following day: "[vide] nei titoli dei giornali dell'indomani: *I figli dell'ottantanove colpiscono ancora. Ucciso il funzionario di polizia che sagacemente li braccava*. Pensò: che confusione!" (OA vol. I 1188).⁵⁴

Il cavaliere e la morte presents many similarities with the structure of *La muerte y la brújula*, and it seems clear that Sciascia had Borges's short story in mind when he wrote his novel.

⁵³ "The point is that the Children of Eighty-nine are being born now: of mythomania, of boredom, maybe of a vocation for conspiracy and criminal activity, but they did not exist a moment before the radio, television and the newspapers carried stories about them. The calculation of the people who murdered Sandoz, or who had him murdered, has created them. They calculated that at the very least they would confuse us, and that at best some fool would answer the call and proclaim himself one of the Children of Eighty-nine" (*The Knight and Death* 32).

⁵⁴ "He watched [...] into the headlines of the following day's papers: *Children of Eighty-nine strike again. Cold-blooded murder of investigating officer*. He thought: what confusion!" (*The Knight and Death* 74).

From the start both present a similar situation, also common to the classic whodunit story: confronted with a mysterious crime, the interpretation of the police – Treviranus in *La muerte y la brújula* and il Capo in *Il cavaliere e la morte* – clashes with that of an independent detective – Lönnrot in *La muerte y la brújula* and il Vice in *Il cavaliere e la morte* who, even if also part of the police, decides to follow his own line of investigation disobeying il Capo's orders. By pursuing this alternative line of investigation, both investigators are led to their deaths. However, there is a fundamental difference between both investigators: whereas Lönnrot failed to solve the first crime, il Vice was always right in his line of investigation. This fundamental difference between the two main characters signals an added twist that Sciascia adds to Borges's story.

In *La muerte y la brújula*, Lönnrot chooses a 'rabbinical explanation' of the crime over Treviranus' simpler explanation because of his love of intricate solutions, similar to one of Auguste Dupin's stories. In *Il cavaliere e la morte*, when il Vice suggests that the *figli dell'ottantanove* have only existed after Sandoz's murder, il Capo diagnoses a similar tendency in il Vice, arguing that il Vice's hypothesis resembles a detective story: "la sua è una linea romanzesca, da romanzo poliziesco diciamo classico, di quelli che i lettori, ormai smalzati, arrivano a indovinare come va a finire dopo aver letto le prime venti pagine..." (OA vol. I 1147).⁵⁵ For il Capo, il Vice's hypothesis is as far from reality as the solution provided by detective novels, and it would be foolish to expect it to be the solution of an actual crime. Like Lönnrot, in his investigation, il Vice is also accused of drifting away from the reality of the case, but only from what il Capo and the media have chosen as the reality of the case; that is, that the *figli dell'ottantanove* are the most likely suspects behind Sandoz's murder. In this case it is the police who choose to pursue a different line of investigation, one that disregards the evidence that could relate il Presidente to the crime, and focus instead on the until then non-existent *figli dell'ottantanove*. Il Vice is the only one who sticks to the solution that seems to him closer to the reality of the case. This difference is illustrated by a conversation between il Capo and il Vice when il Capo urges il Vice to let go of his hypothesis that il Presidente is implicated in the case. This conversation reminds us of that between Treviranus and Lönnrot after the rabbi's body is found, in which Lönnrot dismissed Treviranus's hypothesis of the theft as possible, but not interesting. In *Il cavaliere e la morte*, to one of il Capo's alternative solutions for the case, il Vice replies: "[i]potesi tecnicamente giusta, ma nella sostanza della vicenda credo irrilevante" (OA vol. I 1147).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "[T]he line you are following is lifted straight from fiction, from one of those books they call a classical detective novel, where the sharp-witted reader can guess, after the first twenty pages, how it is all going to turn out..." (*The Knight and Death* 29).

⁵⁶ "A technically correct hypothesis, but, I believe, in the overall view of the matter, irrelevant" (*The Knight and Death* 30).

Lönnrot ignores the evidence of the case and argues that Treviranus's hypothesis is not interesting enough. For il Vice, however, it is il Capo's hypothesis which is ignoring the evidence and going instead for a farfetched solution just to avoid trouble with il Presidente and the elite group to which he belongs.

The death of both characters, even if it happens as a direct result of their investigation, takes place for opposite reasons: whereas Lönnrot is led to his death by following the clues that Scharlach had fabricated for this purpose, il Vice is killed because he has come too close to the actual solution of the crime. The investigation that causes their deaths is in both cases a fabrication of the criminals, but their intention is different: Scharlach devises the second and third crimes to lure Lönnrot to Triste-le-Roy, and the *figli dell'ottantanove* are created as a result of Sandoz's murder in order to drive suspicion away from il Presidente and other powerful personalities. While it can be said that Lönnrot's weakness for elaborate plots makes him the only person responsible for his own death, this is not true for il Vice. Both detectives are victims of an investigation that was too far removed from the reality of the cases they were investigating, but while Lönnrot was the only one who insisted in pursuing his 'rabbinical solution', il Vice was the only one who was against the hypothesis of the *figli dell'ottantanove*. In this sense, the responsibility for il Vice's death is shared by the police for refusing to investigate il Presidente any further, by the media for publicising the *figli dell'ottantanove*, and by those who start acting in the name of the until then fantastic group. Ironically, it is il Vice's murder which establishes them as a criminal organisation since, as he foresees just before he dies, they will be held responsible for his death.

From this comparative reading of *La muerte y la brújula* and *Il cavaliere e la morte* it can be argued that Sciascia was inspired by Borges's story, but managed to add yet another twist to its parody of the detective genre. Borges's short story plays on a circularity between fantasy and reality, emphasising how what began as Lönnrot's fantastic first hypothesis was turned into a real series of murders by Scharlach. It can be read as a commentary on the detective genre, and on the distance that separates the classic whodunit and the successful reconstruction of any past event that we have not witnessed. Written over four decades after the publication of the innovative *La muerte y la brújula*, during which time detective fiction writers had experimented with a number of ways of modifying the genre to suit their own narrative goals, Sciascia's *Il cavaliere e la morte* revisits Borges's story, but in this case to make, as in his other detective novels, a critique of how the power structures that rule society manipulate the truth. This idea, which permeates the whole of Sciascia's literary production, is expressed succinctly in a 1979 interview: "[n]on è la letteratura che è fantasia,

ma la realtà così come essa è pressa e sistemata dal potere” (*La palma va a nord* 155).⁵⁷ As well as subverting the archetypes of the whodunit as Borges had already done in his story, in *Il cavaliere e la morte* Sciascia subverts the roles of literature and reality – in his story, reality has become more fictional than literature. Even though il Capo dismisses il Vice’s hypothesis as worth of a detective novel, it turns out to be accurate precisely because the reality it explains has become a fantasy: the *figli dell’ottantanove* are a fantastic creation which only becomes real when it is presented as real by those in power, and accepted as such by society. Where Borges warned against the dangers of investigating reality through a literary lens, like Lönnrot did, Sciascia warns against the dangers of trying to investigate a reality that has been turned into fiction with any tools other than literary ones.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the conception that Sciascia and Borges had of the detective genre, and analysed how this is reflected in some of their works. Both authors choose the detective genre because its narrative features, principally its double storyline, allow them a reflection on fiction and its relation to reality. Borges and Sciascia parody the genre taking advantage of the fixed structure of the classic detective story, and of the expectations with which readers approach this kind of text. They focus in particular on subverting the idea that the solution provided by the detective story will always point at a single culprit, and that the detective story will always be structured around absolute, opposite notions of truth and falsehood, good and evil, or detective and criminal. The structure provided by the detective story of a crime and its reconstruction allows them a range of playful approaches which show how fiction can interfere with investigations of the past, usually resulting in detrimental consequences for the investigators.

Sciascia’s first detective stories use these literary approaches in order to expose the problem of the mafia in Italy. However, the idea that Sciascia had of the mafia did not limit it to a Sicilian or Italian context, and while his earlier detective stories are presented in a clearly Sicilian setting, he later moves away from the local details in order to convey this understanding of the mafia as a metaphor of the ways in which power can be structured in any society. Sciascia’s progression of his idea of the mafia from a local to a universal phenomenon can be related, as I have argued, to the work of Borges. In *Nuestro pobre individualismo*, Borges identified certain traits that he had previously considered unique to the Argentine people as being shared with the Spanish. Sciascia referred to Borges’s text in

⁵⁷ “It is not literature that is fantastic, but reality in the way it is appropriated and rearranged by power” (My translation).

order to explain his understanding of the mafia as a problem that not only concerned Sicily. Furthermore, on a literary level, Sciascia's effort to portray his idea of the mafia as something more global in his later detective fiction can be related to Borges's presentation of his own detective story *La muerte y la brújula* as taking place in a Buenos Aires setting, yet still being open to being extrapolated to other contexts.

As they highlight in their essays on detective fiction, both Sciascia and Borges pay particular attention to the role played by the readers of this genre. Sciascia chooses the detective story and purposely leaves the ending open – the investigation frustrated, the crime unresolved – in order to urge his readers into the process of detection. This quote from a 1978 interview illustrates the main aim of his detective fictions:

[Interviewer]: *Ogni suo libro è costruito come una inchiesta giudiziaria che va sempre a finire in nulla... leggendo si ha sempre l'impressione che la storia non riesca mai a mettere le mani sui 'veri colpevoli'...*

[Sciascia]: È un modo come altro per dire che finalmente ciascuno di noi è tenuto a rispondere dei crimini che ogni giorno si commettono sotto i nostri occhi. Aggiungerei anche, per parafrasare George Orwell, che se noi tutti siamo assassini, taluni lo sono più degli altri. Ma ciò non cambia la questione, viviamo in un'epoca di criminalità diffusa e anonima (*La palma va a nord* 42).⁵⁸

The society that Sciascia portrays in his detective novels is a society in which criminality is anonymous and diffuse; and yet he finds it necessary to continue investigating and point at, amongst all those responsible, those who are more responsible than the rest. The difference between Sciascia's use of detective fiction to explore a real socio-political situation and the classic detective story is that in Sciascia's novels, finding the criminal is no longer just the responsibility of the detective. In Sciascia's detective story, the readers are forced to reject the passive role of the readers of the whodunit story and take part in the detective process. Not only because the investigation remains open at the end of the story, but also because they are now partly responsible for the crimes: as part of a society where criminality is shared, the responsibility to find those who are more criminal than the others must also be shared.

Borinsky detects a similar trait, even if at first glance not so explicit, in the writing of Borges:

Who will give shape to stories that demand that victims be recognized as such and those responsible be punished? The sorter of details, the builder of taxonomies and hierarchies is the reader who, engaged in detection here as in every specimen of the detective genre *per se*, has to give meaning to stories of the past. Throughout World War II, and beyond, Borges posed his most intense questions about the meaning of historical events and the impact of

⁵⁸ "[Interviewer]: *Each of your books is structured as a judiciary enquiry that always ends in nothing... reading one always has the impression that history never succeeds at getting its hands on the 'real culprits'...* [Sciascia]: It's a way like any other of saying that eventually each of us is bound to answer for the crimes that are committed under our eyes every day. I would also add, to paraphrase George Orwell, that even though we are all assassins, some are more assassins than others. But this doesn't change the question, we live in a time in which criminality is diffuse and anonymous" (My translation).

culture on our understanding of them. The world is his crime scene, whose interpreter and frustrated detective is none other than the reader (Borinsky 474).

Even if an element of explicit social criticism is absent from Borges's detective stories, except for those he wrote with Bioy Casares under the pseudonym of Bustos Domecq, a preoccupation with the ways in which we make sense of the past is indeed still present. Considering the work of Borges alongside Sciascia's detective fiction underscores this aspect in the work of the Argentine author: detective fiction is the perfect space for Borges and Sciascia to investigate the ways in which events of the past are reconstructed, and provides the most truthful narrative form to discuss them, inviting their readers to take part.

To conclude, we can affirm that Sciascia's ideal detective novel is far from the classic whodunit story of Poe and aspires, instead, to resemble the fictional detective novel outlined by Borges in *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain*. In *The God of the Labyrinth*, the readers are given a false solution and the suspicion that it might be so. It is their role, once they have finished reading, to reassess the story and find the right solution. Sciascia's detective novels likewise demand that readers abandon their passive role and continue the unfinished investigation themselves, becoming, in Borges's definition "más perspicacia[ces] que el *detective* [Borges's italics]" (OC vol. I 462).⁵⁹ Furthermore, by frustrating the readers' expectations regarding the detective genre, both Sciascia and Borges are pointing out the fact that the text was approached with certain expectations in the first place. This self-awareness is aimed at making these 'perspicacious readers' realise not only the genre-related expectations with which they approached the text, but also the similar expectations – that all events can be structured according to cause and effect relations around a beginning, a middle, and an end – that often affect our perception of the past.

⁵⁹ "[M]ore perspicacious than the detective" (*Collected Fictions* 108).

CHAPTER 2. *L'affaire Moro* and Borges: Circularity between Literature and Life

Interviewer: *Cosa ti piace in Borges?*

Sciascia: Questo gioco delle coincidenze, questi due piani in cui la realtà diventa finzione, questa specie di circolarità che ha stabilito tra la letteratura e la vita

(*La palma va a nord* 109).¹

L'affaire Moro is a particularly relevant text within Sciascia's production in relation to Borges, since it is in this work that Sciascia's writing is most evidently in close dialogue with the Argentine author's. It is written in the style of the historical essay, the *inchiesta*, that Sciascia had already used for some of his previous works, and that he would use again in subsequent texts. In this chapter, I will start by assessing Sciascia's *inchiesta* form, which occupies a position on the borderline between the detective story and the historical essay. I will argue that the *inchiesta* form that Sciascia uses is already influenced by Borges's writing, an influence that contributes to the creation of a form that deliberately combines historiographical documents and literary references, consciously narrowing the distance between fact and fiction, in order to invite readers to critically approach anew what had previously been presented to them as indisputable facts.

In *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia deems necessary a literary approach to the documents of a case that shocked Italian society in the late 70s, the letters that the politician Aldo Moro sent while he was kidnapped and before he was murdered by the terrorist group *Brigate rosse* [Red Brigades]. Sciascia's aim is to offer a different interpretation from that presented by the Italian government and media when the letters were first made public. Sciascia structures his text around references to several authors, but most importantly around two excerpts from Borges's *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote* and *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain*. The inclusion of a fragment of *Pierre Menard* introduces the reading that Sciascia is going to apply to the documents of the Moro case that he analyses in his text, but it also links it to what Sciascia believes to be the referent behind Borges's short story, that is, Miguel de Unamuno's commentary on Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. I will argue that by presenting this complex game of intertextual relations Sciascia is introducing his methodology when approaching the documents of the Moro case, and at the same time inviting the readers to go beyond his own text. The quotation from *Herbert Quain* that Sciascia uses to close his text constitutes a final invitation for his readers to reconsider the whole Moro case, to read it

¹ “[Interviewer]: *What do you like about Borges?* [Sciascia]: This game of coincidences, these two levels in which reality becomes fiction, this kind of circularity that he has established between literature and life” (My translation).

again from a different perspective in search of an interpretation closer to the truth of the events.

Borges's *Pierre Menard* is, for Sciascia, an “apologo sullo storicismo assoluto” (OA vol. II, t. I 948).² I will analyse the implications behind this statement, in which Sciascia identifies the story of a rewriting of *Don Quijote*, a literary work, as having more to do with historicism than with literature. I will argue that through his personal reading of *Pierre Menard* and its inclusion in *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia is extrapolating the notion of the mutability of literary texts to narrative history, narrowing the distance between the two. I will also relate the parallelism that Sciascia, via his interpretation of Borges's *Pierre Menard*, establishes between literary and historical texts to the relationship between an original text and its rewritings. In *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia proposes a rewriting of the Moro case akin to the rewriting to which a literary text could be subjected. This presentation of real past events as a text subject to multiple reinterpretations is related to the idea that there is a certain degree of circularity in the relationship between literature and life, an idea that Sciascia identified and admired in Borges's work. By exploring in their works this relationship between literature and life, and specifically the relationship between literature and history, both authors warn against the dangers of ignoring the processes of fictionalisation that are involved in the narration of real events.

1. Historical context: the Moro case

L'affaire Moro was Sciascia's written response to the kidnapping and assassination by the left-wing terrorist group Brigate rosse (BR) of the leader of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), Aldo Moro, in the spring of 1978. The tragic events had particular resonance in Italian society due to the significant moment in which they took place – Moro was kidnapped the very morning on which a new government was to be ratified. Moreover, this new government was to be the first government of the DC supported by the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI). This was a first step within the so called *compromesso storico* [historical compromise], whose ultimate goal was presented as the unity of all constitutional forces in Italian politics in a joint effort to strengthen democracy. This political move was regarded with mistrust by factions of both the DC and the PCI, which contributed to a climate of increasing unease in the days leading to the presentation of the new government. On the morning of 16th March, Moro, who had been a key figure for the development of the new government, was kidnapped on his way to the Chamber of Deputies, and the policemen who escorted him

² “Fable of absolute historicism” (My translation).

together with his chauffeur were killed. After the shocking attack, in the Chamber of Deputies the new government was approved without further discussion.

During the almost two months of his captivity, Moro was allowed to send letters to his family, members of his party, and other political figures, many of which were published by the press as they were received. At the same time, the BR issued a series of communiqués claiming responsibility for the attack and stating that Moro was being held in a *prigione del popolo* [people's prison]. The terrorists established that Moro would only be released in exchange for imprisoned terrorists, and would otherwise be condemned and executed. The decision of whether to negotiate with the terrorists or to reject any kind of pact with the BR generated great discrepancies in the political sphere, and especially inside the DC. While the members of the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) argued in favour of negotiating with the terrorists in order to save Moro's life, the PCI believed that agreeing to the terrorists' terms would only lead to more violent attacks in the future. Inside the DC, those members closer to Moro insisted on negotiation, but another section of the party backed a position of intransigence regarding the terrorists' demands. Eventually the new Christian Democrat Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, decided on behalf of his party that there would be no negotiation with the terrorists. Moro was kept prisoner until the 9th of May, when his body was found in the boot of a car that the terrorists had parked, in what was observed as a symbolic gesture, equidistant from the headquarters of the DC and the PCI in the centre of Rome.

The events generated great controversy. First of all the decision not to negotiate with Moro's kidnappers was questioned, but also the surprisingly fruitless investigation of the case was under suspicion. In spite of the massive operation put in force by the police, in almost two months the place where Moro was being held hostage proved impossible to locate, and the terrorists were able to undertake risky operations, such as delivering letters, abandoning the vehicles used during the attack, and returning Moro's body after his murder, all in Rome city centre, without being intercepted at any stage. These controversial issues are what Sciascia tackles in his text.³

2. The *inchiesta* form

The term *inchiesta* [enquiry] is one of many by which critics have referred to a series of Sciascia's texts which could be broadly classified as historical accounts, and also referred to as historical essays, pamphlets, inquest novels, or *racconti-inchiesta* [enquiry-stories]. As Anne Mullen notes, Sciascia himself used interchangeably terms such as *saggio* [essay],

³ For further analysis of the socio-political atmosphere in which the Moro case took place, see Paul Ginsborg's *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*.

racconto [story], *libro* [book], or *cronaca* [chronicle] to refer to this particular category of his writing (Mullen 28). In this thesis I will use the term *inchiesta*, since I believe it to be the one that best describes the two of these texts I will analyse, *L'affaire Moro* and *Il teatro della memoria*, and because it emphasises the connection of this form with Borges, as I will explore in this section. The theme of Sciascia's *inchieste* concerns cases in which he considers that the account held as the 'official version' of events is not the most truthful. By closely examining documents related to the case, he discovers contradictions that were overlooked at the time, or presents new documents that show a different perspective on the events that might previously have been neglected. Sciascia challenges previous reconstructions of what actually happened by presenting conflicting evidence that puts these interpretations back into question.

Alessandro Manzoni's *Storia della colonna infame* [History of the Infamous Column] (1842) is the prototype work from which Sciascia got inspiration for his *inchieste*. Manzoni's historical essay, originally published as an appendix to *I promessi sposi* [The Betrothed] (1827), became a separate text when his background research branched out into a subject that no longer fitted into the novel he was writing. Sciascia discusses the narrative form of Manzoni's text in his essay *Storia della colonna infame*, initially written as an introduction to Manzoni's text and republished later as part of *Cruciverba*. According to Sciascia, Manzoni's decision to leave the *Storia* out of *I promessi sposi* was due to its problematic incorporation into the form of the novel:

La forma, che non era soltanto forma, e cioè il romanzo storico, il componimento misto di storia e d'invenzione, gli sarà apparsa inadeguata e precaria; e la materia dissonante al corso del romanzo, non regolabile ad esso, sfuggente, incerta, disperata (OB vol. II 1077).⁴

The problematic relationship of Manzoni's historical essay with fiction is also reflected in Sciascia's texts. The problem posed by the mixture of history and invention that complicated Manzoni's choice of narrative form; that is, the mixture of fact and fiction, is however addressed differently by Sciascia. For him the mere examination of the documents available, no matter how meticulous, is not enough to reach the truth behind the facts. It is when historiographical documents prove to be insufficient that Sciascia turns to literature for a tool to examine history in search of truth, introducing what constitutes the truly distinctive feature of his *inchieste*. Sciascia's *inchieste* are riddled with references, some explicit and some indirect, to other authors and works of literature. By drawing comparisons to works of literature, or quoting the work of other writers, Sciascia suggests a literary reading of the events and documents that he is studying. Serrano Puche observes:

⁴ "The form, which was not only form; that is, the historical novel, the mixture of history and invention, would have seemed to him inadequate and precarious, and the subject conflicting with the flow of the novel, unable to adapt to it – elusive, uncertain, desperate" (My translation).

As an element of interpretation and tool that helps to compensate for the omissions and lack of documents, Sciascia constantly turns to fiction. By resorting to fragments of other works, to biographical circumstances of writers, to literary characters or motifs, he tries to outline the traits of character of the protagonists of the account or to understand what really happened, for which he finds no true explanation in the texts that so far accounted for that event (My translation).⁵

Even though the vital influence of Manzoni's *La colonna infame* in Sciascia's *inchieste* has already been extensively analysed, other influences to which Sciascia himself made reference have received less critical attention.⁶ In his biography of the author, Collura records that Sciascia considered the influence of Borges to be essential to the creation of his *inchieste*: "[i]l prototipo, altissimo, resta *La storia della colonna infame*; ci sono poi le *inquisiciones* di Borges" (quoted in Collura 328-329).⁷ The word *inquisiciones* [enquiries] recalls in fact the term *inchiesta*, and in Borges's work appears in the title of the book of essays *Otras inquisiciones*.⁸ However, it seems legitimate to think that in his statement Sciascia is referring to Borges's *Historia universal de la infamia*, a collection of short stories, all of them based on actual historical events, although highly fictionalised. In the prologue to the 1954 edition, Borges describes these stories as "el irresponsable juego de un tímido que no se animó a escribir cuentos y que se distrajo en falsear y tergiversar (sin justificación estética alguna) ajenas historias" (291).⁹ Although this assertion places the motivations behind *Historia universal de la infamia* far from those behind Sciascia's *inchieste*, it is the playful ambiguity between fact and fiction in Borges's accounts which Sciascia emulates in his own work. Sciascia deliberately exploits the ambiguity of the cases he chooses for his *inchieste*, but he, unlike Borges, relies primarily on documentary evidence and only turns to literature when documents prove to be insufficient. For him, it is the use he makes of the documents which locates his *inchieste* halfway between the fictional narration and the historical essay. As Sciascia stated in a 1978 interview:

Anche Borges fa uso del documento, ma non sappiamo mai se si tratta di un documento vero o di un documento apocrifo. A costruire dei libri interamente sui documenti è stato un tedesco,

⁵ "[C]omo elemento de interpretación e instrumento que ayude a paliar las lagunas y la escasez de documentos, Sciascia se sirve continuamente de la ficción. Por medio de la apelación a fragmentos de otras obras, a circunstancias biográficas de escritores, a personajes o motivos literarios, intenta perfilar los rasgos de carácter de las personas que protagonizan el relato o entender lo que realmente ocurrió y no encuentra verdadera explicación en los textos que hasta entonces daban cuenta del suceso en cuestión" (Serrano Puche "Ficción, historia y verdad" 163).

⁶ For an analysis of Manzoni's influence, see JoAnn Canon's "History as a Mode of Comprehension and History as Fabulation: a Reading of Sciascia's 'Morte dell'Inquisitore' and 'Il Consiglio d'Egitto'", and Anne Mullen's *Inquisition and Inquiry: Sciascia's Inchiesta*.

⁷ "Its great prototype continues to be *La storia della colonna infame*; then there are Borges's 'inquisiciones' [enquiries]" (My translation).

⁸ Even though Borges's *Otras inquisiciones* has been translated into English as *Other Inquisitions*, I think in this context the translation 'enquiries' is more appropriate to convey the meaning of the Spanish 'inquisiciones'.

⁹ "[T]he irresponsible sport of a shy sort of man who could not bring himself to write short stories, and so amused himself by changing and distorting (sometimes without aesthetic justification) the stories of other men" (*Collected Fictions* 4).

Alexander Kluge, ad esempio nel suo libro su Stalingrado. Io mi sono sempre tenuto a metà (*La palma va a nord* 143).¹⁰

In Sciascia's *inchieste*, fiction not only serves as a way of filling in the gaps for which there is no historiographical evidence, but also allows for a new perspective from which to examine the events. Elizabeth Wren-Owens notes that "[t]he literary lens offers a new way of examining the case, highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions, so that a picture of lies and corruption emerges over the official story" (45). Examining real events with the tools of literature does not make these events fictional, but allows us instead to discover the fictional elements that were present in what until then was the hegemonic interpretation of these events.

What makes *L'affaire Moro* unique among Sciascia's *inchieste* is that it does not investigate a remote, obscure historical event, but a recent case that had been widely covered by the media. It is also a case that Sciascia, an MP at the time, was already investigating as part of his political role. Some critics have argued that, of all Sciascia's *inchieste*, *L'affaire Moro* is the one in which the role of literature as a tool to investigate these documentary sources is strongest. As Farrell observes when considering *L'affaire Moro* in relation to the ensemble of Sciascia's *inchieste*, "[a]lthough this work was the most openly inspired by contemporary life, paradoxically no other work is so tightly packaged in the wrappings of literature" (123). Paradoxically, since it deals with an event for which Sciascia had all the relevant documents at his disposal, and there was no apparent need to reconstruct missing elements through fiction. Moreover, Sciascia purposely did not use any other sources than those that had already been made available by the media. In a 1978 interview, shortly before the publication of *L'affaire Moro*, when asked if he had used any exclusive sources to write his book, he answered:

Assolutamente no. Non ho cercato nemmeno un contatto con la famiglia Moro. Ho voluto auscultare i documenti resi pubblici fino a quel momento. Anche perché ho voluto dimostrare che quelle poche lettere bastavano per avere del caso una immagine vera, reale, quell'immagine che per circa due mesi l'informazione ha ignobilmente alterato. E per informazione intendo i giornali, la radio, la televisione (*La palma va a nord* 75).¹¹

The fact that in this case it was unnecessary to reconstruct missing information with the help of literature, as well as the fact that Sciascia chose to investigate this case from his position of writer as well as from his position of politician, reinforces the importance that the literary references he inserts in *L'affaire Moro* have for the effectiveness of his text.

¹⁰ "Also Borges makes use of documents, but we never know whether they are real or apocryphal documents. It has been a German, Alexander Kluge, who has constructed books entirely of documents, for example in his book about Stalingrad. I have always stood in between" (My translation).

¹¹ "Not at all. I have not even tried to contact the Moro family. I wanted to thoroughly examine the documents made public at the time. Also because I wanted to show that those few letters were enough to have a truthful, real image of the case, an image that for nearly two months the media have despicably altered. And by media I mean the newspapers, radio, and television" (My translation).

In the minority report he presented, as an MP, in 1982, Sciascia points out the controversies surrounding the Moro case that worried him the most. He criticises the position of firm intransigence against the demands of the BR taken by the PCI, the DC and others, who dismissed any possibility of negotiating with the terrorists in order to save Moro's life. He also notes how the escort that accompanied Moro on the day of his kidnap was surprisingly weak despite the importance of the event he was attending, and questions how the apparently impressive display of forces devoted to Moro's search failed to find him. However, what Sciascia emphasises as most worrying among all the inefficiencies in the investigation, is the fact that Moro's letters to members of his party and other public figures, where he pleaded for negotiation in order to save his life, were dismissed by the investigators of the case. At the time it was argued by many that these letters had been written by Moro under pressure in order to serve the terrorists' interests, or even that Moro's captors had written the letters themselves. According to Sciascia, however, this was not the case, and the fact that these letters were so blatantly ignored was due to the decision taken by most members of the DC, and supported by most of the media, of considering the Moro who wrote the letters to be a different person from the politician known to Italian society, starting from the moment immediately after his kidnap. In his report, Sciascia observes: "da quel momento Moro non era più sé stesso, era diventato un altro: e se ne indicava la certificazione nelle lettere in cui chiedeva di essere riscattato, e soprattutto per il fatto che chiedeva di essere riscattato" (OA vol.II, t. I 549).¹²

Sciascia notes that the insistence with which Moro argued in favour of negotiating with his kidnapers was justified by many members of his own party by identifying this Moro with a different man from the lucid politician he had been so far: "si passò ad offrire compassionevolmente l'immagine di un Moro altro, di un Moro due, di un Moro non più se stesso" (OA vol.II, t. I 550).¹³ In his letters, Moro repeatedly asked the government to reach an agreement with the terrorists for his freedom, arguing that negotiating in order to save a life had been a strategy that he himself had already supported in the past, at times when his political ability had not been questioned. Sciascia notes how Moro's arguments were completely ignored:

¹² "From that moment Moro was not himself, had become another. And as proof one was referred to the letters where he asked to be ransomed, and precisely to the fact that he asked to be ransomed" (*The Moro Affair* 113).

¹³ "[T]he pitiful image of an altered Moro was presented to the public, a new Moro, a Moro who was no longer himself" (*The Moro Affair* 114).

Si preferì invece sminuire, invalidare e smentire i suoi argomenti da un punto di vista clinico invece che politico, relegandoli alla sua delirante posizione di prigioniero. Da ciò la nessuna importanza conferita dagli investigatori alle sue lettere (OA vol.II, t. I 550).¹⁴

It is this disregard for Moro's letters sent from the *prigione del popolo* that Sciascia denounces in *L'affaire Moro*, this time from his position as a writer, in an attempt to do justice to the figure of the murdered politician. Placing the focus of his analysis on the letters whose dismissal had determined the fortune of Aldo Moro only a few months before, in his text Sciascia is hinting at the reasons why he believes that the members of Moro's own party actively took advantage of the politician's disappearance.

3. *L'affaire Moro* and *Pierre Menard*: a methodology for reading

In the first two sections of *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia presents Moro's letters, the documents that he will analyse in the text, and also the hypothesis that he intends to prove with their analysis: that these letters contained information that could have led to Moro's release and which was deliberately ignored. In the following section he introduces the method that he is going to use to do this, for which purpose the writing of Borges plays an essential part. Sciascia writes how he recalled Borges's story *Pierre Menard* while he was reviewing the documents of the Moro case:

Si adeguava all'invincibile impressione che l'*affaire Moro* fosse già stato scritto, che fosse già compiuta opera letteraria, che vivesse ormai in una sua intoccabile perfezione. Intoccabile se non al modo di Pierre Menard: mutando tutto senza nulla mutare (OA vol.II, t. I 434).¹⁵

What Sciascia means when he writes of 'the manner of Pierre Menard' as the only way of altering the Moro affair, refers to the main theme of Borges's short story. In *Pierre Menard* Borges reviews the work of a French writer – Menard – whose literary legacy includes, besides a series of mediocre writings, the more extraordinary albeit incomplete attempt at rewriting *Don Quijote*. Menard's intention was not, however, to transform in any way Cervantes's text, or to compose a contemporary *Don Quijote*; but to, from his own time and personal circumstances, write a novel that would correspond word by word with *Don Quijote*. In this way, the difference between Cervantes's *Don Quijote* and that of Menard would not be made at the level of the written text, but only perceived by the reader, who would read the same text differently, being aware of the different historical circumstances of the two writers

¹⁴ "It seemed preferable to invalidate and refute his arguments from a clinical rather than a political point of view, explain them away as the product of a prisoner's deranged mind. Whence the investigators' lack of interest in his letters" (*The Moro Affair* 114).

¹⁵ "Here too one had the irresistible impression that the Moro affair had already been written, was already a completed literary work, already existed in all its unbearable perfection. Inviolable except in the manner of Pierre Menard – by changing everything without changing anything" (*The Moro Affair* 24). In chapter four I will analyse further Sciascia's choice of the phrase 'mutando tutto senza nulla mutare', a reference to Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *Il gattopardo*, to discuss the Moro case and *Pierre Menard*.

who penned the same words. By alluding to 'the manner of Pierre Menard' in *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia is therefore stating the way in which he is going to tackle the Moro case: without adding anything new, but offering a different perspective. The reader will not receive new information about the case, but will instead receive a different interpretation of the circumstances in which Moro wrote his letters.

To show to what extent the Moro case can accommodate a reading in the style of Menard, Sciascia proposes a contrasted double reading of a fragment narrating the events which took place immediately before Moro's kidnap. The fragment describes what Moro did and was getting ready to do in the morning he was kidnapped, and also points out the anxiety with which many members of the DC and PCI regarded the *compromesso storico* in which this new government played a key role. Sciascia analyses how this fragment, read on the same day of the kidnap, is a chronicle that merely describes what Moro, unaware of what awaited him, had planned for the day:

Il 16 marzo 1978, qualche minuto prima delle nove, l'onorevole Aldo Moro, presidente della Democrazia Cristiana, esce dal portone numero 79 di via del Forte Trionfale. Sono ad attenderlo la 130 blu di rappresentanza e un'alfetta bianca con la scorta. Il presidente deve primero recarsi al Centro Studi della Democrazia Cristiana poi, alle dieci, alla Camera dei deputati, dove l'onorevole Andreotti presenterà il nuovo governo e ne dichiarerà il programma. Di questo nuovo governo, che sarà il primo governo democristiano sorretto anche dai voti comunisti, l'onorevole Moro è stato accorto e paziente artefice. Ma c'è inquietudine sia nel Partito Comunista, deluso dalla presenza nel nuovo governo di vecchi e non molto stimati uomini della Democrazia Cristiana, sia in quella parte della Democrazia Cristiana che teme il realizzarsi del cosiddetto compromesso storico. Scritta – e letta – subito dopo il rapimento, questa è una pura cronaca di quel che l'onorevole Moro stava facendo e aveva in programma di fare (OA vol.II, t. I 434-435).¹⁶

However, Sciascia points out how, read from the present from which he writes – after Moro was murdered – the focus of the paragraph is displaced: from focusing on Moro, it goes on to focusing on the Chamber of Deputies and the presentation of the new government:

Per contro [...] se oggi scrivo questo – le stesse parole e nello stesso ordine – per me e per il lettore tutt'altro ne sarà il senso. Si è come spostato il centro di gravità: dall'onorevole Moro, che usciva di casa ignaro dell'agguato, alla Camera dei deputati dove l'assenza dell'onorevole Moro avrebbe rapidamente prodotto quel che la sua presenza difficoltosamente avrebbe conseguito: e cioè quell'aquietamento e quella concordia per cui il

¹⁶ "On 16 March 1978 at a few minutes to nine, Aldo Moro, President of the Christian Democratic Party, comes out of number 79, via del Forte Trionfale. The official blue 130 and his escort's small white Alfa Romeo are waiting. The President will go first to the Christian Democratic Study Centre and then, at ten o'clock, to the Chamber of Deputies where Andreotti will introduce the new Government and announce its policy. This new Government, the first Christian Democratic Government to have the support of the Communist Party, is Moro's cautious and patient creation. However there are some misgivings both within the Communist Party, dissatisfied by the presence in the new Government of former, not much respected members of the Christian Democratic Party, and within that section of Christian Democracy which is wary of the so-called 'historical compromise'.

Written, and read – immediately after Moro's abduction, this is a mere account of what Moro was doing and intended to do" (*The Moro Affair* 24).

quarto governo presieduto dall'onorevole Andreotti veniva approvato senza discussione alcuna. (OA vol.II, t. I 435).¹⁷

The reader who already knows of the tragic fate that awaited Moro two months after his kidnap will now notice what great influence the absence of Moro – an absence which now is not just from the Chamber of Deputies that day but from politics, and from life – had on the development of the political situation. Whereas the ratification of the polemical government would have no doubt been problematic had he been there as expected, it was approved without further discussion precisely because of Moro's disappearance in such shocking circumstances.

Enrico Vettore argues that Sciascia includes the reference to *Pierre Menard* in *L'affaire Moro* in order to establish within his text "an ethics of reading and writing" ("Uncovering Truth through Literature" 221). Indeed, by emulating Borges's *Pierre Menard* through a double reading of the chronicle of the events in the morning of Moro's kidnapping, Sciascia is doing much more than merely pointing out the irony of the advantages that Moro's absence had for the ratification of the new government. As he notes immediately after, "il richiamo all'apologo di Borges vuole essere meno superficiale, meno parodistico" (OA vol.II, t. I 435).¹⁸ In this imitation of Borges's short story, what Sciascia is doing is highlighting the shift of priorities that took place right after Moro's kidnapping; that is to say, that the DC took advantage of the stability that the attack against Moro implied for the government, instead of doing all that was in their power to save his life. Furthermore, Sciascia is proving his point 'in the manner of Menard': without changing any words, but changing the perspective according to the circumstances in which these words were written, which is the method he will use to analyse Moro's letters throughout *L'affaire Moro*. In his analysis, Vettore observes that with his inclusion of Borges's quotation Sciascia is asking his readers to continue investigating beyond the book. The reader "is now involved in an active dialogue with the text and is invited to explore the book in depth or to export this dialogue out of the book and into the realm of political action" ("Uncovering Truth through Literature" 231). However, what Vettore fails to do is to take his own analysis beyond Borges's *Pierre Menard*, not unpacking the reference that Sciascia makes to this short story as related to Unamuno and Cervantes.

In order to fully understand Sciascia's intentions it is important to analyse in more depth the concept of 'inviolable perfection' that he perceives both in the Moro case and in *Don Quijote*;

¹⁷ "On the other hand [...] [i]f today I write these words – the same and in the same order – their significance for me and for the reader will be quite different. The centre of gravity has somehow been displaced: from Moro, coming out of his home unaware of the ambush, to the Chamber of Deputies where Moro's absence will promptly achieve what his presence could only have attained with difficulty – that appeasement and harmony in which the fourth Government, presided over by Andreotti, was to be unanimously approved" (*The Moro Affair* 25).

¹⁸ "[M]y intention in recalling Borges's fable was less superficial, less parodistic" (*The Moro Affair* 25).

likewise, it is necessary to consider Sciascia's personal reading of *Pierre Menard*. In *L'affaire Moro* Sciascia introduces *Pierre Menard* by stating first what he believes to be the real circumstances that inspired Borges to write it. In the reading that Sciascia makes of Borges's story, Pierre Menard would represent Unamuno, and Menard's *Don Quijote* would be Unamuno's commentary of Cervantes's novel, *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* [The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho] (1905). Unamuno's text is a close analysis, chapter by chapter, of *Don Quijote*, in which the author provides his own interpretation of the characters' actions, often contradicting the narrator's views. Instead of rewriting Cervantes's novel word for word, as Menard did in Borges's story, Unamuno provided only a commentary linked to a general summary of the narrative – since the storyline of *Don Quijote* was well-known to Unamuno's readers and this made it unnecessary to repeat in detail.

According to Sciascia, the publication of Unamuno's interpretation of Cervantes's work established a turning point in the way in which *Don Quijote* was read, becoming a watershed moment after which it was no longer possible to read it how Cervantes had written it:

[L]'interpretazione unamuniana, che sembrava trasparente come un cristallo rispetto all'opera di Cervantes, era in effetti uno specchio: di Unamuno, del tempo di Unamuno, del sentimento di Unamuno, della visione del mondo e delle cose spagnole che aveva Unamuno. Da allora si è letto il *Don Chisciotte* di Unamuno credendo di leggere ancora il *Don Chisciotte* di Cervantes: e di fatto leggendo quello di Cervantes (OA vol.II, t. I 433).¹⁹

In *Ore di Spagna*, Sciascia also writes about the layers of interpretation that a cultural monument such as *Don Quijote* has irremediably accumulated throughout the centuries. One of these interpretations is, he observes, the Romantic interpretation, which “fece del libro una specie di breviario dell'ideale contro la materia, dell'illusione contro la realtà” (*Ore di Spagna* 29).²⁰ In Sciascia's view, the moment of Spanish history in which Unamuno's commentary was written lent itself perfectly to being explained through the story of Don Quijote. In the period immediately after the loss of the last Spanish colonies there was, he writes “una Spagna come don Chisciotte sconfitta dalla realtà e uno scrittore capace di estrarre da quella sconfitta i vantaggi dell'anima” (*Ore di Spagna* 30).²¹ The fact that Unamuno's commentary of *Don Quijote* seemed to adapt with such perfection Cervantes's characters to the spirit of Spanish society at the time contributed to the permanent mark that this interpretation would leave on all subsequent readings of the novel. However, Sciascia sees in Unamuno's rewriting of *Don Quijote* not only the influence of the previous Romantic

¹⁹ “Unamuno's interpretation, which seemed crystal clear as regards Cervantes' book, was in fact a reflection – of Unamuno, of Unamuno's time, of his emotions, of his vision of the world and of all that was Spanish. From then on we read Unamuno's *Don Quixote* when we think we are reading Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – indeed, reading Cervantes' *Don Quixote*” (*The Moro Affair* 23).

²⁰ “Made of the book a sort of compendium of the ideal against the material, of illusion against reality” (My translation).

²¹ “A Spain, as Don Quijote, defeated by reality, and a writer capable of extracting from this defeat the benefits for the soul” (My translation).

interpretation of it and its appropriateness to Spain's situation at the beginning of the 20th century, but most of all an idea of the work of art in general as subject to change:

[L]'opera d'arte come forma suscettibile di assumere – nel tempo, nello spazio, nello stato d'animo o condizione dei singoli che ne fruiscono – significazioni diverse, diversa vita; e i personaggi come persone realmente esistite o esistenti le cui azioni e pensieri si possono interpretare al di qua o al di là dell'interpretazione che sembrò voler loro conferire colui che li creò (*Ore di Spagna* 30).²²

According to Sciascia, what Borges does in *Pierre Menard* is to make explicit the change in the way in which *Don Quijote* has been read after the publication of Unamuno's *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. For Sciascia, Borges's story unmasks the effect that, unnoticed, Unamuno's interpretation of *Don Quijote* has had on Cervantes's work. That is; that seeming to be a transparent interpretation of Cervantes's novel which changed nothing in the original text – being a mere commentary of it – it actually invested it with Unamuno's reading of *Don Quijote*. Sciascia concludes: “[m]a ancora l'illusione della trasparenza persiste: e cioè che il libro di Unamuno [...] abbia davvero e definitivamente ‘mutati in se stessi’ don Chisciotte e Sancio” (*Ore di Spagna* 32).²³ It is revealing to consider these passages in *Ore di Spagna* along with the similarities that Sciascia draws between *Don Quijote* and the Moro case in *L'affaire Moro*. First of all, by comparing the Moro case to a literary work, Sciascia seems at first to be attributing to it this characteristic ‘inviolable perfection’ that he also sees in *Don Quijote*. However, this observation reveals its irony when contrasted with Sciascia's remarks in *Ore di Spagna* about literature that he infers from the reading of *Pierre Menard*. The ‘inviolable perfection’ of *Don Quijote* and other great works of literature is an illusion, since, in Sciascia's opinion, nowadays it is impossible to reach the original text that Cervantes wrote without passing through Unamuno's interpretation first.

A similar case to that of Cervantes and Unamuno can also be found in Argentine literature, and it is illuminating to consider Borges's views on it as they reinforce Sciascia's reading of *Pierre Menard*. José Hernández's poem *Martín Fierro* (1872) arguably holds a position in the collective Argentine imaginary comparable to that occupied by *Don Quijote* in the Spanish imaginary. The incorporation of the character of the gaucho Martín Fierro into the national imaginary also took place mediated by interpretations of the original poem, in a similar way to what happened to the character of Don Quijote in Spain. In 1916, Leopoldo Lugones published *El payador* [The Singer], which was to provide an influential interpretation of *Martín Fierro* as epic poem. In his text, Lugones invested the gaucho Martín Fierro with the

²² “The work of art as subject to acquiring – in time, in space, in the state of mind or condition of the individuals that enjoy it – different meanings, a different life; and the characters as people who really exist or have existed, whose actions and thoughts can be interpreted beyond the interpretation that whomever created them seemed to have intended” (My translation).

²³ “But the illusion of transparency persists: and that for this reason Unamuno's book [...] has truly and permanently ‘changed in themselves’ Don Quijote and Sancho” (My translation).

inherent qualities and values of the whole of the Argentine nation. After the epic interpretation of the poem by Lugones and other writers such as Ricardo Rojas, this became the 'official' reading of Hernández's text. Beatriz Sarlo notes that Borges criticised the way in which this reading had imposed itself over others, and highlighted the need to get over that univocal interpretation:

The poem had to be freed from the dead weight of Lugones's epic and hyperbolic criticism and re-installed in a tradition that could prove productive to current literature. In fact the poem had to be read against the grain, and set free from the straitjacket of previous interpretations (39).

Borges himself attempted to do this in several of his texts. For instance, the short story *Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829-1874)*, in *El Aleph*, originates from the events narrated in *Martín Fierro*. Borges does not name the poem *Martín Fierro* in his story, but refers the reader to the adventures and characters that are going to be the focus of his text as part of "un libro insigne; [...] un libro cuya materia puede ser todo para todos (I Corintios 9:22), pues es capaz de casi inagotables repeticiones, versiones, perversiones" (OC vol. I 561).²⁴ This observation already anticipates the attitude that Borges will have regarding Hernández's poem. The original text is introduced as sacred, as can be inferred from the biblical quote, and at the same time is presented as the source of infinite variations that alter it in some way. Another example is the short story *El fin*, included in *Ficciones*, where Borges imagines Martín Fierro's death in a duel, an invented episode not included in Hernández's original:

[Borges] adopts what he says is the only attitude a man can have towards tradition: betrayal. The mode of this betrayal is to contradict other interpretations of the text, and go back to Hernández himself, leaping over the pretentious reading of the poem as an epic (Sarlo 42).

Borges's ambivalent presentation of *Martín Fierro* in *Tadeo Isidoro Cruz* as a text both sacred and subject to infinite reinterpretations can well relate to the presentation Sciascia makes of the Moro case as a work of 'inviolable perfection'. The events of the case and the reading of Moro's letters appear unequivocal; however, Sciascia perceives in them the weight of an interpretation that has already placed itself between public opinion and the truth of events.

Sciascia presents Unamuno's commentary of *Don Quijote* as an interpretation that has imposed itself over Cervantes's novel, making it impossible for later readers to reach the original text. Yet, as he clearly states in the prologue to the text, Unamuno's intention is to provide an interpretation of the adventures narrated in *Don Quijote* that is faithful to its protagonists – not to its author. The reason for this is that in *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* Unamuno read *Don Quijote* not as a fictional account of the lives of Don Quijote and Sancho,

²⁴ "[A] very famous book – that is, in a book whose subject can be all things to all men (I Corinthians 9:22), for it is capable of virtually inexhaustible repetitions, versions, perversions" (*Collected Fictions* 212).

but as an account of two characters who had really existed, and whose adventures had really taken place. Unamuno presents a reading of these adventures opposed to that of Cervantes's, which is considered not as an original novel that he is about to reinterpret, but already as an interpretation in itself, one of many possible interpretations of Don Quijote's real adventures and, as Unamuno also makes clear throughout his text, not necessarily the most faithful to the characters it portrays. Unamuno's aim is to free Don Quijote's adventures from the, in his view, erroneous interpretation provided by Cervantes. To a question regarding the importance of *Don Quijote* in his work, in a 1978 interview, Sciascia answers precisely by summarising Unamuno's goal:

Ma mi dicevi di *Don Chisciotte*, che io ho letto complementariamente al celebre commento di Miguel di Unamuno. Nel romanzo c'era la storia comica di un pazzo che si era infatuato della storia della cavalleria; nel commento c'era la esplicitazione della vicenda di quel pazzo, e cioè la spiegazione dell'anima spagnola (*La palma va a nord* 136).²⁵

A similar assertion could be true for the commentary to the events in the Moro case that Sciascia provides in *L'affaire Moro*. In his text, Sciascia denounces that the events in the Moro case have been misinterpreted in such a way that they resemble a fictional account of Moro's kidnapping and murder. It is this fictional nature which makes it stand in the apparent position of 'inviolable perfection' of the literary work. However, Sciascia reminds his readers, the Moro case was not at all fictional, but was instead the kidnap and eventual murder of a real man. Sciascia claims, as Unamuno did for *Don Quijote*, a rereading of the case that is faithful to the real existence of its main character as opposed to the account of the events that was given by its author in the literary work. This is what Sciascia means when he proposes a reading 'in the manner of Menard': he will not alter Moro's letters in any way, but he will contradict the interpretation that they had been given by government and media.

In the Moro case and the way it was managed by the political forces and the media, Sciascia sees an example of the sense of unreality that affects the political sphere in Italy. For him, the only way of restoring it to reality is through a process mediated by literature. He makes this clear in a 1979 interview:

[I]l potere ha ormai acquistato una qualità fantastica. È realtà – una realtà terribile – divenuta finzione, e per ridiventare realtà occorre che passi attraverso la letteratura. In questo senso il caso Moro mi è sembrato un esempio perfetto, tanto reale da capovolgersi in irreale. Occorreva quindi restituirlo alla realtà (*La palma va a nord* 149).²⁶

²⁵ "You were telling me of *Don Quijote*, that I have read at the same time as the famous commentary by Miguel de Unamuno. The novel featured the comic story of a madman who had been infatuated by the stories of knight errantry; the commentary made explicit the events in the life of that madman, and therefore explained the Spanish soul" (My translation).

²⁶ "Power has nowadays acquired a fantastic nature. It is reality – a terrible reality – that has become fiction, and to become reality again it needs to pass through literature. In this sense the Moro case seemed to me a perfect example, so real that it reversed into the unreal. It was therefore necessary to restore it to reality" (My translation).

What Sciascia considered most unforgivable about the Moro case was the insistence with which the idea that the kidnapped Moro who penned the letters was not himself had been spread, especially by members of his own party. Sciascia finds that Moro's identity was consciously split into two by the government and the media: Moro the lucid politician he was before he was kidnapped, and Moro the alienated man into which he 'transformed' as soon as he was kidnapped by the terrorists, and whose judgements could not, or so it was presented at the time, be trusted in the same way. The way in which this process of separating Moro's identity into two took place is what Sciascia analyses in the following chapters. He detects the first signs in the use of language. Sciascia points out how, after Moro's kidnap, the expression *grande statista* [great statesman] started to appear increasingly often in newspapers to refer to Moro:

L'espressione era quella che ci voleva, quella che si cercava, affinché ogni riferimento a Moro contenesse – sottaciuto ma effettuale – un confronto tra quel che era stato e quel che più non era. Era stato un 'grande statista'; e ora altro non era che un uomo (OA vol.II, t. I 439).²⁷

To this idea that, for over thirty years of his political career and until his kidnap, Moro had been a remarkable man of State, Sciascia retaliates stating that neither Moro nor his party had ever had any kind of *senso dello Stato* [sense of State] (439). Instead, writes Sciascia, what Moro had been and continued to be after he was kidnapped was "un grande politicante: vigile, accorto, calcolatore; apparentemente duttile ma effettivamente irremovibile" (440).²⁸ Sciascia analyses how this process of transforming the kidnapped man into a different, unrecognisable Moro, escalates to the extent that the Moro *grande statista* is praised as if he were already dead, the more explicit his plea for negotiation with the terrorists becomes in the letters. For Sciascia, the culminating point of this process is represented by the letter that a group of public figures, calling themselves Moro's friends, wrote stating that they did not recognise in the letters that arrived from the *prigione del popolo* the Moro that they had known before:

Suggestionato o convinto, Moro ormai parla come le Brigate rosse e per le Brigate rosse: questa è la tesi che come una enorme pietra tombale scende sull'uomo vivo, combattivo e acuto che Moro è ancora nella 'prigione del popolo', mentre si ricorda e si celebra il Moro già morto, il Moro da monumentare: il 'grande statista' che Moro non è mai stato (OA vol.II, t. I 472).²⁹

²⁷ "[I]t was the right word, the word that was wanted, that would make all future references to Moro involve a comparison – tacit but unavoidable – between what he had been and what he now was. He had been 'a Great Statesman'. And now he was nothing but a man" (*The Moro Affair* 28).

²⁸ "[A] great politician, careful, shrewd, calculating, seemingly pliant but in fact unyielding" (*The Moro Affair* 29).

²⁹ "Whether he has been intimidated or converted, Moro now speaks with and for the Red Brigades – such is the verdict which, like a heavy tomb-stone, descends upon the live, pugnacious, logical man Moro continues to be in the 'People's Prison', while outside the already deceased Moro is remembered and honoured, the Moro to be immortalized as the 'Great Statesman' he never was" (*The Moro Affair* 56).

At the end of *Pierre Menard*, Borges reflects on how Menard's attempt at writing a contemporary *Don Quijote* has initiated a new technique of reading literature, and he finishes his story with an invitation for the reader to apply it to the reading of already well-known literary works:

Menard (acaso sin quererlo) ha enriquecido mediante una técnica nueva el arte detenido y rudimentario de la lectura: la técnica del anacronismo deliberado y de las atribuciones erróneas [...]. Esa técnica puebla de aventura los libros más calmosos. Atribuir a Louis Ferdinand Céline o a James Joyce la *Imitación de Cristo* ¿no es una suficiente renovación de esos tenues avisos espirituales? (OC vol. I 450).³⁰

In *L'affaire Moro* Sciascia puts into practice the reading that Borges invites the reader to do at the end of his short story, and to reread Moro's letters as if they had been written by a different author to the one who was thought to be their author in a first reading. Sciascia is denouncing that those who dismissed Moro's letters from the beginning were attributing their authorship to a man who did not exist. As he states in a 1978 interview:

[Q]uelli che hanno inventato un grande statista che non era più un grande statista hanno comesso, umanamente parlando, un delitto. È questo per me il nodo del dramma: il misconoscimento di quest'uomo, l'aver fatto di quest'uomo, che era lucido e continuava a pensare come sempre, un pazzo, un uomo impazzito di paura. Agli italiani è stata offerta questa terribile mistificazione. Non ho mai avuto nessuna simpatia per il Moro politicante, ma ho sentito un grande affetto per quest'uomo solo, negato, tradito (*La palma va a nord* 65).³¹

By means of a close reading of several of Moro's letters, contrasted with their first interpretation, Sciascia is restoring the authorship of the letters to the Moro that was known to Italian politics for over thirty years. Instead of filling 'the calmest books with adventure', as Borges's – or Menard's – literary game permits, Sciascia's method has more profound consequences: restoring Moro the lucid politician as the author of the letters received from the *prigione del popolo* is an accusation against those who chose to ignore Moro's reiterated pleas for negotiation, placing them in a position of responsibility regarding his death.

4. *L'affaire Moro* and *Herbert Quain*: an invitation for the perspicacious reader

By including Borges's quotation from *Pierre Menard* in the beginning of *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia is therefore inviting the readers to apply a reading from the perspective of this man who he feels was betrayed and forsaken by the government and the media. He makes

³⁰ "Menard has (perhaps unwittingly) enriched the slow and rudimentary art of reading by means of a new technique – the technique of deliberate anachronism and fallacious attribution [...]. This technique fills the calmest books with adventure. Attributing the *Imitatio Christi* to Louis Ferdinand Céline or James Joyce – is that not sufficient renovation of those faint spiritual admonitions?" (*Collected Fictions* 95).

³¹ "Those who have invented a great statesman that was not a great statesman anymore have committed, humanely speaking, a crime. This is for me the core of the drama: the dismissal of this man, having made of this man, who was lucid and continued to think as he always had, a madman, a man gone mad with fear. Italians have been offered this terrible mystification. I have never had any fondness for the political Moro, but I have felt a great affection for this man left alone, denied, betrayed" (My translation).

another, more explicit, appeal to the reader at the close of his text, quoting a lengthy excerpt from *Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain* that I reproduce here in Sciascia's Italian translation:

Ho già detto che si tratta di un romanzo poliziesco... A distanza di sette anni, mi è impossibile recuperare i dettagli dell'azione; ma eccone il piano generale, quale l'impoveriscono (quale lo purificano) le lacune della mia memoria. C'è un indecifrabile assassinio nelle pagine iniziali, una lenta discussione nelle intermedie, una soluzione nelle ultime. Poi, risolto ormai l'enigma, c'è un paragrafo vasto e retrospettivo che contiene questa frase: 'Tutti credettero che l'incontro dei due giocatori di scacchi fosse stato casuale'. Questa frase lascia capire che la soluzione è sbagliata. Il lettore, inquieto, rivede i capitoli sospetti e scopre *un'altra* soluzione, la vera [Sciascia's italics] (OA vol.II, t. I 522).³²

Vettore argues that the ending of the book makes it impossible to tell whether the reader that goes back in order to discover the real solution of the Moro case is the reader of *L'affaire Moro*, or Sciascia himself before he wrote it. He states: "[w]hether this was Sciascia's intention is impossible to say given the ambiguity of the book's closing" ("Uncovering Truth through Literature" 231). However, I argue that Sciascia's inclusion of the final reference to *Herbert Quain* is not ambiguous, but indeed a clear invitation for the readers to review the case for themselves, in line with the "ethics of reading and writing" (Vettore 221) proposed by the quotation from *Pierre Menard*. Sciascia is stating once more his intention in reviewing the Moro case, already introduced by the earlier reference to *Pierre Menard*, but most of all he is urging his readers to do the same and apply a second reading to the whole of the case as it was presented by the government and through the media at the time. His intention is clearly conveyed by this excerpt from an interview with Sciascia after the publication of *L'affaire Moro*, where he paraphrases the quotation by Borges that closes his text:

Mi sono messo davanti alla vicenda di Moro come davanti a un'opera letteraria già scritta. Solo che la soluzione offerta da quest'opera è sbagliata: bisogna tornare a rileggerla. Io ne offro una chiave: chi vuole si rilegga, nella memoria, tutto il caso e forse troverà la soluzione giusta (*La palma va a nord* 77).³³

In a similar way to that in which he constructed his detective fictions, Sciascia guides his readers in this *inchiesta* towards an open-ended conclusion. What he provides in *L'affaire Moro* are the tools to re-examine the whole of the Moro case; however, it is the task of the

³² "I have already said that this is a detective story... after seven years I can't recall the details of my plot, but here is the broad outline to which the gaps in my memory have reduced (or refined) it. There's an inexplicable murder in the first pages, a slow investigation in the middle ones, a solution in the last. Then, once the mystery has been solved, there is a lengthy revision which contains the sentence: 'Everybody believed that the two chess players had met by chance'. From this sentence it becomes clear that the solution is the wrong one. The perplexed reader re-reads the misleading chapters and finds *another* solution, the right one" (*The Moro Affair* 98).

³³ "I confronted the events of the Moro case as if I were confronting a literary work already published. Except that the solution offered by this work is wrong: it is necessary to read it again. Here I offer a key to do this: whoever wants to can reread, from memory, the whole case and perhaps will find the right solution" (My translation).

readers to look back on the events of the case and, without changing anything, invest them with a new interpretation.

Sciascia did not consider the changes that different readings of a literary text impose on its meaning to be necessarily detrimental. As he observed, “una grande opera letteraria è sempre piena di mutevoli verità; e ciascuna verità, nel mutare, lascia qualcosa che concorre alla verità, sempre da raggiungere” (*Ore di Spagna* 32).³⁴ In literature, the truth always lends itself to multiplicity. However, when Sciascia notes that he has the impression that the Moro case enjoys the status of an inviolable literary creation, what he is stressing is that a literary work is precisely what the Moro case was not. In the Moro case the proposed interpretations are multiple, but unlike in the literary work, there is one interpretation that comes closer to truth than the others, and which is obviously the one that Sciascia is aiming for. In a 1978 interview, when asked about the confusion between fiction and reality that he denounces in his book, Sciascia answers: “[s]ì, c’è questo continuo processo di trasmutazione di verità in finzione, di finzione in verità. Però ‘c’è’ la verità” (*La palma va a nord* 108).³⁵ Using literature, Sciascia is reversing the process of misrepresentation to which he believes that the figure of Moro was subjected during his kidnapping. A process that, he is implying, contained more literary elements than those of which he is making use in his own text.

The active role that Sciascia is encouraging the readers of *L'affaire Moro* to take is similar to that which he expected from the readers of his detective fiction. As I argued in the previous chapter, this had to be a ‘perspicacious reader’, as Borges defined the reader of Herbert Quain’s detective story who was able to detect the detective’s mistake and provide the correct solution for the crime. Through his reference to *Herbert Quain* in *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia is relating the investigation of past events to the process of detection, establishing a link between the role of the detective and that of the historian that I will explore in the next section.

5. The historian and the detective: fiction and narrative history

The structure of the historical account and the detective story have in common that they both present the reconstruction of past events. However, the main difference between them is that the historian reconstructs actual past events, whereas the fictional detective reconstructs a fictional crime. Nevertheless, strictly within the frame of the narration, the solving of the crime in the detective story enjoys the same status as the reconstruction of

³⁴ “[A] great literary work is always full of mutable truths; and each truth, in changing, leaves something that adds to truth, forever out of reach” (My translation).

³⁵ “Yes, there is this continuous process of transmutation of truth into fiction, of fiction into truth. But ‘there is’ truth” (My translation).

past events made by the historian. Within the reality of the detective novel, the fictional detective's findings represent a claim for truth which is as legitimate as that which the historian's account makes in relation to historical reality. Todorov observes how it is a requirement of the detective story not to give away its fictional condition, in order for this status to be maintained:

This second story, the story of the investigation, thereby enjoys a particular status. It is no accident that it is often told by a friend of the detective, who explicitly acknowledges that he is writing a book; the second story consists, in fact, in explaining how this very book came to be written. The first story ignores the book completely, that is, it never confesses its literary nature (no author of detective fiction can permit himself to indicate directly the imaginary character of the story, as it happens in 'literature'). On the other hand, the second story is not only supposed to take the reality of the book into account, but it is precisely the story of that very book (Todorov 228).

Todorov's observations are not only relevant for detective narratives, but can also be applied to the process whereby historical accounts are reconstructed. In both cases there are two levels of the story: the actual events that took place, and their reconstruction. In this sense, both processes of reconstruction are actually processes of turning a real event into a narration, of rewriting a real event into a narrative.

The use Sciascia makes of the historical account also represents a reflection on the processes whereby a historical account is produced. His *inchieste*, similarly to his detective stories, usually fail to clarify the case they are investigating, often providing more questions than answers. Both his detective stories and *inchieste* emphasise the problematic process of reaching the truth of past events through their reconstruction. It is interesting to consider Sciascia's choice of these two narrative forms from this perspective, since it can explain why they appear interrelated in his literary production so often. This is perhaps most evident in *L'affaire Moro*. As some critics have observed, the motivations behind the investigation undertaken by Sciascia in his *inchieste* are indeed comparable to the task of the detective. Serrano Puche observes:

This literary perspective also informs the narration and the structure of the text. It is shown on the discursive level, structured as a detective story in which the narrator-detective has to confront the solving of a problem [...] by means of a shrewd reading of the documents related to the case and with the help of literary reminiscences (My translation).³⁶

In this way, Sciascia's *inchieste* come closer to a detective story, but a detective story always with an actual case as its subject. Sciascia's role as narrator is comparable to that of a fictional detective, but at the same time his work is also close to the task of reconstruction of the past performed by the historian from archival sources. Cannon notes:

³⁶ "Esta perspectiva literaria también informa la narración y la estructura de la obra. Se manifiesta en el plano discursivo, articulado como un relato policíaco en donde el narrador-detective ha de enfrentarse a la resolución de un misterio [...] por medio de una lectura clarividente de los documentos relativos al caso y con la ayuda de la rememoración literaria" (Serrano Puche "Ficción, historia y verdad" 181).

Sciascia's conception of the writer's role not only explains his predilection for detective fiction but also for the historical essay. The exercise of reason which allows the detective to solve the mystery parallels the cognitive process whereby the historian reconstructs a discontinuous series of past events ("History as a Mode of Comprehension" 78).

Furthermore, in a similar way to that in which Sciascia's detective fictions denied the reader the sense of closure that is expected from the classic whodunit story, his *inchieste* do not always clarify the case they are investigating. Sometimes they only complicate it even more, adding more layers of interpretation. Sciascia acknowledged this feature of his *inchieste* in an interview:

Cercandovi un filo conduttore e un chiarimento, temo di non aver reso le cose più chiare, ma anzi più oscure. C'è però una differenza tra quest'oscurità e quella dell'ignoranza: non si tratta più dell'oscurità dell'inespresso, dell'informe, ma al contrario dell'espresso e del formulato (Padovani 87).³⁷

The main aim of Sciascia's *inchieste* is, as in his detective fiction, not to provide a solution for the case, but to point out to the readers the flaws he detects in the process of reconstruction of a past event. Once they have been made aware of these flaws, the responsibility for appropriately reviewing the case is placed on the readers. By using the forms of the detective story and the *inchiesta*, Sciascia places his focus on the problematic search for the truth of past events, making of his work a reflection on the processes of narration that are present both in fiction and in narrative history.

Debates on the importance of the content and form in narrative history and how they affect the truthfulness of the historical account started developing in the 1960s, following what is known as the 'linguistic turn' in social and cultural studies.³⁸ These debates have addressed the common features of historical accounts and fictional narrations, and discussed how these similarities can affect the claim for truth that the historical account makes regarding the real events that it reconstructs. These debates have led to a series of theories of narrativism in history that are worth reviewing since they address many of the key aspects that Sciascia and Borges also underscore in their works.

Roland Barthes's essay "Historical Discourse" (1967) introduced the basis for historical scepticism from the perspective of semiotics and literary criticism, questioning the

³⁷ "In looking for a thread and for clarification, I fear that I might have not rendered things clearer but indeed more obscure. There is however a difference between this obscurity and that of ignorance: it is not anymore the obscurity of the unexpressed, of the shapeless, but on the contrary, the obscurity of the expressed and formulated" (My translation).

³⁸ The term 'linguistic turn' was first used by the philosopher Gustav Bergmann in 1960 to define an increasing interest in the relationship between philosophy and language, a relationship that had become a primary focus for philosophy and the humanities from the early 20th century. This 'linguistic turn' had a considerable impact on the field of historiography, since it led to challenging the notion that the historian can render an objective account of the past – by considering that the past only exists in textual form, it is implied that the mediation of language in the presentation of this past by the historian will necessarily be affected by the historian's subjectivity.

differences between historical and fictional narratives and the claim for truth to which either of them are entitled:

[I]s there in fact any specific difference between factual and imaginary narrative, any linguistic feature by which we may distinguish on the one hand the mode appropriate to the relation of historical events – a matter traditionally subject, in our culture, to the prescriptions of historical ‘science’, to be judged only by the criteria of conformity to ‘what really happened’ and by the principles of ‘rational’ exposition – and on the other hand the mode appropriate to the epic, novel or drama? (Barthes 145).

Barthes bases his essay on what he finds problematic in historical narratives, which is the fact that the historian is reconstructing events belonging to a different time than her or his present of writing. This past is only accessible indirectly, through documents and other written traces. Barthes detects in historical narratives a two layered structure like that which Todorov identified in the detective story. Barthes finds problematic “the coexistence of or rather friction between two time-scales – history’s and the history book’s” (147). He notes that the historian “needs a two-layered Time, braiding the chronology of the subject-matter with that of the language-act which reports it” (Barthes 148). Barthes also finds problematic that the historian is rarely expected to draw attention towards this two-layered dimension of the narrative, towards her or his own act of writing, or to the presence of the reader. He concludes:

It turns out that the only feature which distinguishes historical discourse from other kinds is a paradox: the ‘fact’ can only exist linguistically, as a term in discourse, yet we behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another plane of existence altogether, some extra-structural ‘reality’. Historical discourse [...] aims at a referent ‘outside’ itself that can in fact never be reached (153-154).

Barthes’s radical observations were developed during the following decades into an understanding of historical narratives that incorporates the perspective of literary studies. Louis O. Mink is responsible for some of the seminal ideas about the importance of narrative in historical discourse that would later be developed by other critics. Mink notes that, even though traditionally it is accepted that history and fiction are both forms of narrative, the difference between them resides in the fact that the writer of fiction creates a coherent narration attending to aesthetic criteria, whereas the historian’s task is to retrieve the coherence that already exists in the reality of the past. Mink underscores that this distinction relies solely on the presupposition that past actuality already exists in the form of a story. According to this presupposition, the historian only needs to restore coherence to the past, whereas the writer of fiction constructs this coherence. Mink argues that there is no evidence that this is so, and that narrative form is not implicit in the events that constitute the historian’s primary sources, but is a cognitive instrument that serves to make sense of these events. To illustrate his argument, Mink differentiates between the concepts of chronicle and narrative. Chronicle is defined as a series of events presented in chronological order, which can be enumerated in objectivity. The narrative adds to the chronicle in the sense that it

establishes order in the events and relationships between them, such as cause and effect. Mink argues that the coherence invested by these interrelations results in an aesthetic effect in the case of fictional narratives, but in the case of historical narratives this coherence also entails a claim for truth (215-218).

Following Mink's ideas, Hayden White is the most important theorist of historical narrativism. He applied literary theory to the study of historical texts, hence drawing similarities between the way in which historical and fictional texts are written. White refers to the process of turning chronicles into stories with the term 'emplotment'. The process of emplotment can take place, according to him, following a series of patterns. White identifies a series of modes of emplotment which, he argues, support all historical narratives. Emphasising the connection between literature and historiography, he borrows this classification of narratives from Northrop Frye's literary criticism. He writes:

[B]y emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures, in precisely the way that Frye has suggested is the case with 'fictions' in general (White "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 223).

For White, the work of a historian is in this way also similar to that of the detective:

In their efforts to make sense of the historical record, which is fragmentary and always incomplete, historians have to make use of what Collingwood called 'the constructive imagination', which told the historian – as it tells the competent detective – what 'must have been the case' given the available evidence and the formal properties it displayed to the consciousness capable of putting the right question to it ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 223).

White emphasises the gap between the past and the reconstruction of this past from the present, arguing that narrative order is not present in the past reality, but imposed on it from the present perspective of the historian. Mink also emphasises this gap between the actual events of the past and the narration of the past made by the historian, pointing out that "stories are not lived, but told" (quoted in Roberts 9). Similarly, White observes that "We do not *live* stories, even if we give our lives meaning by retrospectively casting them in the form of stories. And so too with nations or whole cultures" ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 228).

These observations of Mink and White aim at making explicit the processes of fictionalisation that take place when an event from the past is reconstructed in order to make sense of it. Mink and White argue that it is essential to acknowledge the importance of narrative in our way of making sense of the world, and that, to a great extent, the order that we see in the way past events have developed is imposed in retrospect from our present perspective. Mink writes:

Life has no beginnings, middles or ends; there are meetings, but the start of an affair belongs to the story we tell ourselves later, and there are partings, but final partings only in the story. There are hopes, plans, battles and ideas, but only in retrospective stories are hopes

unfulfilled, plans miscarried, battles decisive, and ideas seminal [...] We do not dream or remember in narrative [...] but tell stories which weave together the separate images of recollection (quoted in Roberts 10).

The 'beginnings, middles or ends' that Mink writes about are the same essential elements that Aristotle in his *Poetics* identified in an effectively constructed tragedy and those that constituted, for Borges and Sciascia, the most remarkable feature of the detective story. As Mink points out, the structure of the story is only established once the ending towards which it is progressing is known. This narrative teleology was also an Aristotelian requirement for tragedy. Frank Kermode argues that structuring reality with views to narrative closure remains a human necessity in order to make sense of the world throughout the history of literature, and that in making sense of human experience we can never escape a teleological design:

[T]here have been great changes, especially in recent times when our attitudes to fiction in general have grown so sophisticated; although it seems, at the same time, that in 'making sense' of the world we still feel a need, harder than ever to satisfy because of an accumulated scepticism, to experience that concordance of beginning, middle, and end which is the essence of our explanatory fictions (35-36).

White also highlights that historical narratives are constructed in retrospect aiming at a particular ending and that, depending on the intentions of the historian, she or he will decide on a particular narrative structure or mode of emplotment to do so. However, and most importantly, for White the fact that a historical account is structured in a particular way will entail that it might also be invested with a particular ideology. According to him, the fact that every narrative is structured from the start in view of a certain ending not only serves the purpose of providing a coherent explanation of a certain historical event, but also adds meaning to it. As Alun Munslow observes, this is an idea that White shares with Foucault, and which is rooted in their idea of the nature of language itself:

[Foucault] concludes (as does White) that language is an ideologically contaminated medium, and what it can and cannot do is dependent upon the use to which it is put, and for what social and political purposes – usually to maintain or challenge systems of authority and views of what is right or wrong, allowed or banned (12).

White stresses that the process whereby historical events become historical narratives presents many similarities with the process of writing fiction, but not only in terms of similarly structured narratives. For him, what is important to note is that the historiographer is not merely rescuing events from the past and presenting them in an organised way, but also adding meaning to these events depending on the form in which these are presented and structured. In this sense, White argues, the task of the historian is closer to that of the writer of fiction than is traditionally acknowledged. However, this does not mean that he considers historical narratives to be equivalent to literary fiction. Instead, he believes it is important to acknowledge the fictive qualities that will be present in any historical account in order to get rid of the ideological elements that might otherwise prevail over it:

[I]f historians were to recognize the fictive element in their narratives, this would not mean the degradation of historiography to the status of ideology or propaganda. In fact, this recognition would serve as a potent antidote to the tendency of historians to become captive of ideological preconceptions which they do not recognize as such but honor as the 'correct' perception of 'the way things *really* are'. By drawing historiography nearer to its origins in literary sensibility, we should be able to identify the ideological, because it is the fictive, element in our own discourse ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact" 235).

In his landmark study *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1973) White advocates a kind of historical writing that acknowledges the narrative condition of narrative history, making evident the processes that have been involved in assembling a certain historical narrative. Metahistory aims at going a step further than taking a chronicle and turning it into a historical narrative, by acknowledging and analysing the mechanisms whereby historical evidence eventually becomes a coherent, organised history. Munslow observes how this attitude towards historiography does not alter the value of historical discourse, but represents a self-conscious approach to it:

None of this precludes the deconstructively aware historian from believing that a past once existed. What it does mean is that he/she will write about a past within a self-conscious framework. It means accepting an impositivism generated through the historian's dialogue with sources that do not necessarily correspond to the past and acknowledging that they are not projections of what actually happened because they are non-referential (118).

There is also a parallelism to be established between the unawareness of the historian towards her or his own methods that White criticises and the unawareness of the fictional detective in the archetypal whodunit story. The claim for truth of the reconstruction of the crime made by the detective relies on this same refusal to acknowledge the fictive elements in her or his account that White argues needs to be acknowledged by the historian. The effectiveness of the detective story depends on how convincing the solution is that is provided by the investigator, and this solution will always be taken as the true solution of the crime. In their detective fictions, Borges and Sciascia challenge the detective's infallibility in a similar way to that in which Mink and White challenge the position of absolute impartiality of the historian. The detective and the historian face the same issues that making sense of past events from the perspective of the present entails, and need to be equally aware of the processes of fictionalisation that take part in their reconstruction. This awareness is what Borges's and Sciascia's 'perspicacious readers' will have to contribute when they are confronted with any narrative about the past.

6. Sciascia's Aldo Moro and Unamuno's Don Quijote

Within this theoretical framework, it is worth going back to Sciascia's choice to include the quotation from *Pierre Menard* in *L'affaire Moro* and consider how it engages with this discussion about fiction and narrative history. As I have discussed above, Sciascia chooses

to investigate into the truth of the Moro case through literature, but that does not mean that he favours a literary interpretation of the events. Rather, what worries him is the literary dimension in which the official public and media perception of the events of the Moro case seems to exist, so far removed from the actuality of its facts. In an interview, he refers to the Moro case as it was presented by government and media as a work of literature:

Io sono arrivato ormai a non vedere più confini tra letteratura e realtà. Questo caso di Moro è stato proprio una specie di sfondamento di muro del suono, mi è apparso proprio come letteratura. Una letteratura che bisognava restituire alla realtà, rimettere in circuito (*La palma va a nord* 109-110).³⁹

The circuit between these two realms, the circularity between literature and life, as he expressed it in this same interview, is something that for Sciascia is fundamentally linked to Borges. Borges's work often draws attention to these instances in which the limits of literature and life become blurred. An example of this can be found in *La muerte y la brújula*: Lönnrot's thinking is so influenced by detective literature that instead of reconstructing the crime he is investigating, he inadvertently fabricates a fictional solution which will eventually result in another crime. Borges's story not only reflects on how the processes of narration can transform reality into fiction, but also on the dangers of mistaking this fiction for reality. The dangers of mistaking a fictional version of reality for actual events is indeed the main theme of Sciascia's *L'affaire Moro*: Sciascia's claim is that the Moro case as presented by government and media was a fictional version of the events, which resulted in the murder of the politician. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that Sciascia chooses to relate his analysis of the Moro case to Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, whose protagonist is so alienated by reading books of chivalry that he is no longer able to perceive reality as it is, but only as belonging to his own fictional universe. I have already analysed earlier in this chapter the comparison that Sciascia established, through the reference to *Pierre Menard*, between the Moro case and *Don Quijote* as literary works enjoying a status of 'inviolable perfection'. In this section I will focus my analysis on the parallelism that Sciascia establishes, again via Borges's quotation, between the character of Don Quijote and the figure of Aldo Moro.

Although Borges's short story is usually read as a fable on issues of rewriting, authorship, and the role of the reader in contributing meaning to a literary work, in *Nero su nero* Sciascia defines Borges's *Pierre Menard* as an "apologo sullo storicismo assoluto" (OA vol. II, t. I 948).⁴⁰ It might seem surprising that Sciascia identifies the story of a rewriting of *Don Quijote*

³⁹ "I have now reached a point at which I no longer see borders between literature and reality. This case of Moro has really been like breaking the sound barrier, it seemed to be proper literature. Literature that had to be restored to reality, put back in the circuit" (My translation).

⁴⁰ "Fable of absolute historicism" (My translation). Sciascia used in a number of occasions the word 'apologo' [fable] to refer to several of Borges's short stories. His use of this term in relation to *Pierre Menard*, and in the context of the Moro case, shows that Sciascia read Borges's story as one that tries to teach its readers a lesson

as having more to do with historicism than with literature. However, if we consider the term 'absolute historicism' according to the meaning that the philosopher Benedetto Croce intended for it, it becomes clear what Sciascia meant with this statement.⁴¹ In his essay "Il concetto della filosofia come storicismo assoluto" (1939), Croce presents a conception of philosophy always necessarily linked to its historical context:

Therefore, the proof of the unity of philosophy and history must be understood [...] by showing that there is no judgement, whole and pure judgement, which is not historical; that also the solutions and definitions of philosophy are historical, always referring to the particular historical situation in which the thinker is at each time (My translation).⁴²

Thus the absolute historicism that Sciascia identifies in *Pierre Menard* establishes a correlation between literature and its historical context equivalent to that which Croce found between philosophy and the historical context that generated it: the differences that the narrator finds by reading Cervantes's *Don Quijote* alongside Menard's concern exclusively the authors' historical circumstances, not the text.

Moreover, the identical fragments of text that the narrator compares in *Pierre Menard* are, incidentally, two passages concerning history – and its relationship to truth: "...*la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir*" (OC vol. I 449).⁴³ When attributing these words to Cervantes, the narrator observes: "[r]edactada en el siglo XVII, redactada por el 'ingenio lego' Cervantes, esa enumeración es un mero elogio retórico de la historia" (OC vol. I 449).⁴⁴ However, for the same paragraph written by Menard, the reaction is completely different:

La historia, *madre* de la verdad; la idea es asombrosa. Menard, contemporáneo de William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino como su origen. La verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió (OC vol. I 449).⁴⁵

– about the possibilities that the anachronistic reading of literature can offer, but also of the dangers that such a reading can pose if it is performed on real life events.

⁴¹ Both Sciascia and Borges made frequent references to Croce in their work. They also discussed some of Croce's views on literature when they met in Rome in 1980. For their full conversation, see "Io, tu, Pinocchio e Proust: colloquio tra J. L. Borges e Leonardo Sciascia". For an overview of the influence of Croce in Borges, see Roberto Paoli's "Borges e Croce" in *Borges e gli scrittori italiani*, p. 133-135.

⁴² "La dimostrazione, dunque, dell'unità della filosofia con la storia si deve intendere [...] col mostrare che non v'ha giudizio, pieno e puro giudizio, che non sia storico, e che storiche sono anche le soluzioni e le definizioni della filosofia, le quali hanno sempre riferimento alla particolare situazione storica in cui il pensatore di volta in volta si trova" (Croce 267).

⁴³ "...[T]ruth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counsellor" (*Collected Fictions* 94).

⁴⁴ "Written in the seventeenth century, and written by the 'ingenious layman' Miguel de Cervantes, is mere rhetorical praise of history" (*Collected Fictions* 94).

⁴⁵ "History, the *mother* of truth! – the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as *delving into* reality but as the very *fount* of reality. Historical truth, for Menard, is not 'what happened'; it is what we *believe* happened" (*Collected Fictions* 94).

The anachronistic reading of this particular fragment of *Don Quijote* highlights how the same views on history are only shocking when these words are considered to have been the work of a writer of the 20th century. With this observation, Borges is signalling the shift concerning the idea of history that should have taken place between Cervantes's and Menard's time. Carmen Rabell observes:

The same words acquire different meanings because the Aristotelian concept of history as a narrator of things in the way they have happened, widespread in Cervantes's time, [...] is different from the current concept of history. According to Fredric Jameson, today history is understood as a writing, and reality as an 'absent cause' that absolutely resists symbolisation. Even though history is not a text, as an absent cause, it is not accessible by any other means than textual (My translation).⁴⁶

The concept of history that Rabell refers to is Aristotle's distinction between history and poetry, according to which history deals with what has happened whereas poetry deals with what would happen (Aristotle 16). Which is to say, history narrates things that have really happened, whereas poetry – which for Aristotle is synonymous with fiction– narrates things that are verisimilar, but not real. Instead, as Rabell observes, a postmodern view of history would be aware that the past cannot be accessed directly from the present, and that having to reconstruct it through language will affect its truthfulness to some degree.

The narrator of *Pierre Menard* marvels at how for Menard, writing this statement about history in the 20th century, historical truth does not reside in the past events –'what happened' –, but in the plausible reconstruction that is made of them – 'what we believe happened'. By incorporating this quotation into *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia is sharing the perplexity of the narrator in *Pierre Menard* when he confronts the Moro case. Sciascia marvels at the gullibility of a society that has chosen to believe a verisimilar explanation of the case rather than the true explanation of the case. He explicitly indicates so in the following pages, when he questions how it was possible that the terrorists were able to evade the police during Moro's captivity, considering the scale of the police operations that were allegedly displayed:

[S]i può sfuggire alla polizia italiana – alla polizia italiana così come è istruita, organizzata e diretta – ma non al calcolo delle probabilità. E stando alle statistiche diffuse dal ministero degli Interni, relative alle operazioni condotte dalla polizia [...] le Brigate rosse appunto sono sfuggite al calcolo delle probabilità. Il che è *verosimile*, ma non può essere *vero e reale* (Tommaseo, *Dizionario dei sinonimi*: 'Per più intensione, le due voci s'uniscono, e dicesi: fatto vero e reale: e simili. *Reale* allora per che aggiunga a *vero*, né solo per pleonasma: ecco

⁴⁶ "Las mismas palabras cobran significados diferentes debido a que el concepto aristotélico de la historia como narradora de las cosas tal como habían ocurrido, predominante en la época de Cervantes, [...] difiere del actual. Según Fredric Jameson, hoy la historia se entiende como una escritura y la realidad como una 'causa ausente' que se resiste absolutamente a la simbolización. Aunque la historia no es un texto, como causa ausente, no es accesible si no a través de dicha forma" (*Collected Fictions* 206).

come. Un fatto vero e reale non solamente è accaduto veramente, ma è propriamente accaduto quale si narra, qual parve, quale è creduto...') (OA vol. II, t. I 437).⁴⁷

This distinction between the *verosimile* [verisimilar] and the *vero e reale* [true] goes back again to Aristotle's distinction between history and poetry. The scenario that Sciascia presents, in which the BR manage to evade the laws of probability, follows Aristotle's tenet that "[w]ith regard to poetic effect, a plausible impossibility is preferable to what is implausible but possible" (Aristotle 45). Such a scenario is plausible, verisimilar; but it is also impossible, it cannot be true.

The shift of perspective regarding the concept of history that is made explicit by contrasting the text of Cervantes and that of Menard is in accordance with the thoughts of Mink and White exposed above, and the following observation by Munslow:

It now seems quite incredible that anyone could have ever believed in the hierarchy of master narratives like liberalism, science, Marxism, socialism, or a view of history that emphasised either the discovery of the past as it actually was, or even the inevitability of progress. So it is that Lyotard describes the postmodern condition as an incredulity towards meta-narratives. We have now lost the old, modernist sense of history as the fount of wisdom or teacher of moral or intellectual certainty (Munslow 15).

However, some critics argue that this allegedly postmodern mistrust towards an idea of history as mother of truth that Borges manifests in his short story is already present in Cervantes's text. Andrés Pérez Simón observes:

The Argentine author shares with the creator of Don Quijote a lucid scepticism for the great truths. Aware of the tricks of language, Cervantes and Borges understand the worlds of fiction as a realm that is never fully closed. However, their works are not intended as a means towards the abolition of referentiality – as some of their more violently postmodern interpretations argue – but towards escaping, through literature, from the dogmas of their time (My translation).⁴⁸

The problematic relationship between history, literature, and truth, can indeed be perceived in chapter nine of Cervantes's novel, where the quotation in *Pierre Menard* comes from, and one of the three chapters that Menard chooses to rewrite in Borges's story. The chapter tells of how the narrator found the rest of the story of Don Quijote (that is, what will follow from chapter nine onwards) in the form of a manuscript in Arabic written by the historian Cide Hamete Benengeli. The narrator, who does not understand Arabic, gets the manuscript

⁴⁷ "[A]nyone can evade the Italian police in its present state of training, organization and management, but it's not so easy to evade the laws of probability. Yet according to the statements broadcast by the Minister of the Interior concerning the operations the police carried out [...] the Red Brigades did indeed evade the laws of probability. Which is *realistic* but can't be *really true*. (Tommaso, *Dictionary of Synonyms*: 'For added emphasis the two are conjoined and one says: a real true fact, and such like. *Real* in this case seems to reinforce *true*, not simply as pleonasm, but thus: a real true fact hasn't simply really occurred but has occurred as it is told, as it appeared, as it is believed...')" (*The Moro Affair* 26-27).

⁴⁸ "[E]l autor argentino comparte con el creador del Quijote un lúcido escepticismo ante las grandes verdades. Sabedores de las trampas del lenguaje, Cervantes y Borges conciben los mundos de ficción como un dominio nunca clausurado por completo. Sin embargo, sus obras no apuntan hacia la abolición de la referencialidad – como mantienen las interpretaciones posmodernas más violentas – sino al escape, a través de la literatura, de los dogmas de su época" (Pérez Simón n.p.).

translated by a third person, and presents the subsequent text as the result of this translation work. The previous chapters had been the result of the narrator's own research on the historical figure of Don Quijote, and made references to a number of sources he had checked. However, from chapter nine the narrator's role changes from historian into transcriber, and he considers it necessary to warn his readers that any fault in the truthfulness of the account will be Cide Hamete Benengeli's sole responsibility, and not his:

If any objection can be raised regarding the truth of this one, it can only be that its author was Arabic, since the people of that nation are very prone to telling falsehoods [...] this is something badly done and poorly thought of, since historians must and ought to be exact, truthful, and absolutely free of passions, for neither interest, fear, rancor, nor affection should make them deviate from the path of the truth, whose mother is history, the rival of time, repository of great deeds, witness to the past, example and adviser to the present, and forewarning to the future. In this account I know there will be found everything that could be rightly desired in the most pleasant history, and if something of value is missing from it, in my opinion the fault lies with the dog who was its author rather than with any defect in its subject (*Don Quixote* 68-69).⁴⁹

More importantly, the narrator emphasises that any inaccuracies are neither his responsibility nor the figure of Don Quijote's. This statement already places Cervantes's protagonist in a problematic position between the historical and the fictional character. The limits between fiction and reality will be compromised several times more throughout the novel. In chapter six, a search through Don Quijote's library finds a copy of Cervantes's *La Galatea*, and prompts a conversation between two of the characters in which also Cervantes is presented as a character, fictional or real to the same degree as they are. Most notably, in chapters three and four of the second part of the novel, Don Quijote and Sancho are made aware of the existence of the first volume of their adventures, translated from the account of Arabic historian Cide Hamete Benengeli.

Unamuno relies on the narrator's statement in chapter nine in order to justify his alternative reading of the text in *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*. As he states in the preface to his commentary, he takes Cervantes's novel not as a work of fiction, but as a historical account:

Cervantes reveals to us that he found the narrative concerning the heroic life of the Knight of the Sad Countenance among some Arabic papers of one Cide Hamete Benengeli. A profound revelation, this, in which the good Cervantes – and so good! – discloses what we might call the

⁴⁹ "Si a ésta se le puede poner alguna objeción cerca de su verdad, no podrá ser otra sino haber sido su autor arábigo, siendo muy propio de los de aquella nación ser mentirosos [...] cosa mal hecha y peor pensada, habiendo y debiendo ser los historiadores puntuales, verdaderos y nonada apasionados, y que ni el interés ni el miedo, ni el rencor ni la afición, no les hagan torcer del camino de la verdad, cuya madre es la historia, émula del tiempo, depósito de las acciones, testigo de lo pasado, ejemplo y aviso de lo presente, advertencia de lo por venir. En ésta sé que se hallará todo lo que se acertare a desear en la más apacible; y si algo bueno en ella faltare, para mí tengo que fue por culpa del galgo de su autor, antes que por falta del sujeto" (Cervantes 88).

objectivity, the existence (*ex-istere* means 'to be outside') of Don Quixote and Sancho and his entire cast of characters outside the novelist's fiction and beyond it (*Our Lord Don Quixote* 6).⁵⁰

In this statement of purpose, Unamuno makes clear that he is not trying to contribute to the understanding of Cervantes's literary work, but he is contradicting it in defence of the character of Don Quijote: "[t]his Arabic text of Cide Hamete Benengeli is in my possession [...] and in this text I have discovered that [...] it was Cervantes who misread the text, so that my interpretation, and not his, is the faithful one" (*Our Lord Don Quixote* 6-7).⁵¹

In *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), his study of intertextual relations, Genette analyses the relationship that Unamuno establishes between his commentary – analysed in terms of 'hypertext' – and *Don Quijote* – its 'hypotext'. Within an elaborate classification of intertextuality, he defines Unamuno's action on Cervantes's text as a 'transvaluation' of *Don Quijote*, which means that Unamuno's book provides not a new account of the events in Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, but gives these events a new meaning. As Genette points out, Unamuno's intention was to "provide a new and more authentic account of Don Quixote's exploits" (318). Therefore, his 'transvaluation' of the text consists in an inversion of the values that Cervantes attributed to the actions of the character of Don Quijote. Genette observes:

[A]n interpretation that assigns to an event a cause differing from that given by the hypotext necessarily introduces a pragmatic transformation, for the cause of a fact – e.g., the motive of an action – is a fact in itself, even if only of a psychological order (324).

Unamuno searches to restore the honourable values behind Don Quijote's actions, actions that Cervantes had approached ironically and explained as consequence of the insanity of his protagonist. Likewise, in *L'affaire Moro* Sciascia tries to recover the motivations behind Moro's letters, motivations that the political figures and the media dismissed arguing the state of mental alienation of the man who wrote them. In this sense Sciascia makes it his task to redeem the figure of Moro, as Unamuno did for Don Quijote. What Sciascia criticises is precisely that Moro was treated as the fictional character of a literary work, and therefore his letters were judged without considering – or choosing not to consider – that this could have fatal consequences for him. Unamuno's intention is surprising because *Don Quijote* is known to be a work of fiction; Sciascia's is surprising, on the contrary, because nobody would have doubted that such a well-known politician as Aldo Moro was a real person.

⁵⁰ "Cervantes nos revela que encontró el relato de la hazañosa vida del Caballero de la Triste Figura en unos papeles arábigos de un Cide Hamete Benengeli, profunda revelación con la que el bueno – ¡y tan bueno! – de Cervantes nos revela lo que podríamos llamar la objetividad, la existencia – *ex-istere* quiere decir estar fuera – de Don Quijote y Sancho y su coro entero fuera de la ficción del novelista y sobre ella" (Unamuno 8).

⁵¹ "[E]se texto arábigo del Cide Hamete Benengeli le tengo yo [...] y en él he visto que [...] fue Cervantes el que leyó mal y que mi interpretación, y no la suya, es la fiel" (Unamuno 8).

There is still another intertextual connection that can be followed in order to complete this analysis of Sciascia's inclusion of the quotation of *Pierre Menard* in *L'affaire Moro*. After he has compared the two identical excerpts from a newspaper that describe the moments preceding Moro's kidnap, Sciascia emphasises what he finds more tragic in his comparative reading:

Al dramma del rapimento si è come sostituito – per quel che volgarmente è detto 'il senno del poi' – il dramma che l'assenza dell'onorevole Moro dal Parlamento, dalla vita politica, è *più producente* – in una determinata direzione – della sua presenza. E direbbe Pirandello: 'il dramma, signori, è tutto qui' (OA vol.II, t. I 435).⁵²

The last sentence paraphrases a line in Pirandello's play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* [Six Characters in Search of an Author] (1921), a line which is worth considering within the context of the play. It belongs to a speech of Il Padre [The Father], one of the members of a family of characters who turn up in a theatre and ask the director that their tragedy, imagined by an author but never fully developed into a play, is represented by the company. The actors try to reproduce the scenes as the characters describe them, but the characters dismiss their attempts as unrealistic, eventually being forced to go up on stage themselves and relive their own tragic destinies. In the speech to which the line paraphrased by Sciascia belongs, Il Padre summarises the identity problem that is one of the core themes of the play:

This is the real drama for me; the belief that we all, you see, think of ourselves as one single person: but it's not true: each of us is several different people, and all these people live inside us [...] We find this out for ourselves very clearly when by some terrible chance we're suddenly stopped in the middle of doing something and we're left dangling there, suspended. We realise then, that every part of us was not involved in what we'd been doing and that it would be a dreadful injustice of other people to judge us by this one action as we dangle there, hanging in chains, fixed for all eternity, as if the whole of one's personality were summed up in that single, interrupted action (*Six Characters in Search of an Author* 29).⁵³

In the context of *L'affaire Moro*, Il Padre's appeal to be judged not only for a single of his actions is the appeal that Sciascia is addressing to his readers in the name of Moro. He asks them to reconsider the injustice that was done to Moro for judging him as an unreasonable man alienated by his captors, instead of reading his letters having in mind the whole of his long political career.

Sciascia also sees a connection between Pirandello's play, Unamuno and Cervantes that can further illuminate this passage of *L'affaire Moro*. In his essay *Con Cervantes*, included in

⁵² "The tragedy of the abduction has been replaced – and as a result of what is commonly called 'hindsight' – by the tragedy of Moro's absence (from Parliament, from politics) which will be, in a certain sense, *more positive* than his presence. As Pirandello would say: 'That, gentlemen, is the whole tragedy'" (*The Moro Affair* 25).

⁵³ "Il dramma per me è tutto qui, signore: nella coscienza che ho, che ciascuno di noi – veda – si crede 'uno' ma non è vero: è 'tanti', signore, 'tanti', secondo tutte le possibilità d'essere che sono in noi [...] Ce n'accorgiamo bene, quando in qualcuno dei nostri atti, per un caso sciaguratissimo, restiamo all'improvviso come agganciati e sospesi: ci accorgiamo, voglio dire, di non esser tutti in quell'atto, e che dunque una atroce ingiustizia sarebbe giudicarci da quello solo, tenerci agganciati e sospesi, alla gogna, per una intera esistenza, come se questa fosse assommata tutta in quell'atto!" (Pirandello *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* 71)

Pirandello e la Sicilia, Sciascia picks up an observation by the historian and literary critic Américo Castro. Castro argued that Pirandello had found the basis for the main theme in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* precisely in the fact that the characters in *Don Quijote* refer to themselves as characters within the novel (OB vol. III 1135). Sciascia considers this connection very pertinent, but even more so if the relationship between Cervantes and Pirandello is mediated by Unamuno:

Potremmo dire che quel che in Cervantes era *fantasia* diventa in Pirandello *problema* per le ragioni stesse per cui la *vita* di don Chisciotte è diventata in Unamuno *problema*. Per don Chisciotte non è un dramma il fatto che uno scrittore di nome Cide Hamete Benengeli abbia dato alle stampe il racconto delle sue imprese; il personaggio esce per un momento dallo specchio della fantasia a controllare la propria realtà; e poi tranquillamente vi rientra. Tutto qui. Ma per noi è diverso: per noi quel momento in cui don Chisciotte esce dallo specchio della fantasia di Cervantes (anche se l'uscita è un giuoco della fantasia dentro la fantasia) è il momento del dramma. Il personaggio entra in un drammatico giuoco di rifrazioni, di prospettive, di fughe: la sua esistenza viene interpretata e storicizzata, diventa *problema*. (OB vol. III 1139).⁵⁴

For Unamuno, the tragedy of Don Quijote is that his adventures have been misinterpreted by Cervantes, and have created a fictional character different from the historical person he was. Likewise, for Sciascia the tragedy of Moro is that his kidnap and murder have been staged in a certain way, making him become a fictional character, different from the real man that he continued to be while he was in the *prigione del popolo*. During his kidnap, Moro was witness to the misrepresentation of his own person that was made in the media, with the same frustration with which the characters in Pirandello's play attended a representation of their own tragic lives. Sciascia makes this fictional misrepresentation of Moro step into a game of literary references that can be traced back to Borges, Unamuno, Cervantes, and Pirandello, creating a game of refractions and perspectives of his own, in order to restore the real figure of Moro to history, and draw attention to the real tragedy behind his death.

7. *L'affaire Moro* and *Tema del traidor y del héroe*: literature prefiguring reality

There is a last aspect of the relationship between history and fiction that Sciascia introduces in *L'affaire Moro* that is worth examining, which is the illusion that literature can foresee, or even instigate, certain events that later take place in reality. This is a theme on which Borges reflects most notably in his short story *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, in *Ficciones*. In this story,

⁵⁴ "We could say that what for Cervantes was *fantasy* becomes *problem* for Pirandello for the same reasons that the *life* of Don Quijote became *problem* for Unamuno. For Don Quijote, it's not a tragedy that a writer named Cide Hamete Benengeli has published an account of his adventures; the character comes out of the mirror of fantasy for a second in order to check on his own reality, and then peacefully goes back in. That's all. But for us it's different: for us, the moment when Don Quijote comes out of the mirror of Cervantes's fantasy (even if his exit is a game of fantasy within fantasy) is the moment of tragedy. The character enters into a tragic game of refractions, of perspectives, of focal points: his existence is interpreted and historicised, it becomes *problem*" (My translation).

the descendant of an Irish revolutionary hero, Fergus Kilpatrick, who died on the eve of the revolution, investigates into his ancestor's death. He eventually discovers that Kilpatrick's death had been staged as the death of a hero when in reality he had been a traitor to the cause; presenting him as a hero who died for the cause instead of as the traitor he actually was had triggered the revolution that followed his death. What leads the protagonist of *Tema del traidor y del héroe* to this unexpected discovery is finding that the events that took place in the hours leading to his ancestor's death strikingly resembled a series of historical events; but also, they resembled a series of famous literary works. Some of the events surrounding the death of Kilpatrick resemble those that took place before the death of Julius Caesar; some of the words Kilpatrick exchanged with a mendicant were, the narrator says "prefiguradas por Shakespeare, en la tragedia de *Macbeth*" (OC vol. I 497).⁵⁵ The narrator then reflects on how it was already shocking that his ancestor's death reminded him of events of the past, but what was most shocking was the fact that some of these events belonged to literature: "[q]ue la historia hubiera copiado a la historia ya era suficientemente pasmoso; que la historia copie a la literatura es inconcebible" (OC vol. I 497).⁵⁶ In *Tema del traidor y del héroe* this confusion between reality and fiction has as a result that there are two versions of the same person: Kilpatrick as a hero, and Kilpatrick as a traitor. Yet, even though the real Kilpatrick was the traitor and the hero Kilpatrick was a fictional character inspired by works of literature, it is the fictional character who prevails as a historical character.

Even if there are no explicit references to this Borges story in *L'affaire Moro*, for Sciascia the subject of the story was clearly related to the Moro case. He stated it in the same interview in which he discussed the circularity between literature and life in the work of Borges:

[Interviewer]: *Per esempio il 'tema del traditore o dell'eroe', di Borges, traditore ed eroe nello stesso tempo. Non ha qualcosa che vedere con le cose nostre?*

[Sciascia]: Sì. È Moro (*La palma va a nord* 109).⁵⁷

In the Moro case, Sciascia sees come true the dangers of fiction being confused with history about which Borges seems to be warning in *Tema del traidor y del héroe*. As happened for Kilpatrick, Sciascia believes that after his kidnap there were two versions of Moro: Moro the experienced politician he had been so far, and Moro the kidnapped man who could no longer make rational decisions, having been taken over by fear. For Sciascia, it is the second version of Moro which is a fiction, and it is this version he is trying to oppose with his account of the Moro case. In Borges's story, the character of Kilpatrick as a hero becomes

⁵⁵ "[P]refigured by Shakespeare, in *Macbeth*" (*Collected Fictions* 144).

⁵⁶ "The idea that history might have copied history is mind-boggling enough; that history should copy *literature* is inconceivable" (*Collected Fictions* 144).

⁵⁷ "[Interviewer]: For example the 'theme of the traitor and the hero', by Borges, traitor and hero at the same time. Does it not have something to do with our affairs? [Sciascia]: Yes. It's Moro" (My translation).

the one that is remembered as a historical character – fiction being confused, in this way, with history. However, the most interesting aspect that the narrator highlights is that this fictional character has been, in its turn, prefigured in literature.

After Moro's death, Sciascia declared on several occasions that he feared that some of his own previous works where he made an explicit criticism of the socio-political situation of his country had somehow prefigured the tragic events. Years later he would still acknowledge the impact that this had on his subsequent works. In a 1982 interview, he stated:

Se dieci anni prima mi avessero detto che Moro avrebbe cambiato la mia vita, avrei riso: invece è stato così. Dopo la morte di Moro, io non mi sento più libero di immaginare. Anche per questo preferisco ricostruire cose già avvenute: ho paura di dire cose che possono avvenire (OB vol. II XLV-XLVI).⁵⁸

The same idea is already present in *L'affaire Moro*. He writes:

Allo stesso modo che don Chisciotte dai libri della cavalleria errante, Moro e la sua vicenda sembrano generati da una certa letteratura. Ho ricordato Pasolini. Posso anche – non rallegrandomene ma nemmeno rinnegandole – ricordare due miei racconti, almeno due: *Il contesto* e *Todo modo* (OA vol. II, t. I 436).⁵⁹

In his two controversial detective fictions, published in the years preceding the kidnap and murder of Moro, Sciascia had indeed imagined a scenario that in many ways resembled that surrounding the death of the politician. In 1979, considering it in hindsight, Sciascia would summarise *Il contesto* as “cronaca di una desertificazione ideologica e ideale che tuttavia in Italia era solo ai suoi inizi” (*La Sicilia come metafora* 71).⁶⁰ *Todo modo* was intended as a portrait of the decadence of the seminal ideology behind the DC and the resulting disintegration of the party, which in Sciascia's novel results in the mysterious murders of several of its members. The character of former senator Michelozzi, the first victim, shares some traits with Aldo Moro:

[C]’era in Michelozzi una particolarità, qualcosa di diverso rispetto a questi altri. Era sì un ladro [...] ma per la morale corrente, per la prassi oggi in uso, era considerato strenuamente onesto: e soltanto perché pochissimo, o addirittura nulla, rubava per sé [...]. La sua diversità, insomma, consisteva in questo: che nessuno di costoro poteva ricattarlo con la minaccia di rivelare le sue malversazioni e corruzioni, e per il semplice fatto che tutti, dico tutti, dai reati commessi da Michelozzi hanno cavato vantaggi (OA vol. I 904).⁶¹

⁵⁸ “If ten years ago I had been told that Moro was going to change my life, I would have laughed: and yet it has been like that. After Moro's death, I don't feel free to imagine anymore. This is also why I prefer to reconstruct things that have already happened: I'm afraid to say things that can happen” (My translation).

⁵⁹ “Just as Don Quixote took his stance from the knights-errant of old, Moro and his vicissitudes seem to have emerged from a certain literary genre. I recalled Pasolini. I might also recall two stories of mine – neither to parade nor disown them – at least two: *Il contesto* (Equal Danger) and *Todo modo*” (*The Moro Affair* 25).

⁶⁰ “Chronicle of an ideological and ideal desertification that however in Italy was only just starting” (My translation).

⁶¹ “Michelozzi was a peculiar man, different from the rest. He was a thief all right [...] but according to current ethics, to the practices of this day and age, he was rigorously honest – and simply because he stole very little, perhaps nothing at all, for himself [...]. His peculiarity in fact consisted in this: not one of this bunch was in a

This description would remind the readers of a passage of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *L'articolo delle lucciole* [The article of the fireflies] (1975), which Sciascia also references in *L'affaire Moro* as somehow a premonition of Moro's fate.⁶² Pasolini's article is a critique of the ideological vacuum he detected behind the DC, and focuses on the cryptic language used increasingly often by the members of the party to mask their lack of values, with the only aim of staying in power. Pasolini points out as slightly paradoxical the fact that it is precisely Aldo Moro in whom this use of an incomprehensible language is most evident, since he finds that Moro is the member of the DC who has less to hide:

Aldo Moro in particular – that is (by an enigmatic correlation) he who seems to be the least implicated of all in the terrible things organised between 1969 and today, in the attempt, until now formally successful, to maintain power at all costs (My translation).⁶³

In *L'affaire Moro* Sciascia notes that, reading Pasolini's article in retrospect, it becomes clear that this 'enigmatic correlation' was in fact a contradiction; meaning that Moro, who was the least responsible for the questionable decisions taken by the DC, was the one eventually kidnapped and murdered in reprisal for his party's actions (OA vol. II, t. I 425-426). The connection between *Todo modo* and Moro was further emphasised by Elio Petri's 1976 film of the same title, loosely based on the novel, where the criticism is aimed more explicitly at DC politicians. The character of il Presidente [The President] in the film, who eventually becomes one of the victims of the killings among members of the party, presents an intentionally uncanny physical resemblance with Aldo Moro. Even though Sciascia did not take part in the making of the film, he still mentions it in *L'affaire Moro* as related to those cultural creations that might seem to have been nothing less than "anticipazioni; che profezie; se non addirittura istigazioni" (OA vol. II, t. I 436).⁶⁴

Sciascia emphasises that his and other intellectuals' criticism, in the form of art, of the political situation of the time, intended to compensate for a lack of any other form of political criticism. This contributed to the illusion that the events that followed had indeed been instigated by the work of these intellectuals: "[l]asciata, insomma, alla letteratura la verità, la verità – quando dura e tragica apparve nello spazio quotidiano e non fu più possibile ignorarla o travisarla – sembrò generata dalla letteratura" (436).⁶⁵ Sciascia believes that

position to blackmail him by threatening to disclose some embezzlement or corruption, for the simple reason that they had all, and I repeat all, profited by Michelozzi's offences" (*One Way or Another* 72).

⁶² The article was originally published in *Il Corriere della Sera* in 1975 with the title *Il vuoto del potere in Italia* [The Power Vacuum in Italy], and later republished as *L'articolo delle lucciole*.

⁶³ "[S]pecialmente Aldo Moro: cioè (per una enigmatica correlazione) colui che appare come il meno implicato di tutti nelle cose orribili che sono state organizzate dal '69 a oggi, nel tentativo, finora formalmente riuscito, di conservare comunque il potere" (Pasolini 133-134).

⁶⁴ "Forebodings and premonitions if they were not outright incitements" (*The Moro Affair* 26).

⁶⁵ "Indeed when the truth which had been confined to literature emerged harsh and tragic within the context of everyday life, and could no longer be ignored, it seemed as if it were a product of literature" (*The Moro Affair* 26).

those in power or close to power favoured this illusion that the literary works had prefigured the tragic events that followed in order to convince even their authors that this was the case:

Dagli uomini politici del potere, o al potere vicini, gli uomini di lettere [...] ne furono accusati: e con una certa buona fede, con una certa innocenza, considerando che gli stessi uomini di lettere avrebbero ad un certo punto avuto l'allucinazione di aver generato quella realtà" (436).⁶⁶

It is interesting to consider Sciascia's choice of the word *allucinazione* [hallucination] in *L'affaire Moro* to describe the sense of responsibility that those in power wanted to impose on the intellectuals who had criticised the political situation in their work. The word *allucinazione* echoes again the references to *Don Quijote* that Sciascia had introduced, via the quotations from Borges's *Pierre Menard*, a few pages earlier.⁶⁷ Sciascia presents himself in his role of writer as victim of a similar hallucination as that which induced Don Quijote to start his adventures: just as the reading of chivalric novels generated the delusional adventures lived by Don Quijote, the polemical works that fantasised with the socio-political situation of its time generated the tragic events in real life. However, the point Sciascia makes in *L'affaire Moro* is that the feeling he has that literature has prefigured reality is also part of the illusion. In Borges's *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, the narrators' bewilderment caused by the similarities between literary works and the death of Fergus Kilpatrick disappears when he realises that they were not accidental coincidences, but that Kilpatrick's tragic death was staged in such a way as part of a political stratagem in order to trigger the revolution. The literary elements, those that resembled Shakespeare's plays, had been included due to lack of time to invent all the details: "Nolan, urgido por el tiempo, no supo íntegramente inventar las circunstancias de la múltiple ejecución; tuvo que plagiar a otro dramaturgo, al enemigo inglés William Shakespeare" (OC vol. I 498).⁶⁸ The literary elements have retrospectively been blended into the version of the events that present Kilpatrick as a hero. Likewise, the causal relationship that seems to link the kidnap and murder of Moro to a series of cultural products that made a political critique has only been established in retrospect, in an attempt to give events a narrative coherence. In both cases, however, this coherence is illusory.

⁶⁶ "Thus it was the men of letters [...] who were blamed by the politicians in power, or on the periphery of power. And not without some justification, some insight, considering that at a given moment these same men of letters were to experience the hallucinatory impression that they had invented that reality" (*The Moro Affair* 26).

⁶⁷ The connection between this passage of *L'affaire Moro* and *Don Quijote* is further emphasised by Sciascia's distinction between the 'men of power' and the 'men of letters', reminiscent of Don Quijote's famous speech about the 'men of arms' and the 'men of letters' in chapter 38 of Cervantes's novel – which is, incidentally, the third of those chapters that Menard rewrote in Borges's story.

⁶⁸ "Nolan had no time to invent the circumstances of the multiple execution from scratch, and so he plagiarized the scene from another playwright, the English enemy William Shakespeare" (*Collected Fictions* 145).

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have structured my analysis around Sciascia's inclusion of fragments of Borges's *Pierre Menard* and *Herbert Quain* in *L'affaire Moro*. I have introduced my analysis with an evaluation of the use that Sciascia makes of the narrative form of the *inchiesta*, paying particular attention to the role that Borges's influence played in its development, and the place that the *inchiesta* occupies with relation to the detective story and the historical account in Sciascia's work. In his *inchieste*, Sciascia combines historical evidence and fiction to compensate for the scarcity of historiographical information, in order to reconstruct a narrative that is more faithful to the past events. However, instead of an obscure, remote historical event, for *L'affaire Moro* Sciascia chose a case that had been extensively covered by the media only a few months before, and a case that he was already investigating from his political role. This feature, I argue, is what amplifies the importance of the literary references he inserts in *L'affaire Moro*.

I have argued that with the inclusion of the fragment from *Pierre Menard* Sciascia's aim is to establish a methodology of reading; not only of the reading that he will be doing in his *inchiesta* of the letters sent by Moro, but also of the reading of the events that he expects his readers to perform. This active role of the readers is similar to that expected from the readership of Sciascia's detective stories. As I argued in the previous chapter, it also coincides with the role of the 'perspicacious reader' presented by Borges in *Herbert Quain*. In fact, these expectations towards the readers are conveyed by the quotation from *Herbert Quain* that Sciascia includes at the end of *L'affaire Moro*. Previous studies of *L'affaire Moro* have overlooked the fact that, by including the quotation from *Pierre Menard* and explicitly relating Borges's story to Unamuno's commentary of *Don Quijote*, Sciascia is establishing a methodology of reading the events of the Moro case that reaches much beyond Borges's text. Therefore, the active participation Sciascia expects from his readers will include following the clues that he places in quotations, paraphrases, and reminiscences of other literary works. This 'detective work', focusing on the references to Borges, is what I have attempted in my analysis in this chapter. I have shown that such an approach enables a reading that goes beyond Borges's *Pierre Menard* and leads to Cervantes's *Don Quijote* and Unamuno's *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho*, and finally to Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. Tracing back these literary references, in my analysis I have focused on two main aspects: first, I have considered the claim that Sciascia makes that the Moro case as it was presented by government and media seemed to enjoy a status of 'inviolable perfection' similar to that of a great literary work. Second, I have focused on the contribution that

Sciascia is trying to make to the figure of Aldo Moro, as opposed to the image of the politician presented by the interpretation that was made of Moro's letters at the time they were first made public.

Sciascia's use of Borges's texts in *L'affaire Moro* draws attention to the feature that he found most interesting in Borges's writing, which is his questioning of the limits between fiction and reality, establishing a 'circularity between literature and life', as Sciascia expressed it. The texts that Sciascia puts in relation to *L'affaire Moro* have in common that they pose questions about the limits between history and fiction, the possibility of reinterpreting the past, and how the identity of historical figures can be as subject to mutability as that of literary characters. Sciascia's reading of *Pierre Menard* as a reference to Unamuno's *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho* implies that his aim in reviewing the events of the Moro case constitutes a claim similar to that made by Unamuno in his commentary of *Don Quijote*: that its protagonist was a historical, and not a fictional character. Sciascia's intention is that his readers will consider these same issues in relation to the events of the Moro case. I have framed the questions that Sciascia's text poses within the theoretical debates concerning the similarities between the way in which fictional and historical narratives are constructed.

By proposing a reading in 'the manner of Menard', Sciascia is immersing the events of the Moro case into a network of literary references that contribute to his interpretation in ways a different kind of enquiry would not be able to do. The rewriting of the narrative of the events that he proposes will not, however, enrich the original events in the way that rewritings of literary works enrich the work they take as their inspiration. A literary work admits multiple interpretations, depending on the context and circumstances of its readers; in a similar way, the same historical events can be explained according to different narratives. However, Sciascia's literary perspective when examining the Moro case aims at providing the interpretation of events which is more truthful to them, instead of adding yet another layer of meaning. The multiplicity of interpretations that in literature is positive and enriching, in history risks affecting the truthfulness of an account of the past. By positioning *L'affaire Moro* on the borderline between the historical account and the detective story, and providing a literary investigation of real events, Sciascia's intention is not to blur even more the limits between reality and fiction, but precisely to denounce a case in which the realms of literature and reality had already been confused. In fact, as I have argued throughout this chapter, the more literary references that 'perspicacious readers' of *L'affaire Moro* manage to follow beyond the text, the stronger Sciascia's political message will become.

CHAPTER 3. *Il teatro della memoria* and Borges: Memory and the Mutability of History

Non c'è fatto pirandelliano che in questa parte della Sicilia, prima o dopo Pirandello, non sia realmente accaduto; e magari, con qualche variante, più di una volta.

(*Occhio di capra* OA vol. II, t. I 1202)¹

Sciascia's *Il teatro della memoria* is one of his less studied works, written in the form of the *inchiesta*. However, it is of great relevance for this thesis since it establishes several links with Borges's work with regards to the relationship between history and fiction, focusing on the role that memory plays within this relationship. In *Il teatro*, Sciascia reconstructs a case that took place in Italy in the 1920s, when a newspaper published the photograph of an unknown man who had been taken to a mental institution and claimed not to remember who he was. Two families recognised the man as related to them, one claiming that he was the philosophy professor Giulio Canella, married to a wealthy heiress and gone missing during the war, and the other claiming he was Mario Bruneri, an anarchist typographer and occasional thief. Although the testimony of numerous witnesses and scientific evidence soon proved that the man was in fact Bruneri, Canella's family repeatedly appealed to the court and the case remained open for several years, during which the man continued living with Giulia Canella as her husband, and the couple had three children. After the trial the Canella family moved to Brazil, where the alleged Giulio Canella lived under that name for the rest of his life.

Sciascia wrote *Il teatro* while he was an MP, and while immersed in the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the kidnap and murder of Aldo Moro. He hints at his political activity in the note at the end of *Il teatro*: "il raccontare la vicenda dello 'smemorato di Collegno' è stato per me un puro divertimento, una vera vacanza: a controparte di un'attività per nulla divertente in cui da più di due anni mi trovo impegnato" (OA vol. II, t. I 673).² It is perhaps this statement of Sciascia presenting *Il teatro* as a mere entertainment to distract him from his parliamentary duties which has predisposed criticism to dedicate less attention to this work. However, the fact that Sciascia locates the writing of this text within the same timeframe as the years he was also committed to the investigation of the Moro case should not be dismissed. In fact, I argue, *Il teatro* can be read as a complementary text to *L'affaire*

¹ "There is no Pirandellian fact that hasn't, in this part of Sicily, actually taken place, before or after Pirandello. And perhaps, with some variations, more than once" (My translation).

² "Telling the story of the 'amnesiac of Collegno' has been for me mere amusement, a mere vacation: as opposed to the not at all amusing business which has been keeping me busy for over two years" (My translation).

Moro, and this aspect of the text becomes evident when studied in the light of its references to Borges.

What fascinated Sciascia about the case of the *smemorato di Collegno* [the amnesiac of Collegno] is that it seemed to be already destined to become a work of fiction, and more specifically, a play by Pirandello. In fact, Pirandello wrote the play *Come tu mi vuoi* [As you desire me] (1929), to which Sciascia will make frequent references throughout his text, inspired by the Bruneri-Canella case, while it was still being taken to court. Even though it is the historical event that Sciascia chooses as the subject of his book, from the start he is emphasising the literary, Pirandellian qualities of it, its readiness to become fiction; in a similar way to that in which he highlighted the literary qualities that he observed in the *Moro* case in *L'affaire Moro*:

[E] lo destinavano [il caso] a prender nome – e poi forma – dallo scrittore che nella realtà di quegli anni, nella vita di quelli anni, aveva inventato [...] casi a questo rassomiglianti o consimili. Casi pirandelliani. Ed ecco già pirandelliana, già destinata a Pirandello, la vicenda che fu detta dello *smemorato di Collegno* (OA vol. II, t. I 619).³

Sciascia lists a series of events that, in the willingness of the Canella family to retrieve their missing relative, were taken as undeniable proof that the unknown man was in fact Giulio Canella. He points out, however, that this apparently irrefutable proof could have been easily contested, and that the eventual decision to release the man from the mental hospital as Canella was solely motivated by the willingness of the family to recognise him. This will lead to what Sciascia refers to as a ‘memory theatre’ as Pirandello would have understood it: a court case that relies as primary evidence not on the irrefutable proof of fingerprints and witnesses, but “sulla ‘memoria dello amnesiaco’ e sulla memoria che familiari, amici e conoscenti conservavano del professor Giulio Canella e del tipografo Mario Bruneri” (OA vol. II, t. I 632)⁴, to such an extent that one family’s willingness to believe has the power to transfigure delusion into reality.

In this chapter, I will explore the links with Borges’s work that can be found in *Il teatro*. Some of these are direct references that Sciascia makes to Borges, and some others are established through the work of other authors, or mediated by Sciascia’s approach to the classical and Renaissance conceptions of the art of memory. I will address Borges’s *Funes el memorioso*, *Pierre Menard*, *La memoria de Shakespeare*, *Borges y yo*, *El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro*, *La busca de Averroes*, *El pasado* and *Tema del traidor y del héroe*,

³ “And it was destined [the case] to take its name – and later its form – from the writer who in the reality of those years, in the life of those years, had invented [...] cases that resembled or simulated this one. Pirandellian cases. And thus already Pirandellian, already destined to Pirandello, that which would be known as the story of *the amnesiac of Collegno*” (My translation).

⁴ “On the ‘memory of the amnesiac’ and on the memories that family, friends and acquaintances kept of the professor Giulio Canella and of the typographer Mario Bruneri” (My translation).

in order to explore how Sciascia and Borges address the role that fiction plays in the configuration of history, mediated by individual and collective memory.

1. The art of memory

Before analysing the presence of Borges's writing in Sciascia's *Il teatro*, it is worth briefly introducing some key concepts for memory studies that will illuminate my reading of the text, paying particular attention to some ideas pertaining to the classical and Renaissance understanding of the art of memory, or mnemonics – which considered the ability to memorise large amounts of information as an art that could be learnt.

Anne Whitehead notes that there are two main ideas of memory that prevail in the conceptualisation of memory in Western culture (49). She identifies these with John Frow's 'retrieval' model of memory and 'textual' model of memory. Whitehead defines the retrieval model as follows:

[M]emory is a system used for storage and retrieval, and the object to be located is precisely that which was initially laid down. Forgetting, in this system, results either from a fault in the storage system or from a decay in or misrecognition of the memory traces (Whitehead 48).

This model, on which the art of memory was based, is opposed to the textual model:

This is predicated on the non-existence of the past, which means that memory is no longer a recovery or repetition of physical traces, but a construction of the past under conditions determined by the present. [...] Meaning is constituted retroactively and repeatedly, and forgetting is embedded as an integral principle, for the activity of ceaseless interpretation involves both selection and rejection. Memory, in this instance, is no longer related to the past as a form of truth but as a form of desire. (Whitehead 49).

Whitehead argues that both these models "intertwine, and continually surface and re-surface across different thinkers and historical contexts" (49). Indeed, both these ideas of memory can be found in Sciascia's *Il teatro*, as I will argue throughout this chapter. However, Sciascia's presentation of them in relation to the Bruneri-Canella case implies his preference for the second model of memory, particularly in the emphasis he places on the process of remembering as a reconstruction of the past, and his constant questioning of the truthfulness of this reconstruction regarding the real past events to which it refers.

In the final note to *Il teatro*, Sciascia lists the sources he has used to reflect on the Bruneri-Canella case besides the documentation about the case and Pirandello's play *Come tu mi vuoi*. He expands on the use he has made of expressions he uses consistently throughout the *inchiesta* such as *teatro della memoria* [memory theatre] and *memoria artificiale* [artificial memory], and acknowledges that he has used these terms quite loosely, which will be evident for those readers who know of the work on the art of memory of Giulio Camillo, Giordano Bruno and Robert Fludd through the studies of Frances A. Yates. It is worth briefly

exploring the original meaning of these notions and to point out the different use that Sciascia makes of these terms in *Il teatro*.

Yates's study *The Art of Memory* (1966) is an extensive overview of the evolution of mnemonics, from the Greeks to the 17th century. Within this long tradition, Yates's main focus is precisely on the contributions of Camillo, Bruno, and Fludd. Memorisation considered as an art to be mastered was based on the idea that memories could be stored and retrieved when necessary, if this was done following a specific method. The first idea that Sciascia borrows from the tradition of the art of memory is the pairing of natural memory and artificial memory. These terms are first used in the anonymous Latin book on rhetoric *Ad Herennium*,⁵ and differentiate between the memory that is stored and subsequently retrieved (natural memory) and the memory that is created in order to prompt the recollection of natural memory (artificial memory). The classical art of memory focuses on the strategies that can be employed in order to create artificial memory in the most efficient way possible. Of these, the main elements are always to be the establishment of places and images. The phrase in *Ad Herennium* that makes reference to this is *constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus*,⁶ a phrase that Sciascia will insert repeatedly throughout the text of *Il teatro*. Yates observes how the importance of images and places as basic elements to produce artificial memory will be maintained throughout the centuries in the tradition of the art of memory. She observes:

A *locus* is a place easily grasped by the memory, such as a house, an intercolumnar space, a corner, an arch, or the like. Images are forms, marks or simulacra [*formae, notae, simulacra*] of what we wish to remember. [...] The art of memory is like an inner writing [...] those who have learned mnemonics can set in places what they have heard and deliver it from memory. 'For the places are very much like wax tablets or papyrus, the images like the letters, the arrangement and disposition of the images like the script, and the delivery is like the reading' (Yates 22).

This seemingly straightforward strategy to remember based on images and places is replaced in Sciascia's *Il teatro* by a different meaning of natural and artificial memory. Where the classical art of memory encourages the formation of artificial memories in order to call to mind the natural ones, Sciascia sees the artificial memory as a fabrication that, if allowed, comes to modify and even replace the natural memory of a certain event. The concept of artificial memory has changed, for Sciascia, from something created in order to help the process of effective remembering into a mechanism to create false memories.⁷ This shift of

⁵ Whitehead (30) and Yates (18) present *Ad Herennium* as an anonymous work, although Whitehead points out that it is often wrongly attributed to Cicero (Whitehead 30).

⁶"The artificial memory is established from places and images" (Yates 22).

⁷ Sciascia's understanding of 'artificial memory' as false must not be confused with the 'false memory' in terms of 'False Memory Syndrome', a concept related to psychoanalysis and developed in the early 1990s with the creation of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation in 1994, and therefore unknown to Sciascia. 'False Memory Syndrome' questions the role that the analyst plays in cases of recovered memory therapy,

meaning between the classical use of the terms and the use Sciascia makes of them can be illustrated with the following passage, in which Sciascia reflects on the amnesiac and Giulia Canella's first days together after she recognised him as her husband and he was released from the mental institution:

Partirono, Giulio e Giulia Canella, per Desenzano del Garda: probabilmente con l'intenzione, da parte della signora, di cominciare dal luogo dove erano andati in viaggio di nozze la sua missione di ridare allo smemorato memoria del passato, del loro breve e felice passato. 'Constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus'. Memoria reale per la signora, artificiale per lo smemorato. O per entrambi reale? O per entrambi artificiale? (OA vol. II, t. I 626).⁸

In the classical art of memory, the places and images that served to help retrieve natural memory should not be the same places and images that generated that memory in the first place, but instead a space where the images corresponding to the artificial memories can be easily found. However, Sciascia imagines that Giulia Canella wants to restore in her husband the memory of their honeymoon by taking him back to the places and images that formed the original memory of that time. He therefore understands natural memory as the real memory of the honeymoon of Giulio and Giulia Canella, and the artificial memory as the fabrication that would be created in the mind of the amnesiac to fill in the void of a memory that did not belong to him in the first place. 'Artificial memory' is, for Sciascia, invested with negative implications of imposture that the term did not have for the classical art of memory.

The other term that Sciascia borrows from mnemonics is the one that serves as title to his book. The memory theatre, developed mainly by Camillo and Fludd, represented the Renaissance model of the art of memory. For Camillo and Fludd, the best background to store and later retrieve memories was the space of a theatre. Camillo's focus is on the structure of the theatre, allocating memories to different levels in the same way as members of the audience would have sat in a theatre, depending on their social status. The person storing these memories would be at the centre of the theatre, in the place of the stage, although Yates notes that Camillo never alludes to a stage as such in his description of the theatre (141). Fludd's memory theatre, however, presents a different idea of memory theatre. Yates notes that by the use of the term theatre, Fludd "does not mean what we should call a theatre, a building consisting of a stage and an auditorium. He means a stage" (Yates 318). Therefore the storage space used by Fludd now lies within the stage, not where the

suggesting that some of the 'recovered memories' of traumatic events in the life of the analysand – such as memories of sexual abuse – are actually a product of the very process of therapy, and do not reflect events that actually took place (Luckhurst 12). For a broader discussion of False Memory Syndrome, see Jane Kilby's "Reading Beyond the False Memory Syndrome Debates".

⁸ "They left, Giulio and Giulia Canella, for Desenzano del Garda: probably with the intention, on Mrs. Canella's part, to start from the place where they had gone for their honeymoon her mission to give back to the amnesiac the memory of the past, of their past, of their fleeting and blissful past. 'Constat igitur artificiosa memoria ex locis et imaginibus'. Real memory for her, artificial for the amnesiac. Or real for both? Or artificial for both?" (My translation).

audience sits: “Fludd stands with his back to the auditorium and looking towards the stage, loading with imaginary imagery its five doors, used as memory *loci*, and distorting the stage for his mnemonic purposes by crushing it into a memory room” (Yates 353). The focus has shifted, from Camillo to Fludd, from memories being placed where the audience sits in a theatre to being placed on stage.

Sciascia’s use of the image of the theatre to speak of memory draws from both these models, but adds a significant difference to it. As Fludd, Sciascia also places his focus on the stage, yet at the same time inverts the conception that Camillo and Fludd had of the memory theatre. Camillo and Fludd chose the space of the theatre because of the possibilities it allowed for the storage of memory images, but Sciascia understands the theatre as the space where a representation is taking place. Sciascia’s theatre stores artificial memories in the sense that they are fabricated, false. He makes this different conception of memory theatre explicit in his text:

Il paradosso del caso, della vicenda, è tutto qui: nel fatto che, accertata al di là di ogni dubbio l’identità del ricoverato numero 44170 attraverso le impronte digitali, si sia dato corso a una ricerca giudiziaria incentrata sulla ‘memoria dello amnesiaco’ e sulla memoria che familiari, amici e conoscenti conservavano del professor Giulio Canella e del tipografo Mario Bruneri. Il manicomio di Collegno, insomma, divenne un *teatro della memoria*: non come secondo messer Giulio Camillo o Giordano Bruno o Robert Fludd, ma come – naturalmente – secondo Pirandello (OA vol. II, t. I 632).⁹

Sciascia’s understanding of this memory theatre where artificial memories are created inverts the focus of Camillo’s theatre: the person creating the artificial memory is still at the centre of the theatre, but on stage; the process of creating artificial memory is the process of them playing a part in a play, impersonating a character. In this memory theatre, the amnesiac is playing the part of Canella, but it is a part that he has to create from the already pre-existing memories of the actual Canella that belong to those who knew him. These would be the natural memories, and from them the amnesiac produces an artificial memory of the life of Canella after his disappearance up until he was found again in the mental hospital. These artificial memories are artificial in the sense that they are false, and will tamper with and eventually replace the natural memory; whereas the artificial memory that was the aim of the art of memory was meant to trigger the natural memory, not by any means replace it. For Sciascia the pivotal moment of the imposture is signalled by the publication of the amnesiac’s autobiography as Giulio Canella:

⁹ “The paradox of the case, of the events, is all here: in the fact that, once verified beyond any doubt the identity of number 44170 by means of fingerprints, a judicial inquiry has begun focused on ‘the memory of the amnesiac’ and on the memory that family, friends and acquaintances kept of the professor Giulio Canella and of the typographer Mario Bruneri. The Collegno mental hospital therefore became a *memory theatre*: not as it was for Giulio Camillo or Giordano Bruno or Robert Fludd, but – naturally – for Pirandello” (My translation).

Il teatro della memoria vi è costruito quasi compiutamente. Della memoria che avrebbe dovuto essere del professor Canella, del capitano Canella, e di cui un altro si era, con perversa prontezza e lucidità, appropriato (OA vol. II, t. I 658).¹⁰

Sciascia explicitly underscores this difference between his personal understanding of memory theatre and that of the art of memory, when he states that he remembers reading about the Bruneri-Canella case in the papers so clearly that he could even structure his own memory theatre:

[U]n sistema di luoghi, di immagini, di azioni, di parole atto a suscitare nella memoria altri luoghi, altre immagini, altre azioni, altre parole: in continua proliferazione e associazione. E siamo così a Proust: a una forma di 'occultismo' non sospettata dai trattatisti dell'arte della memoria (635).¹¹

With the reference to Marcel Proust, Sciascia introduces another pairing of terms related to memory, which again make a sharp contrast with the natural and artificial memory as understood in the art of memory. In his seven-volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* [In Search of Lost Time] (1913-1927), Proust introduces the concepts of voluntary and involuntary memory. Voluntary memory is negatively contrasted with involuntary memory, which is, Proust claims, the only process whereby the true essence of the past can be retrieved. However, as its name indicates, this kind of memory cannot be retrieved at the individual's convenience, but will occur unexpectedly and spontaneously, triggered by factors that cannot be controlled by the person who is remembering. Proust's most illustrative example of his idea of involuntary memory is presented in *À la recherche du temps perdu* in the famous scene of the madeleine, in which the flavour and smell of a madeleine dipped in tea triggers in the protagonist a vivid recollection of his childhood. Whitehead observes that Proust's involuntary memory embodies one of the main motifs of the idea of memory that emerged during late modernity (84), contributing to shift the focus further away from the concept of the relationship between the present and the past on which the classical and Renaissance models of memory had been based. The certainty that the past can be retrieved in its entirety if only it is stored correctly, as the art of memory presumed, is now put in doubt by a new "emergent anxiety regarding memory [...] linked to accelerated processes of modernization, the impact of the industrial revolution, and the advent of technological warfare" (Whitehead 84).

Sciascia's contrasting of the concepts that informed the art of memory and Proust's idea of memory is not accidental. Up until he introduces the reference to Proust, Sciascia had evaluated the Bruneri-Canella case only in reference to the work of Camillo, Bruno, and

¹⁰ "The memory theatre is almost completely built. Of the memory that should have been that of professor Canella, of captain Canella, and which another had appropriated with perverse promptness and lucidity" (My translation).

¹¹ "A system of places, of images, of actions, of words, prone to evoke in memory other places, other images, other actions, other words: in continuous proliferation and association. And thus we get to Proust: to a form of 'occultism' unsuspected by the scholars of the art of memory" (My translation).

Fludd. The reference to a contemporary commentator of the notion of memory – the last volume of Proust’s novel was posthumously published in 1927, the same year that the events Sciascia is commenting on in this passage took place – draws attention to the intentional anachronism with which Sciascia has until then described the Bruneri-Canella case. Unlike the classical and Renaissance scholars of memory, those who lived through the Bruneri-Canella case should have shared with Proust some degree of mistrust towards the retrieved memories that the Canella family was presenting as proof of the amnesiac’s identity. However, as Sciascia reminisces, at the time the case had divided public opinion between those who believed the man to be Canella and those who believed him to be Bruneri (OA vol. II, t. I 635). Sciascia needs to introduce a shift of meaning in the terminology used by the art of memory, and present it in contrast to Proust’s involuntary memory, because he believes that the art of memory overlooks an essential aspect for the contemporary understanding of memory – its capacity not only to retrieve places, images, actions and words of the past, but to do so in an erratic and unexpected way; generating in the process other places, images, actions and words which will alter, or sometimes even replace, the original memory.

Finally, from this perspective of the historical trajectory of the concept of memory, it is worth bearing in mind that even though the events Sciascia is investigating took place in the 1920s, he is writing from the 1980s, which implies that his own perspective on how memory works will also have shifted during the decades between the event and Sciascia’s reconstruction. The late 20th century sees what has often been referred to as a ‘memory boom’,¹² a new interest for memory and the relationship between past and present motivated by a number of events that had marked the previous decades. Jeffrey Barash observes:

The catastrophe of World War I, followed by the rise of totalitarian dictatorships and the advent of World War II, and culminating in the programmed industrial genocide of the Shoah and in the mass murders that have followed in later decades, have brought to the fore intense reflection, both among survivors and later generations, on the problematic status of the past in its relation to the present (205-206).

Sciascia’s interest in the problem of memory and truth in *Il teatro* therefore needs to be considered with this perspective in mind, especially regarding the growing interest, from the second half of the 20th century, in the concept of collective memory and in its relationship to history, as I will explore later in this chapter.

¹² This term was first used by Andreas Huyssen in 1995.

2. *Il teatro della memoria* and *Funes el memorioso*: language and memory

The first reference to Borges that Sciascia introduces in *Il teatro* is to Borges's short story *Funes el memorioso*. Sciascia reflects on the note with which Borges introduced the story in the prologue to *Ficciones*:

Di uno dei suoi racconti più famosi – *Funes, o della memoria* – Borges dice che è 'una lunga metafora dell'insonnia'. Ma se scrivessimo un racconto sull'insonnia, non sarebbe una lunga metafora della memoria? (OA vol. II, t. I 636).¹³

Sciascia uses this quotation as an introduction to present the state of mind in which he considers that the amnesiac would have been for the duration of his trial. He would have spent, he imagines, sleepless nights trying to remember details that could be useful to defend himself in court:

Fuor di metafora, l'equazione tra memoria e insonnia sarà stata vissuta dal 44170 del manicomio di Collegno febbrilmente: rovente insonnia in cui si fondevano, appena apprese e rapprese, immagini, parole, date. Quel che al mattino gli restava di un tal lavorio, di un tal rovello, era qualche frammento, qualche pietruzza (OA vol. II, t. I 636-637).¹⁴

The insomnia that the protagonist of Borges's short story suffers from, however, is of a different nature. The character of Ireneo Funes in *Funes el memorioso* is presented by the narrator as a man who, after an accident, is able to remember absolutely everything he has ever experienced or perceived. The narrator in Borges's story observes the reasons why Funes found it very difficult to sleep:

Dormir es distraerse del mundo; Funes, de espaldas en el catre, en la sombra, se figuraba cada grieta y cada moldura de las casas precisas que lo rodeaban. (Repito que el menos importante de sus recuerdos era más minucioso y más vivo que nuestra percepción de un goce físico o de un tormento físico) (OC vol. I 490).¹⁵

The reasons behind the insomnia suffered by Funes and the amnesiac turn out to be completely the opposite: Funes remembers too much and too clearly to fall asleep, while the amnesiac stays awake struggling to come up with fragments of memories to defend his position as Giulio Canella in court. Sciascia's comparison of the character of Funes and of the amnesiac serves him, on a first level, to emphasise the irony of the whole case, the effort that the amnesiac and the Canella family had to make in order to maintain plausible his identity as Giulio Canella, when all evidence was against it. However, a closer analysis of

¹³ "Of one of his most famous stories – *Funes, His Memory* – Borges says that it is 'a long metaphor of insomnia'. But if we wrote a story about insomnia, would it not be a long metaphor about memory?" (My translation)

¹⁴ "Metaphors aside, the equation between memory and insomnia would have been feverishly experienced by number 44170 in Collegno's mental hospital: burning insomnia in which images, words and dates melted as soon as they were grasped and solidified. What remained in the morning of all that toil were only some fragments, some scraps" (My translation).

¹⁵ "To sleep is to take one's mind from the world; Funes, lying on his back on his cot, in the dimness of his room, could picture every crack in the wall, every molding of the precise houses that surrounded him. (I repeat that the most trivial of his memories was more detailed, more vivid than our own perception of a physical pleasure or a physical torment)" (*Collected Fictions* 137).

this reference allows for another level of interpretation, in a similar way to that in which the reference to *Pierre Menard* included in *L'affaire Moro* could be unpacked and reveal other meanings if considered in all its complexity. What at first glance seemed to be a playful reference to Borges was shortly after emphasised as having much deeper implications, as I argued throughout chapter two of this thesis. This second level of interpretation is possible by analysing Borges's *Funes el memorioso* in light of the ideas related to the art of memory that I introduced in the previous section.

In Borges's story, the narration revolves around the narrator's visit to Funes in order to get back some books he had lent him. During their meeting, Funes shares with the narrator some passages from one of the books, which is Pliny's *Naturalis historia* – also one of the contributions to the Greek art of memory that Yates addresses in her book:

Ireneo empezó por enumerar, en latín y en español, los casos de memoria prodigiosa registrados por la *Naturalis historia*: Ciro, rey de los persas, que sabía llamar por su nombre a todos los soldados de sus ejércitos; Mitrídates Eupator, que administraba la justicia en los veintidós idiomas de su imperio; Simónides, inventor de la mnemotecnia; Metrodoro, que profesaba el arte de repetir con fidelidad lo escuchado una sola vez. Con evidente buena fe se maravilló de que tales casos maravillaran (OC vol. I 488).¹⁶

Even though this is the only direct reference to the art of memory that Borges includes in his story, it is clear that the idea of mnemonics is closely tied to the writing of *Funes el memorioso*. Funes can do without effort what those who practiced the art of memory needed training to achieve. For Funes, Pliny's catalogue of extraordinary memory cases are nothing special, compared to what he is able to remember naturally. At this point, it is especially telling to reconsider Camillo's conception of the art of memory in relation to the character of Funes. Camillo's final goal is to "store up eternally the eternal nature of all things which can be expressed in speech" (quoted in Yates 142). This grand idea of a system to store all things is described by Yates as an idea "of a memory organically geared to the universe" (149). Funes's mind would be, according to this definition, the perfect embodiment of Camillo's ambitious plan. Indeed, the narrator of the story reports that:

Una circunferencia en un pizarrón, un triángulo rectángulo, un rombo, son formas que podemos intuir plenamente; lo mismo le pasaba a Ireneo con las aborascadas crines de un potro, con una punta de ganado en una cuchilla, con el fuego cambiante y con la innumerable ceniza, con las muchas caras de un muerto en un largo velorio (OC vol. I 488).¹⁷

¹⁶ "Ireneo began by enumerating, in both Latin and Spanish, the cases of prodigious memory catalogued in the *Naturalis Historia*: Cyrus, the king of Persia, who could call all the soldiers in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who meted out justice in the twenty-two languages of the kingdom over which he ruled; Simonides, the inventor of the art of memory; Metrodorus, who was able faithfully to repeat what he had heard, thought it be but once. With obvious sincerity, Ireneo said he was amazed that such cases were thought to be amazing" (*Collected Fictions* 134).

¹⁷ "A circle drawn on a blackboard, a right triangle, a rhombus – all these are forms we can fully intuit; Ireneo could do the same with the stormy mane of a young colt, a small herd of cattle on a mountainside, a flickering fire and its uncountable ashes, and the many faces of a dead man at a wake" (*Collected Fictions* 135).

However, when it comes to translate these perceptions into speech, Funes finds it a challenging task:

Locke, en el siglo XVII, postuló (y reprobó) un idioma imposible en el que cada cosa individual, cada piedra, cada pájaro y cada rama tuviera un nombre propio; Funes proyectó alguna vez un idioma análogo, pero lo desechó por parecerle demasiado general, demasiado ambiguo. En efecto, Funes no sólo recordaba cada hoja de cada árbol de cada monte, sino cada una de las veces que la había percibido o imaginado (OC vol. I 489).¹⁸

Funes's memory therefore even goes beyond Camillo's wish to store the memory of all things described by speech, to the point in which speech is not enough to communicate all his memories. When it comes to perceptions, Funes is unable to find a language that can represent all the nuances of what is stored in his mind. In his tale of a man with a flawless memory, Borges is highlighting that once the problem of memory storage and retrieval is rendered irrelevant, a problem of communication arises. Only what can be grasped by language can be retold, and due to language's inability to reflect the complexity of Funes's memories, this process already implies a considerable loss of information.

Also, the narrator notes, being able to store and retrieve large amounts of information does not imply that Funes is able to process them:

Había aprendido sin esfuerzo el inglés, el francés, el portugués, el latín. Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, es abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos (OC vol. I 490).¹⁹

With this observation, the narrator in *Funes* is pointing out the difference between being able to remember with precision, and the ability to verbalise these recollections. As he notes, memory is necessarily selective when it comes to reconstructing the past; it is impossible to generate a coherent narrative by integrating all the details, without partially forgetting or discarding some of the memories. This observation serves to point out a flaw in the art of memory: even if memories can in fact be stored and retrieved at will, as Funes is able to do, there is still a process of reconstruction that needs to take place in order to make the past intelligible from the present. It is precisely this ability to generalise and abstract, due to imperfect remembering, which allows the narrator to write Funes's story.

In fact, he points out throughout the short story that what he is reporting about his meeting with Funes is by no means accurate, since it is based on his unreliable memory – unreliable

¹⁸ "In the seventeenth century, Locke postulated (and condemned) an impossible language in which each individual thing – every stone, every bird, every branch – would have its own name; Funes once contemplated a similar language, but discarded the idea as too general, too ambiguous. The truth was, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree in every patch of forest, but every time he had perceived or imagined that leaf" (*Collected Fictions* 136).

¹⁹ "He had effortlessly learned English, French, Portuguese, Latin. I suspect, nevertheless, that he was not very good at thinking. To think is to ignore (or to forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract. In the teeming world of Ireneo Funes there was nothing but particulars – and they were virtually *immediate* particulars" (*Collected Fictions* 137).

since it cannot be compared to Funes's memory of every detail. The story starts acknowledging precisely this: "[I]o recuerdo (yo no tengo derecho a pronunciar ese verbo sagrado, sólo un hombre en la tierra tuvo derecho y ese hombre ha muerto) (OC vol. I 485).²⁰ The narrator goes on to remind the readers that what he is retelling cannot reproduce the whole truth of his meeting with Funes, and that they will need to contribute their own imagination to the narration:

No trataré de reproducir sus palabras, irrecuperables ahora. Prefiero resumir con veracidad las muchas cosas que me dijo Ireneo. El estilo indirecto es remoto y débil; yo sé que sacrifico la eficacia de mi relato; que mis lectores se imaginen los entrecortados períodos que me abrumaron esa noche (OC vol. I 487).²¹

This same idea is also masked behind a Latin quote that the narrator overhears from Funes, that Pliny dedicates to memory in his *Naturalis historia*: "ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderet auditum" (OC vol. I 487).²² This quotation is also addressing the central theme of Borges's story; that is, that any retelling of a story from memory will inevitably be altered in some way by the process of narration. However, at the same time, without these omissions and alterations, the story would not be able to be told in words at all. Didier Jaén rightly points out:

Narrative, as well as human knowledge, is based on a dialectical selectivity between what we choose to remember and what we choose to forget. Our condition, in contrast to Funes, allows us the freedom to select (and therefore to imagine or create) (Jaén 150).

Like the narrator in *Funes*, in *Il teatro Sciascia* also makes comments about his own memories of the events in the Bruneri-Canella case, and how these memories might have altered the narration of the case that he is providing in his *inchiesta*. The text is preceded by a quotation from Julien Benda: "Sainte-Beuve rinuncierebbe a Kant e a Spinoza, pur di avere le memorie di Aspasia" (OA vol. II, t. I 613).²³ This quotation is however amended by Sciascia in a footnote, where he tells of how Benda's own memory of Sainte-Beuve's words was inaccurate. In fact, Sainte-Beuve was quoting Mérimée, who admitted that he would exchange not Kant and Spinoza but Thucydides, for Aspasia's memory. Sciascia decides to leave the quotation and include an explanation of this slight confusion that he has discovered quite by chance in order, he says, to warn his readers about the text they

²⁰ "I recall him (though I have no right to speak that sacred verb – only one man on earth did, and that man is dead)" (*Collected Fictions* 131).

²¹ "I will not attempt to reproduce the words of it, which are now forever irrecoverable. Instead, I will summarize, faithfully, the many things Ireneo told me. Indirect discourse is distant and weak; I know that I am sacrificing the effectiveness of my tale. I only ask that my readers try to hear in their imagination the broken and staccato periods that astounded me that night" (*Collected Fictions* 134).

²² "So that nothing that has been heard would be retold in the same words" (My translation).

²³ "Sainte-Beuve would renounce Kant and Spinoza, if he could have the memories of Aspasia" (My translation).

introduce: “in questo libretto che s’intitola alla memoria appunto si dispiegano gli inganni – volenti o nolenti o dolenti – della memoria. E forse anche della mia” (OA vol. II, t. I 614).²⁴

Sciascia’s idea of memory in *Il teatro* is accurately summarised by Lina Bolzoni’s definition in her study of the text: “[t]he radical difference between the memory of the Renaissance and modern memory, which places itself at the centre of the novel, in the spotlight, and at the same time generates writing” (My translation).²⁵ Sciascia’s *inchiesta*, indeed, is in itself writing generated by memory, by his own memory of the case. For Sciascia the idea of an ‘artificial memory’ already implies the generation of fiction, appropriating the term coined by the classical art of memory from his present perspective, and investing it with a postmodern self-awareness. Such as Sciascia presents it, the amnesiac is reconstructing, from the memories that others have of Giulio Canella, a plausible version of the past of the man whose memories and past he has adopted as his own – instead of retrieving his own past in its most truthful version.

Sciascia’s modern understanding of the term ‘artificial memory’ is necessarily linked to artistic creation and to fictionalisation, and in this capacity it is easy to extrapolate it to the realm of the literary. It is also in this sense that Sciascia’s ‘memory theatre’ is not a structure to store memories, but a theatrical stage on which a literary work is being represented. In Sciascia’s understanding of the terms, ‘natural memory’ can inspire ‘artificial memory’ in the same way in which a fictional work can be inspired by real events; or even, in the way in which a literary work can inspire a rewriting of it. For Sciascia, this ‘artificial memory’ can acquire the same status as the ‘natural memory’, to the extent that it eventually replaces it. This is what, for Sciascia, happened in the trial of the Bruneri-Canella case, where the ‘artificial memories’ that identified the amnesiac as Canella were given more importance than any other evidence that proved he was Bruneri, and were still held as true by the Canella family for the rest of the amnesiac’s life. Sciascia’s anachronistic use in *Il teatro* of the terms he borrows from the classical and Renaissance art of memory invites a similar reflection as that prompted by the contrastive reading of two fragments of *Don Quijote* in Borges’s *Pierre Menard*, as I analysed in the previous chapter. It acknowledges the shift that has taken place from the Greeks to the 20th century in the understanding of memory in Western tradition – a similar shift, and related to, the concept of history as it was understood in the age of Cervantes and in the age of Menard.

²⁴ “In this little book with a title about memory are actually exposed the deceits – whether regretful, intentional, or not – of memory. And perhaps also of mine” (My translation).

²⁵ “[L]a differenza radicale fra la memoria rinascimentale e quella moderna, che si pone al centro del romanzo, che si mette in scena mentre genera scrittura” (Bolzoni 133).

3. Memory and identity

The second reference to Borges that can be found in *Il teatro* is in the final note to the text. After Sciascia mentions Yates's studies on the art of memory, he states that, outside this field, the key to interpreting his use of these terms is to be found "nella condizione impareggiabilmente creata da Jorge Luis Borges nel racconto *Pierre Menard, autore del Chisciotte*; e cioè nell'impossibilità di parlare della memoria senza tener conto di Proust e, per altro verso, di Pirandello" (OA vol. II, t. I 673).²⁶ Naming these three literary references, Sciascia is in this statement emphasising the literary perspective from which he carries out his investigation of the events of the case, and reasserting the literary elements he has incorporated into the terminology he borrows from the tradition of mnemonics. The importance of the idea of memory in the work of Proust is evident, and I have already discussed his concept of voluntary and involuntary memory in relation to *Il teatro* in the previous section of this chapter. It is however more enlightening to consider Pirandello and Borges from the role that Sciascia assigns them as writers of reference when it comes to memory.

The idea of memory in Pirandello that Sciascia wants to emphasise in *Il teatro* is linked to the problem of identity, with which many of Pirandello's characters struggle. One of Pirandello's most memorable characters is the protagonist of his novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* [The Late Mattia Pascal] (1904), whose identity issues are directly linked to his memory. After escaping an unfulfilling existence as Mattia Pascal, he decides to start a new life under the false identity of Adriano Meis. However, after some time he realises that he cannot manage to live his life fully as Adriano Meis because of the memory of his past as Mattia Pascal, as well as for the lack of memories he has for the past of the Adriano Meis he has created from scratch. Similarly, in *Come tu mi vuoi*, the main character of Ignota [Unknown woman] is a woman of uncertain past living in Berlin with a writer and his daughter. A man recognises her as Lucia (Cia) Pieri, who disappeared shortly after her wedding to Bruno Pieri a decade before when their house was invaded during the war, and was thought to have been dragged along with the enemy's army. Ignota decides to adopt the identity of Cia Pieri in order to escape the aimless life she leads in Berlin and her own past. At the beginning she believes that this new identity will provide a chance for her to start over again, as well as a chance for Bruno to be happy again believing he has found his missing wife. However, she soon discovers that the return of Cia to the family will bring changes to the inheritance of which Bruno will benefit. She is troubled by what she thought would be an act of kindness

²⁶ "In the condition incomparably created by Jorge Luis Borges in the story *Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote*; and therefore in the impossibility of speaking of memory without considering Proust and, in a different sense, Pirandello" (My translation).

towards Bruno and a chance for her to have a new life, but turns out to cause problems in the family and constrains her to live by the memories of someone she never was. She then tries to convince the other characters that she is not the real Cia, and that the only proof the family have of her identity is their willingness to believe she is their missing relative.

As in *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, so in *Come tu mi vuoi* the problem of double identity experienced by the characters is closely linked to memory. Creating a new identity implies creating new memories – ‘artificial memories’, in the sense Sciascia intends for the term. However, Ignota’s drama implies creating a new identity based on the life of a woman who existed with her same name before, which necessarily implies borrowing from the memories that others have of Cia:

If he recreates me, if he gives back a soul to this body, which is that of his Cia – let him take it, let him take it, and put inside his memories – his – a beautiful life, a beautiful life – a new life – I am desperate! (My translation).²⁷

What at first seemed like a liberating chance for Ignota – taking up someone else’s identity and comfortable life – now implies a toilsome process of reconstruction:

Does he [Bruno] need the time to build up again the villa in ruins, the devastated land? Well, time also for me to rebuild myself, stone by stone, like the villa; and the mercy of the memories of poor Cia, transplanted in me, time to nurture them so they will blossom back to life (My translation).²⁸

In his play, Pirandello is recreating the drama he imagines would have been lived by the amnesiac. As Sciascia also points out in *Il teatro*, this man would have had to reconstruct his identity as Canella from those memories that others had of him. This process of reconstruction is presented as comparable to the reproduction of a work of art. In a scene of *Come tu mi vuoi* where Ignota is preparing to meet Cia’s sister for the first time, she dresses trying to imitate a painting of Lucia Pieri at the time of her wedding. If we compare Ignota’s effort of reconstructing a past identity from a painting to the process of rewriting a literary work, this will lead to the idea that Sciascia has of *Pierre Menard* as connected to memory. In Borges’s story, Menard is recreating a text identical to Cervantes’s work, but altered by the centuries that have gone by between the times in which each of the authors lived. The story stresses how the meaning of Cervantes’s text and that of Menard is changed because of the different historical contexts in which they were written, and on how Menard’s technique relied precisely on this:

²⁷ “[S]e mi ricrea lui, se glie la ridà lui un’anima, a questo corpo che è della sua Cia – se lo prenda, se lo prenda, e vi metta dentro i suoi ricordi – i suoi – una vita bella, una vita bella – una vita nuova – io sono disperata!” (Pirandello *Come tu mi vuoi* 67).

²⁸ “Gli ci volle, a lui [Bruno], il tempo necessario per rimettere in piedi la villa in rovina, le terre devastate? Ebbene, il tempo anche a me per ricostruirmi, pietra su pietra, come la villa; e la pietà dei ricordi della povera Cia, trapiantati in me, il tempo di riallevarli per fargli rifiorire in vita” (Pirandello *Come tu mi vuoi* 210).

Conocer bien el español, recuperar la fe católica, guerrear contra los moros o contra el turco, olvidar la historia de Europa entre los años de 1602 y de 1918, ser Miguel de Cervantes. Pierre Menard estudió ese procedimiento [...] pero lo descartó por fácil. [...] Ser en el siglo XX un novelista popular del siglo XVII le pareció una disminución. Ser, de alguna manera, Cervantes y llegar al *Quijote* le pareció menos arduo – por consiguiente, menos interesante – que seguir siendo Pierre Menard y llegar al *Quijote*, a través de las experiencias de Pierre Menard (OC vol. I 447).²⁹

This is what made Menard's task so troublesome, and it is precisely the cornerstone of Ignota's tragedy in *Come tu mi vuoi* – the fact that she cannot be free to start a new life from scratch with a different identity without living her life as remembered – and imagined – by others. This reading explains Sciascia's reference in *Il teatro* to *Pierre Menard* as the ultimate reflection on memory of which he is making use in his *inchiesta*. By presenting the Bruneri-Canella case as a case already predestined to become literature at the hand of Pirandello, he is also presenting the amnesiac's strategy as a literary creation. Sciascia presents Bruneri as someone who is rewriting the character of Canella by using as a stepping stone the facts of the previous life of the actual Canella. It is in this sense that the case Sciascia presents in *Il teatro* is comparable to *Pierre Menard*. Where Menard was rewriting the same text as Cervantes, but making it his own, Bruneri was rewriting Canella's life, but taking it over and making it his. Neither of them could change what already existed. Menard could not change a single word of Cervantes's text; Bruneri could not change any of the events that took place in the life of Canella, or the memories his family and friends had of him. Both Menard and Bruneri had to work with a primary material that they could not alter, but at the same time be the authors of this same material.

The relationship between memory as reconstruction and the artistic process is also central to Borges's story *La memoria de Shakespeare*. In this story, Hermann Soergel, a scholar who has devoted his whole career to the study of the work of Shakespeare, is offered by a stranger the possibility to treasure the memories of the playwright. Soergel accepts, believing that being able to access the totality of Shakespeare's memory will allow him to analyse the whole of his work with unprecedented insight. However, he is soon disappointed when he realises that Shakespeare's lived experiences are not directly linked to his work:

²⁹ "Learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight the Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1918 – be Miguel de Cervantes. Pierre Menard weighed that course [...] but he discarded it as too easy. [...] To be a popular novelist of the seventeenth century in the twentieth seemed to Menard to be a diminution. Being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the Quixote – that looked to Menard less challenging (and therefore less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the Quixote *through the experiences of Pierre Menard*" (*Collected Fictions* 91).

La memoria de Shakespeare no podía revelarme otra cosa que las circunstancias de Shakespeare. Es evidente que éstas no constituyen la singularidad del poeta; lo que importa es la obra que ejecutó con ese material deleznable (OC vol. II 395).³⁰

Trying to write a biography of Shakespeare profiting from the unique source of his direct experience, he discovers that this is also a futile task, since Soergel has not the craft necessary to reconstruct those memories into a coherent narrative:

No tardé en descubrir que ese género literario requiere condiciones de escritor que ciertamente no son mías. No sé narrar. No sé narrar mi propia historia, que es harto más extraordinaria que la de Shakespeare. Además, ese libro es inútil. El azar o el destino dieron a Shakespeare las triviales cosas terribles que todo hombre conoce; él supo transmutarlas en fábulas, en personajes mucho más vívidos que el hombre gris que los soñó (OC vol. II 396).³¹

The character of Ignota in *Come tu mi vuoi* and the portrayal that Sciascia makes of the amnesiac present identity as anchored in memory. However, the issues that they pose derive from this memory as not being individual, but shared. Ignota's struggle to reconstruct Cia's identity is caused by the fact that she needs to borrow these from what the Pieri family remembers of her, as well as from Cia's diary that she has found in the family house. Similarly, Sciascia presents the reconstruction of the past of the amnesiac as a collective effort. In 1931, the amnesiac published a memoir with the title *Alla ricerca di me stesso* [In Search of Myself] – title that clearly tries to evoke Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Sciascia argues that the amnesiac compiled this memoir from the information that the Canella family had contributed, but also from the testimonies of other people who claimed having met him during the war, and to have encountered him during the time he allegedly spent living as a homeless man until he was taken into hospital:

Nella sua 'recherche', lo smemorato ormai gremito di memorie altrui, si era attaccato alla figura di questo randagio [...]. Il fatto è che si era calato nel personaggio e coerentemente, in retrospiezione, andava sviluppandolo e arricchendolo di tutto ciò che i vaghi ricordi altrui [...] venivano offrendo alla vicenda (OA vol. II, t. I 660).³²

Sciascia therefore presents the reconstruction of the identity of Canella as a collaborative project, an idea that not only further reinforces the connection between the process of reconstruction and the creation of a work of art, but also brings to attention issues of authorship.

³⁰ "Shakespeare's memory was able to reveal to me only the circumstances of *the man* Shakespeare. Clearly, these circumstances do not constitute the uniqueness of *the poet*; what matters is the literature the poet produced with that frail material" (*Collected Fictions* 513).

³¹ "I soon discovered, however, that that literary genre requires a talent for writing that I do not possess. I do not know how to tell a story. I do not know how to tell *my own* story, which is a great deal more extraordinary than Shakespeare's. Besides, such a book would be pointless. Chance, or fate, dealt Shakespeare those trivial terrible things that all men know; it was his gift to be able to transmute into fables, into characters that were much more alive than the gray man who dreamed them" (*Collected Fictions* 513-514).

³² "In his 'recherche', the amnesiac now bulging with the memories of others, has become attached to this figure of the homeless man [...]. The fact is that he had got into character and accordingly he was, in hindsight, developing and enriching it with all that the vague memories of others [...] had been contributing to the events" (My translation).

4. Identity and authorship

The idea that identity can be constructed in a collective effort, without even requiring the participation of the subject whose identity is being reconstructed – Giulio Canella, in the case of *Il teatro* – calls to attention issues of authorship that bring together the work of Borges and Pirandello in Sciascia's *inchiesta*. The thematic similarities between the two authors' works have already been studied, and analysing them is not within the scope of this project,³³ but it is nevertheless interesting to point out the link that can be made through the way in which Sciascia approaches them both. A clear parallel can be established between Borges and Pirandello if we reconsider Sciascia's comments on *Pierre Menard* as analysed in chapter two of this thesis. In *L'affaire Moro, Nero su nero* and *Ore di Spagna*, Sciascia proposes a reading of *Pierre Menard* in which Borges would have imagined the fictional French writer and his rewriting efforts thinking of Unamuno and the commentary he wrote of *Don Quijote*. Sciascia observed a change in the way Cervantes's novel and its characters were perceived before and after the reading that Unamuno had imposed on them, a reading that now stood between the original work and any subsequent approach to it. For Sciascia, this was the main premise that inspired Borges to write *Pierre Menard*.

This interpretation of the short story is very similar to another strange game of influences that also fascinated Sciascia, and which was the influence on the work of Pirandello of his critic Adriano Tilgher. In *Pirandello e il pirandellismo, Pirandello e la Sicilia, and La corda pazzo*, Sciascia discusses at length the relationship between author and critic. Tilgher wrote in 1922 an influential article in which he came up with a formula to define the work of Pirandello as concerned with the tensions between life and form. This formula seemed to describe Pirandello's work with such accuracy that from then on it was constantly recycled, not only by Tilgher but by a majority of critics of Pirandello. In *Pirandello e il Pirandellismo* Sciascia mentions an article written by Tilgher years after in which he not only takes responsibility for the fame of Pirandello, but considers himself "addirittura il creatore di Pirandello, del Pirandello che viene dopo la sua interpretazione" (OB vol. III 1019).³⁴ This strange game of influences reminds us indeed of the statement Sciascia made about *Don Quijote* and how the publication of Unamuno's *Vida de don Quijote y Sancho* had altered every subsequent reading of Cervantes's novel. However, the influence that Tilgher claims in his article to have had on Pirandello's work is more direct than this. Whilst Unamuno's commentary changed the readers' perception of *Don Quijote* from its publication in 1905

³³ For an overview of the common themes in both authors' work, see Franco Zangrilli's "Pirandello e Borges" in *Pirandello nell'America Latina*, p. 35-56.

³⁴ "In fact the creator of Pirandello, of the Pirandello that comes after his interpretation" (My translation).

onwards, Tilgher's criticism was produced at the same time as Pirandello was writing; Pirandello was aware of this criticism and corresponded with Tilgher – which obviously could have never been the case between Cervantes and Unamuno, having lived three centuries apart. Tilgher understood his role of Pirandello's critic not only as a commentator of an author's work, but as having an impact on his subsequent production due to the formula he used to describe Pirandello's work. In Tilgher's words, quoted by Sciascia in *Pirandello e il Pirandellismo*:

[The formula] *cannot be found at all in the works of Pirandello prior to my essay (1922)*, and it was me and only me to invent it in those terms [...] and it is my merit, or my fault, to have addressed with it the centre, the cornerstone, the axis of the Pirandellian sense of life. *Pirandello adopted that formula and made it his* (My translation).³⁵

Sciascia wonders whether Tilgher encountered in Pirandello the perfect example to illustrate a theory that until then he had been unable to voice, or whether the theory occurred to him when he discovered Pirandello's work. Whatever the case might be, Tilgher considers his influence over Pirandello decisive for the future trajectory of the writer. Sciascia quotes Tilgher again, also in *Pirandello e il Pirandellismo*: "it is a fact that if it had not been for my essay, Pirandello would have never reached such clarity about his own interior world; it is a fact that if it had not been for my essay, Pirandello would have never written *Diana e la Tuda*" (My translation).³⁶

Sciascia proposes an image of the influence of Tilgher over Pirandello's work related to the influence that, according to him, Unamuno had had on Cervantes: "[n]essuno fu più capace, insomma, di leggere Pirandello senza quei filosofici occhiali che Tilgher lasciò sull'opera" (OB vol. III 1024).³⁷ This was, in Sciascia's view, detrimental for the further development of Pirandello's work. He describes the effect that Tilgher's criticism had on Pirandello:

La tragedia, se così si può dire, di Pirandello [...] fu quella dello scrittore ormai inchiodato dalla sua critica e dal suo pubblico ad una immagine di sé, ad un modo e ad una forma (e qui la parola cade nel senso pirandelliano e tilgheriano: cristallizzazione e morte della fluidità e libertà creatrice) di essere, definitivamente (OB vol. III 1026).³⁸

³⁵ "[La formula] *non si trova affatto nelle opere di Pirandello anteriori al mio saggio (1922)*, e ad inventarla in quei termini fui proprio io e solo io [...] e mio il merito, o demerito, di avere in essa additato il centro, il perno, l'asse della intuizione pirandelliana della vita. *Quella formula, Pirandello l'adottò e la fece sua* [Sciascia's italics] (quoted in Sciascia OB vol. III 1014).

³⁶ "[È] un fatto che senza quel mio saggio Pirandello non sarebbe mai giunto a tanta chiarezza sul suo mondo interiore; è un fatto che senza quel mio saggio Pirandello non avrebbe mai scritto *Diana e la Tuda*" (quoted in Sciascia OB vol. III 1015).

³⁷ "Nobody was ever able again to read Pirandello without wearing those philosophical spectacles that Tilgher left over his work" (My translation).

³⁸ "Pirandello's tragedy, if one can call it that [...] was that of the writer confined by his critic and his audience within an image of himself, within a manner and a form of being (and here the word form falls within the sense it had for Pirandello and for Tilgher: crystallization and death of fluidity and creative freedom)" (My translation).

This poses a problem for the author about her or his own identity not dissimilar from the identity problem suffered by Pirandello's characters. Borges also hinted at this authorship problem suffered by the writer, caused by the reception of the texts by critics and readers. In the poetic prose piece *Borges y yo*, published in *El hacedor*, Borges playfully presents his identity as a man as separated from the identity of Borges the writer that is known to the world: "de Borges tengo noticias por el correo y veo su nombre en una terna de profesores o en un diccionario biográfico" (OC vol. I 808).³⁹ He shows some distress at this identity problem: "yo estoy destinado a perderme, definitivamente, y sólo algún instante de mí podrá sobrevivir en el otro" (OC vol. I 808).⁴⁰ This preoccupation is related to the aforementioned story *La memoria de Shakespeare*, where ownership of the memory of Shakespeare the man only allowed Soergel to discover that this identity had little if anything to do with Shakespeare the author. However, the poetic voice in *Borges y yo* also acknowledges that this split in the author's identity is part of what the process of writing entails: "[n]ada me cuesta confesar que ha logrado algunas páginas válidas, pero esas páginas no me pueden salvar, quizá porque lo bueno ya no es de nadie, ni siquiera del otro, sino del lenguaje y la tradición" (OC vol. I 808).⁴¹ In *Borges y yo* Borges is implying that not only the meaning of a text is subject to the interpretation of those who read it, but also the identity of its author.

This Borgesian idea of the author as a character of her or his own fiction came full circle in 1981, when the Argentine magazine *Cabildo* published a duplicitous letter claiming that Borges did not exist and was in fact a character created by a group of writers, including Bioy Casares, and impersonated by an actor named Aquiles Scatamacchia. According to the letter, this discovery led to the decision of the Swedish Academy to not award the writer the Nobel Prize of Literature. The satirical letter was however taken seriously by some international newspapers, and that is how it reached Sciascia, who wrote a short note on the misunderstanding with the title *L'inesistente Borges*, included in *Cronachette*. Sciascia comments on how appropriate it is that this case involves precisely Borges: "la notizia dell'inesistenza di Borges è una invenzione che sta nell'ordine delle invenzioni di Borges, un portato e complemento dell'universo borgesiano, il punto di saldatura della circolarità borgesiana, del sistema" (OA vol. II, t. I 769).⁴² Sciascia reflects on how the fact that Borges

³⁹ "News of Borges reaches me by mail, or I see his name on a list of academics or in some biographical dictionary" (*Collected Fictions* 324).

⁴⁰ "I am doomed – utterly and inevitably – to oblivion, and fleeting moments will be all of me that survives in that other man" (*Collected Fictions* 324).

⁴¹ "I willingly admit that he has written a number of sound pages, but those pages will not save *me*, perhaps because the good in them no longer belongs to any individual, not even to that other man, but rather to language itself, or to tradition" (*Collected Fictions* 324).

⁴² "[T]he news of Borges's nonexistence is an invention consistent with the inventions of Borges himself: it is both a consequence and completion of the Borgesian universe – the linchpin of Borgesian circularity, of his private 'system'" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 134).

is impersonated by the actor Aquiles Scatamacchia adds another dimension to the authorship problem:

Se infatti per un momento fingiamo di credere alla rivelazione che Borges non esiste e che esiste soltanto l'attore Aquiles Scatamacchia [...] tante delle cose scritte e dette da Borges vengono ad assumere senso e valore di prova. E non solo: dalle cose dette si potrebbe persino estrarre qualche frase da considerare come 'voce dal sen fuggita' ad un Achille Scatamacchia a momenti stanco del ruolo di Borges a cui è ormai condannato (OA vol. II, t. I 769).⁴³

Whatever Borges ever said or wrote, if now interpreted as said or written by Scatamacchia, takes on a whole new meaning. This authorship problem can again be related to the identity problem experienced by the amnesiac of *Il teatro* and Ignota in *Come tu mi vuoi*. These characters, like Scatamacchia, have to adapt their identity to another identity that precedes them. However, they struggle to continue playing the part they have to base on other people's memories – or other people's imagination, for Scatamacchia – and concealing their own true identity. It is in this sense that the reference to *Pierre Menard* that Sciascia brings into *Il teatro* becomes relevant, since Menard's struggle consisted in having to write again a novel that preceded him, but from his own perspective. Reading *Don Quijote* as written by Menard changed its meaning in the same way as Borges's writings and statements would change if, Sciascia suggests, we interpreted them as the writings and statements of Aquiles Scatamacchia.

In his analysis of the relationship between Cervantes and Unamuno, and Pirandello and Tilgher, Sciascia is addressing the implications that reinterpreting a work of literature – be it in the form of rewriting, commentary, or criticism – have not only for this work but for its author. For him Borges's *Pierre Menard* constitutes a fable of these processes, and the whole of the work of Borges, as he hints in *L'inesistente Borges*, is concerned with these implications.

5. Willingness to believe and the willing suspension of disbelief

The next connection between Sciascia's *Il teatro* and Borges's work is to be found at the level of source of inspiration, and is signalled by Sciascia in his *inchiesta La sentenza memorabile*. In this text, Sciascia comments on a case that took place in France in the 16th century, and which was very similar to the Bruneri-Canella case. In 1548, a man called Martin Guerre disappeared, abandoning his wife and son. Some years later, a man claiming

⁴³ "If we pretend for a moment to believe the revelation that Borges does not exist, that it is only the actor Achilles Scatamacchia [...] then so many of the things said and written by Borges begin to make irrefutable sense. And this is not all: from the recorded remarks we might even pick out several sentences which could be attributed to an Achilles Scatamacchia who 'had quite taken leave of his senses', at moments when he wearied of playing the part of Borges to which he is by now condemned" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 134).

to be him returned to his family and was initially accepted as such, but soon rumours started to spread suggesting that this man was an impostor. Guerre's wife, Bertrande, maintained that the man was her real husband, but she eventually gave in to the family's pressure and admitted that he was an impostor. In his trial for this identity swap, the man was identified as Arnaud du Tilh, and was about to be absolved when another man appeared in court claiming to be the real Martin Guerre. Arnaud du Tilh was then condemned to death, and the new alleged Martin Guerre assumed this identity and continued to live as Bertrande's husband – even though, Sciascia suggest, it is not unlikely that he was also an impostor.

As he did in *Il teatro*, Sciascia finds it interesting to question the factors that made those involved in the case believe in the imposture. In *Il teatro* he focused on the figure of Giulia Canella, who was determined to believe the amnesiac was her husband against all evidence. In the case in *La sentenza*, he marvels at the fact that Arnaud du Tilh was taken for Martin Guerre even though he did not resemble him. The man who claimed to be Martin Guerre had different height and hair colour to the missing man, and still the family refused to accept these changes as proof that he was a different person. Sciascia compares this technique, so to speak, with that used by the eponymous protagonist in Borges's *El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro*, published as part of *Historia universal de la infamia*, a collection of fictionalised biographies. In a footnote to *La sentenza* Sciascia claims that Borges's *Tom Castro* was also inspired by the Bruneri-Canella case (OA vol. II, t. I 687). He argues that it was likely that the story of the case had reached Borges in Argentina, since after the trial the Canella family moved to Brazil, where the alleged Professor Canella published extensively.⁴⁴

Borges's short text narrates the story of Arthur Orton, later known as Tom Castro, who is convinced by his friend Ebenezer Bogle to pretend to be the missing son of a wealthy English lady. Bogle thinks of the plan after reading Lady Tichborne's message in a newspaper where she was desperately looking for her son Roger Charles Tichborne, believed by everyone except Lady Tichborne to have died in a shipwreck. Bogle decides to present his friend Castro as the missing son, even though he does not look anything like him, and succeeds in making Lady Tichborne take him in as Roger Charles. It is in *La sentenza* where Sciascia explicitly refers to *Tom Castro*, comparing the strategy used by the impostor in Borges's story and that used by Arnaud du Tilh, of making the most of the fact that they did not look like the person whose identity they were usurping in order to make their claim

⁴⁴ Since the sources that Borges lists at the end of his fictionalised biography of Tom Castro are quite vague and the resemblance between the two cases is indeed striking, Sciascia's claim seems valid. Nevertheless, another possibility that Sciascia does not consider is that Borges might also have become aware of the case through Pirandello's *Come tu mi vuoi*, which would also explain the similarities between *Tom Castro* and Pirandello's play. Pirandello travelled to Argentina and specifically to Buenos Aires in 1927, year of the first production of *Come tu mi vuoi*, and again in 1933. For the occasion, Borges wrote an article as a welcome to the Italian writer in his country (Zangrilli 37).

more plausible. Sciascia quotes the following passage from *Tom Castro* to explain the reasoning he attributes to Arnaud du Tilh. Sciascia quotes the Italian translation, here I provide Borges's original in Spanish:

Bogle sabía que un facsímil perfecto del anhelado Roger Charles Tichborne era de imposible obtención. Sabía también que todas las similitudes logradas no harían otra cosa que destacar ciertas diferencias inevitables. Renunció, pues, a todo parecido. Intuyó que la enorme ineptitud de la pretensión sería una convincente prueba de que no se trataba de un fraude, que nunca hubiera descubierto de ese modo flagrante los rasgos más sencillos de convicción. No hay que olvidar tampoco la colaboración todopoderosa del tiempo: catorce años de hemisferio austral y de azar pueden cambiar a un hombre (Borges OC vol. I 303, Sciascia OA vol. II, t. I 686).⁴⁵

Sciascia attributes the success of the imposture not to the ability of the impostor to produce a doppelganger of the missing man, but to the willingness of his family to believe that he is indeed the missing man. In *Tom Castro*, Borges emphasises this in Bogle's reasoning: "[o]tra razón fundamental: Los repetidos e insensatos avisos de Lady Tichborne demostraban su plena seguridad de que Roger Charles no había muerto, su voluntad de reconocerlo" (OC vol. I 303).⁴⁶

In *Come tu mi vuoi*, the resemblance between Cia and Ignota and the family's willingness to believe are also central to the plot. However, in this case Ignota's resemblance to Cia is striking. When she tries to convince the Pieri family that they have taken her in as Cia because they wanted to believe it was her, she argues:

Ah no, not this! Not because I look like her! I, even I have told everyone that my likeness is no proof, no proof at all. This likeness that made you all believe you recognised me. I even shouted: 'how is it possible, think about it; someone who has gone through war, after ten years, remain the same, just like that?' It should be, rather, the opposite – a proof that it isn't me! (My translation).⁴⁷

Ignota's reasoning, which is the quote that also opens Sciascia's *Il teatro*, is the same reasoning as that of Bogle in *Tom Castro*: it should be easier to believe that people who have gone through decades of hardship will look quite different from the memories that those who knew them have of them. Recognising them therefore depended not on evidence, but

⁴⁵ "Bogle knew that a perfect facsimile of the beloved Roger Charles Tichborne was impossible to find; he knew as well that any similarities he might achieve would only underscore certain inevitable differences. He therefore gave up the notion of likeness altogether. He sensed that the vast ineptitude of his pretense would be a convincing proof that this was no fraud, for no fraud would ever have so flagrantly flaunted features that might so easily have convinced. We also should not overlook the all-powerful collaboration of time: the vicissitudes of fortune, and fourteen years of antipodean life, can change a man" (*Collected Fictions* 15).

⁴⁶ "Another essential argument in favour of Bogle's plan: Lady Tichborne's repeated and irrational advertisements showed that she was certain that Roger Charles had not died, and that she would will herself to recognise him when he came" (*Collected Fictions* 15).

⁴⁷ "Ah no! questo, no! Non perché somiglio! Io stessa – proprio io – ho detto anzi a tutti che non è prova – nessuna prova – la mia somiglianza – questa somiglianza per cui tutti avete creduto di conoscermi. Gridai proprio: 'Ma com'è possibile – ci pensate? – una, a cui sia passata sopra la guerra – dopo dieci anni – rimanere – così – la stessa?' – Sarebbe, se mai – al contrario – una prova che non sono io!" (*Come tu mi vuoi* 203).

on the willingness of their families to recognise them. The character of Ignota also acknowledges this:

More than one poor wretch, years later, has returned like this [...] – almost looking like nobody anymore – unrecognisable – without memory – and sisters, wives, mothers – mothers – have fought over him! ‘He’s mine!’ ‘No, he’s mine!’ – Not because it seemed so to them, no (how can the sons of two women look the same?), but because they have believed it! They wanted to believe! – And there is no evidence that can stand against it, when there is willingness to believe (My translation).⁴⁸

Once more this recalls Aristotle’s principle for poetic effect, according to which “a plausible impossibility is preferable to what is implausible but possible” (45). Discerning whether Ignota, Tom Castro, Arnaud du Tilh or the amnesiac are the people they claim to be is not done based on whether or not they resemble them. In all cases, there was proof that it was realistically impossible that these people were the same as the missing relatives. The families’ decision to believe them to be their missing relatives seems to be following Aristotle’s aforementioned tenet regarding poetic effect, rather than rationally assessing the evidence available. Matthew Potolsky observes:

[Aristotle’s concept of mimesis] defines the work as ‘true to life’ rather than as a replica of life. A work is realistic to the extent that it does not violate our conventional sense of authenticity, what Aristotle defines in terms of probability and necessity, even if it describes things that have never existed or would be impossible in reality (Potolsky 97-98).

For the families of these missing people, their sense of authenticity was determined by whether or not it confirmed their belief that their relatives were still alive. Therefore, the families accept the retrieval of their loved ones because it does not contradict their own personal narrative, according to which they are still alive and are going to return to them somehow; either unchanged or looking like a different person.

This preference for the ‘verisimilar’ rather than the ‘true’ when it comes to making sense of the world, which is at the core of *Il teatro* and *La sentenza*, was also the focus of Sciascia’s *L’affaire Moro*, as I argued in the previous chapter. The idea of the ‘willingness to believe’, that he reinforces here with the references to Pirandello’s *Come tu mi vuoi* and Borges’s *Tom Castro*, also resonates with Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s idea of the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ that is undertaken by the readers in an act of what he terms ‘poetic faith’:

In this idea originated the plan of the ‘lyrical Ballads’; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith (Coleridge 677).

⁴⁸ “Piú di un disgraziato, dopo anni, è ritornato così [...] – quasi senza piú aspetto – irriconoscibile – senza piú memoria – e sorelle, mogli, madri – madri – se lo son disputato! ‘È mio!’ ‘No, è mio!’ – Non perché sembrasse loro, no! (non può sembrare uguale il figlio dell’una a quello di un’altra!) – ma perché lo han creduto! lo han voluto credere! – E non c’è prove contrarie che tengano, quando si vuol credere!” (*Come tu mi vuoi* 205-206).

The willingness to believe of the families in the two cases presented by Sciascia and in Pirandello's and Borges's texts present their protagonists as evaluating reality in terms of literature; ignoring the facts that contradict their preferred version of events, and measuring truth according to the laws of fiction, not of reality.

6. *Il teatro della memoria* and *La busca de Averroes*: life as imitation of art

Sciascia states in *Il teatro* that the Bruneri-Canella case lends itself particularly well to becoming a play by Pirandello because it is already Pirandellian in its nature. In several other writings Sciascia discusses the narrow relationship between Pirandello's work and the reality of his time, a characteristic which he relates to the way in which Pirandello's plays are created. In *Pirandello e la Sicilia* Sciascia tells of how Pirandello got inspiration for many of his stories from a librarian, cavaliere Gubernatis, who selected for him the "più *pirandelliana* cronaca girgentana (ché il cavaliere sapeva trasegliere i fatti: e si può dire adempisse all'ufficio di *raccomandare* al suo amico autore i personaggi che, dalla cronaca, chiedevano un posto nella fantasia)" (OB vol. III 1067).⁴⁹ Again in this quote Sciascia reiterates his idea that some stories and characters demand to be given a place in literature, much as the characters in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* do. The relationship between fiction and historical fact in the work of Pirandello is something that Sciascia keeps mentioning in the many texts in which he commented on Pirandello's work. In the essay *Note pirandelliane*, included in *La corda pazzo*, Sciascia again notes Pirandello's ability to sense the dramatic potential in a real life event:

Pirandello opera insomma una specie di mediazione tra un fatto realmente accaduto in quel teatro che è la sua città e la vera e propria rappresentazione teatrale dello stesso fatto. In questa mediazione, tra i due fatti egualmente ed equamente teatrali, il fatto com'è e il fatto interpretato, la sua condizione d'autore è un po' simile a quella dei persiani di Montesquieu a teatro (OB vol. I 1089).⁵⁰

It is interesting to analyse this reference that Sciascia makes to Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* [Persian Letters] (1721), a satirical work in the form of letters that two Persian noblemen visiting Paris send home, and in which they reflect on their impressions of French society. In this essay Sciascia is arguably referring to the letter in which one of the characters writes about his experience in a Parisian theatre. When the character describes the space of the theatre, he mentions the stage only in passing, and presents the other

⁴⁹ "The more *Pirandellian* chronicles of Grigenti (because the cavaliere knew how to pick his events: and it is possible to say that he fulfilled the role of *recommending* to his friend, the author, characters from the chronicles that were asking for a place in fantasy)" (My translation).

⁵⁰ "Pirandello performs a sort of mediation between an event that has actually taken place in that theatre which is his city, and the proper theatrical representation of this same event. In this mediation between two equally theatrical events, the event as it was and the event as interpreted, his role as author is slightly similar to that of Montesquieu's Persians in the theatre" (My translation).

spaces of the theatre, where the audience sits, as the place where those parts of the play that he finds more interesting are staged. The writer of the letter does not differentiate between what is happening on stage and what is happening in the boxes of the theatre, since for him it is all part of an intricate network of performances. What Montesquieu intended as a critique of the Parisian society of his time through the eyes of the two Persian visitors, is what allows Sciascia to point out Pirandello's ability to consider the theatrical aspects of real life, which makes his theatre so unique. This reference to Montesquieu also enables a better understanding of Sciascia's claim that the 'memory theatre' in which the Bruneri-Canella case was staged was not Camillo or Fludd's 'memory theatre', but Pirandello's – a space in which theatricality is extended beyond the stage and into the world of the audience.

In both *La corda pazza* and *Pirandello e la Sicilia*, Sciascia also has recourse to Borges to elaborate on this ability of Pirandello to choose from real life subjects that adapt perfectly to fiction. For this purpose he refers to Borges's story *La busca de Averroes*, included in *El Aleph*. In the story, Averroes, having given himself the task of translating Aristotle's *Poetics*, struggles to grasp the meaning of the words 'tragedy' and 'comedy', lacking a concept of theatre. Sciascia describes Averroes's drama:

Non sapendo che cosa fosse il teatro, Averroè non riusciva a penetrare il significato delle due parole: e la vita gli scorreva sotto gli occhi indistinta nei suoi elementi tragici e comici, tragedia e commedia insieme, il grande vario mutevole teatro del mondo. E in Pirandello c'è appunto questo: una specie di *invenzione* del teatro; come di chi non conosce la convenzione tecnica ed espressiva del teatro vero e proprio e *inventa*, cioè nel senso più proprio *trova*, il teatro nella vita, nell'indistinto impetuoso scorrere di 'tragedia' e 'commedia' (OB vol. III 1053).⁵¹

Borges's *La busca de Averroes* aims to narrate the story of a defeat, "el caso de un hombre que se propone un fin que no está vedado a los otros, pero sí a él" (OC vol. I 587).⁵² While Averroes is surrounded by tragic and comic stories in life and is unable to recognise them as the elements of poetics that Aristotle discusses, Pirandello can identify precisely these elements in life and transform them into a play. However, Pirandello does not take all the credit for this transformation of the real into literary, since it is the farcical aspects of the society he writes about which are asking to be restored to a fictional realm. This is in fact what Sciascia emphasises in *Il teatro* throughout the constant literary references he makes, that the Bruneri-Canella case was not only staged in a theatre as a play by Pirandello, but

⁵¹ "Not knowing what theatre was, Averroes could not delve into the meaning of these two words: and life's tragic and comic elements passed him by unnoticed, tragedy and comedy together, the great diverse fickle theatre of the world. And in Pirandello we find precisely this: a sort of *invention* of theatre; as of someone who is not aware of the technical and expressive conventions of proper theatre and *invents*, or in this sense actually *finds*, the theatre in life, amongst the indistinct impetuous flow of 'tragedy' and 'comedy'" (My translation).

⁵² "[The case of] a man who sets himself a goal that is not forbidden to other men, but is forbidden to him" (*Collected Fictions* 241).

was also allowed to be staged in court by the Italian society of the early years of the fascist regime.

According to the image that Sciascia presents in *Il teatro* of Pirandello's 'memory theatre', this space would encompass much more than the stage, being closer to the idea of the world as a theatre that he mentions in the quotation above. However, he evokes the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, recurrent since antiquity,⁵³ with the intention of pointing out at a specific characteristic in the works of Pirandello. The key for Sciascia is that Pirandello does not merely draw inspiration for his plays from real events, shaping them afterwards according to the technical conventions of playwriting, but he finds, in the theatre of the world, events that are already theatrical in themselves, and restores them to the realm of fiction.

This poses a new problem, nevertheless related to the issue of verisimilitude and truth discussed earlier. The fact that Pirandello 'finds' his plays already existing in reality contradicts the basis of Aristotle's idea of mimesis, according to which art is an imitation of nature. However, what Sciascia suggests is that the events that Pirandello is able to identify in reality already exist invested with qualities that belong to art. This resonates with Oscar Wilde's claim in his essay against realism in art "The Decay of Lying" (1889) that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life" (61). It is interesting to briefly refer to a note Pirandello wrote about this same issue regarding his novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal*. After having received criticism because his story and characters were not credible enough, he added a note to a later edition of the text commenting on the irony that this verisimilitude, which is required from art, is not required from reality:

The absurdities of life don't need to be plausible, because they are true. On the other hand, the absurdities of art, in order to seem true, need to be plausible. And therefore, if plausible, they are no longer absurdities.

A real life event can be absurd; a work of art, if it is a work of art, cannot (My translation).⁵⁴

He then refers to a real case of bigamy that took place after the publication of *Il fu Mattia Pascal*, and which presents a striking similarity with his novel: a woman identified a corpse as her husband, in order to marry another man shortly after. It was later discovered that the woman's first husband had been in prison all that time, and only found out that he had been declared dead after he had served his sentence. Pirandello wonders how it was possible that some of the most incongruous details of the case were overlooked at the time, and notes that if it had been a fictional story, this would have never been the case:

⁵³ For an overview of the evolution of the concept of *theatrum mundi* throughout history, see Lynda G. Christian's *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea*.

⁵⁴ "Le assurdità della vita non hanno bisogno di parer verosimili, perché sono vere. All'opposto di quelle dell'arte che, per parer vere, hanno bisogno di essere verosimili. E allora, verosimili, non sono più assurdità. Un caso della vita può essere assurdo; un'opera d'arte, se è opera d'arte, no" (Pirandello *Il fu Mattia Pascal* 235).

Fantasy would have had more scruples, no doubt, than to pass over such a fact. And now fantasy, thinking of the lack of verisimilitude it was accused of back then, relishes knowing the implausibility that life is capable of. Even in the stories that life copies from art without knowing it" (My translation).⁵⁵

Pirandello goes as far as to assert that not only can real events can resemble literary works, but they might even be copying from them – highlighting with this ironic remark that the fact that the case he is presenting lacked so much verisimilitude is due to it being the result of a poorly planned imposture. Life imitating art, and more specifically, history imitating literature, is the key to the next link that can be established between *Il teatro* and the work of Borges.

7. *Il teatro della memoria, Tema del traidor y del héroe and L'affaire Moro*

In chapter two I discussed the common themes in *L'affaire Moro* and Borges's *Tema del traidor y del héroe*. I focused specifically on Sciascia's assertion during an interview that he found a parallelism between the figure of Aldo Moro and the character of Kilpatrick in Borges's story. The parallels that both *Il teatro* and *L'affaire Moro* share with *Tema del traidor y del héroe* provides an interesting angle to compare these two of Sciascia's *inchieste* which were also written within a relatively short period of time after Aldo Moro's death.

The first similarity between the three texts concerns issues of verisimilitude as those discussed in the previous section of this chapter. In *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, the narrator starts being suspicious about his ancestor's past when it begins to resemble a literary work. Likewise, Sciascia mistrusts the presentation that the government and the media have made of the Moro case because he feels that it is presented with the perfection of a literary work. These two stories that have now become part of collective memory, the story of Kilpatrick as a hero and of Moro as a man changed by his kidnapping, present qualities that they seem to have borrowed from art, and this is what gives them away as false. In *Il teatro*, Sciascia detects in the Bruneri-Canella case a readiness to become literature which for him is also proof that it conceals an imposture. The idea of the whole Bruneri-Canella case as a theatrical representation also appears in *Tema del traidor y del héroe*. In Borges's story, the death of Kilpatrick takes place in a theatre, but the narrator notes that the stage on which this representation was taking place was much larger than that space: "Kilpatrick fue ultimado en un teatro, pero de teatro hizo también la entera ciudad, y los actores fueron legión, y el drama coronado por su muerte abarcó muchos días y muchas

⁵⁵ "La fantasia si sarebbe fatto scrupolo, certamente, di passar sopra un tal dato di fatto; e ora gode, ripensando alla taccia di inverosimiglianza che anche allora le fu data, di far conoscere di quali reali inverosimiglianze sia capace la vita, anche nei romanzi che, senza saperlo, essa copia dell'arte" (Pirandello *Il fu Mattia Pascal* 240).

noches" (OC vol. I 497).⁵⁶ A very similar statement is made by Sciascia at the beginning of *L'affaire Moro*, when he describes the whole affair as a "melodrama di amore allo Stato che sulla scena italiana grandiosamente si recitò dal 16 marzo al 9 maggio del 1978" (OA vol. I, t. II 440).⁵⁷ There was an actual victim to this melodrama, he notes, and that was Aldo Moro, whose death was real even though the circumstances that led to it were staged.

The three texts also deal with the problem of double identity. Again, there are two characters with the same name but with different identities. In the case of *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, they are Kilpatrick as hero and Kilpatrick as traitor, and in the case of *Il teatro*, they are the real Canella up until his disappearance and the amnesiac taking up his identity and living on with his name. In *L'affaire Moro*, this split identity is constituted by Moro the real politician and Moro's image created by the government and media after he was kidnapped. The dramatic situation for these characters seems to increase from one case to the next. In *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, Kilpatrick's death redeems him from his betrayal, since it sparks the revolution. The tragedy is lived in this case by his great-grandson Ryan, who discovers the truth and feels compelled to maintain the illusion that his ancestor was a hero. In the case of *Il teatro*, the fact that the amnesiac adopts an identity that was not his and keeps it until his death has again no consequences for the real Canella, since he was likely to have died during the war. The tragedy is that of his family and friends who accepted him as Canella and believed this identity as true, and in his own drama of living with two identities – the drama Pirandello imagined in *Come tu mi vuoi*. In the case of Moro, however, the tragedy lies solely in the kidnapped Moro. He was, through the press, witness to this process whereby his own identity was replaced by that of a man who had gone mad due to being a prisoner, and who saw himself abandoned by the members of his own party and left to die. It is obviously essential to note, though, that the Bruneri-Canella case and the Moro case took place in real life, and that the story in *Tema del traidor y del héroe* is completely fictional. This is what Sciascia emphasises as the most tragic element of his *inchieste*, that these cases, which unfolded according to a fictional scheme, eventually had tragic real consequences.

In the text of *Il teatro*, Sciascia makes one reference to the Moro case, when he is commenting on a letter that the amnesiac sent to Renzo Canella, Giulio's brother, after the two had met in the mental hospital. Even though his first impression was that this man was not his brother, the moving letter signed L'Inconnu [The Unknown] made Renzo Canella start

⁵⁶ "Kilpatrick was murdered in a theatre, yet the entire city played the role of theatre, too, and the actors were legion, and the play that was crowned by Kilpatrick's death took place over many days and many nights" (*Collected Fictions* 145).

⁵⁷ "[M]elodrama of devotion to the State so spectacularly enacted on the Italian stage between 16 March and 9 May 1978" (*The Moro Affair* 29).

doubting his own memory, and eventually led to the acceptance of the man as Giulio by the whole family. Sciascia compares the effect of this letter and that of the letter sent by the self-proclaimed friends of Moro that was published in the papers after the politician's kidnap, claiming that the author of those letters was a different man from the Moro they knew:

[Q]uella [lettera] in cui gli amici di Aldo Moro dichiaravano di non riconoscerlo nelle lettere inviate dalla prigione delle Brigate Rosse (e in effetti si tratta di operazioni, a rovescio, analoghe: a promuovere un riconoscimento, *l'inconnu*; un disconoscimento, gli amici di Moro) (OA vol. II, t. I 622).⁵⁸

As he did for the Moro case, Sciascia closely analyses the letters and alleged dialogues with the amnesiac, and determines that the meaning that was attributed to them was imposed by a certain reading of these letters and dialogues. In *L'affaire Moro* such a reading led to the splitting in two of Moro's identity; the Moro before and after the kidnap. In *Il teatro*, such a reading results in the merging of the identities of the missing Canella and that of the unknown man. Even though the result is the opposite – as Sciascia points out in the quote above – the nature of these processes of misinterpretation is the same in the sense that they both alter the memory of the past. Not just the memory of the individuals involved in the case, but collective memory. This altered collective memory of the Moro case and the Bruneri-Canella case has as a result an altered historical record of both cases. This is also what happens, on a greater scale, in *Tema del traidor y del héroe*. Kilpatrick is remembered in history as a hero and praised as such by following generations, when in reality he was a traitor to the revolution. In Borges's story the same character can be remembered in history as having the complete opposite role to that he actually played, and Sciascia manages to find in the recent history of his own country two examples of how this can also happen outside the realm of the fictional.

8. Collective memory and history

This progression from individual memory, into collective memory, and finally into history, necessarily questions where are the boundaries between each of them, and how do events of the past become history mediated by memory. Much has been written about these questions, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve too deeply into them, but it is worth discussing some key ideas in relation to the presentation of these issues that Sciascia makes in *Il teatro*. An illustrative passage is that in which Sciascia makes another comparison between the amnesiac and a character in one of Pirandello's plays:

⁵⁸ "That [letter] in which the friends of Aldo Moro declared that they didn't recognise him in the letters sent from the prison of the Brigate rosse (and in fact these are opposed but analogous processes: in order to trigger recognition, for *l'inconnu*; lack of recognition, for Moro's friends)" (My translation).

[C]osì come il personaggio senza nome di Pirandello si era adagiato in quello di Enrico IV di Germania, il nostro si era adagiato in quello del professor Canella: in parte già fissato, già storia; in parte – ma in coerenza ai dati oggettivi e sentimentali già fissati, già storia – creato da un’immaginazione che a questo punto si potrebbe dire collettiva (OA vol. II, t. I 660).⁵⁹

Sciascia’s passing observation on the fixed quality of history and the collective imagination deserves to be considered in some detail. As I noted earlier, in the second half of the 20th century, encompassing the years when Sciascia was writing *Il teatro*, there is a rise in the interest in memory studies, and specifically in the way in which memory can be thought of as a collective experience. Maurice Halbwachs’s idea of ‘collective memory’ first displaced the focus of the process of remembering from the individual to the group. As Whitehead observes, Halbwachs considers that individuals, from the earliest stages of their life, “are always enclosed within some group, be it familial, religious, political, economic, or social” (126). This group existence will provide a backdrop against which memories will be constructed. As a consequence, Halbwachs considers that the ability to remember will also be linked to shared experiences, not due to “internal processes but to the reawakening of former experiences by external stimuli” (Whitehead 126). Halbwachs’s concept of memory, however, seems to relegate individual memory to a secondary role, to such an extent that it would seem individual recollection is not possible outside a social group. As Whitehead observes, “[i]ndividual memory is therefore effectively displaced by Halbwachs and absorbed into the collective memory” (129). This shortcoming in Halbwachs’s understanding of collective memory has been noted by a number of critics, who have attempted to redefine this concept, responding with more nuanced terminology to his notion of remembrance as a primarily collective activity.⁶⁰

In this quotation from *Il teatro*, Sciascia’s reference to collective imagination seems to be quite close to Halbwachs’s idea of the process whereby collective memory is created. Throughout *Il teatro* Sciascia often draws attention to the participation of others in the amnesiac’s attempts at reconstructing Canella’s memory. Sciascia notes that the memoir he published was rather the result of a collective effort, in which Canella’s family and friends had collaborated with testimonies of their own memories and impressions of the missing man, which the amnesiac had then compiled in a book. As I argued, this presentation of the amnesiac’s identity as a group creation was, for Sciascia, directly related to a problem of authorship. Considering the amnesiac’s reconstruction of the memories of another man as

⁵⁹ “In the same way in which Pirandello’s nameless character had adapted to that of Henry IV of Germany, ours had adapted to that of professor Canella: partly already fixed, already history; and partly – but keeping coherence with the objective and sentimental data already fixed, already history – created by an imagination that at this point we could call collective imagination” (My translation).

⁶⁰ For a review of the most relevant critiques of this aspect of Halbwachs’s work, and other scholars’ alternative terminology regarding ‘collective memory’, see Whitehead’s *Memory* p.129-130 and Barash’s *Collective Memory and the Historical Past* p.173-175.

an analogous process to that of the writing of a literary work, allowed for a discussion of Sciascia's concept of authorship as also a collaborative concept, in which the readers and critics of a literary work contribute not only to the meaning of the work, but also to the writer's persona. I illustrated this idea of authorship in Sciascia with the examples of the image as writers of Pirandello and Borges that he also wrote about.

Considering this passage of *Il teatro* in relation to the work of Halbwachs not only allows for a discussion of Sciascia's personal understanding of memory as a collective process and linked to issues of authorship, but also draws attention to the subtle statement Sciascia is making about the relationship between memory and history. At first glance, it seems that Sciascia does not consider there to be a significant difference between collective memory and history. Where to draw the line between the two is also an issue that has been widely discussed by scholars concerned with the study of memory. For Halbwachs, collective memory encompasses events that belong within the living memory of a particular group. Whitehead observes that, for Halbwachs, "[i]t is only once social groups have disappeared and their thoughts and memories have vanished that history preserves and fixes the past" (131). Halbwachs's definition, which sets the limits between memory and history in relation to the span of time either of them can cover, does not seem to be in agreement with Sciascia's statement in *Il teatro*. For him, at the time of the Bruneri-Canella case, the figure of Henry IV, who lived in the 11th century, and the figure of Canella, who was still supposed to be alive, are equally fixed in history. Fixed only in part, however, as he notes that part of Canella's identity is fixed in history, but another part is collectively imagined. The part of the figure of Canella that is already fixed is that which has already been set in writing, in the form of the memoir that the amnesiac had recently published. This idea of history as fixed in writing and memory as a more fleeting and dynamic concept brings us to Pierre Nora's distinction between the two:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past (8).

Nora's distinction between memory and history is not, unlike Halbwachs's, tied to a determined time span, but is based instead on a difference between memories unconsciously incorporated into the self, and memories inscribed by means of writing (Whitehead 142). Nora states a degree of mistrust for modern reliance on the preservation of memory in the form of writing or other types of material traces. He diagnoses an "obsession with the archive that marks our age" (Nora 13), suggesting that what he considers to be 'true memory' risks being replaced by its written representation:

Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image. What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording. The less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs (Nora 13).

Sciascia's passage in *Il teatro* arguably shares some of Nora's mistrust for the preservation of faithful memories in the form of writing, as he emphasises that the publication of the amnesiac's memoir only contributed to fix a false version of Canella as if it were incontestable historical facts. Sciascia's statement, however, must be taken as an ironical observation. His aim is not to manifest his mistrust for the written form or to argue that the truth of the past can never be reached – which would contradict his own understanding of the role of literature – but to draw attention to the instances in which what is given the name of 'history' is observed with reverence, considered to be an inviolable institution, and under these premises its faithfulness to the reality of the past is never questioned again.

The example he chooses to illustrate this, Pirandello's play *Enrico IV* (1921), reinforces this idea. In the play, a nameless character suffers an accident while attending a costume party dressed up as King Henry IV of Germany. After he recovers, he continues living his life as if this was his real identity, so all the other characters believe that he is mad and play along with his fantasy in order not to upset him, recreating for him the events in the life of the historical character. However, he later reveals that he has consciously chosen to live as Henry IV just for the reassurance of knowing that all the events in his life are already dictated by history, and therefore they cannot be changed. Sciascia quotes a speech from Pirandello's character:

E per quanto tristi i miei casi, e orrendi i fatti; aspre le lotte, dolorose le vicende; già storia, non cangiano più, non possono più cangiare, capite? Fissati per sempre: che voi vi ci potevate adagiare, ammirando come ogni effetto seguiva obbediente alla sua causa, con perfetta logica, e ogni avvenimento si svolgeva preciso e coerente in ogni suo particolare. Il piacere, il piacere della storia, insomma, che è così grande! (OA vol. II, t. I 660).⁶¹

Pirandello's character finds comfort in the narrative structure of history, which allows him to pre-empt the causes and effects of the events in his life before they take place. There is a sense of purpose to his life as Henry IV that he would only be able to ascertain in retrospect had he continued to live his life as before the accident. Using this quotation, Sciascia is criticising the attitude of conformity of those who decided to play along with Bruneri's impersonation of Canella at the time, and now encourages his readers to reconsider the case.

⁶¹ "And as much as my case might seem sad, and its facts seem horrible, my struggle harsh, my experiences painful; they change no more, they cannot change, do you see? Fixed forever: so that you can sit comfortably, admiring how every effect diligently follows its cause, with perfect logic, and every event develops precisely and coherently in its every detail. The pleasure, the pleasure of history, really, which is so great!" (My translation).

Borges argues for a similar attitude towards narratives fixed in history in his poem *El pasado*, in *El oro de los tigres*. From the onset, he points out the perception we have from the present of the past as something unchangeable: “[t]odo era fácil, nos parece ahora, |en el plástico ayer irrevocable” (OC vol. I 1084).⁶² However, he shows that this perception is illusory. After listing a series of events that, in retrospect, seem to have determined the course of human history, he reminds us that these events might as easily not have happened at all, and that only became significant for history by considering them in hindsight:

Esas cosas pudieron no haber sido.
 Casi no fueron. Las imaginamos
 en un fatal ayer inevitable.
 No hay otro tiempo que el ahora, este ápice
 del ya será y del fue, de aquel instante
 en que la gota cae en la clepsidra.
 El ilusorio ayer es un recinto
 de figuras inmóviles de cera
 o de reminiscencias literarias
 que el tiempo irá perdiendo en sus espejos.
 Enrico el Rojo, Carlos Doce, Breno
 y esa tarde inasible que fue tuya
 son en su eternidad, no en la memoria (OC vol. I 1084).⁶³

In the last three lines, Borges underscores the difference between the reality of the past, out of reach from present experience, and the memory we preserve of this past. As Sciascia did in his comparison of the figure of Henry IV and that of Canella, Borges puts on the same level the memory of historical figures and of past personal experiences. This would also seem to place Borges closer to Nora’s distinction between memory and history than to Halbwachs’s. However, what Sciascia’s and Borges’s perspectives support is not Nora’s mistrust of written preservation of memory, but a critical approach towards history that does not consider it as a fixed and unquestionable institution.

Barash introduces a third element to his distinction between collective memory and history that serves to illuminate Sciascia’s and Borges’s approach. He observes that there is a latent “shared *êthos*” (170) which overlaps both the spheres of “the historically recalled past and of living memory that collectives retain” (170). Barash underscores the importance of acknowledging that this *êthos*, because it is “deposited in the passive recesses of shared symbolic forms, is more often a source of ideological claims and political mythologies than of empirically ascertainable comprehension” (170). He then defines the role the historian has to play in acknowledging this:

⁶² “All was easy, we think now |in the plastic and irrevocable past” (My translation).

⁶³ “Those things could have not happened. |They almost didn’t exist. We imagine them |in a fixed, unavoidable yesterday. |There’s no other time than now, this speck |of the ‘will be’ and the ‘already was’; that instant |when the drop falls in the hourglass. |The illusory yesterday is an enclosure |of motionless wax figures |or literary reminiscences |that time will gradually lose in its mirrors. |Erik the Red, Charles XII, Brennus |and that ungraspable afternoon that was yours |exist in their eternity, not in memory” (My translation).

Where collective memory [...] infuses group experience without necessarily occasioning explicit notice or reflection, the historian, far from naively adopting the predominant preconceptions of her present context, seeks to bring them to explicit awareness in order to explore their specific difference from the attitudes at work in the past under investigation (Barash 171-172).

In *Il teatro*, Sciascia is taking the historian's role as Barash describes it, by means of his use of literary references, and of terminology that belongs to the classical and Renaissance art of memory, to investigate an event in the 20th century. His *inchiesta* brings to the fore the development of the concept of memory that has taken place in the years spanning from the time when the terms 'artificial memory' and 'memory theatre' were first used, to Sciascia's present time. His aim is to point out that, despite the new connotations that have been incorporated into the meaning of these terms, the Bruneri-Canella case still seemed to have been assessed according to the notion of memory that defined the classical and Renaissance mnemonics – a system that did not question the faithfulness of the memories retrieved with regards to the events of the past. The 'willingness to believe' that Sciascia denounces in those who believed the amnesiac to be Canella is similar to what surprised the narrator in Borges's *Pierre Menard* about Menard's concept of history: "[l]a verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió" (OC vol. I 449).⁶⁴ Borges is also acknowledging here the development that the idea of history has gone through between Cervantes's and Menard's time. Likewise, by referring to *Pierre Menard* in *Il teatro*, Sciascia is calling for his readers to acknowledge this shift of the meaning of 'history' and 'memory', two essential concepts for the shared *éthos* that defines collective identity throughout time.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the connections between Sciascia's *Il teatro della memoria* and the work of Borges. I have highlighted how these links with Borges also reinforce the connection between *Il teatro* and *L'affaire Moro*, texts which were written in close temporal proximity even if apparently unrelated in their subjects. I have argued that even though Sciascia presented the writing of *Il teatro* as a distraction from his political duties, the text indirectly addresses the same issues as *L'affaire Moro*, and the connections the two *inchieste* establish with Borges make this link between them more evident.

I have structured the sections of the chapter according to the different levels of intertextual relations that each of Borges's texts establish with Sciascia's *Il teatro* and *La sentenza*. I began unpacking the quotation of *Funes el memorioso* that Sciascia includes in *Il teatro* to explore Sciascia's idea of memory. I have then analysed Sciascia's understanding of some

⁶⁴ "Historical truth, for Menard, is not 'what happened'; it is what we *believe* happened" (*Collected Fictions* 94).

terms belonging to the classical and early modern art of memory through his reference to *Pierre Menard* in the final note to *Il teatro*. I have also discussed the problem of identity in *Il teatro* linked to the problem of authorship in *Pierre Menard*, mediated by references to Pirandello. A footnote in *La sentenza* in which Sciascia claims that Borges based *El impostor inverosímil Tom Castro* on the Bruneri-Canella case has allowed me to explore the notion of verisimilitude in the works of both authors. Building on this alleged common inspiration for *Il teatro* and *Tom Castro*, in the following section I have referred to Sciascia's comparison of the genesis of Pirandello's plays and Borges's *La busca de Averroes*. Finally, I have explored the similarities between the themes of *Il teatro* and *Tema del traidor y del héroe*, and I have tried to show how these are the same themes that Sciascia developed in *L'affaire Moro* to denounce the split identity of Moro that had been created by the government and media and which eventually led to the death of the politician. The progression from the direct quotation of Borges by Sciascia to the similarity of the themes between the two authors' work aims at arguing that a reading of *Il teatro della memoria* from the perspective of Borges allows for a much deeper exploration of its themes than has so far been addressed by existing criticism. In my analysis I have discussed Sciascia's text in relation to some key aspects of memory studies, paying particular attention to the role that memory plays in the configuration of identity, and to the relationship between collective memory and history. This perspective has allowed me to highlight, in a text that explicitly deals with memory, Sciascia's views on these issues, issues which nevertheless will also underlie his other texts, and which are vital to the analysis of his understanding of the relationship between history and fiction throughout his work.

CHAPTER 4. Literature Taking the Place of History: *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* as Historiographic Metafiction

Non Dio ha creato il mondo, ma sono i libri che lo creano
(*L'inesistente Borges* OA vol. II, t. I 770).¹

Sciascia's most prominent historical novel, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, deserves to be studied in detail for the unique place it occupies in his literary production. It is also enlightening to consider it in relation to the work of Borges, after having analysed the presence of his writing in other works by Sciascia in the previous chapters of this thesis. Contrary to what is the case in most of the texts discussed in the previous chapters, the presence of Borges is not explicit at first glance in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. There are no quotations or references that lead back to any particular text of the Argentine author, and yet the concerns about the relationship between history and fiction which constitute the main theme of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* are also found at the core of Borges's writing, as I will argue. Also, I will show that analysing *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* from a comparative perspective which includes Borges's writing allows an enhanced reading of the novel as a metafictional work.

Il Consiglio d'Egitto is a fictionalised account of the real imposture of Giuseppe Vella, a priest who lived in Sicily in the late 18th century and who forged a series of translations that allegedly revealed the history of the Arab presence in the island. In the novel, Vella starts by corrupting the original manuscript of a life of Prophet Mohammed and producing its false translation, to which he gives the title *Consiglio di Sicilia*. He soon realises that the false historical information that he is providing can have an impact also in the present – in the troubled climate of the French Revolution, revealing the origins of certain baronial privileges can tilt the balance in favour of the Sicilian nobility, keen to retain these privileges, or in favour of the viceroy, interested in affirming the power of the crown on the island. Vella starts receiving gifts and favours from those worried that the manuscript may reveal controversial information about their ancestors. Following the enthusiasm with which the *Consiglio di Sicilia* is received, Vella announces the finding of a new text he intends to translate, the *Consiglio d'Egitto*, for which this time he has created the manuscript from scratch, not just forged the translation. Thus Vella's influence on the political situation of his time continues to increase, at the same time as his imposture escalates: from forged translations to forged manuscripts, and even to the fabrication of objects such as false medals and coins to support the authenticity of his work. Motivated at first only by the privileges he is obtaining from being in charge of such an important task as that of clarifying a dark period of Sicilian

¹ "It is not God who created the world, but books" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 134).

history, Vella however progressively loses interest in these and starts to regard his work no longer as an imposture, but as a work of literature which he wants to be valued as such. He therefore decides to confess his imposture, and is imprisoned for it.

In my analysis of the novel, I will first undertake a close reading of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* alongside Borges's short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, in *Ficciones*. I will focus on the motif of the mirror, which plays an essential role for the structuring of the narrative in both texts. I will relate the mirroring images in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* to the three categories of *mise en abyme* identified by Lucien Dällenbach, in order to show that some of them point towards a metafictional level of the text which has been mostly neglected by criticism so far. I will argue that most critics have focussed on the mirroring images that I relate to Dällenbach's *mise en abyme* of the *énoncé* and *énonciation*, but that those which direct the readers towards a referent beyond the text, Dällenbach's *mise en abyme* of the code, have been largely overlooked. This analysis allows us to place *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* within what Hutcheon has termed historiographic metafiction. Ruth Glynn classifies *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* among what she calls anti-illusionist novels, a term related to Hutcheon's concept and also linked to Hayden White's discussion about historical narratives that I introduced in chapter two of this thesis. Building on the work of these critics, I will expand on the analysis of the self-aware dimension that can be found in Sciascia's novel, departing from the premise that it is a novel about the problematic nature of historical narratives and at the same time a historical narrative itself. I will argue that the use of a fictional form permits Sciascia to problematize the role of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* in collective memory from within the narrative structure of the novel.

In order to develop my analysis of this metafictional dimension, I will focus the last part of the chapter on discussing the position that Sciascia's novel occupies in relation to historiography, particularly regarding the figure of Giuseppe Vella. To do so, I will consider other historical accounts of the true events behind the novel. These are Domenico Scinà's *Prospetto letterario*, written at the time of the imposture, and Adelaide Albanese's *Il problema dell'arabica impostura dell'abate Vella*, published shortly after Sciascia's text, both of which present very dissimilar versions of the events to the version given in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Lastly, focusing on the three contrasting images of Abbot Vella that these accounts present, I will relate them to the theme of Borges's short story *Tres versiones de Judas*, in *Ficciones*. My comparative reading of the work of both writers will argue that they pose similar questions about the reliability of historical narratives and that they acknowledge, from within their own narrative, the influence that fictional works can have in the structuring of what we consider to be history.

1. The past as a space for fiction

In *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, Vella's translations are at first taken for historical truth, instead of a literary imposture, because they refer to a period of history for which there were no historiographical documents available. In the novel there are frequent references to how Vella's task is to shed light on the darkness of the past. For example, in one passage Vella's work is described in this way: "secoli di storia, di civiltà, dissepoliti dalle tenebre in cui giacciono, riportati alla luce della coscienza" (OA vol. I 358).² However, what Vella is doing is not retrieving the lost past from the darkness through his translation, but using that void as a space to create the fiction that was going to be taken for history in the decade to come, until his imposture was discovered. The narrator compares Vella's creative process to the job Vella had in the past, as a numerologist, where he interpreted and allocated numbers to the dreams of his clients so that they could use them to play the lottery: "[n]ella sua mente era il giuoco dei dadi, delle date, dei nomi [...] di nuovo si agitavano martellanti dentro il cieco passato" (OA vol. I 358-359).³ The images of blindness and darkness to represent a period of the past from which there are no historiographical records are linked with the possibility these offer for the creation of Vella's fantasies: "quel mondo che veniva declinando come impostura si sollevava come ondata di luce a investire la realtà, a penetrarla, a trasfigurarla" (OA vol. I 368).⁴

It is interesting to compare this idea of the unknown as darkness to a similar image in Borges's *Funes el memorioso*. The narrator notes that it was difficult for Funes to sleep, since he could not help getting distracted by the memory of every detail of the environment that surrounded him. This state is presented as opposed to Funes's condition before the accident that provided him with his extraordinary memory. Before then, the narrator says, Funes "había sido lo que son todos los cristianos: un ciego, un sordo, un abombado, un desmemoriado [...]. Diecinueve años había vivido como quien sueña" (OC vol. I 488).⁵ The excess of memories makes it difficult for Funes to fall asleep and consequently to dream, since he is aware of every detail of the present that surrounds him and the past he has perceived. The only space where Funes is free to imagine is what he has never seen, and therefore cannot remember:

² "Centuries of history and of civilisation exhumed from the shadows and brought forth into the light of knowledge" (*The Council of Egypt* 12).

³ "His mind was busy juggling dates and names [...] now they bounced noisily along blind passages of the past" (*The Council of Egypt* 13).

⁴ "[T]he fraudulent world he was delineating surged up like a wave of light to invade, penetrate, and transform reality" (*The Council of Egypt* 28).

⁵ "[H]e had been what every man was – blind, deaf, befuddled, and virtually devoid of memory [...]. He had lived, he said, for nineteen years as though in a dream" (*Collected Fictions* 134).

Hacia el Este, en un trecho no amanzanado, había casas nuevas, desconocidas. Funes las imaginaba negras, compactas, hechas de tiniebla homogénea; en esa dirección volvía la cara para dormir. También solía imaginarse el fondo del río, mecido y anulado por la corriente” (OC vol. I 490).⁶

The lack of perception is associated with the darkness of the new houses unknown to Funes, and of the bottom of the river. These unknown, dark areas are the only ones that allow Funes to fall asleep, and to recreate his condition before his accident, which was most similar to dreaming. If Funes before he had a prodigious memory was ‘what every man was’ it is implied that everyone who is not Funes – including the narrator, who constantly points out the imperfections of his ability to perceive and remember as Funes did – continues to live as if they were dreaming.

In *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, after his imposture has been exposed, Vella also finds many similarities between dreaming and the way in which humans make sense of the world, and more specifically, in the way in which they remember:

La vita è davvero un sogno: l’uomo vuole averne coscienza e non fa che inventare cabale; ogni tempo la sua cabala, ogni uomo la sua... E facciamo costellazioni di numeri, del sogno che è la vita [...] E c’erano i ricordi. Dentro il sogno del presente sognava ora il passato (OA vol. I 484).⁷

Vella progressively starts to appreciate his creation of the forged books not as an imposture, but as the creative process whereby a work of art is produced. This is what leads to his decision to reveal the imposture: “più forte era il gusto di offrire al mondo la rivelazione dell’impostura, della fantasia di cui nel *Consiglio di Sicilia* e nel *Consiglio d’Egitto* aveva dato luminosa prova” (OA vol. I 483-484).⁸ This new condition of writer is compared again to his old job as numerologist: “[i]nseguiva i fatti della vita, il passato e il presente, a cavarne sentimenti e significati come un tempo dai sogni degli altri estraeva i numeri del lotto [...] Il vecchio mestiere di *numerista* rionale gli dava parole ad esprimere, al meno approssimativamente, la sua cabala” (OA vol. I 484).⁹ Extracting numbers from dreams is for Vella equivalent to making sense of an unknown past, both being in essence a process of fictionalisation.

⁶ “Off towards the east, in an area that had not yet been cut up into city blocks, there were new houses, unfamiliar to Ireneo. He pictured them to himself as black, compact, made of homogeneous shadow; he would turn his head in that direction to sleep. He would also imagine himself at the bottom of a river, rocked (and negated) by the current” (*Collected Fictions* 137).

⁷ “Life really is a dream. Men want to be aware, to understand, and they do nothing but to invent cabalas. Every age has its own cabala, every man his own. And out of the dream that life is we form constellations of numbers [...]. And there were memories. Within the dream of the present, he now also dreamed the past” (*The Council of Egypt* 190-191).

⁸ “[H]e had a far stronger appetite for showing the world what luminous proof of imagination and ingenuity he had given in the *Council of Sicily* and the *Council of Egypt*” (*The Council of Egypt* 190).

⁹ “He followed public events, past and present, in order to deduce their meaning and portent just as once he had delivered lotto numbers from people’s dreams. [...] His old occupation as a numerist [sic.] supplied him with the words to express, at least approximately, his own cabala” (*The Council of Egypt* 190).

In his internal monologue, Vella links remembering to dreaming, and dreaming to fantasy, stating that “solo le cose della fantasia sono belle, ed è fantasia anche il ricordo” (OA vol. I 485).¹⁰ In this way he justifies his imposture, which comes from replacing with fantasy something for which there was a lack of memory. For him, there is hardly any difference between the old job he used to have, in which he assigned random numbers to the different elements in dreams, and the job of creating false memories out of a limited amount of vague historical facts, which are all that is known of what life was like in Sicily when it was under Arab domination. Finally, he compares his fantasy of the Arab presence in Sicily to the unknown history of the Arab presence in Sicily, as if both stood on the same level and all that differentiated them was the name they are given: “[a]ltri direbbe alla storia: io dico alla favola” (OA vol. I 485).¹¹

In this and other passages of the novel, Vella links his idea of history to that of literature, both of which get entangled in his imposture. The boundaries between them are blurred by the fact that there are no documents – other than his corrupted and forged manuscripts – that can prove the truthfulness of what he is presenting as the result of historiographical research. For him, his work is a literary work, and he believes that it will continue to exist as such once it has been revealed that it is not historically accurate, but an imposture:

Aveva coscienza che nel suo lavoro, in quel che effettivamente era, ci fosse qualità di fantasia, d'arte; che, svelata tra qualche secolo l'impostura o, in ogni caso, oltre la sua morte, sarebbe rimasto il romanzo, lo straordinario romanzo dei musulmani di Sicilia (OA vol. I 391).¹²

History and literature are, even if entangled, different for Vella, inasmuch as literature is appreciated as art and history is appreciated as truth. However, the difference for him is merely in the status enjoyed by a particular text, not in the way in which said text is produced.

According to Vella, the task of the historian is always an imposture, and it has more merit to invent it from scratch rather than to retrieve it from documental sources:

E allora Giuseppe pianamente gli spiegava che il lavoro dello storico è tutto un imbroglio, un'impostura: e che c'era più merito ad inventarla, la storia, che a trascriverla da vecchie carte, da antiche lapidi, da antichi sepolcri (OA vol. I 393).¹³

Moreover, for Vella, that which is considered history can never convey a completely faithful account of the past. To convince his assistant and accomplice Cammilleri that what they are

¹⁰ “Only the things of fantasy are beautiful. And memory, too, is a fantasy” (*The Council of Egypt* 192).

¹¹ “Others would say history, but I say fable” (*The Council of Egypt* 192).

¹² “[He] was aware that his work, his real work, had elements of imagination and artistry; when, in a few centuries or, in any event, after his death, the historical fraud would be discovered, the romance [the Italian word *romanzo* means ‘novel’, not ‘romance’] he had created would still remain, the extraordinary romance [novel] of the Moslems of Sicily (*The Council of Egypt* 61).

¹³ “At that point, Don Giuseppe would explain to him at length how the work of the historian is all deception, all fraud; how there was more merit in inventing history than in transcribing it from old maps and tablets and ancient tombs” (*The Council of Egypt* 64).

doing is not wrong, Vella reflects on how what remains as history does not take into account, for example, the lives of ordinary people:

Tutta un'impostura. La storia non esiste. Forse che esistono le generazioni di foglie che sono andate via da quell'albero, un autunno appresso all'altro? Esiste l'albero, esistono le sue foglie nuove: poi anche queste foglie se ne andranno; e a un certo punto se ne andrà anche l'albero: in fumo, in cenere. La storia delle foglie, la storia dell'albero. Fesserie! Se ogni foglia scrivesse la sua storia, se quest'albero scrivesse la sua, allora diremmo: eh sì, la storia... Vostro nonno ha scritto la sua storia? E vostro padre? E il mio? E i nostri avoli e trisavoli?... Sono discesi a marcire nella terra né più e né meno che come foglie, senza lasciare storia... (OA vol. I 393).¹⁴

Vella compares the leaves of the tree to the lives of ordinary people, who will leave no trace of their existence in history once they die. Likewise, he compares the lives of kings, nobles and popes to the branches of the same tree: even if their lives might count for more in history, they are also subject to be eventually removed from the tree altogether. And so finally also the tree will disappear, leaving nothing of what is called the past actually accessible from the present. The key to Vella's imposture resides in this impossible link between the present moment and the actuality of the past. Vella's belief that the truth of the past cannot be recovered from the present allows him to create a fictional past that will, however, have consequences in the present.

In one passage of the novel, the new viceroy of Sicily, Lopez y Royo, praises Vella's task of translating books that deal with the past and leave the present alone, failing to realise that Vella is actually inventing the *Consiglio d'Egitto* in order to change the privileges enjoyed by the nobility in the present: "io ammiro gente come voi, che se ne sta a cercare le cose del passato campando in santa pace col presente, senza il prurito di mettere sottosopra il mondo" (OA vol. I 439).¹⁵ For Lopez, the dangerous texts are those that are written in the present to subvert the present social order, and he considers Vella's investigation of the past an innocent task that does not represent a threat for anything he stands for. Lopez's statement reveals the irony that he considers Vella's task as innocuous inasmuch as it is presented as the task of a historian. However, when Vella comes forward presenting his translations as the result of his imagination, that is to say, as a fictional work, he is imprisoned. In a similar way to that in which *Don Quijote* changed its meaning from when it

¹⁴ "It's all fraud. History does not exist. Perhaps you think the generations of leaves that have dropped from that tree autumn after autumn still exist? The tree exists; its new leaves exist; but these leaves will also fall; in time, the tree itself will disappear – in smoke, in ashes. A history of those leaves? A history of that tree? Nonsense! If every leaf were to write its history, then we would say, 'Ah yes, this is history...' grandfather, did he write his history? Or your father? Or mine? Or our great-grandfathers or our great-great-grandfathers? They went down into earth to rot, no more and no less, like the leaves, and they left no history of themselves..." (*The Council of Egypt* 64).

¹⁵ "I admire men like you. You spend your time looking for things in the past and get along in blessed peace with the present. You aren't itching to turn the world upside down" (*The Council of Egypt* 127).

was written by Cervantes to when it was written by Menard, so Vella's translations change from being historical documents to being an imposture.

Vella's view of history is different to that of Di Blasi, the other main character in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* whose story develops parallel to that of Vella and whom at the beginning seems to be the polar opposite to the character of the priest. Di Blasi is a jurist who, inspired by the French Revolution, attempts a similar revolt in Sicily, but fails and is imprisoned and executed. He is one of the very few people to suspect that Vella's translations might be false. At the point where he is certain that this is the case, he reflects on what history means for him: "[e] crediamo che la verità era prima della storia, e che la storia è menzogna. Invece è la storia che riscatta l'uomo della menzogna, lo porta alla verità" (OA vol. I 446).¹⁶ For him, the value of history resides in being the means towards truth, and that is why he is initially appalled by the idea that Vella might be falsifying his translations. However, as the story progresses Di Blasi's opinion changes, and in the end, he appreciates Vella's imposture because it shows the real face of the society in which they live:

[Q]uesto non è un volgarissimo crimine. Questo è uno di quei fatti che servono a definire una società, un momento storico. In realtà, se in Sicilia la cultura non fosse, più o meno consciamente, impostura; se non fosse strumento in mano del potere baronale, e quindi finzione, continua finzione e falsificazione della realtà, della storia... Ebbene, io vi dico che l'avventura dell'abate Vella sarebbe stata impossibile (OA vol. I 452).¹⁷

Di Blasi realises that the history of the society in which he lives is as much of an imposture as that imagined by Vella. The origin of the baronial privileges and Vella's portrait of Arab life in Sicily come from equally obscure sources. The difference resides in the fact that Vella, in revealing his imposture, can try to redeem his work as literature, whereas the accepted order in which the privileges of the ruling classes support themselves will continue to exist as an unmasked fiction. Di Blasi is the only character who learns to appreciate the literary value of Vella's work, and before he is executed he states that he admires Vella's fantasy (OA vol. I 492). The rest of the characters choose to continue living oblivious of the truth that Vella's imposture has revealed about the society in which they live.

2. *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* and *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*

It is interesting to analyse further the implications behind the idea of history as truth versus literature as imposture as presented by the case of Vella's in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*.

¹⁶ "And we believe that truth came before history, and that history is a lie. Instead, it is history that redeems men from falsehood and error and brings them to the truth" (*The Council of Egypt* 138).

¹⁷ "[T]his is no common crime. This is one of those facts which help define a society, a historical moment. If culture in Sicily were not, more or less consciously, a fraud, it were not a tool in the hands of the barons, and therefore an imposture, an endless imposture and falsification of reality – well, I tell you this, Abbot Vella's adventure would have been impossible" (*The Council of Egypt* 144).

Throughout the novel, most references made to literature seem to have a negative connotation. From the books that the viceroy burns, to the French books that Di Blasi reads and which inspire his attempt at a revolution, literature is considered as a potential threat against society's hegemonic values. As reflected in Lopez's remarks quoted above, Vella's translations are not considered part of this literature, since they deal with the past and not with the present. However, once Vella presents them as his own literary creation, they become justification for his arrest.¹⁸ Even though Vella longs for his work to be admired as literature, he is aware that for everyone else it will at least initially be regarded as nothing but a crime. When he looks back on his imposture, he refers to the library to which he accompanied the Moroccan ambassador to first look at the manuscript as the scene of his crime (OA vol. I 473). Vella's observation about the library invests everything that has to do with books with a sense of falseness that pervades the whole of the novel.

The story in Borges's short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, in *Ficciones*, is arguably very similar to Vella's imposture as Sciascia portrays it in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Almost by accident, the narrator discovers the existence of a country called Uqbar when he reads an entry about it in a pirated copy of an encyclopaedia. This copy is only a few pages longer than its original edition, but this short addition is enough to reflect the existence of a whole new country. Progressively, the written accounts of this new reality that appear multiply and expand, from an encyclopaedia entry about the country of Uqbar to the forty volumes on Tlön, the imaginary region in which is set all of Uqbar's literature. This profusion of literature is accompanied by the apparition of physical objects that seem to belong to the reality of Tlön, which the narrator defines as "la primera intrusión del mundo fantástico en el mundo real" (OC vol. I 441).¹⁹ The narrator has discovered that behind the creation of Tlön is a secret society founded in the 17th century which initially set out to create, in several generations, a new country. In the 19th century an American millionaire expands the project to the creation of a whole new planet. It is the discovery of the complete encyclopaedia of Tlön which triggers the definitive imposition of a new reality that takes over the reality of the narrator:

Manuales, antologías, resúmenes, versiones literales, reimpresiones autorizadas y reimpresiones piráticas de la Obra Mayor de los Hombres abarrotaron y siguen abarrotando la tierra. Casi inmediatamente, la realidad cedió en más de un punto" (OC vol. I 442).²⁰

The narrator ends the story with a bleak description of the effects that the discovery of Tlön has had on the world that he used to know: "[e]l contacto y el hábito de Tlön han

¹⁸ For an analysis of the progressive change of meaning associated with the dichotomies history-truth and history-imposture in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* from a semiotic perspective, see Anna Maria Toti's *Leonardo Sciascia, la scrittura investigatrice: Analisi semiotica de Il Consiglio d'Egitto*.

¹⁹ "[T]he first intrusion of the fantastic world of Tlön into the real world" (*Collected Fictions* 80).

²⁰ "Handbooks, anthologies, surveys, 'literal translations', authorized and pirated reprints of Mankind's Greatest Masterpiece filled the world, and still do. Almost immediately, reality 'caved in' at more than one point" (*Collected Fictions* 81).

desintegrado este mundo [...] ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro, del que nada sabemos con certidumbre – ni siquiera que es falso” (OC vol. I 443).²¹ The narrator foresees a future in which all reality will be replaced with the reality of Tlön, up until the point in which the world will become Tlön (OC vol. I 443).

The impact that the discovery of the encyclopaedia articles and volumes about Uqbar and Tlön have on reality in Borges’s story is comparable to the impact that Vella’s translations have on the conception of Sicilian history in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*. Also the development and expansion of the effects that both impostures have in the reality in which they appear are similar: Vella’s imposture starts with the corruption of a manuscript and its false translation, and the first evidence of Uqbar appears in the form of a forged encyclopaedia article. However, Vella’s project later escalates to the creation of a manuscript from scratch, and even the apparition of physical objects (medals and coins) that support the veracity of his task. The supposedly historical facts revealed by Vella’s translations also serve other people as supporting arguments in other documents they write, in the same way in which the discovery of the forty volumes of the encyclopaedia of Tlön triggers the apparition of numerous other texts that discuss them.

In both *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* and *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, a fictional realm manages to make an intrusion into reality. In *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, Vella’s reimagining of the past has consequences in the present, and in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* all human knowledge is on the way to becoming the fiction of Tlön. However, the most relevant similarity between both texts is that the intrusion of fiction into the real world reveals more about the realm which has been until then considered ‘real’ than about its fictional counterpart. As Di Blasi argued about Vella’s tampering with history, such an imposture would have not been possible if the reality in which it thrived had not been an imposture all along. The imposition of Tlön on the reality of the narrator in Borges’s story implies a similar reading. Jaime Alazraki observes: “Borges builds a planet which is beforehand presented as imaginary, only to persuade us later, with the fine ability and invisible patience of the magician, that this fictional planet is our own” (My translation).²²

Tlön seems to echo, albeit in a distorted way, many characteristics that are already present in the reality of the narrator. An example is the apparition of the *hrönir*, which is comparable to the apparition of physical objects from Tlön that takes place in reality. In the review of the first volume of the encyclopaedia of Tlön that the narrator provides, he explains that *hrönir*

²¹ “Contact with Tlön, the *habit* of Tlön, has disintegrated this world [...] already a fictitious past has supplanted in men’s memories that other past, of which we now know nothing certain – not even that it is false” (*Collected Fictions* 81).

²² “Borges construye un planeta que de antemano es presentado como imaginario, para persuadirnos luego, con toda la fina destreza e invisible paciencia de un mago, que ese planeta ficticio es el nuestro” (Alazraki 80).

are objects that appear in order to replace other missing objects: “[d]os personas buscan un lápiz; la primera lo encuentra y no dice nada; la segunda encuentra un segundo lápiz no menos real, pero más ajustado a su expectativa. Esos objetos secundarios se llaman *hrönir*” (OC vol. I 439).²³ In the beginning they are accidentally created, but afterwards they are created methodically. Later, when the narrator is no longer reviewing the volume of the encyclopaedia of Tlön but describing how the reality of Tlön is taking over his world, he describes in a similar way the apparition of objects from Tlön into his reality. It seems strange that the narrator is always present when objects belonging to Tlön start appearing in his own reality. He attributes this to “un azar que me inquieta” (OC vol. I 441).²⁴ However, the narrator’s uneasiness about these coincidences may lead to the conclusion that he is present when the first objects from Tlön appearing precisely because it is him who is in fact motivating their apparition, in the same way in which *hrönir* are created.

These *hrönir* are very similar to Vella’s forged manuscripts and other objects in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, especially so the purpose-built *hrönir* described in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. Vella’s translations appear because they serve a purpose, and it is the false memory of the Arab presence in Sicily that he is creating which later triggers the apparition of other manuscripts and objects which corroborate his false version of history. The narrator of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* observes that “La metódica elaboración de *hrönir* [...] ha prestado servicios prodigiosos a los arqueólogos. Ha permitido interrogar y hasta modificar el pasado, que ahora no es menos plástico y menos dócil que el porvenir” (OC vol. I 439-440).²⁵ This description of the invaluable aid provided by the *hrönir* could perfectly apply to Vella’s manuscripts and forged translations in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, as well as the objects he fabricated to support the content of his textual imposture. The past, which in the fictional realm of Tlön is as malleable as the future, is equally subject to modification in the Sicily of *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*. James E. Irby suggests that in his short story Borges is in fact alluding to a broader metaphor about memory and historiography when the narrator describes the characteristics of *hrönir* and, immediately after, he notes that objects in Tlön also fade and disappear once they are forgotten:

The idea of proliferation is thus abruptly juxtaposed with that of loss, and, retroactively, the idea of forgetting suggests that the preceding discussion of *hrönir* was, at least in part, an extended metaphor of the processes of memory, as well as historiography (Irby 414).

²³ “Two persons are looking for a pencil; the first person finds it, but says nothing; the second finds a second pencil, no less real, but more in keeping with his expectations. These secondary objects are called *hrönir*” (*Collected Fictions* 77).

²⁴ “[A]n unsettling coincidence” (*Collected Fictions* 80).

²⁵ “The systematic production of *hrönir* [...] has been of invaluable aid to archaeologists, making it possible not only to interrogate but even to modify the past, which is now no less plastic, no less malleable than the future” (*Collected Fictions* 77-78).

In Tlön, objects appear and disappear according to the needs of those who perceive them, and when Tlön starts taking over the reality of the narrator, objects similar to the *hrönir* start appearing with the purpose of affirming the reality of Tlön. These objects include a compass and some heavy metallic cones, which are found when the narrator is present, but also the textual objects that record the existence of Tlön, namely the encyclopaedia entries and volumes. It is these textual objects which become irrefutable proof that Tlön is a reality. Their apparition changes collective memory, and eventually also changes history: “ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro” (OC vol. I 443).²⁶

In both Sciascia’s and Borges’s texts, these objects which duplicate themselves to reflect an alternate reality, be it a false past or a whole alternative universe, seem to be the most evident proof that these alternate realities actually exist. Also in both stories their apparition fulfils the needs of a project: in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, Vella wants – at least at the beginning – to modify the social order of his time, and in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, a group of people want to create a new planet. Either way, the impostures are made possible because the environments in which they develop already have fictional characteristics. In *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* Di Blasi argues that the history at the basis of Sicilian society is already an imposture, whereas in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* the narrator observes how his world is already prone to believing in a structured fiction such as Tlön’s:

Casi inmediatamente, la realidad cedió en más de un punto. Lo cierto es que anhelaba ceder. Hace diez años bastaba cualquier simetría con apariencia de orden – el materialismo dialéctico, el antisemitismo, el nazismo – para embelesar a los hombres. ¿Cómo no someterse a Tlön, a la minuciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado? (OC vol. I 442).²⁷

This passage supports the argument that *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* can in fact be read as a metaphor of the processes whereby collective memory can be altered, and therefore what is considered history can be altered as well. Comparing the portrait of Sicilian society that Sciascia makes in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* to the fictional planet Borges imagines in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* shows how Borges’s apparently exaggerated fantasy of the human potential to invent the past to such an extent that it can alter the present is not so far removed from reality. In *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, Sciascia reflects on the same issues, but manages to find a real case in history in which a similar insertion of the fictional into the real took place. Both texts highlight the role that literature plays in these impostures, and explore the blurred limits between the duality history/fiction. The idea that one of them is mirroring the other is what I will analyse more in depth in the following section of this chapter.

²⁶ “[A]lready a fictitious past has supplanted in men’s memories that other past” (*Collected Fictions* 81).

²⁷ “Almost immediately, reality ‘caved in’ at more than one point. The truth is, it wanted to cave in. Ten years ago, any symmetry, any system with an appearance of order – dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism – could spellbind and hypnotize mankind. How could the world not fall under the sway of Tlön, how could it not yield to the vast and minutely detailed evidence of an ordered planet?” (*Collected Fictions* 81).

3. Literature as mirror

In his speech about the characteristics of Sicilian society which allowed Vella's imposture to take place, Di Blasi highlights the fact that what Vella is doing is not an innovation, but he is merely mirroring with his work the imposture of society:

Ogni società genera il tipo d'impostura che, per così dire, le si addice. E la nostra società, che è di per sé impostura, impostura giuridica, letteraria, umana [...] non ha fatto che produrre, naturalmente, ovviamente, l'impostura contraria [...]. [L]'abate Vella non ha commesso un crimine, ha soltanto messo su la parodia di un crimine, rovesciandone i termini... Di un crimine che in Sicilia si consuma da secoli" (OA vol. I 452).²⁸

Di Blasi's words present Vella's translations as a mirror which reflects the society in which the characters live, but which does so in such a way that the fictional features of this reality come forward and are underscored. This ability of literature – since it is to literature that Vella wants his translations to belong – to mirror the fictional features already present in reality is one of the main themes of the novel.

As noted previously, this idea is also present in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*; however, in Borges's short story the game of mirrors seems to be much more complex. First of all, it is important to note that Tlön is by default a literary realm: in the first encyclopaedia article about the country of Uqbar that the narrator finds, it is already stated that the literature of the country "era de carácter fantástico y que sus epopeyas y sus leyendas no se referían jamás a la realidad, sino a las dos regiones imaginarias de Mlejnas y de Tlön" (OC vol. I 432).²⁹ It is only later that an encyclopaedia of Tlön is discovered, and it is the description of the world of Tlön which occupies most of the rest of the short story. In the story it is never revealed why it is the civilisation of the twice-removed imaginary region of Tlön, and not of the country of Uqbar, which ends up taking over reality. Therefore, Tlön is a fantastic reality within another fantastic reality. This can in fact be explained if we consider the status of Tlön as a fiction within a fiction as mirroring the same reality from which the narrator writes. If the fantasy of Tlön is able to prosper so easily in the narrator's reality, it must be because this reality already has something of the fictional in it. This is precisely the same point that, in *Consiglio d'Egitto*, Di Blasi makes about Vella's imposture: such an imposture is possible only because the kind of society in which they live is already based on similar manipulations of history.

²⁸ "[E]very society produces the particular kind of imposture that suits it best, so to speak. Our society is a fraud, a judicial, literary, human fraud [...]. So our society has produced, quite simply and naturally, a reverse fraud [...]. Abbot Vella has not committed a crime; reversing the terms, he has produced a parody of a crime, of the crime that we in Sicily have been committing for centuries" (*The Council of Egypt* 144-145).

²⁹ "[W]as a literature of fantasy, and that its epics and legends never referred to reality but rather to the two imaginary realms of Mle'khnas and Tlön" (*Collected Fictions* 70).

The mirror is one of Borges's most recurrent motifs, and has been reviewed extensively.³⁰

Beatriz Urraca notes the versatile use Borges makes of mirrors in his writing:

The work within the work, the character reading about himself, the storyteller telling her own story in what can lead to the infinite regression of mirrors facing each other, the mirror in the text itself are narrative strategies whose endless possibilities Borges drew upon time and again (154).

Urraca notes the use at different levels that Borges makes of the trope of the mirror, which is related to the device of the *mise en abyme* that I will develop in the next section of this chapter. In the case of *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, the image of the mirror is essential for the development of the plot. From the first sentence of the story, the narration becomes dependent on mirrors: “[d]ebo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar” (OC vol. I 431).³¹ The mirror is presented as a threatening object which haunts the narrator and Bioy Casares, and ultimately prompts Bioy to mention the quotation about the hatefulness of mirrors that he has read in the encyclopaedia article about Uqbar. This image of a literal mirror is followed by multiple mirroring images throughout the short story. The main one is of course that of the reality of the narrator mirroring the world of Tlön. The motif of the mirror is linked to the idea of duplication, which is the basis of the production of *hrönir*. Also in the description of the books of Tlön is present the idea of the mirror: “[l]os de naturaleza filosófica invariablemente contienen la tesis y la antítesis, el riguroso pro y el contra de una doctrina. Un libro que no encierra su contralibro es considerado incompleto” (OC vol. I 439).³² In all the cases, however, the duplication produced by the mirror, whether literal or figurative, is in some way distorted. The mirror which haunts the narrator and Bioy at the beginning of the story makes them conclude that “los espejos tienen algo de monstruoso” (OC vol. I 431).³³ This disturbing sensation produced by the physical mirror is echoed by the images of distorted mirroring that follow in the text. The production of *hrönir*, the narrator notes, is not perfect: the copies of copies either exaggerate the flaws of the initial object or improve it, and eventually they start to decay (OC vol. I 440). The distortion in the case of the books is complete: the books of Tlön include not a duplication inside themselves but their own opposite. The translation that the narrator mentions he is working on at the end of the short story can also be considered an analogy of duplication: his translation of Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial* reflects the world he knows as opposed to the now predominant world of Tlön. However, the most complex of the

³⁰ For an analysis of the mirror as structuring device in Borges's fiction, see Jaime Alazraki's *Versiones. Inversiones. Reversiones. El espejo como modelo estructural del relato en los cuentos de Borges*.

³¹ “I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia” (*Collected Fictions* 68).

³² “Their works of a philosophical nature invariably contain both the thesis and the antithesis, the rigorous *pro* and *contra* of every argument. A book that does not contain its counter-book is considered incomplete” (*Collected Fictions* 77).

³³ “[T]here is something monstrous about mirrors” (*Collected Fictions* 68).

mirror images in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* is that of the reality of Tlön reflecting itself upon the reality of the narrator, since in this case it is not very clear which is a reflection of which. The structure of the story is in itself a mirror, as Alazraki observes: “the narration is constructed like a mirror, and the image reflected in it is nothing but the monstrous reflection of our own cultural universe” (My translation).³⁴

Specular images also drive the plot of *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, although perhaps in a more subtle manner than they do in *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. The importance of the trope of mirroring regarding the structure of the novel and its main characters has already been acknowledged by a number of critics, as I will discuss below. However, I argue that the importance of specular images is already hinted at in the only passage of the novel in which a literal mirror appears. In this passage, the countess of Regalpetra, Di Blasi’s lover, is recreating a painting that appears inside her tobacco tin, in front of a mirror. A *mise en abyme* scenario is presented to the readers: the reflection of the countess in the mirror, who is at the same time recreating the miniature copy of a painting – which is in its turn a portrait of a different woman. The narrator notes the apparent flawlessness of the imitation, mentioning immediately after, however, the factors that contribute to masking its imprecisions – such as the soft light in the room, which makes the countess look closer to the age of the younger woman portrayed in the painting. This scene between the lovers, which seems to take place outside the main plot of the novel, can instead be read as an allegory of its main theme. In the countess’s imitation of the painting, the readers are presented with a scene in which the artistic object is not an imitation of reality, but in which reality is imitating the work of art. It is the comparison that the narrator makes between the painting and the countess’s imitation which points out certain traits in the countess – by making her own body as precise a reflection as possible of the painting, the narrator’s attention is driven towards the very imprecisions that differentiate her from the sitter of the original painting. This mirroring game has the same effects that Vella’s imposture will have later in the story: Vella’s translations are the work of art through which the imperfections of the society on which it is modelled are revealed. This is only possible from the moment in which he starts considering his work as a literary work, and decides to present it as such. Even though this implies that it is immediately exposed as an imposture, and therefore untrue, for those who can appreciate the game of mirrors that it is actually staging it will reveal a much more intricate truth about present society than that of the unknown past Arab presence in Sicily.

³⁴ “[L]a narración está construida como un espejo, y la imagen en él reflejada no es sino el reflejo monstruoso de nuestro propio universo de la cultura” (Alazraki 81).

The motif of the mirror that appears in this passage can be extrapolated to other levels of the novel, which several critics have already considered from this symmetrical perspective. Shiamin Kwa observes:

[S]ymmetries continue on every level in the novel: Di Blasi is mirrored by Vella; each character's point of view physically occupies a hemisphere of the text; and language, without which the novel could not exist, is taken up as a central theme of the novel, suggesting the necessary correspondence of words to meaning in creating understanding. *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, as are so many of Sciascia's novels, is a model of symmetry; in which each aspect has its other side (357).

The duality between the two protagonists of the novel presents interesting characteristics. At the beginning of the novel, Vella and Di Blasi seem to be completely opposed characters. Their views of what history represents in terms of truth are at odds, and the motivation behind their actions also seems to be at different ends of the spectrum: while Vella embarks on his imposture with the aim of getting privileges even if this means tampering with history, Di Blasi's efforts are towards a fairer society. However, as Vella's motives change from class progression into literary ambition, Di Blasi's faith in history as absolute truth diminishes. Glynn notes this initial opposition of the two main characters and how, throughout the novel, their views gradually converge. She identifies as a technique characteristic of Sciascia this process whereby two characters whose views and attitudes initially clash, eventually have their situations exchanged (Glynn 57). Glynn also relates the use that Sciascia makes of this technique in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* to his detective fiction. She attributes great importance to the interference of tropes of the detective story and the motif of the mirror not only in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, but in the subsequent tradition of what she terms the anti-illusionist historical novel in Italy, a definition that I will discuss further later in this chapter. Glynn identifies *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* as a pioneer, stating that "the motifs of the detective story and the mirror are first introduced in Sciascia's novel, but progress to become prominent features of the anti-illusionist mode of narration" (60).

The structuring of the novel around a specular device allows yet another layer of interpretation. Alazraki observes that Borges's stories are structured according to the model of the mirror, and stresses how as a consequence the structure of the narration also contributes a meaning:

Like a mirror whose reflection inverts and/or reverts the reflected object, the structure works as a metacommentary that designates, modifying or reinforcing, the meanings that the text proposes from the signs of language (My translation).³⁵

Alazraki's quote could equally apply to *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Vella's translations invert and expose the true nature of the society they reflect. However, there is another level to this,

³⁵ "Como un espejo cuya reflexión invierte y/o revierte el objeto reflejado, la estructura funciona como un metacomentario que califica, modificando o reforzando, los significados que el texto propone desde los signos del lenguaje" (Alazraki 24-25).

since Sciascia's novel is occupying with regards to history a place as problematic as that of Vella's translations. Critics such as JoAnn Cannon and Carolyn Springer have already pointed out this dimension of Sciascia's novel. Springer writes: "in thematizing an episode of historical counterfeit within the frame of an openly counterfeit form, Sciascia's novel effects a 'mise en abyme' of the problem of authenticity in historical narrative" (Springer 177). In the following section of this chapter, I will analyse more in depth the device of the mise en abyme as it is employed in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, according to the three categories distinguished by Dällenbach, in order to support a reading of Sciascia's novel that incorporates a metafictional dimension.

4. Mise en abyme

First borrowed from heraldry by André Gide for the discussion of works of art, the concept of the mise en abyme alludes to a work of art which reflects upon itself by containing a representation of itself within itself. In his use of the term, Gide gives as examples Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, or the play put on by Hamlet in *Hamlet* (Gide 41). Dällenbach's analysis of the use of the mise en abyme in literature attempts a more accurate classification of this phenomenon. He divides the different kinds of reflection according to the element that is reflected, thus distinguishing between reflections of *énoncé*, *énonciation*, and code (Dällenbach 62).

Dällenbach borrows his terminology from linguistics, where the terms *énoncé* and *énonciation* differentiate the content of what is being said – *énoncé* – from its moment of utterance – *énonciation*. The mise en abyme of the *énoncé* is, for Dällenbach, that which implies a reflection that points towards another moment within the same fiction; for example, a situation in which the fictional characters are exposed to a narration of the events that they are about to experience. Since it is contained within the same story that it is mirroring, the mise en abyme of the *énoncé* will produce an internal repetition (Dällenbach 76). I have already mentioned the main cases of these internal repetitions in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Even if they are not as explicit as the examples given by Dällenbach where the characters find a book in which their future is narrated, those that take place in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* are also cases of mise en abyme of the *énoncé*. The main one is the revelation that Vella's imposture is merely a repetition of the imposture on which the whole of Sicilian society has been based. Also the storyline for the characters of Vella and Di Blasi can be read as a mise en abyme. And as I have argued above, the scene in which the countess imitates the painting can also be read as a metaphor of what is going to happen to the characters throughout the novel.

About the *mise en abyme* of the *énonciation*, Dällenbach states that whereas the *énoncé* reflects the result of a process of production, the *énonciation* puts into play the agent and the very production process (100). As in the use of this term in linguistics, the act of utterance presupposes the existence of a subject who conveys the message and a subject who receives it. In Dällenbach's extrapolation of the terms to the dimension of a literary work, these two subjects will necessarily be the writer and the reader. The *mise en abyme* of the *énonciation* therefore makes explicit the existence of the writer and the reader beyond the text, and the relationship that of each of these subjects will have with the text. This kind of *mise en abyme* can also be found in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. This happens in the instances in which the narrator's presence is made explicit, making comments about the thoughts of the characters which refer to the present moment when the novel is being written and read, and do not belong to the historical moment in which the action is set. One example is when the narrator is reporting the thoughts of Di Blasi while he is being tortured, shortly before his execution. Di Blasi thinks that human beings should never be submitted to torture, and that such a thing will never happen again "nel mondo illuminato dalla ragione" (OA vol. I 494).³⁶ But immediately after Di Blasi's hopeful thought, the narrator steps in and reflects on how Di Blasi would have despaired had he known of the forms of torture that humans would impose on each other centuries after his time. This intromission of the narrator in Di Blasi's internal monologue directs the readers towards the moment of writing of the novel, breaking the illusion that the narration and the events narrated are contemporary. The narrator's observation also makes the readers feel addressed directly and forces them to acknowledge the span of time between the moment of reading and the setting of the story. Springer adds:

[T]he narrator exposes his role as mediator-and meddler-in the representation of historical events, and reminds us of the high degree of artifice involved in every act of historical narrative. These moments of direct authorial intervention point to a deeper irony which pervades Sciascia's text, and compromises any residual claim of the historical novel to the representation of historical 'truth' (180).

The last instance of *mise en abyme* of the *énonciation* is in the figure of Vella and his ambition that his work is recognised as literature. The way in which Vella is presented to the readers, especially towards the end of the novel, is very similar to the figure of a historical novelist. Brian McHale presents the historical novelist as someone who uses the dark periods of history to insert their fiction (87). This is precisely what Vella does, making of his character a historical novelist inside a historical novel, as Farrell has pointed out: "Vella is in his own way a historical novelist, giving *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* the Pirandellian status of novel-within-novel" (Farrell 107-108). This fact prompts the readers to reflect on the act of writing as well as reading historical fiction, and on the problematic relationship that this narrative form has with history. This level of interpretation requires the input of the readers, and will

³⁶ "[I]n a world enlightened by reason" (*The Council of Egypt* 205).

lead to the last level of the *mise en abyme*, which will direct the reader towards referents that are beyond the text.

What Dällenbach calls *mise en abyme* of the code is characterised by revealing the functioning principle of the narrative account (Dällenbach 127). This will imply directing the readers towards something that lies beyond the text, but also beyond the figure of the writer and the reader – towards a greater discussion which encompasses the text itself. In the case of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, this discussion is that of the relationship between history and literature, and of the problematic status of the historical novel. Sciascia chooses Vella's case because it represents a perfect example within this debate, but chooses to frame it within a historical narrative, so that the questions that the narration explicitly poses to the readers also have an echo in the structure of the novel, charging it with meaning. There are two relevant elements in the novel that point towards a referent outside the text, also involving *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* in the problematic relationship between literature and history that drives its plot. The first of them is the inclusion in the text of an actual historical document, a letter penned by Vella which features between the first and third parts of the narration. The second is the title of the novel itself, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, the same title as that given by Vella to his second translation – for which he also forged the manuscript.

The inclusion in the novel of the letter points not only at the author's and readers' relationship with the novel, as did the *mise en abyme* of the *énonciation*, but at the relationship of the story narrated in the novel with the real events which inspired it, which are beyond the frame of the narration and exist independently from it. The decision to give the novel the same title as the forged translation problematizes the position of the novel in relation to historiography. Sciascia's novel does not claim to be a historical document, but as a work of fiction it has the same potential as Vella's translations had to modify collective memory and the sense that its readers will have of the past. After being presented with similarities between Vella's process of forged translation and the writing of a historical novel, the readers are prompted to reflect to what extent the historical novel they are reading (*Il Consiglio d'Egitto*) will have the same effects on their perception of the past, and on the standing that historical characters such as Vella will have in history. The *mise en abyme* of a historical novel which encloses the story of the writing of another – sort of – historical novel, encourages the readers to think of the writing process of the first historical novel: that is what confers on it its metafictional status.

5. The historical novel

Before moving on to the analysis of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* as a work of historiographic metafiction, it is worth discussing some key aspects of the origins and development of the historical novel as a genre, and how these are related to Sciascia's personal understanding of historical fiction. The origin of the historical novel is usually traced back to the beginning of the 19th century, and marked by the publication of Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814). In his book *The Historical Novel* (1937), Georg Lukács observes that novels with a historical theme were of course written before this time, but that these incorporated historical themes merely as a background, instead of with the intention of accurately portraying a specific historical setting: "it is only the curiosities and oddities of the *milieu* that matter, not an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch" (19). Lukács relates the rise of the historical novel to a new preoccupation with history triggered by a series of major events at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century:

It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a *mass experience*, and moreover on a European scale. During the decades between 1789 and 1814 each nation of Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries. [...] Now if experiences such as these are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual (23).

According to Lukács, these crucial events made the population aware that they were part of the process of history, that their individual lives were historically conditioned. Therefore, the historical novel will also have to focus on the lives of these individuals who lived through major historical events, instead of on the great events themselves or on the historical figures directly involved in them:

What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality (Lukács 42).

For Lukács, the realisation that the past was important to understand the present of a country's population was accompanied by a development of the idea of national identity: "[t]he appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, of moments of national dishonour" (25). Lukács therefore presents this new historical awareness as necessarily linked to a desire to understand present national identity in light of the events of the past that have contributed to its development, desire to which the historical novel must contribute. For him, the historical novel must show the path that nations have followed through the ages in order to reach their present identity, not portray past events in isolation:

Without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible. But this relationship, in the case of really great historical art, does not consist in alluding to contemporary events [...] but in bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it (Lukács 53).

The idea of the historical past as necessarily understood from the perspective of the present is something Sciascia also considered essential for historical fiction. In the essay *Verga e il Risorgimento*, included in *Pirandello e la Sicilia*, he discussed how the age of the Italian *Risorgimento* had been represented in literature, mostly alluding to Giovanni Verga, but also to other writers. Sciascia defined his idea of the historical novel as follows:

[L]a denominazione di 'romanzo storico' copre genericamente opere che evocano e rappresentano il passato umano, magari soltanto movendolo come sfondo o atmosfera; ma in effetti dovrebbero essere considerati romanzi storici quelle opere in cui gli accadimenti rappresentati sono parte di una 'realtà storicizzata', cioè conosciuta e situata, nel suo valore e nelle sue determinazioni, in rapporto al presente: passato, insomma, rivissuto in funzione del presente; passato che si fa presente. (E appunto, nel *Gattopardo* accade il contrario: il presente si fa passato) (OB vol. III 1147).³⁷

Sciascia understands the historical novel as a genre that should relate the past to the present, and allow not only a reflection on past events but on how these might be connected to a present reality, much like Lukács defended. Furthermore, it is worth considering Sciascia's observation about *Il gattopardo* in more detail in order to fully grasp the role that he thinks the historical novel must play in the understanding of the past.

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *Il gattopardo* [The Leopard] (1958) is set in the 19th century, during the period of the *Risorgimento* (1815-1871) that would lead to the unification of Italy. The novel portrays the changes that Sicilian society underwent during those years, narrated from the perspective of the aristocratic Salina family. Faced with the political upheaval that threatens the future of his family's privileges, the Prince of Salina decides to resign himself to the changes introduced by the revolution, instead of trying to preserve at all costs the values of his social class. This decision is not due to the Prince's genuine support of the revolutionary efforts, but to his belief that, in these circumstances, it is necessary to adapt to change in order for the family's privileged situation to be altered as little as possible. The famous line in which the Prince's nephew Tancredi paradoxically states: "[s]e vogliamo che tutto rimanga come è, bisogna che tutto cambi" (Tomasi 50)³⁸ has come to define an attitude known as *gattopardismo*: the decision to adapt to new circumstances and pretend to

³⁷ "The denomination of 'historical novel' covers generically works that evoke and represent the human past, perhaps only using it as background or atmosphere; but truly those that should be considered historical novels are the works in which the events represented are part of a 'historicised reality', that is, acknowledged and situated, in its value and in its determinations, in relation to the present: past, in short, relived according to the present; past that becomes present. (And in fact, in *Il Gattopardo*, the opposite happens: present becomes past)" (My translation).

³⁸ "If we want everything to stay as it is, everything must change" (My translation).

support change in order to be allowed to maintain certain privileges related to the past situation.

In *Il gattopardo*, the Prince believes that the Sicilian socio-political environment may change drastically, as it has already done a number of times throughout the centuries, but that the mentality of the Sicilian people is bound ultimately to remain unchanged. This feature of the Sicilian mentality as presented in the novel is implicitly not limited to the age of the *Risorgimento* – and this is the reason why Sciascia states that in *Il gattopardo* it is the present that becomes past, and not the other way round. Through the character of the Prince of Salina, who was partly inspired by the biography of his own great-grandfather, in *Il gattopardo* Tomasi di Lampedusa was also implying that this observation about the immutability of the Sicilian character was still valid at the time he was writing his novel in the 20th century. In the 1959 essay *Il gattopardo*, also included in *Pirandello e la Sicilia*, Sciascia criticises precisely this aspect of Tomasi di Lampedusa's portrayal of the Sicilian reality: “[l]a Sicilia del *Gattopardo* ha un vizio di astrazione – come dire? – geografico-climatica” (OB vol. III 1161).³⁹ With this observation Sciascia implies that the historical setting of *Il gattopardo* is merely an ornamental backdrop, and that instead of evaluating the past from the vantage perspective of the present, Tomasi de Lampedusa chose to portray Sicily in a permanent state of stagnation, indeed suggesting that the Sicilian people exist in an ahistorical dimension immune to change, or progress of any kind:

Perché noi diciamo Sicilia e intendiamo la Sicilia degli Arabi, dei Normanni, dei Vespri, degli Aragonesi, dei viceré spagnoli; la Sicilia dei Borboni e dei Savoia, la Sicilia dei Fasci socialisti. Ma un governatore arabo aveva di fronte una diversa ‘dimora vitale’, che è relativa, come l’anello di una catena, nella nostra nozione della Sicilia, ma che per lui era assoluta ed unica (OB vol. III 1161).⁴⁰

Sciascia's image of the different moments in history as links in a chain is a perfect illustration of the way he considered we must look into the past. For Sciascia, understanding a past event must be done taking into account not only the particular circumstances surrounding that event – an isolated link of the chain – but also all the changes that have taken place from that event up to the present from which we are reconstructing it – the chain as a whole. Only in this way will we be able to piece together events into a coherent portrait of the past that faithfully reflects the evolution of history.

³⁹ “The Sicily of *Il gattopardo* has a weakness for abstraction – how shall I put it? – only concerned with geography and climate” (My translation).

⁴⁰ “Because we say Sicily and we mean the Sicily of the Arabs, of the Normans, of the Vespers, of the Aragonese, of the Spanish viceroys; the Sicily of the House of Bourbon and of Savoy, the Sicily of the socialist Fasci. But an Arab governor had in front of him a different ‘vital delay’, which was only a part of what, as the link is for a chain, our notion of Sicily is today. However for him this ‘vital delay’ was absolute and unambiguous” (My translation).

It is with the aim of proving that there has in fact been a progression that, in *L'affaire Moro*, Sciascia borrowed and subverted the maxim of *gattopardismo*. As I discussed in chapter two, Sciascia stated that he had the impression that the Moro case existed in the 'inviolable perfection' of a literary work: "[i]ntoccabile se non al modo di Pierre Menard: mutando tutto senza nulla mutare" (OA vol.II, t. I 434).⁴¹ Contradicting the view of history as perpetual stagnation as presented in *Il gattopardo*, Sciascia shows that it is by not changing anything that the advance of history can be noticed. His rereading of the Moro case from the present allows him to point out the advantages that the disappearance of Moro had for the government, advantages that could only be fully appreciated by considering the political situation before and after Moro's death. In this sense, Borges's contrasted reading of Cervantes's and Menard's *Don Quijote* shows precisely that the opposite of Tomasi di Lampedusa's statement is the case. It is by leaving things from the past unchanged and revisiting them from the present that the transformative force of history becomes evident – as well as the transformation of the concept of history itself.

With regards to *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, Sciascia's novel seems to fulfil Lukács's main principles of what a historical novel should be. It portrays minor historical characters – Vella and Di Blasi – and presents their historical environment in such a way that we are able to understand their motivation to think, feel and act as they did, even if they belong to a reality far from ours in time. Vella's imposture and Di Blasi's frustrated revolutionary efforts are presented to the readers as conditioned by the socio-political scenario in which they live. However, there is an important aspect of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* that does not appear among Lukács's principles, and that is the understanding that Vella develops throughout the novel of the relationship between the role of the historian and that of the historical novelist. Vella's presentation of his translations first as historical documents and later as historical fiction address the ambivalent position that the historical novel occupies in this respect. Lukács presents the historical novel as a work of literature that faithfully portrays a historical period, but does not indicate whether this problematic status between fact and fiction should be acknowledged within the novel itself. This is nevertheless an issue that Sciascia cannot fail to address. It is revealing to consider his short text *Intervista impossibile a Napoleone Bonaparte*, a fictional dialogue between Napoleon, Chateaubriand, Alberto Savinio, and a young unnamed man, where the speakers discuss what would have happened if Napoleon had been born twenty years before or twenty years after his actual date of birth, or what would have happened if he had not been born at all. In the conversation, Napoleon states that the modern conception of history arose with the French Revolution, but also presents it

⁴¹ "Here too one had the irresistible impression that the Moro affair had already been written, was already a completed literary work, already existed in all its unbearable perfection. Inviolable except in the manner of Pierre Menard – by changing everything without changing anything" (*The Moro Affair* 24).

as irremediably related to fiction, in a statement that establishes a connection between the origins of the modern conception of history and the genre of the historical novel:

[L]a storia non ha leggi, regole, rapporti di causa ed effetto. Ogni teoria o ideologia che si può cavare dal passato serve soltanto a capire quel passato, non a prevedere l'avvenire e a prepararsi. Lo storico si affanna a scoprirli, i rapporti di causa ed effetto; lo storicismo vi si illude e vi si avvolge. Ma nulla nella storia somiglia alla natura nei suoi cicli nelle sue stagioni, nelle sue ore di tenebra e di luce. Si può assomigliare, la storia, forse, alle imprevedibili e atroci zampate che la natura sa dare: ai terremoti, ai cicloni; e dico forse. Ma soprattutto si può assomigliare alla natura umana che la produce: contraddittoria, vacillante, vana più spesso che concreta, pronta ad accendersi di passione ma ancora più pronta a spegnersi nell'egoismo, ad addentare una qualsiasi offa, nutrendosene o avvelenandosene... La storia! L'idea, il concetto, la nozione che voi avete della storia risiedono soltanto nella rivoluzione che io [Napoleone] ho portato avanti (OA vol. I 1615).⁴²

Through Napoleon's speech, which also reminds us of Vella's speech about the leaves and the tree, Sciascia is corroborating Lukács's identification of the birth of the historical novel with the rise and fall of Napoleon, and the realisation that individuals and national identity are tied to historical circumstances. He is also highlighting, however, that because history is now understood as a means of making sense of the present situation of nations and social groups, it will necessarily be ruled by an implicit teleology, which will try to establish cause and effect relationships that link the past to the present, much in the same way narrative fiction is constructed. Sciascia believes that there is a progression to be found in the course of history, as his criticism of *Il gattopardo* demonstrates. Nevertheless, he considers it vital to underscore that this does not mean that past reality is any less chaotic, or that it can be clearly explained and unravelled in an objective, straightforward way.

We can thus distinguish two main questions in Sciascia's approach to the historical novel as a genre: in what way can the historical novel contribute to the understanding of the past in light of the present? And in what way can it contribute to the understanding of the process of writing of history in itself? In order to fully grasp how Sciascia negotiates the tension between these two issues, and manages to merge and incorporate them into his own historical fiction, it is necessary to consider *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* from the perspective of historiographical metafiction.

⁴² "History has no laws, rules, relationships of cause and effect. Every theory or ideology that can be extracted from the past only serves to understand that past, not to foresee the future and be prepared for it. The historian toils to discover them, these relationships of cause and effect; historicism deludes and wraps itself in them. But nothing in history looks like nature in its seasons, in its hours of darkness and light. History can be similar, perhaps, to the unpredictable and atrocious blows that nature can strike: to earthquakes, to tornados; and I said perhaps. But most of all it can be similar to the human nature that produces it: contradictory, wavering, futile more often than tangible, ready to be fired up with passion but even more ready to be put out by selfishness, ready to bite on any sort of bribe, feeding on it or getting poisoned... History! The idea, the concept, the notion that you have of history are only due to the revolution that I [Napoleon] have conducted" (My translation).

6. *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* as historiographic metafiction

In her study of self-conscious fiction, Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as follows:

[A] term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (2).

This definition perfectly fits the two texts that this chapter has considered so far. The main plot of both *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* and *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* revolves around the discovery that fiction has invaded the realm of reality. However, by making this the main theme of the texts, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* and *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* also allow a wider reflection on how literature can contribute to the fictionality of what is considered history, or reality, in the world of their readers. I have already analysed the devices whereby *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* does this, relying on Dällenbach's study of the *mise en abyme*, and now it is relevant to examine the position of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* within the framework of metafiction and, specifically, historiographic metafiction.

The term historiographic metafiction was coined by Linda Hutcheon, in order to distinguish a certain kind of text that questioned the relationship between history and literature, within her definition of what constitutes postmodernist fiction and engaging with the broader debate on metafiction. For Hutcheon, historiographical metafiction is texts which respond to the fact that every narration of the past is made from the present moment of the narrator, and texts which seek to acknowledge the gap between the past events and their reconstruction into facts as they reach the readers. Hutcheon observes that in these fictions there is "a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (86). In the light of this observation, if we go back to Sciascia's definition of a historical novel, quoted in the previous section, we can find significant similarities with Hutcheon's definition of historiographical metafiction, particularly in its way of approaching the past as a way to enlighten events taking place in the present. This is an approach to the historical novel related to the approach that Sciascia takes in his *inchieste*, where he often finds past events illuminating when it comes to reflecting on his present reality, as I have discussed in chapter two.

Il Consiglio d'Egitto provides a unique case study within Sciascia's literary production in this respect because it can be studied alongside the *inchiesta Morte dell'inquisitore*. This *inchiesta* sprang from the research that Sciascia was undertaking in order to write *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, but he considered that the *inchiesta* form suited this account better than

the form of the historical novel.⁴³ It is relevant to analyse the different strategies through which Sciascia problematizes the relationship between history and literature in these two works, one fictional and the other non-fictional, in order to understand the metafictional devices he employs in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. In *Morte dell'inquisitore*, Sciascia examines the case of a man, Diego La Matina, who managed to kill an inquisitor while being imprisoned and was condemned to death at the stake for his crime. After he has presented the historical framework of the case, Sciascia explores the personal background of La Matina. Interestingly, from the *inchiesta* form in *Morte dell'inquisitore*, Sciascia already problematizes the genre of the historical novel. The first source he examines is a serialised novel published in 1923 by the *Giornale di Sicilia* entitled *Fra Diego La Matina*, by William Galt, pseudonym of the historian and novelist Luigi Natoli. Sciascia points out the inaccuracies of the novel, and the overtly romanticised presentation it makes of its protagonist (OA vol. II, t. I, 200-201). However, the fact that Sciascia chooses to start his exploration of La Matina's background by glossing not historical documents but a novel, already problematizes the perception that the readers will have of the figure of La Matina. Sciascia comments on the influence that the historical novel *Fra Diego La Matina* has had on collective memory:

Oggi, a Racalmuto, se chiedete di fra Diego La Matina [...] i più vi raccontano la vicenda del romanzo: come cosa vera, come cosa realmente accaduta in lontani tempi; senza sapere che si tratta di un romanzo o, sapendolo, senza il minimo dubbio che una cosa scritta, specie se in rapporto al passato, alla storia, possa essere non vera ma immaginata (OA vol. II, t. I 201).⁴⁴

In this quotation Sciascia is commenting on the problems that are inherent not only to the genre of the historical novel, but to all things written about the past, when it comes to evaluating their truthfulness. The *inchiesta* form allows him to point out these issues in such a way that his own text is included in the discussion. For example, immediately after criticising that romanticised presentation of the characters of Galt's novel, he acknowledges that some of his own characters – Di Blasi, and even La Matina – are indebted to Galt's (OA vol. II, t. I 201). As he writes his historical account, Sciascia is aware of the ways in which his own text can influence collective memory and therefore alter what is considered to be history, and does not hesitate to point this out explicitly to his readers.

Understandably, this awareness will extend to his own historical novel in the writing of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Just as the inhabitants of Racalmuto hold Natoli's novel to be the most

⁴³ It has been suggested that Sciascia arrived at this decision following a similar reflection to that which led Manzoni to his decision to separate his essay *Storia della colonna infame* from his novel *I promessi sposi*, even though initially these two texts were going to be included in the novel (Springer 183, Cannon "History as Mode of Comprehension" 94).

⁴⁴ "If you ask about Fra Diego La Matina in Racalmuto today [...] most people will relate the story as it appears in the novel, for they believe it to be the true story, something that really happened in distant times. Even those who realize that the story is but a fiction have not the slightest suspicion that the written word – especially if it treats of the past, of history – could ever lie" (*Death of an Inquisitor* 34).

historically accurate and reliable source regarding La Matina's life, so could Sciascia's *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* potentially be held as an accurate depiction of the life of such characters as Vella and Di Blasi. The form of the *inchiesta* permits Sciascia to explicitly question the effects of fiction on what is regarded as history. However, these same observations cannot be made in the same way from within a fictional account. Even though in his definition of what a historical novel should be like Sciascia does not mention that this kind of novel should include a dimension of self-awareness, it is obvious from the consideration of the rest of his work that such a dimension is indispensable. *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* addresses the same issues of truthfulness and the relationship between history and fiction, but does so with the tools of literature, and therefore in a way that involves not only the content, but the form, using the structure of the novel to construct a layer of meaning beyond the plot which will require, as his detective fiction and *inchieste* did, the active participation of the readers in order to be fully deciphered.

Glynn explores some of the metafictional mechanisms that Sciascia uses in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. She establishes her own terminology, engaging with Hutcheon's idea of historiographical metafiction, in order to discuss several examples of contemporary historical novels in the Italian tradition. She uses the terms illusionist historical novel and anti-illusionist historical novel to distinguish between works that maintain an illusion of relationship to reality to captivate the reader (illusionist novels) and works in which the main intention is to make the reader aware of their own controversial relationship with this same reality (anti-illusionist novels) (Glynn 19). It is to this latter category that *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* belongs. Glynn borrows these terms from Kurt Spang, who defines the anti-illusionist novel as the mainstream tendency that has dominated the genre of the historical novel from the end of the 19th century. He relates it to an understanding of the task of the historian as that of selecting, ordering, and interpreting isolated events of the past in order to make sense of them; a sense which will be, however, provisional and subject to modification. Spang argues that this kind of historical novel emphasises the quality of artefact of the narration, giving priority to formal aspects (70). Glynn nuances Spang's terminology, distinguishing two further categories within the anti-illusionist historical novel. These are the microhistorical and metanarrative strands of the anti-illusionist novel – both of which, she argues, are merged in the narrative of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. Microhistorical narratives intend to give a voice to those individuals forgotten by history, emphasising the ways in which power relations determine what is and what is not taken into account by historiography.⁴⁵ Metanarratives focus instead

⁴⁵ In historiography, the term 'microhistory' refers to a current that favours the exhaustive study of a limited unit of research, such as a single historical event or the life of a single individual, in order to obtain a broader picture of the time period in which these are framed. One of the most representative examples of microhistory is Carlo Ginzburg's *Il formaggio e i vermi* [The Cheese and the Worms]. Glynn's definition of the microhistorical

on concerns about the process of writing historical accounts. Glynn notes that “[t]he motifs which predominate in this strand are the labyrinth, the detective story and the mirror, all of which highlight the search for truth, the constructed nature of all narration and the illusory nature of objective truth” (42).

Glynn acknowledges the importance that Sciascia’s novel would have in the subsequent development of this kind of narrative in Italian literature; her analysis provides a close reading of the novel and a comprehensive discussion of the elements in the novel that I have identified in my reading as *mise en abyme* of the *énoncé* and *énonciation*. However, she does not delve into the implications behind the elements I have identified as *mise en abyme* of the code, which would further contribute to reinforcing the reading of *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* as an anti-illusionist historical novel by questioning the place it occupies in historical representation. In order to reinforce this aspect of my reading and the connection between Sciascia’s and Borges’s work, in the next section I will consider the status of *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* with respect to other historical accounts of the life of Giuseppe Vella by comparing it with Borges’s story *Tres versiones de Judas*.

7. Three versions of Vella

Despite the important part that metafictional devices play in *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, as I have argued throughout this chapter, not many scholars have discussed it at length in their analyses of the novel. Carolyn Springer is one of the few critics who considers Sciascia’s novel from the point of view of the contribution it makes to historiography, and more specifically to the portrayal of Abbot Vella in history. Springer takes up White’s concept of the modes of emplotment in historiography in order to present a reading of Sciascia’s novel alongside two historical accounts of the life of Vella. She reads Scinà’s *Prospetto della storia letteraria di Sicilia*, written shortly after the time of the imposture and one of Sciascia’s main sources to document *Il Consiglio d’Egitto*, as emplotted in the form of a comedy, an account which, she argues, Sciascia rewrote in an ironic mode (Springer 182). On the other hand, Adelaide Albanese’s *Il problema dell’arabica impostura dell’abate Vella*, published in 1963, shortly after Sciascia’s novel, is identified by Springer as emplotted in the form of a tragedy (182). I will briefly discuss the main arguments presented by both accounts and how they relate to *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* before extrapolating these themes to a comparison with Borges’s *Tres versiones de Judas*.

anti-illusionist novel is also akin to Miguel de Unamuno’s idea of *intrahistoria* [intrahistory], the everyday of the lives of common people, which tends to be neglected by historiography and yet serves as a backdrop for the major events that are considered to mark the course of history.

Scinà's contemporary account of the imposture presents Vella as an ignorant man who took advantage of his ignorance to present his imposture as authentic. He makes frequent references to how Vella also took advantage of the lack of other historical sources dealing with that specific period in order to develop his fantasy (Scinà 17-18). He refers to the spaces of history in which Vella inserted his fiction in this way: "[h]is novels, with which he filled the gaps left by the meagre reports of historians" (My translation).⁴⁶ Scinà regrets the fact that, because of Vella's imposture, all other books written at the time – which according to him dealt solely with Sicilian matters – "were spoilt and contaminated with the lies of the Arabic codex" (My translation).⁴⁷ He also pays considerable attention to the objects that Vella fabricated, including a ring with Arab letters that he gave to the king on a visit to Naples, and how these same objects became more refined as the imposture progressed. Scinà gives more importance to these coins, medals and other objects and the influence Vella's translations had on other texts than the importance these physical traces of the imposture have in Sciascia's novel. In *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, what draws the readers' attention is not the magnitude of Vella's imposture, but the social environment which made it possible, which was based on imposture in itself; therefore emphasising the ironic mode that Springer identifies in this account.

Albanese's revisiting of Scinà's account focuses instead on redeeming the figure of Vella. She refutes the idea that Vella was ignorant and presents him as a man of exemplary behaviour (Albanese 94). She places the responsibility on those people in a position of power who helped Vella develop his imposture because his translations favoured their social or political position. She says that Vella's *Consiglio d'Egitto* "provided the monarchy with a precious instrument in the fight against feudality" (My translation).⁴⁸ Albanese seems to suggest that Vella's imposture became intimidating to the authorities once it was unveiled, because of how badly it reflected on Sicilian institutions, and that was the reason why such efforts, which might have seemed disproportionate, were made to cover up the imposture and minimise its importance. She also makes an observation that is reminiscent of the speech that Sciascia voices through the character of Di Blasi in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*:

It is true that Sicily, so rich with memories and testimonies of a glorious past now gone for centuries, so nostalgic of its lost greatness, would have necessarily been a fertile ground on which the equivocal art in which Abbot Vella proved to be such an expert could thrive (My translation).⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "[I] suoi romanzi, co' quali iva riempiendo i vani, che lasciavano le magre notizie degli storici" (Scinà 22).

⁴⁷ "[E]ran guasti e contaminate delle ciance del codigo arabo" (Scinà 46).

⁴⁸ "[O]ffriva alla monarchia un prezioso strumento nella lotta contro la feudaltà" (Albanese 118).

⁴⁹ "Certo è che la Sicilia, così ricca di memorie e di testimonianze di un passato glorioso ormai tramontato da secoli, così nostalgica della sua grandezza perduta, doveva per forza essere un terreno favorevole allo svilupparsi della equivoca arte in cui si dimostrò tanto esperto l'abate Vella" (Albanese 113).

Even though Albanese's reflection on how Sicilian society of the time was able to accommodate Vella's imposture so easily is similar to Di Blasi's speech in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, the historical novel form allows Sciascia to go one step further. At this point it is important to emphasise that Sciascia's is a historical novel, whereas Scinà's and Albanese's accounts claim historical accuracy. However, the three of them make a contribution to the portrayal of Vella in collective memory, as Springer suggests in her analysis. The fact that she positions Sciascia's novel on the same level as Scinà's and Albanese's historical accounts directs the same concerns that are presented in the novel towards its own role in historiography.

However, the fictional nature of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* allows Sciascia to express these same concerns in ways in which a historical account cannot, which is something Springer does not discuss in her article. Despite the fact that Sciascia documented *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* from historical sources, obviously the fact that he is writing a novel – and not a historical account, like Scinà and Albanese – allows him the freedom to provide his characters with a depth that they would not be able to have in a historical narrative. Sciascia's main contribution to the figure of Vella consists in his presentation of him as a character with literary ambitions. This interpretation of the figure of Vella is different from that of Scinà's, who presents him as an ignorant criminal, and Albanese's, who presents him as a pious man of whom the powerful took advantage. Sciascia's presentation of Vella does not seek to have him redeemed or condemned in history, as do the versions of the two historians. Vella's character in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* develops throughout the narrative, from being an impostor looking for social promotion into becoming a man of letters who wants to be recognised as such. This process of character development responds to no historical evidence, being the result of Sciascia's fiction. However, it allows Sciascia to voice a criticism of the historical narrative which is not present in the accounts of Scinà and Albanese. It could be said that it presents, while being fiction, the level of meta-analysis that White called for in historical accounts in his book *Metahistory*, as discussed in chapter two. Anna Maria Toti detects in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* an awareness for the need to question the truthfulness of narrative history that is akin to White's approach:

In *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* – as in most of Sciascia's literary production – we see the problem of the ability to grasp history – suspended between imposture and truth – translated into an ethical and metalinguistic problem. The uneasiness about history, as a narrative practice, is conditioned by the enquiry about the truthfulness of language, which is at the same time object and instrument of a perpetual investigation (My translation).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ “[N]e *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* – come in tanta parte della produzione sciasciana – vediamo tradursi il problema della conoscibilità della Storia – sospesa tra impostura e verità – in problema etico e metalinguistico; l'inquietudine sulla Storia, come pratica scrittoria, è condizionata dall'inchiesta sulla Veridicità della lingua, contemporaneamente oggetto e strumento d'una incessante investigazione” (Toti 110).

This is a characteristic that has also been identified in the work of Borges. Santiago Juan-Navarro analyses *Tema del traidor y del héroe* according to these same parameters established by White. He observes that fiction also allows Borges what the historical account could not:

[*Tema del traidor y del héroe*] represents on a literary level the first step proposed by White in the configuration of narrative history (the transformation of chronicle into story). Its quality of pure fiction, instead of historiographical document, allows it a greater self-referential framework: the story not only reproduces some of the mechanisms and tricks of the historical discourse, but also reflects upon them and manages to produce an alternative version which acts as a supplement of historiography (My translation).⁵¹

In a similar way to *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, *Tema del traidor y del héroe* presents an insider's view of the processes of reconstruction of the past. Ryan, the protagonist in Borges's story, uncovers – through his own attempt at reconstructing the past of his ancestor – two versions of the same historical figure, the result of what White would identify as two different modes of emplotment. The uncovering of the two versions of Kilpatrick and the revelation that what had until then been considered history was, in fact, fiction, are only possible because they are contained in a fictional story. The narrative voice at the same time reports on the discoveries of Ryan and on his final decision not to reveal his discovery, therefore creating a game of mirrors that leads the readers to questioning whether this fiction could be a reflection of the same world they inhabit.

It is however Borges's short story *Tres versiones de Judas* which lends itself to an even better comparison with Springer's tripartite reading of the historical figure of Vella. *Tres versiones de Judas* reviews the work of the scholar Nils Runeberg, who throughout his career defended three different interpretations of the figure of Judas. The narrator summarises thus his contribution: "agregó al concepto del Hijo, que parecía agotado, las complejidades del mal y del infortunio" (OC vol. I 517).⁵² Runeberg's first thesis presents Judas as the protagonist of a sacrifice, reflection of Jesus's sacrifice. "[e]l Verbo se había rebajado a mortal; Judas, discípulo del Verbo, podía rebajarse a delator [...] El orden inferior es un espejo del orden superior [...] Judas refleja de algún modo a Jesús" (OC vol. I 515).⁵³ A revised version of this thesis reinterprets the motivation behind his treason and presents Judas as an extreme ascetic: "[r]enunció al honor, al bien, a la paz, al reino de los cielos,

⁵¹ "[*Tema del traidor y del héroe*] representa a nivel literario el primer paso propuesto por White en la configuración de la narración histórica (la transformación de la crónica en relato). Su condición de ficción pura, en lugar de documento historiográfico, le permite un mayor margen de auto-referencialidad: el cuento no sólo reproduce algunos de los mecanismos y trampas del enunciado histórico, sino que también reflexiona sobre ellos y llega a producir una versión alternativa que actúa como suplemento del registro histórico" (Juan-Navarro 30).

⁵² "[H]e added to the concept of the Son, which might have been thought long spent, the complexities of misery and evil" (*Collected Fictions* 167).

⁵³ "The Word had stooped to become mortal; Judas, a disciple of the Word, would stoop to become an informer [...] As below, so above [...] Judas is somehow a reflection of Jesus" (*Collected Fictions* 164).

como otros, menos heroicamente, al placer [...] Pensó que la felicidad, como el bien, es un atributo divino y que no deben usurparlo los hombres” (OC vol. I 516).⁵⁴ Finally, his last thesis reaches a conclusion the narrator deems monstrous – God became a man not in the figure of Jesus, but that of Judas:

Dios totalmente se hizo hombre pero hombre hasta la infamia, hombre hasta la reprobación y el abismo. Para salvarnos, pudo elegir *cualquiera* de los destinos que traman la perpleja red de la historia; pudo ser Alejandro o Pitágoras o Rurik o Jesús; eligió un ínfimo destino: fue Judas (OC vol. I 517).⁵⁵

As in some of his other short stories (*Tema del traidor y del héroe*, *Los teólogos*, *La otra muerte*), Borges plays with the duality between characters who are initially presented as absolute opposites – Judas and Jesus – progressively resembling each other more and more, until both figures are identified in one. The first thesis presents Judas as a reflection of Jesus, again by means of the motif of the mirror, but Runeberg’s final interpretation of the figure of Judas makes both identities not reflect each other but merge, with the result that Judas plays the role that has always been attributed to Jesus.

Borges’s story plays with the idea that a figure so ingrained in collective memory as a traitor as that of Judas could still be reconsidered and reinterpreted in several different ways. It is also interesting to note that the three versions of Judas are conceived by the same scholar. This is where Borges’s story differs from the three versions of Vella that have been discussed in this section, since the two historical accounts and Sciascia’s novel are the work of three different people. However, the process that has taken place in order to obtain such dissimilar narratives is comparable: by attributing different motives to the same actions, just as Runeberg does with Judas, the three accounts present three very different portraits of Vella. It is also worth noting that Borges himself states that the fact that the three versions have been produced by the same scholar is a mere coincidence. At the beginning of the story, he notes that Runeberg could have been born in different times or places, but that what is remarkable is that the work he did of reinterpreting Judas’s figure could have been done by any other mind. The fact that the three versions were produced by the same person is remarkable, but is also a chance happening. Borges’s story can therefore be read not as a fable about the ability of one scholar to reinterpret the same figure thrice, but of the ability of collective memory to do the same, and therefore about the mutability to which any historical figure can be subject.

⁵⁴ “He renounced honour, goodness, peace, the kingdom of heaven, as others, less heroically, renounce pleasure [...] He thought that happiness, like goodness, is a divine attribute, which should not be usurped by men” (*Collected Fictions* 165).

⁵⁵ “God was made totally man, but man to the point of iniquity, man to the point of reprobation and the Abyss. In order to save us, He could have chosen *any* of the lives that weave the confused web of history: He could have been Alexander or Pythagoras or Rurik or Jesus; he chose an abject existence: He was Judas” (*Collected Fictions* 166).

8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed aspects of Sciascia's historical novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, focusing on the way in which it problematizes the relationship between history and fiction, and how this duality is treated similarly in the work of Borges. I have first emphasised how *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* presents the past as a space that can be used for the creation of fiction, underscoring the negative value that most of the characters in the novel attribute to literature (presented as lies and forgery) as opposed to history (presented as immutable truth). For this chapter I have focused my comparative analysis with Borges's work on *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, and discussed the similarities that its plot presents with the way in which Vella's imposture develops in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. My argument has revolved around the trope of the mirror, which plays an essential role in the structuring of both texts. I have suggested a reading of the trope of the mirror in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* according to Dällenbach's tripartite classification of *mise en abyme*, in order to point out the metafictional dimension of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* that requires the participation of the readers in order to be fully unravelled. After briefly presenting Sciascia's views of the historical novel in the context of the tradition of historical fiction as a genre, I have discussed Hutcheon's concept of historiographical metafiction in relation to *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, and contrasted it to Glynn's reading of the novel as an anti-illusionist historical novel. I have argued that an analysis of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* is not complete without paying attention to its own problematic position as a historical novel from the perspective of the contribution it makes to historiography. In order to do this, I have briefly discussed how the historical novel form, and the form of the *inchiesta*, allow Sciascia different approaches to question the processes of historiography in which his own works are inscribed, taking as an example the *inchiesta Morte dell'inquisitore*. Lastly, I have compared the position occupied by *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* in the accepted official version of history to the plot of Borges's story *Tres versiones de Judas*, which provides a similar reflection on how the same historical figures can be portrayed in different ways depending on how the narratives of their lives are constructed.

In his essay *Magias parciales del Quijote*, included in *Otras inquisiciones*, Borges reflects on the effects that fictions which contain other fictions within themselves can have on their readers:

¿Por qué nos inquieta que don Quijote sea lector del *Quijote*, y Hamlet, espectador de *Hamlet*? Creo haber dado con la causa: tales inversiones sugieren que si los caracteres de una ficción pueden ser lectores o espectadores, nosotros, sus lectores o espectadores, podemos ser ficticios. En 1883, Carlyle observó que la historia universal es un infinito libro

sagrado que todos los hombres escriben y leen y tratan de entender, y en el que también los escriben (OC vol. I 669).⁵⁶

Borges's observation is very similar to Patricia Waugh's definition of metafiction quoted on page 169. For Borges, fictions which contain other fictions act as a mirror in which the readers see their own reality reflected, and are therefore forced to question the veracity of this reality as opposed to that shown by literature. Just as Di Blasi is forced to recognise himself as a character in a society based on fiction once he sees it reflected by Vella's translations, so the readers of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* are forced to question the reliability of what they are used to calling history. In its status as a historical narrative which problematizes the historical discourse itself, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* aims at making the reader also feel like a character in a society that is still nowadays influenced by fictional traits. By comparing *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* to *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, it becomes clear that this is also the message underlying Borges's short story. The narrator's observation that the reality of Tlön could do nothing but thrive among the same humans who had embraced other fantasies such as Nazism is a perennially timely warning about the malleability to which the collective imaginary can be subject.

It has been argued that after *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* Sciascia's use of the historical novel form progressively gave way to other narrative forms – mostly the detective story and the *inchiesta* – for the same reasons that Manzoni became disenchanted with the historical novel form: he did not find it an appropriate form to get close enough to the truth. Springer writes:

Sciascia's decision to turn from the historical novel to the essay form was presumably based, like Manzoni's, on a sense of the ontological inadequacy of the historical novel and a desire to recuperate a degree of authenticity in historical narrative (183).

Indeed, as I have argued, Sciascia found problematic the use of the historical novel form to reach the truth of past events, and the fact that he never wrote another historical novel seems to endorse this view. However, I argue that the historical novel form gave Sciascia the chance to develop a sophisticated reflection on history and its processes of narrativisation in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* that a non-fictional approach would have not allowed. Using the tools of fiction allows Sciascia to present a discussion of the historical novel genre that is ingrained in the narrative without the need to be made explicit in the language of the text. Consequently, there is work that the reader will have to do outside the text and that is merely hinted at in the novel. Sciascia's subsequent *inchieste* will provide an investigation of

⁵⁶ "Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1883, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all humans write and read and try to understand, and in which they are also written" (*Labyrinths* 231).

past events as rigorous as possible, but such an unreliable form as that of the historical novel allows another level of reading where Sciascia plays not only with the facts, but also with the way in which he has decided to present them. Of course, the form of the *inchiesta* also allows for information to be rearranged in order to convey a specific message, and Sciascia never tries to hide this in his *inchieste*. However, where the *inchiesta* needs to explicitly signpost its own narrative strategies for the readers, the complex fictional game of mirrors in *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* – the historical novel about a forger who approaches his own work as a historical novelist would – can express through its structure what is not explicitly expressed by its discourse.

According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction “points both to the need to separate and to the danger of separating fiction and history as narrative genres” (78). This seemingly contradictory view on the relationship between history and fiction also agrees with what I have argued in previous chapters about the shared spirit of contradiction that underlies the work of Sciascia and Borges. Both authors include in their works a self-aware dimension which points out to the readers the manipulative powers of fiction; and yet, both of them consider literature to be the form which permits them to get closer to truth. This is precisely because only literature allows this dual approach: making use of all the expressive potential of language, and at the same time underscoring its dangers.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have analysed a series of Sciascia's texts in which it is possible to trace the presence of Borges's writing. I have discussed different ways in which Borges's and Sciascia's works intersect, from similar approaches to the same narrative genre, to Sciascia's inclusion of Borges's quotations in his text. I have structured my thesis in such a way that the analysis of Sciascia's texts is divided in three main categories according to their narrative form: the detective story in chapter one, the *inchiesta* in chapters two and three, and the historical novel in chapter four. An analysis that progressed towards the historical fiction has allowed me to show that there are similar preoccupations about the relationship between history and fiction underlying and connecting both authors' writing. These preoccupations, as I have shown, can also be traced in works that do not specifically deal with historical themes.

What the texts I have analysed in this thesis have in common is that they always address a process of reconstruction of past events. In the detective fiction, the story involves the reconstruction of the crime by the investigator, and the *inchiesta* is a reconstruction of past historical events. In the historical novel that I have analysed, the process of reconstruction is double: Vella reconstructs a fictional version of the past of Sicily, and with *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* Sciascia provides a fictional account of the real life of Vella. In all three narrative forms, throughout the narration this process of reconstruction of past events reveals its flaws. The detective stories fail to develop according to the archetypal structure of the whodunit, the main premise of which was that social order would be restored with the imprisonment of the culprits. Likewise, the *inchieste* do not offer the sense of closure that might have been expected from the reassessment of a past event, since in many cases at the end of the narrative what really happened seems even more unclear than before. In *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*, the flaw of Vella's reconstruction of the past is that it was actually an imposture. The flaws in these processes of reconstruction, once exposed, reveal the problems generated by the search for the truth of past events that from the present are accessible only through indirect sources. Sciascia's readers are therefore presented with the possibility that different reconstructions of the same past events coexist, from which one version is likely to prevail as the 'official' version, but which will not necessarily be the most truthful to what really happened.

In all of Sciascia's works analysed in this thesis, the version of events that has been preserved by collective memory, and which will at some point be regarded as part of the historical past, is the version that best serves the interests of a powerful elite. Most importantly, this version does not have to be true to the events it narrates as long as it

presents a verisimilar rendition of them. This verisimilitude of the hegemonic version of past events is key for Sciascia, since it is this feature which links their reconstruction to fiction. The verisimilitude of a certain account of past events does not necessarily correspond to its truthfulness, but to a presentation of them according to rules of cause and effect similar to those employed in the writing of fiction. Using the narrative structures of the detective story, the *inchiesta*, and the historical novel, Sciascia draws attention to the gap between these interpretations of the past and the past events which originated them. He underscores that the solution for a crime or the explanation of a certain past event might be verisimilar, but that does not mean that this is the only solution or explanation possible and, furthermore, that does not mean that this is the solution or explanation that comes closest to truth. These flawed processes of reconstruction therefore call for a revision of the investigative process, via a rereading of the original evidence. The disappointing endings of Sciascia's detective stories in which the crime is not solved or the criminals are not punished, and the *inchieste* that pose more questions than provide answers to explain a past event, constitute an invitation for the readers to take on the responsibility of reconsidering the past for themselves. Sciascia presents these different processes of reconstruction of the past in the form of literature, even when the subject of his writing has a referent in his present social reality or in the history of his country. The fact that he decides to approach these topics from the perspective of literature is because he wants his readers to approach them as they would approach a work of fiction: as a text subject to reinterpretation and rewriting. For Sciascia, the work of the detective and the historian follow the same procedure as that of the ideal reader of his texts. The text precedes the reader and has been authored by someone else, but in approaching it the readers will always be necessarily influenced by their own circumstances and present perspective, circumstances and perspective from which they will be able to sharpen their understanding of the past.

Borges's literary production is rooted in the idea that an important part of the meaning of a literary work is conferred on it by the readers through the act of reading, and that each individual approach to a work of literature will contribute different elements to it. This contribution will not only vary from reader to reader, but also depending on the different circumstances in which the same reader approaches the same text. In a lecture with the title *El libro*, included in *Borges, oral*, Borges suggests that a book only acquires its meaning, which is always changeable, through the act of reading:

¿Qué es un libro si no lo abrimos? Es simplemente un cubo de papel y cuero, con hojas; pero si lo leemos ocurre algo raro, creo que cambia cada vez. Heráclito dijo (lo he repetido demasiadas veces) que nadie baja dos veces al mismo río. Nadie baja dos veces al mismo río porque las aguas cambian, pero lo más terrible es que nosotros somos no menos fluidos que el libro. Cada vez que leemos un libro, el libro ha cambiado, la connotación de las palabras es otra. Además, los libros están cargados de pasado. [...] *Hamlet* no es

exactamente el *Hamlet* que Shakespeare concibió a principios del siglo XVII, *Hamlet* es el *Hamlet* de Coleridge, de Goethe y de Bradley. *Hamlet* ha sido renacido. Lo mismo pasa con el *Quijote*. [...] Los lectores han ido enriqueciendo el libro (OC vol. II 659).¹

Sciascia shares this idea that the act of reading is necessary for literature to acquire its meaning, but he extrapolates the need for reading from the book to all things in life. Twenty years before Borges's lecture, he had already voiced a statement similar to Borges's above through the protagonist of his novella *L'Antimonio*:

Insomma, mi era venuto il furore di vedere ogni cosa dal di dentro, come se ogni persona ogni cosa ogni fatto fosse come un libro che uno apre e legge: anche il libro è una cosa, lo si può mettere su un tavolo e guardarlo soltanto, magari per tener su un tavolino zoppo lo si può usare o per sbatterlo in testa a qualcuno: ma se lo apri e leggi diventa un mondo; e perché ogni cosa non si dovrebbe aprire e leggere ed essere un mondo? (OA vol. I 247).²

For Sciascia, however, what does not extrapolate to the events of real life is the inexhaustibility of interpretation that enriches the literary work. Even though Sciascia approaches reality from a literary perspective, he is aware that there is a difference between the two, which must be underscored precisely by making explicit the ways in which the latter interferes with our perception of the former. By approaching reality from literature, he is not inviting the readers to consider them as equivalent, but to acknowledge the features that our ways of making sense of the world often borrow from fiction.

This manifests itself again in his choice of narrative forms, which allow a great degree of self-reflection on their own writing process. The detective story, and especially the classic whodunit story, on which Sciascia models his detective fiction, relies on an archetypal structure and on the expectations that the readers will already have when approaching the text. By betraying these archetypes and expectations, Sciascia is making his readers aware of the unsuitability of rigid narrative structures and expectations when it comes to approaching the complexities of the real scenario that he is addressing. Likewise, in his *inchieste* Sciascia constantly draws attention to the process whereby he has assembled all the information he is presenting and how he has reached his conclusions, as well as how the until then 'official' version of events came to be. In the example of historical fiction analysed

¹ "What is a book if we don't open it? It is nothing more than a leather-bound cube of paper, with pages; but if we read it something strange happens, I think it changes every time. Heraclitus said (I've repeated it too many times) that nobody gets into the same river twice. Nobody gets into the same river twice because the waters change, but the terrible thing is that we are no less fluid than the book. Every time we read a book, the book has changed, the connotations of the words are different. Also, books are loaded with past. [...] *Hamlet* is not exactly the *Hamlet* that Shakespeare created at the beginning of the 17th century, *Hamlet* is Coleridge's, Goethe's and Bradley's *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* has been reborn. The same happens with the *Quijote*. [...] The readers have enriched the book" (My translation).

² "In a word, the fury of wanting to see everything from the inside came to me, as if each person, each object, each fact, was a book to be opened and read: a book is an object, you can simply put it on a table and look at it, you can balance an uneven table with it, or even use it to hit someone over the head, but if you open it up and start to read, it becomes a world. Why then should not everything be opened and read and be a world?" (*Sicilian Uncles* 203).

in this thesis, the particularities of Vella's story pose questions not only about how his imposture remained undiscovered for years, but also about the process of writing historical fiction itself – since in the novel the character of Vella approaches his work in a similar way to that of the historical novelist. This awareness of the mechanisms involved in the writing process is what Sciascia expects his readers to extrapolate to their own attitude towards accounts of past events. In this sense, the process of revisiting the past is related to the process of rereading a literary work. The hegemonic narrations of the past need to be reassessed and, sometimes, rewritten. This will not, however, be done with the aim of enriching the narrative in the way in which a literary work is enriched by multiple interpretations. It will be done in order to free the events from all the layers of interpretation that have been added to them, and in order to reach a more truthful version.

The work of Borges constantly questions the way in which fiction interacts with the reality that has inspired it, and for this reason he is an ideal literary referent for Sciascia to address these concerns about the relationship between fiction and reality in relation to the politics and history of his country. The effect that Sciascia aims to produce by inserting Borges's writing in his own texts is very much like the effect Borges considered that including fiction within another fiction would have for the reality of the readers. In his essay *Cuando la ficción vive en la ficción*, in *Textos Cautivos*, he wrote:

Shakespeare, en el tercer acto de *Hamlet*, erige un escenario en el escenario; el hecho de que la pieza representada – el envenenamiento de un rey – espeja de algún modo la principal, basta para sugerir la posibilidad de infinitas involuciones. (En un artículo de 1840, De Quincey observa que el macizo estilo abultado de esa pieza menor hace que el drama general que la incluye parezca, por contraste, más verdadero. Yo agregaría que su propósito esencial es opuesto: hacer que la realidad nos parezca irreal) (OC vol. II 922).³

The possibility that these *infinitas involuciones* [infinite involutions] might reach beyond the fictional work and into the realm of the readers is the same vertigo that Sciascia wants to induce in his readers. With the inclusion of literary elements in the analysis of real past events, Sciascia follows the same procedure as that introduced by Borges in the quotation above, in order to examine reality against the mirror of literature. In this way, Sciascia's detective fiction mirrors the reality of his time and returns a distorted image where the flaws of society are exposed. In the case of his *inchieste* and historical fiction, duplicating the number of possible explanations of the same past and contrasting them also produces this effect, making the readers doubt the truthfulness of the 'official' interpretation. Sciascia's understanding of literature as a mirror to reflect reality is akin to many other authors'

³ "In the third act of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare erects a stage on the stage; the fact that the play enacted there – the poisoning of a king – in some way mirrors the primary play suffices to suggest the possibility of infinite involutions. (In an 1840 article, De Quincey observes that the stolid, heavy-handed style of this minor play makes the overall drama that includes it appear, by contrast, more lifelike. I would add that its essential aim is the opposite: to make reality appear unreal to us)" (*Total Library* 161).

conceptions throughout the history of literature of what the role of a literary work should be. However, his view comes closer to Borges's own understanding of the role of literature in terms of the extent to which both he and Sciascia implicate their readers in the process. As Borges succinctly expresses it in his poem *Arte poética*, in *El hacedor*: "el arte debe ser como ese espejo [que nos revela nuestra propia cara]" (OC vol. I 843).⁴ By reading fiction, the readers will not only learn things about the reality that this fiction addresses, but about the role they themselves play in the circularity that exists between the two.

In his 1979 newspaper article on Borges *Un affascinante teologo ateo*, Sciascia described the first time he saw Borges – before their conversation in Rome, which would take place two years later – presenting an image that can be read as a metaphor of the relationship that Sciascia establishes between the whole of his work and that of Borges:

La sola volta che ho visto Borges è stata in un negozio di pelliccerie, a Roma: e dentro un gioco di specchi che dava come un doppio senso di ossessione: in sé e perché, in quel che vi vorticava – persone e cose –, generava l'impressione che si fosse come dentro una versione stupida, un rovesciamento, un contrappasso, del suo mondo fantastico (*Un affascinante teologo ateo* 3).⁵

The mere presence of Borges inside the shop in Rome makes Sciascia feel that all things and people in that space are now participants in this Borgesian game of mirrors, in such a way that Borges's surroundings seem to be a distorted reflection of his own fictional imaginary, instead of the real world being an inspiration for his fantasy. Borges's presence in Sciascia's work can be represented by this same image: by integrating Borges's fiction in his reassessment of Italian past and present, Sciascia creates the illusion that it is no longer Borges's imaginary that is fictional, but what Sciascia has chosen to contrast with it. This is done in the same way as, for Borges in the quotation above, mirroring fiction within fiction has the effect that we regard our own reality as unreal. Suggesting the possibility of infinite involutions of reality into fiction, Sciascia makes us question the veracity of things that otherwise might have appeared unquestionable.

Making explicit within their literary works the fictional devices that they have employed allows Sciascia and Borges to also make their readers question the limitations of the texts they are reading. Borges and Sciascia are very aware of the limitations that language imposes on literature, and make a point of reflecting on them in their work. The inclusion of references to other authors and other literary works allows them to do precisely this, to point their readers towards elements that lie beyond the text, to encourage them to continue finding elsewhere

⁴ "Art must be like that mirror |that reveals to us our own face" (My translation).

⁵ "The only time I've seen Borges was in a furrier's shop, in Rome: and inside a game of mirrors that made me uneasy in two different ways: because of the game of mirrors itself, and also in the sense that all of us swirling inside it – people and things –, gave the impression of being a sort of stupid version, a reversal, a retribution, of Borges's own fantastic world" (My translation).

the meaning that will complete what is included in the language of their texts. In spite of these limitations, both authors still consider literature as the most honest means of expression, since it is the best space for a process of self-reflection. This takes us once again back to Borges's and Sciascia's shared spirit of contradiction. Even if they are aware of the ways in which literary devices can interfere with the way we see the world, they still find it the best way to understand reality and question truth. This same spirit of contradiction rules their understanding of the process of reconstruction of past events, which can be appreciated in the narrative forms studied in this thesis. Despite not believing that criminality can be eradicated as it does in the traditional whodunit story, they still know that in real life there are always culprits to be singled out, and a need to continue looking for them. Despite thinking it is not possible to retrieve the past as it was in all its complexity from the perspective of the present, they still know that it is imperative to continue investigating the truth of this past.

Moreover, this is not an attitude that has to be necessarily linked to the position of a writer. Sciascia believed that the ability to contradict oneself in a constant reassessing of our own opinions and perceptions of the world is a necessary skill for any individual. He stated:

Di me come individuo, individuo che incidentalmente ha scritto dei libri, vorrei che se dicesse: 'Ha contraddetto e si è contraddetto', come a dire che sono stato vivo in mezzo a tante 'anime morte', a tanti che non contraddicevano e non si contraddicevano (*La Sicilia come metafora* 88).⁶

This spirit of contradiction regarding the way in which we can get to know the truth of the past, or of the reality that surrounds us, would seem to reflect an ultimate pessimism, conveying the idea that the past will always remain ultimately unknowable and that no reassessing of it will ever be definitive. For Sciascia, however, it represented an ultimate act of optimism, incarnated in the act of writing. In the interview in which he identified Pirandello, Kafka and Borges as the seminal writers of the 20th century, Sciascia was asked why he had chosen three authors who had an overall sceptical and negative vision of life, whose works seemed to transpire no feelings of hope. Sciascia replied: “[l]a loro speranza sta nel fatto di scrivere. Perché non c'è pesimismo che sia definitivo quando lo si scrive. Lo scrivere è sempre un atto di speranza” (*Fuoco all'anima* 96).⁷ The hope that Sciascia places in the act of writing is a hope he places in his readers, entrusting them with the task of continuing to reread and reinterpret, also beyond his texts. His idea of reaching an absolute truth with regards to past events is very much like the race between Achilles and the tortoise in

⁶ “Of me as an individual, an individual who incidentally has written books, I would like that it was said: ‘He has contradicted and has contradicted himself’, as if to say that I have been alive among so many ‘dead souls’, so many who didn’t contradict and didn’t contradict themselves” (My translation).

⁷ “Their hope resides in the act of writing. Because pessimism is never definitive when it is written. Writing is always an act of hope” (My translation).

Borges's favourite paradox; there is a need for Sciascia's readers to keep working beyond the text, even when they are aware that the absolute truth in all its complexity, like the tortoise for Achilles, are out of reach. However, getting as close as possible is for Sciascia the ethical responsibility of any individual.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, this ethical instance also underlies Borges's work, and it is studying Sciascia's interaction with Borges's writing which brings it to the fore. The comparison between both authors also underscores that Sciascia's way of evaluating current affairs or real past events through literature is not only relevant to Italian history and the politics of his time. In fact, Sciascia's views on the role that literature can play in understanding the ways we make sense of the world is still, if not more than in his own time, something to keep in mind today. In a globalised world where we are constantly exposed to multiple forms of media, reporting different and even contradictory information about the same events, Sciascia's use of literature as a call to attention for his readers is as valid as ever. Barash describes the ways in which fictional devices interfere with our collective perceptions of socio-political reality in the present, warning of similar dangers as those Sciascia highlighted in his own work:

The deliberative task of imagination as it deciphers the evanescent context of symbols, permitting us to situate and reconstitute the past, is contaminated by collective fantasies that radically distort its factual texture. The abyss between memory and political reality is all too readily filled by fictional representations of public identity, which, in the guise of political myths, have become an all-too-familiar facet of our contemporary political world (70).

A warning against these dangers was already implicit in Borges's writing, which Sciascia was able to detect and translate into his own. Clive Griffin observes:

Borges implies that we constantly search for explanations because we are uncomfortable with the messy unknowability of the world. In the 30s he saw the rise of seductively simple political philosophies. They were, of course, man-made and therefore, like *Tlön* which is also the product of human intelligence, they were neat and rendered the world comprehensible. That was their fatal attraction (10).

Sciascia's inclusion of Borges's writing in his own work identifies Borges's implicit message and turns it into an explicit warning, using it to address specific events of his own socio-political environment or the history of his country. His ability to import Borges's ideas into a socio-political sphere relatively far from Borges's own underscores the timeless validity of the underlying ethics in Borges's fiction. The universality of the message behind both authors' work, their invitation to continue rereading every account of past events and consider it subject to rewriting as if it was a work of literature, is still valid today. Literature as Sciascia and Borges understood it offers us the critical tools not only to examine the fictional devices at play in literary texts, but also to dissect hegemonic explanations of our past, and the mass media coverage of our present; and to identify the ideology, in the form of fictional elements, that pervades the multiple forms of narrative we are exposed to on a daily basis.

The responsibility Sciascia and Borges entrusted to their readers, to continue reading beyond the text – not just beyond literary texts, but beyond any text – is arguably even more pressing nowadays than in their own time. This responsibility entails constantly challenging our views, constantly rereading and reassessing what is presented to us as unquestionable facts, and to do this with the tools that are provided by literature – for Sciascia, ‘the most absolute form that truth can take’.

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