

Should we “Sicilianize” Our Weltanschauung?

Leafing through Sciascia in Search of the
Meaning of Society, Power & Conspiracy

Cumannàri è mègghiu ca fùttiri

(“Exercising power is better than screwing”)

Sicilian proverb

Introductory: In Need of New Lenses

Poiché nulla si sa di sé e del mondo se la generosità degli uomini, se la letteratura non glielo apprende.*

Leonardo Sciascia, *La strega e il capitano*¹

The question, for the time being, could be whether it would be gainful to peep at this inexplicable world of ours through the pellucid cameo of Leonardo Sciascia’s[†] Sicily. Just for the length of, say, a season; indeed, being it understood that this cameo, or any lens, even if *intagliata* more or less artfully, is still a “lens.” And as far as lenses are concerned, these appear to be prosthetic devices which the irreversible dimming of our waking state condemns to rapid obsolescence: lenses condemned not just by the corruption of our spiritual eyesight, but also, by time, which erodes them all.

Of course, one could retort that if such is the fate of all dusty and abraded lenses, certain “crystal visions,” instead, certain “immortal insights” have kept their crispness, their clarity throughout the ages: it is that story of the grain, of the kernel of truth and beauty etc., which these insights (of the “great poets and thinkers”) putatively possess; and which allegedly account for their longevity, as well as their entitlement

* If the generosity of men, of literature will not teach him, one knows nothing of himself or the world.

† (1921-1989).

to front-row seating in all manuals of the world’s libraries. And truth be told, seeing these titanic “regulars” —and their many dwarfish accompanists— monopolizing the bistros of our academic youth (and the taverns of our tedious mid-season), century after century, is justified cause for concern and/or consternation: not that anyone is thinking of impugning Aristotle & Plato, Hobbes & Spinoza, Shakespeare & Dante; but was there truly nothing else, nothing just as good, or — God forbid— *better* in their day and age? Or even before, and since?

So it could be one of two things: either works of art are *all* comparable to lenses, one differing from the other by the combined level of craft and intuition; or the world of fiction simply consists in a pyramidal overabundance of lenses tipped by a fistful of priceless carbuncles. If Sciascia’s narratives are to be counted among the diamonds, all is well. Otherwise, we seem to be assessing the expedience of dedicating any time at all to a lesser vitreous shard.

The triteness of such a consideration would not be so patently embarrassing if it were not the expression of students in search of suitable theoretical material for politological analysis. Admittedly, the whole diatribe of “better” or “worse” is, in this light, premature because the social sciences are still struggling to find their scientific footing. The sheer poverty of the models heretofore employed by their practitioners lies at the foundation of the chronic identity crisis that still plagues the field. It has always been a choice or combination of two evils: the classics’ dogma (*ipse dixit*) on one hand, and modern (deliriously useless) elucubrations on the other.