



Porte aperte

Leonardo Sciascia

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A Palermo, verso la fine degli Anni Trenta, «un crimine atroce e folle, di cui è protagonista un personaggio vinto quanto quelli di Verga e sgradevole quanto quelli di Pirandello». La macchina giudiziaria si muove – e sin dall'inizio aleggia sul processo l'ombra della condanna a morte. In Italia «si dorme con le porte aperte»: era questa una delle più sinistre massime del regime, che molto teneva a sottolineare, in mancanza della libertà, il proprio culto dell'ordine. Ma, trasportata a Palermo, «città irridimibile», quella massima assume subito altri significati. Qui «aperte sicuramente restavano le porte della follia». E, controparte della follia, qui regna una vischiosità di rapporti che inficia ogni gesto, ogni parola. Eppure, proprio qui si profila un personaggio che rappresenta l'opposto: il «piccolo giudice» che, trovatosi fra le mani quel delicato processo dove le autorità tenevano ad applicare la pena di morte, quale prova della loro fermezza morale, testardamente si oppone, soltanto perché ha un'idea netta e precisa della Legge. In queste pagine, che vibrano di un occulto furore, Sciascia ci fa avvicinare ancora una volta, e più che mai, al cuore nero e opulento della Sicilia, scenario e *humus* di una vicenda che «assurge a significare la pena del vivere, lo squallore e l'indegnità di quegli anni, la negazione della giustizia».

Porte aperte Details

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Theut says

Un libro complesso, quasi un saggio sulla legge, la pena di morte e il conflitto tra l'applicazione pedissequa delle norme e quanto dettato dalla coscienza del singolo.

La vicenda dell'omicida rimane parzialmente sullo sfondo trattandosi di un pretesto per parlare della libertà morale dell'individuo che sempre può compiersi.

Che dire dello stile? Splendido, intessuto di citazioni che sono come un regalo in un libro come questo.

Giulia Anna says

Nella Palermo degli anni '30 si celebra un processo contro un uomo che ha compiuto tre gravi delitti: la sentenza dovrebbe portare fatalmente e senza scampo alla condanna capitale. Così si aspettano la magistratura inquirente, l'opinione pubblica, i rappresentanti locali del partito fascista- una delle vittime ne era un alto rappresentante-e personalità romane. Sì, durante il regime si può dormire con le porte aperte, e la sentenza deve essere esemplare. Senonchè...il giudice che presiede la Corte è contrario alla pena di morte per ragioni umanitarie. Porterà avanti con determinazione le sue convinzioni, trovando pure un imprevisto alleato in un membro della giuria popolare, e le pagherà a caro prezzo. Libretto di impegno civile, come tutta la produzione di Sciascia, che a me ha dato voglia di rivedere la storia della pena di morte in Italia: abolita alla fine dell'Ottocento dal codice Zanardelli, è ricomparsa con le leggi fascistissime per reati politici e poi estesa a reati comuni dal codice Rocco. Apprezzo sempre l'impegno civile e morale nella letteratura, credo che sia comunque un valore da riconoscere, quando si unisce al talento da romanziere e alla accuratezza della documentazione

david-baptiste says

Leonardo Sciascia is, for me, one of the great writers of the 20th century. His novellas and extraordinary readings of documents--The Moro Affair w/ The Disappearance of Majoranna--in a one volume edition from NYRB Press--are among the most profound examples of what can be achieved by creating simultaneous fictions/investigative writing that along with the subject matter are essays on writing itself, via meditations on the works of other writers. Like Borges and Bolano--albeit refraining from using fictional writers among the examples chosen--Sciascia makes of literature itself the primary concern in examining fiction/historical texts, events, personalities, all of which participate in a complex and intensely compelling interweaving of points of view which plunge the reader into ever wider and deeper vistas of ambiguity and conspiracy. Conspiracy and ambiguity--appropriate subject matter for a Sicilian author indeed! These vistas open into a continually expanding conept of the ways in which Power functions conspiratorially not as a concealed agent, but one operating like Poe's Purloined Letter--hidden in plain sight, yet, as seen by the method of Poe's detective Dupin in that story--from a vantage point of plunging oneself into total darkness, so that what emerges, "develops" as a foto in a darkroom, are precisely things illuminated by the energy of "shedding light" from themselves and "picked out" in the darkness, so that when light is shed by an outer source--"plain as day"--the object remains as clear as when seen in the darkness in which the detective has closeted himself

for his inductions. As Paul Celan wrote: "Poetry no longer imposes itself, it exposes itself."

The four novellas in this collection include some set in the Fascist Era of modern Italian history. This era provides the background for the sense of the out in the open conspiracies which reach directly in to the future of the events in The Moro Affair, during the waning years of the Christian Democrat -Mafia alliance.

As in many of Bolano's works, which provide compendiums of Chilean literature since the birth of that nation, Sciascia's continually refer to and quote from the Italian poets and writers whose work is created since the time of Italy's emergence/creation as a Nation. Writing itself is examined from the collusion between poetry, prose, reports, documents and Power in its most open acts of torture, betrayal, murder, kidnapping--the Nation operating as Terrorist aided by its own collusion between the mafia and bureaucratic departments within departments, leading to the disappearance of the guilty parties as they themselves disappear citizens and those persons in/of power who need to be "disposed of."

The title of the collection, after one of the novellas, "Open Doors" indicates the multi-layered ambiguities contained within even such a simple phrase and concept. "Open Doors" implies a state of trust and security--both of which, trust and security, imply their exact opposites--hence the sense pervasive in much of Sciascia's work that language itself is--after a quote from Pasolini-- the symptom offering the "Open Doors" into these regions in which, as Sciascia notes re Moro's change of use of the opaque vocabulary he has created as his own rhetorical domain of power, language which had initially been meant to conceal, to refute interpretation, now has to be used to reveal, to open the doors into those behind the scenes behind the scenes labyrinthine machinations of Power when it abruptly turns on its own "master." The Red Brigade kidnappers' own terror is turned against itself by the state Terror which has--historically, since the Terror of the Jacobins during the French Revolution--preceded and often created as its own weapon precisely such groups as the Red Brigades themselves possessors of a rhetorical opacity rivaling Moro's. Indeed, in the novella "Death and The Knight," a new terrorist group is named The Generation 89--which can be read as those coming of age in 1989--or as a direct citation of the Revolution of 1789 as its own ordinary source and example of the uses of terror. from the ambiguity of which particular 89 is being referred to--not simply either/or considered as possibilities but both/and also. Since the initial action claimed by the 89 is the murder of a powerful political figure, a further ambiguity requires consideration and investigation: are the 89 created to carry out this act as their founding "manifesto," not by themselves, who ever they are, but by the government itself, so the 89 may be read as an even more terrifying Power and terror, that of the State itself operating in plain sight to rid itself of opposition--

Power itself is examined as language--is language the creator of Power, or vice versa?--Or are they same--as in Moro being forced to use his own opaque rhetoric of power as a method of revealing the power which is manipulating both himself and the Red Brigades--

This being forced to speak, forced to write, is for a Russian artist precisely the fascist nature of language itself--that language does not mean to be censored, silenced, but forced to speak, as the victim is under torture.

Given his subject matter, fictional or historical, Sciascia's work and its concerns provide in themselves excellent methods of examining what has been happening to and with language, for example in the USA, since the Reagan Era, but now carried to ever greater extremes by the events of 9/11 2001. The emergence of an ever more intensified public rhetoric of Power by means of the escalation of violence in language as well as in War seems to be something "already written" in Sciascia's work in much the way that he considers the kidnapping of Moro as an event to be in itself an "already written" text. This "already written" indicates not only an elaborately pre-planned series of events, but also the script of different order, in which Power writes

not only its own parts, but those of the Red Brigades, the press, the Pope, the mafia, of everyone that is, except for Moro--just as in "Death and the Knight" it is the Deputy Police officer, in continual pain and dying--who begins to see as in a glass, darkly those emergences of light in the manner of Dupin--

Sciascia's works are among the most exciting to read of contemporary writing in the manner that Bolano's are, except that Sciascia himself is part of the already written nature of his writing in that as a Sicilian member of the government, his roles are continually making demands on language which most writers eschew--that of, like Moro, making himself understood in language which is intentionally designed to make oneself incomprehensible. Language functions then as both the cop and the fugitive, with the roles becoming ever more entangled, and the writer, at the heart of the struggle, continually using literature as it were an instrument of attack on language, reflecting the role in which those in Power seek to do. Language, literature are presented not as isolated, separated from events, as is so much the case in the Formalism of so much contemporary American conceptions of writing and poetics--but as the creator and actor of events on a scale threatening to Power itself. Indeed, language, literature, at even their most contemplative are regarded as actions, as events themselves which challenge those very events which themselves appear to be "already written" and hence "meant to be," and "meant to be read" on only their own terms. Opacity, such a valorized concept in American poetics as a form of private anti-transparency, while at the same demanding of Power that it be "transparent" is shown by Sciascia to be itself the most transparent of all strategies of concealment, while that which is, like Poe's Purloined Letter, is considered to be concealment itself--is in fact that most obviously hidden in plain sight--all of which, as Sciascia remarks, the evidence of evermore forms of obviousnesses as ever more variations on concealment.

For an American reader today, especially, I find Sciascia's writing to be of the utmost excitement and concern in a culture which continually attempts to conceal from itself what is in fact "right before its very eyes." Another great excitement in the events which Sciascia presents and dissects, comments on, is the continual presence of writing, of literature as itself a living event, presence, in the very heart of historical events and presences, presentations. Writing as action, as thought and allusion, as quotation, as fiction, as evidences, as a method of interrogation and questioning very rarely is endowed with such a profound sense of "playing with Power" as powerful opponent. That language itself is considered as both co-conspirator and opponent to Power only adds to the heightened sense of struggle over what actually is being the text "already written"--

For myself, Sciascia is a never ceasing joy and inspiration, example to read, as he makes writing truly vital in a way which no other author I have read does with such subtlety, dark humor and grace. His is a harsh, terse Sicilian lyricism which throws an intense light on those things themselves already so well lit, so obvious, that they can only be perceived by being seen in the darkness--

Todd says

The novella Open Doors actually brought to mind the movie Fury directed by Fritz Lang, which is about a man (Spencer Tracy) almost lynched for a murder he didn't commit. It's an anti-death penalty, anti-mob rule film. I remember reading an interview with Lang in which he says he chickened out when he made the movie; that the Tracy character should have been guilty of the murder. Sciascia doesn't chicken out--he makes an anti-death penalty story (in Fascist era Italy) where the accused is undoubtedly guilty of three murders.

While I found Open Doors interesting, the best novella in the book in my opinion is Death and the Knight--

the perfect blend of crime story and philosophical investigation.

Matthew says

Sciascia showed up recently on a listicle of underappreciated crime novelists and, based on the description, I headed to the library to see what I could find, ultimately selecting this collection of novellas because the cover is pretty great. But lord, what a bunch of dreary and pretentious nonsense. The third novella, by far the shortest, is sort of okay, but only sort of, and that is the most positive thing I can say about these tedious stories.

It's probably unfair to judge a writer based solely on what he wrote at the end of his life, a quarter century after his heyday, but it will be quite a while before I attempt this nonsense again.

Niki Costantini says

E' un gioiello questo piccolo romanzo di Leonardo Sciascia. Piccolo solo per le dimensioni, perché per il resto è una lezione di vita e di Giustizia distillata in 107 pagine. Quello che mi ha sorpreso durante la lettura, piacevolmente lenta e meditata, è stata l'incredibile modernità della storia di Sciascia, quanto certa retorica, certi alibi propri e comuni di un periodo storico del passato - il ventennio fascista -, siano tornati oggi prepotentemente alla ribalta sulle pagine di cronaca: il mito dell'ordine, della sicurezza, della pulizia, le "porte aperte", appunto, dietro al quale si cerca di nascondere la realtà un grande vuoto. E contro questo l'umanità di una giustizia "giusta", che metta al primo posto la dignità dell'essere umano in quanto tale, sia che si tratti del giudice che dell'imputato alla sbarra, sia che si tratti di un innocente che di un colpevole reo confessato. Meriterebbe ben più di cinque stellette.

Gabriel says

I would simply reiterate what I wrote about *The Wine-Dark Sea*.

Sciascia's weird, Sebald-esque ideas of what fiction can be are in full flight here, particularly in *1912+1* and *A Straightforward Tale*, my two favorite novellas here. But all four novellas are amazing.

Andrea says

"E questo è il punto - continuava a pensare il giudice - per cui qui tutto continuerà ad andare per mal verso: i rapporti personali, le amichevoli intromissioni e raccomandazioni, la compassione per gli innocenti che la compassione del colpevole può travolgere, il contentarsi del minor danno di fronte al grande che ne può venire scoprendo il piccolo; e insomma il troncare e sopire di ogni cosa, che implicasse la legge, del conte zio manzoniano, e del padre provinciale con lui in accordo, nella paura di conseguenze che possono essere vaste e gravi, ma meno vaste e gravi di quanto alla distanza non siano il lasciar correre, il tollerare, il tributare all'amicizia silenzi e omissioni. Tutto qui. O quasi tutto."

Stefania T. says

Entrata nel vortice Sciascia.

Vortice denso, grumoso, pastoso. Vortice dorato, vortice oscuro. Essenziale, magro, scarno, e che tutto, ugualmente (o forse proprio per questo) riesce a dire, a fotografare. Straripante d'eleganza - contorta e affusolata - non si attarda nemmeno una frazione d'attimo sul superfluo, ma tesse una trama che tutto dice, e poi tace.

Robert Wechsler says

I enjoyed the second of Sciascia's novellas, "Death and the Knight," as much as the first. This one is more ?apekian, a mixture of detective story, philosophy, the detective's personal battle with his boss, his friends, his past, and the pain from the cancer he is dying of. Like the first, it moves at a leisurely pace, and just seems right all the time.

The title novella, *Open Doors*, is an odd, Coetzeean novel-essay about the death penalty, which wanders between a prosecutor and a judge in a murder trial. But it's not at all about the trial, and it also wanders into a consideration of the effects of fascism, musings about literature, and looks at the murderer and other characters. It's a novella that appears to follow no rules, and yet is neither difficult nor showy. I found it an intellectually exciting reading experience.

Padmin says

“durante il fascismo si dormiva con le porte aperte, oggi dobbiamo stare attenti a ladri e criminali ...”.

“Le porte aperte. Suprema metafora dell'ordine, della sicurezza, della fiducia: «Si dorme con le porte aperte». Ma era, nel sonno, il sogno delle porte aperte, cui corrispondevano nella realtà quotidiana, da svegli, e specialmente per chi amava star sveglio e scrutare e capire e giudicare, tante porte chiuse.

E principalmente erano le porte chiuse dei giornali: ma i cittadini che spendevano ogni giorno trenta centesimi di lira per acquistarlo, due su mille nel popolatissimo sud, di quella porta chiusa non si accorgevano se non quando qualcosa accadeva sotto i loro occhi, qualcosa di grave, di tragico, e ne cercavano la notizia o che non trovavano o che trovavano impudicamente imposturata (la parola non è di buon uso, lo sappiamo...”).

“[gli Italiani] Non si erano mai posto il problema di giudicare il fascismo nel suo insieme, così come non se lo erano posto nei riguardi del cattolicesimo. Erano stati battezzati, cresimati, avevano battezzato e cresimato...”.

.....
Profonda riflessione sulla pena capitale e storia di un "piccolo" giudice a latere che non se la sente di comminatarla, pur conoscendo le conseguenze a cui si espone. Eppure “il dirlo piccolo mi è parso ne misurasse la grandezza”.

Meraviglioso, meraviglioso Sciascia...

William2 says

"Open Doors"

Leonardo Sciascia is considered--alongside Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Verga--to be one of Sicily's great writers. *Open Doors* is rich, intellectually dense story, not an easy read but a rewarding and pleasurable one. The story is set in Palermo Italy during the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini (in power 1922-1943) where it is the task of a judge of the criminal court to decide whether or not to support the death penalty in the case of a man who has murdered three people. There is no question about the man's guilt. The reader is taken through the thought process of the judge as he considers the matter. There is plenty of action, though it's mostly in the form of flashbacks relating to the case at trial. Only 72 pages long, I found the novelette immensely intriguing for two reasons.

First, the historical context. The year is 1936. Mussolini has been popular in Italy for ten years, but now his popularity is starting to wane. Public enthusiasm is fading. The Spanish Civil War has just started. In Russia, Stalin's appalling show trials are underway. And not even the most deluded can now doubt that the Nazi military machine is preparing for war. Add to that the fact that we're in the magical city of Palermo where it is gentle golden November. The three murder victims include a prominent fascist lawyer; for this reason the whole trial is gamed by the fascists to gain public sympathy. In the face of this the judge must decide what to do, knowing that a judgement of life in prison will end his career and perhaps his life. The second reason I liked the book was because it does what all good fiction must do: it takes the reader to another world, which, though perhaps understood historically, is completely unknown. In fact, the first ten or fifteen pages are rich with historic detail.

Unless you're Sicilian you're unlikely to know who Giacomo Matteotti was and what the series of events were that led to his assassination. So minimal Googling is necessary. But undertake this very light research and the book opens up wonderfully.

"Death and the Knight"

I found the writing in the early going very dense. There are the deputy's reflections upon the expensive Dürer hanging on his office wall, "The Knight, Death, and the Devil." This is significant for the deputy is gravely ill and in great pain. It's the following exchange with his chief however that struck me as particularly opaque. They are discussing the murder of Sandoz, a lawyer, the previous evening. Sciascia wants this exchange to dazzle but it just comes across as cryptic. One wonders if it wasn't something he undertook to get the book started, something that might have been edited later had he possessed the time. Sciascia himself died the year after publication of the novella. But all this is impossible to know without the help of a biographer. Sciascia seems not without remorse for the way he has proceeded, if we can read anything into the deputy's thoughts late in the story: "He felt entangled in one of those detective stories where the author, without warning, applies and misapplies toward the reader a meretricious duplicity that never even manages to be clever." This is a perfect description of the opening exchange. But then the ship rights itself. Once Sciascia's tale is properly under weigh it becomes downright gripping. The first sign of this regained equilibrium is the dialogue between Senora De Matis and the deputy, which holds the reader, soothes his discontent at the rough preliminaries, and promises future rewards. The book is not a police procedural. It will not satisfy the reader who wishes to be immersed in forensic detail. In fact, the investigation serves merely as a loose framework from which the deputy's thoughts skew from lucidity to delirium and back again. The objective here is character, not plot.

"A Straightforward Tale"

A retired German diplomat returns to Italy where he still keeps a house. When he finds something unexpected in his attic he immediately calls the police. When the Brigadier arrives at the house the next morning it seems long shut up. There is no answer at the door. All the windows are shuttered but one through which a man may be glimpsed slumped over a table. In Italy the police are independent of the carabiniere; it is the latter who now take an interest in the case. The mutual enmity between the two law-enforcement branches reaches an intensity that is almost comic. Joseph Farrell's Afterword says this about the story: "...If it does not have the multilayered richness of the other stories [in this collection] it is a masterly exercise in narrative. Indeed, it is as expertly plotted as any work of Sciascia's. On this occasion there is no temptation to go beyond the conventional bounds of the novel into territory more usually assigned to the essay. The land is Sicily, the characters are Sicilian, and the villains are, although the word is never used, the modern mafia of drug dealers."

"1912 + 1"

Here is another winner with perhaps a bit too much historical context early on for non-Italians. So just google the subjects "Gabrielle D'Annunzio" and the "Gentiloni Pact." After doing so it's smooth sailing all the way with Sciascia's text. There is a fine essay at the end of the book by Joseph Farrell who sums up 1912 + 1 as follows: "The work. . . is of the same type [as Sciascia's *Moro Affair*]. In it Sciascia recounts the known facts of a celebrated murder case in the decadent high society of pre-WW I Italy, when King Umberto was monarch of the nation and Gabriele D'Annunzio monarch of letters. D'Annunzio worshipped the Nietzschean superman, that ambiguous figure who, in his dealings with other men--or women--viewed himself as exempt from the laws of all conventional morality. . . . [D'Annunzio's novels] are impregnated with a Swinburnean sensuality, and Sciascia, in addition to exposing what to him seemed an evident injustice in the case in question, explored the links between the D'Annunzian culture of the time and the actual conduct of men and women. It was D'Annunzio, with his superstitious refusal to use the number 13 even in reference to the year, who provided Sciascia with a title. . . . The central theme--of justice frustrated--recurs in many of Sciascia's works."

This collection is highly recommended.

Aveugle Vogel says

"Wallace Beery"

Bob Newman says

investigative essays or stories?

Some may hail him as a master of 20th century literature, but I found these four long stories pretty tough going and not always interesting. There is very little description of people, places, or the times when the action takes place. Many characters don't even have names; known only by police rank. Without much knowledge of the author, whom I had not encountered before, I would say that he wrote more for himself than many other writers do. He writes in an always-intellectual style on political, moral, and legal topics that interested him, whether readers share these concerns or not. The phrase "investigative essay" has been used to describe Sciascia's writings and I think it's a fair term. The third piece in the book, "A Straightforward Tale" most resembles a story in the usual sense of the word, though it is delightfully not straightforward at

all. All four parts of OPEN DOORS concern murder, the death penalty, justice, and the question of whether it's really possible to understand the nature of crime, though of course we know when one has been committed. "Open Doors", the title piece, harks back to political twists in 1937, the Fascist period in Italy. "Death and the Knight" takes place in 1989, the year the author died, and deals with terrorism. "A Straightforward Tale", already mentioned, is most Sicilian, connecting police, the courts, the church and the Mafia without ever mentioning that last organization. "1912+1" also deals with a murder case, this a real one in 1913, in which a countess shoots dead a young lover---but why? All the stories are interlaced with countless literary references and philosophical wanderings. OPEN DOORS is definitely not beach reading, but thoughtful and illustrative of an interesting mind and a top writer. It's not surprising that he doesn't have a mass following. If Sciascia had not chosen to write in this genre, he might have gotten a Nobel Prize.

Saturn says

Porte aperte potrebbe essere un pamphlet contro la pena di morte. Come nelle più efficaci storie che si oppongono alla pena capitale, il caso giudiziario raccontato riguarda un crimine senza attenuanti e vede un triplice omicidio eseguito con freddezza e lucidità. È un crimine che appare subito imperdonabile in cui è impossibile provare un qualunque sentimento positivo per l'assassino. Ciò che però muove il dibattito interiore del giudice protagonista di questa breve storia non ha a che fare col perdono e neanche con la giustizia. La ferma opposizione che questo uomo pone alla pena di morte è di ordine morale: come può una persona prendersi sulla coscienza la responsabilità di decidere sulla morte di un altro individuo, per quanto la legge glielo consenta, per quanto sia lo stesso Stato a dargli questo potere? È questa la domanda fondamentale che si pone il nostro giudice ed è a questo principio morale che deve mantenersi saldo. Un principio che non riguarda la specifica vita su cui si abbatterebbe la condanna, ma che dovrebbe pesare su chi quella condanna la emette e su chi quella condanna la esegue. Non basta essere un brav'uomo rispettoso della legge in quanto "*di brav'uomini è la base di ogni piramide d'iniquità*".

Questa storia è universale ma nel caso di questo libro si inserisce nel contesto dello Stato fascista che con la reintroduzione della pena di morte in Italia voleva dare una dimostrazione di forza nella lotta contro il crimine (oltre a essere un mezzo per uccidere gli oppositori politici). Questo fantomatico pugno di ferro era ovviamente retorica, in quanto la pena capitale mai nella storia ha avuto efficacia nel far diminuire il tasso di criminalità.
