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Imago Urbis: Federico De Roberto's Catania

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A B S T R A C T

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the relationship between the city, literature and geography in order to study the birth of Catania as a modern city as seen through Federico De Roberto's newspaper articles, his novel *I Viceré* and his guidebook to Catania. The analysis of the three literary genres can help to understand the relationship between the writer and his idea and depiction of the city. To this end, it will be useful to analyse, firstly, the connections between urban space and society, and the descriptions of the city through its literary transposition; secondly, the relationship between the leading characters of a novel and the urban space they inhabit; and lastly, the relationship between literature, history and geography.

I will firstly concentrate on De Roberto's 1880s articles about his city to demonstrate the image of Catania that De Roberto was promoting in order to understand his attitude as a journalist towards its cityscapes and his ideological viewpoint. Then, I will examine De Roberto's novel, *I Viceré* (1894), as an iconographic source and as a meta-language, by which I mean that I will consider the novel both as a reflection on and of Catania and as a work of literature in which the reader can interpret the narrative to discover the connections between urban space and society. Then, I will study De Roberto's guidebook to Catania to compare the urban space as represented in *I Viceré* with that he wanted to promote to a tourist audience. To do so, I will compare De Roberto's Catania with that of previous and contemporary guidebooks in order to find the stereotypes, agreements and discords in describing the city. Finally, I will analyse the six articles De Roberto wrote in 1927 for the local paper *Giornale dell'Isola*, dealing with Catania's artistic heritage, to demonstrate De Roberto's love for Catania and his battle to gain respect and international consideration for his city.

The study and comparison of a novel, a guidebook and various newspapers articles, and the visual analysis of the photos contained in the guidebook to Catania will lead us to discover that De Roberto's conception of the cityscape of Catania was strictly symbolic and profoundly linked to the past, although the author lived in a period in which Catania was developing as a modern city and was beginning to be known as the 'Milan of the South'. Moreover, the above-mentioned works by De Roberto will help us to understand the value that the writer placed on urban space in his portrayals of the city.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to understand Federico De Roberto's contribution to the relationship between literature and the city. A Sicilian writer, De Roberto (1861-1927) is the author of *I Viceré* (1894), as well as of a guidebook to his home town Catania (1907), and various newspaper articles on it. However, Catania has never been taken into autonomous consideration in the scholarly studies of De Roberto. This can be explained, firstly, by its relatively scarce presence in his *I Viceré*; secondly, by a generally different focus in Italian literary criticism, aimed at exploring the relationship between literature and history rather than literature and geography; and, lastly, by the hypothesis that De Roberto's Catania did not correspond to the real Catania and to the city that his contemporaries wanted to promote. My research will contrast these established readings: moving from the idea that the representation of Catania, even when it is to some extent 'hidden' or 'partial', can be a key to understanding De Roberto's literary – and ideological – view of his urban space, as well as to better understand the history of Catania itself, I will re-read all De Roberto's production on Catania in the light of recent studies on the relationship between literature and the city. It will then be possible to argue that a) the presence of Catania in De Roberto's *I Viceré* is symbolically more relevant than is usually understood; b) the focus on history of Italian criticism can be enriched by a geographical perspective; c) De Roberto's image of Catania was purposely different from the usual image of the city in his time because of his precise ideology, as expressed through the different media of fiction, guidebook and reportage.

In this dissertation the importance of the city is explored with regards to the role and significance Catania had to De Roberto. For this reason my work is organised in order to shed light on De Roberto's three different representations of the city: the social and eventful city in his newspaper articles (1880s), the symbolic/metaphoric city in *I Viceré* (1894), the classic and modern city of his guidebook *Catania* and his last articles (1907 and 1927 respectively), in order to map out both the narrative symbolic place and the bourgeois city of the *fin-de-siècle*. Consequently, it will be possible to comprehend how De Roberto interpreted and represented Catania, and to analyse his *Weltanschauung*. Even though scholars have underlined how close to historical events the urban space in *I Viceré*

is and the importance of De Roberto's work as a journalist, there is not a complete study that examines De Roberto's production on Catania.

De Roberto's first portrayal of his home town is 'La Città di Catania', an article the young, promising journalist and writer published in 1881 for *Lo Statuto*, a Palermitan paper (this article and the letter written by the Editor of *Lo Statuto*, which I discovered while researching, are published in the appendix for the first time). In November 1880 Giacomo Pagano, Director of *Lo Statuto*, asked De Roberto to write a report on 'Catania che si trasforma' so as to highlight the transformation Catania was undergoing in order to meet the needs and requirements of new commerce and new society in the late nineteenth century.¹ In his report Pagano referred to Catania as De Roberto's home town. Although he was born in Naples in 1861 and only arrived in Catania when he was a child, De Roberto always felt at home in Catania. With Naples, Catania was part of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies and its way of life and habits were very similar to those of Naples, i.e. Catania, like Naples, was a place which attracted many European travellers, who could experience the natural beauty of Etna and the Ionian Sea, Baroque buildings and Greco-Roman ruins in the framework of their Grand-Tour.

In De Roberto's report – which is a panegyric on the modern city – Catania is spacious, with large streets and beautiful squares; its cityscape is strictly linked to Mount Etna, which is described as huge and superb. Moreover, the city's life is frenzied and lively: 'dapertutto un'attività, un affaccendarsi continuo, un perenne scambio di servizi materiali e morali, insomma tale cambiamento, tali miglioramenti, tali innovazioni, tale trasformazione da non ci si poter più raccapezzare'.² De Roberto describes a city characterised by a modern cityscape and life: Catania is a city that can provide visitors with modern facilities and services. This is the first representation of what will indeed be a leitmotif, and a 'character' itself, in the writer's works: not only is this city the centre stage of the Uzeda family in his masterpiece *I Viceré*, but it is also the nostalgic and modern city of the guidebook to Catania and the subject of various articles De Roberto wrote during his life.

Scholars, such as Pike, Wirth-Nesher, Highmore and Lehan have highlighted the importance of the relationship between the city and literature, underlining how significant

¹ A copy of Giacomo Pagano's letter to De Roberto, Palermo, 11 September 1880 can be found in the appendix, p. 175. The letter is stored in De Roberto's epistolary, which can be found at the Regional University Library, 'Giambattista Caruso', in Catania.

² F. De Roberto, 'La città di Catania', *Lo Statuto*, Palermo 1881.

the representation of the city in cultural studies is.³ The fact is that not only is the city a political, social and economic-geographic network; but it is also a place where human, social and political events happen. Studied by geographers and historians, the city is first and foremost a space produced and created by people; it is also a ‘literary’ place with a symbolic value, which is helpful to analyse an author’s ideological point of view and his *Weltanschauung*.

Thus, the city has a strong imaginative potential, which is revealed through its symbols and signs. As Calvino suggested in his *Le città invisibili*, the city is not simply an urban area, it also stands for a symbolic space which ‘speaks’ through a secret language. ‘L’occhio non vede cose ma figure di cose che significano altre cose’.⁴ The city is a ‘text’ to decipher and decode. Benjamin, for example, defined the Parisian *passages* as the symbols of modernity and Paris as the capital of the nineteenth century. In *The Arcades Project*, the Parisian *passages* – the word refers to pedestrian galleries covered with glass and iron that had been constructed in Paris from the early nineteenth century – can be considered as a city in miniature. There citizens could go shopping and *flâner* – to stroll and observe lazily. ‘Here the city assumes a structure that makes it – with its shops and apartments – the ideal backdrop for the flâneur’.⁵ Baudelaire as *flâneur*, poet, writer and art-critic is the interpreter of modernity. He is the new hero who resisted and tried to survive the temptations and pressures of the modern city’s life. Moreover, the *passages* are both symbols of liberation – they symbolize a utopian world – and oppression – they are the place for modern consumption.

As I have said, Benjamin used the Parisian *passages* as the symbol of modernity. I will try to discover De Roberto’s *passages* – metaphorical and symbolic – of the Sicilian city. De Roberto’s texts and their contexts will be useful to study Catania as a modern city. Since people are ‘historically effected consciousness’,⁶ and interpreting encompasses a fusion of horizons – as Hans Georg Gadamer maintained –, a study of the way in which De Roberto represented the city will prove useful to the comprehension of both the writer and his conception of the relationship between space and society, as well as space and literature. I will, therefore, analyse De Roberto’s articles, *I Viceré* and his guidebook to

³ B. Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); H. Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); B. Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Reading in the Material and Symbolic City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); R. D. Lehan, *The City in Literature: an Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴ I. Calvino, ‘Le città e i segni. 1.’, in Calvino, *Le città invisibili* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), p. 21.

⁵ W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 17.

⁶ H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 2004), p. 336.

demonstrate that Catania, in De Roberto's view, is the geographic theatre of political controversies, for social and political leadership and economic dominance. Moreover, the city is the place where mythology and modernity meet under the gaze of the writer, who – like Janus Bifrons – observed the change and development of the cityscape. The city's historical remains, together with Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea, are the link between the classical city and the modern city.

I will consider the writer both as *flâneur* and chronicler. The *flâneur* represents the artist who is immersed in the vibrant atmosphere of urban life, although he feels isolated and excluded from the world of mass consumption. De Roberto was not a passive city-dweller; neither was he an alienated chronicler locked in an ivory tower from which he observed the city's life. He was neither aloof nor reacted against modernity with passive and lazy *fin-de siècle* poses.

Michel De Certeau has maintained that pedestrians create the city through their walk.⁷ In this regard, De Roberto is a special Catanese 'pedestrian', who observed the social and political life of Catania and gave the Catanese cityscape a symbolic meaning. Moreover, as a chronicler he was interested in the preservation of its historical ruins and made concrete proposals in order to preserve the cityscape from oblivion and negligence. Linking the modern Catania to its classical heritage, De Roberto promoted the image of a city that is both modern and ancient.

The background to my dissertation is the recent critical rediscovery of De Roberto. In 1977 Leonardo Sciascia wrote an article entitled 'Perché Croce aveva torto'.⁸ The aim of the article was to demonstrate that Benedetto Croce, who was the most important and influential twentieth-century Italian literary critic, was wrong in his negative judgement of Federico De Roberto and his novel *I Viceré*. Croce blamed De Roberto for lacking poetical reliability, and for being unable to engage with the reader. On the contrary, Sciascia's revaluation of De Roberto was founded on the grounds that, in his view, *I Viceré* is, firstly, the most important Italian novel after *I Promessi Sposi*; secondly, it is the product of historical disillusion and pessimistic *Weltanschauung*; and lastly, irony is the common thread in De Roberto's description of the Sicilian aristocracy – which was still linked to feudal privileges – and in his demystification of bourgeois liberalism during and after Italian unification. For these reasons, De Roberto deserved to be reconsidered and appreciated. Sciascia's article has led to a slow but progressive revival of De Roberto and

⁷ M. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 92.

⁸ L. Sciascia, 'Perché Croce aveva torto', *La Repubblica*, 14-15 August 1977; now in F. De Roberto, *I Viceré* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1990), pp. XXVI-XXIX.

his works. Margherita Ganeri's *L'Europa in Sicilia* (2005), Julie Dashwood and M. Ganeri's (eds) *The Risorgimento of De Roberto* (2009), Rosario Castelli's *Il punto su De Roberto* (2010), Annamaria Pagliaro's *The Novels of Federico De Roberto* (2011), Annamaria Loria's *Il tempo dello scontento universale* (2012) and Castelli's *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto* (2012) demonstrate the growing interest in the Italian writer, who is now appreciated as being one of the most original, eclectic Italian novelists.⁹ Moreover, Roberto Faenza's film, *I Viceré* (2007), has contributed to revealing 'l'impetosa autobiografia di una nazione'.¹⁰

However, the privilege of creative literature over the other genres has so far made us perceive De Roberto mainly as a novelist rather than a writer who experimented in many different genres of writing, from his newspaper articles to even a guidebook. In privileging the cultural aspects of his works, such as his philosophy of history, his 'verismo' and 'leopardismo', critics have so far disregarded assessing De Roberto's position in his historical, geographical and political context. In fact, it is extremely important to subject De Roberto's writing to just such an assessment, pointing out the extent to which the core of his engaged activism relied on the city where he lived and worked.

De Roberto wrote extensively for various newspapers, such as *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Don Chisciotte*, *Il Fanfulla* and *Il Fanfulla della Domenica*, especially as literary critic, sociologist and anthropologist. Di Grado, Loria, Dashwood and Ganeri have recently stressed the extent to which De Roberto can be considered an important exponent of *fin de siècle* crisis, as expressed in De Roberto's newspaper articles. However, they have not addressed De Roberto's writing about his home town, which can be grouped, as Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri has suggested, into chronicles for *Il Fanfulla* and reports on Etna, written in the 1880s;¹¹ and the articles dealing with the Catanese artistic heritage, published in *Giornale dell'Isola* in 1927.¹²

In this dissertation, my aim is to demonstrate that De Roberto's interest in Catania can be taken as a sort of introduction to his political construction of both a philosophical

⁹ M. Ganeri, *L'Europa in Sicilia. Saggi su Federico de Roberto* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2005); J. Dashwood and M. Ganeri, eds, *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009); R. Castelli, *Il punto su Federico de Roberto. Per una storia delle opere e della critica* (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2010); ID., *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto* (Acireale-Rome: Bonanno, 2012); A. Loria, ed., *Il tempo dello scontento universale. Articoli dispersi di critica culturale e letteraria* (Torino: Aragno, 2012).

¹⁰ R. Faenza in A. Montesi, 'L'uscita dei Viceré di Roberto Faenza e la ricezione nella stampa italiana' in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 268.

¹¹ De Roberto, *Cronache per il Fanfulla*, G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., (Milan: Quaderni dell'Osservatore, 1973); De Roberto, *Scritti sull'Etna*, G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., (Catania: Edizioni Greco, 1983).

¹² De Roberto, *Il patrimonio artistico di Catania*, D. Stazzone, ed., (Enna: Papiro Editrice, 2009).

symbol for modernity and a real space in which to live. Through Catania, the city in which he lived his whole life, De Roberto expresses his political vision better than by any other means because Catania is both a symbolic space and a real space. In order to achieve my aim, I have, firstly, addressed his articles from the 1880s, which he wrote for several national newspapers, such as *Il Fanfulla*, *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* and *L'Esploratore*. I have then studied the novel *I Viceré* to highlight the extent to which it is a 'Catanese' novel, where Catania works as a symbol, a case-study, for a broader depiction of history; the relationship between the past and the present, the ideas of progress and decadence, and the bitter conclusion that history has no teleological implications. I have then moved forward, in my fourth chapter, to De Roberto's guidebook to Catania, to highlight the different approach taken to the novel. De Roberto's Catania will thus appear not only as a literary symbol, but as a reality that the writer wanted to describe and express in its modernity, no longer in its symbolic political decadence. The articles written for *Giornale dell'Isola*, in 1927, will close this study.

The 1880s articles, which are an important source and the appropriate background for De Roberto's novel, highlight the extent to which De Roberto dealt with his city. It is on this basis that a 'new' reading of *I Viceré* is possible. The fact is that the 1880s articles provide a contrast with *I Viceré*: whereas in the novel Catania appears as mainly a place of decadence, the city depicted in the 1880s articles, which is lively and modern, will show that De Roberto's Catania is not simply a literary symbol. Thus, De Roberto's representations of Catania emphasise both the importance of a dialectical relationship between space and historical memory and the leading role of the past in the understanding and reconstruction of the contemporary city. In this way, the four chapters form the 'hermeneutic circle' through which we can study, understand and link De Roberto's works and his portrayal of Catania. Halbwachs has pointed out that memory is a recreation of the past using data taken from the present because 'the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present',¹³ and, as Calvino has underlined, the traveller's past changes according to the route he has taken during his journey.¹⁴

This work consists of four chapters. In Chapter 1 I will introduce my review of the literature that constitutes my source for the construction of my theoretical framework. Starting from Mumford's idea that the city is an economic organization and the scenario where political events happen, and also the symbol of collective cohesion and aesthetic

¹³ M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, L.A. Coser, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 40.

¹⁴ Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 26.

beliefs, the city reflects, in its cityscapes, political events, social habits and historical changes.¹⁵ The city is also a *lieu de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora has suggested.¹⁶ The city being a ‘realm of memory’, it helps to preserve our cultural memory and to link the past and modernity, giving a meaning to our modernity through the recollection of our past. Furthermore, the city can be considered a *dramatis persona* because it is a character in itself.

However, as Amerigo Restucci has pointed out, the city of the nineteenth century is an important reality in post-Unitarian Italy and raises several cultural issues: the relationship with old cities, the birth of suburbs, degradation and the crowd.¹⁷ Moreover, as the scholar has pointed out, it is important to note, on the one hand, the late industrialization and growth of Italian cities and the late introduction of the novel into Italian literature and, on the other, the fact that nineteenth-century Italian writers used the novel to display their anti-industrial and anti-urban attitudes. It was only with the publication of Tommaso Marinetti’s *Manifesto del Futurismo* (1909) that Milan was praised for being an industrialised city where speed, noise, trams and cars contrasted with the immobility of the bourgeois city that was closed in its quiet *decorum*.

Nevertheless, the idea of the city as the symbol of chaos and disorder and the idea of the country as the symbol of peace and harmony is a very common trope. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams has highlighted the idea that the idealization of the country is due to poems by Theocritus, Virgil, Sannazzaro and Spencer, in which the country is portrayed as an idyllic place.¹⁸ It is Williams’s belief that the myth of the country as an Eden and the city as Hell was a myth constructed in order to preserve the class-system to prevent any possible change. Yet, the idea of the city as a symbol of chaos, corruption and disorder is still a literary *topos*, which is also characterized by the arrival of the crowd. It was Baudelaire who has connected the crowd to the modern city, also pointing out that the urban space has to be considered in its dualism: on the one hand, the city is both beautiful and inhuman; on the other hand, it is the main source of reflection for the modern poet. The modern poet, as *flâneur*, is its observer, chronicler and consciousness. It is in this category that I will consider De Roberto, since he was a special

¹⁵ L. Mumford, ‘What is a City?’ in *The City Cultures Reader*, M. Miles, I. Borden and T. Hall, eds, (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶ P. Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past. Vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. XV-XXIV.

¹⁷ A. Restucci, ‘L’immagine della città’, in *Letteratura italiana: storia e geografia*, A. Asor Rosa, ed., vol. III, *L’età contemporanea* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989), p. 170.

¹⁸ R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), pp. 35-45.

Catanese city stroller. I will demonstrate that Catania was a leitmotif in his works as a novelist, as the writer of a guidebook and as a chronicler. Thus, I will study De Roberto's works following the analysis of three different literary genres, by means of which he expressed his political belief, his activism and his being an engaged intellectual. Catania will, thus, appear as the key to understanding De Roberto's construction of the cultural memory of his home town. Rather than being just a novelist and a chronicler, De Roberto reveals himself to be a politically and ideologically oriented writer, whose aim was to combine the past and future to preserve Catania's cultural heritage within a modern reality.

In Chapter 2 I will discuss De Roberto's articles on Catania. De Roberto worked as a columnist for various newspapers, dealing with social life, political matters and Etna. The articles he wrote in the 1880s are another source to use to evaluate De Roberto's conception and idea of the city and are particularly important for two main reasons: that they can highlight the important changes Catania was undergoing in the late nineteenth century and that they show De Roberto's activism and participation in Catania's social, political and cultural events.

In Chapter 3 I will analyse the novel *I Viceré* both as a historical novel and as a source of images, descriptions and representations of Catania. I will point out the close relationship between the characters of the novel and the space in which they live. In so doing, I will demonstrate that Catania is a place in which geography and history are interconnected because the urban space is the reflection of political actions, which also reveal social and economic interests in the appropriation of the city. The micro-world of the Uzeda family is the reflection of contemporary historical events De Roberto had studied and observed during his work as a journalist. Undoubtedly, in *I Viceré* the writer provided his own interpretation of the Risorgimento, national unification and criticism of the bourgeoisie, since Catanese bourgeoisie was not able to contrast the strong power of the rapacious and greedy Sicilian aristocracy, which was still linked to a feudal world of privileges. Therefore, the novel shows De Roberto's philosophy of history, considered as a repetition of cyclical events. In his pessimistic point of view, De Roberto underlined that history has neither rational aims nor a divine Providence. As a consequence of this, space is marked by dialectical conflicts between social classes for economic and social hegemony, both reflected in the cityscapes. Consalvo's final triumph in the Benedictine monastery is used to emphasise the role of this very charismatic aristocratic leader: he is able to reaffirm the privileges of his caste in a public space, which is used for personal aims in order to reaffirm the aristocratic leadership over place, society and history.

In Chapter 4 I will provide, firstly, a comparative study of the different ways in which Catania was portrayed in certain English, French and Italian guidebooks from the age of the *Grand Tour* until the beginning of the twentieth century; I will then study the guidebook to Catania, which De Roberto wrote in 1907, with reference to the images contained in it, so as to investigate stereotypes and common topics in his portrayal of the city. My aim is to study the guidebook following its literary aspect (the narrative account) and its visual aspect (the photographs), in order both to discover De Roberto's aims and ideology and to reconstruct a possible readership. I will close the chapter by drawing a comparison between the city portrayed in the guidebook and the city described in *I Viceré*.

Chapter 5 deals with the six articles the writer wrote in 1927, just before his death in July. They demonstrate De Roberto's interest as an engaged intellectual in the safeguarding of Catania's artistic and archaeological heritage. These articles will close my final chapter. They will be useful to comprehend De Roberto's 'modern' attitude toward his home town, to understand continuity or discontinuity in his idea of the city and to demonstrate his concept of classical modernity.

Chapter 1 De Roberto and Catania: a methodological approach

This review is meant to provide a theoretical framework for my study of De Roberto's representation of his home town, Catania. It is, therefore, a summary of the main critical works, which will prove useful to my analysis. Although Raimondo Uzeda, one of the main characters in De Roberto's novel *I Viceré*, maintains that 'Voialtri vi siete fitto in capo che questa sia una città, e non volete capire che invece è un miserabile paesaccio ignorato nel resto del mondo',¹⁹ De Roberto showed that Catania was neither a terrible place to live nor a provincial city. Firstly, the writer portrays a city which is framed by both the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna; Catania was a place characterised by peculiar natural beauty and attractiveness; secondly, from a social point of view, De Roberto's portrayal of his city describes Catania as being characterised by a local élite interested in political and social dominance of the cityscapes; and lastly, in his work as a journalist and as a writer of a guidebook, De Roberto demonstrated that the city was a modern place where social events were frequent. The writer underlined the fact that Catania experienced the positive and the negative sides of modernity. Catania is, thus, both a symbol to understand modernity in *I Viceré* and, in De Roberto's other works, a geographical locus, which was portrayed as problematic. The writer, who I consider as a *flâneur*, presents himself as the spectator, the observer and the witness to his time. Moving from this assumption, I have examined De Roberto's production as the interplay of geography, history and literature: the city as a social place where time and space – the 'horizontal' and the 'vertical' – are intertwined;²⁰ and the city as a social space which bears the signs of human tensions and political power.

The idea of a connection between literature and Catania was suggested by the reading of Enrico Iachello's *Immagini della città. Idee della città*.²¹ In the introduction to his book Iachello explains his intent and his methodology, also pointing out his concept that the portrayal of urban space is not simply a strict representation of a geographic area, but it is also a reproduction of political, social and religious forces which live and act in the city. These forces both change the city through architectural projects and the symbols they

¹⁹ F. De Roberto, *I Viceré* (Torino: Einaudi, 1990), p. 144.

²⁰ E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 11.

²¹ E. Iachello, *Immagini della città. Idee della città. Città nella Sicilia (XVIII-XIX secolo)* (Catania: Giuseppe Maimone Editore, 2000).

use to affirm their dominium of urban space. The author highlights that, if the countryside represents a meaningless, empty space, the city represents the cultural complexity of modernity, which is also the sign of social and historical identity. However, the city has its own character and way of life, which are an expression of the synthesis, and the symbiosis, between architecture and social, economic and political *élites*. As a consequence, such relationship between space and society, and space and history are necessarily interconnected: palazzos, squares, fountains and gardens are not simply a mere ornament to the city, but reflect the contradictions and tensions of a historical period. Therefore, the literary and artistic representation of the city is, on the one hand, the portrayal and a description of the city; but, on the other hand, it shows the city in its idealized or problematic perception. This is the reason why the iconographic representation of the urban space should be another point of view in the reconstruction of history: the images can be used to connect space and politics, space and social habits, space and economy. In his conclusion to his study Iachello suggests analysing Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* in order to highlight the role of space and geography in the novel and the importance space had for the writer, so as to understand the author's *Weltanschauung* and conception of space.

However, on re-reading *Il Gattopardo* I did not find many descriptions of Palermo and Donnafugata, the places where the history of Don Fabrizio Corbera, Prince of Salina, is set. It was *I Viceré* by De Roberto, the second book I read in order to research the topic, which, to my surprise, not only disclosed Catania as a world of political and social aggregation, but also, a metaphorical space, in which the tragedy of modernity is being consumed. Having focused the scope of my research, I started studying De Roberto's works on Catania – his articles and his guidebook – and finding critical studies on the relationship between literature and the city. In building my theoretical framework I started to answer some questions I had asked myself at the beginning of my research: what are the theoretical approaches to the study of the relationship between literature and the city? What is the connection between the city and the Italian novel? Is the city still a literary *topos*? Is there a link between the country and the city? Is the city the emblem of chaos and disorder? After I answered those questions, I tried to find a case-study that I could use as a model to employ in the study of De Roberto's Catania, which I read through the lens of the *flâneur*: De Roberto as the spectator and narrator of modernity.

1. 1. The city: theoretical approaches

Describing and discussing the city in literature has always been an important focus both for poets and writers. A city could be described as a mimesis of reality, or as a metaphor or an image. Many cities, such as Rome, Troy, Athens or Babylon, have been mythicised;²² others have been praised for their important or amazing physical features: ‘We cannot imagine *Gilgamesh*, the *Bible*, the *Iliad*, or the *Aeneid*, without their cities, which contain so much of their energy and radiate so much of their meaning’.²³

The city has always been celebrated in literature, but, if it was originally used as a beautiful setting in which stories developed, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the city became a literary *topos*. It was the symbol of those political, economic and social events which took place in Europe. Moreover, it represented the confluence of the conflicts aroused by the industrial revolution and urbanisation, which led to a new symbolic vision of urban space. The city became the place of deception, of destruction, of chaos and isolation; the place of man’s *damnatio memoriae*. The city’s tentacles had invaded human space and transformed man into an utterly alienated person. This transformation of human space led, as a consequence, to a change in the representation of the city in the novel.

Reading the representation of the city in modern fiction is the subject of Hana Wirth-Nesher’s book *City Codes*. After stating that discussions in the modern urban novel tend to focus on plot, characters and theme, marginalising the talk of city setting as a problematic site, she points out that the novel’s urban setting is a place which bears the signs of contradictions and tensions of the historical moment and, for this reason, both readers and novelists are engaged in a verbal cartography through the verbal description of the city.²⁴ Discussions of city setting, then, should be interpreted according to the social and cultural position of the subject, with the consequence that the city ‘is rendered legible, then, by multiple acts of the imagination; it is constantly invented and reinvented.’²⁵ In Wirth-Nesher’s study, which concerns the representation of the city in the modern novel, the narrative cartography is not strictly a geographic area or a literary transposition of space, but a noteworthy cultural locus, since novelists tend to transform space into a problematic site and give it a metaphorical role. Emphasising the role of the writer and the

²² I. Hassan, ‘City of Mind, Urban Word’, in *Literature and the American Urban Experience: Essays on the City and Literature*, M.C. Jaye and A. Chalmers Watts, eds, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 93-112.

²³ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 3.

²⁴ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, pp. 3-4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

reader in the representation of the city – they are both observers immersed in a cultural and social context – she identifies four categories of urban space in the portrayal of the city in literature: the natural, the built, the verbal and the human. She maintains that ‘Each of these environments can be perceived and represented by all of the senses as the action of the novel unfolds. The reader is then put in the position of apprehending the cityscape in a visual, audial, or tactile manner; but always mediated by the written word’.²⁶ Natural stands for natural environment, that is to say, the way in which nature, parks or gardens, for example, play an important role in the novel. The human, which stands for human environment, does not refer to the main characters that perform the actions, but to human features, which people the settings, such as passers-by or a *clochard*, for example. The verbal environment refers to both spoken and written language, verbal or non-verbal code, and the built environment refers to architecture, urban fixtures and fittings or objects. Italo Calvino’s *Le città invisibili* provides the appropriate example for a fusion of all four categories. Calvino’s novel is a very complex text in which Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, the main characters, discuss the cities which form Kublai Khan’s empire. During the imaginary dialogues between the Venetian traveller and the Tartar Emperor, the reader apprehends the stories of some imaginary cities which bear women’s names. Although Calvino used historical figures as his main characters, the book does not belong to the historical novel genre because the places described are seen in a dreamlike atmosphere. It is Marco Polo who amuses Kublai Khan with tales of the cities he has seen on his travels around the empire: cities and memory, cities and desire, cities and designs, cities and the dead, cities and the sky, trading cities, hidden cities. In the end it becomes patent that each of these fantastic places is really the same place, Venice. So, the reader is called upon to confer a meaning to Calvino’s narration by reading the text in whatever sequence he pleases because the book does not follow a traditional pattern.

One of the revelations that strikes the reader of Calvino’s *Le città invisibili*, as Wirth-Nesher has pointed out, is the ‘association of urban landscape with woman’.²⁷ The scholar states that Calvino’s narrator would like to suggest to the reader that cities are forms of encoded human desire or forms of desire which are transformed into an urban space, with its boundaries and sounds. This idea of the city as a symbol of the disembodied urban space is also maintained by Burton Pike, who states that Calvino’s use of female names ‘recalls on the one hand Mumford’s depiction of early settlements as containers,

²⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 205.

symbolizing the female principle, and on the other hand Balzac's Paris and Angoulême, cities under the sign and domination of woman'.²⁸ They seem to be the same city but described with different ornaments: the book can be considered as a novel to complete in order to allow the reader to compose his own city.²⁹ Wirth-Nesher's point of view is complementary to other important studies on the representation of the city in novels, which have focused on the historical aspects. Raymond Williams, for instance, has privileged the contrast between the country and the city;³⁰ Richard Lehan has focused on the changes in city functions, from the industrial city to the global city;³¹ and Burton Pike has highlighted the change of the relationship individual/community.³²

It is Pike who has underlined that, although a real city may be used to provide material for the literary city, nonetheless a writer can use it to arrange 'elements from that world to correspond to an idea which he has first conceived, and which expresses through conventions latent or unarticulated attitudes of his audience'.³³ The reason why a writer transforms the real image of the city into something he believes to be real in his mind is due to the fact that he 'does not mimetically paint what he sees, but makes what he sees correspond to a relational model to his mind'.³⁴ The writer, in other words, arranges elements which belong to the world he lives in and they become the mirror of his time, his space and his *Weltanschauung*.

Calvino's *Le città invisibili* is also at the core of Ben Highmore's *Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City* and Burton Pike's *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*.³⁵ Highmore's *Cityscapes* offers another remarkable theoretical framework to those studying representations of the city in literature and cultural studies. Highmore points out that cultural texts and metaphors do not stand for the city but *are* the city, because 'it is the tangle of physicality and symbolism, the sedimentation of various histories, the mingling of imaginings and experience that constitute the urban'.³⁶ He defines his methodology as 'the practice of doing' and as realistic, which means 'that cultural materials are a product of a real-world limits and pressure: they are elaborate

²⁸ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 126.

²⁹ C. Springer, 'Textual geography: The role of the reader in Invisible Cities', *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 15, No 4, Fifteenth Anniversary Issue (Autumn, 1985), pp. 289-299.

³⁰ R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973).

³¹ R. D. Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 1998).

³² Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

³⁵ B. Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Reading in the Material and Symbolic City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

responses to a complexly figured environment'.³⁷ Thus, the city is a metaphor and a text to decode since human language possesses the means to 'read' and render the language and signs through which the city 'speaks' to the city dwellers. In illustrating this idea of the city as a tangle of signs and metaphors, Highmore refers to Calvino's *Le città invisibili*: 'Finalmente il viaggio conduce alla città di Tamara [...] Come veramente sia la città sotto questo fitto involucro di segni, cosa contenga o nasconda, l'uomo esce da Tamara senza averlo saputo'.³⁸

Tamara is the name of the city in which a man, who is the symbol of mankind, arrives after a long, lonely walk. In this city everything is silent and empty. After such a solitary journey, one might feel the desire to talk or meet other people in the desperate attempt to escape from such loneliness and desolation, but the reader will discover that the city is not a busy urban space, but a place full of signs which refer to other signs, which are difficult to decipher. In writing his story, Calvino used two traditional literary *topoi* to refer not to real or imaginary places, but to an abstract, disembodied, timeless space, which is encoded and needs to be decoded. The country is the symbol of a silent nature, which is conceived of as a completely empty space, whereas the city is a place in which 'L'occhio non vede cose ma figure di cose che significano altre cose'.³⁹ The city – Calvino suggests – is a symbolic space which 'speaks' to the visitor through a secret language. In fact, the city of Tamara is a book to read, comprehend and analyse. There is nothing new in this because the literary *topos* of space as a book was used in the sacred literature of the Middle Ages or in the Bible. Yet, there is a difference: in the past, it was Nature which was presented as a book, while in Calvino's story the city becomes the book which is the equivalent of human culture and knowledge. The city is, then, a metaphor of culture as well as language: it is, in other words, the symbol of man trapped in a space where there is no external reality beyond it and whose only possibility to express oneself is language: 'Nessuno sa meglio di te, saggio Kublai, che non si deve mai confondere la città col discorso che la descrive. Eppure tra l'uno e l'altro c'è un rapporto'.⁴⁰

Olivia, which is the final brief text of the section entitled 'Cities and Signs', is the city which represents hypothesis and lies. Actually, it is another example of an urban space which is not real; it is a mental figure which represents the impossibility of using language to talk about reality and express it through words which refer to other signs in an almost

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸ Calvino, 'Le città e i segni. 1.', in Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, pp. 21-22.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

circular dialogue. They are words which have no meaning and lose any kind of power because there is no city, that is to say a real world, beyond the linguistic signs. I will use this emphasis on the city as a linguistic sign in order to read *I Viceré* not only as a historical novel, but as a great metaphor which expresses De Roberto's representation of the appropriation of the urban space by political forces and the relevance of the crowd in the modern city, which underlines the strong power of propaganda as a means of mass control. Finally, I will read the city as the metaphor of chaos and disorder, but also as the interplay of geography and history, as Richard Lehan has highlighted.

In *The City in Literature: an Intellectual and Cultural History* Lehan investigates the changes in the urban portrayal, also exploring the connections between the history of the city and its literary representation. Considering urbanism at the core of Western culture, and urbanism as the product of Enlightenment, the scholar demonstrates that transformations of the urban space, in terms of functions and forms, have influenced the way in which the city is portrayed in novels. Because urban structures and its literary representation are intertwined, Lehan has analysed various novels so as to demonstrate that 'literature gave imaginative reality to the city, urban changes in turn helped transform the literary city'.⁴¹ This symbiosis between urban text and literature is at the core of his book, which also shows new ways of conceptualizing the city. An example of the link between urban development and literature and the way in which the modern city is portrayed is given in works on London by Daniel Defoe and Charles Dickens. The Royal Exchange, which replaced Saint Paul's Cathedral as the new city centre, designed by the architect Christopher Wren after the Great Fire in 1666, is a reflection of the economic and social changes the city was undergoing. New London is portrayed in novels by Daniel Defoe and Charles Dickens. However, if Defoe portrayed the city as a community of people united by material needs, Dickens denounced this materialistic view of the city and tried to give a sense of group identity through sentimental characters that could redeem city life with their moral presence.

Lehan's comparative approach highlights some recurrent categories which appear both in history and urban literature, such as chaos and disorder, city and frontier, and the relationship between individual and society. As the scholar explains, with the growth of the modern city and the subsequent change in economic and social functions, a new category appears: the crowd, which is seen as a group of alienated people that has lost its identity as individuals. As a consequence, novelists used the crowd as a metonym: the crowd as the

⁴¹ Lehan, *The City in Literature: an Intellectual and Cultural History*, p. xv.

symbol of an alienated force in search of a materialistic satisfaction. Since ‘the city became a closed system, caught in an entropic process that depleted its energy’,⁴² it became also the symbol of a desolated space and the symbol of human loneliness and disorder, because the individual was no longer part of a community.

The relationship between space and human community is the focus of Raymond Williams’s study *The Country and the City*. In this study the scholar provides an analysis of the descriptions of the city and the country in literature and gives a convincing account of the evolutionary stages in the representation of the city. Williams studied the images of the country and the city in English literature and how they became emblems of two different ways of conceiving human space and how we inhabit it. According to Williams the images of the country we find in literature support the idea of the countryside as a place of peace, serenity, harmony and wellbeing, whereas the idea of the city is drawn as a place of capitalist production, chaos, disharmony and labour. ‘Country and city are powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities’.⁴³ The contrast between city and country reaches back into classical times. Williams’s analysis focuses on how the idea of a ‘Golden Age’ has been influenced by pastoral and neo-pastoral poems (as exemplified by Theocritus, Virgil, Sannazzaro or Spencer), which give us a clear image of the perception of the countryside in contrast to the city. Nonetheless, Williams’s study shows how false the idea is of the country as an Eden. He states that this is a myth which was useful in order to hide class conflicts and hostility arising during the sixteenth century.⁴⁴ The poems the scholar has analysed have no historical reference nor was it important, Williams points out, to give the reader geographical coordinates: what was really important was to celebrate the past through the description of the country. For this reason, the idealised past refers back to a feudal and post-feudal time, when everything was ruled by a code, ‘an order based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations of an avowedly total kind’.⁴⁵ This was a time where the class-system was trying to preserve the *status quo* against any change through the perpetuating myth that rural life was unadulterated, simple and natural. The image of the country as a Golden Age, which Williams defines as ‘a myth functioning as a

⁴² Ibid., p. 127.

⁴³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

memory', is a very subtle way of highlighting the past to criticise the chaotic modern present, that is to say, city and capitalism.⁴⁶

Paradoxically, Williams underlines that, if we look back in time, it is quite difficult to find a happy rural England, and it is really hard to discover a place where people could rest. Williams's aim is to demonstrate that there is not a dichotomy between the country and the city and that the main difference is connected to a different way of production. He states that in Great Britain there was strong rural-intellectual radicalism, very hostile to industrialism and capitalism, which tried to impede the logic of profit.⁴⁷ As a result of that tendency, the Christian paradise and the Pagan Hellenistic Land were used to remind people of a happy past in the country, a symbol of a primitive communal society, in contrast to the city, which was a symbol of alienation and loneliness. 'Thus a moral order is abstracted from the feudal inheritance and break-up, and seeks to impose itself ideally on conditions which are inherently unstable'.⁴⁸ The reason is that the idealisation of the country was used to prevent disorders and disturbance, but it was merely a contrivance to hide and erase all the contradictions of the age and describe the city as a prototype of evil.

It would seem, then, that the solution to the question of what the city is or what the city represents in literature is not so simple. Scholars have tried to give a satisfactory definition. From a literary point of view, for example, a city is a space where characters act or a stage where events happen and plot develops. The city might be a space conceived of as the symbol of claustrophobic and chaotic lives, a place where man is dehumanised and alienated or a place which is conceived of as a nowhere place. Nonetheless, the city is a human archetype which is a symbolic place with positive and negative semantic meanings. As Lewis Mumford states: 'The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity. The city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theater and is the theater'.⁴⁹ The scholar points out that the city is not a mere cityscape of streets and buildings, but it is also the pulsating network of human relationships. Mumford suggests that the city is a reflection of an epoch and a projection and a reflection of human, social and political events and changes. The city is, then, more than a 'physical fact'; it is a social institution. Consequently, it is possible to assume that the city represented in the novel may allow us to discover not only the author's point of view, but also the concept of the city he

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁴⁹ Mumford, 'What is a City?', in *The City Cultures Reader*, Miles, Borden and Hall, eds, p. 29.

and his contemporaries shared. As such, it allows us to investigate the urban space both as a symbolic place and a physical environment.

This idea of a strong link between the city as a symbolic and physical environment makes the urban space a *lieu de mémoire*.⁵⁰ As Nora has suggested, a realm of memory is ‘a significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community’.⁵¹ The city is both a historic reality, but also a symbolic space which survives the passing of time and can help to reconstruct the collective memory by rebuilding the past. In addition, space can help to investigate the social and political events which characterised an epoch, providing also material and information to recall particular events or past habits. Furthermore, events have an important role in the cultural and economic life of a city, which can also enhance social participation in the life of the city and attract tourism and economic investments. As Greg Richards and Robert Palmer state, cultural events ‘have become central to processes of urban development and revitalisation, as cultural production becomes a major element of the urban economy, and cultural consumption can dominate both the image of places and urban life in general’.⁵²

In *Imagining the City* Christian Emden, Catherine Keen and David Midgley propose two possible approaches, one that is typical of the historian and the geographer and another, typical of the literary scholar which ‘proceeds from the significance of the physical location for an individual human life, and for the experiences of memory, desire, and narrative coherence in which that life may be articulated’.⁵³ Emden, Keen and Midgley’s focus is on the one hand, on the city as a physical organization for political, social, cultural and religious purposes; on the other hand, on the importance of a city in our cultural memory and on the cultural and political process that have characterised the use of urban space: the city, then, as a polisemantic *topos*, from which the various interpretations the city has undergone in different epochs can be discovered. From a semiotic point of view, the city can be seen as an actantial model. Being an actant a substitute of character and *dramatis personae*, ‘since it applies not only to human beings but also to animals, objects or concepts’, the city in the novel not only describes urban elements but it is also a

⁵⁰ Nora, ‘Between Memory and History. Les lieux de mémoire’, *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory (Spring 1989), pp. 7-24.

⁵¹ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, p. XVII.

⁵² G. Richards and R. Palmer, *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalisation* (Amsterdam; London: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2010), p. 3.

⁵³ C.C. Emden, C. Keen and D. Midgley, eds, *Imagining the City* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 12.

place which accomplishes or undergoes the action.⁵⁴ Since space is created and produced, it is a phenomenon brought about by people and social, political and geographical circumstances. With the help of situational mediators, modern semiotics has defined space as a place of production of meaning and as a cultural process.⁵⁵ The importance of everyday urban life and walking in the city is highlighted in Michel de Certeau's study *Walking in the City* (1984), in which the scholar asserts that the city is the most immoderate of human texts.⁵⁶ The scholar refers to New York City seen from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center, from which the reader/observer can discover the vision of the conceptual city and its rational order. However, the city is not what can be seen from this privileged point of view: the urban space is the product of 'ordinary practitioners of the city'.⁵⁷ He thinks that New York, which has not undergone all the historical changes Rome has been subject to through the centuries, invents itself every minute so that 'the spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding'.⁵⁸ The city is, then, a text pedestrians write and rewrite, even though institutional bodies and corporations try to create the image of the city as a unified body through the creation of maps and symbols of cohesion. However, it is the experience of walking in the street that allows pedestrians to discover their conception of the city. By using products and rules of everyday culture, but without being wholly determined by these rules, products and social networks, it is people who give the city meaning and bring it to life. Streets, buildings and crowds are part of the city, and the act of walking is pivotal in their reading of the urban space.

However, if De Certeau's pedestrians are ordinary people, Benjamin's *flâneur* is a new figure in modern literature. In his works on Charles Baudelaire (1859-1887) Benjamin points out that Baudelaire, as a *flâneur*, gives walking a special meaning and, in so doing, he becomes one of the protagonists of city life.⁵⁹ Therefore, the city became the emblem of modernity and was characterized by the *café*, passers-by, boulevards and the crowd, which was depicted from two antithetic points of views: 'While Victor Hugo was celebrating the crowd as the hero of a modern epic, Baudelaire was seeking a refuge for the hero among the masses of the big city. Hugo placed himself in the crowd as a *citoyen*; Baudelaire

⁵⁴ A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: an Analytical Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 5.

⁵⁵ P. Pellegrino, 'Spaces of relevance, times of constancy', *Semiotica*, 122 (3-4), pp. 369-385.

⁵⁶ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 92.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁹ Now in W. Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, M. W. Jennings, ed., (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p.96.

divorced himself from the crowd as a hero'.⁶⁰ It is Baudelaire that developed the concept of the *flâneur* and his dialectical attitude towards the city. In Baudelaire's view, the *flâneur* becomes the symbol of the artist who walks the city and experiences modernity as an observer and a participant.

1. 2. The city and the *flâneur*

The word *flâneur* was, firstly, used by Baudelaire to refer to the city stroller, who has a negative impact on the crowd, which is the symbol of modernity;⁶¹ later, it was used by Benjamin to refer to Baudelaire as the spectator of modernity.⁶² Since the artist becomes the symbol of man, who feels isolated and alienated from modern society, the *flâneur* is the symbol of the modern anti-hero. He thinks that he is surrounded by a conventional, mean environment from which he wants to stand aloof.

During the nineteenth century the representation of the city in literature changed: the urban space stopped being a fixed place in which to set a plot and became the reflection of the human condition. From then on, the description of the city underwent a very important change due to the influence of Baudelaire, who used the city streets to represent his mood and feelings. The idea of the urban space as a 'subjectively perceived image' arose while 'the idea that the city represented a stable community also faded; the instability of the outer world as seen by a solipsistic character or narrator reflected an increasing disorientation of the time sense as well as the space sense'.⁶³

Thus, the city became, together with two new actors – the isolated middle-class person and the masses – the protagonist or co-protagonist of novels, which showed the dehumanising features of modernity. Needless to say, this was due to the change in the social structure of industrialised countries, which permitted writers to focus their attention on individuals who were separated from a community and who became 'outsiders', their counterpart was the crowd. Furthermore, in early novels of the period there seem to be a feeling of loss and, at the same time, a sense of harmony among the lonely and isolated characters. The reason is that most novels can be considered 'knowable communities', as writers 'show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁶¹ C. Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen: Little Poems in Prose* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), p. 22.

⁶² Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, p. 40.

⁶³ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 72.

ways'.⁶⁴ In later novels, which show the division and complexity of labour, the difficult relationship between social classes, the transition from country to cities, the idea of a knowable community became difficult to maintain.

In *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* Dana Brand articulates the difficulties of giving a proper definition of 'modernity' and how many epistemological problems it raises. The first problem we have to face is that of establishing which experience we define as characteristically modern; the second is whether it is possible to 'study the "modern" experience of the crowd,' without having a 'clear understanding of the way in which crowds were experienced in early centuries'.⁶⁵ She also maintains that any discussion of modernity is based on arbitrary definitions and arbitrary distinctions, and that her understanding of modernity 'derives from a consensual understanding of the term'.⁶⁶ Habermas, Nietzsche, Foucault and Benjamin are among the scholars she refers to in order to find similar basic elements in the study of the modern world. According to Brand, they all observed that 'in the modern world, the phenomenological character of the experience is less unified, coherent, or continuous than it was in earlier historical periods'.⁶⁷ With the change of philosophical, social and economic structures, the value of the individual experience was of less importance:

There is a surplus of signifiers and a dearth of signification. It is possible to bathe in such a world, to collect images, or to enjoy the way in which they rapidly succeed each other. It is harder to be oriented, rooted, or convinced of the solidity or permanence of anything one believes or observes.⁶⁸

The scholar highlights that Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* can be considered as the first effort to describe what the word 'modern' might mean. In chapter four of his work, Baudelaire wrote: 'By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable'.⁶⁹ Baudelaire's point of view is that the modern man had to find a new way to express his art, which had to correspond to the idea of the new urban consciousness. Big cities, popular fiction and newspapers are the emblem of modernity, together with the passive, lazy imagination: 'If the fundamental

⁶⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 165.

⁶⁵ D. Brand, *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁶⁹ C. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, J. Mayne, ed., (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 12-15.

cultural fact of the nineteenth century was understood to be the development of great cities, the representative modern subjectivity was understood to be that of the city-dweller, the passive yet compulsive consumer of a rapidly and perpetually changing spectacle'.⁷⁰ As a matter of fact, the *flâneur* was the new consciousness of the modern industrialised city, and was also the symbol for 'the creative and consuming consciousness implicit in much of the art of the bourgeois nineteenth century'.⁷¹ Furthermore, Baudelaire represented the artist who is at the same time the observer and the participant of city life in a period in which economic and social changes, caused by industrialisation, obliged the artist to immerse himself in the urban life. Baudelaire, who has connected the modern city to the crowd, underlines that it is the crowd which characterises the modern city, and that the *flâneur*, symbol of the artist shocked by the chaos of modern life, is the lyrical voice of modernity. The artist is immersed in a world in which the crowd makes him experience his loneliness within and his belonging to modernity.

Walter Benjamin's work on Baudelaire, along with his study *The Arcades Project*,⁷² made an important contribution to the study of the city and the new perception of the artist.⁷³ Benjamin maintains that Paris, which was, in his opinion, the capital of the nineteenth century, was the prototype of the modern industrialised city. Benjamin's interest in the Parisian *passages* is due to the fact that he considered the arcades – made of glass and iron – to be the centre of modern commerce, i.e., the icon of modern production, distribution, and consumption. The *passages*, thus, were places which were the symbol of inclusion and exclusion because they had been designed for wealthy people, but gave the working class the feeling of participating in the life of the rich. There the upper-class could shop for the most fashionable items and show off their prestige and power. The working class, who could not afford to buy the expensive items but could discover what the latest fashion tendencies were, was the silent spectator to the ritual.

The magnificent, gorgeous *passages* – it is worth underlining that they were public spaces – are, in Benjamin's view, the symbol of modernity, and the mark of the increasing desire for material goods. They displayed the trophies of modernity, which Benjamin considers the fetishised idolisation of the object. Then, if the *passages* of Paris represent the triumph of modernity, and the places where the masses could share a public space with the upper-class, Baudelaire is the symbol of the alienated individual who experiences the

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Belknap Press, 1999).

⁷³ Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, pp. 27-45.

chaotic, busy city life. Baudelaire is, in other words, a spectator, 'a paradigm for the consciousness produced by the experience of modernity'.⁷⁴ As a spectator, he is an isolated and alienated individual, who is contrasted with a mass of undifferentiated people, who are completely depersonalised and without any sense of community. That is why the city in novels reflects the 'growing loss of shared conventions and values'.⁷⁵ The *flâneur*, in other words, is immersed in a paradoxical urban experience: he experiences disintegration and loneliness within the crowd and the city acts centre stage of modernity.

In *Myth and Metropolis*, a study on Benjamin and the city, Graeme Gilloch has underlined that the city stroller is victim to a terrible urban experience as soon as he discovers the crowd and the objects of mass production. The *flâneur*, then, is an allegorical figure used to explain the complexity of Paris, which is both a place of evil and social injustice and the locus of modern capitalism, with its luxury and expensive items. 'Jostled, pushed and shoved by the seething urban crowd, the city dweller must remain ever vigilant, constantly on guard and alert. In the midst of the crowd, the individual is bombarded by a plethora of unassimilable stimuli'.⁷⁶ The importance of the reproduction of identical objects to offer to the masses and the importance of fashion made Paris the symbol of the modern city and the place for both the cult and the production of the commodity. As a consequence, the artist tries to distance himself from mass society and mass culture, and the *flâneur* becomes the symbol of the modern hero who refuses to be part of the fetishised world of the bourgeoisie.

1. 3. A *flâneur* in Catania

Sipala has underlined the importance of De Roberto's work as a journalist. Being a journalist gave De Roberto the opportunity to study Catania and develop a certain attitude towards a naturalistic method of observation he used in the writing of his novels. Furthermore, his articles form a nodal point in the understanding of the writer and his literary education, and can help to study the context in which De Roberto lived. As Pike has highlighted, 'many writers for whom the city is important have been urban journalists and dedicated *flâneurs*'.⁷⁷ This is the reason why the articles De Roberto wrote for local

⁷⁴ Brand, *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-century American Literature*, p. 186.

⁷⁵ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 100.

⁷⁶ G. Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 143.

⁷⁷ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 10.

and national papers highlight, on the one hand, the relationship between the writer and his home town, and, on the other, how Catania had changed over the years in its social and political life. Furthermore, the concept that Catania is indissolubly linked to its past and its natural beauty (the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna) is emphasised. De Roberto's articles on his city show to what extent Catania was part of his life and can be a new starting point in the study of the Sicilian writer, and can enrich Italian criticism in the understanding of the writer's *Bildung*. Moreover, they can help to contextualise the times he lived in, since the relationship between De Roberto and Catania was undoubtedly very strong. As Benjamin has pointed out, 'the social base of *flânerie* is journalism',⁷⁸ strolling and walking allow the writer to observe, re-create and record the urban experience as he is engaged in the search for collective myths, rituals and dreams of modernity in a dialectical tension between his self and the crowd.

Moving from De Certeau and Benjamin's studies, I consider De Roberto to be a 'special' *flâneur*. I am using the adjective 'special' in order to highlight that De Roberto was neither affected by dandyism nor a *flâneur* who wanted to contrast the bourgeoisie's world and its values. De Roberto did not share Baudelaire's idea of the purposeless life of the city stroller nor Baudelaire's conception of putting himself outside of city life. However, I would like to consider De Roberto a 'special' *flâneur* for three main reasons: firstly, De Roberto lived the spirit and contradictions of *fin de siècle* culture; secondly, the writer was an active observer of the life of his city and its urban practices; and, lastly, he was both the flagellant of the Sicilian bourgeoisie in *I Viceré* and the apologist for the Catanese bourgeoisie in his articles and in his guidebook because the Catanese bourgeoisie was able to transform Catania into a modern city.

As mentioned above, De Roberto was not an isolated, lazy, passive city-dweller. He was neither alienated nor locked up in his *turris eburnea*. As a *flâneur*, he walked the streets of Catania and observed the crowd that had invaded the modern city. He was fully immersed in city life as his many articles, written for local and national papers, demonstrate. As a journalist, he started his career as a young reporter publishing articles on Catania's social and political events. The topics he discussed are quite various, from the description of Catania and its life and political problems, to Mount Etna and its various eruptions. He used his articles to describe Catanese folklore and religious events, such as the festivals of St Agatha – the city's patron saint – and others to deal with the safeguarding of the Catanese heritage and the importance of the notable archaeological

⁷⁸ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 446.

sites for the city, both to bear testimony to the past and as a means of attracting foreign travellers. Moreover, as many critics have pointed out, some protagonists of his novel *I Viceré* were based on real Catanese people he had observed and studied with scrupulous precision.⁷⁹ De Roberto did not stroll around the boulevards as Baudelaire did. The cityscape of Catania is very restricted, even though the city was growing in size and popularity. Catania was, thus, part of De Roberto's life both as a citizen and a writer, even though the value of his *I Viceré* does not lie as much in the description of Catania, but rather in its literary transfiguration, which gives the urban space a symbolical meaning. The guidebook to Catania De Roberto wrote in 1907 and the numerous articles he published give him the status of a 'special' observer. As a scholar of Catania, his unique point of view is very significant both for his description and for his chronicles of the city he was attached to.

Although in De Roberto's works we do not find descriptions of the Catanese Baroque style, and the modern city is quite hidden and overwhelmed by the city of the past, De Roberto was acutely aware of the social and political problems Catania was undergoing, as he stated in a letter to the Catanese politician Giuseppe De Felice Giuffrida in 1910:

Catania è come un adolescente giunto al periodo critico della crescita, quando nuovi atteggiamenti, nuovi istinti, nuovi bisogni si manifestano ed urgono. Il suo rapido e costante sviluppo dev'essere disciplinato, favorito e assicurato con una serie propriamente innumerevole di provvedimenti intorno ad ogni ordine di pubblica necessità. Qui c'è tutto un mondo da creare, e c'è da creare, che è il più difficile, i mezzi con i quali crearlo: vasta ed ardua impresa, da spaventare i più arditi ed esperti.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ In a letter to De Roberto Giovanni Verga states that the book 'è una *machine* poderosa che hai messo in piedi, e dei cristiani in carne e d'ossa che mi sembra di aver conosciuti. Anzi a questo proposito ti dico che ti sei fatto un bel cuscinetto costì a Catania, fra tutti cotesti Uzeda che si riconosceranno allo specchio, deputati, senatori o semplici minchioni che sieno'; in Castelli, *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto*, p. 22. Di Grado and Giarrizzo have highlighted that, in portraying Consalvo, De Roberto took inspiration from Antonino Paternò Castello Marquis of San Giuliano (1852- 1914), who was elected mayor of Catania at the age of twenty-six. He was a city councillor, a mayor of Catania, and a foreign minister. A. Di Grado, *La vita, le carte, i turbamenti di Federico De Roberto, gentiluomo* (Catania: Fondazione Verga, 1998), pp. 192-193, 272-273; Giarrizzo, *Catania* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1986), pp. 123-127; P. M. Sipala, *Introduzione a De Roberto* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1988), pp. 71-72 and Id., 'Il romanzo di Consalvo', pp. 197-209; C. Spalanca, 'L'ascesa politica del Principe Consalvo', in *Gli inganni del romanzo. 'I Viceré' tra storia e finzione letteraria*, Atti del congresso celebrativo del centenario dei Viceré, Catania, 23-26 November 1994, (Catania: Fondazione Verga, 1998), pp. 223-240.

⁸⁰ De Roberto's letter to De Felice Giuffrida, 19th September 1910. Now in *Catania. La città moderna, la città contemporanea*, G. Giarrizzo, ed (Catania: Domenico Sanfilippo, 2012), pp. 128-129. De Roberto's epistolary can be found at the Regional University Library, 'Giambattista Caruso', in Catania. Moreover, a list of his letters can be found at the following website: <http://manus.iccu.sbn.it/index.php>.

The simile De Roberto used to describe Catania, comparing it to an adolescent, highlights two important points: first of all, the fact that the city was flourishing and becoming more and more important; and, secondly, that, instead of pursuing positive territorial policies, the politicians and local administrators, elected to improve the growth of the city as a social and cultural space offered to its citizens, wasted their time quarrelling and arguing. De Roberto, then, did not indulge in a passive and contemplative *fin-de-siècle* pose, nor did he seem affected by ennui of his contemporaries. On the contrary, he was an active, committed *flâneur*; a critical observer and a careful reporter, who provided a critical vision of history and society. Walking in the city, instead of thinking of it or imagining it, allowed this special city stroller to render visible what cannot be seen because he was able to discover new signs and new meanings linked to his urban experience. In fact, De Roberto describes Catania as the *locus* – both symbolic and real – of the tensions between conflicting forces, which try to conquer and rule the cityscape; but also as the *locus* in which the past meets modernity. In addition, his representation of Catania reveals his conception of the urban space and his idea of modernity. These are the leitmotifs which mark De Roberto's literary production that I will examine in following chapters.

1. 4. The city and the Italian novel

The presence of the city in the Italian novelistic tradition is an issue to be discussed in depth. Before analysing De Roberto's works, it is appropriate to have a broader picture of the Italian situation in order to understand where De Roberto stood *vis-à-vis* his contemporaries on the portrayal of the city and the role of urban space as a character of the novel. The relatively rare and late presence of the urban cityscape in Italian novels is usually explained by two main factors: the late introduction of the novel into Italian literature and the late development of the city as a modern space on the Italian landscape. Whereas in other European countries the industrialised city was already a significant phenomenon at the turn of the eighteenth century, in Italy it is only in the second half of the nineteenth century that cities started to expand; as confirmed by the censuses conducted in the newly-formed state in 1861, 1881 and 1901, which revealed the development of cities in the new state.⁸¹ The development of Italian cities was a phenomenon which came about as a result of two important events. First of all, there was

⁸¹ Restucci, 'L'immagine della città', in *Letteratura italiana: storia e geografia*, Asor Rosa, ed., pp. 172-173.

the great migration of people to cities in order to find a job; secondly, the establishment and the middle-class's involvement in the economy of the country and in the not necessary compatible task of giving a modern image to the country competitive to that of other European cities. Writers and men of letters 'hanno bisogno di offrire un'immagine urbana come realtà pacificata, come luogo capace di cementare l'unità e di far crescere un'istanza globale collettiva'.⁸² Not only did the city boast the symbols of the new political power, but it also displayed its modernity: 'la città del passato viene attraversata dal progresso, dai primi omnibus a cavalli, dal feticcio-merce, da un pubblico di massa, dai fasci di binari alla stazione, dall'abbattimento delle mura, dalla costruzione delle nuove zone di espansione "fuori porta", dagli sventramenti'.⁸³

Needless to say, the process of modernity was neither uniform nor fast. Even though there were groups of intellectuals who had connections with some of the most important figures in European literature, the economic situation of Italy 'and the cultural gap that affected many regions, especially the South, was an obstacle to true progress, although some of the best intellectuals and writers of the time came from those same backward regions'.⁸⁴ Yet, if the city as a character of the novel developed later, the city in Italian literature appeared in the Middle Ages and offered one of the most important *topoi* of literature: the city as Hell.

Leslie Fielder has studied the relationship between the city and literature, demonstrating the strong underlying presence of the city in some poems and novels and how novelists and poets have contributed to make the city a legendary and mythical place. The verses from *Inferno* III give a powerful example of how the city was conceived during medieval times.

Per me si va ne la città dolente,
per me si va ne l'eterno dolore,
per me si va tra la perduta gente. [...]]
Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate⁸⁵.

The *motto* on the gate of Hell gives a precise picture of how the city was the prototype or model of evil, corruption and pain. If we study the framework of Dante's masterpiece, we discover that Hell is depicted as a walled city, probably the poet's own city, Florence,

⁸² Ibid., p. 172.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 174.

⁸⁴ R. Ceserani, 'Italy and Modernity: Peculiarities and Contradictions', in *Italian Modernism*, L. Somigli and M. Moroni, eds, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Corporation, 2004), p. 48.

⁸⁵ D. Alighieri, *La divina commedia* (Milan: Principato, 1998), canto III, vv. 1-9, p. 47.

while Heaven is a great rose in a boundless sea. Fielder has underlined that the idea of the city as Hell communicates the failure of Christianity to adopt the myth of a Holy City in its own theology. The *topos* of the city as the prototype of Hell appeared in the fourteenth century and extends to contemporary literature. It appears in Shakespeare, ‘whose urban plays – *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida* – tend to be his most horrendous’.⁸⁶ It does not matter whether they are set in Troy or Rome, as what is described is a cultural milieu in which betrayal and infidelity are the main themes. The scholar has also compared the image of the city in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the image of the city in Thomas Stearns Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, ‘for whom the Dantesque metaphor of Hell as the City becomes the modern metaphor of the City as Hell’.⁸⁷ From Dostoevsky to Zola, Baudelaire to Beckett the myth of the city as Hell is a common theme and this is not confined to European or American literature.

With the Renaissance, and the discovery of perspective, the medieval idea of the city as a spectral vision vanished and was replaced by another vision of urban space. Bramante, Leonardo, Alberti, Brunelleschi and Campanella ‘turned to the dream of reason; circular or square, radial or polygonal, their urban visions revealed logic, will, clarity, purest tyranny of the eye’.⁸⁸ With the new anthropocentric idea of the world, the city became the ideal space where man could express his power and his concept of beauty. Squares, buildings, churches and roads were the perfect scenario in which to live and act. Ideal cities were projected and almost all of them were inspired by radio-centric principles that were well suited to the characterisation of urban space. Monumental points of attraction, such as squares with obelisks, equestrian statues, fountains and stairways were built to attract visitors’ attention and strike them with a sense of harmony and order, in contrast to the clutter of the typical maze of alleyways in the medieval city. The emblem of the city is the leading family’s palace, such as those belonging to the Medici and the Sforza. During the Renaissance, as a matter of fact, the city was a place which had to satisfy the necessities and desires of its citizens, as Leon Battista Alberti wrote in his essay *De re aedificatoria*: ‘E pertanto noi deliberiamo che la città debba essere talmente fatta che

⁸⁶ L. Fiedler, ‘Mythicizing the City’, in *Literature and the American Urban Experience*, Jaye and Chalmers Watts, eds, p. 116.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-122.

⁸⁸ Hassan, ‘City of Mind, Urban Words’, in *Literature and the American Urban Experience*, Jaye and Chalmers Watts, eds, p. 96.

e' non vi sia incomodità alcuna di quelle che noi raccontammo nel primo libro, e che non vi manchi cosa alcuna che a la necessità de la vita si desidera'.⁸⁹

The fountains, statues and buildings were used to show off the power of the *Signori* who governed the cities. This was due to a process, which involved the city during the Renaissance, which Annastella Carrino defines as *aristocratizzazione*.⁹⁰ The word alludes to the change in social hierarchies and in the new forms of political rule, which prevented *il popolo* from active participation in the government of the city. This aristocratic process created new noble values, which were codified in manuals that detailed the new canon of *bon vivre* and good manners. *Il cortegiano* or *Il galateo* are examples of the importance of a reliable code to refer to if a citizen wanted to be part of the city's oligarchy, whose aim was to subject citizens to its will and political power.⁹¹

The relatively late birth and even the very existence of an Italian urban literature is still a controversial issue. If we study the works of some eminent writers such Manzoni or Verga, we discover that they dealt with Italian cityscapes but were examples of anti-urban attitudes throughout the nineteenth-century.⁹² When they describe Milan, for instance, there is always a comparison with the country-side. If Manzoni described the city from an external point of view, Verga, on contrary, was fully immersed in the vibrant heart of the city. Not only was the latter interested in the way of living in a city, which was the symbol of modernity, but he also wanted to highlight the relationship between the Lombard countryside and the Southern Sicilian landscape. As Restucci states: 'C'è dunque una drammatizzazione della città, e questo proprio quando letterati e scrittori hanno bisogno di offrire un'immagine urbana come realtà pacificata, come luogo capace di cementare l'unità e di far crescere un'istanza globale collettiva'.⁹³ The reason is that the middle-class, with the aim of projecting a positive image of the cityscapes, promoted certain exhibitions which had the purpose of showing how positive and modern was life in the city. Guido Gozzano, for instance, edited a catalogue for the Turin International World Fair of 1911,⁹⁴ as did Federico de Roberto for *Albo illustrato dell'esposizione di Catania 1907*,⁹⁵ whereas

⁸⁹ L.B. Alberti, *De re edificatoria*, in *La città ideale nel Rinascimento*, G. C. Sciolla, ed., (Torino: UTET, 1975), p. 53.

⁹⁰ A. Carrino, *La città aristocratica* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2000), pp. 7-22.

⁹¹ B. Castiglione, *Il cortegiano* (1528); G. Della Casa, *Il galateo ovvero de' costumi* (1558).

⁹² Restucci, 'L'immagine della città', in *Letteratura italiana: storia e geografia*, Asor Rosa, ed., p. 170.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁹⁴ G. Gozzano, *Un vergilato sotto la neve. Scritti sull'esposizione universale di Torino 1911*, G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., (Catania: Tringale, 1984). On the exhibitions see C. Della Coletta, *World's Fairs, Italian Style: The Great Exhibitions in Turin and Their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁹⁵ F. De Roberto, *Albo illustrato dell'esposizione di Catania 1907* (Catania: Galátola Editore, 1907).

Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana and Arrigo Boito wrote articles on the Milan International Fair of 1881.⁹⁶ However, those exhibitions were seen merely as spectacle, and failed in the aim of attracting people to life in the city. In fact, Italian post-unity literature displayed the anti-urban and anti-industrial attitudes of its novelists. When we look at the city in the Italian novel, we discover that writers followed a very profound dichotomy. On the one hand, they were very intrigued by the city and the novelties it brought but, on the other hand, they were uncertain and quite uneasy about a place which appeared to be very chaotic and unsafe, compared with the simple life in the countryside. That is why in *Per le vie* (1883), written by Verga during his stay in Milan, the countryside is presented ‘come elemento risanatore delle miserie prodotte dalla città’ and the city is the perfect scenario to depict the world of the rich and describe the humble condition of the poor, who were excluded from the sparkling life of *cafés*, *promenades* and the urban life of the middle-class.⁹⁷ Moreover, in *I Malavoglia* (1881), Verga compared the two worlds, that of the city, which is the symbol of ruin, and the life in Trezza, which is the symbol of the patriarchal family and of a very protective world. Lia and ‘Ntoni, who revolt against misery and are attracted by Catania and its city life, are swept away by the modern capitalistic world. Furthermore, we do not find in the novel a full description of Catania nor of Trezza, because space has a symbolic meaning in the comparison of the micro-society of the village and the macro-society of the city.

The contrast between the old aristocratic world and modernity is also evident in Gabriele D’Annunzio’s novels, *Il piacere* (1889) and *Le vergini delle rocce* (1895), where the relationship ‘D’Annunzio-città è anzi simbolicamente definita nel rifiuto, sin dall’inizio, ad occuparsi della nuova Roma, del mondo piccolo-borghese degli speculatori e degli affaristi: la città “degli imperatori e dei Papi” viene resa in un clima teatralmente fascinatore’.⁹⁸ If D’Annunzio can be considered the voice of the Roman aristocracy, which was unable to challenge the changes the city was undergoing, Edmondo De Amicis, with the publication of *Cuore* (1886), is the emergent pedagogical voice of the bourgeoisie in the new Italian State. This was due to the Italian bourgeoisie’s effort to give an optimistic image of a class which was successful owing to hard work and efficiency. The city described in *Cuore* is a city which shows its desire to be conceived of as a place which

⁹⁶ In *Mediolanum* (Milan: Vallardi, 1881); *Milano 1881 negli scritti di Luigi Capuana, Giovanni Verga, Neera, Raffaello Barbiera, Vanni Scheiwiller* (Milan: Tipografia U. Allegretti di Campi, 1976).

⁹⁷ Restucci, ‘L’immagine della città’, in *Letteratura italiana: storia e geografia*, Asor Rosa, ed., p. 194.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

was built through the sacrifice and the ability of a class characterised by a strong sense of duty, a new conception of order and obedience to fixed rules.⁹⁹

The positive attitude towards modernity and the price paid for progress is the topic of a reflection by Adriano Mei in *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1904) by Luigi Pirandello. The protagonist reflects on the frenzied life in Milan, a city characterised by crowds and noise: ‘E intanto il frastuono, il fermento continuo della città m’intronavano’.¹⁰⁰ If Pirandello’s character complains about the commotion and disturbance of Milan, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in *Manifesto del futurismo* (1909) declared the importance of the city and the new values which, in his opinion, characterised the twentieth century, and whose key words were energy, force, vitality and audacity: ‘Noi canteremo le grandi folle agitate dal lavoro, dal piacere o dalla sommossa: canteremo le maree multicolori e polifoniche delle rivoluzioni nelle capitali moderne’.¹⁰¹

The city, in Marinetti’s opinion, is characterised by ‘life’ and ‘power’, and he imagined that people would enjoy living in a city dominated by electrical forces: the power-station is, then, the symbol of Marinetti’s city of the future. Not only does he reject the static city of the past and exalt the dynamic city, but he also underlines the strong relationship between engineering and architecture, which is the perfect organisation that would govern, in his opinion, the ‘empowered’ futuristic city.¹⁰² These ideas are expressed well in Antonio Sant’Elia’s *L’architettura futurista* (1914): ‘Noi dobbiamo inventare e rifabbricare la città futurista simile ad un immenso cantiere tumultuante, agile, nobile, dinamico in ogni sua parte, e la casa futurista simile ad una macchina gigantesca’.¹⁰³ David Ohana has highlighted Sant’Elia’s anti-historicism and his opposition to the monumental and the decorative, highlighting that Sant’Elia’s focus is on the city of the future – a Utopian city – in which man is ‘functional’ to the city and not the opposite.¹⁰⁴

Another aspect of the relationship between literature and the city is discussed in Luciano Patetta’s essay *L’immaginario della città socialista in alcuni testi anarchici italiani dell’Ottocento*.¹⁰⁵ Patetta’s study is an analysis of the architectonic images of the city in Utopian literature, in which the scholar points out the very close connections

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁰⁰ L. Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2009), p. 142.

¹⁰¹ F. T. Marinetti, *Manifesti del futurismo* (Florence: Edizioni Lacerba, 1914), p. 7.

¹⁰² D. Ohana, *The Futurist Syndrome* (Brighton: Sussex Academic, 2010), p. 50.

¹⁰³ A. Sant’Elia, ‘Manifesto dell’architettura futurista’, in Sant’Elia, *L’opera completa*, L. Caramel and A. Longatti, eds, (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1987), pp. 347-348.

¹⁰⁴ Ohana, *The Futurist Syndrome*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ L. Patetta, ‘L’immaginario della città socialista in alcuni testi anarchici italiani dell’Ottocento’, in *Testo letterario e immaginario architettonico*, R. Casari and others, eds, (Milan: Jaca Books, 1996), pp. 243-254.

between the socialist credo and the idea of the city. If, in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the urban architecture was a mirror of social order and a reflection of both social and political stability, the Utopian literature of the second half of the nineteenth century was pervaded with philanthropic attitudes: writers started to be aware of the conditions of the working-class during the first Italian industrial revolution. Some books written in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, such as *La città felice* (1553) by Francesco Patrizi, *La repubblica immaginaria* (1575) by Ludovico Agostini, *La città del sole* (1602) by Tommaso Campanella or *Il porto, o vero della repubblica di Evandria* (1625) by Ludovico Zuccolo provide examples of an idealised – Utopian – city. This ‘ideal’ city is only possible in an ideal space, which represents the emblem of a golden age in contrast with the contemporary epoch because, as Patetta states, ‘il sogno di una società dell’uguaglianza e della giustizia si accompagna sempre con le novità della struttura urbana e con la bellezza della sua architettura’.¹⁰⁶

It is only with the rise of industrialisation that the city became the symbol of social justice and social harmony, which is well represented in Andrea Costa’s *Un sogno* (1881), as a possible realisation of the socialist dream in a city in Romagna or Giovanni Rossi’s *Un comune socialista* (1884), which depicts a socialist village where everything belongs to the community, even though, as Patetta underlines, writers were not able to imagine ‘una struttura urbana che non sia quella piccolo-borghese, nella quale si sogna possa avvenire un rinnovamento con un semplice cambio di classe sociale’.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the idea of social justice and equality are expressed in the new cityscapes and in its architectural beauty. Moreover, the city is both the representation of mankind’s desire to build a harmonious society and a literary *topos* to discuss the relationship between the author and the space he portrays. The myth of the city as a perfect place and the city as a symbol of corruption are still strong concepts which belong to our culture. On the one hand, the city is the symbol of our cultural and economic growth; on the other hand, it is the symbol of dystopia and conflict.¹⁰⁸ Dickens’s London can sum up the contradictions modernity arose.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 243

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁰⁸ Dystopia is the opposite of Utopia and refers to society characterised by totalitarian governments, political disorder and dehumanization, which have as a consequence a decline of humanity, see M. D. Gordin, H. Tilley and G. Prakash, eds, *Utopia/Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton, New Jersey; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 1-16.

1. 5. The static city versus the modern city: London, an English case-study

Writers have used urban settings for their literary works either as a symbolic reconstruction of reality or as a place where various semantic elements are generated. Interpreting the city means decoding a text which contains human, natural and imaginary elements, ‘For the city, Hassan points out, acts as mediator between human and natural orders, as a changing network of social relations, as a flux of production and consumption’.¹⁰⁹ The allegories of Paris in Baudelaire’s poems; the naturalistic view of the city in Balzac’s novels; the city as a dream in Proust or Joyce are just some examples of the complexity of the city in literature over the course of the centuries. In this section I will study Dickens’s representation of London as a model for my analysis of De Roberto’s depiction of Catania. My three main reasons are these: firstly, because Dickens’s writing can be a model for considering De Roberto’s alertness to the political and social changes of Catania as influenced by the forces of modernity; secondly, because London’s urban hustle is seen through the lens of a novelist and the city is portrayed as a character in itself; and, lastly, because Dickens was able to describe the different aspects of the urban life: ‘the random and the systematic, the visible and the obscured, which is the true significance of the city, and especially at this period of the capital city, as a dominant social form’.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Dickens was a chronicler of city life. The writer depicted London and its inhabitants in his work *Sketches by Boz* (1836), a collection of articles he had previously published in various newspapers. Thus, his work as a journalist,¹¹¹ as was the case for De Roberto, was the starting point to his career as a novelist.¹¹²

It was during the nineteenth century that the city in literature underwent two important changes, in part due to the creation of industrial capitalism. The first change occurred in the conception of urban space, which was no longer conceived as a static environment; the second shift affected its human actors, who did not live in the space as a community of people but as isolated individuals. The city as a static image, Pike states, is a ‘rhetorical stereotype’, a mere background in which to set a story, ‘before individualized description of the city displaced the fixed topos’.¹¹³ As an example of the static city, the

¹⁰⁹ Hassan, ‘City of Mind, Urban Words’, in *Literature and the American Urban Experience*, Jaye and Chalmers Watts, eds, p. 95.

¹¹⁰ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 154.

¹¹¹ J. M. L. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

¹¹² Sipala, *Introduzione a De Roberto*, p. 3.

¹¹³ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, pp. 27-28.

scholar quotes Wordsworth's sonnet *Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802*.

In the sonnet the city appears as a stereotyped place whose features – tower, bridge, domes – could easily be located in any city. Were it not for the title, we could not have identified the city of London and the age in which it was written. The elements of the city described are symbols of art, commerce and religion, which have been the characteristics of the city in Western culture for centuries. The space of the city is empty: there are no people ‘as if the city, seen in depopulated, death-like repose, has left the world of human activity where it belongs to become another object in the world of nature’.¹¹⁴ This is the reason why the city as a static place suggests to Pike the idea that the poem is a *trompe l’oeil* reconstruction of a passing impression.

This image of the city as a static place appears in Dickens's early novels which presented the city as a picture whose figures moved in a space which reflected the apparent relationships they had in real life. However, as Pike has demonstrated, Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, written in 1864 and 1865, is one of his elaborated works, since it combines both social and psychological analysis. In addition, Dickens's ‘perception of the urban world as fragmented and unstable was ahead of the literary conventions and techniques, based on fixed forms and stereotypes, which were his stock-in-trade for presenting it’.¹¹⁵ The reason is that Dickens was able to both represent the city and describe modern urban life; its streets, squares and houses make the city real and reveal its transformation, which was brought about by industrial capitalism.

Dickens's London was a city which dominated the English urban scene during the Industrial Revolution, and its continuing growth and rapid development attracted thousands of people who were in search of work or fortune. Pike's opinion is that Dickens created a new kind of novel where London appears, in his early works, as ‘a relatively coherent, fixed place’, whereas ‘in the later ones it becomes a destabilized place’,¹¹⁶ where Dickens's characters are representative of a very complex society. We can find police and criminals, nouveaux-riches and the penniless working class, the idle professional and the urban poor. Nonetheless, the individual moral qualities are felt as if they were collective. The result of Pike's analysis of *Our Mutual Friend* is that it offers a new perspective of the urban space because it contains some signals of change in the representation of the city, from the conception of the city as a static image to the idea of the city in flux.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

Dickens's London is completely different from the other industrial cities (such as Coketown, which is described in *Hard Times*), which were built in a period of rapid expansion around what had been a village. The new towns were organised around their places of work in such a way that the city reflected the social system, so that, for example, the social order and economic system of the town were quite visible: there was, in other words, an identification of the idea of industry with the idea of the town. London was 'a paradox: the coexistence of variation and apparent randomness with what had in the end to be seen as a determining system: the visible individual facts but beyond them, often hidden, the common condition and destiny'.¹¹⁷ London did not reflect the physical features the other industrial cities possessed, but was the capital of distribution, trades and financial capitalism. 'Eighteenth-century London was the astonishing creation of an agrarian and mercantile capitalism, within an aristocratic political order',¹¹⁸ which had, as consequences, an increase both in the number of inhabitants and in that of the poor. Dickens's London was the backdrop in which the crowd, poor people and wealthy people could meet in the new spaces created by capitalism. In so doing, both the city and its inhabitants are not mere conventional or stereotyped characters, but are representation of modern urban life: London is vibrant, animated by its unstable social world.

According to Steven Johnson, describing the experience of the industrial city was a challenge because the city became a character itself, with the features of a literary hero: 'La città era sia causa che effetto dei suoi abitanti-personaggi: le loro azioni la ponevano in essere, e la città, a sua volta ne influenzava il comportamento'.¹¹⁹ The scholar maintains that if we compare the endings in Dickens's novels with those in Richardson's, we discover that, after a century, they are quite similar: the story ends when the hero gets married or the inheritance is given to the legal heir. The difference is that, while in the past the plot was dominated by the unreliability of the social network, in Dickens's novels events happen because characters meet each other in the cityscape: it is the city life which allows people to meet after a long time. In novels like *Pamela* (1740), for example, events start when a letter is lost or because a diary is stolen; a letter or a message arrives very late and, being isolated, it is relatively difficult to solve the problem because there is not urban network. In contrast, the events described in Dickens's novels occur, for example, when an orphan meets a benefactor by chance or a poor girl meets her benefactor's daughter: the

¹¹⁷ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 154.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹¹⁹ S. Johnson, 'Complessità urbana e intreccio romanzesco', in *Il romanzo*, F. Moretti, ed., (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), vol. I., p. 729. Johnson's essay is not included in the English edition published in 2008.

city and hero are protagonists together as the city is the pivotal place of experience for Dickens's characters.

Space, and its cognition, can also be investigated as a chronotope. As a chronotope,¹²⁰ it serves to analyse the distinctive ways in which time and space were conceived: time can become artistically visible, while space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of plot, time and history. The importance of space and time is discussed by Ian Watt, whose work *The Rise of the Novel* focuses on these two aspects as the distinctive elements of the novel. He considers time and space as correlative elements,¹²¹ and as two inextricable dimensions, which 'break with the earlier literary tradition of using timeless stories to mirror the unchanging moral verities', with the result that time is related to space.¹²² For these reasons, with the rise of the novel, space, which was traditionally indistinct and general, achieved a greater importance: Defoe's and Richardson's protagonists are immersed in a concrete, vivid world, which had the scope of putting the hero in a plausible environment and that of giving him the chance to express himself as an individual, with the result that his own private experience can be considered as the *manifesto* of a 'man-centred world [...] in which the individual was responsible for his own scale of moral and social values'.¹²³ Collective tradition is replaced by individual experience and events stopped being seen in an abstract, intangible continuum of space and time. As a consequence, formal realism is the new narrative method that allows the writer to put his character in his spatial and temporal environment.

Watt's thesis is, then, tied to the rise of literacy and a middle class, and relates to the eighteenth-century changes in the social, intellectual urban milieu. Eighteenth-century London was described as a city where different social groups lived and moved; as a place which was the representation of both urban and suburban ways of living.¹²⁴ Besides,

¹²⁰ See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, M. Holquist, ed., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 85.

¹²¹ This opinion is also shared by David Harvey who states that 'Space and time are basic categories of human existence. Yet we rarely debate their meanings; we tend to take them for granted, and give them common-sense or self-evident attributions'. D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 201. On this subject see also A. Thacker, *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); J. Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); R. Antonelli, 'Tempo e spazio nella storiografia letteraria', in *La scrittura e la storia: problemi di storiografia letteraria*, A. Asor Rosa, ed., (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1995), pp. 161-195.

¹²² I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 22.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹²⁴ Watt states that 'the suburb is perhaps the most significant aspect of the segregation of classes in the new urban pattern. Both the very rich and the very poor are excluded, and so the middle-class pattern can develop unmolested, safe both from the glittering immorality of the fashionable end of town and from the equally affronting misery and shiftlessness of the poor – the word "Mob" is a significant late seventeenth-century coinage which reflects a growing distaste and at times even fear of urban masses'. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

London became the emblem of the supremacy of material values and the decline of religious values, ‘a supremacy that was symbolised in the way that London was rebuilt after the Great Fire: under the new plan it was the Royal Exchange and not St Paul’s which became the architectural focus of the City’.¹²⁵ London, which is the symbol of urbanisation, is described in English novels ‘as the symbol of wealth, luxury, excitement and perhaps a rich husband’.¹²⁶ As a result of these important changes in experiencing everyday life and in sharing new values, which ‘now’ depend on economics, the novel shows ‘the individual seeking his fortune in the big city and perhaps only achieving tragic failure’.¹²⁷ Watt’s study clearly shows how urban space, from the eighteenth-century novel onwards, grew in importance, not only because novelists were interested in realism – which would lead to the French theory of the novel as a *tranche de vie* – but also because, step by step, the city became one of the protagonists of the novel itself. The result is that urban space was not considered as a backdrop or as a frame in which to settle a plot, but was given an active role in the story.

1. 6. De Roberto’s Catania (1861-1927)

Dickens’s London is both a fictional scenario in which to develop a plot and a main character in itself. As a social commentator, Dickens shows the role of the city in changing and affecting his novels characters’ lives, the importance of realistic environments and the interaction between characters and urban space. Since the novel contains a degree of verisimilitude, as Douglas C. D. Pockock has underlined, and being ‘a source for new insights and a testing ground for hypotheses in the experiential foundation of our world’,¹²⁸ literature can be seen as a mirror, a microcosm or a reflection of reality, having, therefore, a certain degree of isomorphism between the real world and the fictional world.

The importance of a relationship between literature and space suggests a geographical approach to the analysis of the novel, and can be used to investigate a writer’s concepts of space. Franco Moretti has suggested that we can refer to both space in literature and literature in space. The first concept highlights the fictional space, whereas

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ D. C. D. Pockock, ‘Imaginative Literature and the Geographer’, in D. C. D. Pockock, ed., *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on the Experience of Place* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 15.

the second concept indicates a real historical space.¹²⁹ This relationship between real space and fictitious space can be a new starting point in analysing and interpreting the novel, recognizing in it both fictitious and real environments. This approach to literature is a way to study the importance, the role, the perception and the meaning space has for a writer, and can also reveal the author's aesthetic and political beliefs. I will use this approach in studying De Roberto's works on Catania and, taking inspiration from Dickens's London, I will try to reconstruct Catania's historical and social background in order to understand his vision and conception of urban space; the importance of De Roberto's use of narrative space, chronotope and verisimilitude; and, lastly, his *Weltanschauung*. For these reasons, it is important to have a historical and social background of Catania between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the turn of the century.

De Roberto, who was born in Naples in 1861 and only arrived in Catania when he was a child, had an ambiguous relationship with his adoptive city: Catania was both *grembo* and *prigione*.¹³⁰ On the one hand, the writer was attracted by Catania's natural beauty, its lively society life, its historical monuments and its glorious past; on the other hand, he felt repulsion towards a cultural environment that he felt to be narrow-minded and frustrating. However, during the '70s of the nineteenth century Catania was growing, improving its social life and urban architecture. Catania, as the historian Giuseppe Giarrizzo has underlined, was becoming a wealthy city: its streets were the place to stroll, were full of shops and had gas lighting; *café-chantants* and bars were the meeting point of the bourgeoisie and the city centre was the point of attraction both for the Catanese and foreigners.¹³¹ The city was also enjoying an economic growth, due to the vital role of the port and the railway. To give an example, Catania's railway and port were the pivotal point in sulphur production, which arrived by railway from Messina and was later transported by ship to other Mediterranean ports. As a consequence, Catania was becoming a mercantile city, in contrast with the aristocratic city of the Bourbons, whose *élite* had had the leadership from 1819 until 1861.

Antonino Paternò Castello, Marquis of San Giuliano, is one of the main figures who promoted economic, social and political changes.¹³² Paternò Castello was elected

¹²⁹ F. Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 3-10.

¹³⁰ Castelli, 'La Catania grembo e prigione di De Roberto', in *La parola e il luogo*, A. Di Grado, ed., (Palermo: Kalós, 2010), pp. 23- 28.

¹³¹ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, pp. 34-40.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 69-77; see also G. Policastro, *Un uomo di stato. Il Marchese di San Giuliano* (Ancona: Puccini, 1912); F. Cataluccio, *Antonio di San Giuliano e la politica estera italiana dal 1900 al 1914* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1935); R. Longhitano, *Antonino di San Giuliano* (Rome-Milan, Fratelli Bocca, 1954); G. Giarrizzo, *Diario fotografico del Marchese di San Giuliano* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1985); G. Ferraioli, *Politica e*

mayor in 1879 at the age of twenty-seven, and was the supporter of Catanese liberalism and modernity. He was convinced that Catania, ranked eleven among the modern Italian cities, had to improve its urban architecture and urban décor in order to be transformed into a city of tourism, which meant public benefit and cultural regeneration¹³³ However, Paternò Castello was not able to find funds to achieve his goal, as De Roberto reported in two articles published in 1880,¹³⁴ and, consequently, he had to renounce his project, even though Catania had become, as a matter of fact, ‘la città borghese del Mezzogiorno’, aspiring to a leading role in Southern Italy.¹³⁵ Verga, Capuana and De Roberto were the storytellers and the witnesses of such political and social debates and ambitions, even though it was De Roberto who denounced and described, in *I Viceré*, the voracious Catanese aristocracy and the intersection between politics and society.

Giarrizzo has pointed out that the city reflected the aristocratic dominance of the urban space and that ‘la storia della città era la storia di quella razza, e la sua vita lo spazio vitale della sopravvivenza proterva dei viceré’.¹³⁶ Although the city had become modern and the urban décor reflected bourgeois industriousness, Catania was the symbol of the Italian *trasformismo*.¹³⁷ De Roberto highlighted in *I Viceré* this practice, and art, of making coalitions in order to achieve personal political goals and reach parliamentary agreements. In the novel, *trasformismo* is a sign of opportunism, careerism and cynicism, but also a way to express the writer’s political disillusionment and a description of an Italian bourgeoisie incapable of opposing the greedy aristocracy.¹³⁸

Although Catania was described as a city in which local political *élites* tried to dominate the urban space and aimed at pursuing personal interests, at the turn of the century Catania started to be known, and considered, as the first bourgeois city of the Italian Mezzogiorno, especially after Giuseppe De Felice Giuffrida, who played an

diplomazia in Italia tra XIX e XX secolo: vita di Antonino di San Giuliano (1852-1914) (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007).

¹³³ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 70.

¹³⁴ De Roberto, ‘La crisi municipale a Catania’, *Il Fanfulla*, 9 March 1880; ID., ‘La crisi municipale a Catania. La crisi è finita’, *Il Fanfulla*, 17 March 1880.

¹³⁵ Giarrizzo, ‘Le élites’, in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, M. Aymard and G. Giarrizzo, eds, (Catania: Domenico Sanfilippo Editore, 2007), p. 302.

¹³⁶ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 125.

¹³⁷ *Trasformismo* was a political system, begun by Agostino Depretis, that aimed to enforce the moderate political parties and enlarge the consent of the young state government to extend the progressive bourgeoisie. The word *trasformismo* has come to mean a parliamentary practice consisting of continuous exchange of vows between the majority and the opposition, in the frequent passages of deputies and senators from one political party to another. On this topic see L. Musella, *Il trasformismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003); G. Sabbatucci, *Il trasformismo come sistema* (Rome: Laterza, 2003); V. Valbruzzi, ‘Is trasformismo a useful category for analysing modern Italian politics?’, *Journal of Italian Studies*, 19, n. 2, (2014), pp. 169-185.

¹³⁸ Ganeri, ‘Italian Trasformismo before Il Gattopardo’, in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, pp. 201-212.

important role in the modernisation of the city, promoted the myth of Catania as the Milan of the South.¹³⁹ In 1902 De Felice Giuffrida, who was the first left-wing mayor of Catania, tried to form an alliance between the working class and the enlightened bourgeoisie and became the protagonist of Catania city life and the supporter of both civil and social progress. De Felice Giuffrida's leadership marked a turning point in the transformation of the city and 'De Felice Catania' was considered a model to propose to Sicilians in order to have a 'Sicilia desta, forte, libera e moderna'.¹⁴⁰ The importance of Catania as a modern city is described in De Roberto's guidebook to the Sicilian Second Agricultural Exhibition, which the writer supervised in 1907, and the guidebook *Catania con 152 illustrazioni* for the series 'Italia Artistica', published by the Istituto D'Arti Grafiche of Bergamo in the same year.¹⁴¹ The guidebook to the Sicilian Second Agricultural Exhibition marks the importance of Catania as a city that aspired to a leading role in Italy and that would be compared with other European cities. This guidebook reveals the importance and the role of Catania as a cultural, economic, political and tourist milieu. However, it offers the image of a city which is very different from the description De Roberto provides in his guidebook to Catania for the series 'Italia Artistica', which is, as Pagnano has pointed out, one of the most important sources in order to understand both De Roberto's *Weltanschauung*, *fin de siècle* culture and aesthetic beliefs.¹⁴² The illustrated monograph on Catania is a means by which De Roberto investigated his adoptive city and an account of the cultural aesthetics of his epoch, and the photographs contained therein are a source for further analyses of Catania in its modernity.

In the early twentieth century, then, Catania is characterised for having a modern, industrious community, which reflects its aspirations and aims in the urban environment: large squares, fountains, gardens and some important streets; elegant liberty villas and palazzos, which denote an urban planning aimed at connecting the classical city to the modern city. However, urban space is the place of social conflicts and economic antagonism. Liberals, socialists and Catholics are in competition and responsible for

¹³⁹ G. Giarrizzo, 'L'età di De Felice. La Milano del Sud', in *Per un bilancio di fine secolo: Catania nel Novecento*, Atti del I convegno di studio I primi venti anni, C. Dollo, ed., (Catania: Società di storia patria per la Sicilia orientale, 1999), pp.13-18. On this topic, see Giarrizzo, *Catania*, in particular chapter V, 'La Milano del Sud', pp. 159-198; R. Bruno, 'La città di De Felice', in *Catania. La città moderna, la città contemporanea*, Giarrizzo, ed., pp. 137-141.

¹⁴⁰ G. De Felice, 'Le aberrazioni dei separatisti', *Corriere di Catania*, 25 September 1902, in Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 170.

¹⁴¹ *Guida 'ufficiale', Catania 1907, II esposizione agricola siciliana, mostra campionaria nazionale* (Catania: Crescenzo Galàtola, 1907); De Roberto, *Catania* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1907).

¹⁴² Pagnano, 'La costruzione dell'identità di Catania dal Secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, p. 210.

promoting the city's policy with the aim of controlling civil social progress and economic development.¹⁴³ Catania required a political class able to manage, and implement, the city's expansion and growth. However, the ruling class was not able to carry out this task because, as De Roberto has underlined: 'Com'è possibile compierla, quando le parti che si contendono il pericoloso onore di assumerla sono intente a dilaniarsi e distruggersi?'.¹⁴⁴ Catania was growing in terms of popularity and urban space, but its organisational bodies were spent in useless diatribes and quarrels, and failed to institute an effective political leadership. For these reasons the future of the city was uncertain and unstable and it was necessary to find a new political force in order to promote the development of modern Catania. Despite the difficulty of the task, Gabriello Carnazza, minister of Public Works (1922-1924) during the first Mussolini cabinet, promoted a modern urban development of the city.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, as Catania developed and expanded, its urban environment continued to the modern city and the classical city. It was necessary, then, to promote and integrate an approach between modern architecture and the ancient city in order not to consider the remains of the past as an obstacle to progress, but to develop concern for the protection of classical monuments.

In 1914 Carnazza founded the local paper *Giornale dell'Isola*, it was to be directed by his brother Carlo and, after his death, by Giuseppe Simili from 1919 until 1924. *Giornale dell'Isola* was an important paper in which political and social issues, modern culture and the arts were discussed and debated. It was one of the various papers and magazines published in Catania around the 1910s which gave voice to the young generation whose aim was to renew, and reinvent, local culture to enhance Catanese cultural and literary life. Papers such as *Pickwick*, *Le Maschere*, *Siciliana*, *La Fonte* and *Il Giornale dell'Isola letterario* (*Giornale dell'Isola Letterario* was a fortnightly supplement to *Giornale dell'Isola*) were the point of attraction for the Catanese *intelligenza*.¹⁴⁶ In 1927 De Roberto, who was at the time both a famous, prominent journalist and novelist, wrote six articles on the historical and artistic patrimony of Catania in *Giornale dell'Isola*. It was in fact in 1926 that Carlo Carnazza, in his role of vice-mayor, had asked De Roberto, who was at the time Superintendent for the Fine Arts, to write a report on the condition of Catanese monuments and historical ruins. This report was the basis for the six

¹⁴³ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 182.

¹⁴⁴ De Roberto's letter to De Felice Giuffrida, 19 September 1910, see note n. 78, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 214

¹⁴⁶ G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, *La dimensione catanese nelle riviste letterarie del primo '900* (Acireale: Accademia degli Zelantei e dei Dafnici, 1975), pp. 5-52.

articles the writer published the following year.¹⁴⁷ In 1927, from May to July, the articles went on to highlight De Roberto's cultural and political activism in favour of his home town and foreshadow the later work of such a special *flâneur* as the spectator to and connoisseur of Catania's city life and cultural heritage.

My dissertation argues, ultimately, that De Roberto's *I Viceré* can be seen as not simply the denunciation of Italian *trasformismo* and the failure of bourgeois liberalism, but as being related to his work as a journalist as he observed, scrutinized and studied the Catanese city life, and that, furthermore, De Roberto's six articles on Catania's artistic heritage are an exhortation to a political, social and intellectual commitment to the preservation of the classical city and the construction of the modern city; a recognition that Catania in the 1920s had to find new political mandate in order to start a new development of a new urban model.¹⁴⁸ My aim is to demonstrate that the writer contributed to building Catania's literary, cultural, political and tourist identity, and that De Roberto's works can be an important source to an understanding of his idea and representation of Catania, both as a real and a metaphorical city.

¹⁴⁷ D. Stazzone, 'Presentazione', in De Roberto, *Il patrimonio artistico di Catania*, D. Stazzone, ed., p. x.

¹⁴⁸ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 214.

Chapter 2 The city in De Roberto's articles

2. 1. De Roberto reporter

In this chapter I will study some of De Roberto's articles dealing with Catania and analyse his point of view as a journalist. I will consider these first to follow the chronological development of De Roberto's thought through his different approaches. As a journalist, De Roberto worked as a columnist giving his opinion on contemporary social life, sports, social events and political matters. The result is that the author is fully immersed in the life of the city and is acutely aware of his role as chronicler and citizen. If in *I Viceré* the cityscape of Catania is described as a closed area and as a claustrophobic environment to live in; and the image of the city in the guidebook is strictly linked to Etna and its Greco-Roman period (although some pictures De Roberto chose for the guidebook to illustrate the monuments and life in the city at the turn of the century), in the articles Catania is described as a very modern, lively city, whose life is characterised by important social and political events. The cityscapes of its transformation can truly represent the ideals and ambitions of the new political forces, which were still linked to aristocratic values, but whose main aim was that of making Catania less provincial. De Roberto's articles can therefore highlight these important changes the city was undergoing and provide images and ideas of Catania. I will start by focusing on the articles De Roberto wrote during the period 1880-1883 in order to consider his attitude towards Catania in his first production as a journalist.¹⁴⁹

These articles show that as a journalist De Roberto did not describe the city with aristocratic distance nor that he gave his opinions enclosed in his *turris eburnea*. He was not disconnected from society and was fully immersed in modern city life. I will read De Roberto's production in the light of the category of *flâneur*.¹⁵⁰ I will demonstrate that De Roberto can be considered as an 'active' *flâneur*, since his articles show, firstly, his interest

¹⁴⁹ A complete list of papers De Roberto worked for and the titles of the articles he published can be found in Castelli, *Il punto su Federico De Roberto*, 'Scritti giornalistici', pp. 68-112. I will study the six articles on Catania's artistic heritage he published on *Giornale dell'Isola* in 1927, a few months before his death, in chapter five.

¹⁵⁰ This category was, firstly, used by Baudelaire to address to the city stroller, who has a negative impact with the crowds, which is the symbol of modernity; later, it was used by Benjamin to refer to Baudelaire as the spectator of modernity, since the artist becomes the symbol of man who feels isolated and alienated from modern society. See Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, p. 40.

in modernity; secondly, they attest to De Roberto's participation in Catania social life; lastly, that De Roberto has a key role in understanding Catania as a modern city. I will demonstrate that the writer can be represented as Janus Bifrons since De Roberto, in his work as an editor of a guidebook and as a journalist, was able to link, to describe and to reveal how Catania's urban space is a combination of the past and modernity.¹⁵¹ A link De Roberto underlined very often in his articles.

De Roberto did not consider his work as a journalist a marginal activity. On the contrary, many of De Roberto's essays group different articles first published as journalist the writer collected some of these in *Rapisardi e Carducci. Polemica* (1881),¹⁵² *Arabeschi* (1883),¹⁵³ and *Il Colore del Tempo* (1900).¹⁵⁴ In the latter he states that:

Io ho, – e non credo d'esser solo ad averla, – una speciale predilezione per i volumi messi insieme con articoli pubblicati qua e là, in tempi diversi, sopra varî argomenti, senza ordine prestabilito. Libri così fatti ci danno il colore del tempo, e par quasi che arrestino l'attimo fuggente; non già perché bello, – noi siamo, ahimè! altrettanti Fausti a questo riguardo; – ma perché notevole, singolare ed insolito.¹⁵⁵

De Roberto underlines his idea of preventing what was written in papers from sinking into oblivion. He states that 'I giornali vivono quanto le rose: *l'espace d'un matin*', nonetheless, dried petals are thrown into the bin, old papers can be useful to make books.¹⁵⁶ Despite the fact that De Roberto was a very prolific journalist, there is no complete study of his articles, with the result that it is not possible to understand the importance and complexity of such a writer. De Roberto's journalistic production shows the origins of his thought and illuminates the work of the narrator. The full evaluation of De Roberto should not exclude his career as a journalist and a reporter, as his articles are an important compendium of his work and of his method of direct observation and 'scrupolosità nell'osservazione'.¹⁵⁷

Working as a journalist gave De Roberto the opportunity to study Catania and develop a certain attitude towards a naturalistic observation method he used in writing his novels. It has been underlined that 'Federico De Roberto entra nella letteratura attraverso il

¹⁵¹ In Roman mythology Janus, who is the god of beginnings and transitions, but also endings and time, doors and gates, is iconographically represented as a two-faced man with one face looking to the past and one face looking to the future.

¹⁵² De Roberto, *Rapisardi e Carducci. Polemica* (Catania: Niccolò Giannotta, 1881).

¹⁵³ De Roberto, *Arabeschi* (Catania: Niccolò Giannotta, 1883).

¹⁵⁴ De Roberto, *Il colore del tempo* (Milan-Palermo: Remo Sandron Editore, 1900).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁷ De Roberto, *Arabeschi*, p. 62.

giornalismo',¹⁵⁸ and that his articles on Catania are a preparatory work for his novel *I Viceré*.¹⁵⁹ Thus, a study of De Roberto's articles can contribute to a better understanding of the novelist, and also provide a new perspective for a contemporary analysis of an author who has been redeemed, only recently, from oblivion, being now celebrated as one of the most important Italian writers.

In 1876, De Roberto, who was fifteen years old, published his first article, 'Le Feste Belliniane', in *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, which marks De Roberto's debut as a reporter for local and national papers. The Milanese illustrated weekly, *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, was founded in 1875 by Emilio Treves, who later became one of the most important Italian publishers.¹⁶⁰ Treves's paper was representative of the culture of the Italian liberal bourgeoisie, and Giosuè Carducci, Grazia Deledda, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Luigi Pirandello, Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga were some of its prominent contributors who wrote extensively about political and social life, literature, geography and contemporary events in the arts and sciences.

The young De Roberto, in his first article, reports the transfer of Bellini's body to Catania Cathedral, after the musician had been buried for forty-one years in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. The writer describes this as an event for which the city has been waiting a long time and which it is experiencing with commotion and enthusiasm: 'Tutti i balconi erano parati a festa, sui muri delle vie si vedevano le immagini di Vincenzo Bellini circondate da ghirlande e festoni di fiori, e su tutte le bocche risuonava il suo nome; era un vero entusiasmo'.¹⁶¹ The quotation reveals that De Roberto was an attentive observer who was focused on the scenographic and decorative effects of the city, the urban space playing an important role in promoting the event, making Catania both a cultural attraction and a tourist place. Furthermore, this page is striking because, as early as 1876, De Roberto was dealing with 'the curious crowd' of modernity, which will be at the core of both *I Viceré* and his later guidebook. So the crowd, made of the Catanese and *forestieri*, is described as being part of the cityscape, which is transformed into a lively, blatant, noisy place able to include and integrate local community and visitors: 'I treni e i piroscafi provenienti da tutte le direzioni versavano a migliaia i forestieri, e la folla curiosa circolava per le vie della

¹⁵⁸ Sipala, *Introduzione a De Roberto*, p. 3; see also Castelli, 'La renaissance', in Castelli, *Il punto su Federico de Roberto*, pp. 26-37.

¹⁵⁹ S. Catalano, 'Dalla cronaca ai Viceré', *La Sicilia*, 23 July 1983.

¹⁶⁰ M. Grillandi, *Emilio Treves* (Torino: UTET, 1977).

¹⁶¹ De Roberto, 'Le feste belliniane', *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, III, n. 51, 15 October 1876.

città adorna di un infinito numero di bandiere nazionali e di quelle di tutte le nazioni del mondo'.¹⁶²

The account of the event can be defined as a 'fresco', as De Roberto is able to represent both the atmosphere and the mood of Catanese society and the landscape in which the event is unfolding. People are excited about the arrival of Bellini's body and Catania is completely immersed in the celebration from the port to the city centre – 'la folla sgombrò il porto per gettarsi nelle vie'.¹⁶³ The writer reports the spatial coordinates, Porta Uzeda, Porta Aci and Piazza Borgo, to give the reader an ideal map of the city and suggest how widespread is the phenomenon. The article is not just a report of how important the arrival was, but rather a presentation of local atmosphere and at a cultural event, and the tourist side of the city. The crowd is the protagonist of the article together with the urban space: the illuminated Catanese streets and palazzos. De Roberto's detailed chronicle of the event shows the importance of Bellini not only as the symbol of bel canto, but also as the symbol of Catania's cultural identity: Catania would go on to dedicate to the musician a monument in Piazza Stesicoro, a garden and a theatre, as I will discuss in depth in chapter four.

'La città di Catania' – the title reveals the focus of the piece – is the second article dealing with Catania De Roberto published in 1881 in *Lo Statuto*. *Lo Statuto* was a paper published in Palermo and Giacomo Pagano was its director. On November 1880 Pagano wrote to the writer. In his letter he invited De Roberto, who was nineteen, to the opening of the new offices of *Lo Statuto* and asked De Roberto to write an article on Catania. The topic was change in the city. In his letter Pagano requested that the article had to point out the positive aspects of Catania and describe how the city had progressed in order to meet the needs of modern commerce and modern society. As Pagano wrote to De Roberto:

Io ho l'ambizione di rendere poco a poco lo Statuto il giornale dell'isola – autorevole non solo perché ne propugna gl'interessi legittimi ma perché mette in rilievo ogni caso buono che tenda a migliorarla, e tutte le grandi città siciliane hanno da avere l'orgoglio di contribuire alla grandezza della patria italiana prestandosi l'una e l'altra sopra ogni altro concorso della simpatia cordiale.¹⁶⁴

Pagano's letter makes it clear that his aim was to use *Lo Statuto* to show the importance and the growth of Sicilian cities, but also their role in the cultural, social and economic

¹⁶² Ibidem.

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ See Pagano's letter to De Roberto in the appendix, p. 175.

development of the new Italian state, so as to evoke in the reader a strong appreciative idea of Sicily in its modernity. Moreover, the letter demonstrates that the young De Roberto had already a good credibility as a journalist and that he could positively contribute to Pagano's project.

De Roberto was asked to write his article 'La città di Catania' to highlight the transformation the city had undergone in the late nineteenth century, after Italian national unification, and to show all the positive aspects of the modern city.¹⁶⁵ In so doing, the writer provided an image of the city which could be compared to a modern postcard, and whose idea was suggested by a novel he had planned to write taking inspiration from Guy De Maupassant's *Une vie*.¹⁶⁶ For these reasons, the analysis of this article is important since it can, firstly, show the writer's modern technique in describing the cityscapes; secondly, it highlights both De Roberto's conception of Catania as an open city and the city as the *locus* – 'the theater of human events' – of social and political occurrences.¹⁶⁷

The above mentioned article starts with a description of the Gulf of Catania. De Roberto's portrayal, which focuses on the panorama of the city from the sea, first 'framing' Catania from the top of a steamship, seems to be shot with a modern camera. A Catanese is returning home to visit his city after a long absence in America, and is looking forward to the experience. As soon as the boat reaches the Sicilian coast, the 'buon catanese', as De Roberto defines his hypothetical passenger, rediscovers Etna:

una massa imponente, maestosa, coronata da un gigantesco pennacchio di nubi: l'Etna; ed il suo cuore sussulterebbe di gioia al mirare la montagna colossale su cui si arrampicò chissà quante volte, e l'ansia di calpestare quella terra benedetta, di respirare quelle dolci aure, vivificate dagli effluvi dello Jonio, salutari e balsamici, farebbe certo affrettare il cammino alla nave troppo pigra per l'arditezza dei desideri del nostro viaggiatore.¹⁶⁸

In his first sequence De Roberto 'films' the city under the volcano, and suggests that Catania is strictly linked to Etna, which is described as huge and superb. The image of Catania as a city under the volcano is not new. As Iachello has underlined, such views of the city date back to the sixteenth century and are 'entrusted with the achievement and

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁶ See Castelli, 'La Catania grempo e prigione di De Roberto', in *La parola e il luogo*, Di Grado ed., pp. 23-24.

¹⁶⁷ A. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge Massachusetts; London: Published by the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies by MIT, 1982), p. 7.

¹⁶⁸ De Roberto, 'La città di Catania', *Lo Statuto*, Palermo, 3 January 1881.

diffusion of the urban identity' of Catania.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, Catania is characterised by a multifaceted urban space, being the city linked to the volcano and being characterised by an interaction between classical buildings and modern urban structures. Thus, the subsequent description of Catania focuses on the Archi della Marina and the Dogana – ‘comoda, vasta, sicura, destinata a sostituire l'antica per nulla sufficiente agli scambi, smisuratamente cresciuti’ – both symbols of the modern, working city, and very close to the city centre, which strikes the Catanese as he discovers how beautiful, large and modern the city has become:

Il viatore, fatti pochi passi, per la porta Uzeda entra nella via Etnea. Una esclamazione di meraviglia gli sfugge suo malgrado, ed ha ragione di che meravigliarsi. Aveva lasciata una strada irregolare, mal lastricata, a gobbe, a fossi, corta, fiancheggiata da pochi palazzi degni di questo nome; e trova una strada lunga tre chilometri, ben livellata, lastricata come un salone, con grandissimo sfarzo di illuminazione, intermezzata da piazze regolari, adorna di splendidi fabbricati, qualcosa insomma che, secondo Réclus, è degno di essere ammirato, magari a costo di partirsi dalle Ande!¹⁷⁰

De Roberto's representation of Catania is that of a large, open city. The wayfarer – De Roberto uses the word *viatore* – is amazed because of the new High street, via Etnea, which is the nerve centre of the city, and its modern squares, beautiful palazzos, buildings and street lighting. Catania is praised for its new modern urban space, which really deserves to be visited and admired, but also for its ‘fabbriche industriali che ergono al cielo gli svelti camini’. Catania is represented in its urban growth and in its industrial development, which both highlight the process of urban innovation and economic development due to Catanese entrepreneurial investments.

Thus, the visitor is struck by the beauty of the city, but also by its modern urban space as it is presented in the final ‘shot’ of the article, when the protagonist walks in the city:

Ad ogni passo strade rifatte a nuovo, o che si rifanno, grandiosi edifizii sorti come per incanto, altri in via di completamento, altri abbelliti o sostituiti da vie, da piazze; qua due teatri sorti dove vegetavano le opunzie ed i fichi selvatici; là ricchi negozi messi con isfarzo e con gusto.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Iachello, ‘Urban views of Catania from the foothills of the volcano’, in *Il Mediterraneo delle città*, E. Iachello and P. Militello, eds, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), pp. 179- 192.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem. Élisée Reclus (1830 –1905), also known as Jacques Élisée Reclus, was a renowned French geographer and writer.

¹⁷¹ De Roberto, ‘La città di Catania’, *Lo Statuto*, Palermo, 3 January 1881.

The wayfarer is impressed by the symbols of modernity: shops, theatres, schools, omnibuses, factories, and the comings and goings of the people. This final depiction of Catania is a celebration of De Roberto's city from the point of view of an external voice, which is able to understand and praise the amazing modern cityscapes. Catania is, then, a vibrant, crowded city that can provide visitors with modern facilities and services.

In 'La città di Catania' De Roberto provides an image of Catania in its urban development and modernisation. Catania is described as a modern space which 'houses' social and cultural events, and whose urban space is strictly linked to the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna. Nonetheless, as in other articles, De Roberto used the cliché of the city under the volcano, but he neither described the city from a picturesque perspective nor with a nostalgic or backward-looking vision. Moreover, Catania was more than a folkloristic city of Southern Italy; it was, first and foremost, a modern space with new streets, buildings and monuments. Catania was also centre stage to the crowd, which is portrayed in its collective participation to cultural events, social practices and as representative of everyday life, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

2. 2. The city in the 1880-1883 articles

Catania as a *locus* of social events, political conflicts and debates is the topic of several articles De Roberto wrote as a correspondent for *Il Fanfulla*, a Roman daily press. *Il Fanfulla* was a moderate liberal newspaper founded in Florence in 1870 – when Florence was the capital of the newborn Italian state – by Francesco De Renzis, Giuseppe Augusto Cesana e Giovanni Piacentini. In 1871 the editorial office moved to Rome, which had become the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. In 1876 the newspaper became the opposition paper to the Sinistra, the political party which governed Italy at the time. Gabriele D'Annunzio, Carlo Collodi and Ferdinando Martini were some of its famous journalists, along with Giosuè Carducci, Matilde Serao, Grazia Deledda, Giovanni Verga, Ruggiero Bonghi, Luigi Capuana and Federico De Roberto, who wrote for *Il Fanfulla della Domenica*, the paper's Sunday supplement published from 1879.

In 1880 De Roberto started his collaboration with the paper, writing his articles under the pseudonym of Hamlet. Since he was a very prolific journalist, he also used Cardenio and Anonimo as nom de plume. De Roberto's reports were published in a section called 'Ritagli e scampoli' in which the articles written by correspondents from other

Italian cities were grouped. Each article has a title which sums up its topic, such as ‘Da Catania. Le amministrative’, or a generic, yet engaging, title such as ‘Echi dell’Etna’. He also wrote for *Don Chisciotte*, *Il Giornale di Sicilia* and *Corriere della Sera*, just to name a few, even though he did not write regularly. He explained the reason for this discontinuity in an article published in *Il Fanfulla* in 1881:

In queste nostre città di provinciali così quiete, così tranquille, così monotone, non è cosa da stupire se un povero corrispondente di giornale resti per dei mesi e dei mesi a secco di notizie. Per compenso, poi capita spesso di non sapere da che parte rifarsi per parlare di tutte le cose che si succedono in pochi giorni e che preoccupano – come si dice – la così detta opinione pubblica.¹⁷²

However, if it is true that there was a discontinuity in the writing of *reportages* dealing with Catania’s political and social events, he also published various articles on literary criticism and cultural studies.¹⁷³ Finocchiaro Chimirri has pointed out the importance of De Roberto’s 1880-1883 articles. These *reportages* demonstrate De Roberto’s interest in his city as a political commentator and as a witness to the transformation of Catania into a modern city. De Roberto was ‘cronista mondano, apologeta delle bellezze naturali etnee, polemista vivace e attento ai fatti culturali della città’.¹⁷⁴ In particular, in his work as a young journalist, De Roberto showed his adherence to the ideals and aspirations of the Risorgimento, which he would later denounce as a failure because of political corruption and mystification.

However, in his chronicles of the time De Roberto did not yet show his disillusionment at the failure of Italian governments to accomplish significant changes in order to avoid the failure of the liberal ideal. These also demonstrate De Roberto’s attitude towards his city and his growth as a writer and journalist. The style of the articles is vivid and the descriptions contained are detailed and precise. De Roberto uses English and French expressions and humorous phrases, revealing his innate sense of humour and unique modern writing style.¹⁷⁵ Festivals, political debates, excursions around Etna, the arrival of King Umberto I and his wife, Margherita, Princess of Savoy in Catania and Catanese city life are some of the topic De Roberto reported. Most importantly, they can be used to discover the role of the Catania as a place which mirrors the close relationship

¹⁷² De Roberto, ‘Echi dell’Etna’, *Il Fanfulla*, 27 June 1881.

¹⁷³ Some articles from 1884 until 1895 are now published in De Roberto, *Il tempo dello scontento universale*, A. Loria, ed., (Torino, Aragno, 2012).

¹⁷⁴ Finocchiaro Chimirri, ‘Introduzione’, in De Roberto, *Cronache per Il Fanfulla*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., p.10-12.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

between urban space and its symbolic dimension, along with its connection with social power and political dominance of urban space.¹⁷⁶

At the turn of the nineteenth century Catania was characterised by the presence of distinguished people such as Angelo Musco, Giovanni Grasso, Giuseppe Dusmet, Mario Rapisardi, Nino Martoglio, Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana, and attracted famous writers such as Gabriele D'Annunzio and Edmondo De Amicis; the French writer Guy De Maupassant and the German Adolf Holm, who described the beauty of Catania and helped to create a lively cultural environment. Nino Martoglio founded *D'Artagnan*, a satiric journal, and Niccolò Giannotta, who started out as a bookbinder, became one of the most important Italian publishers. Sabatino Lopez, for example, a Tuscan dramatist who taught at the University of Catania, stated that he liked Catania because it was a cultural city with a lively atmosphere. He described Catania as an active, exciting place to live.¹⁷⁷

Catania was neither a provincial city nor a dull place to live in. On the contrary, the city offered cultural stimuli and interesting social events, as described in De Roberto's articles, which show an active city the journalist caught, and reported, in its significant moments and important events, such as the crisis of Catania city council described in the first article De Roberto published in *Il Fanfulla* on March 9th 1880. The article, 'La crisi municipale a Catania', refers to the *querelle* between Catania Mayor, Antonino di Sangiuliano, who had asked the assembly to take out a loan of five million Lire needed to complete works of public interest, such as the port, the theatre and the hospital, and start new projects, such as the train station and the cemetery. The City Council sitting lasts for three days and the 'curious' crowd assists at the debate and applauds and whistles:

Si discute tre giorni di seguito; la città è in orgasmo: la sala del Consiglio è zeppa di gente; i consiglieri si scaraventano in faccia i milioni, i canoni, i beni, le ipoteche, le banche, il porto, il teatro: insomma un casaldiavolo [...] applausi e fischi accolgono contemporaneamente queste decisioni.¹⁷⁸

Some members of the assembly proposed to reduce the sum to three million Lire, and sell some urban and rural possessions of the city council, but the Mayor refused the proposal and threatened to resign. However, in the report published on March 13th, De Roberto reports that the crisis had finished and suggests the conflict between Catania Mayor and the

¹⁷⁶ Emden, Keen and Midgley, eds, *Imagining the City*, pp. 11-13.

¹⁷⁷ S. Lopez, *S'io Rinascessi* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1949), pp. 37-38, in S. Correnti, *Quella Catania. Storia e società della città etnea nell'età Defelicianiana (1881-1920)* (Catania: Tringale Editore, 1983), p. 105.

¹⁷⁸ De Roberto, 'La crisi municipale a Catania', *Il Fanfulla*, 9 March 1880.

Municipality was linked to personal ambitions and interests: ‘via, confessiamolo, è l’amor proprio che voleva essere soddisfatto [...] i dimostranti erano solo mossi da stima personale verso il sindaco ed avevano dimenticate le rispettive opinioni politiche’.¹⁷⁹ It is worth underlining that De Roberto used his chronicles in order to comment, with cutting irony, the political and administrative work of Antonino di Sangiuliano, the young Mayor of Catania (from whom he took inspiration for Consalvo Fracalanza in *I Viceré*), who became, later, ambassador and Foreign Minister.¹⁸⁰

Since he observed, studied and analysed Catanese society and its political controversies, De Roberto used his articles to highlight on a problem or to exhort politicians not to waste time with useless disputes when, for instance, he declares that ‘È urgente che le opere si compiano; i tempi sono difficili; la crisi, prolungandosi, non potrebbe certo far bene nel paese’.¹⁸¹ He was committed to his city’s problem and exhorted for political measures and economic investments. However, it is the crowd that is the leitmotif of his reports, so that Catania is represented as a community of people, with shared ideals, values and aspirations.

De Roberto dedicated the following article to the arrival in Catania of the Italian Sovereigns in 1881 stressed, for example, the Italian-ness of the Catanese crowd: ‘Finalmente l’ostacolo della lontananza sarà spezzato, finalmente questo popolo, eminentemente italiano, potrà avvicinare il suo Re’.¹⁸² De Roberto emphasises the emblematic role of the crowd and Catania: the public space of the city is used to highlight the importance of the political, social and cultural events, which are undoubtedly interconnected; but also to describe the participation of the crowd, the ‘ordinary practitioners of the city’.¹⁸³ As De Roberto states: ‘Intanto in città c’è un’operosità straordinaria’;¹⁸⁴ and the urban space is colourfully immersed in a festival ‘mood’ and a cheerful atmosphere. Catania is jubilant, and it seems to be in its ‘Sunday best’: ‘Qui si ripulisce, là si ripara, quel prospetto s’imbianca, quei fossi si colmano, il teatro si abbellisce, e poi si fanno venire non so quante migliaia di bandiere, e si fabbricano giardini interi di fiori artificiali’.¹⁸⁵ The article highlights how Catanese society is interested in projecting a positive image of Catania’s urban space, so that flags, fireworks and artificial

¹⁷⁹ De Roberto, ‘La crisi è finita’, *Il Fanfulla*, 13 March 1880

¹⁸⁰ See footnote n. 80, p. 29.

¹⁸¹ De Roberto, ‘La crisi è finita’.

¹⁸² De Roberto, ‘Gli amati sovrani’, *Il Fanfulla*, 2-3 January 1881.

¹⁸³ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 93.

¹⁸⁴ De Roberto, ‘Gli amati sovrani’.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

flowers can show off the magic, electric moment the city is living, and even Etna is part of the historic occurrence: ‘Pare che fin l’Etna si prepari a fare onore ai reali d’Italia: la poca neve raccolta sui fianchi dell’enorme montagna va dileguandosi a vista d’occhio.’¹⁸⁶ De Roberto presents Catania in its natural beauty (with Etna as part of the cityscape, Catania is a stereotypical city under the volcano), and in its architectonic attractiveness – ‘ci sarà un gran corso di gala, ed a questo Catania, colle sue vie lunghe rigorosamente dritte, si presta mirabilmente, come pure all’illuminazione, che sarà qualche cosa di fantastico’.¹⁸⁷ It is worth noting that De Roberto does not refer to any complaint about the arrival of the sovereigns and that it seems as if time has stopped for a moment. Sicily and Catania participate in the historical moment reflecting in its cityscapes its citizens’ mood: ‘Finalmente il lungo desiderio sarà pago, e Sicilia tutta si adorerà a festa, ed i rancori prodotti dai partiti, e i malumori suscitati dal governo, tutto sarà dimenticato per dar luogo alla più completa esultanza’.¹⁸⁸ De Roberto’s emphasis in his narration highlights his participation in the event not only as a journalist but also as a member of a community he feels part of. Thus, his description is not reported as an external voice but with the pride of a Catanese who was enjoying and participating in the memorable event.

In this way, De Roberto’s chronicles become ‘framings’ of the history of the city when, for instance, the writer speaks of the municipal election; when he describes the funeral of the distinguished patriot Gabriello Carnazza and the commemoration of Salvatore Marchese, both identified as major figures of Italian Risorgimento; or when he reports the way in which Catania organised a memorial day for the death of Giuseppe Garibaldi.¹⁸⁹ Space, city and history are strongly linked and Catania becomes a *lieu de mémoire*, in which, in Pierre Nora’s definition, memory and history grapple each other so as to become the memorial heritage of Catanese society. The city is the place in which official history and individual memory interweave, and a place where events emphasise and reinforce the culture and identity of the places in which these happen.¹⁹⁰

The fact is that De Roberto’s articles disclose the space in which micro-historical events happen, map the occurrences the city undergoes and help to understand the writer’s political and social stance. The articles also highlight De Roberto’s engagement in his

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁹ De Roberto, ‘Un illustre patriota’, *Il Fanfulla*, 5 April 1880; De Roberto, ‘I funerali del senatore Marchese’, *Il Fanfulla*, 3 December 1880; De Roberto, ‘È morto Garibaldi’, *Il Fanfulla*, 11 June 1882.

¹⁹⁰ N. Schröder, *Spaces and Places in Motion. Spatial Concepts in Contemporary American Literature* (Tübingen: Gunter Nar, 2006), pp. 11-49.

city's matters when, for example, he deals with the electoral campaign or the construction of the new port; or when he deals with the importance of a modern railway to serve Catania and its provinces. In addition, the articles show how Catania was an 'eventful' city. An eventful city is characterised by cultural events, which, as Greg Richards and Robert Palmer state, 'have become central to processes of urban development and revitalisation, as cultural production becomes a major element of the urban economy, and cultural consumption can dominate both the image of places and urban life in general'.¹⁹¹ The articles dealing with the arrival of the King, the Alpine Convention, St Agatha's Day and the Carnival show Catania immersed in cultural exhibitions and social happenings show the city transformed into a stage to host a stream of events. From the 'XIII Congresso degli alpinisti italiani', when Catania organised a 'programma, succulento ed appetitoso, compilato con tutte le cure';¹⁹² to the regatta, which De Roberto described as a memorable day for the city since it was experiencing such an event for the first time:

La festa, improvvisata dai nostri tanto valorosi quanto eleganti ufficiali, non poteva riuscire più geniale. Il porto offriva una vista incantevole. Acque limpide e calme; una folla innumerevole stipata sulla spiaggia e sul molo; un gran numero di imbarcazioni di ogni forma e dimensioni addossate ai colossi della guerra; luce rosea del tramonto; assordante ronzio delle lance a vapore; allegrezza e soddisfazione in ogni volto.¹⁹³

Although most of De Roberto's articles are dedicated to Society news, his political and social engagement is expressed when he underlines the insensitivity of Catania council in preserving the monuments and ruins of the city from decay; when he exhorts the Italian Parliament to build a direct railway to link Catania to Palermo; or when he discusses the importance of a new port for a city which had increased its population and commercial transactions: Catania had become a modern city.

De Roberto's celebrative attitude towards the modern world and the celebration of Post-Risorgimento Italy and national unity is at the core of De Roberto's political commitment, as when he describes the Florio Maritime Company starting a direct shipping line from Sicily to America:

Tu saprai certamente a quest'ora le ardite traversate che la Compagnia Florio ha fatto intraprendere ai più bei vapori della sua flotta, quali l'Egadi, il Marsala, il Solunto, il Peloro, ecc. ecc. Questi legni [...] vanno a riattaccarsi, veri lembi di terra italiana, alle popolose rive di Long Island, dove, fra le

¹⁹¹ Richards and Palmer, *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalisation*, p. 3.

¹⁹² De Roberto, 'XIII Congresso degli alpinisti italiani', *Il Fanfulla*, 1 June 1880.

¹⁹³ De Roberto, 'Le regate', *Il Fanfulla*, 16 July 1880.

selve delle antenne di tutte le marine del mondo, fanno sventolare onoratamente i nostri colori, che i vecchi shippers ed i giovani midshipmen americani contemplano con ammirazione.¹⁹⁴

The modern city attracts De Roberto, who makes a panegyric of the Florio Company, and also appreciating the positive aspects of modernity, since he decides to experience the journey by railway from Catania to Palermo, which is transcribed as a geographical enquiry and a historical experience:

299 chilometri attraverso alle valli del Simeto, del Dittaino, del Salso, del Platani e del Torto; 56 viadotti fra grandi e piccoli, della lunghezza complessiva di 3634 metri; 30 gallerie, di cui la più lunga misura 1650 metri! 306 caselli; 43 stazioni, innumerevoli rovine; tutta la storia della Sicilia, dai Fenici ai Greci, dai Romani agli Arabi, dai Normanni agli Spagnuoli, scritta su queste rovine; 12 ore di viaggio, 24 chilometri all'ora.¹⁹⁵

The history of Sicily is here framed within its new modernity: the railway is a means to unify and connect the island geographically; but it is also a means to comprehend history while travelling. In fact, the Sicilian past is not denied. It can be stated that the means modernity offers can allow Sicilians to rediscover and apprehend that there is continuity between the past and modernity. Since the Sicilian landscapes and the Sicilian cities bear witness to Sicily's past grandeur and magnificence, modernity is strictly related to the classic age. Undoubtedly, De Roberto's articles highlight the cultural and social world the writer was immersed in, and give a representation of Catania as a place that was trying to build its status as modern city. A city he talked lovingly about in his works whose undeniable symbol is Mount Etna, to which he dedicated several articles.

2. 3. Etna: a symbol of De Roberto's philosophy of history

As De Roberto underlines in his guidebook to Catania, many writers have described the amazing beauty of the volcano. The writer highlights that Etna is the symbol of Catania and an integral part of its cityscape. In his guidebook to the city De Roberto portrayed Catania as city under the volcano and underlined the profound ambivalence of Etna, which is the symbol of both death and life. In the novel *I Viceré*, which does not contain many geographic or spatial references to the mount, Etna is mentioned as a place for *villeggiare*

¹⁹⁴ De Roberto, 'Consolazioni di mare', *Il Fanfulla*, 13 April 1880.

¹⁹⁵ De Roberto, 'Dall'Jonio alla Conca d'Oro', *Il Fanfulla*, 10 November 1880.

(holidaying) during the summer and to escape from the plague. The writer also gives a short description of Etna's power when he tells the story of the Benedictine Abbey.¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Etna is neither part of the city nor is it part of its iconographic representation since in the novel Catania has a symbolic meaning.

The importance of De Roberto's articles on Etna is due to the fact that the volcano is not, simply, part of Catania *forma urbis*: the writer emphasised the powerful symbolic meaning of Etna, which can be considered, as I will demonstrate, the symbol of De Roberto's philosophy of history. De Roberto was enchanted by Etna, and the volcano is a constant element, a leitmotif, in his life and works. The articles dedicated to Etna, the writer published in different papers, such as *Giornale di Sicilia* and *Il Fanfulla*, demonstrate De Roberto's skills in describing the cityscape, social life and political events of Catania, and provide information and description of a *locus*, Mount Etna, which was strongly tied to the city of Catania.¹⁹⁷ Mount Etna, which is one of Catania's symbols, becomes, through the writer's narration, both a magic and a real place, where different cultures and different people have dominated this perfect 'scenario'. This set is a place which contains different cultures and different climates. Etna appears to be a magic location praised by both past and modern poets:

Poeti antichi e moderni, scrittori d'ogni età e d'ogni paese hanno cantato e decantato l'Etna per l'enormità della sua mole e la terribilità della sua ira; pochi hanno detto che questo monte tremendo è anche uno dei più belli. Spaventoso ed incantevole, non assomiglia a nessun altro. Non è un monte, è un mondo. [...] La leggenda e la storia vi si danno la mano. Encelado vi fu sepolto ed Empedocle vi scomparve; vi errarono gli Dei dell'Olimpo e i cavalieri della Tavola Rotonda, Proserpina e Re Artù; fu la fucina di Vulcano e la porta dell'Inferno cristiano; se lo disputarono genti, accorse dai quattro angoli della terra: i Greci dall'Oriente e gl'Iberici dall'Occidente, i Normanni dal Nord e gli Arabi dal Sud.¹⁹⁸

The quotation highlights two of Catania's peculiarities: the fact that it was dominated by many people from different civilisations; and the fact that the city has a love-hate

¹⁹⁶ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 183-185.

¹⁹⁷ De Roberto wrote eight articles on Etna: De Roberto, 'L'eruzione dell'Etna', *La Rassegna Settimanale*, 15 June 1879; Id., 'L'osservatorio etneo', *L'Esploratore*, April 1880; Id., 'Il Congresso Alpino (Aci)', *Il Fanfulla*, 23 September 1880; Id., 'Il Congresso Alpino. Excelsior!', *Il Fanfulla*, 24 September 1880; Id., 'L'eruzione', *Il Fanfulla*, 29 March 1883; Id., 'Le avventure dell'Etna. L'Eruzione di oggi veduta da vicino', *Giornale d'Italia*, 30 March 1910; 'Alle rabide sorgenti del gran fiume di fuoco sull'Etna', *Giornale d'Italia*, 3 April 1910; Id., 'Giorgio Sand sull'Etna', *Giornale di Sicilia*, 3 March 1925. These articles are now in De Roberto, *Scritti sull'Etna*, G. Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., (Catania: Edizioni Greco, 1983); the article 'L'eruzione', *Il Fanfulla*, 29 March 1883 is now in S. Nicolosi, ed., *Dal nostro inviato speciale. Antologia del giornalismo* (Catania: C. Tringale, 1983), pp. 433-436.

¹⁹⁸ De Roberto, 'Alle rabide sorgenti del gran fiume di fuoco sull'Etna', *Giornale d'Italia*, 3 April 1910.

relationship with Etna, whose constant activity throughout the ages has modified the cityscape. De Roberto's article is a mixture of legend and reality. On the one hand, the mountain landscape is transformed in an unreal world peopled with Greek gods, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and mythical characters; on the other hand, it highlights De Roberto's accuracy in describing Etna. This abundance of details and a good knowledge of the geographical area are stressed in 'L'eruzione', another article published in 1883 in *Il Fanfulla*. In this article De Roberto reports that some Italian papers have given a distorted account of Etna's eruption. Therefore, he would like to avoid any rhetorical idioms in order to give a faithful description of the events which have stricken Catania and its surroundings:

Egli è per questo che molte famiglie di Mascalucia, Belpasso, Nicolosi, Pedara, Zafferana ecc. hanno lasciato i loro paesi; che i rimasti hanno dormito nelle baracche; che le chiese sono state chiuse ed eretti altari nelle piazze; che si sono fatti numerosi viti ed offerte ai santi protettori di ogni paesello; che si è vissuti nella trepidanza e nell'incertezza.¹⁹⁹

To avoid any misunderstanding, De Roberto provides the reader with a detailed account of the eruption and exact reference to places and events he deals with. Literary transfiguration does not prevent him from giving a precise, and correct, description of what was happening, avoiding any superfluous information and supporting his observations with data to give readers a clear, and truthful, report.

It has been underlined that De Roberto's articles demonstrate his ambition to write an external or impersonal narrative.²⁰⁰ To give his article scientific consistency, De Roberto states that Professor Orazio Silvestri, a famous geologist, volcanologist and scholar of Etna, had published every day reports on the volcanic phases of Etna.²⁰¹ De Roberto quotes professor Silvestri to show how often journalists write articles without having a clear awareness of the events they discuss.

De Roberto's articles on Etna offer another view to understanding the writer and the Catanese city dweller and show De Roberto's skilfulness in dealing both with social life and scientific phenomena. For example, in the article 'L'Osservatorio Etneo' published in 1880 in *L'Esploratore*, the writer discusses the importance of the new astronomical

¹⁹⁹ De Roberto, 'L'eruzione', *Il Fanfulla*, 29 March 1883.

²⁰⁰ Finocchiaro Chimirri, in De Roberto, *Scritti sull'Etna*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., pp. 26-29.

²⁰¹ O. Silvestri, *Sulla esplosione eccentrica dell'Etna avvenuta il 22 Marzo 1883 e il suo contemporaneo parossismo geodinamico-eruttivo: saggio di nuovi studi che comprende tutti i fenomeni vulcanici presentati dall'Etna dal 1 gennaio 1880 al 1 gennaio 1884* (Catania: Galàtola, 1884).

observatory, which had been built on Etna. He states that ‘Ora, dopo dieci anni, le difficoltà sono state vinte e l’Osservatorio è pronto, là, sulla cima dell’Etna, a ricevere gli strumenti e gli scienziati che dovranno aprire nuove vie nel campo vastissimo della scienza umana’.²⁰²

The Bellini observatory built at 3000 meters above sea level offered volcanologists, astronomers and meteorologists a modern building for their studies, but it was also a new tourist attraction. Etna was not simply the symbol of Catania, or the stereotype which made Catania a city under a volcano. On the contrary, it was a place the international community could use for its studies, which could offer the biggest telescope in Italy to scan the sky and with a comfortable, safe place to stay (the observatory was later destroyed by the eruption of 1971).

The article highlights the importance of Catanese volcanological tradition, whose studies had attracted national and international scientists. Once again De Roberto points out that Catania is an important cultural milieu, as emphasised in ‘Cose dell’Etna’, when he describes the Alpine Congress in Catania:

Il Club alpino italiano terrà quest’anno il suo tredicesimo congresso, nella prossima estate, a Catania. La scelta, a parte la soddisfazione di questa cittadinanza, non poteva essere migliore. L’ascensione all’Etna, la visita a tutte le sue principali adiacenze (Monti Rossi, Val del Bove, ecc.) l’escursione agli interessanti scogli basaltici, chiamati *Fariglioni di Trezza*, scagliati, secondo la favola, da Polifemo addosso al pastorello Aci, perché era il preferito di Galatea, dal ciclope ardentemente amata; sono tutte partite che, mentre dilettono il *touriste*, offrono allo scienziato vasto soggetto di studio.²⁰³

It is important to note that there is in De Roberto a tendency towards the use of mythological images and that of reporting via classical erudition ‘modern’ events. By so doing, De Roberto wanted to highlight that Catania is both an ancient and a modern city. As such, the city is both the place of myth – Polyphemus, Acis and Galatea – and the place which can provide people with all the facilities a modern city can offer. As the writer states in his article, the event attracted many *forestieri*: French and English travellers would take part in the congress. The result is that Catania is feted for being such a lively, crowded city as De Roberto reports:

²⁰² De Roberto, ‘L’osservatorio etneo’, *L’Esploratore*, April 1880.

²⁰³ De Roberto, ‘Cose dell’Etna’, *Il Fanfulla*, 16 April 1880.

Grandi applausi a Catania, ai Catanesi ecc. Una gran folla si accalca sui passi degli alpinisti. Le maschie figure di tanti baldi giovanotti, i grandi cappelli piumati, le placche d'argento con le armi del Club attirano gli sguardi delle belle ragazze. La cortesia, il buon umore, l'allegria corrono per le file dei congressisti, che ricambiano di infinite squisitezze i soci di Catania. Il tempo è stupendo; l'Etna, sgombro di vapori, erge maestosamente al cielo la sua cima imponente, ed invita alla scalata.²⁰⁴

De Roberto comments, firstly, on the generic but large crowd – *una gran folla*; then, on the people making this crowd – *baldi giovanotti* and *belle ragazze*; and, lastly, on their mood – *cortesia*, *buon umore* and *applausi*. He describes the high spirits the city was experiencing, and the joyful atmosphere the Alpine Congress brought to Catania, which is embraced by the majestic beauty of Etna.

Despite the positive descriptions, in De Roberto's reports of Etna, the volcano brings death as well as life: 'questa terra che inghiotte i suoi abitanti è anche la più popolosa: pochi altri luoghi hanno altrettanta densità di popolazione', as the writer remarks in an article written in 1910.²⁰⁵ Etna is the place which best expresses the power of nature and its destructive force: 'malgrado l'aridità, la sterilità della lava, della *sciara* come qui dicono, il tempo e la mano dell'uomo fanno il miracolo di ridurre quella massa dura e compatta nella terra più fertile del mondo.'²⁰⁶ Etna is a source of life as its fertile soil supports extensive agriculture, with orchards and vineyards on its slopes until the Plain of Catania. De Roberto stresses the role of Etna in giving people, who were born on its slopes, a particular attitude towards life because, as the writer states:

Quando qualcuno scriverà la psicologia delle sue genti, dovrà dire una cosa degna di osservazione: quanti sono nati e vissuti restano freddi e quasi delusi non solamente dinanzi ad altri spettacoli della natura, ma anche in presenza delle maggiori opere umane. Ciò che sta loro dinanzi li ha troppo meravigliati: nulla più li impressiona.²⁰⁷

In De Roberto's opinion Etna, whose allure is boundless, is a place characterised by great beauty and magnificence, steeped in classical mythology where 'la leggenda e la storia vi si danno la mano'.²⁰⁸ De Roberto's reading of Etna through the 'lens' of classical mythology legitimises Etna as myth. Finocchiaro Chimirri has suggested that Etna was an obsessive presence in De Roberto's works and life and that it can be seen as the classical

²⁰⁴ De Roberto, 'Il Congresso Alpino', *Il Fanfulla*, 15 September 1880.

²⁰⁵ De Roberto, 'Alle rabide sorgenti del gran fiume di fuoco dell'Etna', *Giornale d'Italia*, 3 April 1910.

²⁰⁶ De Roberto, 'Il congresso alpino (Aci)', *Il Fanfulla*, 23 September 1880.

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

Medusa, one of the three Gorgons, who was beheaded by Perseus.²⁰⁹ Medusa was described as a beautiful girl but, after she desecrated Athena's temple by lying there with Poseidon, she was transformed by the outraged Athena. Not only did the goddess turn Medusa's hair into living snakes, but those who gazed directly upon her would turn to stone. According to Sigmund Freud Medusa's image – which is linked to the fear of horrific sight – is associated with male castration and, in the child's mind, with the discovery of maternal sexuality.²¹⁰ Hence, she becomes the symbol of a woman who is unapproachable and repels all sexual desires. It can be argued that in De Roberto's portrayal of Etna, the volcano, which is not easy to approach, acts like the goddess Medusa as when 'she' erupts all is turned in stone. The image of Medusa has also been associated to nihilism.²¹¹ In this interpretation, the fact that it is better not to look at Medusa is to avoid realising how horrific, tremendous reality is. To avoid looking into Medusa's eyes means not facing the fact that life is meaningless and a social construct.

In the same way that there is a philosophy of history in De Roberto's *I Viceré*, in which he reveals his negative belief in history, in mankind and in any positive attitude towards human destiny, Etna is another pessimistic metaphor through which the writer expresses the horrible human condition and his deterministic point of view. Nunzio Zago has pointed out that the Uzeda family 'sono la metafora più eloquente di un'antropologia negativa, d'una disarmonia universale, del tetro pessimismo dello scrittore, esistenziale prima ancora che storico'.²¹² Etna can be considered the symbol of the fight between man and his horrible destiny, and the symbol of the eternal struggle against a natural force.

However, it has been pointed out that through his journalistic works De Roberto reveals his 'profound ontological pessimism and relativist stance'.²¹³ Etna, then, might be read as the metaphorical 'mountain' the bourgeois Catanese society, which wanted to change reality, was obliged to climb. In other words, it might be stated that the Sicilian bourgeoisie, like a modern Sisyphus, was condemned to roll an immense boulder to the top of the volcano, only to watch it roll back down, and to repeat this action forever as the

²⁰⁹ Finocchiaro Chimirri, 'Introduzione', in De Roberto, *Scritti sull'Etna*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., pp. 42-43.

²¹⁰ S. Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 264-268; see also O. Fenichel, 'Das Medusenhaupt. (The Head of Medusa)', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 1942, 11, pp. 266-267.

²¹¹ K. Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 59.

²¹² N. Zago, 'Sulla strategia narrativa dei Viceré', in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 219

²¹³ A. Pagliaro, "Pessimism as 'il colore del tempo' in L'imperio", in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 224.

‘rights’ of Sicilian aristocracy were truly immortal, and the effort made by the Sicilian bourgeoisie useless, because, as Consalvo states in *I Viceré*, history is a monotonous repetition of identical events.

Despite his pessimistic vision of history, his anthropological disillusionment and condemnation of the aristocracy, De Roberto exalts the figure of Ignazio Paternò Castello, the Prince of Biscari. Paternò Castello, who is portrayed as a modern *mecenate*, is the symbol of an enlightened aristocracy able to promote Catania as a modern European city and give prestige to Catanese historical and artistic heritage through the foundation of the Museo Biscari. The museum was both a collection of artefacts and a site of memory.

2. 4. The Museo Biscari: a site of memory

De Roberto’s Catania is a city of natural and artistic beauty, dating back to classical antiquity with a strong link to the modern and bourgeois city. I will now focus on one of the key monuments considered in the guidebook to Catania and on two articles – one written in 1881 and one in 1927 – De Roberto dedicated to the Biscari Museum. In so doing, I will show that De Roberto wanted to avenge the ‘wealthy’, enlightened aristocratic leadership, which was able to prevent the city’s archaeological heritage from falling into oblivion. I will consider the Biscari Museum as a site of memory.

In his guidebook to Catania, as I will discuss in Chapter four, the writer did not describe many buildings which have an institutional value, such as the university or the city hall. It can be argued that De Roberto was not interested in their urban and architectural importance or their political and symbolic role. Rather, by focusing his attention on a private property, Palazzo Biscari, and the annexed museum (to which he dedicated many pages and photos, as well as praising the role and work of its owner, Ignazio Paternò Castello, the Prince of Biscari), De Roberto’s interest in the aristocratic face of the city rather than the institutional or political landscape is evident.²¹⁴

In 1881 De Roberto wrote his first article dealing with the Biscari Museum. He reported that during the eighteenth century the Prince of Biscari had obtained the permission and a financial contribution from Catania city council to start archaeological

²¹⁴ On the Biscari Museum and its founder see P. Castorina, *Cenno storico intorno al museo d’antiquaria e gabinetto di storia naturale da Ignazio Paternò Castello Principe di Biscari fondati in Catania* (Catania: Tipografia G. Pastore, 1873); G. Libertini, *Il museo Biscari* (Milan: Bestetti e Tuminelli, 1930); S. Pafumi, *Museum biscarianum. Materiali per lo studio delle collezioni di Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari (1719-1786)* (Catania: Alma Editore, 2006).

excavations. The result was that he was able to build a very important and vast collection which needed to be allocated. As De Roberto states: ‘Il principe si mise all’opera con ogni solerzia ed in breve tempo la sua collezione cominciò ad assumere assai vaste proporzioni, tanto che egli dovette far costrurre appositi locali adiacenti al suo palazzo, per sistemarvi le ricchezze rinvenute od acquistate’.²¹⁵ As the writer highlights, the collection was so important that the museum, to be known as the Museo Biscari, in honour of its founder, became one of the main tourist attractions.

De Roberto provides an account of the Prince of Biscari’s collection, which was a cabinet of curiosities housed in the Prince of Biscari’s palace, which he defines as a temple of art. He refers that the Biscari Museum contained bronzes and marbles of great value, statues, bas-reliefs, fragments, Etrurian vases, earthenware, natural history objects, Sicilian wildlife specimens, volcanic minerals and fossils. The magnificence of the museum and its importance for Catania are always underlined. It is evident that De Roberto considered the Museo Biscari part of the city and his celebration of an aristocratic figure, such as Paternò Castello, shows both De Roberto’s passion for archaeology and his love for the old city. Furthermore, in the same article, he denounces the *querelle* between the heirs of the Prince of Biscari and Catania council over the possession of the collection, and the way in which disputes over political and economic interests riddled the government of the city. The result was that the museum was closed and people were prevented from enjoying the artistic patrimony of the city.

In the guidebook he published in 1907 the writer dedicated many pages, and photos, to the museum and its founder. De Roberto gives a short portrayal of the *mecenate* and quotes Wolfgang Goethe, who had visited the museum and appreciated its art collection. Goethe had reported that the visit to the Museo Biscari had enlarged his artistic knowledge of Sicilian art, history and culture: ‘Le statue, i busti di marmo e di bronzo, i vasi e le altre antichità raccolte in questo museo, hanno molto slargato il cerchio delle nostre cognizioni artistiche...’.²¹⁶ Goethe, who had visited Catania in 1787, published the first volume of his diary of his journey to Italy, *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey), in 1813 and the second volume in 1817. The fact that De Roberto quotes Goethe indicates, firstly, how important the figure of the Prince of Biscari was in European high society; secondly, how European travellers eulogised Biscari’s art collection; and, lastly, the fact that the Prince was a

²¹⁵ De Roberto, ‘Il Museo Biscari’, *Il Fanfulla*, 12 September 1881.

²¹⁶ In De Roberto, *Catania*, pp. 126-127, and De Roberto, ‘Il Museo Biscari’, *Giornale dell’Isola*, 1 May 1927.

positive model of an enlightened local élite, who was able to build social relationships with European travellers, especially French voyagers.²¹⁷

The Prince of Biscari, who had studied architecture and natural history, had travelled extensively in Italy. As a consequence of his travels, he had developed a passion for the search for and of historic buildings and ruins. He fostered the digs in Catania, Syracuse, Taormina and Lentini. He unearthed many ruins of the Greco-Roman period, and, as at the time the law did not prevent people from gaining possession of the treasures found during excavations, was able to build a very important collection. Moreover, he was an excellent writer and his *Discorso accademico sopra un'antica iscrizione, trovata nel teatro della città di Catania, recitato nell'adunanza de' pastori etnei dal Principe di Biscari, fondatore, e protettore della medesima* (1771), *Memoria presentata all'illustrissimo Senato della chiarissima, e fedelissima città di Catania dal Principe di Biscari in occasione del molo da costruirsi nella marina della suddetta Città* (1771), *Viaggio per tutte le antichità della Sicilia e Calabria* (1781) and *Descrizione del terribile terremoto del 5 febbraio 1783* (1784) demonstrate Biscari's modernity, his cultural knowledge of Catania, and his social and political commitment to making Catania a modern European city.

The fact is that the Prince of Biscari was a connoisseur of Catania and Sicily and was famous for his guidebook to Sicily, *Viaggio per tutte le antichità della Sicilia*. With his guidebook the Prince of Biscari exhorted foreign travellers to visit Sicily and demonstrated his relationship and role in promoting the image of Catania and the beauty of its archaeological ruins to foreign travellers. For example, in the first chapter of his guidebook the Prince of Biscari exhorts travellers to visit Sicily: 'Venite, o Ammiratori della veneranda antichità, che ben soddisfatto resterà il vostro erudito genio in osservare la Sicilia tutta sparsa, ed adorna delle più rispettabili vetuste magnificenze, testimonio ben chiaro di sua antica opulenza'.²¹⁸ He was considered the most famous connoisseur of Sicily, as Jean Houel pointed out: 'Quand un étranger est curieux de voir ce beau rest antique, il faut qu'il s'adresse au Prince of Biscari'.²¹⁹

The prince of Biscari proposed a description of Sicily linked to the picturesque stereotype of the island that could offer its visitors natural beauty and archaeological ruins. It can be surmised that De Roberto considered the Prince of Biscari a promoter of Catania

²¹⁷ Iachello, 'Viaggiatori francesi ed élites Siciliane', in Iachello, *Immagini della città*, pp. 38-46.

²¹⁸ I. Paternò Castello, *Viaggio per tutte le antichità della Sicilia* (Naples: Nella Stamperia Simoniana, 1781), p. 9.

²¹⁹ In Iachello, *Immagini della città*, pp. 38-39.

artistic heritage and the Biscari Museum worthy of being described as one of the most important tourist attractions as praised by European travellers. Unfortunately, the museum, which De Roberto defined as a 'tempio dell'arte',²²⁰ was dismantled in 1932 and its collection, together with that of the Benedictine monastery, moved to Castello Ursino, but even today there is not a complete exhibition of the objects which belonged to the Benedictine monastery and the Prince of Biscari.

In an article published in 1881 De Roberto reports that the Museum was closed to the public due to a quarrel between the Prince of Biscari's heirs and Catania Municipality and that he hopes for an immediate solution in order not to impede tourists and scholars from enjoying the precious artistic heritage. He comments that: 'sarebbe sommamente dispiacevole che tanti tesori andassero dispersi o che, restando fra noi, continuassero ad essere ermeticamente chiusi agli studiosi',²²¹ because the Biscari Museum was considered to be the place that could keep alive the historical memory of the city, in other words, a site of memory.

According to Nora, *lieux de mémoire* – sites of memory – exist because *milieux de mémoire* – real environments of memory – do not exist anymore.²²² Nora's concept of sites of memory describes the artificial landscape of the modern re-creation of national and cultural memory, and the conjunction of collective memory and national identity. Sites of memory are contrasted with environments of memory, which describe the mythical relics of traditional cultures. Nora states that 'memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past'.²²³ Thus, some places – it does not matter if they are real or symbolic – have a very profound meaning in the reconstruction of our past. For this reason *lieux de mémoire* prevent some events from being forgotten. As these places witness historic events through ages in a certain space, they are important historic sources of reference to in the reconstruction of past habits. They also allow scholars to understand the collective memory which has been created around a particular situation. Nora underlines that 'Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative'.²²⁴ Thus, the scholar points out the importance of a site of memory because it can help historians to reconstruct, and anchor, both historic events and the

²²⁰ De Roberto, 'Il Museo Biscari', *Il Fanfulla*, 12 September 1881.

²²¹ Ibidem.

²²² Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representation*, Spring 1989, 26, pp. 7-25.

²²³ Ibid., p. 8.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

memory of them. Moreover, sites of memory can help to keep alive even those events which have been neglected, deleted or sunk into oblivion.

As a consequence of Nora's discourse, I will consider the Biscari Museum as a site of memory. First of all, because, as De Roberto states, the museum contained a vast part of the city's heritage; secondly, because the collection could help to enlarge the knowledge of the Catanese artistic production; and, lastly, the fact that the collection was part of the city's historic memory. It was the symbol of the grandeur of Sicilian and Italian past, as De Roberto underlined in 1927 in his article 'Il Museo Biscari', 'Non c'è frammento d'architettura, non rottame di capitello, non tronco di colonna, non parte di statua che non testimonii la grandezza dei nostri monumenti, la nobile vetustà della Patria nostra.'²²⁵

Historic buildings, statues, columns and ruins deserve to be looked after because they are testimonies of the past, symbols of the collective memory, and can help building a patriotic consciousness. At the beginning of his article De Roberto points out that Catania's heritage needs to be preserved from oblivion and negligence: 'Il Patrimonio artistico catanese merita il più fervido amore dei cittadini e le più diligenti cure dell'Amministrazione Comunale, non soltanto per le ideali ragioni dell'Arte, della Storia e in generale della Cultura, ma anche per una reale e tangibile utilità'.²²⁶

It is important to note that De Roberto refers to both politicians and citizens and invites the Catanese to develop a heritage consciousness. He points out that the cultural heritage has to be sustained and preserved, not only because it is part of the city's history, but also because Catania can profit from its artistic production. De Roberto, with a modern outlook, suggests that local administrations had to invest in the preservation of the city's heritage because memory is the perpetual link to our past. In preserving Catania's sites of memory the city can offer tourists the opportunity to discover the natural beauty of the place and the ruins of its thousand-year past; the idea that Catania could be a geographical hub is also stressed. As such it can host the past, through the marks of Mediterranean civilizations, and modernity, through a rational conception of space, which can contain both the symbols of the past and the symbols of modernity. Thus, De Roberto was promoting a future memory of Catania, which I will discuss in Chapter 5.

The articles examined, from De Roberto's début in 1876 to the articles published in *Il Fanfulla*, demonstrate that De Roberto was interested in the social and political life of Catania; but also in its representation of a lively city characterized by a modern urban

²²⁵ De Roberto, 'Il Museo Biscari', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 1 May 1927.

²²⁶ Ibidem.

space, archaeological ruins and monuments. Etna and the Ionian Sea are described as its natural beauty and the city is represented in its modernity: streets full of shops where the Catanese could go shopping and meet, as happened in other modern European cities at that time. De Roberto's chronicles reveal, on the one hand, that the young writer was a profound observer of the city life in his home town and enthusiastic about Catania's artistic and historical patrimony; on the other hand, that he was an attentive observer of the city's political life which he reported with irony, but not acrimony, pessimism or disillusionment. As Finocchiaro Chimirri has underlined 'nelle cronache del 1880 traspaiono i fiduciosi sentimenti del giovane De Roberto in quei freschi ideali che a poco a poco saranno abbassati a uno scaltro gioco di interessi economici e stravolti dalla generale corruzione che nei primi decenni investe globalmente il sistema'.²²⁷ De Roberto's reports show both the life in Catania in the first 1880s and the cultural and political Catanese milieu in which De Roberto grew up and formed his identity as a citizen and a writer.

Despite the positive comments on Catania social life and the role of the crowd that make Catania a modern space; descriptions of political debates; the importance of the Biscari Museum as a *lieu de mémoire*, where objects of the past could bear witness to the importance of Catania in the classical age, and their role in preserving the city's historical memory; and the importance of Etna, both in its role as a natural beauty and as part of the identity of Catania, there was, later, a shift in the representation of the city. The publication of *I Viceré*, in 1894, marked a change of perspective in De Roberto's description of his home town, because the urban space was used to address a political issue and reconstruct the political and historical background for his analysis of Italian unification. In the novel, Catania is almost 'absent' and the descriptions focus on the Uzeda's palazzo, symbol of disaster and disorder, their villa, which is presented as a place to escape the plague, and the Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena, which is an extension of the Uzeda estate, avoiding any descriptions of the countryside and natural beauty.

Catania became the ideal and symbolic set for De Roberto's critical representation of the lack of opportunism, greed, ambition and morality of the established élites ready to change in order to reaffirm their rights. I will demonstrate that De Roberto's Catania in *I Viceré* was used as a metaphor for opportunistic aristocratic power to highlight the failure of liberal ideals and the victory of the strong aristocracy over the weak bourgeoisie.

²²⁷ Finocchiaro Chimirri, 'Introduzione', in De Roberto, *Cronache per Il Fanfulla*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., p. 13.

Chapter 3 The City in *I Viceré*

3. 1. The cityscape of the Uzeda: history and geography

The novel *I Viceré* by Federico De Roberto focuses on the life of a Sicilian family during the struggle to achieve Italian national unification. While telling the story of the Viceré family, De Roberto provides the reader with information and images of Catania during the events which led to the foundation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. Although De Roberto was born in Naples in 1861 and arrived in Catania when he was a child, he did not find any great differences to his native city, as the people, habits and way of life were almost the same as those he was used to. It was twenty-five years after his arrival in Sicily that he took inspiration from the events and people he had observed for such a long period.²²⁸ Although Catania at the time was growing in terms of both urban beauty and as a tourist attraction, De Roberto pays attention only to a particular part of the city: he selects a specific point of view and addresses a political issue. His representation of Catania is, therefore, not predominantly descriptive, but symbolic.

Being a symbol (statues, palazzos, churches) a tangible reality that reveals something intangible (ideas, values, feelings),²²⁹ space is used in order to demonstrate the inextricable relationship between political power and urban space. Even though scholars have pointed out that space in *I Viceré* is very restricted and so closed that it can be considered as a prison, there is not a study that contains a full analysis of the novel that has as its focus space and its representations. Since my interest is to shed light on the importance of Catania as both a symbolic and a real place, in analysing the novel I have compared the real social and urban space of Catania to De Roberto's literary depiction in order to understand the reasons why he chose to describe some buildings and urban space and how some places and urban areas acquire a metaphorical status. My source of inspiration is Calvino's *Le città invisibili*. Although in Calvino's novel the main characters, Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, are historical figures, the importance of the novel relies on Calvino's use of symbolism: the city is not simply an urban space; it also stands for a

²²⁸ G. Centorbi, 'La Catania di Federico De Roberto', *Le vie d'Italia*, anno 72° n. 9, September 1966, p. 1057.

²²⁹ J. Monnet, 'The Symbolism of Place: A Geography of Relationships between Space, Power and Identity', *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* 562 (1998), online <http://cybergeo.revues.org/5316#toc>.

symbolic space which ‘speaks’ through a secret language: ‘L’occhio non vede cose ma figure di cose che significano altre cose’.²³⁰ It has been my task to use *I Viceré* as a ‘text’ to decipher and decode in order to comprehend De Roberto’s symbolic representation of Catania.

Many critics have pointed out the historical features of the novel. Giancarlo Borri has stated that, in the novel, ‘la storia appare essenzialmente come la materia grezza, l’impasto di base che mescola e amalgama così strettamente il fattore socio-ambientale e collettivo a quello umano-individuale da rendere ben difficile una loro scissione’.²³¹ This idea of a close relationship between the characters of the novel and the place and environment they live in is also shared by Vittorio Spinazzola, who defines *I Viceré* as a historical novel but ‘d’ambiente ultracontemporaneo’,²³² to underline how close to De Roberto the events were. Unlike Manzoni, De Roberto preferred to observe society and describe it through the model proposed by Hippolyte Taine: the author as a witness to his epoch, which is narrated through ‘piccoli fatti’,²³³ even though, as Francesco Del Vecchio has underlined, De Roberto can be considered neither a *verista* nor a follower of Capuana and Verga.²³⁴

As a consequence, critics have often taken the historical nature of the novel as an ideological issue. According to Spinazzola, De Roberto used a typical bourgeois genre to investigate and denounce the failure of the Sicilian bourgeoisie to change and supervise the events which could have led to a new epoch. He defines De Roberto’s novel as ‘romanzo antistorico’ because of the lack of a positive belief in history and in any possible change,²³⁵ an opinion also shared by Carlo Alberto Madrignani.²³⁶ However, Mario Paolo Sipala quotes Consalvo (the main character of *I Viceré*), who states that ‘La storia è una monotona ripetizione: gli uomini sono stati, sono e saranno sempre gli stessi’,²³⁷ and points out that it is a prejudice to think that a historical novel should give a faithful description of historical events or that the novelist should share his political credo. The scholar underlines that in De Roberto’s novel there are neither romantic nor idealised echoes. On the contrary,

²³⁰ Calvino, ‘Le città e i segni. 1.’, in Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 21.

²³¹ G. Borri, *Invito alla lettura di Federico De Roberto* (Milan: Mursia, 1987), p. 75.

²³² V. Spinazzola, *Il romanzo antistorico* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1990), p. 5.

²³³ G. Grana, *I Viceré e la patologia del reale* (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), p. 159.

²³⁴ F. Del Vecchio, ‘La verità romanzesca di Federico De Roberto’, in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, pp. 19-44.

²³⁵ Spinazzola, *Il romanzo antistorico*, p. 9.

²³⁶ C. A. Madrignani, *Illusione e realtà nell’opera di Federico De Roberto* (Bari: De Donato, 1972), p. 98.

²³⁷ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 697.

there is a rejection of historicism and of a teleological vision of history.²³⁸ Drawing from these critics, I will demonstrate that, in De Roberto's view, history and geography are interconnected. Thus, time and urban landscape are intertwined and the urban space is highly symbolic and evocative, leaving the reader to interpret what Douglas Poccock has defined 'literary revelation'. In other words, the writer, as Poccock has suggested, can transcend everyday reality and physical space in order to allow the reader to discover 'a truth beyond mere facts'.²³⁹ In fact, the representation of the cityscape of Catania is an illusory portrayal and a literary device employed to stimulate discussion about the philosophy of history. Undoubtedly, as Pike has pointed out, 'the city seems to express our culture's restless dream about its inner conflicts and inability to resolve them',²⁴⁰ since it is not simply the symbol of our economic and cultural growth, but also the *locus* of political and social conflicts as well as dystopia.²⁴¹

Ruth Glynn defines De Roberto's *I Viceré* as an 'illusionist' novel because the author reflects in his work the determinist philosophy of history – mostly based on Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. The illusionist novel is characterised by the philosophy of history, which functions, as Glynn discusses, 'as a structuring, unifying device within the fictional narration, establishing coherence and cohesion between the fictional and historical matter'.²⁴² She points out that De Roberto's book is an example of a cyclical historical novel. Furthermore, the Uzeda family is portrayed as a *race* – whose dominant temperamental and physical features are handed down from generation to generation – while the *milieu* they move in is their palazzo in Catania, with a strong link to the Benedictine monastery, which is a confirmation of their power in the city during the struggle for the foundation of the Italian State. This selective urban setting reflects the Italian historical novel's tendency to represent the spatial area the author hails from. In the case of De Roberto, this became the way to represent a reality that he did not like.²⁴³

Following Glynn's analysis of De Roberto's book, urban space is part of the verisimilitude which characterises the historical novel. And it is this constraint, with the specificity of behaviour, manners and customs, which allows us to explore how the author

²³⁸ Sipala, *Introduzione a De Roberto*, p. 87.

²³⁹ Poccock, 'Introduction: Imaginative Literature and the Geographer', in *Humanistic Geography and Literature*, Poccock, ed., p. 11.

²⁴⁰ Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*, p. 8.

²⁴¹ On this topic see note n.107, p. 35.

²⁴² R. Glynn, *Contesting the Monument: the Anti-Illusionist Italian Historical Novel* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2005), p. 20.

²⁴³ N. Tedesco, *La concezione mondana dei 'Viceré'* (Caltanissetta-Rome: Ed. S. Sciascia, 1963), pp. 117-118.

described Catania and the way in which the urban space depended on political appropriation. So, the book is, in effect, a micro-history of what was happening in Catania in those years, as De Roberto wrote in a letter to his friend Ferdinando Di Giorgi in 1899:

Io mi son fatto una legge di non scrivere se non cose che sono passate, tutte o in parte, sotto i miei occhi. Quando ho soltanto, intorno ad un argomento, qualche dato, cerco di costruire, con l'aiuto di questo, tutto il resto [...] Le situazioni inventate di sana pianta, i caratteri ideati e non osservati nella realtà, li lascio da parte, aspettando di trovare, quando che sia, dei punti di appoggio che mi permettano di riprenderli... La fantasia è di molto aiuto: ma da sola non riesce a dare all'opera d'arte i criteri del vero.²⁴⁴

Although De Roberto states that he falls back on real life, and that he took inspiration from contemporary historical events, neither the 'real' city nor the Baroque style, which had inspired the architect Giovanni Battista Vaccarini in the reconstruction of Catania in the early eighteenth century, and whose aim was to impress visitors through decorated façades, reception rooms, grand staircases and internal courts, is represented in *I Viceré*.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, there is no mention of the fact that the city was rebuilt by Vaccarini, nor of how he characterised urban space by palazzos and lava-grey squares chequered with white; nor any reference to a city which was becoming modern and industrious, and whose society was flourishing; nor descriptions of the main street, Via Etnea, Piazza Duomo or Piazza Stesicoro. Despite the fact that during the nineteenth century Catania was growing and developing so much that it deserved the title of the 'Milan of the South', in the novel, when Raimondo Uzeda – Prince Cosalvo's brother – is asked if the Archduke Maximilian would visit Catania, he answers acrimoniously that Catania is not a city, rather a provincial town:

E che volete che venga a fare? Per vedere l'elefante di piazza del Duomo? Voialtri vi siete fitto in capo che questa sia una città, e non volete capire che invece è un miserabile paesaccio ignorato nel resto del mondo.²⁴⁶

De Roberto was well-acquainted with the city of Catania and its distinctive elements, Etna and the seaside,²⁴⁷ which had attracted travellers and visitors during the *Grand-Tour*.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ A. Navarra, 'Lettere inedite di Federico De Roberto a Ferdinando Di Giorgi', *L'Osservatore politico-letterario*, August 1963, pp. 9-10.

²⁴⁵For studies on G.B. Vaccarini see F. Fichera, *G.B. Vaccarini e l'architettura del Settecento in Sicilia* (Rome: Reale accademia d'Italia, 1934); S. Boscarino, *Sicilia barocca. Architettura e città, 1610-1760* (Rome: Officina, 1981); *L'attività di Giovan Battista Vaccarini a Catania* (Messina: Raphael, 1961); E. Magnano di San Lio, *Giovan Battista Vaccarini, architetto siciliano del Settecento* (Syracuse: Lombardi, 2010).

²⁴⁶ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 144.

Sicily, during the late eighteenth century, was a place which had started to intrigue travellers who wanted to experience towns full of old domes and cathedrals; monasteries and Baroque abbeys; beautiful palazzos and a cityscape that recorded previous epochs and civilisations, from the Roman and the Greek, to the Norman, the Spanish and the Bourbon eras.

However, the writer did not describe Catania as an open, spacious city. The city he depicts in his novel is extremely claustrophobic and closed: Catania is neither a city on a large gulf nor is it dominated by the volcano. The seaside and Mount Etna, which can be considered the symbols of the city, are merely mentioned in passing. This is clearly an ideological choice, the result of which is that the urban space of Catania is characterized by a sense of decay and a lack of geographic setting, which leads to a very restricted cityscape. Consequently, De Roberto's Catania is reduced, reflecting the very close relationship between the characters and space and is responsible for evoking the family's strangeness and eccentricity.

De Roberto kept his characters within the assigned stage of Catania. The reader learns nothing of Don Gaspare Uzeda's stay in Turin, Rome and Florence; nor do we find any description of cities such as Palermo or Messina, where Garibaldi and his troops fought against the Bourbons. De Roberto does not follow his characters outside the scenario they are part of; the city of Catania is an enclosed space where his characters live, and the Uzeda Palazzo is their centre stage where they are allowed to act.

The protagonists seem, moreover, to be subject to frenzied comings and goings, which balances the claustrophobic effect with a sense of agoraphobia. These two procedures, the denial of the Baroque urban landscape of Catania and its larger setting, and the fact that the characters are confined within a very constricted environment, allow De Roberto to develop a symbolic meaning of Catania's urban space. The city plan of Catania

²⁴⁷ As Ermanno Scuderi has pointed out, 'Il materiale d'ispirazione fu offerto al De Roberto dall'osservazione diretta della vita che si svolgeva nella sua Catania, un materiale vivo proiettato in un tempo storico determinato e fantasticamente risolto', in Scuderi, *Federico De Roberto e la letteratura d'oggi* (Catania: Niccolò Giannotta Editore, 1972), p. 47.

²⁴⁸ On this topic see: J. Houel, *Voyage Pittoresque des Isles de Sicilie, de Malte et de Lipari* (Paris, 1782-1787); P. Brydone, *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta in a Series of Letters to William Beckford* (London: H.D. Simmons, 1807); G. Dennis, *A Handbook for Travellers in Sicily: Including Palermo, Messina, Catania, Syracuse, Etna, and the Ruins of the Greek Temples* (London: J. Murray, 1864); R. A. Wilton and I. Bignamini, eds, *Grand Tour: the Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1996); E. Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Relations since the Renaissance* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); C. De Seta, *L'Italia del Grand Tour. Da Montaigne a Goethe* (Naples Electa, 2001); P. Findlen, W. Wassing Roworth and C. M. Sama, eds, *Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Stanford: California; London: Eurospan, 2009); V. Bonaventura, *La Sicilia al tempo del Grand Tour: l'isola vista dai maggiori viaggiatori stranieri della seconda metà del Settecento* (Messina: GBM, 2009).

does not follow the shape of the real city, but that of an imagined city characterized by a family whose social dominance, nepotism and interests symbolise Italian *trasformismo* and what Edward C. Banfield defined as ‘amoral familism’.²⁴⁹

The events of the Uzeda family are restricted to two main settings: the family palazzo and the Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena. The indolent family of the Uzeda, representative of the feudal aristocracy tied up to the Spanish dominance in Sicily, acts within these two enclosed spaces. The two core places of the novel that form the space of the Uzeda family have been pointed out by Michela Sacco Messineo:

Tornano nel romanzo le celle, le stanze nobili, i grandi spazi comuni, i corridoi, il corpo della scala, le due corti, la Chiesa, la sacrestia, che scandiscono l’enorme edificio barocco in cui rimbalza l’eco della vita cittadina. Come il convento anche il salotto delle dimore Uzeda costituisce un doppio della città in cui tutti gli avvenimenti vengono manipolati e gestiti secondo gli interessi familiari.²⁵⁰

The Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena is a sort of privileged observatory used to describe the public and private events in the Uzedas’ lives: two members of the family, don Blasco and don Lodovico, live in the monastery, and there Consalvo is educated and will arrange his electoral campaign. In fact, the monastery can be considered an extension of the urban space where family matters are controlled and manipulated. Space is, therefore, a fundamental feature to describe human relationships and social networks. In *I Viceré* De Roberto limits his narration of the city of Catania to the private space of the monastery and the Uzeda palazzo (where the family members meet on private occasions and in times of need). This allows De Roberto to restrict his focus to two places, which include both private and public life, where ‘real’ Catanese society can be observed in greater depth, as will be discussed in the following section.

²⁴⁹ *Trasformismo* is the art of making alliances in order to achieve political goals, see footnote n. 137 p. 43. Amoral familism marks the inability of society to contrast or engage a cooperative activity to oppose the nuclear family’s interests; see E. C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

²⁵⁰ M. Sacco Messineo, ‘Il vuoto barocco della storia’, in *Gli inganni del romanzo. ‘I Viceré’ tra storia e finzione letteraria*, Atti del Congresso celebrativo del centenario dei Viceré, Catania, 23-26 November 1994, pp. 167-182.

3. 2. Space and history: ‘*La storia è una monotona ripetizione.*’

Giuseppe Petronio underlined that the patriotic pathos of the Risorgimento, national consciousness and bourgeois consciousness could easily find space in a genre such as the historical novel in which the fortunes and misfortunes of individuals were attached to public events.²⁵¹ The historical novel is a genre in which, as Manzoni’s novel *I Promessi Sposi* (1827) shows, a micro-history is inserted into greater and more significant historical events, which provide scene and setting for the individuals and the crowd, the actions of the powerful and the humble, and their stories of romance.

In the historical novel history is used to give consistency to the plot. However, by projecting fictitious and historical events onto a space which has the characteristic of being a mirror or a reflection of reality, writers provide a description of an epoch and its cultural, social and political features.²⁵² The result is that history and the *Weltanschauung* of a period play the role of the protagonists or co-protagonists of the novel. Thus, in *I Viceré*, De Roberto provides a picture of Sicily which is linked to the national events that involved the Italian peninsula in the transition from the Bourbons’ centralist absolutism to bourgeois liberalism leading up to Unification. Although De Roberto sets the events narrated in the years of the fight for and accomplishment of Italian unification, he chose, as protagonists for his historical novel, the Uzeda family, heirs of the Spanish Viceroy. That is, in order to represent the age of the Risorgimento, he chose, significantly and paradoxically, the ‘Viceroy’, who are a clan entrenched in the distant past, both in mentality and way of life.

Undoubtedly, with *I Viceré* the writer provides his own interpretation of the Risorgimento as a historical process whose values and ideals are destined to be extinguished as soon as they pass from the ideological dimension into the real world of historical events. De Roberto’s point of view is shared by the Catanese historian Giovanni Beritelli who, in 1860, wrote:

Sovente accade, che certuni chiedendo beneficî dal Governo in nome di un popolo, del quale si mostrano appassionati amici, essi non sono che pochi uomini intesi a ingannare quello e raccogliere l’utilità che divisato hanno, e

²⁵¹ G. Petronio, ‘Appunti per una storia e tipologia del romanzo Italiano nel primo Ottocento’, in *I Romanzi Catanesi di Giovanni Verga*, Atti del I Convegno di Studi, Catania, 23-24 November 1979 (Catania: Fondazione Verga, 1981), pp. 9-32.

²⁵² See Glynn, ‘Theorizing the Historical Novel’, in Glynn, *Contesting the Monument*, chapter I, pp. 7-18. See also S. Dai Prà, *Federico De Roberto. Tra Naturalismo ed Espressionismo: lo stile della provocazione* (Palermo: Istituto siciliano di studi politici ed economici, 2003), chapter II, ‘Un mondo senza alternative: I Viceré’, pp. 49-101.

per se sperarono sempre. I rettori preposti alla cosa pubblica, se ne debbono guardare peggio che dal fuoco: ed è meglio, a mio intendimento, abbandonarsi costoro alle ispirazioni della loro anima, che a' non buoni suggerimenti di quegli ingannevoli sollecitatori del bene de' cittadini.²⁵³

Beritelli's suggestion of distrusting those politicians whose aim is that of pursuing a personal approval for the public good in order to ultimately achieve their own goals is clearly denounced by De Roberto. In fact, the writer was witness to some important historical, political and social events, which he did not report as a historian but, inspired by Gustave Flaubert, Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana, analysed empirically in order to study and portray family life and relationships.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, De Roberto, who was strongly influenced by his friends, Verga and Capuana, shows a clear ideological awareness of the problems of the social and economic backwardness of Southern Italy. Not only did he describe, as a chronicler, with a pessimistic point of view, his epoch, but also humanity, whose positive and negative attitudes are more or less always the same.

De Roberto's idea of history is that the powerful have always ruled the world and that history is a repetition of identical events: the laws that govern the victory of the strong over the weak cannot be changed; nor can we weaken the hegemonic role of the aristocracy in political and economic matters. The rules that govern history cannot be affected as they are immutable. This conception of history allows De Roberto to give his Catania a symbolic rather than historical meaning. Since history is strongly related to space, De Roberto's philosophy of history, and even ideology, comes from his representation of space. Catania is a 'fictional' space useful in mirroring the political failure of the Risorgimento and depicting the Sicilian aristocracy as greedy and voracious. Strangely, it is the monastery, a religious place, but also an extension of the Uzeda palazzo, which reflects the symbiosis between space and history:

A San Nicola, dopo la sistemazione del governo italiano, si faceva la stessa vita di prima, come al tempo dei napoletani; anzi era questo uno degli argomenti sfoderati dai liberali contro i *sorci*, durante le discussioni politiche che s'ingannavano continuamente all'ombra dei chiostrì.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ G. Beritelli, *Catania e la sua provincia, ragionamento di Giovanni Beritelli* (Catania: Stamperia di Salvatore Zammataro, 1860), p. 3. See also Id., *Dei doveri del Governo in Sicilia: brevi considerazioni di Giovanni Beritelli* (Turin: Stamp. di Compositori-Tipografi, 1861).

²⁵⁴ Madrignani, *Illusione e realtà nell'opera di Federico De Roberto*, p.92.

²⁵⁵ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 333.

Space and history are related to each other in the Benedictine monastery. It is in the shadow of the cloister – ‘all’ombra dei chiostri’ – that the two historical dimensions, the Uzeda microcosm in Catania and the external world, symbolized by the arrival in the city of Garibaldi’s troops, are intertwined. However, there is no conflict between the ancient world of the Viceroys and the ‘arrival’ of the bourgeois modern world. On the contrary, the two historical dimensions – the past and present – can coexist in the monastery’s space, as if history had no relevance due to the cyclical repetition of events: ‘Avete visto? A darvi ascolto doveva succedere il finimondo, dovevano mandare all’aria il convento, e invece è sempre ritto...’.²⁵⁶

The open space of the monastery – ‘*immenso*’ and ‘*suntuoso*’ – is the counterpart to the Uzeda palace. If the Uzeda family wants to survive in the bourgeois world, it has to enlarge the constricted boundaries of its enclosed space so as to adapt to modern times. It is Consalvo who understands this constraint since he states that ‘In verità, aveva ragione Salomone quando diceva che non c’è niente di nuovo sotto il sole!’.²⁵⁷ Space and time, then, have no effect and neither does the cityscape because, as Consalvo emphasises for his aunt, Donna Ferdinanda, history is a monotonous repetition since human nature does not change. What really changes are the external conditions: the post-industrial present of De Roberto, for instance, may appear very different from the Middle-Ages, but it is just a *trompe-l’oeil*, that is to say, a deception. Therefore, this seemingly, apparent change is rather more external and deceptive than real. Consalvo’s conception of history can clarify the concept:

Quasicché, ammessa pure la possibilità d’abolire con un tratto di penna tutte le disuguaglianze sociali, esse non si sarebbero di nuovo formate il domani, essendo gli uomini naturalmente diversi, e il furbo dovendo sempre, in ogni tempo, sotto qualunque regime, mettere in mezzo il semplice, e l’audace prevenire il timido, e il forte soggiogare il debole!²⁵⁸

This statement re-enforces De Roberto’s pessimistic point of view, not only on the secular world, but also the Church, whose members, such as Don Blasco and Don Lodovico Uzeda, are as greedy as Duca d’Oragua, who is able to change his political creed according to suit his needs to the circumstances. Since space is where historical events happen and ‘the locus for the tensions and contradictions in the novel and in the historical moment,

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 334.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 697.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 662.

both inscribed into the cityscapes',²⁵⁹ the reduction of space to closed and restricted environments of the city; the total absence of the countryside in the novel; and the way in which De Roberto represents the cityscape of Catania suggest an image, and an idea, of the city as a claustrophobic place. Catania seems to be a prison whose inhabitants are victims of the cyclical idea of eternal return: a denial of history both as progress and as enduring transformation. The final conclusion is that history is a monotonous, endless repetition of events and that 'la differenza è tutta esteriore'.²⁶⁰

Given the presence in the novel of such prominent historical figures as Giuseppe Garibaldi, Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, Nino Bixio or Carlo Filangieri, Prince of Satriano, it may appear strange that they are lightly drawn and have less relevance in the narration. Moreover, historic events, such as the risings of 1821 and 1848, and the arrival of *I Mille*, Garibaldi's troops, are narrated indirectly through the Uzeda reports and dialogues. There are no 'frescoes' of these historical milestones nor are there detailed accounts of the epic events of the time. On the contrary, it is the micro-history of the Uzeda family which dominates the historical scenario of the novel, with only passing reference to the macro-history, which is used to show how history works. Even Garibaldi, one of the most important protagonists of the Risorgimento, is depicted as a dictator rather than a liberator or the symbol of Italian unification: 'Garibaldi dev'essere arrestato a forza; non si può permettere che una nazione di ventisette milioni è messa in orgasmo da un uomo che ha meriti distinti, ma pare avere giurato di farli dimenticare;²⁶¹ and 'il nome di Garibaldi sonava come quello di un guerriero formidabile che altre leggi non conoscesse fuorché le dure, le violente leggi di guerra'.²⁶² The 'Dittatore', as Garibaldi is defined,²⁶³ 'strangely' settles his troops in the Benedictine abbey. Nonetheless, he has no relevance to the narration or control of the space.²⁶⁴ After Garibaldi's arrival nothing seems to have changed. The reason is, as Consalvo highlights, that 'quasicché, ammessa pure la possibilità d'abolire con un tratto di penna tutte le disuguaglianze sociali, esse non si sarebbero di nuovo formate il domani, essendo gli uomini naturalmente diversi'? This rhetorical question demonstrates De Roberto's disillusionment and disappointment and highlights the idea that history is the sum of individual rivalries and competitions that lead

²⁵⁹ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, p. 3.

²⁶⁰ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 697.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 679-680.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²⁶⁴ Ganeri, 'Italian Trasformismo before Il Gattopardo', in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 208.

to a 'natural' *status quo*.²⁶⁵ De Roberto's pessimistic point of view is also expressed with the metaphor of the telescope used both by Garibaldi and Duca d'Oragua. The telescope, through which Garibaldi gazes at the horizon from the top of the dome of the church of the monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena, and through which Duca d'Oragua observes, as if he were at the theatre, 'the dying city' of Catania, is the symbol of a decentralized, anti-historical perspective, both the crisis of the Risorgimento and that of the Italian nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, which had to surrender and accept the *status quo* of the transformed 'outdated' Italian political beliefs.²⁶⁶

In De Roberto's novel the modern cityscape of Catania and two symbolic representatives of the Risorgimento, Garibaldi and the *nouveau riche* Giulente, are obscured by the strong figure of Consalvo, who is convinced that 'la nostra razza non è degenerata: è sempre la stessa',²⁶⁷ whose electoral meeting in the abbey of San Nicolò l'Arena represents the final triumph of a modern 'totalitarian' Viceré. Consalvo, being convinced that 'invece di sprezzare le nuove leggi, mi pare quello di servircene!...',²⁶⁸ is the 'victim' of *Hybris*. He has the extreme arrogance to think he has the duty to dominate space and history by becoming the new leader. However, Consalvo will not be punished for his overconfident egotism and aristocratic pride because justice is just a human illusion.²⁶⁹

Since literary space can translate real events into a symbolic space, 'It is here in this metaphor city that we must begin and it is here that we must make an initial claim: to privilege the metaphors of the city is not to leave the real city behind'.²⁷⁰ As a metaphor, the city becomes the element through which it is possible to analyse and understand the social, political, and economic changes space has undergone. As a consequence, I would argue that the Uzeda palazzo and the Benedictine monastery in *I Viceré* work as objective correlatives. In T. S. Eliot, the objective correlative is 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion'.²⁷¹ Moving on from these

²⁶⁵ Madrignani, *Illusione e realtà nell'opera di Federico De Roberto*, p. 98.

²⁶⁶ Castelli, 'Il cannocchiale di Federico: De Roberto e il padre in un inedito progetto narrativo', in *La Letteratura, la storia, il romanzo*, M. Tropea, ed., (Caltanissetta: Edizione Lussografica, 1998), pp. 153-177; see also Castelli, *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto*, pp. 45-50.

²⁶⁷ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 700.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 698.

²⁶⁹ Frank Ignazio Caldarone defines Consalvo a Machiavellian character because of his tyrannical behaviour, which reflects Teresa Uzeda's egotism. However, the scholar points out that Teresa's tyrannical temper dominates over her family, whereas Consalvo, her grandson, aims at ruling the entire nation. F. I. Caldarone, *Il ciclo dei 'vinti' da Verga a De Roberto* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1992), p. 129.

²⁷⁰ Highmore, *Cityscapes: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City*, p. 5.

²⁷¹ M. H. Abrams and G. Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), p. 261.

assumptions, the city in *I Viceré* is used to suggest to the reader that the cityscape is not a mere geographic plexus,²⁷² rather the place of hidden conflicts and evident tensions, for political and economic dominance of space and people. Space is, thus, a place where historical events happen and follow one another in order to ‘transform’ reality and its political, social and economic manifestations. There is not a teleological vision nor divine Providence, but a dialectical conflict for political and social dominance.

The metaphor of such a conflict is given by the testament of Teresa Uzeda, whose inheritance marks the beginning of family quarrels. As the city of Catania is a metaphorical space where history repeats itself indefinitely, the cityscape has no boundaries and gives birth to a place whose name and urban characteristics have no importance. Squares, streets, buildings and monuments are extraneous to the completion of cyclical events. The cityscape is reduced to a mere backdrop onto which events are projected. For such reasons, the characteristic Baroque style of the city disappears from view and becomes an empty frame which contains the endless repetition of historical events, as happens to the Uzeda palazzo which is under constant re-arrangement. Pocock has underlined that ‘literary revelation, as opposed to reporting, is implicit, suggestive’.²⁷³ Then, the urban space of Catania acquires the symbolic meaning of being a metaphor for the island of Sicily which was witness to very important historic events and changes. Regrettably, they were illusory and deceptive.

3. 3. The family and the crowd: the privatization of public space

De Roberto’s description of Catania is focused on the creation of a city whose public space is under the control of the Uzeda family. This expedient is aimed, as I will discuss, at underlining the privatization of public space and, consequently, the possession and management of urban space. Furthermore, the crowd is the counterpart of the Uzeda family: if the former represents the masses of the big city, the latter is manifestly interested in space and human control.

The novel *I Viceré* begins with the funeral of Teresa Uzeda di Francalanza to whom the city of Catania pays homage with the tolling of its church bells. The author stresses that the cathedral bell:

²⁷² Mumford, ‘What is a City?’, in *The City Cultures Reader*, Miles, Borden and Hall, eds, p. 29.

²⁷³ Pocock, ‘Introduction: Imaginative Literature and the Geographer’, in *Humanistic Geography and Literature*, Pocock, ed., p. 11.

Sonava a morto solo pei nobili e i dottori, e il suo nton-nton grave e solenne costava quattr'onze di moneta; talché la gente, udendo la gran voce di bronzo, diceva: 'se n'è andato qualche pezzo grosso!'.²⁷⁴

The urban element (the city's cathedral) immediately becomes a sociological and political feature. Teresa's funeral is a spectacular event through which De Roberto underlines the importance of the Uzeda family and the ostentation of the family's power in a public space, to the extent that the Cappuccini church became a '*formicaio*'.²⁷⁵ It is worth noting that, since the writer emphasises that myriads of curious people gathered for the sad occurrence, the reader can understand the extent to which this private event becomes public. The Catanese are involved in the funeral: 'Il comandante della guarnigione, il presidente della Gran Corte, tutte le autorità, tutta la città si condoleva con la famiglia',²⁷⁶ and people are curious to know what is happening in the palazzo, and the reason why Prince Giacomo left it. Since De Roberto passes from description to action, the cityscape is transformed by the lively introduction of the crowd:

Intorno alla casa Francalanza c'era come una fiera, per le tante carrozze aspettanti, pel tanto popolo fremente d'impazienza. Dal portone socchiuso vedevasi un'altra folla radunata nei due cortili, uno sciame di servi con le livree nere che andavano e venivano, il maestro di casa senza cappello che s'affannava a dar ordini, la carrozza di gala a quattro cavalli che sarebbe servita da carro funebre.²⁷⁷

Although the crowd that walks in the street is noisy and vivacious, in *I Viceré* it is the symbol of the immobility and stagnancy of Catanese society, which can be defined, as Baudelaire has stressed in 1851, a 'sickly population'.²⁷⁸ In the novel the crowd is presented in various parts of the narration, and with a particular emphasis at the beginning of the novel, when the news of the death of Princess Teresa Uzeda spreads throughout Catania:

Tutta la nobiltà sarebbe stata a lutto, tutti i portoni dei palazzi signorili, a quell'ora, si chiudevano o si socchiudevano, secondo il grado di parentela [...] "Via di qua! Che diavolo volete? Aspettate i numeri del lotto?" Ma la

²⁷⁴ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 31.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁷⁸ Cited in Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, p. 102.

folla non si muoveva, guardava per aria le finestre ora chiuse quasi aspettando l'apparizione della stampiglia coi numeri.²⁷⁹

These passages show the presence of two social levels, the aristocracy behind the closed doors and the crowd in the street. Moreover, despite the comings and goings of the crowd, its presence does not inspire the perception that time is passing. It is Baldassarre, *il maestro di casa*, who has to arrange everything, regardless of time, while dealing both with aristocrats and the crowd. This latter, which is described as curious and meddling, seems to be waiting for something to happen and incapable of moving as if it were hypnotised by the windows of the palazzo, which is the symbol of the Uzeda family's prestige and power. The way in which De Roberto presents the wake, the funeral honours and the people involved is used to direct the reader towards a comprehension of the Uzeda's social status, as happens when the narrator describes the funeral procession:

Veniva innanzi la fila dei frati cappuccini con la croce, poi la carrozza funebre, dentro alla quale si vedeva il feretro di velluto rosso, fiancheggiata da tutta la servitù con le torce in mano; poi l'Ospizio Uzeda dei vecchi indigenti, tutti a testa nuda; poi le ragazze dell'Orfanotrofio coi veli azzurri pendenti fino a terra; poi tutte le carrozze di famiglia: altri due tiri a quattro, cinque tiri a due, e poi ancora un altro gruppo di gente: una quarantina d'uomini, la più parte barbuti, con le giubbe di velluto nero, anch'essi coi ceri in mano.

“Chi sono?... Di dove spuntano?...”

Erano i zolfai delle miniere dell'*Oleastro* chiamati a posta da Caltanissetta per l'accompagnamento della padrona: quest'ultimo accessorio finiva di sbalordire tutti quanti: ancora non s'era visto una cosa simile!...²⁸⁰

The presence of sulphur mine workers during the funeral is not casual, as the writer points out that nobody has ever seen a funeral like that, and that the miners are called upon to display the Uzeda's economic power. In fact, during the late nineteenth century, Catania had become the 'city of sulphur' because of the extraction of sulphur and its commerce.²⁸¹ It is natural to assume that the passage is used by the writer to highlight the Uzeda family's economic interests in a region which was undergoing important political, social and economic changes.

The Uzeda family, which is portrayed following the idea of race of French Naturalism – Naturalistic writers believed that man's character is largely determined by

²⁷⁹ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 10.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸¹ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 6.

social environment and heredity²⁸² – is focused on maintaining their power and glory, trying to adapt to new political and social realities in order to keep their money under control. Despite their wealth and splendour, they are victims of avarice and malice. Their main interest lies in holding on to their political power via falsehood and the use of subterfuge. Nonetheless, the world of the Uzeda family is neither that of a feudal regime nor that of a family which lives in a *latifondo*. On the contrary, the Uzeda family makes a pretence of being *borghese* and *liberale* in order to maintain their leading role in the newborn Italian State élite. It is Prince Consalvo who really understands the role of the crowd, which is to be manipulated and dominated in order to achieve political aims.

Although he strongly disdains the bourgeoisie, he is obliged to interact with it during his political campaign, so that he is able to bring to his family prestige and power. Consalvo – who ‘incarnates the very worst spirit of the times’²⁸³ – is obliged to mix with the bourgeoisie in order to reach his political goal and to maintain the aristocratic status of his family. He is not a liberal politician, but a cunning opportunist, who is able to disguise his aims behind the mantle of democracy, the use of persuasive speech and versatile behaviour: ‘Dobbiamo farci mettere il piede sul collo anche noi? Il nostro dovere, invece di sprezzare le nuove leggi, mi pare quello di servircene!’²⁸⁴

After Italian national unification, the bourgeoisie tried to gather its forces in order to fight the aristocratic system of power and ideological hegemony. However, this aristocracy transformed itself in order to safeguard its *Ancient Régime* privileges and the Italian bourgeoisie was not as mature as it should have been to stem the power of the aristocracy. Hence, the urban crowd is the means by which the members of the Uzeda family can maintain their power, as new Viceroys, in Catania, where they want to start their project to conquer the city by subjugating the Catanese to their wishes. Since space is formed by people and people are part of a political transformation, which is necessary to dominate the cityscape, the people need to be won over. The crowd is inebriated and captivated by Consalvo’s eloquent words during his electoral campaign:

Alla folla che voleva entrare ad ogni costo, diceva, alzando le mani: ‘Signori miei, un po’ di pazienza; c’è tempo... ci vuole un’ora...’. Era possibile lasciar entrare la ciurmaglia prima degli invitati?... Ma alle undici e mezzo la resistenza fu impossibile: dato ordine ai dipendenti di difendere almeno i

²⁸² R. D. Lehan, *Realism and Naturalism: the Novel in an Age of Transition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 3-44.

²⁸³ Ganeri, ‘Italian Trasformismo before Il Gattopardo’, in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 209.

²⁸⁴ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 698.

posti riservati, lasciò aprire la terrazza e l'arena. In un attimo l'onda umana vi si rovesciò. Era ancora la folla anonima, il popolo minuto; ma a poco per volta cominciavano a venire le persone di riguardo, signori e signore eleganti, dinanzi alla cui carrozze s'apriva altra folla rimasta nel cortile esterno.²⁸⁵

The presence of the crowd highlights how the middle-class, the aristocracy and the poor are intermingled in the urban space in De Roberto's novel. Further, the 'anonymous' crowd is always used as confirmation of the power of the Uzeda in Catania and as evidence of the *trasformismo* (the art of making alliances in order to achieve political goals) through which the Uzeda are trying to adapt to the new era. This concept is underlined by De Roberto's choice of using the nickname, *Viceré*, of Spanish origin 'Il nomignolo degli Uzeda, i *Viceré*, diceva della loro antica potenza'.²⁸⁶ In fact, it is a concept to emphasise the arrogance of the nobility and their desire to show off their luxury and the ostentation of their magnificence. The Sicilian aristocracy, we might say, used bourgeois political convictions with the aim of perpetuating, during the nineteenth century, their habits and beliefs.²⁸⁷ In addition, after the Unification, the new Viceroy, inspired by the conduct and values of their ancestors, did not share the values of the new state. On the contrary, they referred back to their 'golden age' in order to subject the city and the crowd to their rapacious greed.

A very close analysis of the novel reveals the lack of people in open spaces, such as squares, streets and public areas, which characterise the modern city and the new idea of *promenade*. Only on special occasions, such as the festival of St Agatha – the city's patron saint – and the festival of the Holy Nail, is the crowd the protagonist of a folkloristic Catania. In a letter De Roberto wrote to his friend Ferdinando di Giorgi on December 1891, he stated that he was consulting some books in order to have supporting material for his novel: 'E se tu venissi a trovarmi, mi troveresti coi volumi della Giurisprudenza, con la regola di S. Benedetto, col Mugnos, con l'antico codice napoletano, col giornale di Catania del 1855: tutta roba che mi serve di documento'.²⁸⁸ It is possible to argue, then, that De Roberto studied the local folklore and ethnology in order to give a realistic and faithful portrayal of the Catanese festivals. St Agatha's day is one of the most distinctive local events De Roberto describes in his novel and in his articles, together with the festival of

²⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 675-676.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

²⁸⁷ Ganeri underlines that Gaspare and Consalvo Uzeda, who become members of Italian Parliament, enter politics only to satisfy their desire for power; see Ganeri, 'Italian Trasformismo before Il Gattopardo', in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 209.

²⁸⁸ De Roberto, quoted in A. Navarria, *Federico De Roberto. La Vita e l'Opera* (Catania: Niccolò Giannotta Editore, 1974), p. 96.

the Holy Nail, ‘la cui magnificenza – the writer underlines – sbalordiva la città’,²⁸⁹ so that ‘tutta la città s’era riversata lassù’,²⁹⁰ in Piazza San Nicola. The day of the festival of the Holy Nail (which is not celebrated in Catania any more) was 14th September and consisted in the exhibition of a relic which belonged to King Martin, who had donated it to the monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena in 1393. The city gets involved in the event and there are so many people that De Roberto uses a simile in order to describe how the Catanese gather in the square to attend the festival:

Ma la vera festa fu quella della sera, quando la vasta piazza di San Nicola parve trasformata in un salone, dalle tante faci accese per ogni dove, dalle tante seggiole disposte per le signore che arrivavano dalla Trinità e dai Crociferi, e venivano ad assistere alla processione.²⁹¹

The outer space (the square) is transformed into an inner space (a dining room) so that the festival is not described as a religious but as a social event. Piazza San Nicola, the square which surrounds the monastery, is full of people and the city comes alive thanks to the colours, sounds and noise of the eagerly-awaited spectacle. The crowd seems to brighten up, and occupy, the Uzeda’s claustrophobic space. Moreover, the crowd, which could be defined as a mass society *ante litteram*, represents a menace to aristocracy.

De Roberto uses this description to focus on the importance of mass control by the outdated aristocratic power during religious rites. The reason is that De Roberto observed, with disillusionment and disappointment, the failure of the Risorgimento values. The writer’s intellectual disappointment, which enabled him to discover the idealistic nature of these values, forced him to capture and reveal the nobility’s clever manipulations and amoral behaviour.²⁹² The same atmosphere is described during the patron saint’s festival, which is one of the most important events which characterise the history of Catania both in past and contemporary times.

The festival is a mixture of the sacred and the profane and is celebrated twice a year, in February and August, when thousands of people meet in the city to pay homage to St Agatha. De Roberto describes the festival in two moments of his narration, focusing on its role as a symbol of Catania and the economic problems the celebration brings. In his

²⁸⁹ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 199.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁹² Ganeri, ‘Italian Trasformismo before Il Gattopardo’, in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 207.

first description of the festival, the writer shows to what extent the political authorities are involved in the event. Presenting the local Senate members parading through the main street, via Etna, De Roberto, with a touch of irony, highlights how the festival had become a social occurrence in which local authorities could show off their status to the city, rather than being just a religious event:

Consalvo stava attento al cerimoniale spagnolesco di quelle feste: il Senato della città, nella berlina di gala grande quanto una casa, preceduta da mazzieri e gonfalonieri e *catapani* che sonavano tamburi, andava a prendere l'Intendente, il quale doveva farsi trovare sul portone: al senatore più giovane toccava mettere il piede sulla predella, in atto di scendere; ma allora il rappresentante del Governo doveva avanzarsi con le braccia distese, per impedirgli di toccar terra. Erano le prerogative della città. Il Senato aveva avuto lunghe contese con le altre autorità circa il posto da occupare nella cattedrale, durante le grandi funzioni: per evitare liti ulteriori, s'era tracciata per terra una riga di marmo che nessuno poteva varcare.²⁹³

The disputes on where to sit in Catania Cathedral are not the only moments De Roberto describes to point out how a public city event is transmuted into a political conflict to acquire prestige and popularity. Later on in the novel, when portraying the festival, not only does the writer emphasise the way the Catanese celebrate the event, but also the relevance of the crowd and its link with the cathedral bell:

Saliva dalla via un rumore come d'alveare, tanta era la folla, e il campanone del Duomo coi suoi rintocchi lenti e gravi pareva batter la solfa alle campane della Badia, della Collegiata e Dei Minoriti. 'Viva Sant'Agata!...' [...] le grida di *viva* si perdevano in mezzo al fragore degli scopii e solo vedevasi sul mar delle teste sventolare i fazzoletti come sciami di colombe impazzite.²⁹⁴

De Roberto uses the simile of the frenzied hive to describe the irrational force of the crowd. Apparently there is no way of escaping, on the one hand, the rational, but baroque aristocracy; on the other hand, the lively, but crazy crowd. In order to stress the political, economic and anthropological meaning the celebration has for the city, the writer gives a brilliant and very ironic account of the reaction of Catania when the new liberal city council decides to celebrate the religious event only once a year:

La celebravano, come sempre, due volte all'anno: in febbraio e in agosto; ma un'amministrazione libera-pensatrice, giudicato che una sola gazzarra

²⁹³ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 242.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

bastasse, aveva soppresso dal bilancio l'assegno per la festa estiva. Questo fu il segnale di una specie di guerra civile. Dal pulpito, nei confessionali, nelle sacrestie i preti incitavano i fedeli alla riscossa: i liberali si ostinavano nel loro proposito, gl'indifferenti erano costretti a prendere un partito, e le cose minacciavano di guastarsi. Il consiglio fu chiamato a decidere. Una folla straordinaria assisté alle tempestose sedute: sagrestani, scaccini, appaltatori e mercantucci interessati alla festa pel guadagno che ne speravano; giornalisti improvvisati badavano a stendere precise relazioni del dibattimento e divulgarle.²⁹⁵

Only the intervention of Consalvo on behalf of the festival can solve the dilemma. He takes advantage of the problem to gain the approval of the crowd, which is described as an extraordinary audience, and reaffirm his aristocratic power behind a liberal and democratic act. In order to convince the city council to celebrate the festival twice a year, Consalvo states that councillors are elected by citizens and that, in this capacity, they should represent the city's interests and needs.

He remarks that the members of Catania council are 'uomini d'un patriottismo superiore' and that they 'non intendono per nulla cancellare tutto un passato che la storia ha scritto a lettere d'oro nei suoi annali imperituri!...'.²⁹⁶ He strongly stresses that the city, and the crowd, wanted the festival. It is, then, his opinion to satisfy the necessities and will of the people who voted for the city council. Further, he maintains that sovereignty resides in the nation and belongs to the people. The crowd, captivated and seduced by Consalvo's 'democratic' speech, applauds loudly:

Oramai ad ogni periodo gli applausi scrosciavano come gragnuola, e quando egli cominciò a dimostrare per quali interessi 'legittimi, rispettabili, onesti' tutte le classi della popolazione volevano la festa, l'ovazione si mutò in trionfo: i festaioli per poco non lo portarono a braccia per le vie; gli stessi oppositori dovettero riconoscere la sua abilità.²⁹⁷

Consalvo's speech is the demonstration of the re-appropriation of the social and political space of Catania by his old aristocratic family, confirmed by the acclamation of the crowd and the considerable number of fireworks he buys to honour St Agatha: 'egli fece dar fuoco a un considerevole numero di bombe e mortaretti'.²⁹⁸

It seems, then, that Consalvo is clearly aware of the role money has in promoting his image as a modern leader, spokesman and a 'democratic' politician. For these reasons

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 558.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 560.

²⁹⁷ Ibidem.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 561.

he buys fireworks and invests in his political campaign: 'Mio caro, ho da farmi popolare; mi servo dei mezzi che trovo. Credi tu che questo gregge m'apprezzi per quel che valgo? S'ha da buttargli la polvere agli occhi!'.²⁹⁹ His use of the formula *panem et circenses*,³⁰⁰ in the search for his personal approval, makes Consalvo Uzeda di Francalanza the new politician who is able to understand and use old strategies to manipulate the modern crowd in order to reach his goal, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.³⁰¹

In the final pages of the novel Consalvo, speaking to his aunt Ferdinanda Francalanza, reveals his political creed: 'Un tempo la potenza della nostra famiglia veniva dai re; ora viene dal popolo... La differenza è più di nome che di fatto...'.³⁰² Donna Ferdinanda, symbol of the past power of the Uzeda family in Catania, is listening to her nephew as he talks about modernity. De Roberto describes this aristocratic old woman, who is sitting in an armchair in silence, half-asleep or moribund, who is unable to answer her nephew's questions. She is unaware of the importance of being able, as the *onorevole* Consalvo underlines, to adapt to the changes occurring in Italy at that time in order to maintain the family's social status in the new bourgeois nation.

Despite modernity, the progressive ideals of bourgeois liberalism are shattered. Consalvo's dominance of urban space and his power over the crowd underline his triumph, but it also highlights what Glynn has called 'the continuous reaffirmation of the hegemonic race', i.e. the hegemony of aristocracy in the struggle for social and political dominance of the city.³⁰³ The Uzeda palazzo, which will be the subject of the following section, and its continuous re-arrangements made by the family household are the symbol of the Uzeda's insanity, and the metaphor of chaos and disorder brought about bourgeois liberalism, which clashed with the organised, ruled world of the aristocracy.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 616.

³⁰⁰ *Panem et circenses* (bread and circuses) is a Latin phrase used by the Roman satirical poet Juvenal in Satire X. The poet used this phrase to display his contempt for the decadence of Romans who ignored political decay as long as they were fed and entertained. The phrase was also used to indicate the most effective way to gain popularity, political approval and rise to power; see C. Keane, *Figuring Genre in Roman Satire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 36.

³⁰¹ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 697. The French phrase, which means 'the more things change, the more they stay the same', was written by the journalist Alphonse Karr in 1848; it expressed the futility and failure of political reforms; see Karr, *Les Guêpes* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères Editeurs, 1891), p. 278.

³⁰² De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 696.

³⁰³ Glynn, *Contesting the Monument*, p. 24.

3.4. The palazzo: ‘*Composto di quattro o cinque diversi pezzi di fabbrica messi insieme...*’

At the beginning of his novel De Roberto describes the death of Princess Teresa Uzeda and the Francalanza palazzo. The reader learns that the building has two courts, which are full of coaches and look like an open market; and a loggia, from which Baldassarre – the master of ceremonies – commands the servants and checks that everything is under control during the funeral, which is both a private and public event. De Roberto neither indulges in detailed architectonic descriptions nor does he make many comments on the beauty or ugliness of the building; neither does he provide any information on the location of the palazzo. He only refers to the city toponymy. We learn, for instance, that Donna Ferdinanda buys a noble house in Via Crociferi, which is one of the most prestigious streets in Catania, as the street is one of Vaccarini’s masterpieces; he mentions the Salita del Santo Carcere and that of San Domenico; Via Messina, Via Etna and Via Del Plebiscito. The writer does not describe any of the religious or political buildings, such as Palazzo del Seminario dei Chierici or the city hall, known as Palazzo degli Elefanti, which faces Piazza Duomo, where the symbol of Catania, the Fontana dell’Elefante, is located.

The Baroque beauty of the city is obscured by the Uzeda Palazzo, a central ‘character’, and the *dramatis personae* move as if they were pawns on a chessboard.³⁰⁴ This narrative device ‘is heightened even more by the fact that the scope of the book is limited to the narrow confines of Catania and the Uzeda household, so that the same characters must always encounter each other on the same limited spatial expanse’.³⁰⁵ Although Catania is the city where the Uzeda family lives, it is their palazzo that has the pivotal role in De Roberto’s narration, together with the Benedictine Monastery, which is a reflection of the family palace. Yet, the space the Uzeda inhabit is characterised by a very gloomy atmosphere, which is only broken by the presence of the crowd – curious to know everything about the family – and a certain number of minor characters who move, frenetically, as if the building were a stage.

Although De Roberto seems to be interested in focusing his attention only on the Viceré’s residence, he does not refer to any square or street which might allow the reader to identify the palazzo in any area of Catania, nor does he provide any reference to other aristocratic or bourgeois buildings. When saying, for instance, that ‘Tutta la nobiltà

³⁰⁴ Spinazzola, *Il romanzo antistorico*, p. 126.

³⁰⁵ Glynn, *Contesting the Monument*, p. 26.

sarebbe stata in lutto, tutti i portoni dei palazzi signorili, a quell'ora, si chiudevano o si socchiudevano, secondo il grado della parentela,³⁰⁶ or that the Giulente family – who is not aristocratic – ‘vennero a star di casa dirimpetto al palazzo dei Francalanza’,³⁰⁷ the writer does not give any further details on the cityscape. In this way, De Roberto privileges the symbolic over the real cityscape of Catania: not only is the map of the city disconnected – Via Crociferi, Via Messina, Salita del Santo Carcere but also the palazzo's interiors create a grim atmosphere and seem to lack in luxury and splendour. Catania is still there, perfectly identifiable and recognizable, but the separation of the buildings from their context switches the focus from the city to the inner life, creating a psychological locus. Only the Sala Rossa, the Sala Gialla and the Galleria are mentioned as part of the building's interiors. They are described as the places where the family meets on special occasions. For instance, the Galleria, which is decorated with the family's portraits, is the place where the family convenes, at the beginning of the novel, for the reading of Teresa's will:

Intorno alla tavola dodici seggioloni e braccioli aspettavano i testimoni e gl'interessati: quello del principe, più alto, volgeva la spalliera al grande ritratto centrale del Viceré Lopez Ximenes de Uzeda, a cavallo e in atto di frenare la bestia con la sinistra e d'appuntar l'indice destro al suolo come dicendo: ‘Qui comando io!...’.³⁰⁸

Under the menacing portrait of Lopez Ximenes de Uzeda, who is the symbolic representation of the Viceré's authority and power, and who seems to keep an eye on his family, it is the celebration of Lucrezia's wedding to the lawyer Giulente, in the above-mentioned halls, that is underlined as the moment in which two different epochs, *Ancien Régime* and modernity, meet. Thus, the palazzo interiors acquire the symbolic value of representing the decline of an aristocratic family who has to adapt to modernity, and accept the compromises which the new historical events have given rise to. Baldassarre notes: ‘i Viceré che guardavano dall'alto delle pareti!’.³⁰⁹ the ‘fossilized’ ancestors hanging up on the walls of the arcade can only watch the changes their descendants are experiencing, without being able to influence their destiny. Even the external structure of the building reflects the madness and chaos of the *mala razza*, as don Blasco (Prince Consalvo's Benedictine uncle) defines his family. De Roberto's description of the palazzo contrasts

³⁰⁶ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 10.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 324.

with the Baroque style and its geometrical effects: the building is described as an urban disaster and as an example of disorder, a metaphor of the continuous changes the world of Southern Italy was undergoing. De Roberto describes Teresa's desire to widen and refurbish the palazzo soon after her wedding with Consalvo VII di Francalanza:

Ella stessa aveva lavorato a mutar l'architettura dell'edificio il quale pareva composto di quattro o cinque diversi pezzi di fabbrica messi insieme, poiché ognuno degli antenati s'era sbizzarrito a chiuder qui finestre per forare più là balconi, a innalzar piani da una parte per smantellarli dall'altra, a mutar, a pezzo a pezzo, la tinta dell'intonaco e il disegno del cornicione. Dentro, il disordine era maggiore: porte murate, scale che non portavano a nessuna parte, stanze divise in due da tramezzi, muri buttati a terra per fare di due stanze una: i 'pazzi' come don Blasco chiamava anche i suoi maggiori, avevano uno dopo l'altro fatto e disfatto a modo loro.³¹⁰

The Uzeda palazzo is the allegory of the disorder, and chaos, which Italian unification brought. Despite the foundation of the Italian nation in 1861, the idea of social and political change was beyond any possible realisation. Italy, like the palazzo, is characterised by disorder and confusion. A confusing, disorientated fragmentation which reflects both the irrationality of historical events, and their political and ideological implications: there is no optimistic belief in a teleological vision of history, which can, through its eternal return, rule space and society. Madness and confusion dominate and lead events: the Uzeda family, symbol of the Sicilian nobility, was forced to adapt to new changes they neither wanted nor shared. Further, the restricted space of Catania in which the Uzeda live and the disorder of their palazzo are strongly connected to their madness, which is in turn reflected in a claustrophobic Catania, of which the palazzo and the monastery are the places where family matters are discussed and investigated. Indeed, the Uzeda residences are the symbol of the family insanity; the psychological correlative of their obsession and eccentricity, not to mention their irrationality and pathological desire for power.³¹¹

Modifying space is also one of Prince Giacomo's (Prince Consalvo's father) strongest desires, either as revenge against his mother, who had not allowed him to move even a chair when she was alive or because it is simply typical of the head of the household

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

³¹¹ N. Zago, 'Sulla strategia narrativa dei Viceré', in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 218.

to re-arrange the existing space in order to demonstrate his leadership. Villa Belvedere, the Uzeda's summer residence, can be an example of such disorder and chaos:³¹²

La villa degli Uzeda era tanto grande da capire un reggimento di soldati, non che gl'invitati del principe; ma come il palazzo di città, a furia di modificazioni e di successivi riadattamenti, pareva composta di parecchie fette di fabbriche accozzate a casaccio: non c'erano due finestre dello stesso disegno né due facciate dello stesso colore; la distribuzione interna pareva l'opera di un pazzo, tante volte era mutata. Altrettanto avevano fatto dell'annesso potere.³¹³

The connection between place and madness – outer and inner space – is made by both the urban palazzo and the country villa mirroring the Uzeda's state of mind. The palazzo and the villa are characterised by a confined space with narrow boundaries. They play the role of a gravitational force which compels the protagonists of the novel to move inside its restricted area.

As Di Grado has underlined, if we confront the real map of Catania with the descriptions in the novel, we discover that De Roberto referred only to some areas of the city because his Catania is the symbol of emptiness and of a negative utopia and the impossibility to escape or run away from the city/prison.³¹⁴ Only Consalvo breaks the boundaries of this world. His educational journey to the continent, from Naples to Rome and on to Paris is the only departure from Catania De Roberto gives a full account of. It is through this experience that the young Viceré discovers modernity and becomes aware of the narrowness of the world in which he lives:

In paese straniero, la maggior ricchezza e autorità della gente della sua casta non lo feriva tanto, ma un altro impaccio lo aspettava lì: col suo povero e mal digerito francese, si sentì come fuor del mondo a Vienna, a Berlino, a Londra: a Parigi fece sorridere come in Italia Baldassarre. Ma frattanto la Sicilia, il suo paese nativo, la sua casa dove la considerazione ed il primato di un tempo lo aspettavano, erano divenute per lui sempre più piccoli e meschini. Come rassegnarsi a tornare laggiù, dopo aver visto la gran vita delle grandi città.³¹⁵

³¹² Belvedere is the old name of Piedimonte Etneo, which was, together with Trecastagni, Pedara, Nicolosi, Valverde and Viagrande, one of the main towns on Etna where people moved to during the summer for their *villeggiatura*. Staying in villas was a typical habit of the aristocracy, but it became common for the middle-classes to do so from the late nineteenth-century onwards. De Roberto used to rent a flat in Zafferana Etnea. Many villas were built at the turn of the nineteenth-century in Catania, see V. Sapienza, *Residenze in villa a Catania: tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Catania: Il Lunario, 2004); F. Basile, E. Magnano di San Lio, *Orti e giardini dell'aristocrazia Catanese* (Messina: Sicania, 1996); G. Palumbo, *Le residenze di campagna del versante orientale dell'Etna* (Catania: Università di Catania, 1991).

³¹³ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 151.

³¹⁴ Di Grado, *La vita, le carte, i turbamenti di Federico De Roberto, gentiluomo*, pp. 227-228.

³¹⁵ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 516.

This experience allows him to realise how limited and enclosed the space of his family is, which leads him to make good use of the tools democracy offers in order to fulfil his ambitions for political power beyond his city limits:

La forza della memoria, la facilità della parola, la sicurezza dinanzi alla folla che erano mancate al duca e lo avevano tormentato per tutta la vita accrescendo la sua miseria intellettuale, Consalvo le possedeva: a San Nicola, dinanzi ai monaci che s'empivano il buzzo di cibo o al cospetto della folla che veniva ad ascoltar le prediche di Natale; più tardi nelle vie della città, nelle taverne, attorniato da gente d'ogni risma, egli aveva dato sfoggio d'eloquenza: gli sguardi fissi su di lui, il silenzio dell'uditorio aspettante non lo avevano mai sgominato. Che altro occorreva?³¹⁶

At the end of his initiatory experience, Consalvo goes back to Catania where he starts studying, trying to learn as quickly as possible. His aims are very clear and his determination strong: he has to dominate Catania and its social life.

Consequently, he will do whatever he can to reach his goal of transforming his family's social status and political power, apparently, turning his back on the past, but, effectively, aiming at retaining the family's privileges:

Né credeva alla sincerità della fede altrui. Monarchia o repubblica, religione o ateismo, tutto era per lui questione di tornaconto materiale o morale, immediato o avvenire. Al Noviziato aveva avuto l'esempio della sfrenata licenza dei monaci che avevano fatto voto dinanzi al loro Dio di rinunciare a tutto; in casa, nel mondo, aveva visto ciascuno tirare a fare il proprio comodo sopra ogni cosa. Non v'era dunque nient'altro fuorché l'interesse individuale; per soddisfare il suo proprio egli era disposto a giovare di tutto. Del resto, il sentimento ereditato della propria superiorità non gli permetteva di riconoscere il male di questo scettico egoismo: gli Uzeda potevano fare ciò che loro piaceva.³¹⁷

Consalvo aims at using the urban space to start his political climb. He begins with the Benedictine monastery where he had been educated as a student. Not only does he use the abbey as an extension of his residence; but also, by choosing a religious building for his electoral campaign, he will mark the space of his political power in Catania. Moreover, he will manifest the supremacy of his family and exercise his hegemony over space and

³¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 518-519.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 550.

history. Through Consalvo's political success, the Uzeda family can satisfy their desire for political power in the new liberal Italian Reign.³¹⁸

In conclusion, scholars have pointed out the role and the importance of Consalvo: Sipala, for example, has stated that *I Viceré* can be considered as 'il romanzo di Consalvo', and Castelli has underlined that Consalvo is the principal thematic presence and is used to investigate the 'fenomenologia dell'uomo forte'.³¹⁹ However, I would like to highlight, first of all, that Ferdinando Uzeda, Consalvo's uncle, who lives in the countryside, is Consalvo's counterpart; and, secondly, that the countryside has no space in the novel; and, therefore, Ferdinando is a negative presence. If Consalvo is the prototype of the *Übermensch*, Ferdinando represents the category of the incapable, the *Untermensch*. Ferdinando Uzeda is called *babbeo* because of his experiments 'di coltura nel giardino e nella terrazza del palazzo, e gli venne il gusto della campagna, che la principessa assecondò. Gli aveva messo il soprannome di Babbeo per quelle sue sciocche manie'.³²⁰ Moreover, he lives on the outskirts of the city, distant from family matters and intrigues, 'libero e a modo suo'.³²¹ Ferdinando lives his life as a castaway – 'fa la vita del Robinson Crusuè' – and is considered *naïf* – 'non fa male a nessuno; è il migliore di tutta la casata'.³²² His life is solitary in Pietra dell'Ovo, a land he rents from his mother, Teresa Uzeda, where he settles in order to 'coltivare da sé l'*isola* che aveva conquistata'.³²³ However, the countryside is neither described nor praised as a place to rest and relax and Ferdinando seems, as Spinazzola underlines, 'un caso da manuale di infantilismo psichico',³²⁴ because he is happy to imitate the life of his hero, Robinson Crusoe, far away from the rest of the world.³²⁵ Teresa Uzeda supports her son's desire to live in the countryside for two main reasons: firstly, she can have an income (Ferdinando has to pay 'cinquecent'onze l'anno'),³²⁶ and secondly, she takes advantage of her son's belief that

³¹⁸ Caldarone has underlined Consalvo's amoral behaviour. The scholar has also pointed out that Consalvo is only interested in satisfying his will to power and his personal ambitions; Caldarone, *Il ciclo dei 'vinti' da Verga a De Roberto*, p. 136.

³¹⁹ Sipala, 'Il romanzo di Consalvo', in *Gli inganni del romanzo. 'I Viceré' tra storia e finzione letteraria*, Atti del congresso celebrativo del centenario dei Viceré, Catania, 23-26 November 1994, pp. 197-209; Castelli, *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto*, p. 109.

³²⁰ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 80-81.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³²² *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34. In an article published in 1995 Salvatore Nigro compared Ferdinando Uzeda, il Babbeo, to De Roberto because the writing of *I Viceré* was the beginning of his neurosis and anxiety; see S. Nigro, 'Corrispondenze rubate', *Il Sole 24 ore*, 26 March 1995.

³²³ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 81.

³²⁴ Spinazzola, *Il romanzo antistorico*, p. 108.

³²⁵ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 81.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*.

rural life is synonymous to happiness and simplicity. She supports Ferdinando's idea of living his solitary life and his silly 'manie' because they are useful to her plans.³²⁷

As Williams has demonstrated, the idea of the country as an Eden is false, because it is a myth perpetuated in order to hide class conflicts and hostility.³²⁸ Teresa Uzeda uses her power as a mother, apparently to go along with her son's wishes, but, actually, to satisfy her greediness and ambition: 'la principessa, deridendolo, lo lasciava fare',³²⁹ aware as she was that, in promoting Ferdinando's desire of living as a new Robinson Crusoe in the country, she was preserving her patrimony, leaving the *Babbeo* with the conviction that his dream had come true. De Roberto underlines that Ferdinando does not live as an aristocrat, but that he 'dormiva sopra una specie di cuccetta da marinaio, costruiva da sé tavole e seggiole, e la casa pareva un arsenale dalla tanta roba che v'era sparsa'.³³⁰ De Roberto does not describe the country as a mythological place or as a place of memory, as his friend, Verga, has done.³³¹ The place where Ferdinando lives is another extension of the Uzeda's estate and represents, as do the family palazzo and villa Belvedere, the decaying world of the 'razza di matti'.³³²

3. 5. The monastero: 'Immenso, sontuoso, era agguagliato ai palazzi reali...'

The Benedictine monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena, symbol of the rebirth of Catania and its Baroque style, constitutes the epicentre of the novel,³³³ and is the only building of the city praised by De Roberto in *I Viceré*. The monastery, one of the biggest in Europe, is a place of absolute beauty, and its open spaces and cloisters show the importance of the abbey from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.³³⁴ Moreover, as the *majoratus* gave the right to inherit only to the oldest son, in order to prevent the distribution of the family wealth among their members and undermining their position, 'Re, regine, viceré e baroni avevano

³²⁷ Ibidem.

³²⁸ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 49.

³²⁹ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 82.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

³³¹ Restucci, 'L'immagine della città', in *Letteratura italiana: storia e geografia*, Asor Rosa, ed., p. 194.

³³² Di Grado, *La vita, le carte, i turbamenti di Federico De Roberto, gentiluomo*, p. 214.

³³³ Ibid., p. 231.

³³⁴ For a description see F. Bertucci, *Guida del monastero dei PP. Benedettini di Catania* (Catania: Giuseppe Musumeci-Papale, 1846); M. Gaudio, 'L'Abbazia di San Nicolò l'Arena di Catania', *Archivio storico Sicilia Orientale*, 25, 1929, pp. 199-243; G. Giarrizzo, *Catania e il suo monastero: S. Nicolò l'Arena 1846* (Catania: Maimone, 1990); C. Napoleone, ed., *Scienza e arti all'ombra del vulcano: il Monastero di San Nicolò l'Arena a Catania* (Catania: Maimone, 2009). Today the monastery belongs to the University of Catania, which restored the abbey, see G. De Carlo, *Un progetto per Catania: il recupero del Monastero di San Nicolò l'Arena per l'Università* (Genoa: Sagep, 1988).

cominciato a donar roba al convento; e a furia di raccogliere legati i Padri si trovavano possessori di un gran patrimonio'.³³⁵ Thus, the monastery is described as an economic and political place, where the nobles were educated, and, as *fra'* Carmelo suggests to Consalvo, 'Basta essere ai Benedettini, o Monaco o novizio, per significare che uno è signore'.³³⁶

The Benedictine Monastery is, ultimately, the only place in the novel that could aspire to the status and function of chronotope,³³⁷ (chronotope, in Mikhail Bakhtin's definition, is 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'),³³⁸ being the only place that marks the intersection of historical time and real space in *I Viceré*. From its description, we can infer that the monastery's space is antithetic to the palazzo's space. However, the monastery is a place where the members of the Uzeda family feel at ease (it is in the monastery that Don Blasco and Don Lodovico live, and Consalvo is educated) as if it were an extension of their home, a sort of protectorate or enclave. It is not, then, a coincidence that Consalvo arranges his electoral meeting in this special place, he needs to take possession of the religious space (symbol of Catania) to reaffirm his aristocratic ideals, as 'egli non poteva assuefarsi a quest'ideale democratico contro il quale protestava la sua educazione ed il suo stesso sangue'.³³⁹ Since Consalvo considers himself the last of the Viceroy's, he feels obliged to regain control of the city in the name of a dynastic power, hidden behind the mantle of modernity. In so doing, he starts the rebirth of his family and can re-affirm that the monastery is an extension of the Uzeda Palazzo because it plays an important role in the life of his family.

Although De Roberto does not provide many details about the Uzeda residence, with its stifling and grim atmosphere, the monastery's image is quite detailed and strikes the reader for its splendour, richness and magnificence. The beauty of the place, as well as its importance in the urban space of Catania, is underlined: 'Il convento, immenso, sontuoso, era agguagliato ai palazzi reali, a segno che c'erano le catene distese dinanzi al portone; e le rendite di cui godeva, circa settantamila onze l'anno, bastavano appena ad una cinquantina tra monaci, fratelli e novizi'.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 185; for the privileges enjoyed by the monks see B. Saitta, 'Ferdinando I d'Antequera e il Problema dei Monasteri di S. Maria di Licodia e di S. la Rena', in Saitta, *Catania Medievale* (Catania: C.U.E.C.M., 1996), pp. 82-84.

³³⁶ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 187.

³³⁷ Di Grado, *La vita, le carte, i turbamenti di Federico De Roberto, gentiluomo*, p. 231.

³³⁸ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, Holquist, ed., p. 84.

³³⁹ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 673-674.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

The description of the monastery is poles apart from that of the Uzeda palazzo. The sensation the reader receives is that of a very open space the ambience of which is far from the asphyxiating atmosphere of the Uzeda home. One of the cloisters, for instance, is ‘contornato da un portico che reggeva la terrazza superiore, pieno di statue, di vasche dove l’acqua cantava, di sedili distribuiti fra le aiuole simmetriche, con un padiglione in centro, di stile gotico, a quattro archi, la cui volta di lastre lucide faceva specchietto al sole’.³⁴¹

Space reflects the cheerful and relaxed attitude of the monks, who seem to live idyllic lives, whose aims, as De Roberto has it, are those of eating, drinking and going for walks.³⁴² The sarcastic and bitter irony in depicting the monks’ way of life gives way to the description of the enormous refectory that has ‘la volta dipinta a fresco, rischiarato da ventiquattro finestre grandi come portoni’;³⁴³ even the kitchens, whose ‘calderoni e le graticole erano tanto grandi che ci si poteva bollire tutta una coscia di vitella e arrostitire un pesce spada sano’,³⁴⁴ were famous in the city, as were their food and delicacies.

De Roberto’s portrayal of the monastery is very detailed and its space and architecture are always exalted, and the grandeur of the place and its magnificence are always underlined. We discover, for instance, that the interiors of the abbey are so vast that even the rooms of the novitiate open on to a very big garden, which was not only full of flowers but also of orange, lemon, apricot and mandarin trees. In order to highlight how the monastery occupies an important role in Catania, the narrator states that ‘Il convento possedeva una buona metà del quartiere in mezzo al quale sorgeva: i tre palazzotti della piazza semicircolare dinanzi alla chiesa e una quantità di case terrene tutt’intorno alle mura’;³⁴⁵ he also asserts that the monks possessed so much money that, after the earthquake in 1693, when Sicily was devastated by this event, they planned to rebuild the monastery following a grandiose project which was completed only in part. The abbey had one of the biggest churches in Sicily, which was adorned with marble and stuccoes, with an enormous dome – ‘che sfondava il cielo’ – and with an organ which was built in thirteen years by Donato del Piano.³⁴⁶ The monastery is isolated from the other Baroque

³⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 179-180.

³⁴² De Roberto gives a very ironic description of how the monks moved from Etna, where they had founded the first monastery in 1136, eventually arriving in Catania in 1558. See De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 183-185.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 190.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

³⁴⁶ Donato del Piano (Grumo Nevano [Naples] 1704 – Catania 1785) was a monk also well-known for being an organ builder. He engaged in building the biggest pipe organ in Italy in the monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena, the work of which lasted thirteen years. Although he was very famous, he lived a sober, humble life. He is given a special consideration in De Roberto’s works. A short novel titled *Donato del Piano* is contained in De Roberto’s *Documenti umani* and, although Del Piano was not from Catania, De Roberto inserted a

churches that surround it (such as the Church of San Benedetto, the Church of San Francesco Borgia, the Church of San Giuliano and the Church of San Camillo), thus stressing not only its beauty and vastness, but also its symbolic value in representing a city which was undergoing important political and social changes: ‘come trasformavasi materialmente, la città prendeva anche moralmente un nuovo indirizzo’.³⁴⁷

It is in this symbolic place – which is the economic and political heart of Catania – that Consalvo will arrange his electoral meeting, and from which the Uzeda family will start to expand their power in Catania after the Italian Unification. They survive the decline of a privileged world through the chameleonic activity of Consalvo, who will lead his family to modernity through his ability to wear ‘la maschera del patriottismo’, as Mariani has observed.³⁴⁸ The scholar has pointed out that Consalvo, as the heir of the Uzeda family, has to face the crowd because it is the crowd that is the surest way to achieve power. It is the crowd that would serve him that he inebriates with promises and empty words in order to gain his victory and, ultimately, that of his aristocratic name.³⁴⁹

The importance of the monastery is emphasised in the final pages of the novel when Consalvo observes the Monastery of San Nicolò l’Arena, in which he had lived during his education. The magnificence and splendour of the place have disappeared and he can now watch its ruin and decay: ‘L’enorme e nobile monastero, la signorile dimora dei Padri gaudenti, l’aristocratico collegio della gioventù era irricognoscibile’.³⁵⁰

The reason is that post-unification ‘Liberal Italy’ had taken possession of religious places which, at the time, were also symbols of aristocratic privilege. After the Unification, in 1861, the government of the new state promulgated, in 1866, an act which suppressed religious congregations and gave religious estates to the local governments. Catania council used the monastery to house a gymnasium, a school, which De Roberto attended, an observatory, the municipal library and even a military barracks. Moreover, De Roberto, who had spent a period as a librarian in the new civic library situated in the monastery,³⁵¹ was witness to the gradual decay of the monastery over the years. If we consider that

picture of the organist in his guide to Catania. Castelli underlines that the writer was very close to the master who had built the magnificent organ of San Nicolò l’Arena. They were both ‘buried’ under their masterpieces; see Castelli, ‘La Catania grebbo e prigione di De Roberto’, in *La parola e il luogo*, Di Grado, ed., pp. 23- 28.

³⁴⁷ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 593.

³⁴⁸ G. Mariani, *Federico De Roberto narratore* (Rome: Il Saggiatore, 1950), p. 42.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁵⁰ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 673.

³⁵¹ Castelli, *Il discorso amoroso di Federico De Roberto*, p. 17.

Consalvo's considerations and beliefs reflect De Roberto's viewpoint,³⁵² it is possible to infer that through Consalvo's reflections the narrator is denouncing the decay of the monastery as he would, later, report in his guidebook to Catania and in the articles I will discuss in chapter 5.

The dilapidated state of the monastery makes Consalvo realise that it was there that the members of the aristocracy were educated as students: 'Lì, a San Nicola, forse più che a casa propria, egli era stato imbevuto di superbia signorile',³⁵³ and that the arrival of the Liberal state brought chaos and disorder: 'Adesso ci vengono i figli dei ciabattini!'.³⁵⁴ Once again the idea that the monastery is an 'extension' of the Uzeda's space is highlighted, even though he is bitterly obliged to observe that the monks' rooms and the cloisters have been devastated. The long corridors are full of indecent drawings and graffiti as the aristocratic place was overwhelmed by the bourgeoisie's cultural hegemony: the crowd had invaded the aristocratic symbol of the secular world of the Viceré. Consalvo's reflections highlight the importance of the monastery not only as a symbol of the Catanese nobility, but also as the symbol of the economic and political power of the Church in Catania:

Ai Benedettini, infatti, c'era un regno da conquistare: l'Abate era una potenza, aveva non so quanti titoli feudali, un patrimonio favoloso da amministrare: le antiche Costituzioni di Sicilia gli davano il diritto di sedere tra i Pari del regno! Don Lodovico volle pervenire a quel posto nel più breve tempo possibile; [...] Assetato di potere, don Blasco voleva anch'egli esser Priore ed Abate; ma la vita scandalosa, il carattere violento, l'ignoranza supina gli rendevano se non impossibile per lo meno difficilissimo l'appagamento di quell'ambizione [...].³⁵⁵

Consalvo's Benedictine uncles, Don Lodovico, who is the symbol of the social climber, and Don Blasco, who is the symbol of corruption, can be conceived of as two sides of the same coin: they both consider the religious place as a kingdom to conquer and a place in which to expand their aristocratic power. Consalvo takes advice from his relatives as to how re-establish the Viceroy's supremacy. In fact, Consalvo, as De Roberto underlines, is like his father Prince Giacomo: they are both exponents of 'ingordi Spagnuoli unicamente

³⁵² Madrignani, *Illusione e realtà nell'opera di Federico De Roberto*, pp. 96-97.

³⁵³ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 674.

³⁵⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

intenti ad arricchirsi, incapaci di comprendere una potenza, un valore, una virtù più grande di quella dei quattrini',³⁵⁶ even though Consalvo is able to hide his political ambitions.³⁵⁷

In order to realise his political ambitions, Consalvo decides to use the cloister of the monastery: the claustrophobic urban space of the Uzeda palazzo gives way to the sumptuousness of the monastery, which becomes the ideal and perfect platform for his rise to power. There Consalvo is acclaimed by a crowd composed of thousands of people:

Ora la palestra offriva uno spettacolo veramente straordinario: l'arena era un mare di teste, serrate le file delle sedie, stretti come acciughe gli spettatori in piedi; in terrazza una folla variopinta, sulla quale fiorivano gli ombrellini di molte signore che non avevano trovato posto giù. Ma l'aspetto più sontuoso era quello dei portici: tutta la migliore società vi s'era riunita.³⁵⁸

Consalvo's re-appropriation of the urban space is the consequence of the chaos and disorder of modernity, from which he thinks he has to preserve and safeguard the idea that the prestige and wealth of the nobility are truly immortal. He is a 'priestly king',³⁵⁹ being able to embody both the spiritual and political leader through his extraordinary personality, as he demonstrates in his electoral speech in the monastery: 'la mia vita è stata spesa in un'opera di redenzione [...] voi vedete che non posso più rinunciare a questa fede' and 'il nostro motto sia: *Fiat lux!*'.³⁶⁰ Thanks to his chameleon-like personality, he can re-arrange the urban space to subjugate Catanese society to his will and political aims. He has no doubt he will succeed in his task because he thinks that history is simply a monotonous repetition of the same events, and therefore there can be no true change.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 463.

³⁵⁷ Mariani, *Federico De Roberto narratore*, p. 44.

³⁵⁸ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 676.

³⁵⁹ J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York: Cosimo, 2009), pp. 9-11.

³⁶⁰ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 681-687.

Chapter 4 The City in De Roberto's Guidebook to Catania

4. 1. Introduction: De Roberto's *guida artistica*

In 1899 De Roberto was appointed member of the local commission for the conservation of Catania's heritage and, in 1906, he became a member of a committee whose remit was to plan a National Museum. He was also a member of Catania's Department of National Heritage, whose task was that of preserving Catania's artistic patrimony. The following year, in 1907, he wrote the guidebook *Catania con 152 illustrazioni* for the series 'Italia Artistica', published by the Istituto D'Arti Grafiche of Bergamo and edited by Corrado Ricci.³⁶¹ The guidebook offers a vision of a city which has always flourished despite earthquakes and eruptions; a city which wished to improve its image characterised by the presence of Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea, as seen in the photos the reader can find in its opening pages. Later, for the same series, in 1909, De Roberto wrote another guidebook to Randazzo, a town on the slopes of Mount Etna, and the Alcantara valley.³⁶²

Of course, the guidebook is a completely different genre to the novel. It differs in scope, aims and audience. Moreover, thirteen years had passed since *I Viceré*, and the vision of the urban space described in the guidebook is profoundly different from that of the city represented in the novel. For these reasons, I will focus on De Roberto's new approach to portraying Catania and the metamorphosis it had undergone over the centuries. Furthermore, the analysis of the guidebook will prove very useful in understanding both continuity and discontinuity in De Roberto's representation of Catania. On the one hand, we will appreciate De Roberto's changing view of his city, its chronological development supported by a switch in literary genre; on the other hand, we will see the recurrent themes, the stereotypes and *topoi* De Roberto employs when describing his Catania, regardless of the genre.

There are no studies of De Roberto's guidebook, apart from the introduction to the 2007 edition written by Rosalba Galvagno e Dario Stazzone, and Giuseppe Pagnano's

³⁶¹ De Roberto, *Catania con 152 illustrazioni* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1907).

³⁶² De Roberto, *Randazzo e la Valle dell'Alcantara con 148 Illustrazioni* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1909).

analysis with reference to the construction of the urban identity of Catania.³⁶³ Pagnano was first to point out that De Roberto's guidebook would be, during the twentieth century, the reference model to use in describing Catania: the tourist city prevailed in the description of the modern city. From then onwards, guidebooks would describe the tourist side of Catania, giving readers descriptions of Greco-Roman and Medieval ruins and descriptions of Baroque buildings, but omitting any reference to the modern city.³⁶⁴

My aim is not only to read the guidebook as a description of Catania, but also to study it from two viewpoints: firstly, I will analyse De Roberto's verbal account of events in the city (the literary aspect of the guidebook); secondly, following Iachello's suggestion of using the images inserted in guidebooks in order to find a methodological approach 'che non si lasci condurre passivamente lungo i percorsi preordinati che la città volutamente predispone per il visitatore con i suoi monumenti e i suoi assi',³⁶⁵ I will focus on the city as it is narrated through the photos (the visual aspect of the guidebook), which also show how close De Roberto's guidebook is to those written during the age of the *Grand Tour*. De Roberto showed the importance of discovering Catania's artistic patrimony as an educational experience. Furthermore, I will use Iachello's approach as De Roberto's guidebook can be considered a *récit de voyage* having, as it aims to show through its descriptions of the city, Catania's urban identity.

I will introduce De Roberto's guidebook and make a comparative analysis with previous and contemporary guidebooks in order to compare the image of the city proposed by De Roberto with those of some other authors in the same genre; I will then try to reconstruct De Roberto's ideology and aims, as well as to identify a possible readership. Finally, I will draw comparison between the city as it emerges from *I Viceré* and the city as presented in the guidebook. In order to do so, I will mainly refer to the study *Immagini di una città. Catania di fine Ottocento nelle pagine di Gustavo Chiesi*, by Giuseppe Arcidiacono e Antonio Fabiano.³⁶⁶ The scholars, whose focus is on Gustavo Chiesi's guidebook to Catania written in 1892, make a comparative study of some Italian, English and French guidebooks to Catania written during the nineteenth-century and the turn of the century. This analysis can help us understand how Catania was perceived and can help

³⁶³ R. Galvagno and D. Stazzone, eds, 'Introduzione', in De Roberto, *Catania* (Enna: Papiro Editore, 2007), pp. iii-xx; Pagnano, 'La costruzione dell'identità di Catania dal secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, pp. 210-214.

³⁶⁴ G. Arcidiacono, 'Immagini di una città', in *Immagini di una città. Catania fine Ottocento nelle pagine di Gustavo Chiesi*, G. Arcidiacono and A. Fabiano, (Rome: Gangemi, 1988), p. 112.

³⁶⁵ Iachello, *Immagini della città*, p. 15.

³⁶⁶ Arcidiacono and Fabiano, *Immagini di una città. Catania fine Ottocento nelle pagine di Gustavo Chiesi*.

uncover the changes in the image of the city and its role. Therefore, not only do the guidebooks analysed allow us to investigate the literary *topoi* and *clichés* used by both travellers and writers, they also allow us to contextualize De Roberto's guidebook in a wider context. I will start by analysing nineteenth-century guidebooks to note the switch from the Romantic perception of the city – still linked to the landscape and view of the city, which is characterised by ancient ruins – to that of the new bourgeois city, which deserved the epithet of the 'Milan of the South'. Then, I will go on to discuss the image of Catania at the beginning of the twentieth century, focusing on the importance of social spaces, new monuments and new streets.

The first modern descriptions of the city of Catania can be found in guidebooks dedicated to Sicily in which Catania is depicted as one of the most distinguished Sicilian cities. The image of Catania is still linked to an eighteenth-century sensibility and the search for the picturesque, as portrayed in *Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile* edited by Jean Frédéric D'Ostervald (1773-1850).³⁶⁷ D'Ostervald, who was a Swiss publisher, declares that his aim is to provide a description of Sicily to those travellers who loved that island, which is 'celle qui offre en effet les monuments les plus remarquables et le plus de sûreté et de commodités pour les voyageurs'.³⁶⁸ The focus of the guidebook on the picturesque aspect of the island is so personal that, in his note to the reader, D'Ostervald tells of his search among the portfolios of artists from England, Germany and Switzerland for the construction of his collection.

The large and luminous view of Sicily encompasses the Greek temples, villages, medieval churches, but also port scenes and Etna. The picturesque image of Sicily is presented by a mixture of wild nature and beautiful historic ruins. In fact, it suggests the idea of purely scenic pleasure touring. The concept of the picturesque was created by William Gilpin (1724-1804) in 1802.³⁶⁹ Roughness is the main category Gilpin used to make a distinction between the sublime and the picturesque: the sublime is related to the surprise of beauty; the picturesque frames nature in its variety and force.³⁷⁰ In those travel

³⁶⁷ J. F. D'Ostervald, ed., *Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile* (Paris: P. Didot, 1822-1826).

³⁶⁸ D'Ostervald, 'Avis de L'Editeur' in D'Ostervald *Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile*, Vol. 1, fol. 4.

³⁶⁹ In his *An Essay on Prints* he states that picturesque is 'a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture, and was used in order to describe 'the aesthetical view of nature', W. Gilpin, *Essay On Prints* (London, 1802), p. xii. Picturesque derives from the French *pittoresque* or the Italian *pittoresco*, which referred to the way in which the charm of natural beauty was represented, and only later, it was used to the painting of scenes whose focus was on landscape and roughness, see J. Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, disgust and other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 4.

³⁷⁰ D. Punter, 'The Picturesque and the Sublime', in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, S. Copley and P. Garside, eds, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 283.

books which represented the picturesque aspect of Sicily pictures prevailed over the description of places and historical events. The guidebooks provided the reader with drawings which could reveal the inspiring beauty of landscapes and towns, and framed Sicily in a way that was both evocative and aesthetically pleasing. In fact, the picturesque meant both beauty – which was intended as order and regularity – and the sublime – intended as awe and grandeur. *Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile* is thus a description of Sicily within the late eighteenth-century stereotype and addressed to an audience still linked to the idea of the *Grand Tour*.³⁷¹ However, it provided travellers with the opportunity to admire archaeological sites and amazing works of art. Iachello, for instance, has pointed out that the *Grand Tour* guidebooks, which do not have a ‘scientific’ value, having a subjective perspective, are the product of an immediate emotion and aim at a clear and simple representation of Sicilian cities: however, eighteenth-century guidebooks ‘hanno il valore di immagini condivise dalle élites europee’,³⁷² because they allowed travellers to immortalise the images of Sicily with its glorious past and create a long-lasting image of Italy as ‘an early modern tourists’ paradise’.³⁷³

Those guidebooks put an emphasis on the representation of natural landscape, stressing its romantic and spiritual qualities.³⁷⁴ It is for these reasons that in D’Ostervald’s book Sicily is represented as an idealised reality, while the real aspect of the island is neglected; Catania is mainly praised for its archaeological sites and the magnificence of Mount Etna. Moreover, the guidebook describes the excursion travellers could undertake to discover the natural landscape of the volcano. D’Ostervald points out that ‘Du côté de la mer la vue de la ville est très agreeable et très pittoresque; un quai commode, des bâtiments qui présentent de belles lignes, les dômes de la cathédrale et d’un monastère, le palais du Prince Biscari, sont les principaux objets qui appellent le regard’.³⁷⁵ The only mention of the ‘modern’ city is the port, which suggests that Catania was still perceived as a picturesque town rather than being seen in its development, at a time when the city was undergoing important urban reconstruction. The same archaeological, tourist cliché

³⁷¹ Upper-class European élites of the seventeenth and eighteenth century used to take a long trip around Europe, with particular regard to France and Italy, in search of the roots of Western culture, classical antiquity and the Renaissance. The purpose of the *Grand Tour* was mostly educational and became a very important social convention; see Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Relations since the Renaissance*, p. 58.

³⁷² Iachello, *Immagini della città*, p. 21.

³⁷³ P. Findlen, ‘Introduction’, in *Italy’s Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour*, P. Findlen, W. Wassing Roworth and C. M. Sama, eds, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 4.

³⁷⁴ J. Towner, *An Historical Geography of Recreation and Tourism in the Western World, 1540-1940* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996).

³⁷⁵ D’Ostervald, ‘Catane Vue du Port’, in *Voyage Pittoresque en Sicile*, Vol. II, fol. 37v.

appears in William Light (1784-1849) and Peter De Wint (1786-1839) in their book, *Sicilian Scenery* (1823), written both in English and French.³⁷⁶ They represented Catania as a city under the volcano and inserted black and white drawings in which Catania is depicted as a fisherman's village with domes and medieval towers in the background and seabirds circling. The description Light and De Wint provide is linked to the idea of Sicily as a Gothic place, dark and ominous: 'The whole neighbourhood of Catania is covered with torrents of lava which Mount Etna has at various time sent forth. [...] Surrounded by this torrent stands an old Norman castle, now converted into a prison.'³⁷⁷ The authors describe Catania as a gloomy city with its dominant volcano and ancient ruins. The book can be considered another picturesque depiction of the cityscape of Catania.

The authors identify the centre of the city as the 'Square of the Elephant' – as they define what at the time was Cathedral Square – from whose corners two principal streets depart. They stress that 'the town itself has an unfinished appearance'.³⁷⁸ Although they highlight that the two main streets are spacious and adorned with beautiful palazzos, monasteries and churches, they do not seem to acknowledge Catania's modernity, rather concentrating on the stereotype of a city still linked to its ruins and its past; and to a city under the volcano.

The above-mentioned guidebooks follow the tradition of greatly highlighting images rather than narrative descriptions and were intended for wealthy people who could afford to buy expensive books. However, not only does the island possess beautiful landscapes and marvellous archaeological sites, but also a natural environment to study. The guidebook written in 1842 by Jeannette Villepreux would provide a different approach to describing both Sicily and Catania. Jeannette Villepreux (1794-1871) was a French woman who had married James Power, a noble Englishman, who ran his business in Messina. Messina, at the time, hosted a large group of English people. When Jeannette became Lady Power, she devoted herself to the study of the Sicilian environment. In 1842 she published in Naples her *Guida per la Sicilia*.³⁷⁹ The guidebook was written in Italian and its importance is due to the fact that Power was not an occasional traveller – she had lived in Sicily for almost twenty years so her point of view was that of a person who was very familiar with the cities and the places she described. The guidebook contains a section

³⁷⁶ W. Light and P. De Wint, *Sicilian Scenery from Drawings* (London: Rodwell & Martin, 1823).

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³⁷⁹ J. Power, *Guida per la Sicilia: opera di Giovanna Power nata Villepreux* (Naples: Tipografia Cirelli, 1842). I will quote from the modern edition: J. Power, *Guida per la Sicilia*, M. D'Angelo, ed., (Messina: Istituto di Studi Storici Gaetano Salvemini, 2008).

of natural studies and an appendix dealing with Sicilian botany, ornithology and conchology; it also contains an account of the typical fauna and flora of Etna, a mineralogy catalogue of the volcano and a chronological table of Etna's eruptions. Power was the first woman member of the Catania Gioeni Academy and member of the Science Academies of Messina, Palermo and Acireale. She was also member of other European Academies. Her passion for natural history, her innate curiosity for the environment, her being primarily a scholar and not an occasional traveller and her long stay in Sicily give her guidebook a special place as it provides the reader with both a description of Sicily's natural landscape and a historical reconstruction of the island.

She starts her description pointing out that not only is Sicily one of the most beautiful islands, but also that it boasts many artistic and natural treasures. She underlines that there was not a complete, accurate guidebook of the island and declares that she has written her guidebook following her continuous travelling in Sicily. Catania is described as a '*città memoranda*', i.e. a city that was celebrated during the ages for its historical events and its architecture,³⁸⁰ stating that 'Polifemo ed i suoi ciclopi, il porto di Ulisse, Talia e i Palici suoi figli, spogliati delle allegorie della favola, rimangono storiche verità'.³⁸¹ Power broke down the borders between mythology and history, to give Catania a legendary aura as well as to make this aura credible. She defines Catania as the Athens of Sicily and asserts that 'siami lecito di così denominarla fiorendo in essa stupendamente ogni maniera di letteratura e sopra tutto le scienze naturali'.³⁸² Power underlines the importance of Catania as being not only worthy of the attention of tourists, but also as an active intellectual centre, a city of a great flourishing in literature and the natural sciences. Power's guidebook provides the reader with an unconventional focus. Etna is part of the landscape, but it is not its central locus.

Although the image of Catania as a city under the volcano would be depicted for many years to come, there were variations. The book by the Catanese Francesco Paternò Castello Duke of Carcaci *Descrizione di Catania e delle cose notevoli ne' dintorni di essa* (1841) introduced a new perspective on the representation of the cityscape of Catania.³⁸³ In Paternò Castello's guidebook the image of old Catania could co-exist with the image of the modern city – the Baroque city is an integral part of the nineteenth-century city – where historical monuments and new urban developments are seen together as a 'unique'

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁸¹ Ibidem.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 52.

³⁸³ F. Paternò Castello, *Descrizione di Catania e delle cose notevoli ne' dintorni di essa* (Catania: Pietro Giuntini, 1841).

cityscape. In 1847 a paperback edition in two volumes was published. The publisher of Paternò Castello's book underlined that this second paperback edition would be easy to use and that the price was very competitive 'pel facilitarne l'acquisto ad ogni classe di persone', in order to achieve his aim of showing to a wider readership that Catania was a city considerably rich in 'monumenti d'ogni maniera, decorate d'ampie strade, di sontuosi edifici'.³⁸⁴ The importance of this guidebook lies in the fact that its focus is on the 'new' Catania and its geometrical squares and streets; its cultural and artistic aspects. The 'urbanity' of Catania and its social life are highlighted when Paternò Castello describes the walk alongside the marina quay:

si è ripartito questo piano in sezioni per mezzo di alberi, i quali formano diversi viali fiancheggiati di sedili di marmo e di colonne di granito [...] questi viali sono illuminati da lampadari di cristallo ed in fondo al largo verso est si leva una loggetta posticcia ove si eseguono tutti i giovedì e le feste pezzi di musica strumentale con affluenza straordinaria di gente.³⁸⁵

Catania becomes a place of social events and shows, as its architecture and plan revealed, the signifiers of its aspiration to being recognised as a modern European city. Although Paternò Castello eulogises and exalts Catania as a modern city, he does not write a panegyric of the city as he is careful to denounce its difficulties and problems. He also proposed a model for the protection and promotion of the cityscape: the two aspects of Catania, the old city and the modern city, were now the peculiar characteristics of the cityscape.

Following in the footsteps of the earlier *Catania illustrata: sive sacra, et civilis urbis Catanae historia a prima eiusdem origine in praesens usque deducta ac per annales digesta* by the abbot Vito Maria Amico,³⁸⁶ Paternò Castello underlines that the new identity Catania was trying to construct in its cityscape, after the earthquake of 1693, was marked by the Baroque style. As a consequence of the earthquake, the city possessed the ruins of past splendour, the grandeur of Etna and the desire to restart and redeem Catania from death and destruction: Catanese Baroque is the expression of a city strongly linked to

³⁸⁴ Paternò Castello, *Descrizione di Catania e delle cose notevoli ne' dintorni di essa. Seconda edizione con correzioni, note e aggiunte* (Catania: Pietro Giuntini, 1847), p. 4.

³⁸⁵ Paternò Castello, *Descrizione di Catania* (1841), pp. 102-103.

³⁸⁶ V. M. Amico, *Catana illustrata: sive sacra, et civilis urbis Catanae historia a prima eiusdem origine in praesens usque deducta ac per annales digesta* (Catania, 1740-1746).

the place in which it was built and rebuilt from age to age.³⁸⁷ Being rebuilt in the same place, despite natural disasters, gave Catania a special continuity both in space and time.

A different point of view is expressed in Karl Baedeker's *Italie Meridionale: Sicile, Sardaigne et Excursions à Malte, Tunis et Corfou: Manuel du Voyageur* (1883). Baedeker, who is considered the pioneer in publishing guidebooks for travellers, is of the opinion that 'Catane offre peu de curiosité' because most of its ruins are of no particular interest.³⁸⁸ Baedeker emphasises that the Greco-Roman theatre is buried under the lava and that it cannot be compared to the magnificent constructions of the same kind in Syracuse and Taormina. Furthermore, Baedeker's guidebook points out that there are no remarkable buildings of the Middle Ages, whereas the Benedictine Monastery and Villa Bellini are important only because they offer a spectacular view of Etna. Moreover, not only does he invite travellers to go on an excursion to Etna, but he also underlines that the volcano 'fait costamment beau à Catane'.³⁸⁹ Baedeker highlights the fact that Etna is not simply a volcano, and a natural beauty to visit and observe, but that it is an integral part of the cityscape of Catania. He dedicated to Catania just a few pages and stated that it takes two days (three for an in-depth tour) to visit the city.

It was only with Gustavo Chiesi (1855-1909) that Catania was presented as an example of a modern cityscape. In 1892 Chiesi, a journalist and a political activist, published for Sonzogno, an editor in Milan, *La Sicilia illustrata, nella storia, nell'arte, nei paesi*,³⁹⁰ which gave a descriptive overview of Sicily. The chapters he dedicated to Catania, which focus on the rebuilding of the city after the earthquake in 1693 and on how it looked two centuries later, highlights the importance of the fact that Catania, having undergone many changes during the centuries, could, more than any other Italian cities in all its innovations and peculiarities that determine a progress towards modernity, embody a bourgeois metropolis. The changes Catania had undergone show how active and hard-working the local middle-class was, especially when compared to the rigid urban development typical of an old aristocratic conception of the cityscape. As the symbol of the modern city, Chiesi chooses Via Stesicoro-Etnea, Catania's main street, praised for its

³⁸⁷ The document written on 28th June 1694, *Consiglio ed istruzioni fatte dal vicario generale Duca, che fu di Camastra, col voto dell'illustrissimo Senato, e corpo ecclesiastico, per la nuova reedificazione della città*, highlights the reason why the city was rebuilt on the same site and the exhortation to plan it according to a modern and rational project; in F. Fichera, *Una città settecentesca*, (Rome: Società d'Arte Illustrata, 1925), pp. 62-72.

³⁸⁸ K. Baedeker, *Italie Meridionale: Sicile, Sardaigne et Excursions à Malte, Tunis et Corfou: Manuel du Voyageur* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1883), p. 336.

³⁸⁹ Ibidem.

³⁹⁰ G. Chiesi, *La Sicilia illustrata, nella storia, nell'arte, nei paesi* (Milan: Edoardo Sonzogno, 1892).

beauty and urban decor, and declares that ‘pochissime vie di città italiane ponno gareggiare con questo rettilo’.³⁹¹ The importance of this arterial street is demonstrated by the fact that it was not projected according to the Mediterranean culture of alleyways full of markets and bazaars, nor to the Renaissance perspective.³⁹² Via Stesicoro-Etnea is eulogised for being an elegant and modern ‘democratic’ street, with shops that could satisfy the needs of all social classes, ‘lo sfilare continuo della gente di ogni classe’.³⁹³ The main street becomes the street for *promenades* and *flâneries*,³⁹⁴ being characterised by all the Catanese comings and goings allowing Catania to be compared to the biggest and most populated cities of Europe. Thus, Catania had its shopping place, Via Stesicoro-Etnea, which is a crowded, busy street: ‘si riversa ad ogni ora del giorno, dall’alba alla tarda notte, il fiotto della vita cittadina nelle sue manifestazioni’.³⁹⁵ The words Chiesi employs in the description of Catania, such as *splendidi*, *eleganti*, *illuminata*, *vivo* and *palpitante*, suggest an idea of a very chaotic, modern city, which is very distant from the image proposed by other guidebooks of the time. Furthermore, via Stesicoro-Etnea is the street that links, metaphorically, the Ionian Sea, Catania and Mount Etna, ‘fumante e torreggiante nel suo sfondo’,³⁹⁶ because from this street, and Villa Bellini, it is possible to enjoy a spectacular view of the volcano and descend to the port.

The author refers to the city’s archaeological sites and its monuments, but he is strongly convinced that Catania is a modern city – he states that Catania is a ‘città eminentemente moderna’.³⁹⁷ It is important to note that he does not deal with its Baroque architecture nor make any reference to the architect Vaccarini. The exaltation of the past, which is typical of eighteenth-century sensibility, is naturally linked to the modern city which reflects in its very structure the long tradition of Catania’s urban and commercial outlook. Thus, the port, the Bellini Monument, the Bellini Theatre, Villa Pacini and Villa Bellini are the ideal symbols by which a proud nineteenth-century bourgeoisie projects its aspiration to make Catania a modern European metropolis. In the conclusion to his guidebook to Catania, Chiesi enters into a debate with those who visit Catania ‘col

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 363.

³⁹² G. Arcidiacono and A. Fabiano, ‘Catania fine Ottocento nelle pagine di Gustavo Chiesi’, in Arcidiacono and Fabiano, eds, *Immagini di una città: Catania fine Ottocento nelle pagine di Gustavo Chiesi* (Rome: Gangemi, 1988), p. 18.

³⁹³ Chiesi, *La Sicilia illustrata, nella storia, nell’arte, nei paesi*, p. 362.

³⁹⁴ Benjamin has pointed out that the *flâneur* was the product of the Industrial Revolution and modern life and that *flânerie* was used in order to sell goods; see Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, p. 40.

³⁹⁵ Chiesi, *La Sicilia illustrata, nella storia, nell’arte, nei paesi*, p. 363.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 317.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 362.

Baedeker alla mano' and do not spend enough time there to appreciate the amazing monuments, streets and buildings the city can offer.³⁹⁸ It is Chiesi's belief that Baedeker did not give a proper description of Catania since he portrayed a city which belonged to the previous century. Chiesi states that 'Le migliorate condizioni politiche ed amministrative e della viabilità, le ferrovie, la navigazione a vapore, hanno portato un grande squarcio nelle usanze del tempo'.³⁹⁹ Chiesi's guidebook to Catania is a panegyric of a modern city that had flourished politically, economically and socially thanks to the Catanese *buona società*, the Catanese bourgeoisie, who were trying to promote the new image of Catania.

Chiesi's work describes the change Catania had undergone in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the predominant political approach to Catania found in contemporary guidebooks and descriptions, for Chiesi Catania was the Sicilian symbol of a modern bourgeois city, which was, later, compared to Milan and called the 'Milan of the South'. That Catania was considered the first bourgeois city of the Italian Mezzogiorno was especially due to Giuseppe De Felice Giuffrida, who played an important role in the modernisation of the city by creating the Fasci Siciliani (1889-1894), a popular movement of socialist and democratic inspiration. The movement created by De Felice, who wished to establish a democratic management of the local government, was suppressed by the intervention of the Prime Minister, Francesco Crispi, but its commitment continued. After De Felice's election, in 1902, as the first left-wing mayor of Catania, he tried to form an alliance with the working class and the enlightened bourgeoisie. In an interview in *Corriere di Catania*, 15th September 1906, De Felice stated that his aim was that of forming 'una società moderna, a tipo industriale e con forme puramente democratiche, nelle quali il valore collettivo delle organizzazioni conta molto e quello della vecchia aristocrazia si può dire scomparso'.⁴⁰⁰ During those years – defined, as Giarrizzo has pointed out, 'De Felice's Catania' – the city was a very important, lively, political workshop, and could also boast the presence of prestigious writers and intellectuals, such as Giovanni Verga and De Roberto himself.⁴⁰¹ As Giarrizzo has pointed out, politics, science and culture had developed under the sign of modernity, and the city had

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 374. De Roberto had already discussed this issue in 'Archeologia', *Il Fanfulla*, 27 January, 1881.

³⁹⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁰ In Giarrizzo, *Catania*, p. 170.

⁴⁰¹ For an account of the importance of Catania as a cultural milieu at the turn of the century see R. M. Monastra, 'Avanguardia e Futurismo a Catania', in *Per un bilancio di fine secolo: Catania nel Novecento*, Dollo, ed., pp. 301-319.

consolidated the features of a modern cityscape, which could offer its citizens the services and facilities to which they aspired, along with a modern way of life.⁴⁰²

As a consequence of the new image of the city, mostly due to Chiesi's guidebook, a new approach to Catania flourished. For example, the guidebook published in 1899 by Crescenzo Galàtola, who had founded at the time one of the most important Catanese publishing houses, provides a lively account of the new bourgeois cityscape.⁴⁰³ It highlights, for example, how people used to meet in the *Circolo*, which had taken the place of the *caffè* as a meeting place for political discussion:

Della vita catanese, assai più che i caffè, sono importantissimi fattori i Circoli, ove sia di giorno che di sera si riuniscono i soci che ne fanno parte: la Birreria Svizzera, rimpetto la posta, è un locale di convegno che dà un'idea della vita di caffè delle città del continente. È molto frequentata; essa per Catania è il Caffè Aragno di Roma.⁴⁰⁴

So Catania was a city where the middle-class became, in the first two decades of the 1900s, the dynamic force which made social and urban changes possible.⁴⁰⁵ The Catanese bourgeoisie met in clubs where they could discuss and debate with 'the socially prestigious but politically uninfluential nobles as "common" human beings', as Jürgen Habermas has observed in his inquiry into bourgeois society.⁴⁰⁶ The construction of new neighbourhoods, houses, villas and clinics, along with the creation of new squares and streets, widened the boundaries of the city and modified the cityscape. Consequently, the aristocratic palazzos, the churches and the monasteries, which had characterised the city during its reconstruction, during the eighteenth-century, lost their appeal as symbols of the city centre and via Etna and the new port, which represented the triumph of modernity over the past, became the new points of attraction of the modern city. The open space of Catania could now offer its citizens many new amenities, such as railways, public parks and the wide streets where they could meet for their promenade. Therefore, the leading role did not

⁴⁰² G. Giarrizzo, 'L'età di De Felice. La 'Milano del Sud', in *Per un bilancio di fine secolo: Catania nel Novecento*, pp. 13-19. On this topic see Giarrizzo, *Catania* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1986), in particular chapter V, 'La Milano del Sud', pp. 159-198; and R. Bruno, 'La città di De Felice', in *Catania. La città moderna, la città contemporanea*, Giarrizzo, ed., pp. 137-141.

⁴⁰³ On the publisher see S. Raffaele, 'Abile nella sua prediletta carriera artistica: Crescenzo Galàtola (1813-1866) Tipografo in Catania', in *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, 2008, CIV, I, pp. 35-81.

⁴⁰⁴ *Catania e le sue Vicinanze. Guida del viaggiatore* (Catania: Crescenzo Galàtola, 1899), pp. 43-44.

⁴⁰⁵ Giarrizzo, *Catania*, pp.169-176.

⁴⁰⁶ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), p. 35.

belong to local aristocratic families but to middle-class people, who were aware, and proud, of their functions and responsibilities.

Some books published in the early twentieth century, *Catania Illustrata. Guida storica, biografica, archeologica, industriale e commerciale di Catania e dintorni* by Sebastiano Salomone,⁴⁰⁷ published in 1907, and *Ricordi di un viaggio in Sicilia* (1908), by Edmondo de Amicis, document the political, social and cultural changes Catania had undergone. In *Catania illustrata* Salomone proposes the image of a city which is much improved. It is praised for its growth in population and space so that ‘chi ricorda Catania qual era sino al 1860, non la riconoscerrebbe più, vedendola oggi immensamente migliorata ed estesa fino ai sobborghi’;⁴⁰⁸ its expansion and success are attributed to its railways and the development of the port. It is Salomone’s belief that Catania had become the keystone of the commercial and industrial movement of Sicily:

La nuova vita politica ed economica della nazione ha reso la città fiorentissima, una fra le più belle d’Italia: la ferrovia ne ha fatto la chiave del movimento commerciale ed industriale di tutta l’isola e la sistemazione del porto, quantunque non ancora portato alla potenzialità cui ha diritto, ne ha favorito il grande sviluppo.⁴⁰⁹

Salomone points out how political and economic strategies had improved the life of the city. He underlines that the cityscape had undergone an urban renewal with the development of villas, buildings, theatres, monuments and shops. The changes to the cityscapes, along with the increase in inhabitants, revitalised Catania and helped its citizens to build a modern image of the city. Moreover, the vocabulary used by Salomone, such as *fiorentissima*, *grande*, *sviluppo* and *potenzialità*, expresses the positive attitude of Catania, which was in the vanguard of Italian cities at the time. The stereotype of the city under Etna, which was rich in history and archaeological ruins vanished, whereas the concept of a modern, industrious, progressive, active city arose.

At that time, the writer Edmondo De Amicis (1846-1908), who had visited Catania in 1906, was to observe that Catania, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was definitely a modern city:

⁴⁰⁷ S. Salomone, *Catania illustrata. Guida storica, biografica, archeologica, industriale e commerciale di Catania e dintorni* (Catania: Tipografia Editrice del Popolo, 1907).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibidem.

Ma non è città industriale e commerciale soltanto: è ricca di Istituti di beneficenza, possiede biblioteche cospicue, è sede d'una delle maggiori Università d'Italia, in cui sono laboratori rinomati di chimica e di fisica, d'anatomia e di zoologia, e rinomatissimi di geologia e mineralogia; ed è fra i primi d'Europa, visitato da scienziati di ogni paese, il suo Osservatorio Astronomico, in specie per riguardo alla fotografia stellare, a cui è propizia la meravigliosa limpidezza atmosferica e agli studi geodinamici; ai quali appartiene una collezione di fotogrammi sismici, forse la più preziosa al mondo.⁴¹⁰

If Salomone highlighted the relevant features of Catania as a modern, industrial city, De Amicis, who appreciated such features, focused on the social and cultural aspects of it. De Amicis praised Catania for having one of the most important universities and for having a prestigious astronomical observatory. Thereby, at the beginning of the twentieth century the cliché by which Catania was represented had changed: the modern city prevailed over the ancient.

This new approach is also evident in the guidebook to the Sicilian Second Agricultural Exhibition, which De Roberto supervised in 1907.⁴¹¹ This guidebook is a very significant document that refers to the National Exhibition inaugurated on April 14th 1907. Exhibitions were a new way to promote modernity in Europe and Italy at the time, so the 1907 Agricultural Exhibition highlights both the relevance of Catania in the national panorama and its ambition to acquire a leading role in modern Sicily.⁴¹² The importance of hosting such an event is also highlighted by the attendance to the opening ceremony of King Vittorio Emanuele III, ministers and personalities from the world of culture.

After the show, the city council approved the proposal to change the name of the square where the exhibition had been organised, so that Piazza d'Armi became Piazza Esposizione. The guidebook De Roberto edited for the exhibition provides descriptions and images of Catania which are very different from the city he describes in his guidebook to Catania published the same year. The erudite account of the guidebook to Catania, which is aimed at a well-educated readership cognizant with the arts, is simplified in the guidebook to the Sicilian Agricultural Exhibition which was addressed to a more heterogeneous audience. In the preface Galàtola states that his aim is that of giving an image of Catania as a modern, lively city. In addition, the guidebook written and published by Crescenzo Galàtola, and supervised by De Roberto, provides 'appunti di storia cittadina' – an account

⁴¹⁰ E. De Amicis, *Ricordi di un viaggio in Sicilia* (Catania: Niccolò Giannotta, 1908), pp. 81-83.

⁴¹¹ *Guida 'Ufficiale', Catania 1907, II Esposizione agricola siciliana, Mostra Campionaria Nazionale* (Catania: Crescenzo Galàtola, 1907).

⁴¹² S. Catalano, 'Catania nell'Esposizione del 1907', in *Per un bilancio di fine secolo. Catania nel Novecento*, Dollo, ed., pp. 183-200.

of the most important events in the history of city. It also points out that Catania had grown in population and space, and that the event was organised there because Catania was enjoying commercial and economic prosperity. Moreover, the exhibition reveals, as Galàtola emphasises in his preface, ‘la straordinaria crescita, il prodigioso sviluppo, la multiforme potenzialità’ of Catania.⁴¹³ To substantiate his arguments, the publisher states that Catania was ranked fifth for Italian seaport custom; it was the second for import-export commerce and the first in Sicily for rail traffic. Galàtola provides this account for the reason why Catania had to be considered one of the most important cities of the Italian Kingdom:

Noi crediamo dunque che Catania possa senza presunzione compiacersi d’esser divenuta, per le dogane marittime, la quinta città d’Italia; per il commercio d’esportazione la seconda dopo Genova; e la prima di Sicilia per il rinnovamento delle ferrovie, e le entrate gabbellarie e la seconda in tutte le altre forme della sua attività.⁴¹⁴

Galàtola wished that other Italian cities might grow and improve as had Catania. Catania, then, aspired to playing a leading role in Italy. The idea that Catania could be compared with other European cities and deserved the title of the ‘Milan of the South’ is confirmed by the great deal of information the guidebook to the exhibition contains: tourist information, such as train timetables, a list of hotels and restaurants; advertisements for hotels, clinics, sewing machines, photographers, engineering works, perfumes and pianos. These advertisements demonstrate how lively, active and industrious Catania was in that period. Although the guidebook reveals the importance and the role of Catania as a cultural, political, economic and tourist milieu, it offers the image of a city which is very different from the description De Roberto provides in his guidebook to Catania for the series ‘Italia Artistica’ I will discuss in the following section.

4. 2. De Roberto’s guidebook to Catania

Having demonstrated how Catania was described at the turn of the century, I will now concentrate on De Roberto’s portrayal of Catania in his own guidebook. There are very few critical studies on De Roberto’s guidebook or on the series ‘Italia Artistica’, which is a

⁴¹³ Galàtola, in *Guida ‘Ufficiale’, Catania 1907*, p. 4.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

collection of illustrated monographs on various Italian cities.⁴¹⁵ For a better understanding of De Roberto's guidebook to his home town, it will be useful to contextualise it within the series to which it belongs. The series was directed by Corrado Ricci (1858-1834), a scholar of the artistic and historic heritage of Ravenna, his native city. Ricci had already published a guidebook to this city in 1878.⁴¹⁶ In 1897 he was superintendent for the archaeological heritage of Ravenna. He was one of the first scholars, between the nineteenth and twentieth century, to understand the importance of, and to encourage, the preservation and safeguarding of Italy's artistic and cultural heritage.

Acknowledged as one of the most important scholars of the Arts in Italy at the time, Ricci was called upon by the Istituto d'Arti Grafiche of Bergamo to inaugurate the collection of monographs dedicated to those historic and natural sites which were considered important at the turn of the century. The series is made up of one hundred and thirteen volumes, and its framework consists of historical accounts and some illustrations, both of archaeological and artistic interest. It has to be pointed out that the series contains neither introduction nor preface – so the aims of the guidebook and its ambit are not declared – nor a list of contents, but only of the numbered illustrations, their artists, and of previously published guidebooks.⁴¹⁷ The photos, maps and images included in the guidebooks do not follow the authors' accounts, thus the cities can be 'read' through the illustrations provided and through the writers' narratives. In reading the guidebooks, one has the impression that the aim was to allow the reader to choose to read the book through its verbal and non-verbal language, to benefit from visual and notional impressions, apart from the fact that the position of the illustrations is dictated by the cost of printing and binding. Although the guidebooks of the series do not include an introduction or

⁴¹⁵ See R. Galvagno and D. Stazzone, 'Una strana fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto, in De Roberto', *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, (Enna: Papiro Editore, 2007), pp. i-xx; Pagnano, 'La costruzione dell'identità di catania dal Secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, pp. 181- 240.

⁴¹⁶ C. Ricci, *Ravenna e i suoi dintorni* (Ravenna: Antonio e Gio. David Editori, 1878).

⁴¹⁷ De Roberto's guide is the twenty-seventh of the collection after: C. Ricci, *Ravenna* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano D'arti Grafiche, 1906), n. 1; G. Agnelli, *Ferrara e Pomposa* (1906), n. 2; P. Molmenti, *Venezia* (1906), n. 3; S. Rocco, E. Mauceri, *Girgenti - Da Segesta a Selinunte* (1906), n. 4; C. Ricci, *La Repubblica di San Marino* (1906), n. 5; G. Lipparini, *Urbino* (1906), n. 6; U. Fleres, *La campagna Romana* (1906), n. 7; P. Molmenti, D. Mantovani, *Le isole della laguna Veneta* (1906), n. 8; A.J. Rusconi, *Siena* (1906), n. 9; G. Solitro, *Il Lago di Garda* (1906), n. 10; R. Pàntini, *San Gimignano e Certaldo* (1906), n. 11; E. Corradini, G.A. Borgese, *Prato - Montemurlo e Campi* (1906), n. 12; A. Colasanti, *Gubbio* (1906), n. 13; A. Beltramelli, *Comacchio, Argenta e le bocche del Po* (1906), n. 14; R. Gallenga Stuart, *Perugia*, (1906), n. 15; I. B. Supino, *Pisa* (1906), n. 16; G. Pettinà, *Vicenza* (1906), n. 17; C. Ricci, *Volterra* (1906), n. 18; L. Testi, *Parma* (1906), n. 19; G. Carocci, *Il Valdarno da Firenze al mare* (1906), n. 20; A. Colasanti, *L'Aniene* (1906), n. 21; G. Caprin, *Trieste* (1906), n. 22; G. Fogolari, *Cividale del Friuli* (1906), n. 23; G. De Lorenzo, *Venosa e la regione del Vulture* (1906), n. 24; F. Malaguzzi Valeri, *Milano, parte I* (1906), n. 25; F. Malaguzzi Valeri, *Milano, Parte II* (1906), n. 26.

presentation, Ferruccio Canali has pointed out that the final pages of the third edition of Ricci's guidebook to Ravenna, published in 1903, can be considered the 'manifesto' of the series.⁴¹⁸ In these final pages Ricci explains and comments on the aims of the collection and states the audience to which it was addressed:

Ora niuno ignora che il più rapido mezzo di apprendere, si ha nel metodo intuitivo. A risparmiare tempo e parole, nella descrizione di un paese, di un oggetto, di una serie sistematica di cognizioni, il migliore spediente è di offrirne, se possibile, l'immagine, di mettere, a così dire, lo studioso in presenza delle cose. Per poco che la sua intelligenza sia già iniziata, un fiotto di idee gli entrerà direttamente per l'immagine nel cervello; e pochi cenni di storia, di commenti, o di riferimenti basteranno allora a completare il linguaggio delle cose.⁴¹⁹

Ricci points out that the focus of the guidebooks of the series on Italian cities is both on the artistic and tourist side of the city. Moreover, he highlights, and anticipates, the importance of visual communication as a means to educate people, since verbal language and visual language are strictly connected and complementary when presenting information and expressing concepts and ideas. Furthermore, pictures are not mere ornaments nor pleonastic nor tautological figures since 'l'illustrazione dev'essere documentale, non di fantasia o di maniera'.⁴²⁰ Ricci, then, underlines the documentary role of photography and its value in mass communication.

By focusing on the importance of photography, Ricci emphasises his idea that photography was useful in order to show the artistic patrimony of Italy: 'per i progressi ottenuti coi nuovi mezzi di riproduzione foto-meccanici, non v'è più mistero di archivi o rarità di capolavori o novità di scoperte e di esplorazioni delle quali anche il più povero dei lettori non possa contemplare la veduta'.⁴²¹ Firstly, Ricci stresses the importance of photography as a new way to disclose the amazing Italian artistic patrimony; secondly, he points out that culture, in the early twentieth century, was characterised by having both immediate and utilitarian aims; and, lastly, he underlines that the guidebooks were addressed to a vast audience and that the purpose of the Italia Artistica series was to 'Far conoscere i tesori artistici della patria nostra, e, ad un tempo, invogliare e guidare i

⁴¹⁸ F. Canali, *Corrado Ricci fotografo ed esperto della fotografia* in *Corrado Ricci: nuovi studi e documenti*, N. Lombardini, P. Novara and S. Tramonti, eds, (Ravenna: Società di studi ravennati, 1999), pp. 284-289.

⁴¹⁹ C. Ricci, *Ravenna* (Bergamo: Istituto d'Arti Grafiche, 1903), p. 95.

⁴²⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴²¹ *Ibidem*.

visitatori, nostrani e stranieri, nello scovirli e apprezzarli degnamente'.⁴²² Ricci points out the importance of helping people to discover and appreciate the exquisite Italian artistic patrimony; he uses the word '*degnamente*', which highlights the importance of preserving and nurturing the vast Italian classical cultural heritage, which was quite neglected – Ricci was the superintendent of Ravenna and had a profound knowledge of the problems that arise on conservation sites and in the maintenance of works of art.

The series of illustrated monographs would be an innovative instrument to describe Italian cities through the work of 'specialisti che abbiano buona fama come scrittori'.⁴²³ The aim of the series was, furthermore, that of describing the treasures of Italian heritage for local and foreign visitors to discover and appreciate the artistic beauty of Italian cities. It should not be – underlined Ricci – a work of pure erudition or a sterile guidebook, rather a 'compendium' to help people to discover art and history as described by famous writers.⁴²⁴ It was De Roberto who was assigned the task of describing and portraying Catania to a modern and educated audience, and to employ iconographic sources with the aim of using both verbal and visual language.

The guidebook to Catania by De Roberto is divided into six sections marked in Roman numerals. It follows a chronological development and recounts the history of Catania from the foundation of the city until the turn of the century. De Roberto derived information from many historical and literary sources. Since he had already studied a vast number of documents dealing with Catania whilst writing *I Viceré*,⁴²⁵ he focused his attention on a local bibliography before writing his guidebook. De Roberto's passion for accurate historical reconstruction of the places he was studying and his research for source material are particularly evident in the guidebook.

At the beginning of his guidebook the writer clearly sets out his historical sources: *Catania Restaurata* by the Catanese jurist Mario Cutelli (1584-1654),⁴²⁶ *Catania destrutta* by Franciscan Domenico Guglielmini (1660-1710),⁴²⁷ *Opere archeologiche ed artistiche*

⁴²² Ibid., p. 96.

⁴²³ Ibidem.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

⁴²⁵ See footnote n. 288, p. 86.

⁴²⁶ M. Cutelli, *A la enmortalidad del esclarecido nombre del exelentissimo senor Duque del Infantado Don Rodrigo Mendoza, Sandoual, Catania Restaurada, dedicala Mario Cutelli Conde de Villarosada* (Catania: Vincencio Petronio, 1652).

⁴²⁷ D. Guglielmini, *Catania destrutta con la narrativa di tutte le città, e terre danneggiate dal tremuoto nel 1693. Di Comeindo Muglielmini catanese frà gli accademici infecondi di Roma, detto l'Etno* (Palermo: Agostino Epiro, 1695). Comeindo Muglielgini is the near-anagrammatical pseudonym of Domenico Guglielmini.

by the Catanese architect Mario Musumeci (1778-1852),⁴²⁸ Carmelo Cordaro Clarenza's (1793-1860) *Osservazioni sopra la storia di Catania*,⁴²⁹ the Catanese historiographer Carmelo Sciuto Patti's (1829-1889) *I monumenti di Sant'Agata esistenti in Catania: note storico-archeologiche*,⁴³⁰ as well as the Palermitan art historian Gioacchino Di Marzo's (1839-1916) books *Biblioteca storica e letteraria di Sicilia*,⁴³¹ and *Delle belle arti in Sicilia dai Normanni sino alla fine del XIV*.⁴³²

Eighteen years after its publication De Roberto's guidebook was mentioned in the very influential bibliographical note by Guido Libertini to his Italian translation of *Das Alte Catania* by Adolf Holm.⁴³³ Holm (1830-1900) was a German scholar of Sicily and Sicilian history. He worked as a professor of history at Palermo University in 1876 and in 1884 moved to Naples to teach history until 1897. His work *Das Alte Catania* was a fundamental volume for local archaeological studies and the translation made by the Sicilian archaeologist Libertini subserved the circulation of this important work on Catania.⁴³⁴ Since De Roberto's guidebook is quoted in Libertini's bibliographical references, it can be inferred that the writer's account of Catania was considered an important source of reference for the study of Catania's artistic patrimony and heritage.

The guidebook to Catania by De Roberto contains one hundred and fifty-two illustrations. The writer used pictures by local photographers, such as Michele Grita and Luigi Martinez,⁴³⁵ but also the Florentine studios of Alinari and Brogi.⁴³⁶ The images they proposed are a unique witness to a city which was rich in culture, history and monuments,

⁴²⁸ M. Musumeci, *Opere archeologiche ed artistiche* (Catania: 1845-1851).

⁴²⁹ C. Cordaro Clarenza, *Osservazioni sopra la storia di Catania* (Catania: S. Riggio, 1833-1834).

⁴³⁰ C. Sciuto Patti, *I monumenti di Sant'Agata esistenti in Catania: note storico-archeologiche* (Rome: R. Bonsignore, 1892).

⁴³¹ G. Di Marzo, *Biblioteca storica e letteraria di Sicilia* (Palermo, L. Pedone Lauriel, 1879).

⁴³² G. Di Marzo, *Delle belle arti in Sicilia dai Normanni sino alla fine del XIV* (Palermo: S. Di Marzo, 1858-1864).

⁴³³ A. Holm, *Das Alte Catania* (Lübeck: Bolhovevener & Seelig, 1873).

⁴³⁴ A. Holm, *Catania antica*, translated by G. Libertini, (Catania: Libreria Tirelli di F. Guaitolini, 1925), p. 95.

⁴³⁵ It has not been possible to find studies on local photographers, apart from Martinez for whom see A. Cantone and A. Martinez, eds, *Catania e il suo fotografo. Le fotografie di Luigi Martinez* (Catania: Studio Martinez, 1984). Martinez is considered by the historian Giuseppe Giarrizzo the photographer of De Roberto, since Martinez's shots represented quite well De Roberto's ideology; see G. Giarrizzo, 'Le Immagini di Luigi Martinez, un Commento al Vero De Roberto', in A. Cantone and A. Martinez, eds, *Catania e il suo fotografo. Le fotografie di Luigi Martinez*, pp. 7-9.

⁴³⁶ Giuseppe Alinari together with his brothers, Leopoldo and Romualdo, founded in Florence, in 1852, their photographic studio. They specialised in portraying people, monuments and works of art. They achieved national and international success and their archive is one of the most important. Giacomo Brogi was another Florentine who started his work as a photographer around 1856. He specialised in portraiture and was one of the promoters of the Photographic Society of Italy. See A. C. Quintavalle and M. Maffioli, eds, *Fratelli Alinari fotografi in Firenze. 150 anni che illustrarono il mondo 1852-2002* (Firenze: Fratelli Alinari, 2003) and F. Recine, *La documentazione fotografica dell'arte in Italia dagli albori all'epoca moderna* (Napoli: Scriptaweb, 2006), pp. 28-36.

and whose main characteristic is that of being graced by both Etna and the Ionian Sea. In order to propose an image and an identity of Catania, De Roberto promotes Etna as the focal point of the cityscape, marginalising the modern features of the city, such as the new port and the new neighbourhoods. This might indicate that De Roberto made a selection of what he considered worthy of attention in his portrayal of his city and what he considered aesthetically inadequate in representing his idea of Catania. Moreover, it is important to highlight that De Roberto was a photographer himself. As Benjamin maintains, since historical ‘thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well’,⁴³⁷ photography can become a tool for the comprehension of history and a means of social and political analysis. For these reasons, in order to study De Roberto’s portrayal of his city, I will start with a study of the ‘illustrations’ contained in the guidebook, which will be useful in order to focus on De Roberto’s idea of history and modernity.

4. 3. *Illustrazioni*: images and ideas of Catania

Following Ricci’s suggestion of using ‘*illustrazioni*’, in order to take advantage of both verbal and visual language, De Roberto proposes an image and an identity of Catania characterised by Etna. The photos chosen are a visual collection of the most important monuments and buildings of the city. Sipala has accentuated that Verga’s, Capuana’s and De Roberto’s interest in the field of photography was both artistic and scientific.⁴³⁸ The three writers aimed to use photography as a means of artistic expression and as a ‘document’ to show and represent reality in an objective way. Capuana and Verga were the founders of *Verismo*, a literary movement of the late nineteenth century, which took inspiration from the French Naturalism of that time. Naturalism was a literary movement which highlighted the importance of detailed realism. Believing man was the product of heredity, social conditions and environment, writers had to describe reality as it appeared, avoiding any personal comment. It was Capuana, influenced by the works of French writer Emile Zola, who theorised *Verismo* and the importance of ‘photographing’ reality so as to give a faithful portrait of reality, society and mankind. Literature was the means for a

⁴³⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1982), p. 264.

⁴³⁸ M. Sipala, ‘Prefazione’, in G. Garra Agosta, ed., *Verga fotografo* (Catania: G. Maimone, 1991), pp. 11-16.

scientific, impersonal representation of reality, which could be studied and analysed as if the writer/photographer were an anatomist.⁴³⁹

Photography was, thus, more than a passion for Verga, Capuana and De Roberto. It was an alternative instrument to capture, study and investigate reality. It was a different way to represent the world they narrated in their books. Verga and Capuana, for instance, used photography to select possible places in which to set their stories and design the costumes of the characters in their plays. In other words, to pursue their idea of a faithful portrayal of reality they used photography as support for a 'scientific' study and representation of the same. De Roberto, more generally, used photography as a support for his work as a journalist, a writer and a historian.⁴⁴⁰

The importance photography had for De Roberto is also shown in an article he published in 1909 dealing with St Sylvester's Feast day in Troina, a Sicilian town.⁴⁴¹ The article, which consists of eleven pages with eight photos De Roberto had taken during his stay in Troina, can be considered a modern reportage, which follows Ricci's suggestion of using illustrations to support the narrative account. In the article De Roberto tells the history of Troina and of St Sylvester – the city's patron saint – and describes the festival held in August.

However, the objectivity of photography is a very controversial issue. Susan Sontag has pointed out that it is the photographer who chooses a subject, the angle from which to shoot the photo and what part of the subject to focus on, in order to put it in the foreground or in the background.⁴⁴² Thus, photography can mirror the historical, social and cultural environment the photographer decides to immortalise, but it is a subjective reflection of the world. As such, the photographs chosen by De Roberto mirror real life and society in Catania at the turn of the century but provide a personal portrayal of the modern city. It is worth noting that the second guidebook he wrote in 1909, for the same 'Italia Artistica' series, contains about seventy photos De Roberto had taken of Randazzo and the Alcantara Valley.

In this guidebook De Roberto's name as a photographer is presented alongside some very famous photographers of the time such as Brogi and Scala. Pierre Bourdieu has

⁴³⁹ See V. Spinazzola, *Verismo e positivismo* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977); G. Petronio, *Romanticismo e verismo: due forme della modernità letteraria* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003); R. Luperini, ed., *Il verismo italiano fra naturalismo francese e cultura europea* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2007).

⁴⁴⁰ L. Sciascia, 'Prefazione', in A. Nemiz, *Capuana, Verga, De Roberto fotografi* (Palermo: Edikronos, 1982), pp. 7-9.

⁴⁴¹ De Roberto, 'San Silvestro da Troina', *La Lettera*, Rivista mensile del *Corriere della Sera*, August 1909.

⁴⁴² S. Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

stated that ‘the photograph becomes a sort of ideogram or allegory’ of reality.⁴⁴³ As such it can be considered a ‘linguistic sign’ through which a photographer can express his opinion, his mood and his *Weltanschauung*. Then, not only does the visual aspect of the guidebook provide images of the ruins and archaeological sites of Catania; it also documents the life of the modern city, its symbols and stereotypes. Hence, the photos contained in the guidebook, showing the beauty and magnificence of the volcano, which dominates the ‘scenario’ of the city and frames its cityscape, are extremely precious and of great importance: De Roberto’s passion for photography and his being a photographer himself suggest that the writer studied and chose with accuracy the pictures that he would incorporate into his guidebook. So, the photos give a direct picture of the city and show ‘real life’ in Catania at the turn of the century as he saw it.

Calvino has underlined that the city is made of ‘relazioni tra le misure del suo spazio e gli avvenimenti del suo passato’.⁴⁴⁴ For this reason the photos can express the relationship between the transformation of the cityscape of Catania and the historical events of its past. However, everyday life is represented. More precisely, the pictures, while focusing on monuments and buildings, also portray the life of the city, such as children playing in the sea; fishermen casting their nets; workers in the streets; people in squares meeting during their promenade; carters with their loads; people watching the excavation of the amphitheatre; and the crowd during the procession of St Agatha’s relics. As in some of the most recent guidebooks, the city is peopled by the Catanese, who do not make Catania a static place, but rather, an active, vibrant city.

The photos enrich the guidebook as they are the ‘scenario’ in which the Catanese move and live and provide a representation of Catania which is not ‘corrupted’ by literary transfiguration. The 152 images in the guidebook are a very important reportage of the city at the turn of the century and can be considered a valuable documentary evidence of those places which no longer exist, such as the Museo Biscari. The first *imago urbis* De Roberto proposes of Catania is that of a city at the foot of the volcano (Figure 1).

⁴⁴³ P. Bourdieu, *Photography. A Middle-brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 77.

⁴⁴⁴ Calvino, ‘Le città e la memoria. 3.’, in Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, p. 18.

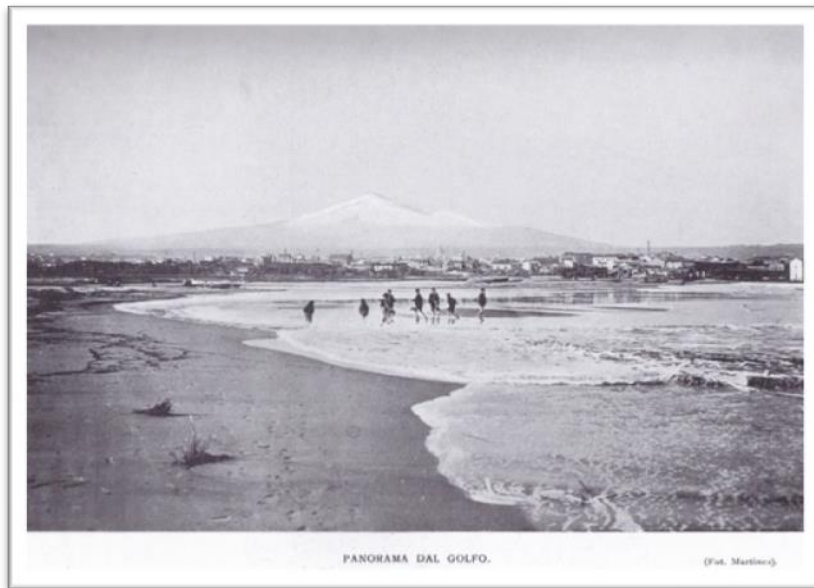


Figure 1. Etna.

This image of Catania as a city under the volcano is re-presented in two old maps. Initially, they do not seem to have any connection with the narrative, since De Roberto makes no mention of them. However, these maps show that, even in the past, the image of the city was strongly linked with Etna. The first map is a sixteenth-century representation of Catania by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Map of Catania – Sixteenth-Century – G. Braun and F. Hogenberg.

The city is located at the foot of Etna and facing the Ionian Sea; it also reveals that Catania is a great city with a large port. At the top of the map there is the following inscription: ‘Catana Urbs Siciliae Clarissima Patria Sc.t Agathae Virginis et Mart.’. The inscription emphasises that the city of Catania is the homeland of the virgin and martyr St Agatha and that Catania is *clarissima* – an illustrious city. The second map (1761) by Giuseppe Orlando (Figure 3) shows how the city had expanded over the Etnean region after the 1693 earthquake. In addition, Orlando inserted, on the left side of the map, a list of squares, churches, streets, monasteries and fortresses that the city possessed at the time. The maps, however, show Etna to be a constant menace to Catania as the volcano is represented spewing flames from its top.



PIANTA DEL SEC. XVIII.

Figure 3. View of Catania – Eighteenth-Century – G. Orlando.

De Roberto included another image of Catania as a city under the volcano. In Figure 4 Etna’s devastating power is emphasised. It is the image of a fresco which can be found in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Catania, a church dedicated to St Agatha. De Roberto attributes the work to Mignemi, but it was Giacinto Platania who was the author of the painting, which portrayed the 1669 eruption (Figure 4).⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁵ P. Musmeci, *La città ed il suo testimone* (Acireale: S. Guarrera, 2006), pp. 77-78.

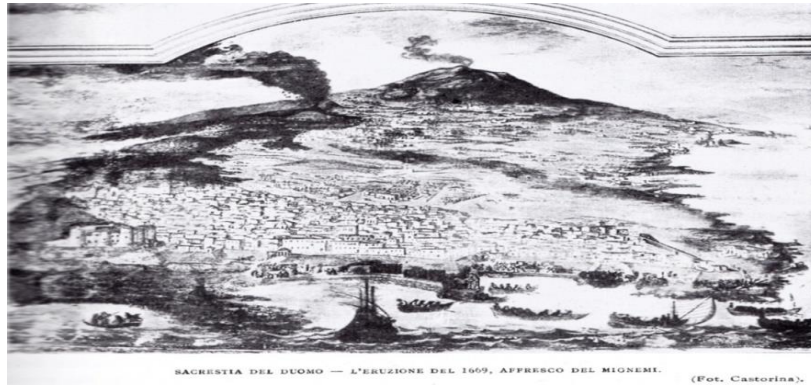


Figure 4. The eruption of 1669 – Giacinto Platania.

It was one of the most catastrophic events the city experienced, along with the earthquake in 1693, and the cause of the city's subsequent reconstruction in the Baroque style. Platania had participated in an expedition to prevent lava from reaching Catania by trying to place large boulders into the flow. Obviously, the experiment was unsuccessful, but made the painter able to observe and study the destructive force of Etna. People, as shown in the painting, were terrified by the event and crowded the port of Catania waiting for ships to leave the city. Lava surrounded the Ursino Castle and covered, almost completely, the Greco-Roman relics and destroyed the medieval city. The painting gives a very evocative, vivid account of the terrible catastrophe the city endured. De Roberto states that he mentions the big fresco not because it can be considered a masterpiece but, rather, because it provides a very clear picture of the eruption. The fresco, the author underlines, bears witness to the changes in the cityscape:

In fondo al quadro l'Etna solleva la gigantesca sua mole: nel secondo piano, ai fianchi del monte, si erge il nuovo cratere dei Monti Rossi, dal quale un fiume di fuoco scende per le più basse pendici fino alla città, ne investe e scavalca le muraglie occidentali, ne invade ed incendia i sottoposti quartieri, ne ciruisce e diminuisce il castello, per gettarsi finalmente in mare, restringendo il porto dal quale escono a forza di vele e di remi le navi cariche di atterriti fuggiaschi.⁴⁴⁶

De Roberto, who does not comment on the two maps by Braun and Hogenberg and by Orlando, now comments vividly, incorporating a wealth of details from the fresco. He highlights the majestic image of Etna in the background, whereas Catania is in the foreground almost enclosed by lava. Further, the eruption has generated a new crater very close to the city, Monti Rossi. De Roberto underlines how terrifying the event was for the

⁴⁴⁶ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 69.

city and how the Catanese tried to reach the port and sail to safety. The fresco is also used to accentuate the great power that Etna has over the city.

As a consequence of the 1669 eruption and the later 1693 earthquake, there was a change in the cityscapes and in the layout of the city. However, some of the city ruins were partly spared by lava and De Roberto includes images of the city's past glories, such as the Greco-Roman Theatre and the annexed Odèon (Figure 5) and the Roman Amphitheatre (Figure 6).

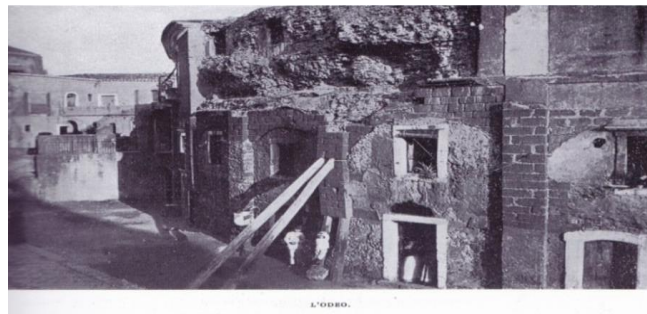


Figure 5. The Odèon.

The photo of the Odèon is used by De Roberto to underline the decline and neglect of the relics of the past. He comments that ‘Anche qui terremoti e vandali hanno lasciato i loro segni’.⁴⁴⁷ The description of the Odèon is an open denunciation of the deterioration of Catanese archaeological sites. He exhorts Catania municipality to restore the ancient ruins and preserve them from oblivion and negligence. Thus De Roberto raises a very important point concerning one of the city's problems: the conservation and custody of archaeological areas, which were worthy of political interest and economic investments. Unfortunately, the Catanese city council did not seem to pursue the advice after investing in and commencing new digs when the Roman amphitheatre was discovered under Piazza Stesicorea, which was one of the central squares in the city (Figure 6).

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 45.



Figure 6. Stesicorea Square and the Roman Amphitheatre.

It was De Roberto's belief that the modern city had to preserve and safeguard the ancient city. The photos contained in the guidebook show the link between the past and modernity: they portray the beautiful Baroque perspective symmetry of Stesicorea Square (Figure 6), show its geometrical effects, the symbol of the classical city, the amphitheatre, and the monument to Vincenzo Bellini, symbol of modern culture (Figure 7).



MONUMENTO A VINCENZO BELLINI, DEL MONTEVERDE. (Fot. Alinari).

Figure 7. Monument to Vincenzo Bellini by Monteverde.

Stesicorea Square is pictured as a modern space that bears both the signs of the past – the Roman Amphitheatre – and the signs of the modern city – the monument to Vincenzo Bellini. This 'combination' of the past and the modern is also evident in the Norman apses

– which are part of Catania Cathedral (Figure 8) – built with lava stones, and Ursino Castle (Figure 9), which is surrounded by a very large square. The apses and the castle are both relics of the medieval city and symbols of the integration of the past and modernity in Catania.

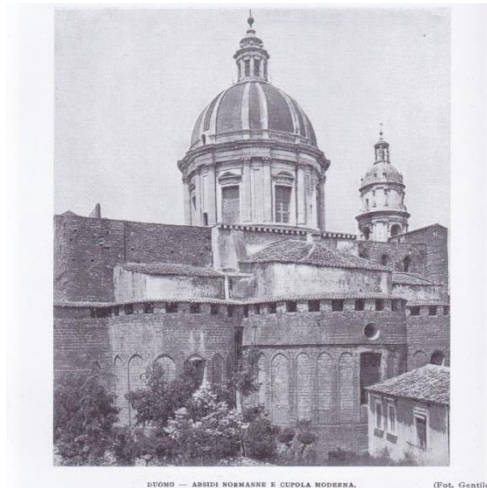


Figure 8. Cathedral – Norman Apses and the Modern Dome.

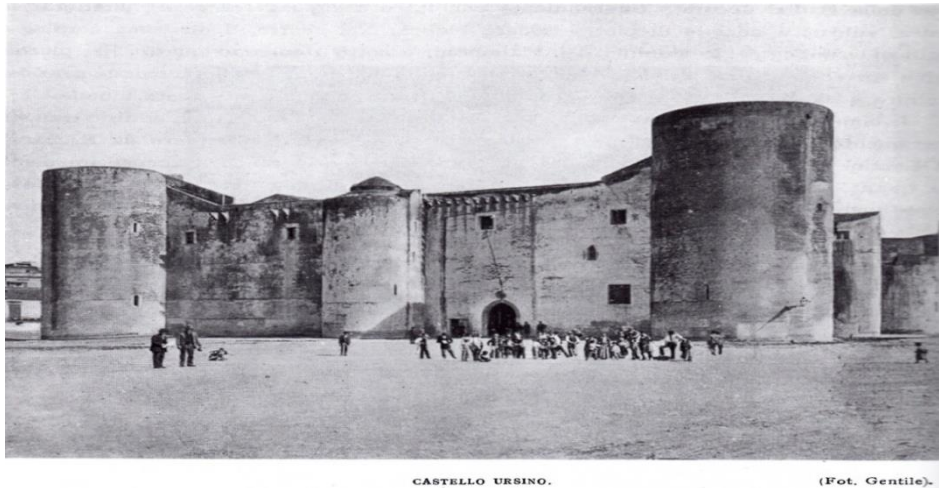


Figure 9. Ursino Castle.

The city rebuilt during the eighteenth-century pays homage to the Baroque style. This very elaborate style celebrates – through the use of the white and grey stones, stuccoes and perspective effects – the victory of the city over the destructive force of Etna. It also emphasises the presence of an influential aristocracy, which showed off its power through

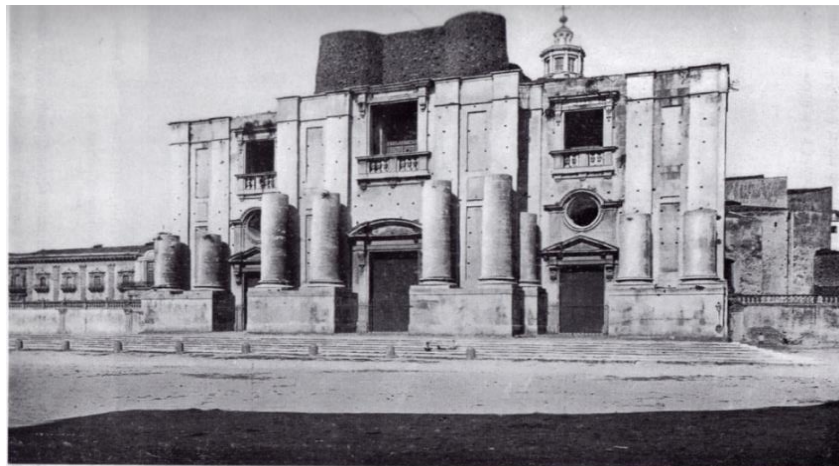
the beauty and grandeur of its palazzos. This artistic period of the city is well represented through the images depicting the Benedictine Monastery (Figures 10, 11, 12).



MONASTERO DEI BENEDETTINI — FACCIATA PRINCIPALE.

(Pot. Brogl.)

Figure 10. The Benedictine Monastery – Main Façade.



MONASTERO DEI BENEDETTINI — CHIESA DI SAN NICOLA.

Figure 11. The Benedictine Monastery – Church of St Nicholas.



MONASTERO DEI BENEDETTINI — SALA MAGGIORE DELLA BIBLIOTECA. (Fot. Giuffrida).

Figure 12. The Benedictine Monastery – The Library Main Reading Hall.

The magnificence of Baroque Catania reflected the social order that De Roberto had criticised in *I Viceré*, in which the Sicilian aristocracy ruled the city governed by Spain. The architects Vaccarini, Ittar and Battaglia gave the city its flamboyant, theatrical aspect, enriched by sculptures and ornaments and the use of chiaroscuro effects. However, Baroque Catania is still considered the symbol of a negative aristocracy which pursued its own interests.⁴⁴⁸ Nonetheless, De Roberto provides the description of the Prince of Biscari and his palazzo. The Prince of Biscari's palazzo is one of the most admirable, splendid buildings the city can offer its visitors (Figure 13). This Catanese aristocrat is one of the few people De Roberto focuses on, as he was the charismatic representative of an enlightened aristocracy who wanted to embellish Catania and give it a cultural status.⁴⁴⁹ So, a private palace is chosen to celebrate the heritage of Catania and one of its most important citizens.

⁴⁴⁸ Pagnano, 'La costruzione dell'identità di Catania dal secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, p. 18.

⁴⁴⁹ Iachello, *Immagini della città*, pp. 38-39.



PALAZZO BISCARI — SCALA INTERNA.

(Fot. Giuffrida).

Figure 13. Palazzo Biscari – Internal Staircase.

Apart from the monastery and the cathedral, there are few descriptions of the interiors of buildings. Nor are there descriptions of buildings which have institutional, social or political value. The Prince of Biscari is eulogised for his prestigious residence and his art collection, both praised by foreign travellers during the age of the Grand-Tour. De Roberto underlines the importance of the Prince of Biscari in his relationship with foreigner travellers, who were received with great courtesy:

Tutte le persone di riguardo che passarono per questo estremo lembo d'Italia ebbero onesta ed intelligente accoglienza nel suo palazzo, costruito verso la fine del Seicento sulla cortina delle vecchie mura, alla Marina; e non dovettero provare poca meraviglia trovando nella piccola e povera Catania di quella età una dimora tanto magnifica, ricca di sale sontuose [...].⁴⁵⁰

The writer stresses the importance the palace had for Catania, as it was a point of attraction for foreign travellers, being rich in decorations, mirrors and stuccoes. He also highlights its opulence, its architecture and its luxurious salons. However, what really strikes De Roberto about the Prince of Biscari's residence is his art collection (Figures 14, 15).

⁴⁵⁰ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 115.



MUSEO BISCARI — CORRIDOIO DELLE TERRECOTTE

(Fot. Gentile)

Figure 14. The Biscari Museum – Hall of Terracotta.



MUSEO BISCARI — GALLERIA DEI MARMI

(Fot. Gentile)

Figure 15. The Biscari Museum – Hall of Marble.

These photos can be considered of great historical value, because they show how rich and vast the museum was and because they are among the few existing pictures of the museum, which was later dismantled. Furthermore, they prove that the museum consisted of an eclectic collection related to the idea of a *Wunderkammer* – literally wonder-room. It was not a museum but a cabinet of curiosities, an encyclopaedic collection of objects.

The Prince of Biscari can be considered the first and the most important promoter of the image of Catania during a period in which the city had modified, enlarged and modernised its cityscape.⁴⁵¹ In the eighteenth century, after the eruption and the earthquake, the plan of the city was modified and this modification had, as a consequence,

⁴⁵¹ Iachello, *Immagine della città*, pp. 38-46.

firstly, a change in the cityscape of Catania and, secondly, in the conception of public space. During the nineteenth century new spaces were built according to a modern concept of the city. Public areas, a new garden, the extension of the port and the seafront promenade are among the projects which Catania city council developed.⁴⁵² The open spaces became ‘spaces where people repeatedly gather, linger, undertaking a range of activities’.⁴⁵³ The cityscape of Catania was transformed to satisfy its inhabitants’ desire to live in a modern city (Figures 16, 17, 18) that could keep pace with modern cultural practices.



Figure 16. Charles V Wall.

The photograph of the crowd walking near Charles V wall (Figure 16) provides an image of Catania as a busy place. A detailed analysis of the picture shows that underneath the wall and the railway arches – symbols of the modern city – there are vendors and shoppers, along with people transporting their merchandise.

⁴⁵² Ibid., ‘Emporeo de’ pubblici commodi e piaceri: la passeggiata alla marina e la villa pubblica’, in Iachello, *Immagini della città*, pp. 166-175.

⁴⁵³ C. Ward Thompson, ed., *Open Space: People Space* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007), p. 47.



Figure 17. Borgo – Cavour Square.

Figure 18. Stesicorea Square before the Amphitheatre Diggings.

Alternatively, the photograph of Cavour Square (Figure 17) shows a new neighbourhood, called Borgo, and the very large square dedicated to Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour – a representative of Italian Risorgimento. The square has a kiosk, a garden – places symbols of social interaction – and a fountain with the statue of Ceres – symbol of the classical city (Figures 19).⁴⁵⁴

However, it is Stesicorea Square (the square is named after the Greek poet Stesichorus, who was famous for his contribution to the evolution of choral lyric poetry) that is the core of both the historical and the modern city (Figure 18). It is one of the biggest open spaces in Catania and the new street, Etna Street, divides it in two. The photos of Stesicorea Square show that on the east side of the square stands the monument dedicated to the musician Bellini, which the sculptor Giulio Monteverde created in 1882, on the west side, there is the Roman amphitheatre; these demonstrate the coexistence between historic and modern Catania. It is worth noting that modern squares are embellished with representative symbols of the city, such as the statues of Ceres (Figure 19), the Bellini monument (Figure 7) and the elephant fountain, the elephant being the symbol of Catania par excellence (Figure 20).

⁴⁵⁴ Ceres was the Roman goddess of grain crops, agriculture and fertility.



BORGO — FONTANA DI CERERE. (Fot. Martine).

Figure 19. Borgo – Ceres Fountain.



PIAZZA DEL DUOMO — LA FONTANA DELL'ELEFANTE. (Fot. Alinari).

Figure 20. Cathedral Square – The Elephant Fountain.

Bellini was a Catanese who was particularly esteemed by De Roberto and the city. Since the musician was the most widely celebrated Catanese, the theatre and the city garden bear his name (Figure 21).

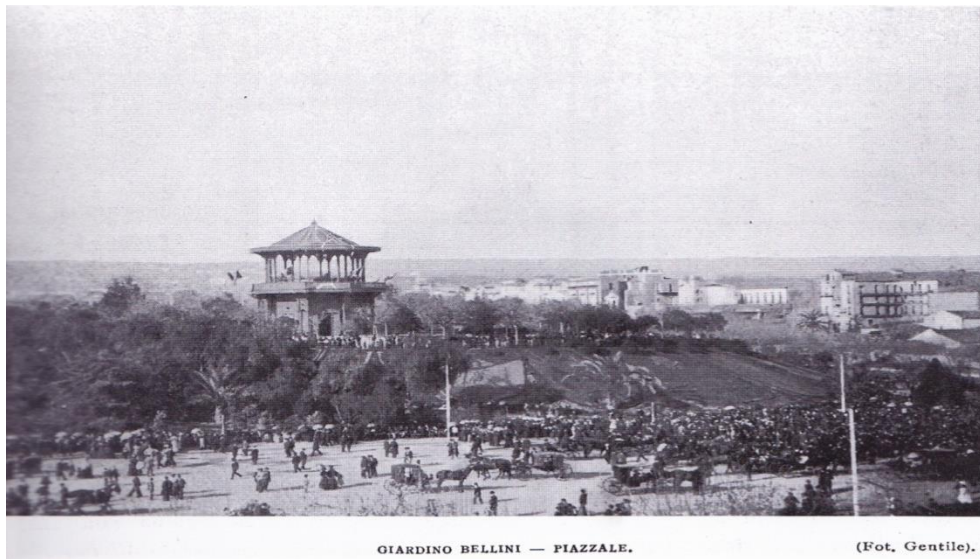
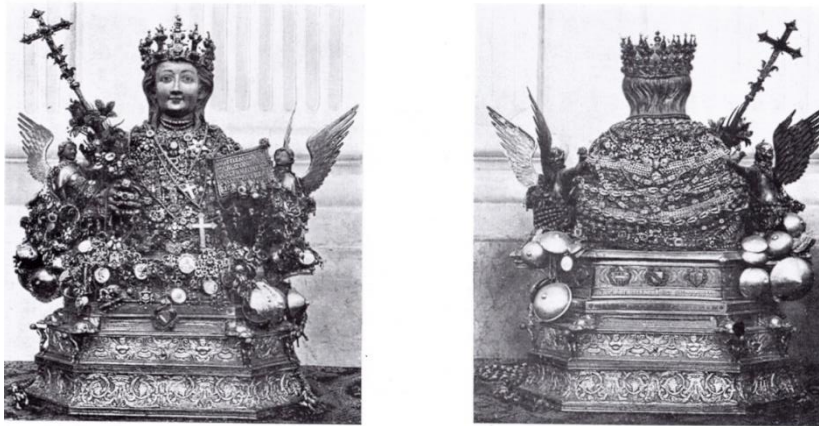


Figure 21. Bellini Garden – Square.

Bellini Garden was the public meeting-place used for social and cultural events. The photo shows how crowded it could be with people and coaches (Figure 21). However, the relevance of the crowd is best seen during the description of St Agatha's Day. The photos reveal how great the participation of the Catanese to the feast was (and is) and help understand one of the most important religious and folkloristic festivals of Sicily and the role of St Agatha as one of the principal symbols of Catania: the festival being the symbol of social cohesion and a mark of the continuity of local traditions and folklore and modernity.

Since 1376 parts of the body of the saint have been kept in a reliquary, in the form of a bust with lifelike skin tone and blonde hair (Figure 22). The photos show how precious the statue is; it is made in silver and embellished with enamels and engravings. Over the centuries the very fine net which covers the bust of St Agatha had been enriched with precious stones and jewels donated by Popes, Kings and illustrious people. Bellini, for instance, offered his decoration of Officer of the Légion d'Honneur to his city's patron. The festival merits De Roberto's very detailed description.



DUOMO — IL BUSTO DI SANT'AGATA.

Figure 22. The Cathedral –Bust of St Agatha.

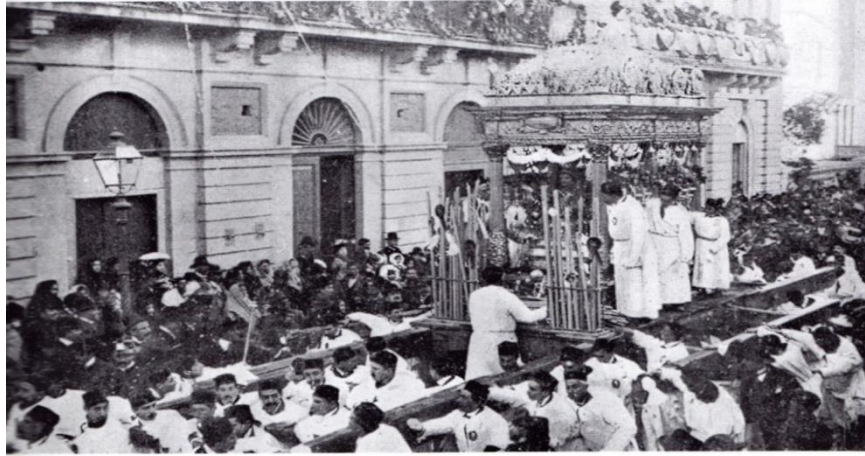
The photos inserted into the guidebook highlight the significance of the event and the extraordinary participation of the crowd in the celebration (Figures 23, 24).



PROCESSIONE DI S. AGATA.

(Fot. Martinez).

Figure 23. The Procession.

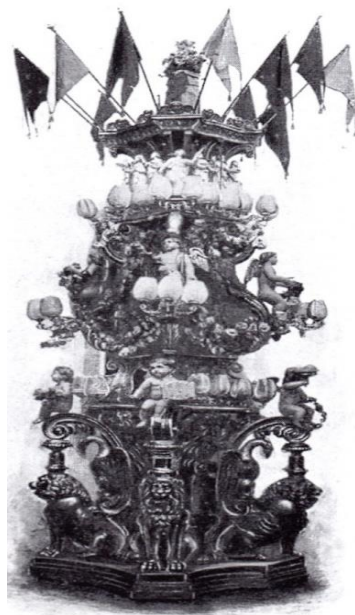


FESTA DI S. AGATA — LA « BARA » IN PROCESSIONE.

(Fot. Martinez).

Figure 24. St Agatha's Festival – The Feretory Being Carried in Procession.

Figures 23 and 24 show the Catanese lining the streets and squares to watch the passage of the feretory and the *devoti*, who wear the traditional white votive costumes and are seen while they drag along the feretory. The rich style of the feretory and the bust is reflected in the style of the *candelore*, which start the procession. These large candelabras – which symbolise a gigantic candle – are decorated with scenes of the lives of saints and their martyrdom, with cherubs, flags and flowers (Figure 25).



FESTA DI S. AGATA — CANDELORA.

(Fot. Ursino).

Figure 25. St Agatha's Festival – Candelora.

De Roberto emphasises how the festival is part of the city’s life, religious practice and tradition. It marks the commixture of spectacle and devotion. The festival becomes an urban experience full of colourful images and music, and marks the social habits of the Catanese. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim has stated that ‘Collective beliefs and practices are largely a phenomenon of the past’.⁴⁵⁵ However, the festival was – and still is – part of the city’s life and a sign of devotion, but it also underlines a sense of belonging to the city. In fact, that St Agatha is the religious symbol of the city whereas Bellini is its most illustrious citizen is stressed in the final pictures and final lines of the guidebook.

Bellini’s tomb in Catania Cathedral (Figure 26) is the subject of one of the photos contained in the guidebook. It is not one of the most important or most precious works of art in the cathedral, nonetheless, the writer inserted the photo to foreground in the city’s history one of its most illustrious Catanese.



DUOMO — SEPOLCRO DI VINCENZO BELLINI.

(Fot. Gentile).

Figure 26. Cathedral – Tomb of Bellini.

Finocchiaro Chimirri has stated that Bellini is ‘uno dei due poli verso i quali converge l’appassionata affettività dei catanesi autentici. Se l’Etna è infatti il nume tutelare di tutto il territorio circostante, sui declivi e nella pianeggiante distesa sottostante, Bellini è il laico nume tutelare della città’.⁴⁵⁶ It can be assumed that it is not a coincidence that the final page of De Roberto’s guidebook to Catania celebrates Bellini, together with St Agatha, as

⁴⁵⁵ E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. vii.

⁴⁵⁶ Finocchiaro Chimirri, ‘De Roberto quindicenne testimone belliniano’, in De Roberto, *Scritti sull’Etna*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., p. 92.

a symbol of the city. De Roberto defines Bellini as ‘il gentilissimo Cigno, alla cui memoria essa – Catania – ha meritatamente dedicato ciò che ora ha di più attraente: il grazioso giardino pubblico, il monumento scolpito da Giulio Monteverde, e il teatro dello Scala e del Sada echeggiante di melodie immortali’.⁴⁵⁷

De Roberto’s representation of Catania through the illustrations is developed through the use of three symbols: Etna, St Agatha and Bellini, these are also leitmotifs in De Roberto’s journalistic writings. Etna is the metaphorical link between the old city and the modern city. The volcano has both an active role in changing the cityscape and is a mythical observer of the changes Catania has undergone from ancient past to modern present. Hence, at the end of the nineteenth century Catania’s main street was called via Etnea to pay homage to the volcano. St Agatha also constitutes a religious, folkloristic and anthropological symbol of the city through history. She is the symbol and sign of social integration in the Catanese society and St Agatha’s day is a ‘gran veglione di cui tutta la città è il teatro’.⁴⁵⁸ Lastly, Bellini is the representative of Catanese culture in ‘il secolo agonizzante’, as De Roberto defines the nineteenth century.⁴⁵⁹ Bellini is the symbol the writer chose in order to represent his opinion of *fin de siècle* culture, overpowered by technology.

Scholars have observed that writers would follow the stereotype proposed by De Roberto, although emphasising, for example, that Catania was growing more and more; that it was an important area as regards industry and trade or that it could be compared to Milan.⁴⁶⁰ In brief, the modern city was not part of the image of the cityscape proposed by De Roberto; the urban elements of modernity were not conceived as the new ‘monuments’ that symbolise Catania in the modern era. On the contrary, they were considered as mere ‘mechanical tools’ of a world obsessed with purely profit-based exchanges, which allow the city to work, but which were no longer part of its architectonic framework. It is Etna which remains the symbol of both the ancient and the modern city, together with the city’s patron saint and Bellini. Thus, it seems that De Roberto is not attracted by the modern city and that the final part of the guidebook is a *deprecatio temporum*; and that he prefers to focus his attention on the *antiquaria*.⁴⁶¹ However, if we compare De Roberto’s guidebook

⁴⁵⁷ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 146.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁵⁹ De Roberto, *Il colore del tempo*, pp. 9-25.

⁴⁶⁰ Arcidiacono, ‘Immagini di una città’, in *Immagini di una città*, Arcidiacono and Fabiano, p. 112.

⁴⁶¹ Galvagno and Stazzone, ‘Una Strana Fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto’, in De Roberto, *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, p. xix. Antiquarium, plural form antiquaria, is a Latin word that refers both to those temporary structures which contain archaeological finds so as to allow people to visit the collection before opening a museum and to archaeological museums, which are built close to the area of the findings.

to Catania with the guidebook to Ravenna by Ricci – the editor of the series *Italia Illustrata* De Roberto’s guidebook belongs to – we discover that even Ricci seems to indulge in the remembrance of the classical age: ‘Ravenna felix si legge sopra alcune monete antiche; ma per comprendere quell’inviabile aggettivo, bisogna cercar nella storia il ricordo della perduta grandezza di Ravenna e nei monumenti superstiti le tracce del suo fasto’.⁴⁶² The passage reveals Ricci’s critique of modernity, even though he had a ‘modern’ vision in planning the series of guidebooks. Therefore, what may seem criticism or *deprecatio temporum* reveals the discovery of the tourist side of Italian cities and the arrival of the crowds, which started the age of ‘mass tourism’. It can be stated that both Ricci and De Roberto were not against modernity. They stressed the importance of preserving the artistic side of the city by making economic investments and appropriate political choices. The photographs contained in the guidebook and the various articles De Roberto wrote on Catania’s monuments, symbols and social life prove that he was not against modernity.

4. 4. A stereotype: a city under the volcano

De Roberto’s guidebook to Catania starts with a picture of the city at the foot of Etna. The incipit of the guidebook is dedicated to the volcano and the destruction it had caused to the city throughout the centuries. In order to give his guidebook historical consistency, De Roberto quotes *La Catania Distrutta* (1695) by the Franciscan Domenico Guglielmini, who described the 1693 earthquake as a disaster, which had struck and damaged the ‘città clarissima’ of Catania.⁴⁶³ Guglielmini pointed out that the ‘illustrious city’ was built between the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna: ‘La città di Catania situata vedeasi a i lidi del mar Jonio, tra il mezzogiorno e l’Oriente à piedi del monte Etna’.⁴⁶⁴ This incipit, then, confirms that, for De Roberto, for Italian and foreign travellers over the centuries, Catania is inextricably linked with the volcano. In addition, as the writer comments, it is not clear why people had persisted in rebuilding the city at the foot of a mountain which had destroyed it so many times. De Roberto introduces this subject using a rhetorical question:

Appena ventiquattro anni prima, nel 1669, l’Etna aveva fatto sentir loro in altro modo la sua tremenda potenza, investendo la città dal lato di ponente col

⁴⁶² Ricci, *Ravenna*, p. 9.

⁴⁶³ D. Guglielmini, *La Catania destrutta*, in De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 9.

⁴⁶⁴ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 9.

gran fiume di fuoco sceso dai Monti Rossi, ricoprendone un intero quartiere e colmandone il porto. Dai libri si sapeva che cinque secoli innanzi, il 4 febbraio 1169, un altro terremoto aveva abbattuto Catania, seppellendo sotto le macerie quindicimila dei suoi figli; e che troppe altre volte, nei tempi storici e preistorici, le scosse del suolo e le inondazioni della lava avevano rovinato la disgraziata città. A chi mai era dunque venuto in mente di fabbricarla proprio in quel sito, ai piedi della malferma ‘colonna del cielo’ e sulla stessa officina del Dio del fuoco?...⁴⁶⁵

The reason is that the place and the climate where Catania was founded had so deeply attracted people that they did not care about *fiamme* and *scotimenti*:⁴⁶⁶ the natural position of Catania is thus more important than any risk it involved. The natural beauty and the favourable climate win over earthquakes and fires. Furthermore, De Roberto points out that Etna was the first name of the city and that, later, the Phoenicians called it Katna, meaning a small place,⁴⁶⁷ and it really is, if compared to the volcano, which overlooks the city and is also a source of benefit and misfortune. On the one hand, the volcanic soil is very fertile, on the other hand, the mountain’s violent eruptions have desolated and destroyed a vast part of its territory. Thus, Etna becomes the metaphor of the power of life and death, Eros and Thanatos, and the antithesis of a spirited soul and a snow-covered mantle, as De Roberto wrote later in an article published in *Giornale d’Italia* on 3rd April 1910:

L’antitesi dell’anima di fuoco e dell’ammanto nevoso è la più evidente, ma ve ne sono molte altre, senza contare la leopardiana del fiore del deserto, della soavemente odorante sull’orrore delle lave sulfuree e ferrigne. Questa terra che inghiotte i suoi abitanti è anche la più popolosa: pochi altri luoghi hanno altrettanta densità di popolazione. Questo suolo sul quale la lava distende impenetrabili croste dove non alligna un filo d’erba, è anche uno dei più fertili che si conoscano. La sterilità e lo sterminio vi precedono congiunti alla vita e alla fecondità.⁴⁶⁸

The opposition with which De Roberto has chosen to describe the volcano, as ‘frightening’ and ‘enchanted’,⁴⁶⁹ is the cliché writers have used to describe Catania: a contradictory

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

⁴⁶⁷ The writer does not use the stereotype of beginning his narration with the explanation of the noun of the city; moreover, in other guides it is said that Catania derives from Katana, Kata Etna, that means under Etna. De Roberto refers to this possible explanation at page 26. It is important to underline that De Roberto uses the name Mongibello just once. Mongibello is another way in which Sicilians call Etna, as it is reported by K. Baedeker: ‘les Siciliens l’appellent Mongibello de ‘monte’ et de ‘djébel’, mot arabe qui signifie aussie montagne, où bien il Mont tout court’. In K. Baedeker, *Italie Méridionale: Sicile, Sardaigne et Excursions à Malte, Tunis et Corfou*, p. 342.

⁴⁶⁸ De Roberto, ‘Alle Rabide Sorgenti del Gran Fiume di Fuoco sull’Etna’, *Giornale d’Italia*, 3 April 1910.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibidem.

city, where good and evil coexist.⁴⁷⁰ The article describes Etna as a sublime *lieu* which has damaged and changed its landscapes and that attracts people for its grandeur and majesty. The city is, thus, characterised by a fundamental ambivalence, represented by its volcano. Nature prevails on society in the image De Roberto presents to his readers.

De Roberto had a strong passion for Mount Etna, as is testified by the numerous articles and reportages he dedicated to the volcano and a short collection of poems entitled *Encelado*.⁴⁷¹ The collection, which the writer published at his own expense in 1887, is composed of six sonnets. It has Etna as its main subject and tells the story of the giant Enceladus.⁴⁷² De Roberto's interest in the mount is also shown in his unfinished work *Casa Verga e Altri saggi verghiani*, a book published posthumously in 1964.⁴⁷³ It is a collection of articles on Verga, which De Roberto wrote between 1920 and 1925 for *Il Giornale di Sicilia*, *Illustrazione Italiana* and *Lettere*. The book aims at deconstructing the works of his friend Giovanni Verga in an effort to comprehend both the man and the writer.⁴⁷⁴

In the chapter '*Storia della "Storia di una Capinera"*' De Roberto reports Verga's experience of Etna and its role in his novel, *Storia di una Capinera*, written in Florence. Verga had moved to Florence in 1865. The Tuscan city was at the time a lively, cultural attraction for the young, post-Unitarian Italian generation. De Roberto notes that Florence was 'la metropoli dell'Italia risorta, il cuore della giovane nazione, il centro d'attrazione di tutte le forze vive della nazione'.⁴⁷⁵ However, Verga's stay in Florence transformed the writer's attitude towards Etna: the volcano became a mythological and legendary place. In '*Storia della "Storia di una Capinera"*' De Roberto emphasises the powerful symbolic meaning Etna had for Verga: 'Da lontano, agli occhi del cuore, quel paesaggio arso dal

⁴⁷⁰ The famous archaeologist Holm started his book on old Catania stating that it is almost impossible to write the history of Catania, which, he underlines, is the story of Sicily, without taking into account the influence Etna has on the city. See, Holm, *Catania antica*, p. 1.

⁴⁷¹ De Roberto, *Encelado* (Catania: Crescenzo Galàtola, 1887). Later, the writer published the six sonnets in an appendix to his novel *Ermanno Raelli*, (calling them: 'una ghirlandetta di sei sonetti intitolati da Encelado'); see De Roberto, *Ermanno Raelli. Nuova edizione riveduta con l'aggiunta di un avvertimento e di un'appendice* (Milan-Rome: Edizioni Mondadori, 1923), pp. 304-307. On this topic see F. Branciforti, 'Alcune annotazioni in margine a Encelado di Federico De Roberto', in *Siculorum Gymnasium*, Rassegna della facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Catania, January-December 1995, N° XLVIII, pp. 39-45.

⁴⁷² In Greek mythology Enceladus was one of the Giants, son of Gaia and Uranus. During the Gigantomachy, the battle the Giants fought against the Olympian gods, he was wounded by Athena and buried in Sicily under Etna. The volcanic fires of Etna were said to be the breath of Enceladus, and its tremors to be caused by him rolling his injured side beneath the mountain. Among the various sources, see Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated into English verse by J. Rhoades, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1893), Book III, vv. 568-590, p. 96.

⁴⁷³ De Roberto, *Casa Verga e altri saggi verghiani*, C. Musumarra, ed., (Florence: Le Monnier, 1964).

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., '*Storia della "Storia di una Capinera"*', pp. 135-179.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

fuoco del monte e del sole, quei caratteri tonanti e fiammeggianti nei primi secoli del mondo, ora ammantati di boschi e di vigneti, [...] acquistò un fascino possente'.⁴⁷⁶ De Roberto underlines how important Etna was to Verga's work as a writer, but also the fact that living far from his homeland had 'transfigured' the terrific and menacing power of the volcano into a place of remembrance, a charming place to think of with nostalgia and emotion.⁴⁷⁷ Mythology and legend characterise the volcano both in Verga and De Roberto.

The relevance of the volcano in the guidebook is even more important to us if we take into consideration the switch of focus from *I Viceré*, where the power of Mount Etna appeared only once in the story. Etna is mentioned as a place to holiday during the summer and with reference to the foundation of the Benedictine abbey:

Nel primo principio non si sapeva bene chi lo avesse fondato, ma il 1136 certi santi Padri Benedettini s'erano ritirati, per meditare e far penitenza, nei boschi dell'Etna e lì, coll'aiuto del conte Errico, avevano eretto il primo convento di San Leo. San Leo era uno dei tanti crateri spenti del Mongibello, tutto coperto di boschi e sei mesi all'anno ammantato di neve; una vera solitudine adatta al santo scopo. [...] A San Leo, intanto, oltre il freddo c'era un altro spavento, quando la montagna s'apriva, vomitando fuoco e cenere ardente: i terremoti sconquassavano la fabbrica, la lava distruggeva gli alberi e disseccava le cisterne, la cenere infocata bruciava ogni verdura.⁴⁷⁸

Whereas in the novel De Roberto is interested in the mountain from the point of view of human society, in the guidebook he focuses on the power of nature rather than on its effect. In the novel the prevailing feeling is fear; in contrast, in the guidebook it is fascination. However, in De Roberto's account Etna is not merely a mountain which dominates the city, nor is it simply a destructive force, it is primarily the symbol of Catania's identity. Earthquakes, eruptions and lapilli are part of Catania's cityscape, whose *imago urbis* is indissolubly linked to the volcano and its *sciara*.⁴⁷⁹ As De Roberto writes in the final page of his guidebook, the position of Catania at the foot of Etna gives the city fame and prosperity. Catania is then a product of Etna, which is still a menace to, and an enemy of,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁷⁷ However, other critics have stated that in Verga's works the volcano is used as a conventional setting for his stories, from *Carbonari della montagna* to *Storia di una Capinera* and *Nedda*; or as a place which is linked to personal experience of riding through its woods. Although Verga knew the mountain and its surroundings quite well, his descriptions are generic. They lack, in other words, emotional attitudes which, by contrast, characterise De Roberto's accounts. See Finocchiaro Chimirri, 'Introduzione', in De Roberto, *Scritti sull'Etna*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., pp. 11-44.

⁴⁷⁸ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, pp. 184-185.

⁴⁷⁹ *Sciara* is the Sicilian word for lava. See De Roberto, 'Il Congresso Alpino', *Il Fanfulla*, 23 September 1880.

the city. Nonetheless, as the writer underlines, the volcano is the real source of Catania's transformation and prestige. For this reason, it can be inferred that, in De Roberto's mind, it is not the urban space which gives Catania its identity but, rather, Mount Etna, which is the singularity of the city:

E l'Etna è la nota dominante, il motivo fondamentale, così nelle storie della città come nei quadri che la rappresentano. In nessun punto del suo enorme perimetro di centocinquanta chilometri la montagna ha un profilo così puro, da fumante piramide, come da Catania. E come da Catania, essa forma la prosperità di un gran numero di altri minori città e borghi e casali disseminati alle sue falde.⁴⁸⁰

De Roberto points out that Catania and Etna are indissolubly related to each other: it is the volcano that marks the urban identity of Catania.⁴⁸¹ Although the flamboyant Baroque forms and ornaments, grotesque masks and putti, together with the volcanic lava stone, create chiaroscuro effects that enrich and characterise the new streets and squares of the rebuilt city, celebrating life and exorcising death, De Roberto does not want to define the 'character' of new Catania as a city related to the Baroque, preferring, on the contrary, to focus his attention on Mount Etna,⁴⁸² the cause not the effect. The *explicit* of the guidebook is, then, dedicated to Etna. In describing his city De Roberto insists on the leitmotif of loss and destruction, and as if Catania were an Arabian Phoenix, the symbol of rebirth, immortality and renewal. The volcano is chosen as the symbol of Catania and as the distinctive element which gives the city its new identity as a *città rinata*. Thus, Etna is not simply the background to the cityscape of Catania, but it is an integral part of both the ancient city and the modern city. It is an eternal symbol that marks the history and the account of Catania.

⁴⁸⁰ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 144.

⁴⁸¹ For a study of the way in which the volcano is part of the identity of Catania see Iachello, 'Urban Views of Catania From the Foothills of the Volcano', in *Il Mediterraneo delle città*, Iachello and Militello, eds, pp. 179-192.

⁴⁸² Pagnano, 'La Costruzione dell'identità di Catania dal secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, p. 213.

4. 5. History and change: the guidebook and *I Viceré*

After the short introduction to Mount Etna, which is one of the three symbols I have identified as the three ‘archetypes’ De Roberto used to give Catania its urban identity, the first and the second parts of the guidebook are dedicated to the origins of the city and its history during the Greek and the Roman periods; the third and the fourth parts deal with Catania during the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance; the fifth focuses on the Baroque revival of the city; and the final part is related to the modern city at the turn of the century.

In the short introduction and in the first chapter of the guidebook De Roberto recounts the history of the origins of the city. The historical narrative account of the foundation of Catania is told using mythological, literary and historical sources. De Roberto refers to the legend of the Cyclops and that of the Laestrygonians, as narrated in *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides; to the verses of Dante, who refers to Sicily as Trinacria; and to Paul Bourget, who describes Catania as ‘*sombre*’.⁴⁸³ De Roberto’s scientific and poetic narrative accounts are quite often intertwined.⁴⁸⁴ The writer recalls that the Franciscan Gugliemini had defined Catania ‘*clarissima*’.⁴⁸⁵ ‘*Clarissimo*’ is the superlative of the Latin adjective ‘*clarus*’, which means famous, renowned and clear. Catania is represented both as a ‘bright’, inviting city and as a ‘sombre’ city. It is worth underlining that, after the 1693 earthquake, the architect Vaccarini chose grey and white as the colours to use in rebuilding Catania during the Baroque age. This light and dark, which characterises many of the buildings of the period, might symbolise the dominance of Etna and its strong power over life and death.

Thus, in his first description of Catania, De Roberto highlights the fact that Catania is a city which had undergone very significant changes, both human – invasions, wars, political and economic dominations – and natural – earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The description of Catania follows a dichotomic pattern: on the one hand, the writer focuses his attention on *Catania destrutta*; on the other hand, on *Catania restaurata*, highlighting the positive attitude of the Catanese, who had rebuilt the city over the centuries. The writer states that it is very difficult to understand how beautiful and magnificent the city was over the Greco-Roman age, firstly, because many important

⁴⁸³ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 22.

⁴⁸⁴ Galvagno and Stazzone, ‘Una strana fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto’, in De Roberto, *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, p. iv.

⁴⁸⁵ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 9.

literary and artistic testimonies of the old city had been lost; secondly, because cataclysms and acts of vandalism had almost erased its remains:

A poco a poco, nel corso dei secoli, la città aveva perduto l'importanza e la prosperità godute durante l'epoca greca e la romana, quando scrittori come Tucidide, Pindaro e Cicerone ne lodavano la grandezza e la bellezza. Non era stata menzionata da Ausonio insieme con Siracusa, allorchè quest'ultima gareggiava con Atene? Ma gli stessi documenti della prisca gloria, i sontuosi monumenti che l'avevano un tempo decorata, si disperdevano per le concomitanti ingiurie del vulcano e degli uomini; oggi, dopo tanti cataclismi e vandalismi, ne resta poco più che il ricordo.⁴⁸⁶

Unfortunately, as De Roberto reports, the monuments of past splendour had disappeared under seas of lava. Furthermore, the Catanese negligence in preserving the testimonies of their city's past grandeur and the violence of Etna had almost erased the evidence of a city which was praised by both Greek and Latin writers. The reference to Thucydides, Pindar, Cicero and Ausonius highlights the importance of the city in ancient times and introduces the second chapter in which De Roberto points out the passage from pagan city, which was full of sumptuous temples, to Christian city and the Christianisation of sites that had been pagan: 'A tutti i Numi dell'Olimpo sorsero qui tempi sontuosi, e ad uno ad uno furono sostituiti – vecchia storia – da altrettante chiese cristiane.'⁴⁸⁷ In chapter II, in order to keep the memory of the past splendour of the city alive, De Roberto explains that the city boasted numerous sumptuous pagan temples.

The reader of the guidebook discovers that the 'pagan' city was incorporated and almost erased by, the rise of Christianity, when churches replaced the magnificent temples, which he estimates numbered around thirteen. The classical city, whose monuments De Roberto declares 'offesi dal tempo, dalla natura e dagli uomini'⁴⁸⁸ – a leitmotiv which marks the narration along with the cliché of death and rebirth – was embellished with the Foro, the Basil, the Erario and the Zecca, not to mention the Ippodromo, the Ginnasio and the Naumachia, buildings and monuments which reveal how important the city was, and which had been described in the works of Cicero, Vitruvius and Bolano.⁴⁸⁹ De Roberto was enchanted by the classical city. His enthusiasm is plain when he talks about the Terme della Rotonda and the Terme Achillee; the Greco-Roman theatre and the annexed Odèon; and when he describes the ongoing archaeological excavations of the Roman Amphitheatre

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibidem.

in Piazza Stesicorea. The importance of the city in the classical age, De Roberto muses, is not just demonstrated in its grandeur:

Ma più che dai ruderi di questo e degli altri maestosi edificii dei quali si è ragionato, il grado di floridezza e di civiltà di Katana si desume da più piccole, da veramente minuscole opere d'arte: le monete che vi furono battute.⁴⁹⁰

In De Roberto's description the classical city was rich in art and culture. However, the writer denounces the deterioration and the damage caused by both earthquakes and vandals, and hopes for the intervention of restorers. De Roberto gives an example of how the classical buildings had been marked by time and people, when he offers this account of the state of the Odèon:

L'edifizio, pertanto, appena si riconosce: mutilato, squarciato, convertito nelle parti ancora resistenti in abitazione di umile gente, con gli archi dei cunei trasformati in orribili terrazzini ed in luride stamberghe.⁴⁹¹

De Roberto points out the poor condition of the Greco-Roman ruins using two strong adjectives, *mutilato* and *squarciato*. The metaphor reminds the reader of soldiers wounded after a terrible battle, encouraging the idea that archaeological remains should be considered 'vital parts' of the city. To add insult to injury, the place had been transformed into horrible hovels, once again, highlighting the negligence and disorganisation of the local administration, but also revealing the unhealthy conditions of the poor during the twentieth century. Even in his guidebook to Catania De Roberto reveals his pessimistic point of view. It seems as if the writer's disillusionment and *Weltanschauung* had not changed over the many years after the publication of his novel. Nevertheless, the guidebook dedicated to Catania shows a city which is characterised by beauty and by a modern, urban decor. The city is no longer a murky setting for the adventures and intrigues of an aristocratic Sicilian family, but a precious place mounted by the menacing beauty Etna.

After the presentation of the relevance of the Greco-Roman city, the narrative account continues with the description of the most important buildings that characterise

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 47. He refers to the Baron of Floristella's collection. De Roberto states that the most important coin is that which dates back to when the city was called Etna: 'nell'iscrizione infatti, invece che KATANAION si legge AITNAION'. Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p.45.

Catania: Castello Ursino, the city walls built by Charles V, the Norman Apses, the Museo Biscari and the Baroque churches, which are selected as symbols of the city. The guidebook presents a description of the city which is far removed from the account the writer gave in *I Viceré*. If in the novel Catania appears to be a dreary and asphyctic place, characterised by a grim urban setting, the city in the guidebook appears to be a convivial, exclusive place.

Having described the Greco-Roman and the Medieval ages in chapters two, three and four of his guidebook, in the penultimate chapter De Roberto's focus is on Baroque Catania:

Barocche sono tutte le chiese, fra le quali particolarmente notevoli la Collegiata, regia cappella degli Aragonesi, l'aquila dei quali spiega ancora le ali sulla facciata ricca di colonne, di statue e di ornati; la Badia di S. Agata, con le finestre difese da grate panciute e traforate; la chiesa dei Crociferi, esempio di architettura gesuitica; quella di S. Placido, e via dicendo.⁴⁹²

De Roberto identifies the Swabian Castle as one of the few structures of the old city to survive the earthquake of 1693 that marked the destruction and the rebirth of Catania. The city was later rebuilt under the influence of Baroque architecture. In order to describe Baroque buildings De Roberto uses definitions such as '*d'enfasi meridionale*' and '*spagnolismo*' in a critical sense. De Roberto's criticism of the Baroque style is also confirmed by the reference to only one of the works architect Vaccarini, La Badia di Sant'Agata; and two of architect Ittar, the churches La Collegiata and San Placido.⁴⁹³

Pagnano has underlined De Roberto's negative attitude towards the Baroque style. The scholar has pointed out that the two 'negative' expressions were used some twenty years later by architect Francesco Fichera, who wrote in 1925 a panegyric of Baroque in Catania.⁴⁹⁴ Fichera emphasised the importance of the Baroque as a period which gave Catania its status as a modern city, so, he used '*d'enfasi meridionale*', and '*spagnuola*' with a positive connotation: 'Quest'arte, – che aveva preso l'universo estendendo i suoi confini dove nessun'altra era mai giunta, associando e confondendo elementi da altre lasciate in disparte, – fioriva anche in Catania, nutrita dell'enfasi meridionale, aiutata dalla sfarzosa dominazione spagnuola, esaltata dal fasto col quale il culto cercava di abbagliare,

⁴⁹² De Roberto, *Catania*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁹³ Galvagno and Stazzone point out that the guidebook to Catania demonstrates that De Roberto's main focus is on the seventeenth century city, as he did not like the modern city; Galvagno and Stazzone, 'Una Strana Fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto', in De Roberto, *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, pp. xix-xx.

⁴⁹⁴ Fichera, *Una città settecentesca*, p. 15.

prima di soggiogarla, l'anima del popolo'.⁴⁹⁵ Fichera was an architect and his appreciation was based on aesthetic criteria; De Roberto's was political. The reason De Roberto became an outspoken critic of the Baroque style was that it was the product of the Spanish domination. The writer underlines that, during the Spanish dominium, even the land was and Catania lost its prestige:

Nella storia delle arti del disegno, ed anche in quella delle lettere e delle scienze, Catania tenne, durante l'età più vicina alla nostra, un posto troppo mediocre. Neanche nella restante Sicilia la vivacità dell'ingegno isolano poté, per colpa della secolare oppressione spagnuola e borbonica, esser fecondata. Le stesse ricchezze naturali della terra non poterono fruttificare. Catania, che era una cittaduzza di quattordicimila abitanti nel 1501, mise tre secoli a crescere fino a cinquantamila; ma in questi ultimi sessanta anni, con uno slancio paragonabile solo a quello di Milano, ha più che triplicato la sua popolazione.⁴⁹⁶

Spanish control marked the beginning of economic and social decline. The Sicilian intelligentsia could do nothing to contrast the impoverishment and stagnancy of the Bourbon dominion. De Roberto emphasises that it was only during the mid-nineteenth century that Catania found the economic strength through investment and political support for sustained improvements to oppose the inertia of Spanish political system. Hence, after three centuries, Catania, 'con uno slancio paragonabile solo a quello di Milano, ha più che triplicato la sua popolazione'. It was in the nineteenth century that Catania was destined to grow with its 'commerci e le industrie.'⁴⁹⁷

The fact that De Roberto did not eulogise the Baroque city, but praised the Prince of Biscari's palazzo and the annexed museum, confirms De Roberto's condemnation of those political forces whose aim was to pursue their personal interests under the mantle of democracy. Alongside an 'appalling' aristocracy, there was an enlightened aristocracy, which was able to promote a positive image of the city which countered that of a Baroque Catania, metaphor of a city which was able to hide both political interests and social dominance – a 'whited sepulchre'. This issue was highlighted by De Roberto in *I Viceré* when he described the beauty and importance of the Baroque monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena and St Agatha's day in association to Consalvo, who uses both the festival and the

⁴⁹⁵ Pagnano, 'La costruzione dell'identità di Catania dal secolo XVI al XX', in *Catania. La città, la sua storia*, Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds, pp. 181-240.

⁴⁹⁶ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 144.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

monastery in order to achieve his political aims. Consalvo's leadership is the symbol of the eternal victory of the strong over the weak and the unchanging rules which govern history.

In the guidebook to Catania the Benedictine monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena, which was stage centre in *I Viceré*, is praised for being one the most beautiful buildings in the city. De Roberto gives a brief account of the history of the monastery and the many pictures he inserts reveal its beauty and magnificence; it is defined as a unique monument of the city. Unfortunately, as he had pointed out in the novel, after the monastery had become a possession of Catania city council in 1866, its condition had deteriorated. The following passage of the guidebook echoes Consalvo's thoughts on noticing the decay of the abbey, and his resolution to start the Uzeda family political and social rise from there:

Questo è, o per meglio dire era prima della soppressione, una singolarità di Catania: andati via i Padri per dar luogo ai soldati ed agli studenti, i lunghi corridoi furono divisi e suddivisi, il più antico ed elegante chiostro fu trasformato in palestra ginnica, una strada fu aperta nei terreni che lo circondavano, un osservatorio ed un ospedale furono eretti nei suoi giardini.⁴⁹⁸

The writer, once more, expresses his great displeasure at the bad condition of the monastery. The act promulgated in 1866, which gave the religious estates to Italian city councils, was a complete disaster. From then on the magnificence and grandeur of the monastery vanished and its decline started. De Roberto highlights the work and effort of the Benedictines, who had organised a museum where Francesco Di Bartolo became curator after 1866. The museum, as the writer reports, contained 'parte dei marmi, dei vasi, delle lapidi, dei mosaici trovati negli scavi cittadini'.⁴⁹⁹ The Benedictines, who are described in the novel as devoted to the art of *Michelasso*, that is to say eating, drinking and going for walks,⁵⁰⁰ are now praised for their collection and holy paraphernalia; their library, which contained codex of great value; the enormous church, with the famous organ by Donato del Piano, the sundial and the choir. In this part of the guidebook, De Roberto draws a map of the city which is still linked to the world of the Uzeda family, as though he was endeavouring to represent a city still related to the seventeenth-century rather than to Baroque Catania.⁵⁰¹ As a matter of fact, the monastery was transformed to adapt it to the

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

⁵⁰⁰ De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 189.

⁵⁰¹ Galvagno and Stazzone, 'Una Strana Fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto', in De Roberto, *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, p. xv.

needs of Catania city council.⁵⁰² It was this transformation that, in *I Vicerè*, spurs Consalvo Uzeda to begin to move with the times: he decides to use the monastery for his electoral campaign and, having shown off his power in this way, he then uses St Agatha's festival to gain the approval of the Catanese. De Roberto reports that Consalvo does not seem to be interested in the religious aspects of the feast, but rather in its social relevance since 'imbandierando e illuminando la sua casa per tutte le feste costituzionali e democratiche, pareva non accorgersi delle solennità religiose, della festa di Sant'Agata specialmente'.⁵⁰³ In the novel, then, the feast is an important event which Consalvo uses for his own political purposes, for this reason 'Per la festa i suoi balconi furono illuminati a giorno'.⁵⁰⁴

De Roberto describes the festival, both in his novel and in his guidebook, as a moment in which the city celebrates its patron saint, but also as an event which represents a collective rite of self-celebration. Even today, the festivals of St Agatha, in February and August, are the main attraction for believers, who attend to pay homage to the saint, and tourists, who can discover one of the most folkloristic and religious events Sicily can offer (together with the *festino* for Santa Rosalia in Palermo). The festival takes place annually from 3rd to 5th February and on 17th August. The earlier dates commemorate the martyrdom of the Catanese saint, whereas the late date celebrates the return to Catania of her remains, after these had been transferred to Constantinople by the Byzantine general George Maniaces as war booty.

The festival is the subject of the third chapter of the guidebook. St Agatha is described as the religious and artistic protagonist of the city; she is also an emblematic figure who marks the passage of Catania from a pagan to a Christian city.⁵⁰⁵ The account De Roberto gives of the legend of the martyr and the history of her simulacrum are narrated through a series of erudite reports, hagiographic data and literary references, such as those to the work of Alexandre Dumas and Verga.⁵⁰⁶ In addition, De Roberto establishes

⁵⁰² De Roberto complains about the act which had allowed city councils to use historic buildings as barracks. This had happened to the Benedictine monastery. It was a national problem, as reported in an article he published in 1927, almost thirty-three years after the first denouncement in his *Vicerè*: 'Come Catania molte altre città italiane hanno lungamente sofferto che i loro luoghi forti, eretti per ordine di Principi illustri e per mano di artefici insigni, fossero offesi dal tempo, dal disuso e dal cattivo uso. L'esercito è bensì il fiore della nazione; ma la più gran parte dei soldati non sono educati al rispetto per le cose d'arte [...]'. De Roberto, 'Il Castello Ursino', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 8 May 1927.

⁵⁰³ De Roberto, *I Vicerè*, pp. 557-558.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

⁵⁰⁵ Galvagno and Stazzone, 'Una Strana Fenice. La Catania di Federico De Roberto', in De Roberto, *Catania*, Galvagno and Stazzone, eds, pp. vii-viii.

⁵⁰⁶ A. Dumas, *Le spéronare* (Paris, 1842). The reference to Dumas is really important as the French writer points out the importance and beauty of some sculptures of the Choir of Catania Cathedral. De Roberto quotes Verga's short novel *La coda del diavolo* in which Verga wrote that 'A Catania la quaresima vien senza carnevale; ma c'è in compenso la festa di S. Agata, gran veglione di cui tutta la città è il teatro'. See

a relationship between St Agatha and Vincenzo Bellini, not only as two distinctive symbols of the city, but also as protectors of Catania. It is not by chance that the mortal remains of the Saint – the religious symbol of the city – and those of Bellini – the artistic symbol of the city – are kept in the Cathedral.

In the guidebook to Catania Agatha's life and persecution by Quinziano, a Roman proconsul, are recounted. Then De Roberto describes the churches in Catania where the Saint is worshipped, from the Church of Sant'Agata la Vetere, to the church of Santo Carcere and the Cathedral, which were damaged and almost destroyed by the earthquake in 1693. With the description of the cathedral De Roberto seizes the opportunity to praise Vincenzo Bellini. Bellini died in Paris in 1837 and his body, after being buried for about forty years in the Parisian cemetery Père Lachaise, was transferred to a tomb within the Cathedral. De Roberto asserts that Bellini is 'il maggior catanese dei tempi moderni' and that he really deserves, because of his artistic sensibility and universal fame, to rest close to St Agatha, his most famous fellow citizen.⁵⁰⁷ The festival starts on 3rd February when the lay and religious confraternities move from Calcarella church, carrying candles in homage to the Saint, to the Cathedral.⁵⁰⁸ The procession deserves De Roberto's detailed description:

In coda al corteo, vistoso per le variopinte tonache e cotte dei seminaristi, dei preti, dei frati, dei canonici, dei vescovi, dei caudatarii, vengono le candelore, forse così chiamate dalla festa della Candelora celebratasi il giorno prima: pesanti macchine scolpite e dorate, colossali candelabri infiorati ed imbandierati, dove sono confitti gli enormi ceri offerti dalle varie corporazioni operaie. La sera di quello stesso giorno, schiere di devoti accompagnate da altrettante musiche scendono dai vari quartieri della città in piazza del Duomo; dove, dopo un'orgia di fuochi artificiali, cantano le laudi alla Santa, e donde muovono poi a ripetere i cantici dinanzi alle case dei più ragguardevoli cittadini.⁵⁰⁹

As De Roberto highlights, all the city is involved in the event: noble families attend the festival from the balconies of their palazzos and the *devoti* – dressed in white tunics, gloves and a black hat – drag a heavy float containing the relics in procession through the streets of Catania. The crowd is the protagonist of the festival, which is a mixture of the sacred and the profane:

'La coda del diavolo' in G. Verga, *Tutte le novelle*, C. Riccardi, ed., (Milan: Mondadori, 1981), vol. I, pp. 43-55.

⁵⁰⁷ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 70.

⁵⁰⁸ De Roberto refers to the church of St Biagio, also called Sant'Agata alla Fornace.

⁵⁰⁹ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 88.

Una folla di devoti insaccati in grandi tuniche bianche e col capo coperto da un berretto di velluto nero, trascina la Bara preceduta dalle candelore per la cerchia delle antiche mura, troppo poca parte delle quali è ancora visibile qua e là, alla Marina, al Santo Carcere e in via del Plebiscito.⁵¹⁰

Devoti is the name given to those who carry the statue of the saint and her relics and *candelora* is the name given to enormous, decorated structures. *Candelore* represent a huge candle that each Catanese guild walks in procession during the festival as a sign of their devotion. The social side of the festival is highlighted when the writer refers of '*ntuppatedda*, an outdated habit. '*Ntuppatedda*, which means 'covered', refers to the way in which Catanese ladies used to walk in the street during the festival. Wearing big black cloaks and hiding their faces in them, they used to stop relatives and friends to choose a gentleman who had to please their desires and whims without talking, as Verga narrates in his short novel *La coda del diavolo*.⁵¹¹ De Roberto points out that St Agatha's Day is a religious festival, but also a social moment, since almost everybody is involved in the event. Whether they like it or not the urban space is characterised by the presence of *devoti* (the crowd), the *candelore* (a religious symbol), music, fireworks and lights (social aggregation symbols).

De Roberto's description of the festival emphasises the importance of a religious practice that is part of the urban life. A Christian celebration is transformed into the celebration of the city and society. In *I Viceré*, the religious moment is used to highlight the 'boorish' behaviour of the aristocracy, which is convinced that their power is immortal. At the end of the novel Consalvo states that 'Le condizioni esteriori mutano; certo, tra la Sicilia di prima del Sessanta, ancora quasi feudale, e questa d'oggi pare ci sia un abisso; ma la differenza è tutta esteriore'.⁵¹² Consalvo's behaviour – symbol of greed – and his use of the urban space of Catania, which attests to his antidemocratic attitude, is representative of a provincial aristocracy that subjected urban space and the crowds to their power. On the contrary, the pages De Roberto dedicated to Ignazio Paternò Castello, Prince of Biscari, demonstrate the positive work of an aristocratic community, which tried to make Catania a modern European city. The analysis of the novel *I Viceré* and the guidebook to Catania has

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 89. The walls De Roberto refers to are those which Charles V, ruler of the Spanish Empire (1516-1556) erected to protect the city.

⁵¹¹ It is worth underlining that Verga points out that this habit refers back to the Saracens' dominance of Sicily. Baedeker states that during St Agatha's day 'les femmes s'attachent leurs mantes devant la figure de manière à ne laisser qu'en oeil découvert, pour s'amuser au dépens des homes et les ingriquer'. Baedeker, *Italie Méridionale: Sicile, Sardaigne et excursions à Malte, Tunis et Corfou*, p. 338.

⁵¹² De Roberto, *I Viceré*, p. 697.

shown the way in which De Roberto used the urban space of his city: in the novel space has a metaphorical meaning in order to address a political issue, whereas the guidebook reveals that the author described both the modern and the old city. With his novel, *I Viceré*, De Roberto denounced the failure of Italian unification and deplored the Sicilian aristocracy, which was able to ‘transform’ itself so as to adapt to the new post-unitarian political climate. Urban space, then, is used in order to express a political issue. For such reasons, Catania is a symbolic space which represents both De Roberto’s anti-historic perspective and the failure of nineteenth-century Sicilian bourgeoisie. Catania is a metaphor of political hegemony and the appropriation of urban areas; and the crowd, which has a fundamental role in the description of the city in De Roberto’s novel, guidebook and articles, is the symbol of Catanese immobility.

The city in the guidebook, written in 1907, points out how Catania is a combination of the past and modernity, although the historical and artistic narrative account prevails over the description of the modern city. It is in the illustrations contained in the guidebook that Catania as a modern city is shown, so that workers, the crowds and festivals reveal an active, lively, modern city. The erudite account of the historic and artistic side of the city prevails over a description of the modern, tourist Catania, in the literary aspect of the guidebook. In contrast, the photographs inserted in the guidebook demonstrate, firstly, the importance of photography as a modern means of communication; secondly, that not only do the images proposed by De Roberto focus on the old city, but also also the three symbols – Etna, Bellini and St Agatha – which are a leitmotif in De Roberto’s description of Catania. An analysis of the city ‘illustrated’ through photography shows that Catania is modern because it is characterised by a modern urban decor, the presence of the crowd and an active city life. Catania is, then, a city that bears the marks of both the past and modernity. The articles I discuss in the following chapter will confirm De Roberto’s positive attitude towards modernity.

Chapter 5 Decadence and rebirth

5. 1. Catania between the Past and Modernity, De Roberto's 1927 articles

In 1927 De Roberto published in the local paper *Giornale dell'Isola* six articles dealing with the artistic heritage of Catania. These articles can be considered, firstly, the confirmation of De Roberto's love for Catania and of his battle to gain respect and international recognition for his city; secondly, proof that De Roberto had a keen interest in local history, arts and photography; thirdly, the articles demonstrate that Catania showed both signs of the past and modernity; finally, that De Roberto's last journalistic production was an exhortation to political forces to intervene in order to safeguard the historical and artistic patrimony of Catania: the city as a *lieu de mémoire*.

These six articles – which might be considered as the six chapters of a report on Catania – were published under the title 'Il patrimonio artistico di Catania' from May to June, a month before De Roberto's death.⁵¹³ These articles were published on the fifth page of the newspaper, in a four-column layout, with some photographs, which recall the guide to Catania and De Roberto's passion for photography. The photographs and the article are strictly linked as their aim is that of reporting the condition of Catania's heritage and the ways in which it could be improved, re-evaluated and enhanced, as is stated in the introduction to the first article, which appeared on 1st May 1927:

L'On. Carlo Carnazza, nella sua qualità di Prosindaco di Catania, volendo provvedere con geniale, patriottica iniziativa, al Patrimonio artistico della città, troppo a lungo trascurato, invitò nello scorso anno l'illustre Federico De Roberto a compilare una relazione intorno allo stato di esso patrimonio ed ai provvedimenti necessari per accrescerlo, ordinarlo e rivalutarlo. Siamo ora lieti di iniziare la pubblicazione, a puntate, di questo rapporto che è un interessantissimo documento d'arte, di letteratura e di sentimento patrio e il cui autore, gloria fulgida di Catania e d'Italia, siamo da oggi fieri di annoverare fra i nostri collaboratori ordinarii.⁵¹⁴

This introduction was written by Carnazza, deputy mayor of Catania at the time of writing, who had invited De Roberto to report on Catania's artistic heritage. De Roberto, who was

⁵¹³ There are no studies on these articles apart from the introduction Stazzone wrote in 2009 when De Roberto's six articles were published for the first time; see Stazzone, 'Presentazione', in De Roberto, *Il patrimonio artistico di Catania*, Stazzone, ed., pp. ix-xliv.

⁵¹⁴ De Roberto, 'Il Museo Biscari', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 1 May 1927.

at the time a member of Catania's Department of National Heritage, had already denounced the effect of urban decay on the buildings, and the poor condition of the archaeological sites, in a report published in 1926. For this reason, the articles took inspiration from the account De Roberto had written the previous year.⁵¹⁵

At the time De Roberto was sixty-six, and was a famous writer. He had already published several articles on Catania, had been consultant to the International Exhibition catalogue, and author of the guidebook to Catania. He had studied and discussed the city's artistic heritage, and these final articles are not a mere literary pretext to show how deep and vast his cultural knowledge was; nor are they the work of an venerable writer who gives his opinion from his ivory tower, remembering and contemplating the past. On the contrary, they are the demonstration of De Roberto's interest in the contemporary city's art and culture. He discussed Catania's artistic heritage with a modern approach, by focusing on the importance of the city's historical heritage in order to prevent the past undergoing a *damnatio memoriae*, and addressing the close relationship between national political power, local power and the citizenry. His very strong criticism is directed at political power and his exhortation to preserve both the Catanese historical memory and the local artistic monuments is very convincing.

De Roberto did not simply denounce the bad conditions of the most important buildings of the city, but made concrete proposals about how to solve the problems that the symbols of Catania were suffering from, in order to give his city the opportunity to revive the glory of its past in modern times. Since the task was to highlight the importance of the Catanese historical patrimony, De Roberto's use of literary language is completely different to that used in his other works. The style he used in the 1880s articles is, for example, 'vivace e colorito',⁵¹⁶ and the particular strength of *I Viceré* 'comes from the ironic and expressionistic power of De Roberto's language',⁵¹⁷ whereas the style used in his guidebook to Catania is elegant and refined and shows a scholar perfectly capable of representing the aesthetic culture of his own time. In the six articles on *il patrimonio artistico di Catania* language is precise and clear, and De Roberto uses neither irony nor satirical representation of events, as he had done in his early articles and in *I Viceré*. It is important to note that the crowd is at the core of De Roberto's early articles and novel: in his articles of 1880s the crowd, part of city life, is the symbol of modernity and in *I Viceré*

⁵¹⁵ Catalano, 'Dalla cronaca ai Viceré', *La Sicilia*, 23 July 1983.

⁵¹⁶ Finocchiaro Chimirri, in De Roberto, *Cronache per Il Fanfulla*, Finocchiaro Chimirri, ed., p. 16.

⁵¹⁷ A. Nigro, 'I Viceré: The Novel and Faenza's Screenplay', in *The Risorgimento of Federico De Roberto*, Dashwood and Ganeri, eds, p. 255.

it is the symbol of Catanese immobility. In his last works, however, De Roberto did not report on city life or social events. His focus is on the bad condition of the city's monuments and buildings. Yet, they highlight the importance of Catanese historic and artistic heritage as a tourist attraction and bear witness to the strong and lasting relationship the writer had with Catania and its cultural patrimony.

The first article on the artistic heritage of Catania, published May 1st 1927, deals with the Museo Biscari, whose collection was praised in the guidebook to Catania and in the article written in 1881, previously discussed. The article highlights a problem the city continued (and continues) to have, *id est* that of being a city surrounded by many archaeological sites, such as those of Syracuse and Taormina, not to mention the magnificent natural beauty of Etna, with the consequence that tourists do not stay long in Catania, preferring to move on and visit other places. Its question is: what can be done to attract tourists to the city?

Ora, è possibile fare in modo che passando dalla città di Timeo a quella di Epicuro i forestieri amanti delle cose grandi e belle siano moralmente costretti a sostare per qualche giorno sotto il cielo che risuonò della gloria di Stesicoro? Questo risultato si può conseguire, ed è tale che le fatiche o le spese alle quali bisognerà andare incontro saranno ampiamente remuneratrici di nobilissimo vanto e di concreto vantaggio.⁵¹⁸

De Roberto's rhetorical question underlines how vast Sicilian heritage is. Taking issue with the Baedeker guidebook, which offered a very short description of Catania and invited travellers to spend no more than two or three days – too short a period in De Roberto's opinion – in visiting the city and then move on to Taormina, the writer stresses the importance of making Catania a crucial place, and the symbol of the cohesion of the past and modernity: Catania as a city of art. De Roberto's solution is that of restoring and providing access to the city's historical monuments and buildings in order to allow people to enjoy the beauty of Catania, whilst furnishing the city with the modern structures necessary to cater for tourist.

Unfortunately, Catania, De Roberto states, had lost most of its heritage, due to the many archaeological finds stored in the Museo Biscari, whose collection was disputed over by Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello's heirs and Catania city council. The city, in his opinion, had to acquire those attractions which had led many travellers to Catania during their *Grand Tour*. In the article De Roberto insists that the Biscari collection and the

⁵¹⁸ De Roberto, 'Il Museo Biscari'.

Benedictine collection had to be housed together. Both collections, even though many important pieces of the Biscari collection had been sold, were of vital importance to the city in reconstructing Catania's past grandeur in order to instil in future generations a sense of history and local identity:

Chi oserà sostenere che tutti questi oggetti dissepoliti dalle sue viscere, scampati alle distruzioni prodotte dal tempo, dai barbari, dai terremoti, non meritano d'essere sottratti alla seconda sepoltura nella quale ora giacevano, per essere amorosamente raccolti; sollevati come trofei, custoditi come reliquie, ed esposti all'ammirazione dei contemporanei e dei posteri, dei cittadini e degli stranieri? Non bisogna anzi fin da ora pensare a scegliere e predisporre una sede che sia degna di essi?⁵¹⁹

Castello Ursino – to which the second article is devoted – was the suitable place in which, in De Roberto's opinion, to host the collections of *antiquaria*, which were admired by Baron Riedsel, Brydone and Goethe.⁵²⁰ Unfortunately, as the writer notes, Castello Ursino was another neglected monument, 'che non appartiene neanch'esso, come dovrebbe, alla Città della quale fu propugnacolo e lustro'.⁵²¹ The castle's regrettable condition motivated De Roberto to petition for a political intervention, as had happened in favour of Castello Sforzesco in Milan, Maschio Angioino in Naples and Castel Vecchio in Verona. He points out that the Sicilian castle deserved the same treatment. De Roberto focuses on the importance of redeeming the Swabian castle given that the *Rocca Orsina* – another name for the castle the writer uses – is a symbol of the glorious past of the city, and can become part of the modern city:

esso sarà sgombrato dai settanta carabinieri che ne formano oggi tutta la guarnigione, se sarà restaurato con la cura e l'amore dei quali è degno; se troneggerà un'altra volta sui fossati sgombri dai cumuli delle macerie rovesciatevi dentro; se tutt'intorno la piazza sarà sistemata, alberata e chiusa da una cancellata che non si potrà varcare dal monellame e dai malviventi.⁵²²

The writer highlights the importance of restoring the old castle, but also of cleaning up and clearing the area around it in order to give the monument the aspect and status it deserves.

⁵¹⁹ Ibidem.

⁵²⁰ The Civic Museum was inaugurated only in 1934. Stazzone points out that 'De Roberto aveva vinto la difficile battaglia degli ultimi anni di vita, e le collezioni d'arte, 'patrimonio estetico e storico' della città, erano trasigrate da un edificio privato ad una sede che ne garantiva la fruizione collettiva, 'a maggior lustro della patria'. Stazzone, 'Presentazione', in De Roberto, *Il patrimonio artistico di Catania*, Stazzone ed., p. xxi

⁵²¹ De Roberto, 'Il Museo Biscari'.

⁵²² De Roberto, 'Il Castello Ursino', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 8 May 1927.

De Roberto exhorted politicians and public opinion to preserve both the modern and the classical city. It was local administrators' duty and politicians' responsibility to appreciate and re-evaluate the Catanese heritage to preserve each memento of the past to enlighten new generations of their traditions, history and past habits. Although he gives an account of the different monarchies which had lived in the Catanese fortress since it was built in 1239 by Frederic II, De Roberto is not interested in a 'revival' of the past. On the contrary, he clearly states the importance of re-qualifying and renovating the monument, which can become 'la più nobile, la più adatta, la più suggestiva sede del Museo – Biscariano – ed anche Benedettino', that is to say, the ideal site for the Museo Civico (one of the modern city's future pearls) in which to exhibit the old collections housed in a modern gallery.⁵²³

The Benedictine collection was removed from the monastery after the abbey was confiscated in 1866. As the writer points out in the guidebook to Catania, 'qui sono adunati parte dei marmi, dei vasi, delle lapidi, dei mosaici trovati negli scavi cittadini',⁵²⁴ but also the Madonna col Bambino, attributed to Antonello da Messina; some paintings by Pietro Novelli, another Sicilian painter, and 'molti buoni quadri d'ignoti autori'.⁵²⁵ The Benedictine gallery, in De Roberto's opinion, deserved to be enhanced so as to give prestige to Catanese cultural environment, and the monastery needed to be preserved from decay and decline, as denounced in the article, which would follow, published in *Giornale dell'Isola* in May.

De Roberto was strongly linked to the Benedictine abbey, as he had studied at the Istituto Tecnico Commerciale Carlo Gemmellaro, which was based in the monastery; he had worked in the monastery as a librarian of the city council library;⁵²⁶ and had described the beauty and splendour of the place in his novel *I Viceré*, and in the guidebook to Catania. In the article 'Il monastero dei Benedettini', published on 22nd May 1927, he does not focus on the artistic and architectonic aspects; instead, he denounces the degradation and the violation the place was suffering from:

A poco a poco, per conseguenza, l'incomparabile solennità dei corridoi, il maggiore dei quali andava dalla fronte del mezzodì, per la lunghezza di due

⁵²³ Ibidem. On the Museo Civico see A. L. D'Agata, *The Civic Museum at Castello Ursino: Introduction to the New Layout* (Catania: Maimone, 2000); B. Mancuso, *Castello Ursino a Catania: collezioni per un museo* (Palermo: Kalós, 2008); F. Caffo, ed., *Castello Ursino di Catania: gli anni dei restauri 1988-2008* (Palermo: Regione Siciliana, Soprintendenza BB.CC.AA. Catania, 2009).

⁵²⁴ De Roberto, *Catania*, p. 108.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

⁵²⁶ On this topic see S. Inserra, 'Critico, novelliere, poeta, fotografo... e bibliotecario: Federico De Roberto a Catania tra fine '800 e primi decenni del '900' in *Nel mondo dei libri. Intellettuali, editoria e biblioteche nel Novecento italiano*, G. Di Domenico and M. Santoro, eds, (Manziana: Vecchiarelli Editore, 2010), pp. 19-42.

centinaia di metri, alla grande finestra di tramontana aperta alla visione dell'Etna, fu perduta con le suddivisioni continue, e offesa in più luoghi dalla vergogna delle latrine.⁵²⁷

The monastery, which was the central to *I Viceré* and a *leitmotiv* in De Roberto's life and works, was in a bad state of repair and he invited the local authorities to become aware of the problem, and urged town planners to build modern edifices into which they could transfer the schools and barracks which were housed there. De Roberto was extremely aware of the importance of the use of the cityscape as a cultural space and of creating an image of the city which was the mirror of bourgeois decorum. To this end, he made realistic proposals, such as that of giving the monastery to the University of Catania and that of using the monastery together with Castello Ursino to host Catania's artistic and social events, pointing out that: 'Una grande città deve possedere una o più sale per le grandi solennità della vita artistica e sociale'.⁵²⁸ This declaration shows, on the one hand, that the city needs both artistic and social spaces in which its city's identity and traditions are reflected and integrated, and, on the other hand, De Roberto's conception of what a city is. After almost fifty years since his first reports, articles and chronicles, De Roberto re-proposed the *cliché* of Catania as an eventful and tourist city. In so doing, he stressed the pivotal function of the city as an event in itself. Richards and Palmer have highlighted that 'viewing the city as an event in itself is also one means of revisioning the city, enabling new and creative solutions to be sought to the problems of modern urban life'.⁵²⁹

In his analysis, the writer focuses on the importance of public and institutional spaces, which become the loci in which the past and modernity can be linked: De Roberto invites the local administration to open a museum dedicated to the Risorgimento, as Palermo and Rovereto had already done. He underlines the importance of this museum in order to emphasise the contribution of Catania to National Unification and its active role in it. Therefore, public and institutional spaces are the pivotal centre of the city, since they are the places in which the past is preserved from oblivion, and the places in which modernity can express its values, unravel its social order and demonstrate its philosophical and artistic predilections. Yet, the article ends with a bitter observation: 'Catania che noi vediamo formarsi sotto i nostri occhi per forza della natura, ma che gli uomini non solamente non

⁵²⁷ De Roberto, 'Il Monastero dei Benedettini', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 22 May 1927.

⁵²⁸ Ibidem.

⁵²⁹ Richards and Palmer, *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalisation*, p. 468.

hanno concorso ad arricchire di valori estetici, ma hanno vulnerata in quelli già da lei posseduti'.⁵³⁰

Central to De Roberto's idea is that Catanese society had neither extended the artistic patrimony of the city nor guarded its heritage. Moreover, De Roberto's intervention calling for the institution of museums and sites for social and cultural events demonstrates his modernity: he was aware that a museum is one of the most significant places in which social identity can be forged; and that it was in the new public space that emerged as part of the modern city in which social life and cultural exchange could occur, as happened in cafés and in debating and literary salons during the eighteenth century.⁵³¹

The church of San Nicolò is also among those historical buildings whose beauty and magnificence had been violated, and not preserved from decay and destruction. The fourth article De Roberto wrote is dedicated to the church of the Benedictine coenobium, which was desecrated and plundered 'in sessant'anni di iniquo abbandono',⁵³² and whose renovation was, and still is, in progress. De Roberto gives an account of the work the church was undergoing and points out the importance of completing its façade, whose original plans were kept in the Benedictine library, drawing attention to the crucial question: should the façade of the church be completed or should it remain incomplete?

Per ora, la questione principale è se la Chiesa di San Nicola meriti d'essere compiuta nella facciata. Se si dà il dovuto peso al fatto che questo è il massimo Tempio di Sicilia; se si considerano ad uno ad uno tutti i suoi pregi singolarissimi; [...] se si mette nella bilancia la nuova destinazione di quella casa di Dio divenuta anche ara del Sacrificio umano, non si dubiterà che essa deve essere finita, che una fronte maestosa dev'essere imposta sulle immense colonne degne dei classici delubri d'Agrigento, di Selinunte e di Segesta.⁵³³

De Roberto's advice is to complete the unfinished work and give the Catanese the chance to express their opinion by examining the projects submitted to a national competition. His idea of calling on the citizens to express their opinion underlines the fact that city space and its image are, in De Roberto's view, the expression of social involvement and political investment. A city is much more than an architectonic and aesthetic space: it is a space represented by the people who are part of it. As Sergio Pace states, referring to the contemporary Italian city, 'the city has become the place where most cultural processes,

⁵³⁰ De Roberto, 'Il Monastero dei Benedettini'.

⁵³¹ J. Barrett, *Museums and the Public Space* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 28.

⁵³² De Roberto, 'La Chiesa di San Nicola', *Giornale dell'Isola*, 3 June 1927.

⁵³³ *Ibidem*.

however controversial or contradictory, find their confirmation'.⁵³⁴ De Roberto shows his understanding of the city as a space in which different actors try to conquer the stage, to command and make their own. In dealing with the city of Catania, the writer used a modern approach: he did not indulge in nostalgic reveries nor did he limit himself to an erudite description of urban spaces and to a monumentalisation of history. On the contrary, he shows his commitment as a Catanese intellectual and opinion leader to the preservation of the city's heritage through his belief in the power of public opinion, as the introduction to the fifth article, 'Il teatro antico', highlights:

La pubblicazione su questo giornale, dei primi quattro capitoli dell'importante scritto, mentre ha raccolto i più vasti ed entusiastici consensi a Catania e fuori, negli ambienti dell'alta cultura come presso le umili classi di cittadini che sentono profondo e geloso l'amore per le bellezze artistiche della città nostra, ha avuto un'eco notevolissima anche presso varii giornali e riviste.⁵³⁵

In describing the Roman theatre, whose columns were taken to be used in the cathedral, Piazza Mazzini and even in Palazzo Biscari, and whose annexed Odeon was surrounded by 'modern' constructions, De Roberto raised an important point: the Catanese had to support the City Council in order to preserve and profit from the benefits of the archaeological buildings that, even today, tell the thousand-year history of Catania. He points out that 'bisogna una volta per sempre comprendere che il Governo fa ciò che può, ma che non può bastare a tutto e che a lui devono associarsi le città alle quali deriva un più diretto vantaggio da queste grandi imprese archeologiche'.⁵³⁶

De Roberto gives examples of the works promoted by Syracuse and Girgenti (the old name for Agrigento), which are praised for their efforts to recover their archaeological heritage, demonstrating how aware he was of the importance of financial investment to fund the renovation of the monuments of the city.⁵³⁷ He goes on to exhort Catania council

⁵³⁴ S. Pace, 'Through the Looking-Glass. Research on the Italian City in Historical Perspective', in R. Lumley and J. Foot, eds, *Italian Cityscapes* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), p. 15.

⁵³⁵ De Roberto, 'Il teatro antico', *Giornale dell'isola*, 18 June 1927.

⁵³⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁷ 'Quando si pensa che la dotazione annua per gli scavi nell'intera isola nostra non ammonta a più di trentamila lire, appare evidente che la Soprintendenza di Siracusa ha compiuto e compie veri miracoli; ma l'ammirazione e la riconoscenza dovuta all'insigne professor Paolo Orsi sarebbero sterili se non si traducevano in concorsi finanziari alle mirabili opere che egli dirige'. De Roberto, 'Il teatro antico'. Paolo Orsi was the director of the Archaeological Museum in Syracuse from 1895 until 1934. The Museum collection is one of the most important in Southern Sicily. Its artefacts, which were discovered throughout Sicily, survey the Greek, Roman and early Christian epochs. See G. Vorza, *The Archaeological Museum of Syracuse Paolo Orsi* (Syracuse: Ediprint, 1990) and A. Mondo, *Sotto la sabbia dorata: Paolo Orsi tra Gela e Siracusa* (Siracusa: Morrone, 2013).

to clear the *cavea* of the Roman Theatre to make them more readily accessible. He concludes that ‘conviene a Catania, sotto tutti i rapporti, di rimettere in valore il suo patrimonio artistico ed archeologico’.⁵³⁸ Thus, the Roman theatre, the annexed odeon, and Gravina Cruillas palace – the building in which Bellini was born – could be numbered amongst the most important attractions the city had to offer to travellers and tourists. Since the artistic heritage of the city does not only consist of solely ruins, buildings and monuments, De Roberto dedicated his final article to Baron Antonio Ursino Recupero, a distinguished scholar who had donated his collection of books on Sicily and Catania to his city.

Ursino Recupero’s collection was ‘una biblioteca siculo-catanese’, as De Roberto calls it in his article, which contained letters, books, manuscripts, and ‘una gran quantità di scritture degne di fermare l’attenzione e capaci di stimolare la curiosità’.⁵³⁹ The collection was later incorporated into the Biblioteche Riunite Civica e Ursino Recupero, which is housed in the library of the Benedictine Monastery, which is also the seat of the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy of the University of Catania, as De Roberto had wished in his articles. He reported Ursino Recupero’s testament in order to highlight the difficulties that had arisen in donating the collection, which contained ‘tutti i documenti della propria storia’, to the two institutions.⁵⁴⁰ The safeguarding of documents is intended to promote the preservation of historical documents to provide primary source material for future scholars.

Apart from highlighting the problems the donation of the library had caused due to its joint ownership by the University of Catania and the city council, De Roberto’s interest was in pointing out that the collection was also part of Catania’s historical heritage, which it was the city’s responsibility to preserve. Moreover, if, as a novelist, De Roberto employed the city as the perfect *milieu* to mirror the portrayal of the Uzeda family, ‘city leaders’ in both political and social life; and in the guidebook to express his role as editor, his passion for the classical city and the visual language of photography, thus revealing his idea of the contemporary city; the six articles dealing with Catanese heritage highlight De Roberto’s commitment, as a reporter, a citizen and an engaged intellectual to his home town.

The city of Catania is a leitmotif in De Roberto’s works. His articles, however, demonstrate that Catania was more than a metaphor for political events and more than a place for tourists to visit but a living entity, by revealing its social life and artistic heritage.

⁵³⁸ De Roberto, ‘Il teatro antico’.

⁵³⁹ De Roberto, ‘La Biblioteca Ursino’, *Giornale dell’Isola*, 8 July 1927.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibidem.

In his guidebook to Catania De Roberto reported that the city was defined as the ‘Milan of the South’, this title, he points out in the articles, could be retained, however, only if Catania started to protect and preserve the memories of its past.

Thus, the final six articles on the artistic heritage of Catania demonstrate De Roberto’s literary, political and social engagement with the problems Catania’s artistic patrimony suffered in the early twentieth century. Stazzone has stated that the articles are ‘una riflessione attenta e puntuale sulla città di Catania divenuta vero luogo dell’anima’.⁵⁴¹ In De Roberto’s view, then, the modern city and, consequently, its urban identity are strictly linked to the past, since one cannot look forward without looking back and, to paraphrase Calvino, the past is constantly modified by our ongoing experiences. Etna erupts and we rebuild and the past looks different.

De Roberto died on 27th July 1927, merely a few days after the publication of his last article, and his works have been considered the works of a minor Italian writer for many years. Only recently has he had his ‘*risorgimento*’ as one of the most important Italian novelists of his era and his *I Viceré* is now regarded as a timeless masterpiece of Italian literature.

⁵⁴¹ Stazzone, ‘Presentazione’, in De Roberto, *Il patrimonio artistico di Catania*, Stazzone, ed., p. xiii.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation has been to study the relevance of the representation of Catania in De Roberto's works, so as to find a new perspective in the reading of the Sicilian writer, and highlight how important this city was for him, since it is a leitmotif in his works as a writer and a journalist. De Roberto has traditionally been underestimated by Italian literary critics, but has recently gained attention in Italy and abroad. This attention is mainly due to the interest in the Italian historical novel, as well as in post-Risorgimento Italy. Yet, De Roberto's historical context and political interests remain to some extent obscure. In particular, his relationship with his home town, Catania, has been overshadowed due to literary interest being focused on the novelist and not the journalist. In fact, not only did De Roberto live and work in Catania for more than fifty years, but he also wrote for *Don Chisciotte* (1881-1883), a Catanese newspaper, and worked as a contributor to various Italian papers, such as *Il Fanfulla* (1880-1883) and *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* (1884-1890), where he published articles on Catania and Etna. Moreover, in 1885 he was named librarian of the town library in Catania and, in 1899, was appointed superintendent for the Catanese historical heritage. He was consultant for the publishing house Galàtola and, in 1907, wrote a guidebook to Catania. His activities show that De Roberto had a very long relationship, both professional and personal, with Catania.

This work has shed light for the first time on De Roberto's representation of his home town, taking into consideration both his literary approach to Catania, concentrating on his acknowledged masterpiece, *I Viceré*, and his works as journalist and chronicler, as a writer of the guidebook and the newspaper articles. I have demonstrated that not only is De Roberto's Catania a symbolic city, related to a distant past that is both real and imagined, but also the real, contemporary, vibrant city, where De Roberto lived and worked, which he loved and fought for and which has yet to be imagined. I have highlighted how, through the metaphorical representation of Catania in *I Viceré*, its 'real' and symbolic depiction in the guidebook and the pragmatic political vision of the newspaper articles, De Roberto has imagined a modern city. He wanted to set the stage for a new bourgeoisie that was able to preserve the glories of the past (therefore the celebration of monuments and ancient memories, as well as the plan to create a new civic museum) to develop a new scenario for business and sociality.

In Chapter 1 I introduced my review of the literature, useful to build my theoretical framework and find a case study in order to have a model to refer to in my analysis of the relationship between literature and the city. Furthermore, I discussed my idea of considering De Roberto as a *flâneur* and a chronicler of Catania: the writer observed, studied and analysed the city from a political, historical and anthropological point of view.

There are very few studies on De Roberto as a journalist. Yet, his articles are a nodal point in the understanding of the writer and his literary education, and can help to contextualise the period in which De Roberto lived. The articles written for local and national papers highlight, on the one hand, the relationship between the writer and his home town and, on the other hand, how Catania had changed over the years: its social and political life and its being indissolubly linked to its past, the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna. De Roberto's articles on his city show to what extent Catania was part of his life.

In Chapters 2 and 5 I analysed these articles. I highlighted De Roberto's background to his two major representations of Catania, the symbolic in *I Viceré* and the 'real' in the guidebook, going back to his early articles on Catania and forward to his last articles before his death. In so doing, I demonstrated, firstly, De Roberto's political commitment to his home city; secondly, the extent to which his early articles constitute the background, even a source, to his successive works; lastly, that his representation of Catania was mostly focused on the crowd, public events and Mount Etna, rather than on urban structures. De Roberto's Catania was first and foremost a human place.

The study of the articles demonstrates that De Roberto 'lived' his city and that Catania was neither the sombre place described in *I Viceré* nor simply a city of art and history. Catania was a city that experienced both the positive and negative aspects modernity brought. Thus, the city is seen to be immersed in political controversies, as the reports on the quarrels during the city council meetings show and as an important *locus* of the newborn Italy, as the article on the arrival of King Umberto I and his wife, Margherita Princess of Savoy, highlights. Furthermore, the articles on Etna emphasise the role of the volcano as being part of Catania's identity and being the mark of De Roberto's philosophy of history: the volcano becomes the symbol of the power of nature, its destructive force, and its dominance over history and man. It can also be read as the metaphorical mountain that the bourgeois Catanese society, like a modern Sisyphus, was doomed to climb to discover the futility of its efforts through the repetition of its actions.

Central to De Roberto's thought is the idea that Catania had to preserve its artistic heritage in order to give future generations an awareness of their past. The last articles he

wrote in 1927 show De Roberto's modernity through the description the city's historical buildings, which have an important role in preserving and preventing the past undergoing a *damnatio memoriae*. The Prince of Biscari's museum is, thus, a 'site of memory' and De Roberto's emphasis on the link between the classical city and the modern city demonstrates that his Catania is a modern rather than a nostalgic city. Modern Catania is an extension, and a continuation, of the classical city, thanks to its timeless natural beauties: Etna and the Ionian Sea. Therefore, the several articles De Roberto wrote during his life can be a new starting point in the study of the Sicilian writer, which can also enrich Italian criticism in the understanding of the writer's *Bildung* and can help to contextualise his times, since the relationship between De Roberto and Catania was undoubtedly very strong.

In Chapter 3 I explored the depiction of the urban space in De Roberto's novel *I Viceré* and the lack thereof to highlight the representation of political power and the relevance of the crowd to the public scene. In the course of the eighteenth century, the city had changed its architecture and urban decor due to the intervention of the architects Giovanni Battista Vaccarini and Stefano Ittar, whose Baroque buildings and squares had become the symbols of the new Catania, after the earthquake of 1693. However, although verisimilitude is one of the characteristics of the historical novel, Baroque Catania is not described in *I Viceré*. Rather, the city in the novel is a lifeless, dreary reality. The places described, the settings and the palazzos are all representations of an urban space that is cramped, poorly articulated and sometimes amorphous. Catania is not portrayed with benevolence or with the pride of a person who knows the city and its life: it is a segregated and enclosed space, which is the symbol of the mean, illiberal Catanese aristocracy, only interested in the preservation of its prestige, financial power and social status.

In *I Viceré*, space is limited, and settings, even the large and spacious ones, suffer from a dark and almost funereal atmosphere. Thus, Catania is a world of segregation in which the temporal dimension is marked only by family matters. Historical events, such as the arrival of Garibaldi's troops, are related by family members. Catania seems to be a prison and its inhabitants are victims of the cyclical idea of eternal return, which becomes the denial of history both as progress and as enduring transformation. The final conclusion is that history is a monotonous repetition of events. An example of the idea of endless repetition is the re-arranging of the family residence, which De Roberto describes as being made of different styles and materials. The re-furbishing of the palazzo by Teresa Uzeda and, afterwards, by her son, Prince Giacomo, is the metaphor for chaos and disorder. It is also the metaphor for the Uzedas' madness and symbolises their eccentricity and obsession.

The places where the narrative unfolds are essentially three: the Uzeda Palace, the Benedictine Monastery and Villa Belvedere, their holiday home. Squares, streets and social places, where the nobility and the rich middle class could meet and walk, or other spaces of socialization are not portrayed: the few social occasions, which allow the characters to meet, are those where the family gathers to discuss money and family problems. Catania is portrayed as an indolent, inert and silent city. Only St Agatha's Festival breaks the monotony and breaches the closed atmosphere. The rest is almost silent, interrupted by the freshness and vigour of the young Prince Consalvo – inspired by the figure of Prince Antonino Paternò Castello Marquis of Sangiuliano, who became, in 1879, Mayor of Catania at the age of twenty-seven.

Consalvo Uzeda, who experiences life in various Italian and European cities, has an antithetical conception of space to that of his family: the urban space must be at the service of the modern leader, who must be able to manipulate it and to subject it to his own ends. Consalvo adapts to new bourgeois liberalism to further his personal search for power as a new viceroy. This new viceroy realises that there is an inseparable link between space and society and the family palazzo is opened to inaugurate his electoral campaign as is the Benedictine monastery. The latter is the only place that can be defined as a chronotope, since it marks the intersection between space and time. The monastery, symbol of culture and magnificence, is the only building described for its splendour and its immensity, its beauty is compared to royal residences. However, this beautiful place is being debased by lively, guzzling monks, such as Don Blasco Uzeda, whose only wish is to live an idyllic life.

Consalvo recognises that the monastery is the ideal place to reunite the Catanese social classes and makes it his own. The electoral success is ensured: Consalvo becomes the leader of a new aristocracy, able to change and adapt to the new political and social conditions. Thus, feudal privileges are maintained under the mantle of democracy. The cityscape remains unchanged: Catania is a theatrical space in which the tragedy of modernity is realised through deception and transformation, where a public space is used for private aims. It is in the monastery that the crowd is captivated and fascinated by Consalvo's electoral speech. The crowd is not the symbol of the modern city, but of the immobility of Catanese society.

A double vision of the urban space is proposed in the guidebook to Catania, which has been discussed in Chapter 4. I placed De Roberto's guidebook in the context of other guidebooks to Catania and within the framework of the series in which it was published. In

so doing, I demonstrated that De Roberto's guidebook followed the shift in focus from ancient to modern Catania of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century guidebooks. However, being more acquainted with the culture, De Roberto tried to link the ancient and the modern city to establish as part of his political agenda an ideal modernity which was an extension rather than a refusal of the past.

In this new portrayal of the city De Roberto used both verbal and non-verbal language. By so doing, he allows the reader to learn about the history of the city and through the use of photography to show a city that is not 'adulterated' by literary transfiguration. The result is that the guidebook is neither strictly a guidebook nor a work of pure erudition, but a narrative and visual 'compendium' of the city. Whilst De Roberto's verbal account is elaborate and contains many quotations from the old volumes he uses to illustrate his city, the photographs give a more direct representation of Catania, showing how life was at the turn of the century. Catania is shown to be an active, vibrant city marked by the presence of the crowd.

The history of Catania is narrated from its inception, to the classical and medieval ages, and the modern present, when Catania aspired to the role of the 'Milan of the South'. The urban space is large and spacious, with modern squares and streets, dominated by Mount Etna, which 'connects' the classical city and the modern city. Not only does the volcano dominate the cityscape; it is also a constant menace to it, its natural strength being often underlined. As Catania is a 'city under the volcano', it has been rebuilt several times after its destruction. Like the mythological Phoenix, the city is cyclically regenerated, reborn from fire. Etna thus characterises Catania as self-regenerating and is one of its symbols, together with St Agatha and the musician Vincenzo Bellini. St Agatha represents the anthropological, religious and folkloristic element of the city and thus the people, St Agatha's festival being a social phenomenon that involves all the Catanese. Bellini represents De Roberto's idealized view of *fin de siècle* culture that overwhelmed by new technology as if the volcano will rise triumphant over the ashes of the failures of the new state.

Apart from Bellini, there is no exaltation of other significant Catanese, who helped to build the modern city; neither are there portraits of charismatic personalities. De Roberto does, however, focus on Ignazio Paternò Castello, Prince of Biscari and his art collection. Both the Prince of Biscari, who is portrayed as a modern *mecenate*, and his private museum, which was visited and appreciated by foreign travellers, such as Wolfgang Goethe, are key to understanding De Roberto's idea of aristocracy. By choosing a private

property, rather than describing buildings which have symbolic and political importance, De Roberto showed his interest in the aristocratic side of the city rather than the political or institutional side. Although in *I Viceré* the Catanese aristocracy is depicted as voracious and self-serving, in the guidebook the writer highlights the importance and the role of an enlightened aristocracy, which was able to build a positive image of Catania. It was this aristocracy which tried to promote and embellish the city and the Prince of Biscari is its symbol. It is Catania's artistic and historical heritage that gives the city a cultural status and, possibly, makes it a modern European city.

From my analysis it can now be argued that Catania is at the core of De Roberto's thought as an engaged intellectual and that his portrayals of the city, far from being merely literary, show elements of a political and ideological agenda. De Roberto's representation of Catania is not only descriptive, as is believed by many learned local historians, such as the editors of his writings, but also demonstrates a clear view of how the city was developing and to what extent this had to be accepted or rejected. De Roberto's knowledge of the past representations of the city (such as earlier guidebooks or mythological tales) has herein been used to demonstrate that his engagement with the city was not occupational, but rather professional and political. De Roberto's innovative use of contemporary visual means, such as photographs, has been considered to demonstrate his interest in representing the city not only as it was or is, but as it ought to be seen, meaning that the ideal view of the city prevailed over consensual reality. Whilst it can be argued that De Roberto's diachronic interest towards the city shows discontinuities rather than continuities, I demonstrated the extent to which we can trace a double approach to the city: symbolic and allegorical in his novel *I Viceré* and sociological and aesthetic in his newspaper articles.

All this leads to the idea that De Roberto witnessed the birth of Catania as a modern city and that he was creating his *passages* to Catania. Benjamin considered the Parisian *passages* – those arcades made of iron and glass – the symbol of modern commerce that made Paris the capital of the nineteenth century. De Roberto's representations of Catania are mostly metaphorical and symbolic: Etna represents the historical continuity of the city; St Agatha cements the religious and social strata; Bellini and the Prince of Biscari grant permanence to the past within the modern city.

Therefore, Catania as a modern city, and as 'the Milan of the South', was strictly linked by De Roberto to its past, its natural beauty and its cultural and historical background. Despite his pessimistic *Weltanschauung*, this special *flâneur*, and spectator of Catania's city life, was not only a modern writer, but also an engaged intellectual. De

Roberto's six articles on Catania's artistic heritage, published a few months before his death, are an exhortation to a political, social and intellectual commitment for the preservation of the classical city and the construction of the modern city. Catania, Janus-like, looks both forwards and back.

APPENDIX

Palermo, 11 settembre 1880⁵⁴²

Gentilissimo Signore,

Gli amici collaboratori dello “Statuto”, tra i quali Ella ha voluto gentilmente annoverarci, hanno mostrato desiderio di fare una manifestazione giornalistica speciale, nella occasione della inaugurazione, che avverrà tra qualche giorno, dei nuovi spaziosi e bellissimi uffici dello “Statuto”.

Siccome questa inaugurazione coinciderà colla venuta qui dell'onorevole Sella rimane inteso che Ella ci farebbe un regalo se volesse intervenireci.

Ma siccome è desiderio nostro di fare numero straordinario e doppio del giornale, pel quale numero abbiamo richiesto il contributo di moltissimi amici del continente e dell'isola, Ella ci farebbe poi un regalo grandissimo se volesse per quella occasione mandare una speciale corrispondenza = sul tema = Catania che si trasforma = in cui metta in rilievo (non più di una colonna di giornale) tutto ciò che si è fatto di buono e di bello, nella magnifica città sua per rispondere alle esigenze della civiltà e dei commerci crescenti.

Io ho l'ambizione di rendere poco a poco lo Statuto il giornale dell'isola – autorevole non solo perché ne propugna gl'interessi legittimi ma perché mette in rilievo ogni caso buono che tenda a migliorarla, e tutte le grandi città siciliane hanno da avere l'orgoglio di contribuire alla grandezza della patria italiana prestandosi l'una e l'altra sopra ogni altro concorso della simpatia cordiale.

Io conto sul suo consenso e la saluto cordialmente.

Devotissimo Suo
Giacomo Pagano

P.S. Se qualche spacciatore di giornali volesse vendere costì il numero straordinario di cui le ho fatto cenno, l'amministrazione dello “Statuto” gli spedirebbe le copie abbisognevole franche a Catania con lo sconto del 20% . Il prezzo di quel numero straordinario sarà fuori Palermo di centesimi 15.

Scusi del distu

⁵⁴² Giacomo Pagano's letter to De Roberto, Palermo, 11 September 1880 can be found at the Regional University Library, 'Giambattista Caruso', in Catania.

La Città di Catania

Se un buon catanese, da parecchio tempo - non da molto ma almeno da una ventina d'anni - assente da Catania e stabilito - poniamo - a Nuova York, si decidesse a tornare in patria, avrebbe più d'un argomento di profonda meraviglia.⁵⁴³

Imbarcato, naturalmente, sul gigantesco e veloce *Washington*, traverserebbe rapidamente la grande laguna che sovrasta alla inabissata Atlantide, si lascerebbe dietro le rocce di Pirena e Calpe, entrerebbe nel *mare nostrum* dei latini, accosterebbe l'isola felice che gli diede la vita, e fra le brume dell'orizzonte discernerebbe una massa imponente, maestosa, coronata da un gigantesco pennacchio di nubi: l'Etna, ed il suo cuore sussulterebbe di gioia al mirare la montagna colossale su cui si arrampicò chissà quante volte, e l'ansia di calpestare quella terra benedetta, di respirare quelle dolci aure, vivificate dagli effluvi dell'Jonio, salutari e balsamici, farebbe certo affrettare il cammino alla nave troppo pigra per l'ardenza dei desiderî del nostro viaggiatore. Ma finalmente la terra è vicina, il terribile Mongibello si estolle in tutta l'imponenza dei suoi contorni scelti ed eleganti; una striscia biancastra, chiazzata di macchinette vivamente colorate, si distingue sempre più nettamente in riva al mare: è Catania!

La complicata macchina del piroscifo estingue gradatamente la sua potente attività, l'elica agita meno convulsivamente le azzurre onde del mare, la terra è sempre più vicina, tutto si va disponendo per l'approdo, quando una voce energica, quella del capitano, comanda: Il timone a babordo, tutto!

Tale insolita manovra stupisce altamente il nostro eroe. Una nave minaccerebbe di investirci? No; accanto al vapore una flotta di barchette aspetta il momento del sbarco. Ma che è mai quella lingua di terra, lunga, nera che sorge sul mare come la carena di una nave naufragata o come una balena gigantesca, su cui le onde si frangono e spumeggiano? E che è quella campana che suona tristemente in mezzo al mare per segnalare un pericolo? E che fanno quei barconi, sovraccarichi di pietre, trascinati da assordanti vaporini che deturpano col loro denso fumo la purezza del cielo? Mistero.

⁵⁴³ De Roberto, 'La città di Catania', *Lo Statuto*, Palermo 1881.

Il piroscalo è giunto all'altezza della lanterna vecchia. Un altro soggetto di meraviglia fa arrestare estatici gli sguardi del passeggero. Un largo ponte, a grandi arcate, traversa la marina, si slancia attraverso le acque del porto, e, svoltando bruscamente, si perde di vista. Altra incognita: in un angolo del porto, in mezzo al mare, sorgono le fondamenta di un vasto edificio.

Un fischio rauco percuote l'aria, il battello si arresta, il viaggiatore si slancia in uno schifo e, posto piede a terra, domanda innanzitutto spiegazione di quel che ha visto. La ottiene, ed apprende con indicibile soddisfazione che quella lingua di terra è un molo, lungo oltre un chilometro, che sarà tra qualche anno completo e destinato a racchiudere un gran tratto di mare, a renderne calme le acque e propizio al ricovero delle navi; che su quel ponte la ferrovia si slancia rapidamente e, schernendo le distanze, attraversa i fertili campi della *Piana* e si dirige a Siracusa ed a Palermo; che quell'edificio in costruzione è una Dogana, comoda, vasta, sicura, destinata a sostituire l'antica per nulla sufficiente agli scambi, smisuratamente cresciuti.

Il viatore, fatti pochi passi, per la porta Uzeda entra nella via Etnea. Una esclamazione di meraviglia gli sfugge suo malgrado, ed ha ragione di che meravigliarsi. Aveva lasciata una strada irregolare, mal lastricata, a gobbe, a fossi, corta, fiancheggiata da pochi palazzi degni di questo nome; e trova una strada lunga tre chilometri, ben livellata, lastricata come un salone, con grandissimo sfarzo di illuminazione, intermezzata da piazze regolari, adorna di splendidi fabbricati, qualcosa, insomma, che, secondo Réclus, è degno di essere ammirato, magari a costo di partirsi dalle Ande!

Il nostro personaggio si interna nella città. Ad ogni passo strade rifatte a nuovo, o che si rifanno, grandiosi edifici sorti come per intanto, altri in via di completamento, altri abbattuti e sostituiti da vie, da piazze; quà due teatri sorti dove vegetavano le opunzie ed i fichi selvatici; là ricchi negozi messi con isfarzo e con gusto; linee di *omnibus* che percorrono i principali corsi della città, istituti d'istruzione, fabbriche industriali che ergono al cielo gli svelti camini; dappertutto un'attività, un affaccendarsi continuo, un perenne scambio di servizi materiali e morali, insomma tale cambiamento, tali miglioramenti, tali innovazioni, tale trasformazione da non ci si poter più raccapezzare.

Al posto di un giardino privato, al Rinazzo, è sorta una villa pubblica, vasta, varia, elegante, che si nomina dall'immortale Bellini. Dall'altura che la costituisce si vede un panorama incantevole. Le pendici etnee si svolgono dinanzi allo sguardo ammirato. Sul vertice, accanto alla *Montagnola*, si vede una macchietta bianca. Sarebbe un residuo di neve refrattario ai cocenti raggi del sole? No; è la Specula Bellini.

Il nostro eroe ritorna per le vie della città. Ad un tratto si arresta. La bandiera d'Italia sventola al palazzo civico. Questi tre colori, vivi, gai, palpitanti che egli aveva imparato ad amare sulle antenne delle navi italiane, là nella lontana America, quella croce gloriosa, che rappresenta tutto un passato di nobiltà, di coraggio, di forza, di abnegazione, lo fanno esultare di contento ed egli scioglie in cuor suo un inno di grazie, caldo di amor di patria alla Libertà, che dispensa i suoi benefizî su queste terre predilette, e ai gloriosi principi dal cui senno e dalla cui lealtà noi la riconosciamo.

F. De Roberto Asmundo

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