

Dissertation Defense: Nicholas Albanese

*Tuesday,
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2PM*

Ballantine Hall, Room 018

COMMITTEE IN CHARGE

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Imagining Sicily: Representation and the Cultural Poetics in Contemporary Italian Historical Fiction

The present dissertation investigates the representation of society and history in the fictional works of three Sicilian-born authors: Leonardo Sciascia (1921 – 1989), Vincenzo Consolo (b. 1933), and Andrea Camilleri (b. 1925). Sciascia is considered the most important Sicilian writer from the 1960s to the 1980s; the other two are considered the heirs of Sciascia's ethical writings: Consolo for historical prose fiction, and Camilleri chiefly for the detective novel, both genres belonging to Sciascia's broad repertoire. The Sicilian literary tradition from Verga to Lampedusa has largely perpetuated myths in constructing an imaginative geography based on an apologetic approach for the cultural distance between the island and Italy. Through a historical critical approach, this analysis examines in what ways some of the most significant Sicilian writers of the last decades challenge those myths through a continuing literary investigation into Sicily's past. The goal of the dissertation is also that of examining in what ways their cultural poetics contribute to the narrative discourse of identity as established by the rich literary heritage of the region. The publication of Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo* in 1958 represented the culmination of the essentialist depiction of the island while initiating a re-interpretation of the Italian Unification and of the Sicilian question in relation to the rapid social transformation under way in the 1960s. As proven by Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism approach, which challenges the possibility of an objective representation of history, the de-centralized vantage point of those who write from the margins acquires an increasingly important role in a national cultural context. The historical fiction of Sciascia, Consolo, and Camilleri play a decisive role in the renewal and transformation of the genre in the last part of the 20th Century, one in which the cultural space of Sicily becomes an ideological filter through which Italian society is interpreted and critiqued.