

# Authority, Sincerity, Commitment: A comparative case study of narrative relationships in Italy in the era of digital media

Georgia Wall

Romano Luperini, commenting in 2011 on the current status of intellectuals in Italy, suggests that the authority, autonomy and legitimacy of the traditional figure of the intellectual has been transformed by the ease and speed with which information, ideals, and debates are shared, elaborated upon, and discarded in a highly technological era (Luperini 2011:10-11). In this network of fluid communications, the position of the writer might be considered a precarious one; particularly that of the Italian writer, who, Lino Pertile has argued, historically has not been granted the same security in his role as that afforded to his European counterparts (Pertile 1993: 6).

Is the reality really that dire? Is there nobody who speaks up, who shows courage, who is well-published, well-known and frequently appears in the media to speak out on all kinds of issues? [...] There are two names that immediately come to mind: Roberto Saviano and Andrea Camilleri. Both are bestselling authors who regularly appear in print-media and on TV. They have become household names in Italy (Eckert forthcoming 2014).

As Elgin K. Eckert highlights, both Camilleri and Saviano are recognizable as figures who have acquired a significant level of

intellectual and general authority. They are not alone in this regard. The public commentary on wider societal issues offered by Dacia Maraini, Carlo Lucarelli and Massimo Carlotto, to name but a few examples, indicate the presence of a community of Italian writers whose work engages with social preoccupations and extends their influence beyond a literary context. Camilleri and Saviano have been identified as appropriate for this comparative study to enable a greater degree of thematic continuity; both are writers whose 'meridionalità' plays a role in their texts and in their public persona, and both are ubiquitously represented in Italian media. In addition, both personalities are associated with the fight against regionally-rooted organized crime; Saviano's first (non-fiction) novel, *Gomorra: viaggio nell'impero economico e nel sogno di dominio della camorra* (2006), [*Gomorra*] manipulates genre to raise awareness of the *camorra*, whilst Camilleri's Montalbano novels are set against the backdrop of mafia corruption, with the author regularly dealing directly with the subject of organized crime in his public interventions and journalistic writing.<sup>1</sup>

These figures and their public presentation are examined within this article as case studies of contemporary 'narrative relationships' which engage with current societal concerns. This term is employed to denote the bond and interaction that exists between the three principle entities involved in literary communication: author, text, and reader (Burns 2009: 65). The media personalities of Andrea Camilleri and Roberto Saviano are examined in light of Nick Couldry's affirmation, in his analysis of contemporary digital media practice, that «there are at least three virtues [...] which we would want anyone involved in

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<sup>1</sup> Camilleri offers an extended consideration of the Sicilian mafia in *Voi non sapete* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007) is an alternative biography of mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano, traced via a dictionary of vocabulary used in *pizzini*, the small notes used to communicate in the crime network. All proceeds from the book are destined to an organization which helps victims of mafia violence. For the purpose of this analysis, I focus on the Montalbano series which, as the author himself acknowledges, are primarily responsible for his widespread popular acclaim.

media practice to exhibit: accuracy, sincerity and care» (Couldrey 2012: 190). I consider here the respective writers' public discourse enacted in online and televisual environments under Gérard Genette's definition of «any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space» (Genette 1997: 344). Without denying the problems inherent in the application of this term for the potentially temporal and spatial boundlessness of today's media, the choice of Genette's terminology is informed by his explicit statement that «the ultimate destiny of the paratext is sooner or later to catch up with the text in order to *make a book*» (Genette 1997: 436). I seek to stress here the implied requirement on the part of the reader for continuity between paratext and text, particularly in 'committed' literature where writer sincerity and authority, I suggest, are significant elements in the reader engagement. This emphasis on continuity reflects in turn the commonality of print and digital media, informed by Anouk Lang's caveat that «simplistic and ahistorical characterizations of this period as one of radical discontinuity need to be resisted» (Lang 2012:4).

By offering an overview of online activity associated with Camilleri and Saviano, and relating this comparatively to the *impegno* represented by their texts, I highlight the opportunities and risks associated with more fluid and instantaneous contemporary communication strategies, whilst deflating the divide between reader-writer interaction intrinsically related to today's media environment, and those relationships created and sustained by traditional print books.

Narrative relationships in the twenty-first century more than ever involve a web of immeasurable elements; publisher, economic interest, commercial viability, literary trends. This analysis is interested in the role that public understanding of the author can play. Given the ease with which it is possible to access authors as personalities, even as celebrities, via visual and digital media filters, our understanding of these figures can exert a more influential role in the communication undertaken between author and reader through the text; particularly

compared to previous eras in which less media exposure restricted mass access to such personalities. Balancing a consideration both of the real-life Andrea Camilleri and Roberto Saviano with the image constructed by the reader's understanding of the text requests that the continuity in the desire for what Couldrey terms 'media ethics' (Couldrey 2012: 180-210); and specifically sincerity, be acknowledged.

In *Gomorra*, disjunctive chapters, a seemingly arbitrary division of the text in two cinematic halves and an emphasis on provocative corporeal imagery indicate a preference for the visual over the sequential. The criminal 'characters' detailed in the account are negotiated through film counterparts. Immacolata Capone's fluorescent yellow Smart car and her female bodyguard's matching sunglasses are «la stessa tonalità di giallo della tuta da motociclista che Uma Thurman indossa in *Kill Bill*» (Saviano 2006:161). The reader witnesses Giuseppe and Romeo's imitation of their Hollywood heroes in their scripted dialogues; the new fashion of shooting *à la* Tarantino; Walter Sandokan's replica Scarface villa (ibid.: 267-270). At the same time, Saviano directly calls into question a cinematic, and more generally, visual, capacity to offer a meaningful and accurate insight: «ma questi i film non lo raccontano, si fermano un attimo prima» (ibid.: 280). Roberto Saviano's relationship with visual media can be deemed an ambivalent one; a stance that overtly declares loyalty to the written word «Se ho avuto un sogno, è stato quello di incidere con le mie parole, di dimostrare che la parola letteraria può ancora aver un peso e il potere di cambiare la realtà» (Saviano 2010: 15); but with a manifest awareness and desire to embrace the possibilities of a visual, and digital, culture. There are interesting echoes of his declared literary role model here, as Fabrizio Cilento points out, describing Pasolini as, «another intellectual who wanted to be seen protesting television on television and who used paid time to stage his ferocious polemics» (Cilento 2011: para. 7 of 28).

Following the popular success of *Gomorra*, Saviano appeared first on Rai Tre's *Che tempo che fa* before co-hosting with Fabio Fazio *Vieni via*

*con me* in November 2010, a series of live broadcasts dealing with topical social and political debates, in which consideration of a theme, introduced by an authorial monologue, is combined with music, poetry and interventions from intellectual and political figures such as Roberto Benigni, Francesco De Gregori and Pierluigi Bersani. This series attracted a record 31.6% share of viewers, «un fenomeno televisivo e culturale», which drew a «pubblico non abituale, anzi, solitamente distante dal piccolo schermo» (Vitali 2012). A similar format of 'cultural lectures' broadcast in May 2012, under the title *Quello che (non) ho*, achieved a peak public of 2.8 million for La7. Saviano continues to exercise a prolific televisual presence, selecting *Che tempo che fa* to introduce *Zero Zero Zero*, and as the subject of the MTV documentary *Il testimone*, dedicated primarily to the author's life under round-the-clock witness protection. Paul Ginsborg has shown how television in Italian society can stimulate social debate, particularly within the family, citing it as a democratic and potentially subversive environment (Ginsborg 2009: 89-91). Saviano's exploitation of this medium, rather than compromising his commitment to the written word, therefore can be seen not only as a means of drawing widespread attention to the problem of organized crime, but also as promoting, in this key context, a greater awareness of the shortcomings of television first emphasized by the author in *Gomorra*. Television, as a channel of communication, is in this way simultaneously manipulated and constructively interrogated.

Utilization of social media in 'l'affaire Saviano' conveys a similar dexterity and willingness to interpret and respond to contemporary cultural trends. The official Roberto Saviano website, <http://www.robertosaviano.it>, presents publisher's promotional material as a variety of interactive curriculum vitae. Links to the writer's Facebook page and Twitter account are embedded in the site and the dedicated press archive profiles Saviano's role as a journalist. Saviano has collaborated with several international newspapers, including *The Times*, *New York Times* and *El Pais*, and is a regular contributor to *La Repubblica* and *L'Espresso*. The consistent interplay between literature

and cinema forms a crucial part of the promotional strategy, shaping our understanding of the author as a comprehensive intellectual, not only in his desire to intervene on a variety of social issues outside the realm of organized crime, but also in his manner of enacting this commitment, a method which sees the maximum exploitation of all channels available to the writer. At the same time, the stability of the link between visual and written media is invoked by the fact visitors to the website are greeted with a 'book trailer' introducing Saviano's latest title. This is in line with Lang's observation that the use of terms such as *page*, *scroll*, and *index* «are firmly anchored in codex publication and also central to our understanding of new technologies for reading» (Lang 2012: 4).

The most revelatory aspect of Saviano's 'communication strategy', to borrow Cilento's description of this mechanism, is the use of the social networking service Facebook. Through this instrument Saviano appears to sustain direct contact with his public. His Facebook page, categorized as a 'writer' to which followers must subscribe, rather than a pseudo-personal account, serves as a platform for commentary on matters ranging from homosexual marriage to organ donation. Rather than true reader-writer interaction, we can interpret this as an online forum in which Saviano provokes collective contemplation, launching a theme which is then managed and explored by an active proportion of his 1.7 million followers. These lively online debates are balanced with continual updates on Saviano's daily activities; meetings, presentations, inspiration and reaction to his environment. This strategy of self-promotion works to create an illusion of collaboration with the potential reader, who is offered an ongoing insight into both the construction of the text and Saviano's life. Saviano's commitment is perceived as one which seeks to operate in a network with the outward appearance of being fed by 'grass-root' communication with his public. In reality, however, the communication enacted is mono-directional; Saviano rarely replies to comments posted. This is not to deny the potential the voice of such contributors; as I discuss below, the perspective offered by participants in the group on the Impastato-

Persichetti case is indicative of the interrogative and potentially destabilizing power of such sites.

Access to Andrea Camilleri via visual and digital media is much more limited. In 2012, Sellerio released *La Regina di Pomerania e altre storie di Vigàta* as an App, in which each novella is presented with Camilleri's video commentary and includes hyperlinks to a Vigatese-Italian glossary. The online point of reference for the author, <http://www.vigata.org/>, rather than a publisher-led or authorial initiative, is managed by a community of fans. Mondadori's official website, <http://www.andreacamilleri.net/>, though underlining the civil commitment of the author by mapping the site under key words: 'stato', 'linguaggio' 'Sicilia' and 'indagine', appears largely abandoned, with the last update in 2008. The fact that the spontaneous reader response embodied in [vigata.org](http://www.vigata.org/)'s dynamic online society has completely superseded the publisher's official presentation of the author is wholly in line with the idea of an 'upstream engagement' in which writing with social aspirations is a more dynamic creation, born out of precise concerns of individuals or specific communities rather than operating within a political framework operates (Antonello and Mussnug 2009: 12). All the initiatives outlined here stress the writer's commitment first and foremost to the text itself and to the facilitation of the reader's comprehension of the text. Indeed, correspondence between Camilleri and this virtual community alludes to a two-way project in which the interdependence of the reader and writer is underlined. Consider the author's response after learning of a school writing project inspired by the characters of the Montalbano series:

Carissimi picciotti e picciotteddre della V, voi non meritate di stare in H ma di giocare in serie A! Devo sinceramente dirvi che me la sono scialata a leggere i vostri due giornali [...]. Le opinioni di Ragonese (avversario storico di Montalbano) sono perfettamente in linea col mio personaggio e non è detto che, in futuro, io non "rubi" qualche vostra battuta [...]. Amici miei, che dirvi? Sono commosso per l'attenzione e ringrazio voi e il professor Pintacuda. La mostra avrei proprio voluto vederla, ma...siccome sono

tanticchia vecchio, viaggiare mi stanca molto. Continuate ad avere fantasia, è importante!! Vi abbraccia il vostro Andrea Camilleri<sup>2</sup>.

Camilleri's emphasis on age in this quotation is a recurring element in his interaction with readers, as this article explores subsequently. Note the characteristic deference shown to the reader. Camilleri consistently acknowledges the importance of his readers' influence in his writing; this ostensibly sincere flattery colours the author with unpretentiousness; he succeeds in emanating an unaffected gratitude for the insight offered by his own public, directly and repeatedly recognizing that there is «sempre qualche cosina che io non sapevo di me e che mi veniva rivelata» (Camilleri 2004: 220).

In visual terms the writer is a more elusive figure and appearances in front of the camera are rarer than those of Saviano, and this perhaps compliments the nostalgic appeal of his novels which is discussed below. Nevertheless, popular success has bestowed upon Camilleri an iconic media status, attested by Fiorello's easily-identifiable affectionate radio caricature of «la sua voce rauca, impastata da anni di frequentazione col tabacco»<sup>3</sup>. The media weight of Camilleri the writer is inextricably linked to his protagonist, who exerts an increasingly fruitful commercial role; Montalbano has even been interpreted by Disney in a special edition of *Topalbano* in which 'Topalbano' and his long-suffering other half Minnie embark on a series of adventures in Sicily. The pervasive presence of this popular protagonist gives Camilleri access to a wide range of audiences, and thus can be seen as enabling the circulation of his texts. Francesca Santulli (2010), Marco Trainito (2009), and most recently, Gianni Bonina's comprehensive encyclopaedia of Camilleri's works (2012) are examples of the balance

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<sup>2</sup> See 'Camilleri a scuola', *Camilleri Fans Club* <[http://www.vigata.org/scuola/camilleri\\_a\\_scuola.shtml](http://www.vigata.org/scuola/camilleri_a_scuola.shtml)>.

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See Lorenzo Trenti, 'Camilleri e Lucarelli come non li avete mai sentiti', at *Camilleri Fans Club* <<http://www.vigata.org/eventi/fiorello.shtml>>.

between literary analysis and interview transcripts in which Camilleri's wider concerns regarding moral, social and political issues emerge more pointedly. These volumes, whilst denoting public interest in Camilleri's quality as an intellectual, necessarily envisage a narrower audience than that appealed to by television or internet; the same is true for the primary material of Camilleri's texts themselves. The physical text is the primary vehicle of Camilleri's commitment, a middle-brow *impegno* which deals with meaningful issues and engages a wide popular audience. Key to this aspect of the texts is a self-reflexive interplay with reality which stresses the continuity with the reader's contemporary environment, as exemplified in *La danza del gabbiano* (Camilleri 2012:16-17):

«Come, che me ne frega? E se putacaso mi vengo a trovare faccia a faccia con l'attore che fa me stesso...come si chiama...Zingarelli...»

«Si chiama Zingaretti, non fare finta di sbagliare. Lo Zingarelli è un dizionario. Ma torno a ripetere: che te ne frega? Possibile che tu abbia questi complessi infantili all'età che ti ritrovi?»

«Che c'entra l'età, ora?».

«Eppoi nemmeno vi somigliate.»

«Questo è vero.»

«Lui è assai più giovane di te.»

By referring directly within the novels to the television adaptation of the series, Camilleri anchors his stories in the context of his reader's reality, whilst at the same time directing a playful nod towards the popularity of the programme. In doing so, he exhibits the legitimacy of writing, and specifically the book, as a form of bi-directional communication; his narratives take into account and respond to the reality and reactions of his reader. Camilleri has constructed, through his texts, an ongoing dialogue with his reader, subtly but firmly

reinforcing an image of the writer as a figure equipped with a capacity to meaningfully assess and question the status quo, the book his means of doing so.

A final case in point is provided by the serialized publication of Montalbano stories in the *Gazzetta dello Sport* between July and August 2011; an initiative which epitomizes the approach of an author both conscious of and implicitly grateful for popular collaboration. At the other end of the scale sit his regular contributions to *MicroMega*, and somewhere in the middle lies his collaboration with the Sunday cultural pages of *Il Sole 24 Ore*. The heterogeneity of the readership appealed to by such a broad spectrum of journalism emphasizes his popular appeal alongside a valid intellectual weight. *MicroMega's* association with the political Left also brings to the table Camilleri's open, if at times ambiguous, Communist sympathies, an element reflected in the political representation of Montalbano in the text. Together with the emphasis on aging that has been identified in the previous chapters as a feature both of the Montalbano series, and a recurring element of Camilleri's public persona, I suggest this works to further cement the security of the narrative relationship associated with Camilleri.

Salvo invecchia con le sue storie. È questa la cosa più importante, è questa la sua caratteristica. Maigret, per citarne uno, rimane sempre uguale a se stesso. Non cambia, non reagisce con il mondo che ha attorno. Ma ve lo immaginate voi Maigret tutto indignato per quello che è successo durante e dopo i fatti di Genova? Montalbano cresce e invecchia. Come me.

By drawing attention to Montalbano's aging in this way in interview (Saldì 2004: 16), Camilleri subtly foregrounds the relevance of his books – focalizing here, once again, his commitment to the truth and in particular revelation and condemnation of the events at the G8 summit in Genova. At the same time, repeated references to the author's advanced age (Camilleri was born in 1925) could be seen as affording

him a class of authority as an intellectual figure who represents link to a past regarded with affection by a weighty nostalgic segment of Italian society; a sort of fond 'respect for one's elders'. Francesco Erspamer (2002: para 5 of 6) explains:

Esiste in Italia un orizzonte d'attesa molto favorevole per opere in grado di evocare obliquamente (ossia eheggiando le forme e strategie narrative che in altre epoche li esprimevano) valori, emozioni e comportamenti datati ma profondamente sedimentati nella nostra cultura [...]. Il pubblico chiede a Camilleri conferme e conforto, e li ottiene attraverso aperte prese di posizione e attraverso subliminali richiami a forme e certezze del buon tempo andato.

Such an apparatus engenders a relationship in which the implicitly shared pessimistic evaluation of the present provides comfort to the reader. This warm rapport might disguise - or at least encourage us to concede - Camilleri's self-contradictions both within his literary oeuvre and in his public interventions, in the same way we would overlook inconsistencies in an elderly grandfather. Examination of Camilleri's public persona, like that of Saviano, naturally reveals discrepancies. However, empathy with Camilleri, both as an implied author<sup>4</sup> and a public figure, can be seen to render his reader more tolerant and at the same time, reflects positively on his texts. The stability of this relationship may promote a longer-term engagement which permits the author continually to acknowledge and react to reader feedback. The extract from *La danza del gabbiano* cited previously is an explicit

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Booth explains that the author, "creates not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' [...]. The 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (Booth 1961: 70-75). The term 'implied author' is therefore used here to indicate the reader image of the author persona derived from the narrative alone, as opposed to the actual person.

example of this device, but a wider-ranging consideration of Camilleri's literary output could perhaps reveal a longer-term communicative relationship, which sees each text as a response to society's – and readers' - anxieties. Certainly in the case of Montalbano, we can say that the public figure of Andrea Camilleri works to illuminate the element of social inquiry in the novels.

Saviano's creative media presence, on the contrary, and particularly when balanced against his relatively limited literary output, seems to extend far beyond Genette's definition of the paratext; it can be seen to resist such a definition not only in its dynamism, but also in its interaction in the process of the 'making' of the book; might we say the contradictions in Saviano's own position and consequent dubitable sincerity act in ways that 'un-make' the *impegno* the text aspires to create? The emphasis on the corporeal within the text, together with the forceful 'io' of the protagonist, is key to this question, as it has been argued that this device serves as means of authenticating the account, in that Saviano offers himself, and his own body, as a guarantee of sincerity. For Raffaello Palumbo Mosca, «la tendenza a rappresentare emozioni e in genere situazioni astratte in termini corporei fa capo al principio che dati o interpretazioni possono essere inesatti o manomessi, ma il corpo non mente» (Palumbo Mosca 2009:317). Alessandro Dal Lago suggests that the protagonist is presented as a writer-hero who seeks to unite with an ostentatious self-sacrifice the reading public (Dal Lago 2010: 75-110). The idea of the young writer's personal sacrifice now constitutes an inextricable element of the reader's understanding both of the text and of the writer, frequently reinforced by Saviano himself. This polemical aspect can be seen as catapulting Saviano into an exclusive class of intellectual authority. The 24-hour protection deemed necessary following the death threat issued by the camorra subsequent to the commercial success of the novel has clear parallels with the fatwa placed upon Salman Rushdie subsequent to the publication of *The Satanic Verses*: a link whose cultural weight and commercial potential has not been

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ignored either by Saviano, or his PR team. *La Repubblica's* petition for state-funded protection of the writer was instigated by a group of six Nobel prizewinners; Dario Fo, Günter Grass, Orhan Pamuk, Michail Gorbachev, Desmond Tutu and Rita Levi Montalcini were the first of its

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150,000 signatures. Whilst the genuine courage inherent in *Gomorra's* assembly should not be overlooked, nor the very real toll exerted on Saviano's personal liberty, the accent placed on this aspect of the writer, and the level of 'ethical immunity' or irreproachability this has afforded him in many circles has also given rise to an element of cynicism towards the text as well as its author. Saviano here might be best viewed as simultaneously the beneficiary and the victim of the cycle of production and consumption in which *Gomorra* exists as an industrial product. Consider how the extreme close-up depicting a stony-faced Saviano on the back cover of *Gomorra* is by now a characteristic pose of the author; the focus is not the text, but Saviano himself; and the ongoing assembly of a 360° representation of the writer effected by Mondadori's marketing strategy and enacted by the author himself in social networking services and television appearances, works to direct the reader's attention towards Saviano in a way which promotes two divergent understandings of *Gomorra* and its author. On the one hand, the photographic autograph stamped on Saviano's works can be read as an act of courage and defiance in the face of organized crime. On the other, it can be interpreted as a motif of

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A first meeting in 2008 was documented by Mario Calabresi, 'NY, l'incontro Saviano-Rushdie "Noi, scrittori sotto scorta"', *La Repubblica*, 3 May 2008. <[http://www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/spettacoli\\_e\\_cultura/saviano-rushdie/saviano-rushdie/saviano-rushdie.html](http://www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/spettacoli_e_cultura/saviano-rushdie/saviano-rushdie/saviano-rushdie.html)>; their last meeting to date was on *Che tempo che fa*, Rai Tre, 19 November 2012.

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See Paolo Coppola, 'Saviano, firmano altri Novel su Repubblica.it: 150mila adesioni', *La Repubblica*, 22 October 2008 <<http://www.repubblica.it/2008/10/sezioni/cronaca/camorra-4/oltre-150mila-adesioni/oltre-150mila-adesioni.html>>.

visual vanity and self-interest that reflects a prevalent characteristic of contemporary society. Both interpretations construct Saviano as a celebrity figure. Whilst the text itself does not favour an identification of the reader with the writer, the apparent transparency and interactivity of the writing process, sustained by Saviano's productive media presence, constitutes a call on the reader's sympathies. The intimate portrait to which we have access; a bittersweet affection for his estranged Naples, snapshots of meals before eating, plane tickets, postings of favourite songs, all appeal to a reader understanding of Saviano which resembles the dynamics of a growing friendship rather than that of an objective inquiry; a pseudo-intimacy that is characteristic of a celebrity/fan relationship, and in which his physical presence is focalized. I am tempted to consider the insistent foregrounding of Saviano as a tangible person on *terra firma* in some way a response to the ephemerality of his pervasive media presence. For Pellini, however, Saviano is not a solitary case, but an example of a predominant category of Italian writers in which «l'appello all'identificazione, all'empatia e alla simpatia, prevalga tendenzialmente – e sia pure in forme ogni volta diverse – sull'invito all'autonoma riflessione, alla presa di distanza intellettuale» (Pellini 2011: 161). For this reason, he explains that a cultural assessment of Saviano is likely to waver between:

L'ammirazione per il coraggio civile dello scrittore e lo sconforto per una sovresposizione dell'io che appare perfettamente omologo [...] all'egotismo narcisistico che pervade la postmoderna società dello spettacolo. Il fatto è che [...]. Saviano non ha, da investire nel pubblico dibattito, il capitale simbolico di un'opera letteraria che pretende all'eternità: non solo e non tanto perché non l'ha mai scritta, essendo *Gomorra* il suo primo libro – in questo

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“Stasera, in meravigliosa compagnia del dono che ho ricevuto dagli studenti e docenti di Marano.” 11 May 2013; “Ascolto “Il flauto magico” di Mozart e per la durata di questa musica sono felice di appartenere alla razza umana...” 3 May 2013, Roberto Saviano '(Facebook)'.

merceologicamente omologo ai numerosi *best-sellers* di esordienti (sovente senza futuro), di cui l'editoria italiana dell'ultimo decennio s'è fatta una specialità. Soprattutto perché il capitale letterario s'è deprezzato vertiginosamente. (Ibid.: 161-162).

Pellini ascribes a certain lack of ideological weight on Saviano's part as an intellectual figure (specifically, it should be noted, compared to that of Émile Zola) not only due to his limited weight as writer, but to general lack of validity of literature as an ideological currency in Italian society today. Cilento implies, reading neither courage nor vanity in the media tempest which situates Saviano, and not *Gomorra*, as its epicentre, and instead proposing an extension of Wu Ming's concept of the Unidentified Narrative Object to describe Saviano himself (Cilento 2011: para 5 of 28):

A ubiquitous storyteller in the age of media convergence and participatory culture [...]. Seen in this light, *Gomorra* appears to be an UNO not only for the literary techniques identified by Wu Ming, but especially for Saviano's capacity to transform a best-seller into a fluid work in progress that each time resists its detractors by refining its own arguments, or by choosing new objectives [...]. He is a catalyst able to generate in-depth discussion and to bring to light what had been, before the "*Gomorrhah* effect," conveniently removed from the Italian civil conscience for decades. Another proof of Saviano's pursuit of this strategy lies in the fact that he has chosen the dynamic essay form over the novel for *The Beauty and Inferno* (2009) and *Vieni via con me* (2011), which contain the stories that were presented in the TV program he co-hosted. While of course he may publish another UNO novel in the future, what is remarkable about *Vieni via con me* is that Saviano adapted texts originally conceived for television monologues into a book, and not vice-versa (ibid.: para 7-8 of 28).

However, the immediate nature of such a 'fluid work in progress', and the high level of exposure it entails, enables the reader to both recognize and express - instantaneously via social media - inconsistencies within the Saviano's stance. If the sincerity of his

testimony is undermined, so too is his reliability as a voice of authority. The legal case following claims made by the author in *La bellezza e l'inferno: Scritti 2004-2009*, is illustrative here. Saviano describes a telephone interchange with Felicia Impastato, the mother of mafia victim Giuseppe 'Peppino' Impastato (Saviano 2010: 124). Subsequent to the doubt cast on the possibility that such a conversation ever occurred by journalist Paolo Persichetti in *Liberazione*, Saviano filed, and lost, a legal complaint on the grounds of defamation<sup>8</sup>. The author used his Facebook page to explain and justify his claims<sup>9</sup>. One reassuring aspect of the heated reactions that this post provoked is that Saviano's Facebook page also appears to give a voice to his detractors as well as his supporters, confirming its potential as a forum for debate. Saviano's post is an example of how literary texts, television, journalism, collaborative projects such as *Vieni via con me* and *Quello che (non) ho*, and online media interaction with readers are woven together to form a narrative tapestry which the writer continually re-elaborates as necessary. However, as Mario Lucio points out, «altrettanto legittimamente si può pensare che la mafia si batte principalmente con risposte sociali prima che 'culturali', per non dire di bon ton [...]. Se Saviano considerasse legittime anche queste distinzioni, e non solo le sue, avrebbe certamente risposto a Persichetti su *Liberazione*, invece lo ha querelato, dando prova di quanto sia sterile il suo moralismo»<sup>10</sup>. Saviano's continued reworking of his narrative in this way entails a detrimental ambiguity which betrays the book. Though the example cited by Cilento previously of the transformation of a television

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<sup>8</sup> Paolo Persichetti, 'La famiglia Impastato contro Einaudi (e Saviano)', *Liberazione*, 17 November 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Roberto Saviano, 15 May 2013, ('Facebook').

<sup>10</sup> Mario Lucio, 'Saviano perde la causa con Persichetti. Il diritto di critica vince sul moralismo', *Polisblog* <<http://www.polisblog.it/post/86641/saviano-perde-la-causa-con-persichetti-il-diritto-di-critica-ha-vinto-sul-moralismo>>.

intervention into a literary text exalts the significance, relevance and value that continue to be afforded the physical book in the digital media age, the latter example of the Impastato case indicates the risks that the writer must negotiate in self-exposure across multiple channels. The sour taste left lingering following the doubt cast on his testimony and Saviano's recourse to a legal means, instead of a like-for-like written response therefore raises questions as to how far it is important that the elaboration of a narrative, which relies upon transgression of the written text, remains faithful to the nature of the relationship established between reader and writer via that text. *Gomorra's* investment in Saviano as the guarantor of the account provides an example of the increased possibility generated by today's media, in particular social media, for the reader to hold the writer to account. The anger and sense of betrayal evident in the reaction to the Impastato case suggests to me therefore to contradict Pellini's bleak image of the contemporary literary field as one with decreasingly relevant ethical authority, as it seems to be precisely Saviano's infidelity towards the terms of authority established by his book against which readers protest.

It is important however not to overstate the democratic nature of the media. The very ease with which the Persichetti-Impastato protest has (been) faded into the shadows of Saviano's celebrity figure is evidence of the complex and largely opaque power structures operating within digital and media networks. As Couldrey emphasizes «the digital ages's extended range of content producers does nothing to counter the inherent inequalities and hierarchies of the internet as a networked space where 'links in' – and so basic searchability – are distributed unevenly» (Couldrey 2012: 205).

Camilleri's fiction has been shown by Erspramer to perform a consolatory function. However, this seemingly resigned nostalgia is belied by the author's consistent exploitation of narrative fiction, in particular the confirmed popular genre of crime fiction, as a vehicle to draw the reader's attention to social injustice. Camilleri's employment of fiction to signal and comment on key social issues, such as

maltreatment or abusive employment of illegal immigrants, police brutality as well as organized crime, indicates his conviction in the power of the novel as a means of revealing hidden or neglected aspects of Italian society today. The promotion of writing and the book as a means of interpreting reality is complimented by author's creation of an easily decipherable form of Sicilian; now a well-established characteristic of the novels that further emphasizes the complicit bond between reader and author; it is a unique language, Camilleri's invention, but the common tongue for communication in this narrative relationship. This feature of the narration of Montalbano exhibits words playfully, interrogates their function and at the same time reference the power of the literary text to situate the reader and invite him to engage in communication according to the terms dictated by the writer.

Camilleri is regarded as a valid source of authority in the general public sphere; as Eckert suggests, his opinions get requested on arguments as varied as whether Milan's *Teatro della Scala* is still an important opera house or the probable outcome of a football match (Eckert forthcoming 2014). Simultaneously, reader understanding of the 'real' Camilleri reflects accurately and positively back onto the figure implied by his texts, not only supporting but further elucidating the social inquiry and political undertones of his stories. The authorial fame of Camilleri in this way works to enhance his *impegno* in both its augmentation of his potential readership, and its affirmation of the sincerity of the implied author.<sup>11</sup> The references to contemporary events - both serious and more light-hearted - emphasize the interactive and cooperative power of the text. As such, they can be considered to fall within the boundary of the paratext; contributing to a positive reader perception of the public figure of Camilleri that in turn

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<sup>11</sup> Though beyond the scope of this article, I believe comparisons here with Ed Finn's exploration of the digital networks associated with the writer Toni Morrison (Finn 2012:177-202) in the US context would be revelatory.

works to verify the authority and potential longevity of literary communication; to return to Genette, they '*make a book*'.

## Conclusions

Saviano operates and presently thrives in an environment in which fluid and rapid systems of communication envisage a participatory narrative culture. His manipulation of a wide variety of social and digital media, oscillating between the visual and the written, imbues his commitment with an immediacy that places him in closer proximity to his public. In this way, he appears to be renegotiating the approach of his 1950s literary forefathers, in particular that of Pasolini, according to the terms of the contemporary intellectual setting. Whilst the use of social media affords him a level of visibility, accessibility and relevance as a public intellectual able to stimulate debate and highlight contemporary social issues, the very same media promote a more democratic narrative relationship in which writer authority can be rapidly and publicly interrogated. As such, the Saviano case acts as a prompt for recognition and further exploration of Couldrey's identified tensions of authority in the media of our age:

The general idea of mediatization must be translated into more specific analysis of how capital, authority and power are being transformed by media meta-capital in particular sites. A broader paradox then emerges: that, as more and more fields of social competition become open to the dynamics of media visibility, and so in a sense 'democratized', the force of media power increases (Couldrey 2012: 155).

The cycle of communication created by Camilleri's texts allude to the infinite paratextual possibilities created by effective manipulation of contemporary technologies. In this model, paratexts reflect reader understanding of the implied author, writer sincerity and authority is affirmed, and the text is retained as the principle vehicle of writer-reader communication.

The coexistence of these contrasting models suggests that reader-text-writer relationships in Italy in the digital era reflect the fluidity, flexibility and immediacy of the technologies dominating today's environment; narrative relationships appear increasingly organic and dynamic. However, the level of democracy promoted by a new media age in this context should not be exaggerated. Indeed, we might point to the very ubiquity of both Saviano and Camilleri as indicative of the hidden mechanisms of exclusion and diffusion in a world which is often considered to be more independent and subversive.

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## The author

Georgia Wall is a PhD student at the University of Warwick. Current research explores the notion of 'success' in migrant culture, focusing on celebrities the British-Italian community as part of the AHRC-funded project, 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures'. Other research interests include *impegno* in contemporary Italian literature, interaction between the regional and the national in Italian popular culture, and the cultural identity of the Abruzzo region.

Email: [g\\_wall@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:g_wall@hotmail.co.uk)

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