

A Name “in the Mirror”. Narrative Strategies and Onomastic Choices in a Tale by Rocco Scotellaro

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Abstract

An analysis of the anthroponyms used by Rocco Scotellaro in his tales will paint a picture of a consistent context of references, responding to his political and socio-cultural aims of representing the situation in progress of his *Contadini del Sud* [Southern peasants]. Through this creative procedure, Scotellaro gives his readers samples of what could be defined as a striking choice of “regional univocity”, which is realized by using – almost exclusively – nouns and names with a strong local flavour which fully represent that Southern world. Only one name does not conform to this approach, that is to say “Ramorra”: an idiosyncratic choice (a *unicum* in the whole of Scotellaro’s work, novels, poems and theatre included) which will appear all the more significant considering that it has been adopted for naming the author’s alter ego. Such a choice results in tearing the auctorial “I” to pieces. Ramorra is, in fact, the main character in that strange “autobiography of the double” entitled *Uno si distrae al bivio* [One gets distracted at the fork], the very first of his juvenile attempts at prose (1942-43), a mysterious and complex work published only after Scotellaro’s death thanks to the efforts of Carlo Levi.

The essential value of the work by Rocco Scotellaro, the young *poet-Mayor* of Tricarico – a small village near Matera, in the South of Italy – is in its complete identification with the popular and ‘country way’ of living and thinking based upon his own experience of ‘peasant life’. Being true to its “still-alive roots”, the ‘popular’ for Scotellaro represents the chance to describe a world “without Christ”, so still and anonymous, that one described by Carlo Levi in his *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* [Christ stopped at Eboli] (it is important to remember that Levi was Scotellaro’s old friend and master, as well as his ‘publisher’); a world, the Southern one, which is rejected at the edge, that Pasolinian world, *pre-human* and *pre-rational*, of his “Southern peasants”, to quote one of his best known novels, *Contadini del Sud* (1954).

Therefore, and for the first time in contemporary Italian literature, in Scotellaro’s work new characters emerge from that buried land which is the South of Italy, “further than India or China” as observed by M. Alicata (1954) in his *Il meridionalismo non si può fermare a Eboli* [Southernism can’t be stopped at Eboli]. So, in this context it is the ‘nomination’, the ‘word naming’, which as an immediate means of existence and freedom allows the writer to put situations and characters into the scene that had been thought of before then as ‘unpoetic’: Isabella “*la figlia del trainante*” [“the ploughman’s daughter”], Pasquale “*il fuochista*” [“the stoker”], Michele “*il figlio del tricolore*” [“the tricolour’s son”], the poor, the harvesters, the farmers, etc., the same ones who were ready to “come into play” in the memorable lines of *È fatto giorno* [The dawn is always new], one of the most emblematic of Scotellaro’s poems, a sort of “Marseillaise of the peasant awakening” as Carlo Levi defined it: “è fatto giorno, siamo entrati in gioco anche noi, con i panni e le scarpe e le face che avevamo” [“day has dawned, we too have come into play, with the clothes, the shoes and the faces we had”]. Of course the anthroponyms, with their ‘southern-ness’, are part of this ‘entry into play’, and in doing so they make themselves representatives of that world “as protected from history and time” (Levi).

Although a survey of the onomastics in Scotellaro's works has never been carried out, literary anthroponymy is a useful tool for the definition and interpretation of the writer's literary choices. An anthroponymy study can also offer valuable support for the critical analysis of his works (in this sense, the analysis based on the anthroponyms used by Scotellaro in his writings depicts a consistent context of reference, responding to his political and socio-cultural aims of representing the situation *in progress* of his *Southern peasant*) if it is true that the author's literary method of work reported a significant 'recycling', a re-use of anthroponyms, along with frequent changes of themes, motifs and characters from one genre to another, in order to outline a single, grand and uninterrupted Southern epic: by this creative procedure, Scotellaro gives his readers samples of what could be defined as a striking choice of 'regional univocity'. The environment in which each story takes place is in fact mostly the Lucanian one, full of characters, farmers or villagers, representing the world the writer actually interacts with; also his family – a model of private life and foundation of a culture – often appears in this southern world to mediate this relationship; moreover, the family the Narrator belongs to due to a question of 'blood and affinity' also participates in the 'country life', sharing its mentality and problems (not by chance many of the anthroponyms used by Scotellaro are familiar proper names).

Schematizing, the use of almost solely regionalist proper names adopted by Scotellaro (on this subject it is useful to underline that to some extent his choice is shared and adopted by other 'Southerner writers') responds to at least 3 orders of reasons, 3 types of 'needs' which are not only stylistic and formal but also practical and socio-political:

1. A need for a MIMESIS of the REAL: characters' proper names used by Scotellaro correspond to true stories. They are, therefore, firmly attached to the actual socio-cultural and linguistic model of the South, and particularly that of Lucania in the 1950s; we might say, then, that the chosen anthroponyms, quite exclusively the real ones, become almost 'label names' that fully represent his Southern world and that provide the reader with an essential local flavour, in accordance with the author's realistic intent;
2. A need for (SELF-)IDENTIFICATION/GROUP EVOCATION (the concept of group evocation is borrowed from Migliorini 1927): the anthroponyms in Scotellaro's works, with their 'southern-ness', are also a "measure of the whole landscape, of men and things of that region" (Levi, Preface, 1974) according to the concept expressed by Bally (1951), which responds to the will of the author to "emphasize the belonging of a name to a specific, historical, cultural, political and social *milieu*" (Marzano 2008:40);
3. The author's need for CREATION/EXISTENCE: through a sort of onomaturgic/demiurgic act (which in this case also figures as a socio-political one) Scotellaro, for the first time, creates the 'things' of his region by 'nominating' them; so the Southern peasants are dragged from darkness and indistinction and they finally 'exist' in their subjectivity and in their oxymoronic individuality of 'real characters'.

In order to confirm this hypothesis, the compilation of a register of names (see **Table 1**) has proved to be indispensable, useful for providing details about the onomastic choices of the author and about their use and meaning. This register is a comprehensive and nearly complete sample of anthroponyms and characters in Rocco Scotellaro's prose production, all published posthumously considering the premature death of the young Lucanian writer. It is a limited, fragmented, often incomplete literary production, but not for this reason less interesting and stimulating both from a socio-political and a literary perspective.

Table 1

	SCOTELLARO'S LITERARY PRODUCTION	PROPER NAMES AND CHARACTERS
PROSE	<i>L'uva puttanello</i> [The unripe grapes]	Giuseppe, Nicola, Paolo, Giovanni, Michele, Innocenzo, Carmela, Domenica, Teresa, Gregorio, Angelo, Serafina, Ninuccio, Angelina, [Sindaco, Pulce rossa], zia Filomena, Pasquale, Enrico, Rocco, Irene, Pietro, Donato, Maria, "Chiellino", "Giappone"[Vito Agresti], "Pasciucco", "Bartolomeo Vasco", "Mazzolla", "Ciccillo", "Codicchio", "Brancaccio", "Purchia", "Timpone", "Antonio", "Carritelli".
	<i>Contadini del Sud</i> [Southern peasants]	Mulieri Michele (fu Innocenzo), Di Grazia Andrea (fu Pancrazio), Laurenzana Antonio (di Domenico), Francesco Chironna (di Michele), Montefusco Cosimo (fu Nunziante).
	Racconti [Tales]	Giuseppe, Ninuccio, Paolo (<i>Il paese</i>); Nicola (<i>La festa</i>); Tilde, Carlo (<i>Fili di ragno</i>); Gulli (<i>Sala d'aspetto</i>); Nicola (<i>Suonata a distesa</i>); Francesca ["mia madre"] (<i>La capera</i>); Salvatore, Lucia (<i>Salvatore</i>); Serafina, Nicola, Antonietta, Rosa, Pancrazio Schiavone, Antonio, Mincuccio Strazzanera, il signor Raffaele Montesano, Battista (<i>Pace in famiglia</i>); Franco, Paolo, Serafina (<i>Una testuggine</i>); Prospero, Vincenza (<i>La postulante</i>); <i>Un cigno canta in ottobre?</i> : --- ; Lorenzi (famiglia), Giorgio, Peppino, Commendator Franceschi, Franca (<i>Ed anche i ricchi</i>); Giorgi Ramorra (<i>Uno si distrae al bivio</i>).
POETRY	Tutte le poesie 1940-1953 [All poems 1940-1953] (<i>È fatto giorno</i> [The dawn is always new]; <i>Margherite e rosolacci</i> [Daisies and poppies])	Mariarosa (<i>Saluto</i>); Isabella (<i>Per Pasqua alla promessa sposa</i>); (Santo)Antonio (<i>Una fucsia</i>); Silvia (<i>Una dichiarazione d'amore a una straniera</i>); Trude (<i>Passeggiate</i>); Rocco (<i>A una madre</i>); (Santo) Pancrazio (<i>Salmo alla casa e agli emigranti</i>); Beatrice (<i>Adolescente</i>); (Santo) Giuseppe (<i>La pace dei poveri</i>); Serafina (<i>La cartolina del giovane vacaro</i>); Ninetta, Nicola, Benì, Antonio, Pancrazio (<i>La canzone del disamore</i>).
THEATRE	Giovani soli [Younger alone]	Angelo, Piero, Fulgenzio, Armando, Sergio.

With a close analysis of Scotellaro's overall literary production, carried out in order to offer a representative framework which is capable of fully showing the onomastic universe of the writer, I have been able to notice an idiosyncratic choice of Scotellaro's *modus operandi*, an abnormal and undervalued case which has been rather 'ignored' by the critics. This is an unusual choice, which becomes much more singular if we consider it as inserted into the context of a production generally referred to as 'primitive' and 'without Christ' as is the society of Lucania, which remains a *unicum* in his whole production, novels, poems and theatre included. It has been put in place in *Uno si distrae al bivio* [One gets distracted at the fork], a strange 'autobiography of the double', the very first juvenile attempt at prose by Scotellaro, only published after his death thanks to the efforts of Carlo Levi.¹

¹ Scotellaro's early prose production is mostly unknown, despite its value and the fact that it offers interesting information about the author's later production, representing not only its premise but also an unexplored part of the writer's talent: his short stories, in fact, develop, *in nuce* 'new' themes for Scotellaro, and reveal – or unveil – an original aspect, mysterious and complex, which frees his production from the banalizing accusation that his work was characterized by an involuntary regionalism 'of ignorance', and releases the author himself from the narrow label of 'peasant-poet'. The earliest Scotellarian prose were never organized in an organic *corpus* and were individually published from 1948 to 1953 in literary magazines of limited circulation, remaining on the sidelines of the literary debate and out of the interest of the critics, and because of the great difficulty in finding them, they are almost unheard or unread.

The story opens in the name of his ‘unknown’ main character: the only anthroponym to be pronounced in *Uno si distrae al bivio* is in fact the apparently nonsensical Ramorra; and so Scotellaro, who creates ‘the things’ of his region by naming them first, similarly ‘creates a name’ for himself or, better, for his own double, his image in the mirror.

Scotellaro never mentions the proper name of the homodiegetic Narrator, distracted like many other young men “suffering from nothing”, at the ‘fork’ of his adolescence: in this context it seems as if the title referred to a generality, and that the author surely wanted to ‘expand’ his ‘autobiographical analysis’, or perhaps self-analysis, to an entire ‘generation’. As an archetype of the irresolution and uncertainty of adolescence *Ramorra* is the proper name that the homodiegetic Narrator Scotellaro, through a so-called ‘baptism of himself’ (see: Ferrucci 1986; Sasso 1990: 112-115), chooses for the main character of his narration. It is his *alter ego*, who in the *incipit* is “emerging from the mirror’s surface”, by demanding a “novel of his own”. It is an autobiographical tale, able to develop according to a twofold register of ‘oppositional coexistences’, which retraces the “real contradictions of Southern society” (Fortini 1974). It marks a sort of boundary between adolescence and maturity, the point from which the crossroads branch off, marked by the “oppositional game of memory and project”. This is a dualism which is constantly present in all Scotellaro’s works and is a theme that the author will more richly and maturely use especially in his later poetry. It is precisely from these ‘adolescent’ pages that motifs and themes appear, proposed in a dichotomic and premature fashion. Joining the PSI (the Italian Socialist Party) and the beginning of Scotellaro’s socio-political commitment in 1943, together with the traumatic death of his father in 1942, are two crucial events that required the end of his adolescence. So like his main character, Scotellaro is also at ‘the decisive crossroads’ in his life. Giorgi Ramorra wants a novel of his own, and so the Narrator, to please him/himself, recalls his life in a story that takes place at several levels, such as past and present, dream and reality, in an ambiguous and voluntary juxtaposition of scenes and situations. He does this through a process that allows him to investigate and present the multi-faceted psychology of Ramorra from different perspectives, by putting together all the pieces which in the narrative are symbolically shown by “mirror fragments” to be reconstructed into a unity, a sort of ‘spiritual mosaic’ that wants precisely to be a symbolic autobiography of the Narrator/Author himself.

The significant immission of new, unusual themes for the author such as the theme of the *mirror* and the *double*, emerging from the very title of his tale (*bivio*, the keyword in the text, which is a fork in the road, is the sign and metaphor of a conscious ‘bipolarity’ on the part of Scotellaro), together with the tale’s symbolic intention – the splitting of the main character (“I had Ramorra in my soul a long time ago...”), the introduction of the metaphor of the crossroads (which is obviously the set of unlimited possibilities and choices of life) and the announcement of a ‘narration within the narration’ – contribute to determining in the reader an effect of alienation and a feeling of artificiality that initiate a critical reading of the text.

Also the setting of the story – which is certainly influenced by “the well-known *metafictional* experiments of Pirandello, Proust, Gide” (See: Pupino 2000: 8) – registered for the first time a significant innovation attempted by Scotellaro compared to the stagnation of Southern culture in the 1950s. Regarding the structure of the story, in the twentieth-century novel the fit of narrative sequences had already found extensive use in Svevo’s prose production, as well as the introduction of symbols and symmetries that combine to create an oniric atmosphere which refers both to the metaphysical lesson of G. de Chirico and the ‘surreal stories’ of M. Bontempelli, with specific reference to the stories of *La scacchiera davanti allo specchio* [*The chess set in the mirror*]. These innovations also highlight the opening by the author to a wider culture, a culture ‘in motion’ which, through new stylistic

instances, combines realism in content (a dominant stylistic choice in Scotellaro's work) with an all psychological and interior in-depth examination, by exploiting even the original narrative function of the proper name. Analyzing Ramorra – born as an imaginary double character, as an *alter ego*, who intends to separate from the narrator and to acquire its independence through the writing of a “book for oneself” – it is unavoidable to refer to all those characters we can find in Pirandello's works (regarding Pirandello's onomastic choices see Marzano 2008 and Porcelli-Terrusi 2006, for main essays dedicated to the author): the “characters in search of an author”, the “others”, the “tenants”, the “ghosts” and the characters who “flock around the writing table”. At the same time the Scotellarian main character seems to be almost an exercise in self-analysis and self-awareness, an experience which leads, once again, to Svevo, as well as, of course, to Freud, with obvious references to the myth of eternal adolescence and the Freudian reading of the myth of Narcissus, an aspect that Levi did not fail to emphasize in his Preface (1974).

So Ramorra is the first Scotellarian character and remains the only one with *fictional* features, especially considering the proper name: a total invention by the author, or almost that. Pronounced in the *incipit*, the name of Ramorra performs the function of ‘*catalyzation*’, and in so doing it begins the story (the tale is indeed written by Ramorra, according to his will). Despite the importance that is assigned to him, the choice of the main character's proper name is never explained explicitly in the text, and it is impossible in this case to trace the sources or any evidence of Scotellaro's onomatopoeic activity, even having recourse to his *Taccuini [Notebooks]*, a real repository of suggestions and incitements (which are subsequent to that first early experiment in prose), in which the author – here I quote and translate from Scotellaro – used to make a note of “names and facts considered as interesting, words, phrases, definitions and quotes from other authors – like Machiavelli, Ariosto, Camus – that would be useful at the appropriate time”.

However, the name of Ramorra gives us interesting cues for literary analysis, and hence it is possible to formulate some interpretative assumptions. First of all, according to the effective formula by Sasso (2000) taken from his *I nomi delle tenebre, [Names of darkness]*, in the text – through onomastic strategies, first of all based on acoustic-articulatory motivations (Hamon 1977), like the alliteration of the letter R that refers to his own name, Rocco, a “phonetic symbolism” (Migliorini 1927) that led the author to the ‘choice of name’ – the physical and moral aspect of the “*caRo magRo e bReve RamoRRa*” is outlined so that, and again I quote the text: “a name is a portrait. It is an image of the individual [...]. A name may delineate an aspect of the character of the individual, it designates the shape of its body, the traits of its face, even indicating its destiny”; regarding the character's surname, Giorgi (particularly in use in central-north of Italy, especially in Toscana; cf. D'Acunti 1994, De Felice 1980 and Raimondi-Ravelli-Papa 2005) is also the anagram of *grigio* [grey], like the ‘autumn of his soul’ which sees him dull and sad, in Northern Italy, in Trento. From his youthful distress and his troubles, from his sentimental failure due to its inner contradictions, the insane idea of suicide will mature in Ramorra. In the same way, probably not by chance, Giorgi Ramorra is emblematically also an anagram of ‘*morirà raggiro*’ [‘deception will die’]: so it is as if there were – on the part of the protagonist/narrator/author – the desire to enshrine the end of ‘the deception of adolescence’ and embark on a mature and adult life of renewed awareness, through the very existence of this ‘strange double-of soul’, this Narcissus that emerges in ‘the mirror of consciousness’ and that, somehow, is meant to represent the overcoming of the main character's limits.

First of all in my interpretive hypotheses I will also consider that in this mysterious and complex tale, the creation of a name results in tearing the auctorial “*I*” to pieces, as mentioned. And it will only be after a ‘double’ laceration, a second fragmentation, this time a real one (the one that will destroy Ramorra, reducing him to “mirror fragments”), that the narrating “*I*” can be reconstructed as a unity. “I had Ramorra in my soul a long time ago” – this is the formula that, as an old and unbroken Southern folk rhyme delimits the story in a circular way, seems never-ending. The explicit closes the circle by reducing Ramorra to mirror fragments. Although not even the name of Ramorra remains, the story begins again and again: it is not by chance that a previous draft of *Uno si distrae al bivio* was titled *E non è mai la fine* [And it is never ending] (see N. Ginzburg’s letter to R. Scotellaro in Vitelli 1983). It was an explicit allusion to the ‘infinite circularity’ of the story, which, moreover, opens and closes – in a circular way – with a mirror, and under the name of Ramorra, a proper name which structurally already seems to defer to a continuously returning, circular echo: RAMORRA-morRA, which also focuses on the repetition of the letter R, a vibrant consonant used by the author with an almost onomatopoeic value, placed in a middle and strengthened position (see the concept of “sound appearance”, Smith 2009). By the way, this effect of circularity is at once the ‘product of name’, which with its symmetrical scheme seems to allude, in a significant prelude, to the very structure of the novel. The lexical specularity (or circularity), found both in the forename and in the surname – which also proves to be useful in order to express the ‘dualism’ consubstantial to the character itself – is obtained by using the pattern of the *syllabic palindrome*, a word whose syllables are readable backwards and forwards, like in a mirror (in this regard, see the concept of “quantità sillabica” [“syllabic quantity”], Marzano 2008 and the concept of “visual appearance” too, Smith 2009). The circularity of the proper name, at last, is evident from the sound effect that is produced when pronouncing it: a clear message generated by the association of first name and surname through the technique of *incastro* [interlocking]: giorGI RAMorra (*gira*, that is to say: *turns*).

As previously mentioned, within Scotellaro’s onomastic choices the name of Ramorra is significant because it breaks with the poetic imagery derived essentially from the peasant universe, and is even more symptomatic in the definition of the socio-literary path of the author, due to the fact that Scotellaro makes this unusual onomastic choice when he attempts his approach to the short stories, far – for the first significant time – from his country and from its ‘Southern life’. The ‘irruption’ of Ramorra’s forename within a production composed of a series of anthroponyms typical of Scotellarian Lucania of the 1950s (like Michele, Nicola, Cosimo, Francesco, Pasquale, Filomena, Ninetta, Isabella, etc.) is such as to attract the reader’s attention, by causing a phenomenon of defamiliarization, of ‘*straniamento*’ or onomastic alienation. Translating from P. Marzano’s volume *Quando il nome è «cosa seria»* [When the name is “something serious”]:

“The first appearance in the text of a proper name that is not already famous establishes a sort of ‘semantic gap’. A not speaking name, apparently ‘a-semantic’, ‘mute’, actually stimulates curiosity and inevitable attempts at interpretation (a discrepancy of use is added to recordable constants): the name is significant because of what it will eventually be precisely in virtue of the fact that it is apparent nonsense”.

There is thus an alienation, which is functional to effectively reproducing the feeling felt by the protagonist (himself in Trento) when he enters a ‘foreign land’, an incomprehensible land. Naming his character Rocco Scotellaro can, in fact, also play on the “predictability of certain operations the reader will probably carry out, by isolating, in the proper name,

suffixes, prefixes and morphemes that it will then analyze, as an effect of *feedback*, in relation to the meaning of the character” (Marzano 2008: 55). This is what happens for Ramorra, a proper name ‘invented’ by the author, but strongly connotative/communicative and with a clear narrative function (for example, as already mentioned, it is functional to the circularity of the plot). It is conceived as having a certain similarity with real nouns, on the model of the *portmanteau-word* (that is to say: new words, minted by the contraction of several terms, simultaneously vehicles of more meanings) ‘invented’ by L. Carroll in his *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871). In this case, if we only consider the most significant example (without neglecting the other references *found* in the name of Ramorra, such as *ramarro*), we are able to find an actual assonance that produces a transparency based not so much on etymology *tout court*, but rather on a sort of ‘folk etymology’. “The quintessential function of all words is symbolic, and so when used as names [and proper names], words carry with themselves some measure of additional associations” (Smith 2009: 6). This is the case with *morra*, a very popular and ancient game particularly in use in Scotellaro’s post-war peasant civilization (and still widespread especially in Southern Italy). As a main theme of two poems entitled *Morra* and *Sera lontana* (produced shortly following Scotellaro’s first tale, *One gets distracted at the fork*, dated respectively 1944-46), that of *morra* is an image-symbol which must have been very close to Scotellaro. In both cases, in fact, the author uses it with a nostalgic-evocative function (an evocation of the country just like in his tale, in which Scotellaro, far from his village, in Trento, explicitly expresses his homesickness).

In summary, the ‘social distance’ apparently sought by the author with his unusual onomastic choice comes to be nullified by confirming his ‘regionality’. Understood as a voluntary and rational choice – if it is true that Ramorra’s proper name “is descriptive not only literally but also metaphorically” (Smith 2009), even in this case performed in a less clear way and although it has been ‘disguised’ (actually Ramorra, despite its ‘opacity’, is a ‘speaking name’, an *analogous name*) – so even the apparently nonsensical name of Ramorra ‘reveals its mystery’: through the strong phonetic symbolism, the ‘triggered’ language games, the evocative onomastic strategies intentionally put in place by the author, Ramorra brings to mind, again, the images of his Southern country, those images which “overflow in the brain” of a nostalgic Scotellaro. In the same way as his Ramorra, like a torn and smug Narcissus at ‘the mirror of his conscious’ the author finally refuses to change and, even, to die.

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