

Sicily: *In the Name of the Law*

It is September 1948, but the scorched expanses of the Sicilian interior that stretch out before the camera seem timeless. A young man in a double-breasted jacket, his chiselled face shaded by a fedora, sits erect in the saddle. Suddenly, he swivels to look out across a lunar landscape of dust and rock. He sees eight figures on horseback emerge over a hilltop to stand silhouetted against the sky.

'The mafia.' The young man speaks the dread word aloud to himself, and his jaw sets with determination. His name is Guido Schiavi, and he is a magistrate, a champion of the law. This is the confrontation he has been expecting.

The mafiosi, riding beautifully curried thoroughbred mares, come down the hill towards the magistrate at a stately canter. The soundtrack provides an accompaniment of stirring trumpets and driving strings to their cavalcade. As they approach, Schiavi sees that each is dressed in corduroy and fustian; each has a flat cap pulled down over a craggily impassive face; and each has a shotgun slung over his shoulder.

The mafiosi come to a halt on a low bridge. Their boss, who goes by the name of Turi Passalacqua, is unmistakable on his statuesque white mount. He raises his cap courteously to address the magistrate.

Good day to you, voscenza. Welcome to our land. You do us a great honour.

You are very young, sir. And my friends and I are very happy about that. Because we know that the

young are pure of heart. You are intelligent, and I'm sure you have already understood the way of the world here. Things have been like this for more than a hundred years, and everyone is content.

The magistrate Schiavi is not impressed by this homily. He objects that there are plenty of people who are far from 'content' with this 'way of the world': the victims of murder and blackmail and their families, for example; or the brutalised farm labourers and sulphur miners. But his words fail to provoke even a flicker of irritation on the mafioso's serene countenance:

Every society has its defects. And besides, it's always possible to reach an agreement between men of honour . . . You need only express your desires.

Now it is the magistrate's turn to remain unmoved. In tones of measured defiance he affirms that he has only one desire, only one duty: to apply the law.

Clearly, there can be no compromise. Two opposing value systems have deployed their forces in the field. A great clash between the state and the mafia is inevitable. All that remains is for the capomafia Turi Passalacqua to restate his credo:

You are a brave man, but we make the law here, according to our ancient traditions. This is an island. The government is a long way away. And if we weren't here, with our own kind of severity, then criminals would end up spoiling everything, like rye-grass spoils the wheat. Nobody would be safe in their own home any more. We are not criminals. We are honourable men: as free and independent as the birds in the sky.

*And with that, the trumpets and strings swell once more.
We watch as the posse of Men of Honour wheels round
and gallops off into the distance.*

In 1940s Italy, the movies meant much more than just entertainment. The US studios had boycotted the Italian market in protest at Mussolini's attempts to control imports. During the last five years of Fascism, Italians were denied their weekly dose of Californian celluloid. When the theatres were reopened after the Liberation, and the supply from Hollywood resumed, Italians were soon going to the movies in greater numbers than ever – greater than in any other European country. The glamour of Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford held out the promise of what freedom and democracy might bring to a country racked by war and demoralised by the debacle of Fascism.

Yet no country that had lived through such traumatic changes could ever be entirely satisfied with the products of the US studios. So, in the cinema, the years 1945–50 have come to be defined by the gritty homegrown poetry of Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* or Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. Neorealism ('new realism') was the cultural buzz-word of the day. Neorealist directors took their cameras out into the bomb-shattered streets; they found moving dramas among the peasants toiling on the terraces or wading through rice paddies. Neorealist cinema seemed so true to life that it was as if the skin of history had peeled off as film (to quote what one critic evocatively wrote at the time). There has never been a moment when the movie screen was more important to how Italy imagined the light and the dark within itself.

Released in Italian cinemas in March 1949, *In nome della legge* (*In the Name of the Law*) was Italy's first mafia film. It is a strange muddle of a movie: it has many of the accoutrements of Neorealist cinema, notably in its use of the sun-blasted Sicilian landscape; but it also straddles the divide between Neorealism and Hollywood. The film's director, Pietro Germi, had never been

to Sicily before his film went into production in 1948. Then again, his ignorance mattered little. Because when he got off the ferry and set foot on the island for the first time, he already knew exactly what he was going to find: Arizona. *In the Name of the Law* stages a shotgun marriage between Neorealism and the cowboy movie genre. Germi's Sicily is Tombstone with Mediterranean trimmings: a place of lone lawmen, long stares and ambushes in gulches. Here trains pull into desert stations, gunshots echo across vast skies, and men stride into bars and drink glasses of Sicilian aniseed liqueur as if they were knocking back fingers of hooch whiskey.

Germi's reasoning was that the quasi-Wild West setting would dramatise the head-to-head between the lone lawman and his criminal foe. Muscular heart-throb Massimo Girotti, playing the young magistrate Guido Schiavi, was to be Italy's answer to John Wayne. But Germi's camera is even more obsessed with mafia boss Turi Passalacqua, played by French veteran Charles Vanel: he is always framed from below, cut out against a pale sky – as if he were part craggy rancher, and part Apache sage.

The cowboys-cum-*capos* formula clearly worked. 'Frenetic applause' was reported at the first public screenings. *In the Name of the Law* went on to become the third most popular movie of the 1948–9 season in Italy, taking a bumper 401 million lire (roughly €7 million in 2011 values) at the box office, and standing toe-to-commercial-toe with such Hollywood classics as *Fort Apache* and *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

As mob movies go, *In the Name of the Law* may seem quaint at first glance – now that our tastes are attuned to *GoodFellas* and *Gomorrah*. Yet Germi's film is sinister too: it has a back-story full of dark surprises, and a context of unprecedented mafia violence and arrogance. More recent classics of the mafia movie genre, like *The Godfather*, are often criticised for glamourising organised crime. But in this respect Coppola's film has nothing on *In the Name of the Law*. The opening credits display a familiar

disclaimer: 'Any reference to events, places and people who really exist is purely coincidental'. But that is some distance from the truth.

In the Name of the Law was based on a novel, and inspired by the example of the novel's author. Written in the early months of 1947, *Piccola Pretura* (*Local Magistrate's Office*) was the work of Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo, one of the country's foremost authorities on the Sicilian mafia. Born and brought up in Palermo, Lo Schiavo was a hero of the First World War who, when the war ended, went into the front line of the fight against organised crime on his island home.

Lo Schiavo's life was closely intertwined with the history of the Sicilian mafia under Fascism. In 1926 he was himself a young magistrate, like the hero of his novel. (The similarity between the names of author and protagonist – Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo/Guido Schiavi – is no accident.) In that year, Benito Mussolini's dictatorship launched a long overdue attack on the mafia. The 'cancer of delinquency' was to be cut out of Sicily by the Fascist 'scalpel', the Duce boasted. The police and *Carabinieri* led the assault, and prosecuting magistrates like Lo Schiavo had the job of preparing the evidence needed to convert thousands of arrests into convictions.

Lo Schiavo was among the most enthusiastic instruments of the Fascist repression. In 1930, one of the mobsters' defence lawyers, Giuseppe Mario Puglia, published an essay claiming that the mafia was *not* a secret criminal society. Indeed *mafiosi* were not even criminals. Rather the *mafioso* was an incorrigible individualist, 'a man who instinctively refuses to recognise anyone superior to his own ego'. What is more, the *mafioso* was a typical Sicilian, because this exaggerated pride and self-containment had seeped into the island's psyche as a form of resistance to centuries of foreign invasions. Therefore to repress the mafia was inevitably to repress the Sicilian people. Puglia's essay, in other words, reads like the words Lo Schiavo would later put into the mouth of mafia boss Turi Passalacqua in *In the Name of the Law*.

Lo Schiavo refused to let the defence lawyer's claims pass unchallenged, responding to them in a pamphlet that is a little masterpiece of controlled anger. The mafia, Lo Schiavo argued, was 'a criminal system'; it was not just illegal, it was an 'anti-legal organism whose only aim was getting rich by illicit means'.

Lo Schiavo went on to give the mafia lawyer a lesson in mafia history. The Sicilian mafia first emerged from the political violence of the *Risorgimento* – the nineteenth-century movement that turned Italy's disparate states into a unified nation. All revolutionaries need strong men to turn their ideals into reality, Lo Schiavo explained. The revolutionaries of pre-unification Sicily were no exception: they found the muscle they required among the fearsome wardens, overseers and bravoos who were already a law unto themselves in the Sicilian countryside. Thus a pact was formed between the island's toughest and most ambitious thugs on the one hand, and the patriots conspiring to make Italy into a nation on the other. The pact was not broken when Sicily became part of a unified Italian state in 1860, and the patriotic conspirators joined the national ruling class.

Many of the patriotic conspirators were members of the Freemasons or of Masonic-style sects, Lo Schiavo argued. The more unscrupulous among them taught their thuggish friends what huge advantages could accrue to a criminal network able to structure itself along the same lines as the Freemasons.

Lo Schiavo had also researched the economic history of the mafia. He learned that it had first grown rich by establishing protection rackets over the valuable lemon and orange groves surrounding Palermo. At the time, those lemon and orange groves constituted some of the most profitable agricultural land in Europe. *Mafiosi* would demand money to 'guard' the lemon trees on behalf of the landowner – just in case someone vandalised them. Someone like a *mafioso*, that is. These rackets would then give members of the mafia the power-base they needed to control the whole citrus fruit market.

Fear of the mafia pervaded society in western Sicily, reaching

right up into parliament. Anything unfavourable said about the mafia would inevitably reach hostile ears. And that, argued Lo Schiavo, is why so many Sicilians could be found spouting the same drivel, along the lines that: 'the mafia does not exist; at worst, *mafiosi* are local problem solvers who embody the typically Sicilian pride and truculence towards authority'. Even the landowners who were, in theory, the mafia's most prominent victims, had bought into this fiction and espoused the belief that the mafia was somehow good for social peace, for law and order. On the contrary, Lo Schiavo asserted, the mafia was 'a programme to exploit and persecute honest members of society while hiding behind a reputation for courage and welfare that was only so much lying garbage'.

So, in the early 1930s, the man who would later inspire *In the Name of the Law* was an anti-mafia crusader with the bravery to engage in a public spat with the crime bosses' own defence lawyers. By 1948, Lo Schiavo had become one of the country's most senior magistrates, a prosecutor at the Supreme Court in Rome. In that year he published his novel, which was immediately adapted into a film.

Both novel and film tell a simple story about a young magistrate, Guido Schiavi, who is posted to a remote town deep in the arid badlands of the Sicilian interior. In this lawless place, the mafia rules unchecked, and runs a protection racket over the estate of the local landowner. When bandits kill one of the landowner's men, *capomafia* Turi Passalacqua hunts them down: the bandits are trussed up and tossed into a dried-up well, or simply shotgunned in the back in a mountain gully.

The young magistrate investigates this series of slayings, but he is frozen out by the terrified townspeople. When the courageous Schiavi confronts *capomafia* Turi Passalacqua on his white mare, he resists the boss's attempts to win him over to the mafia's way of thinking (the scene with which I began this chapter).

Eventually, Schiavi narrowly survives an assassination attempt. Resigned to defeat, he decides to abandon his post and return to the Sicilian capital, Palermo. But just as he is about to board

the train to safety, he learns that his only friend in town, an honest seventeen-year-old boy called Paolino, has been murdered by a renegade *mafioso*. Indignant and distraught, Schiavi strides back into town. He rings the church bells to summon the whole population into the piazza for a do-or-die engagement. The state and the mafia are set to have their high noon – in what turns into perhaps the most bizarre climactic scene in the long history of gangster movies.

The church bell clangs out a continuous, urgent summons across the dust of the piazza, over the sun-weathered rooftops, and out into the surrounding fields. We are shown the unemployed sulphur miners, sitting and dozing in a line at the kerb, who raise their heads to listen. The camera then cuts to the women, young and old, who come out into the street wrapped in their black shawls; and then to the elegant club where the mayor and his cronies forget their game of baccarat and turn towards the source of the alarm.

Without discussion, everyone ups and walks towards the bells. The mule drivers scarcely pause to tether their beasts. Labourers drop their mattocks in the furrows. Soon streams of people are converging on the piazza. Led by Turi Passalacqua on his white mare, even the mafiosi – accompanied as always by the rhythmical trumpets of their signature theme – gallop into town to join the crowd gathering before the church steps.

There are loud murmurs of anxious curiosity as the young magistrate Guido Schiavi emerges from the church doors. Silence falls as he begins his address:

Now that you are all here, I declare that this is a trial. Half an hour ago we found Paolino's body, blasted by a double-barrelled shotgun. He was seventeen years old and he had never harmed anyone.

Schiavi scans the crowd as he speaks, seeking to look directly into the eyes of every person there. Then, staring with still greater intensity, the magistrate hails the group of stony-faced men on horseback.

You there, men of the mafia. And you, Turi Passalacqua. Your bloody and ferocious brand of justice only punishes those who give you offence, and only protects the men who carry out your verdicts.

At these words, one of the mafiosi levels his shotgun at the magistrate. But with a firm but gentle hand his boss pushes the barrels downwards again.

Guido Schiavi does not hesitate for an instant:

And you chose to put your brand of justice before the true law – the only law that allows us to live alongside our neighbours without tearing one another to pieces like wild beasts.

Isn't that true, massaro Passalacqua?

Everyone in the piazza cranes to see how the capomafia will react to this breathtaking challenge. A subtle change in his expression shows that he is troubled: his habitual composure is gone, replaced by solemnity. Silhouetted once more against the sky, Turi Passalacqua begins to make a speech of history-making gravity:

Those were tough words, magistrate. Until now, no one had ever spoken such tough words to us.

But I say that your words were also just. My people and I did not come into town today to listen to your speech . . . But listening to you made me think of my son, and made me think that I would be proud to hear him talk in that way.

So I say to my friends that in this town the time has come to change course and go back within the law. Perhaps everyone here did kill Paolino. But only one person pulled the trigger. So I hereby hand him over to you so that he may be judged according to the state's law.

He turns and, with a mere flick of his head, gives the order to his crew. Amid clattering hooves, the Men of Honour corner the murderer before he can run away: it is the renegade mafioso, Francesco Messina.

The magistrate advances, flanked by two Carabinieri: 'Francesco Messina, you are under arrest, in the name of the law.'

The murderer is led away. The magistrate then turns, and with a look of glowing appreciation, gazes up towards the mafia boss to utter the film's final words:

In the name of the law!

And with that we cut to yet another shot of Turi Passalacqua silhouetted against the sky. His serenity has returned, and the suggestion of a smile plays on his lips. The mafia cavalcade music rises yet again. As the credits begin to roll, the boss turns his white mare to lead the mafiosi in their heroic gallop towards the sunset.

Mafiosi are not criminals, *In the Name of the Law* tells us. Turi Passalacqua is a man devoted to living by a code of honour that, in its own primitive way, is as admirable a law as the one magistrate Guido Schiavi is trying to uphold. If only *mafiosi* like him are addressed in the appropriately firm tone of voice, they will become bringers of peace and order. The mafia finds its true calling at the end of the film, the best way to live out its deeply held values: it becomes an auxiliary police force. If Sicily were

really Arizona, and *In the Name of the Law* were really a cowboy film, then we would not know which of the two men should wear the sheriff's badge.

In the Name of the Law is not *about* the mafia; rather it is mafia propaganda, a cunning and stylish variant of the kind of 'lying garbage' upon which Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo had poured vitriol in the 1930s. In the 1940s, each day of chaos in Sicily was adding to a mountain of proof that *mafiosi* were anything but friends to the rule of law. Yet this was precisely the time that Lo Schiavo's views on the mafia underwent an astonishing reversal. Lo Schiavo became a convert to the mafia's lies.

Now, anyone inclined to be generous to Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo might suppose that Pietro Germi's movie had twisted the meaning of the magistrate's novel by grafting a happy Hollywood ending onto a grimmer Sicilian tale. And it is certainly true that, in 1948, it would have been tough to create a genuinely realistic portrayal of the mafia. Rumours circulated during production that, when director Pietro Germi first arrived in Sicily, he was approached by several senior *mafiosi* who would not allow him to begin work until they had approved the screenplay. After the movie's release, during a press conference, a young Sicilian man in the audience argued with Germi about how true to life the Men of Honour in the film were: was the director not aware that the real mafia had killed dozens of people? Germi could only give a lame reply, 'So did you expect me to meet the same end?'

But the local difficulties that Germi faced in Sicily actually do nothing to excuse Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo. Indeed, his novel is *even more* pro-mafia than *In the Name of the Law*. In Lo Schiavo's tale, mafia boss Turi Passalacqua is 'the very personification of wisdom, prudence and calm . . . pot-bellied, shaven-headed and smiling like a benevolent Buddha'.

The conclusion is unavoidable: a magistrate who was a scourge of the mafia in the early 1930s was, by the mid-1940s, an enthusiastic mouthpiece for mystifications that could easily have been voiced by the mafia's slyest advocates. Once Giuseppe Guido Lo

Schiavo had been scornful about the way 'literature and drama glorified the figure of the *mafioso*'. Now he was himself writing fiction that did precisely that.

But why? What caused Lo Schiavo to upend his views so shamelessly?

Lo Schiavo was a conservative whose political sympathies had made him a supporter of Mussolini's regime in the 1920s and 1930s. After the Liberation, his conservatism turned him into a friend of the most murderous criminals on the island. The magistrate-novelist's bizarre rewriting of the mafia records in *Local Prosecutor's Office* testified to an unspoken and profoundly cynical belief: better the mafia than the Communists. This simple axiom was enough to drive Lo Schiavo to forget his own hard-won knowledge about Sicily's 'criminal system', and to relinquish the faith in the rule of law that was the grounding ethos of his calling as a magistrate.

Turi Passalacqua, the heroic bandit chieftain of *In the Name of the Law*, was laughably unrealistic. But, in a peculiarly Sicilian paradox, he was also horribly true to life. *In the Name of the Law* may have been a cinematic fantasy, but it nonetheless glorified a very real deal between the mafia and the state in the founding years of the Italian Republic.

Sicily is a land of strange alliances: between the landed aristocracy and gangland in the Separatist movement, for example. And once Separatism had gone into decline, the political and criminal pressures of 1946–8 created a still stranger convergence of interests: between conservatives, the mafia and the police. It is that alliance which is celebrated by *In the Name of the Law*, through the fictional figure of mafia boss Turi Passalacqua, sermonising from the saddle of his thoroughbred white mare.

In 1946, the police and *Carabinieri* were warning the government in Rome that they would need high-level support to defeat the mafia, because the mafia itself had so many friends among the Sicilian elite – friends it helped at election time by hustling votes. But these warnings were ignored. It may have been that

conservative politicians in Rome were daunted by the prospect of taking on the ruling class of an island whose loyalty to Italy was questionable, but whose conservatism was beyond doubt. Or more cynically still, they may have reasoned that the mafia's ground-level terror campaign against the left-wing peasant movement was actually rather useful. So they told the police and *Carabinieri* in Sicily to forget the mafia (to forget the real cause of the crime emergency, in other words) and put the fight against banditry at the top of their agenda.

The police knew that to fight banditry they would need help – help from *mafiosi* prepared to supply inside information on the movement of the bands. For their part, *mafiosi* appreciated that farming bandits was not a long-term business. So when outlaws outlived their usefulness, *mafiosi* would betray them to the law in order to win friends in high places. Italian 'mafiologists' have a word for this traditional arrangement between the police and the mafia: they call it 'co-managing' crime.

Through numerous occult channels, the help from the mafia that the police needed was soon forthcoming. In the latter months of 1946, the bandits who had made Sicily so lawless since the Allied invasion in 1943 were rapidly eliminated. Until this point, police patrols had ranged across the wilds of western Sicily without ever catching a bandit gang. Now they mysteriously stumbled across their targets and killed or captured them. More frequently outlaw chiefs would be served up already dead. Just like the bandits of *In the Name of the Law*, they would be trussed up and tossed into a dried-up well, or simply shotgunned in the back in a mountain gully.

So at the dawning of Italy's democracy, the mafia was *exactly* what it had always been. It was *exactly* what the anti-mafia magistrate Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo, the US Army Intelligence officer Captain William Everett Scotten, and any number of police and *Carabinieri* had described it as: a secret society of murderous criminals bent on getting rich by illegal means, a force for murder, arson, kidnapping and mayhem.

Yet at the same time, give or take a little literary licence, the mafia was also *exactly* what the novelist Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo and the film director Pietro Germi portrayed it as: an auxiliary police force, and a preserver of the political status quo on a troubled island. Without ceasing to be the leaders of a ‘criminal system’, the smartest mafia bosses were dressing up in the costume that conservatives wanted them to wear. Hoisting themselves into the saddles of their imaginary white mares, *mafiosi* were slaughtering bandits who had become politically inconvenient, or cutting down peasant militants who refused to understand the way things worked on Sicily. And of course, most of the mafia’s post-war political murders went unsolved – with the aid of the law.



The Cold War’s first major electoral battle in Italy was the general election of 18 April 1948. One notorious election poster displayed the faces of Spencer Tracy, Rita Hayworth, Clark Gable, Gary Cooper and Tyrone Power, and proclaimed that ‘Hollywood’s stars are lining up against Communism’. But it was predominantly the Marshall Plan – America’s huge programme of economic aid for Italy – that ensured that the Partito Comunista Italiano and its allies were defeated. The PCI remained in opposition in parliament; it would stay there for another half a century. The election’s victors, the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC), went into government – where they too would stay for the next half a century. Like trenches hacked into tundra, the battle-lines of Cold War Italian politics were now frozen in place.

A few weeks after that epoch-making general election, the most senior law enforcement officer in Sicily reported that, ‘The mafia has never been as powerful and organised as it is today.’ Nobody took any notice.

The Communist Party and their allies were the only ones not prepared to forget. In Rome, they did their best to denounce the

Christian Democrat tolerance for the mafia in Sicily. Left-wing MPs pointed out how DC politicians bestowed favours on mafia bosses, and used them as electoral agents. Such protests would continue for the next forty years. But the PCI never had the support to form a government; it was unelectable, and therefore impotent. In June 1949, just a few weeks after *In the Name of the Law* was released in Italian cinemas, Interior Minister Mario Scelba addressed the Senate. Scelba had access to all that the police knew about the mafia in Sicily. But he scoffed at Communist concerns about organised crime, and gave a homespun lecture about what mafia really meant to Sicilians like him:

If a buxom girl walks past, a Sicilian will tell you that she is a *mafiosa* girl. If a boy is advanced for his age, a Sicilian will tell you that he is *mafioso*. People talk about the mafia flavoured with every possible sauce, and it seems to me that they are exaggerating.

What Scelba meant was that the mafia, or better the typically Sicilian quality known as ‘mafiosity’, was as much a part of the island’s life as *cannoli* and *cassata* – and just as harmless. The world should just forget about this mafia thing, whatever it was, and busy itself with more serious problems.

For over forty years after the establishment of the Republic, Scelba’s party, the DC, provided the mafias with their most reliable political friends. But the DC was by no means a mere mafia front. In fact it was a huge and hybrid political beast. Its supporters included northerners and southerners, cardinals and capitalists, civil servants and shopkeepers, bankers and peasant families whose entire wealth was a little plot of land. All that this heterogeneous electorate had in common was a fear of Communism.

In Sicily and the South, the DC encountered a class of political leader who had dominated politics since long before Fascism: the *grandees*. The typical southern grandee was a landowner or

lawyer who was often personally wealthy, but invariably richer still in contacts with the Church and government. Patronage was the method: converting public resources (salaries, contracts, state credit, licences . . . or just help in cutting through the dense undergrowth of regulations) into private booty to be handed out to a train of family and followers. Through patronage, the grantees digested the anonymous structures of government and span them out into a web of favours. *Mafiosi* were the grantees' natural allies. The best that can be said of the DC's relationship with the mafias is that the party was too fragmented and faction-ridden to ever confront and isolate the grantees.

Under Fascism, as on many previous occasions, police and magistrates had painstakingly assembled a photofit of the mafia organisation, the 'criminal system'. Now, in the era of the Cold War and the Christian Democrats, that picture was broken up and reassembled to compose the Buddha-like features of Turi Passalacqua. Better the mafia than the Communists. Better the Hollywood cowboy fantasy land of *In the Name of the Law* than a serious attempt to understand and tackle the island's criminal system of which many of the governing party's key supporters were an integral part.



Thanks to the success of *In the Name of the Law*, and to his prestigious career as a magistrate, Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo went on to become Italy's leading mafia pundit in the 1950s. He never missed an opportunity to restate the same convenient falsehoods that he had first articulated in his novel. More worryingly still, he became a lecturer in law at the *Carabinieri* training school, the chairman of the national board of film censorship, and a Supreme Court judge.

In 1954 Lo Schiavo even wrote a glowing commemoration of the venerable *capomafia* don Calogero Vizzini, who had just passed away peacefully in his home town of Villalba. Vizzini had

been a protagonist in every twist and turn of the mafia's history in the dramatic years following the Liberation. By 1943, when he was proclaimed mayor of Villalba under AMGOT, the then sixty-six-year-old boss had already had a long career as an extortionist, cattle-rustler, black-marketeer and sulphur entrepreneur. In September of the following year, Vizzini's men caused a national sensation by throwing hand grenades at a Communist leader who had come to Villalba to give a speech. Vizzini was a leader of the Separatist movement. But when Separatism's star waned, he joined the Christian Democrats. The old man's grand funeral, in July 1954, was attended by mafia bosses from across the island.

Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo took Calogero Vizzini's death as a chance to reiterate his customary flummery about the mafia. But intriguingly, he also revealed that, one Sunday in Rome in 1952, the fat old boss had paid a visit to his house. He vividly recalled opening the door to his guest and being struck by a pair of 'razor-sharp, magnetic' eyes. The magistrate issued a polite but nervy welcome: '*Commendatore* Vizzini, my name is—'

'For you, I am not *commendatore*,' came the reply, as Vizzini waddled into the book-lined study and lowered his meaty frame onto the sofa. 'Call me Uncle Calò.'

Uncle Calò's tone was firm, but his manner open-hearted. He praised Lo Schiavo as a man of the law who had played hard but fair. The two men shook hands as a sign of mutual respect. Lo Schiavo tells us that, as he gazed at Uncle Calò, he was reminded of a picture from the past, from his first years as an anti-mafia magistrate in Sicily, when he first met a corpulent old mafia boss who always rode a white mare. He concluded his memories of Uncle Calò with good wishes for his successor within the mafia: 'May his efforts be directed along the path of respect for the state's laws, and of social improvement for all.'

Lo Schiavo's account of the conversation between himself and don Calogero Vizzini is as fictional as any of his novels. But the meeting itself really happened. The reason for Uncle Calò's visit

was that he was caught up in a series of trials for the hand-grenade attack back in 1944. Only three days earlier, the Supreme Court had issued a guilty verdict against him. But the legal process was due to run on for a long time yet, and Uncle Calò knew that he would almost certainly die before he saw the inside of a jail. The real reason that he called in on Lo Schiavo may simply have been to say thank you. For the celebrated magistrate-novelist was involved in presenting the prosecution evidence at the Supreme Court. The suspicion lingers that, behind the scenes, he gave the mafia boss a helping hand with his case.

In today's Italy, if any magistrate received a social call from a crime boss he would immediately be placed under investigation. But in the conservative world of Christian Democrat Italy, affairs between the Sicilian mafia and magistrates were conducted in a more friendly way. The state and the mafia formed a partnership, in the name of the law.