

Fallen women in the Galleria: Giovanni Verga and the 19th-century Milanese shopping arcade

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The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, built between 1865 and 1867, is the heart of the Lombard capital. Giovanni Verga, a resident of the city for twenty years, was the Galleria's most faithful and consistent chronicler in his Milanese short stories. While Verga's contemporaries tended to portray the Galleria as a melting pot, Verga departed from this model. He depicted it as home to two distinct categories of people: aspiring artists and fallen women. He employed these figures and the space of the Galleria as a means to reflect on and grapple with his anxieties about the changing position of women in late nineteenth-century Italian society. I argue that Verga chose to pathologise the space of the Galleria to warn 'respectable' women off and to maintain highly gendered conceptions of public and private realms. This article will thus explore Verga's representation of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II between 1875 and 1892, with an emphasis on the gendered dynamics of movement in this temple of consumerism.

(166 words)

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For any visitor to Milan, the monumental arcade known as the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II is hard to miss. Constructed between 1865 and 1867, it forms a passageway between the two landmarks of the Gothic Duomo and the eighteenth-century Teatro alla Scala. The Galleria is the largest structure of its kind anywhere in the world, some 200 metres long with a 30-metre-high central vault, and is one of the archetypal symbols of the Lombard city. Today, home to upmarket boutiques of Italian fashion houses such as Gucci and Versace (Prada opened its very first boutique here in 1922), it is an obligatory stop for any tourist.

The Galleria has also long been a source of fascination for scholars from many different disciplines. Due to its innovative use of iron and glass, the structure has been the subject of numerous architectural studies,¹ and more recently specialists in tourism studies and conservation management have sought to explore contemporary experiences of the space.² Perhaps surprisingly, however, in spite of the building's undeniable importance for nineteenth-century Milan and many of its best-known writers, it has been passed over by literary scholars as an object of interest. Both during its planning and construction phases, and in the decades following its inauguration, the Galleria was used by writers and poets to showcase a wide range of perspectives. As it was being constructed in the 1860s, the bohemian writers of the Scapigliatura used the associated demolition works as an entry point to explore class dynamics and to voice their contempt at Milan's new bourgeois culture. In subsequent decades, Realist writers, such as Luigi Capuana and Emilio De Marchi, had more positive views, considering the space in their factual writings as a melting pot and emblematic of Milan's position as Italy's preeminent modern city.

Although the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele featured heavily in journalistic writings about Milan (particularly during the Great Exhibition of 1881), it featured relatively infrequently in the fiction of the period. Sicilian author, Giovanni Verga, a resident of the city for twenty years, was the Galleria's most faithful and consistent chronicler in

¹ See Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy: The Challenge of Tradition, 1750–1900*, 2 vols (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), I, pp. 199–204; Laura Gioeni, *L'affaire Mengoni: La piazza Duomo e la Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. I concorsi, la realizzazione, i restauri* (Milan: Guerini, 1995), and Johann Friedrich Geist, *Arcades: The History of a Building Type* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 371–401.

² See, for example, Philipo L. Pearce, Mao-Ying Wu, Manuela De Carlo, and Andrea Rossi, 'Contemporary Experiences of Chinese Tourists in Italy: An On-site Analysis in Milan', *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 7 (2013), 34–37 and Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'Assessing Authenticity of Nineteenth-Century Shopping Passages', *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 1.2 (2011), 135–56.

his Milanese short stories, arguably the most neglected part of his oeuvre. While Verga's contemporaries tended to portray the Galleria as a melting pot and as an inclusive space open to all of Milan's diverse population, Verga departed from this model. He never presented it as a place for a multitude of different figures; rather it was depicted as home to two distinct categories of people: aspiring artists and fallen women. He employed these figures and the space of the Galleria as a means to reflect on and grapple with his anxieties about the changing position of women in late nineteenth-century Italian society. This article will thus explore Verga's representation of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II between 1875 and 1892, with an emphasis on the gendered dynamics of movement in this new temple of consumerism.

The analysis in this article is situated within the general shift towards 'spatiality' in the humanities in recent years,³ a tendency to which our discipline of Italian Studies has not been immune.⁴ Of course, it goes without saying that literary and historical considerations of Italy's cities and regions have never been lacking, and when approaching the study of specific place typologies in the Italian case, unsurprisingly, the piazza has received particular attention.⁵ In recent years, numerous scholars of Italian history, literature, and film, have begun to devote attention to exploring a wider range of place types and their representations in different historical and contemporary texts and films. Locales recently investigated include urban slums, asylums and nomad camps;⁶ the brothel and the Via Veneto;⁷ the train station;⁸ the office, the beach, and the factory;⁹ the café,¹⁰ as well as outlet malls.¹¹ Aside from the first chapter of Forgacs's book on nineteenth-century urban slums and two chapters examining café spaces in the eighteenth century, the works cited above all focus on depictions and interpretations of

³ See Denis Cosgrove, 'Landscape and Landschaft', *German Historical Institute Bulletin*, 35 (2004), 57–71; Barney Warf and Santa Arias, eds., *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009), and Ralph Kingston, 'Mind over Matter: History and the Spatial Turn', *Cultural and Social History*, 7.1 (2010), 111–21.

⁴ Silvia Ross, 'Space and Place in Italian Literature: Writing a Region', *Italian Studies*, 68.3 (2013), 449–60.

⁵ Mario Isnenghi, 'La piazza', in *I luoghi della memoria*, ed. by Isnenghi (Rome: Laterza, 1997), pp. 43–52; Eamonn Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza: The History and Meaning of the Italian Square* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

⁶ David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁷ See Danielle Hipkins, 'The Brothel in Italian Cinema, 1959–1960: Creating a Space for Female Spectators', and Stephen Gundle, 'The Via Veneto by Night: Space and 'Unreal Estate' in the Rome of the Dolce Vita', both in *Beyond the Piazza: Public and Private Spaces in Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Simona Storch, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 99–114 and pp. 181–98 respectively.

⁸ Simone Brioni, 'A Station in Motion: Termini as Heterotopia', *Italian Studies*, 72.4 (2017): 443–54.

⁹ Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space: Comedy, Italian Style* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁰ See Part 3 on Italy in Leona Rittner, W. Scott Haine, and Jeffrey H. Jackson, eds., *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy and Vienna* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 161–222.

¹¹ See Stephanie Malia Hom, *The Beautiful Country: Tourism and the Impossible State of Destination Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 184–212 and Paolo Bartoloni, *Objects in Italian Life and Culture: Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 161–72.

such places in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In work on the spaces of 19th-century Italy, attention has been instead given to the examination of the domestic, private sphere in both historical and literary terms.¹² In the context of the 19th century, and particularly in comparison to other European countries where there have been numerous studies of places such as the department store and the café,¹³ much less attention has been paid to the study of public spaces in Italy, which this paper seeks to address, by focusing on the space of the shopping arcade.

The first arcades were built in Paris in the 1820s and the first in Italy was the Galleria de Cristoforis in Milan at the end of Corso Vittorio Emanuele (at the time Corso dei Servi), which opened on 29 September 1832.¹⁴ After this, however, no other arcade structure was built in Italy until the construction of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in the 1860s,¹⁵ and all other arcades in Italy were imitations of the enormous Milanese structure (Galleria Mazzini in Genoa, 1876; Galleria Principe di Napoli, 1883; Galleria Nazionale in Turin, 1890; and Galleria Umberto I in Naples, 1892).

In June 1859, following the Sardinian-French victory against the Austrians at the Battle of Magenta, the Commanders Vittorio Emanuele II and Napoleon III entered newly liberated Milan. Plans to redesign the square outside the Duomo had been underway for some time but the liberation of the city gave the project a new impetus. Alongside the plan to redesign the piazza, the newly-appointed Commander of the city, Count Luigi Belgioioso, decided to launch a competition to create a link, either a street or an arcade, between Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Scala, which would be named after King Vittorio Emanuele II in honour of the recent victory. After a protracted process, the architect Giuseppe Mengoni won the tender in 1863 with a design that included a cruciform-shaped pathway that would be covered over by glass, providing Italy ‘with a new form of public open space.’¹⁶

¹² See, for example, Giuliana Pieri, ‘Gabriele D’Annunzio and the Italian Fin-de-siècle Interior’, *Italian Studies*, 62.2 (2007), 219–30; Katherine Mitchell, *Italian Women Writers: Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 59–79; Ann Hallamore Caesar, ‘Home and Happiness in Neera’s fiction’, *The Italianist*, 30.1 (2010), 87–100, and Perry Willson, ed., *Gender, Family and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). This has remained the primary focus, despite some attention on the public sphere. See, for example, Mitchell, pp. 80–91 and Caesar, ‘About Town: The City and the Female Reader, 1860–1900’, *Modern Italy*, 7.2 (2002), 129–41.

¹³ Aside from Rittner, Haine, and Jackson, *The Thinking Space*, mentioned above, see Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869–1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, eds., *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850–1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), and Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, eds., *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ On the Galleria De Cristoforis, see Geist, *Arcades*, pp. 366–71.

¹⁵ The Galleria Natta in Turin was constructed in 1858 but as Geist points out this was built into the pre-existing system of *portici* in the city as so cannot be considered an independent structure (p. 561).

¹⁶ Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza*, p. 174. For a consideration of the ‘age of windows’ and the development of the use of glass in 19th-century architecture, see Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 112–15.

In fact, the space of the arcade is unusual in that it is generally understood as a hybrid space in between the formal separation into public and private spheres. It is an idea that Walter Benjamin frequently returned to in his seminal, but unfinished, work *The Arcades Project*, a collection of largely fragmentary musings on the arcade and its role in nineteenth-century Paris. He described the Parisian arcades as ‘peculiar hybrid forms of house and street’¹⁷ and as the ‘furnished and familiar interior of the masses.’¹⁸ At a time when the street was dirty, noisy and the preserve of less than desirable characters, the covered arcade in European cities could provide a respectable and elegant way to partake in city life while not being fully exposed to its murkier sides. The arcade became the new market place for the middle classes, a place to shop, socialise and consume. The form of the arcade was perfected in Milan through the construction of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. While small ‘passages’ proliferated in Paris from the 1820s–40s, Milan opted for a different scale of development. It was the first in what has been called the monumental phase of arcade architecture.¹⁹ Thus, while the narrow Parisian arcade explored by Benjamin could be regarded as a ‘private street’,²⁰ the grandiose scale of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan meant that it was more akin to a public interior and it was quickly dubbed ‘Milan’s sitting room’.

Far more than being a practical way for pedestrians to traverse damp cities like Paris and London, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan became a destination in its own right and the focal point of the city. The Galleria was a performative space, providing the bourgeoisie with a ‘fluid space of encounter’²¹ and offering ‘the opportunity to display itself to the world.’²² Perhaps this is unsurprising as the architect Mengoni had studied scenography in Bologna. While the narrow confines of the Parisian arcade meant that it was a ‘space of movement’ and a ‘transitional passageway’,²³ perfectly suited to the ramblings of the flâneur, as Benjamin described (see below), the Galleria occupied a very different role in Milan. While it connects the Piazza del Duomo and the Piazza della Scala, it is not connected to other passageways, as was the norm in Paris, and so it is not foremost of a place of movement but one of stasis, a site of performance, display and consumption. Many would amble around its interior but it was also home to many cafés and a favoured male pastime was to sit and converse at the tables that lined the wide branches of the cruciform shape.

In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin intended to explore the stages of development of the structure. Fragments included plans to discuss the ‘first dialectical stage: the arcade

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 923.

¹⁸ Benjamin, p. 423, M20a, 1.

¹⁹ This is part of the chronological classification laid out by Geist, *Arcades*, p. 65.

²⁰ Margaret McKeith, *The History and Conservation of Shopping Arcades* (London: Mansell Press, 1986), p. 1.

²¹ Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, p. 203.

²² Geist, *Arcades*, p. 114.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

changes from a place of splendour to a place of decay.’²⁴ When Verga wrote his Milanese short stories that reference the Galleria between 1875 and 1883, it was exactly this moment that he sought to confront and counteract. For Benjamin, the Parisian arcades had flourished under Louis Philippe (1830–48) but by the end of the nineteenth century were in a state of chronic decline. With the arcade space having come later to Milan than to Paris, the heyday of the Galleria was already over by the time Verga moved to the city. A crucial element of the decline, as identified by Benjamin, was ‘the whore’²⁵ and in a similar vein, Verga in his stories connected the presence of a certain kind of woman to the space of the Galleria. Before examining Verga’s approach to the Galleria, however, it is necessary to explore in more detail earlier responses to the space in order to understand how Verga diverged and differed in his representation of it, particularly in relation to those who frequented the space.

Responses to Milan’s changing urban landscape in the early 1860s

Before construction on the Galleria could begin and in order to accommodate the enlarged piazza of Mengoni’s design, it was necessary to demolish a number of buildings in the pre-existing piazza, the most significant of which was the Renaissance Coperto dei Figini. Prior to its destruction, the Coperto featured prominently in paintings of the Piazza, often with the viewer positioned inside the covered portico and the Duomo visible in the distance.

In the literature of the early 1860s which addressed the fervour of urban renewal that gripped Milan, references to the construction of the Galleria were notable for their absence. The *scapigliati milanesi* instead chose to focus their attention on the destruction that the Galleria’s erection was causing in the heart of the city. In 1862, even before Mengoni’s design had been selected, Emilio Praga decried the demolition of the Coperto dei Figini, writing:

l’epica è morta, e del teatro Fiando
già si minaccia il fato,
e cadrà dei Figini il porticato.²⁶

It was Iginio Ugo Tarchetti’s novel *Paolina*, however, (later given the subtitle *Mistero del Coperto dei Figini*) that most memorably addressed this architectural moment of change in the centre of Milan. *Paolina* was published in two instalments in the *Rivista Minima* on 30 November 1865 and 31 January 1866, during the construction of the Galleria. Tarchetti opened the preface to the novel with his memory of exiting the Duomo and seeing a crowd of curious bystanders observing the destruction of the neighbourhood of Rebecchino. He highlighted the ambivalent feelings of the Milanese people as they passed by the ruins ‘con un sentimento di meraviglia, oscillante tra il

²⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 907.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 910.

²⁶ Emilio Praga, ‘Canzone di un misantropo’, in *Poesie*, ed. by Mario Petrucciani (Bari: Laterza, 1969), pp. 37–42 (p. 40).

rammarico e la gioia'.²⁷ His own feelings tended towards regret rather than joy and he observed: 'vi ha qualche cosa di triste e di solenne nelle ruine d'un edificio che ha veduto succedersi tante generazioni d'uomini, che fu teatro degli affetti più teneri e miti.'²⁸ In response, he intended in the novel to focus on the lives of the proletarians and workers – '[la] parte più umile e più sconosciuta dell'edificio.'²⁹ Without explicitly naming the Galleria as the culprit, he attempted to draw attention away from the excitement that the construction of the new structure was fomenting in the city and to remind his readers of the human scale of the loss that such a monumental change entailed.

Arrigo Boito also elliptically addressed the destruction of the Coperto dei Figini and the construction of the Galleria in his 1866 poem *Case nuove* (first published in 1877). The target of the poem's sarcastic and bitter tone was the newly wealthy bourgeois class. Boito deplored this rise in materialistic and mercenary culture, of which the wanton destruction of houses and buildings was a product, declaring that:

'La progenie dei lupi e delle scrofe
Oggi è sovrana [...].'³⁰

As Enrico Cesaretti has suggested, the recurrence of imagery of destruction in the writings of the Scapigliatura demonstrated their attempt to 'subtly desecrate, challenge and critique [...] the bombastic and ostentatious attempts of "official" rhetoric to build a national image based on solid and unified foundations.'³¹ In place of celebratory rhetoric regarding the development of a modern Milan, Boito was filled with anxiety as he contemplated the future and associated the changed landscape with a profound sense of disorientation. It is somewhat ironic therefore, that despite his trepidations about the construction of the Galleria, Boito would become one of its most assiduous patrons, from the 1860s right up until his death in 1918.³²

First impressions: Milan's sitting room, 1867–1881

The cornerstone of the Galleria was laid on 7 March 1865, in a scene immortalised in Domenico Induno's canvas *Posa della prima pietra della Galleria*. The space was officially inaugurated on 15 September 1867, at a ceremony attended by the King, whose name it bore.³³ By naming it after the King, the Galleria acquired the status of a quasi-national monument, symbolising the grand future that lay before the newly

²⁷ Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, *Paolina* (Milan: Tipografia Editrice Lombarda, 1875), p. 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ Boito, 'Case nuove', in *Opere letterarie*, ed. by Angela Ida Villa, 2nd edn (Milan: Edizioni Otto/Novecento, 2003), p. 11.

³¹ Enrico Cesaretti, 'A New Home for Italians? A Literal and Metaphorical Interpretation within the Context of Scapigliatura', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 38.2 (2002), 140–54 (p. 142).

³² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti opened his autobiography with a scene at the Ristorante Savini in the Galleria, at which Boito was also present. See Marinetti, *La grande Milano tradizionale e futurista. Una sensibilità italiana nata in Egitto* (Milan: Mondadori, 1969), p. 8.

³³ The triumphal archway leading to the Piazza del Duomo would not be unveiled until 24 February 1878. For a detailed discussion of the Galleria's construction and design, see Geist, *Arcades*, pp. 371–401.

unified Italian state. In addition, it was a symbol of Milanese freedom from foreign domination; a proud declaration of Milan's new status and the beginning of a new era for the city. The placement of the Galleria marked a distinct turning away from the fifteenth-century Duomo to a marvel of nineteenth-century design featuring iron, glass and gas lighting. As Geist commented, the Galleria became the 'secular counterpart of the cathedral.'³⁴ The interior decoration indicated the particular values that the Milanese city would embody in the post-Unification period. There were frescoes depicting Science, Art, Industry, and Agriculture, with Religion noticeably absent.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele is regarded as the 'zenith of the development of the arcade building type.'³⁵ Once it had opened, the despair of the *scapigliati* soon gave way to more positive considerations of this new public space, which became the ultimate embodiment of the bourgeois cosmopolitanism they had denounced. Even before construction was finished, guidebooks were touting it as 'un modello d'eleganza'³⁶ and soon after its opening, it was hailed as 'la migliore delle vie coperte che in Europa si conoscano.'³⁷ The Galleria became 'a fluid space of encounter for the middle class, an augmentation of caffè society, a commercialization of theater life, and a secularization of the cathedral's neighbourhood.'³⁸ In fact, Luigi Capuana in 1881, made exactly such an observation, writing that the Galleria had assumed 'l'aspetto d'un tempio, non meno sacro del Duomo' that sacrificed itself to the 'gran Dio della società moderna, al *Lavoro*.'³⁹

The Galleria thus quickly established itself as the heart of the Lombard metropolis. In 1880, its visitors were described as walking its length 'colla beatitudine di un padron di casa che, da poco tempo arricchito, vada circolando nel suo elegante appartamento, compiacendosi dei capolavori di cui l'ha mobigliato.'⁴⁰ The Esposizione Nazionale of 1881, held in Milan, confirmed the Galleria as the city's focal point, with writers such as Capuana and Emilio De Marchi dedicating a piece of writing to the building.⁴¹ The Galleria was not only 'bella e magnifica come un salone'⁴² but became a microcosm of the entire city. For Capuana, the Galleria was 'il cuore della città. [...] Tutte le

³⁴ Geist, *Arcades*, p. 74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

³⁶ *Guida dell'Italia*, 12th edn (Milan: Artaria, 1867), p. 66.

³⁷ Pietro Edoardo Sacchi, *Guida nell'Italia settentrionale* (Milan: Ferdinando Artaria, 1871), p. 51.

³⁸ Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy*, p. 203.

³⁹ Luigi Capuana, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele', in *Milano 1881* (Milan: Giuseppe Ottino, 1881), pp. 407–17 (p. 412).

⁴⁰ Felicita Morandi, *Da Torino a Napoli: Descrizioni Aneddotiche* (Milan: Gnocchi, 1880), pp. 423–24.

⁴¹ For example, the Galleria was depicted on the front cover of this guide, published to mark the Esposizione: Tito Vespasiano Parravicini, *Guida artistica di Milano, dintorni e laghi. Ricordo dell'esposizione nazionale del 1881* (Milan: Vallardi, 1881).

⁴² Emilio De Marchi, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele', in *Milano e i suoi dintorni*, ed. by Cesare Correnti (Milan: G. Civelli, 1881), pp. 243–51 (p. 248). Capuana made a similar observation that when the electric lights were switched on 'la Galleria, da bazar si trasforma in salone.' Capuana, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,' p. 416.

pulsazioni della vita cittadina si ripercuotono qui,⁴³ while for De Marchi, the Galleria reflected the rhythms and moods of the entire city:

[se] vi fosse [...] un misuratore della vita più o meno intensa d'una città, è nella galleria Vittorio Emanuele che Milano andrebbe a collocare questo curioso strumento. Non avviene cosa infatti, non passa nell'aria il rumore d'una festa o d'una sventura, di cui l'ottagono della nostra Galleria non risenta o poco o tanto l'influenza e non ne dia qualche segnale.⁴⁴

The Galleria was the location in which citizens would congregate whenever there was an important piece of political news or an anniversary. De Marchi specifically recalled 9 January 1878, when King Vittorio Emanuele II died. It was in the King's eponymous Galleria that the Milanese gathered 'e così pure un grande dolore pubblico ha il suo contraccolpo in Galleria, come se qui fosse il cuore della città.'⁴⁵

One of the dominant descriptions of the Galleria at this time was the insistence by writers that the space was open to people from all walks of life. The crowds were compared by Capuana to an 'alveare immenso,' and he referred to a range of different characters from 'operai' and 'contadini' to women with 'testine ben pettinate' or servants with 'grembiuli bianchi,' as well as groups of men speaking 'in tutti i dialetti della penisola.'⁴⁶ Similarly, in his 1892 novel, *Decadenza*, Luigi Gualdo wrote that the Galleria was a 'formicola di gente, d'un accozzamento di elementi disparati, di una folla variopinta, dove i superstiti dell'antica vita sono perduti tra una gente nuova, commercianti, forestieri, provinciali, romani, ebrei arricchiti, artisti,' concluding that 'Milano è il centro del mondo e la Galleria è il centro di Milano.'⁴⁷ The Galleria had become, for many, the embodiment of a vision of Italy as a thriving, successful society and was celebrated as such. Verga's feelings, on the other hand, were rather more complex and he adopted a noticeably different approach to its representation compared to the other writers already discussed.

Giovanni Verga and the Galleria: Between male socialisation and female delinquency

Verga moved to Milan from Sicily in 1872 and would remain there for the following twenty years. He was immediately captivated by the city's dynamism and energy and wrote impassioned letters to Capuana (who was still in Sicily), extolling the virtues of the Lombard city and urging his friend to join him in the north. Two years later, Verga published 'X' in *Strenna Italiana*, his first story to be set in the city and the following year 'Primavera', also set in Milan, appeared in *Illustrazione Italiana*. His most sustained consideration of the city, however, appeared in the collection *Per le vie*,

⁴³ Capuana, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,' p. 409.

⁴⁴ De Marchi, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,' p. 243.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 245–46. In his own essay of 1881, Verga also briefly mentioned the crowds in the Galleria. See Verga, 'I dintorni di Milano', in AAVV, *Milano 1881: La vita* (Milan: Giuseppe Ottino Editore, 1881), pp. 61–62.

⁴⁶ Capuana, 'La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,' pp. 410–12.

⁴⁷ Luigi Gualdo, *Decadenza*, ed. Geno Pampaloni (Milano: CDE, 1961), pp. 47–48.

published in 1883.⁴⁸ Gian Paolo Marchi has argued in relation to Verga's Milanese stories that 'a Verga interessano di più gli interni, d'ambiente e d'anime, che l'atmosfera delle strade e delle piazze.'⁴⁹ While exploration of characters' internal motivations is undoubtedly of fundamental importance to these stories, Verga's construction of character is tightly linked to the spatial dynamics of Milan and to his protagonists' ability to move freely around the urban space. While Contarini may be correct in her assertion that 'Milano non diviene mai il personaggio principale' of *Per le vie*,⁵⁰ there is no denying that the city is a crucial supporting player. Verga covers the entire city in the stories – from the working-class peripheries to the Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Scala, and of course the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele.

Walter Benjamin famously linked the space of the arcade with the figure of the flâneur, observing that 'strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades [...] It is in this world that the flâneur is at home.'⁵¹ He also pointed out that in 1839, it was fashionable to take a tortoise out walking, commenting that 'this gives us an idea of the tempo of flânerie in the arcades.'⁵² From its origins, the arcade space was constructed as a masculine domain, described by Ferdinand von Gall in 1845 as a 'favored haunt of strollers and smokers.'⁵³

For Verga, the space of the Galleria was inextricably bound up with the space of the café, of which there were a number within the arcade. The most famous were the Caffè Biffi and the Ristorante Savini, both of which opened in 1867, the year the Galleria was inaugurated. In his Milanese stories, the flâneur is repeatedly seen both in the arcade and in its cafes. A consistent pattern in Verga's treatment of the Galleria (and the cafes therein) was his focus on it as a space for male socialisation, and more specifically as a place for male artists and writers to pursue their dreams, usually unsuccessfully. Although coffeehouses had existed in Europe since the 1650s, it was only in the mid nineteenth century that they became undeniable centres of importance for male socialisation in every major European city. They were sites both of 'social interaction and solitary introspection'⁵⁴ and have also been construed as an 'intellectual laboratory.'⁵⁵

⁴⁸ The original title Verga had planned was *Vita d'officina* so that the stories would serve as a companion piece to *Vita dei campi*. See Silvia Contarini, 'La fantasmagoria del reale: una lettura delle "novelle milanesi" di Verga', *Lettere italiane*, 60 (2008), 323–51 (p. 336).

⁴⁹ Gian Paolo Marchi, 'Giovanni Verga per le vie di Milano', *Quaderni di Lingue e Letterature*, 24 (1999): 47–63 (p. 55).

⁵⁰ Contarini, 'La fantasmagoria del reale', p. 346.

⁵¹ Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 36–37.

⁵² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 422, M3,8.

⁵³ Ferdinand von Gall, *Paris und seine Salons* (Oldenburg: Schulze, 1845), pp. 22–23, quoted in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 41, A3,9.

⁵⁴ Haine, 'Introduction', in Rittner, Haine, and Jackson, eds., *The Thinking Space*, pp. 1–22 (p. 3).

⁵⁵ Benoit Lecoq, 'Le Café', in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), vol. 3, p. 87.

The protagonist of Verga's 'Primavera', Paolo, is a case in point. The story opens with his arrival in Milan 'colla sua musica sotto il braccio,' full of hopes and dreams for the future when 'il sole splendeva per lui tutti i giorni, e tutte le donne erano belle.'⁵⁶ His poverty, however, weighs heavily on him, and the Galleria is initially constructed as a symbol of the disappointment of his artistic dreams: 'le sue scarpe s'erano logorate a correr dietro le larve dei suoi sogni d'artista, e della sua ambizione giovanile, - quelle larve funeste che da tutti gli angoli d'Italia vengono in folla ad impallidire e sfumare sotto i cristalli lucenti della Galleria, nelle fredde ore di notte, o in quelle tristi del pomeriggio' (p. 68). Unlike other writers who considered the Galleria space as a melting pot for all of society, Verga identifies it specifically as a mecca for young, aspiring male artists, some of whom, like Paolo, will ultimately be successful, while others will not. In the opening story of *Per le vie*, 'Il Bastione di Monforte', the framing story for the whole collection, we encounter an alter-ego of the author, a poor writer who will go 'a pranzare con una tazza di caffè e latte fra gli specchi e le dorature del Biffi.'⁵⁷ The simplicity of the lunch contrasted with the grandeur of the surroundings serves to highlight the poverty of this young man.⁵⁸ Both he and Paolo are prototypical examples of the Benjaminian flâneur, the 'alienated man' who is 'at home neither in the metropolis nor in the middle class.'⁵⁹

As well as claiming the Galleria as a safe space for male intellectuals, Verga also sought to depict the arcade as a locus of delinquent female sexuality and thus to ensure its continued existence as a male-dominated space. Verga's short stories and their construction of the Galleria space can be read as cautionary tales against women in the modern urban environment. Verga himself admitted to being 'poco femminista'⁶⁰ and the evidence of his Milanese stories shows no desire to challenge the strict division of men and women into separate public and private spheres.

In studies of the space and the nineteenth-century metropolis, the role of women and the question of gender have long been of central importance. Much of the discussion surrounding space and gender has centred on the division between the public and private spheres, and on the relegation of women to the domestic environment.⁶¹ Griselda Pollock has argued that 'for women, the public spaces thus construed were

⁵⁶ Verga, 'Primavera', in *Novelle*, 4th edn (Milan: Treves, 1887), pp. 59–80 (p. 59). Further page numbers relating to this story will be given in brackets after the quotation.

⁵⁷ Verga, 'Il bastione di Monforte', in *Per le vie*, 2nd edn (Milan: Treves, 1883), pp. 3–14 (pp. 10–11). For more on this story, see Olga Ragusa, *Verga's Milanese Tales* (New York: S.F. Vanni, 1964), pp. 6–8.

⁵⁸ For a portrait of the clientele of the Caffè Biffi, see Roberto Sacchetti, 'La vita letteraria a Milano', in *Milano 1881*, pp. 427–55.

⁵⁹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Verga, *Lettere sparse*, ed. by Giovanna Finocchiaro Chimirri (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), n. 494.

⁶¹ For critiques of the separate spheres, see Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History', *Journal of American History*, 75.1 (1988), 9–39 and Janet Wolff, 'The Culture of Separate Spheres: The Role of Culture in 19th-century Public and Private Life', in *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class*, ed. by Wolff and John Seed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 117–34.

where one risked losing one's virtue, dirtying oneself; going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied.⁶² In the case of Verga, however, it is not the public space in general, but very specifically, the Galleria, which was constructed as the locus of female disgrace. His literary map of Milan is very precise on this point. Although other writers and painters did depict the Galleria as a place associated with female vice, no writer except for Verga so consistently and single-mindedly constructed the Galleria only as a site of female sexual depravity, with none of the counter-balancing examples present in the works of other writers already mentioned, who represented the space as a melting-pot for the entire city. Female behaviour as depicted in these stories has a highly developed spatial component in relation to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele. The only women represented actually inside the arcade space are constructed as fallen women and the physical location of female characters is highly controlled in these stories.

Katharine Mitchell has argued that the careful and frequent descriptions of women's movements in public and private in the fiction of female nineteenth-century authors constitutes a 'subtle critique of the ideology of the separate spheres of gender being implemented by the hegemony of late-nineteenth-century Italy.'⁶³ Verga was exactly one of these hegemonic figures. As Janet Wolff has observed: 'The invisibility of women in the literature of modernity has nothing much to do with women's actual lives in the period. Rather it is a product of the discourse of modernity itself.'⁶⁴ Elsewhere, Wolff argued that in this literature of modernity, 'women only appear [...] through their relationships with men in the public sphere, and via their illegitimate or eccentric routes into this male arena – that is, in the role of whore, widow, or murder victim.'⁶⁵ This observation sums up much of Verga's treatment of women in his Milanese stories and his female characters frequently fall into the category of 'whore,' with this status tightly connected with the specific space of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele.

In post-Unification Italy, there was something of a moral panic surrounding the question of prostitution. Prostitutes were classed as deviants in need of 'special government intervention.'⁶⁶ In Lombardy in 1881, there were 1,037 legally registered prostitutes, most of whom were based in Milan. Poor women flocked from the countryside to the city, but many, finding no work, fell into prostitution. However, the zealous surveillance of prostitution by city authorities meant that many ordinary, working-class women fell

⁶² See Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 50–90 (p. 69).

⁶³ Mitchell, *Italian Women Writers*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ Wolff, 'Gender and the Haunting of Cities (or the Retirement of the Flâneur)', in D'Souza and McDonough, eds., *The Invisible Flâneuse?*, pp. 18–31 (p. 22).

⁶⁵ Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2.3 (1985), 37–46 (p. 44).

⁶⁶ Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860–1915* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986), p. 16.

under suspicion. Any homeless, unemployed women, or working-class woman alone on the streets at night could be arrested for prostitution.⁶⁷

The Galleria was indeed a popular location for clandestine prostitutes in the city to congregate, a fact often commented upon in writings of the time. De Marchi noted that after midnight ‘tutti coloro insomma che il caso, la sventura, o il capriccio conducono per le strade dopo le due e le tre ore di notte, convengono in Galleria attratti dal centro e dalla sicurezza del luogo.’⁶⁸ Capuana mentioned the elegant young men at the cafés who would throw a smile in the direction of the ‘belle peccatrici [...] coi loro seni prepotenti,’⁶⁹ and he showed particular compassion for those ‘povere creature’ who provoke ‘con sfacciata insistenza lo scettico torpore del nostro vizio [ma che] trattengono a stento le loro lagrime di creature che hanno fame.’⁷⁰ Journalist Paolo Valera’s in-depth sociological study of the underbelly of Milan also described the various itineraries of the city’s prostitutes. Although they were not portrayed only in the Galleria, it was around the Galleria that they would wander and roam, eager to take advantage of the crowds:

quando le vie si spopolano e la zona viva è quella che incide i ristoranti, i caffè e i bar in Galleria, a fianco della Galleria, in faccia alla Galleria, al dorso della Galleria, a pochi passi dalla Galleria, nei vicoli, nelle piazzette, nelle viuzze che circondano la Galleria.⁷¹

Under the porticos of the Galleria, Valera noted that ‘di tanto in tanto qualcuna si ferma per riavere nella mano l'ondata delle vesti chiassose o lasciare vedere una spanna di polpacci nelle calze colorate e qualche altra legge sul viso di un uomo la voglia di conoscerla.’⁷²

Similar themes are explored by Verga in his Milanese stories. The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele already featured in Verga’s earliest story set in Milan, published in 1874. ‘X’ recounts the story of a young man who meets a mysterious woman at a masquerade ball at La Scala. He does not find out her name, but desperately searches for her for a few days before finally seeing her again, this time in the Galleria. This is the true beginning of their interaction. She smiles at him and he feels ‘spinto fatalmente verso di lei, e venti volte fui sul punto di prenderle la mano al cospetto delle persone che

⁶⁷ See Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy*, p. 2 and pp. 131–32. The figure for the number of prostitutes in Milan is from Gibson, p. 89.

⁶⁸ De Marchi, ‘La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,’ p. 244.

⁶⁹ Capuana, ‘La Galleria Vittorio Emanuele,’ p. 413.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

⁷¹ Paolo Valera, *Milano sconosciuta rinnovata* (Milan: LEDI, 2016), p. 12. The text was first published in installments in *La Plebe* in 1879 and then as a standalone text in 1881, followed by numerous other editions up to 1922.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 12. Just such a scene is depicted by Angelo Inganni in one of his many paintings that feature the space of the Galleria. *Veduta di piazza della Scala con neve cadente vista dalla Galleria* of 1874 depicts a probable prostitute, not under the porticoes of the Galleria but within the main space of the arcade.

l'accompagnavano'.⁷³ Their affair fizzles out but a few months later he receives a note instructing him to go to the Cimitero Monumentale where he finds a fresh grave marked with an 'X'. Olga Ragusa has argued that the story's purpose was to 'meditate on a psychological attitude' and that this accounted for the 'almost non-existence of the setting' in which the Piazza della Scala and the Galleria are 'simply mentioned by name without even the most superficial of attempts at characterization.'⁷⁴ This is indeed true if one examines 'X' in isolation. However, when we look at the body of Verga's Milanese stories and the references to the Galleria therein, a very clear characterisation of the space emerges, of which 'X' provides the first inkling.

In 'X', the seductions of Milan that Verga had mentioned in his letters have become embodied in the figure of the 'femme fatale', and very deliberately sited in the space of the Galleria. It is the locus of female delinquency and the place where men fall prey to feminine wiles. As Amatangelo has noted, for Verga, the city 'represents the place of "fatal" passion and adventure'⁷⁵ and in the case of Milan, this place, par excellence, is the Galleria. This first brief indication of the Galleria in 'X' sets the tone for how the Galleria will be represented by Verga in the rest of his Milanese short stories, published between 1875 and 1883.

In 'Primavera', already mentioned above, the arcade is immediately set up as a place of inappropriate female behaviour. The story recounts the fates of Paolo, the aspiring young musician who has just arrived in Milan, and the Principessa who he meets and with whom he falls in love. In the story's opening paragraph, the Principessa is described as 'superbiosetta' (p. 59) and she is set apart as a more refined character than her friends who 'irrompevano in Galleria come uno stormo di passere' (p. 59). The verb 'irrompere' immediately implies that those rambunctious women are invading the male space and are unwelcome in it. Unlike her raucous friends, the Principessa is not seen inside the Galleria: 'ella preferiva andarsene tutta sola, impettita sotto la sua sciarpetta bianca, sino a Porta Garibaldi' (pp. 59-60). Later in the story, when Paolo and the Principessa begin their relationship, he is shown waiting for her in the Galleria, but she is not placed there with him. The first time she is placed within the arcade is at the scene of her downfall. Paolo has invited her 'a cena, in un gabinetto riservato dei Biffi' (p. 70), in order to break off their relationship. Although as an unmarried woman it was still inappropriate to meet with a man alone, even in a public setting, the café gives their encounter a veneer of respectability. When they exit the Caffè Biffi, however, she does so as a disgraced woman, now that Paolo has abandoned her. As they leave, walking together through the Galleria 'indugiarono alquanto pel cammino, rifacendo tutta la triste via crucis dei loro cari e mesti ricordi' (p. 74). As we shall see, the portrayal of the

⁷³ Verga, 'X', in *Novelle*, pp. 115–32 (p. 123–24).

⁷⁴ Ragusa, *Verga's Milanese Tales*, p. 26.

⁷⁵ Susan Amatangelo, *Figuring Women: A Thematic Study of Giovanni Verga's Female Characters* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p. 51.

Galleria as a *via crucis* for Verga's female characters is a recurring element, culminating in 'Via Crucis', first published on 29 April 1883.

There is a clear development from the earliest reference in 'Primavera' of 1875 to 'Via crucis' of 1883. In 'Primavera', the two protagonists, Paolo and the Principessa together traverse the Galleria after he has left her, tracing a 'via crucis' of 'dei loro cari e mesti ricordi' (p. 74, my italics). Such an idea had already been expressed by Verga in a letter to Capuana in February 1873 stating that he felt himself to be experiencing a 'via crucis' 'sparsa di triboli e di editori, bisogna starci e andare innanzi col sacco vuoto ed i piedi addolorati.'⁷⁶ Verga then encapsulated this image in his portrayal of the artist Enrico in *Eva* (1873), set in Florence rather than Milan, who falls in love with the titular dancer. After her death, Enrico is portrayed walking the streets having lost everything, passing in front of 'vetrine di parecchi caffè' and wandering 'tutta la sera per le vie come un fantasma, senza direzione senza saper che fare.'⁷⁷ Here, it is the male figure who has been broken by the city, but, significantly, his movements in the urban space are not controlled in any way. Ten years later, in 'Via crucis' of 1883, it is the female character who is cast adrift in the streets of Milan, threatened by surveillance, arrest, and imprisonment. As Verga becomes more comfortable in the city, he no longer feels himself to be completing a *via crucis* and this state of penitent suffering is instead transferred onto his female characters.

In 'Via crucis', a young woman Santina becomes involved with two different men, both of whom abandon her, she subsequently loses her job and is forced to leave home. Verga recounts thus her journey through the city: 'scese giù nella strada; fece la dolorosa via crucis della Galleria e di Via Santa Margherita.'⁷⁸ She wanders the streets, looking at shop windows, stopping at cafés (which she is asked to leave, further confirming the café as a male space) and walking through the Galleria, 'alta, sonora, coll'arco immenso spalancato sull'altra piazza bianca di neve' (p. 209). As she wanders the city centre, she hears police officers behind her, but it is in the Galleria that she feels most threatened: 'dietro sempre il passo sonoro dei questurini che la scacciavano avanti, sempre avanti' (p. 209). The Galleria is a particularly hostile place for the female body, where female movement must be controlled.⁷⁹ The story ends, much like the ending of Capuana's piece of the Galleria, with an image of Santina, smiling uselessly and trying to attract customers.

⁷⁶ Verga to Capuana, 7 February 1873, in *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, ed. by Gino Raya (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1984), p. 21.

⁷⁷ Verga, *Eva* (Milan: Treves, 1873), pp. 135 and pp. 138–39 respectively.

⁷⁸ Verga, 'Via Crucis', in *Per le vie*, pp. 195–210 (p. 207). Further page numbers relating to this story will be given in brackets after the quotation.

⁷⁹ On policing in nineteenth-century Milan, see Simona Mori, 'The Police and the Urban "Dangerous Classes": The Culture and Practice of Public Law and Order in Milan after National Unity', *Urban History*, 43.2 (2016), 266–84.

Another indication of the symbolic relationship between the Galleria and a woman's respectability appears early in *Per le vie*. Luisina is a figure who features fleetingly in 'In Piazza della Scala' and then again in 'Al veglione', the story that directly follows it in *Per le vie*. Her social respectability is constructed by Verga in relation to Mengoni's arcade. In 'In Piazza della Scala', the coachman Bigio notices 'quella povera donna che sta l'intera notte sotto l'arco della galleria, per vendere del caffè a due soldi la tazza.'⁸⁰ In 'Al veglione', we discover that she is Luisina, who had 'un reuma alla gamba, collo star di notte a vendere il caffè sotto l'arco della Galleria.'⁸¹ She is a poor, working-class woman, barely making enough to support her family, but she is still respectable and worthy of the reader's esteem. She stands just at the entrance to the Galleria: she has not yet crossed the threshold and entered its world of vice and immorality. Similarly, in 'Il Canarino del n. 15', the Galleria is also used as a shorthand for indicating that a girl has fallen prey to prostitution. Gilda, depicted as a vain and conceited young woman, flirts with men and allows herself to be bought expensive gifts by them. After she has left home, a neighbour reports to the family that he has seen her 'in Galleria',⁸² which is sufficient information to confirm what has become of her and to signal the family's disgrace.

Connected to Verga's condemnation of these women who populate the space of the Galleria is a focus on their materialism and consumerist behaviour, particularly highlighted in 'Via Crucis' and 'Il Canarino del n. 15'. At the outset of 'Via Crucis', Santina has a humble but respectable job as a seamstress. After she has been abandoned by two different lovers, she loses this position and eventually falls into prostitution. This fall from grace is repeatedly described in parallel with her improved outward appearance and fine garments, provided by her clients. Verga pays particular attention to her 'mantello di seta' (p. 208), its finery contrasting with her otherwise impoverished material circumstances and moral disgrace. In the Galleria, she shivers under her cape and Verga rather ironically concludes the story by describing her walking through the Galleria 'come una regina' (p. 210) as she tucks under her cape some bread she has bought with a few coins offered by a gentleman.

'Il Canarino del n. 15' is also very explicit in describing Gilda's fine garments as a sign of her fall into disgrace. Firstly, she refuses to be seen in public with her suitor while he is wearing his blue worker's overalls. After they part ways, she is depicted returning home in ever more elaborate garments, including a mantilla, slippers, and a gold bracelet, whose origins are unclear. Finally, when she is seen in the Galleria by her neighbour, it is reported that she was 'vestita come una signora'.⁸³ Not only is Verga here warning women away from the space of the Galleria, he is cautioning against the

⁸⁰ Verga, 'In piazza della Scala', in *Per le vie*, pp. 17–28 (p. 27).

⁸¹ Verga, 'Al veglione', in *Per le vie*, pp. 31–43 (pp. 34–35).

⁸² Verga, 'Il canarino del. n. 15', in *Per le vie*, pp. 47–66 (p. 58). This story was first published in *Domenica letteraria* on 21 May 1882.

⁸³ Verga, 'Il canarino del. n. 15', p. 58.

female behaviour most associated with it, namely shopping and consumption, activities which he directly connects to prostitution and which lead to ruin according to the end of these stories. Such observations foretell in miniature Verga's later and more profound preoccupation with consumption and the accrual of material wealth, as encapsulated in the idea of 'la roba' and the figures of Don Mazzarò and Mastro Don Gesualdo.⁸⁴

The clear focus of *Per le vie* is on the Milanese poor – male artists and working-class young women. In another novella, however, *Il come, il quando ed il perché* (1882, published both independently and as part of *Vita dei campi*), Verga turns his attention to the middle-class women of Milan. We do not see Signora Rinaldi, a middle-class woman who commits adultery, in the streets of the city, but rather at the Giardini, at the Zoo, and at Lago Maggiore, where, as Ragusa has put it 'the beauty of the natural setting conspires to take the sting out of the illicit passion.'⁸⁵ No such relief is offered to his working-class female characters, whose disgrace is linked to the Galleria and the city streets. In fact, there is only one mention in any of Verga's Milanese stories of middle-class women in the Galleria, and the mention comes not in *Per le vie*, but in 'Il tramonto di Venere', first published in 1892. Bibì, a womaniser, sits expectantly at the tables of the Caffè Biffi between five and six in the evening 'nelle ore in cui anche le matrone s'avventurano in Galleria.'⁸⁶ The choice of verb describing the action of these bourgeois women clearly indicates that entering the Galleria is a risky endeavour for them, and indeed, that any that attempt to do so will be immediately taken advantage of by the monstrous Bibì. This brief statement, alongside the descriptions of the dismal fate of the working-class women in the Galleria, acts as a warning to bourgeois women that the arcade is no place for them, and indicates the longevity of Verga's interest in the gendered dynamics of the space over a twenty-year period from 1874 to 1892.

Conclusion

Unlike other authors such as Capuana and De Marchi, who presented more rounded characterisations of the space filled with both working class and bourgeois figures, both male and female, the Galleria, for Verga was, by rights, a space of male flânerie, which was being threatened by a moral decline, embodied in the figure of the fallen woman. Verga was uncomfortable with those women who defied convention and lived outside the strictures of bourgeois society. Female writers of the period also wrote about space, gender and conduct, challenging the discussion of separate spheres. However, as Ann Caesar has pointed out, generally the spatial element was left rather vague.⁸⁷ Verga was

⁸⁴ See 'La roba' in *Novelle rusticane* (Turin: Casanova, 1883), first published in 1880, and *Mastro-Don Gesualdo* (Milan: Treves, 1889). On this theme, see Anthony J. De Vito, 'Roba e miseria: Motivi dominanti nell'opera di Giovanni Verga', *Italica*, 31.4 (1954), 225–36 and Roberto Ghiringhelli, *La roba come gioia e/o come incubo. Riflettendo con Giovanni Verga* (Varese: La tipografia varese, 2009).

⁸⁵ Ragusa, *Verga's Milanese Tales*, p. 36. For the novella *Il come, il quando ed il perché*, see Verga, *Vita dei campi*, 2nd edn (Milan: Treves, 1881), pp. 211–65.

⁸⁶ Verga, 'Il tramonto di Venere', in *Don Candeloro e C.*, 2nd edn (Milan: Treves, 1894), pp. 93–106 (pp. 93–94).

⁸⁷ Caesar, 'About Town', p. 36.

unusual in his treatment; what set him apart was the very deliberate spatial element to his critique, centred on the space of the Galleria. Verga was not alone in experiencing anxiety about these new feminised urban spaces and their connection to women's greater visibility in nineteenth-century society.⁸⁸ As Amatangelo has observed with regard to Verga's female characters (although not speaking about the Milanese short stories, or making any specific reference to spatial dynamics):

The Fatal Woman [...] expressed patriarchal society's apprehension regarding change. As women began to articulate their needs and desires, and, however slowly, to acquire more rights, men experienced anxiety about their own potential loss of power and decline in status. The unconventional woman posed a threat to individual, familial, and social stability by challenging the values upon which bourgeois society was constructed. [...] By depicting the Fatal Woman as an unpredictable, irrational, and disruptive force, writers illustrated society's dread of female power without addressing the real issues surrounding the emancipation movement.⁸⁹

Similarly, Gibson has observed that 'the increased visibility of [...] "independent" women on city streets reinforced general anxieties about female emancipation.'⁹⁰ Verga folded in many such anxieties into the figure of the fallen woman in his Milanese stories. The seed of this characterisation was already evident as early as 1873 when Verga wrote to Capuana about 'le larve affascinanti che ti hanno sorriso per le vie che son diventate patrimonio della tua mente.'⁹¹ Here, Verga gave voice to some of the themes that would preoccupy him in the following years. The description of these fallen women as 'larve' has a twofold meaning: a 'larva' is a spectral figure, specifically for the Ancient Romans the ghost of one who had been wicked in life and also connotes a person who is physically emaciated. The fallen woman is at once both physically attractive and repulsive and her ghostly presence threatens the genteel atmosphere of Milan's streets. As Verga began to develop these ideas further, he explicitly located this figure not just 'per le vie', but within the space of the Galleria. A deliberate characterisation of the space by Verga can be observed, with a specific sociological purpose. It has been argued that Verga's fallen women can be 'viewed as cautionary tales for men and women alike,'⁹² and it has also been noted that while the representation of the working-class world is fundamental in *Per le vie*, it often seems as if 'il mondo popolare fosse rappresentata [...] per contrasto.'⁹³ Indeed, Verga chose to pathologise the space of the Galleria, to warn 'respectable' women

⁸⁸ See, for example, on the department store, Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, p. 80.

⁸⁹ Amatangelo, *Figuring Women*, pp. 143–44.

⁹⁰ Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy*, p. 4.

⁹¹ Verga to Capuana, 5 April 1873, in Raya, *Carteggio Verga-Capuana*, pp. 25–26.

⁹² Amatangelo, *Figuring Women*, p. 144 (although she was not referring to the Milanese stories here). On the relationship between writers and the readers of 19th-century novels, see Maria Grazia Lolla, 'Bovarism in a New Key: The Reader of Novels and the Social Sciences in fin-de-siècle Italy', in *The Formation of a National Audience in Italy 1750–1890: Readers and Spectators of Italian Culture*, ed. by Gabriella Romani and Jennifer Burns (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), pp. 213–237.

⁹³ Franco Ferrucci, 'I racconti milanesi di Verga', *Italica*, 44.2 (1967), 117–34 (p. 120).

off and to maintain highly gendered conceptions of public and private realms. The arcade as a liminal zone between public and private was threatening to the male hegemony of the public sphere and through his short stories, Verga sought to maintain it as a site of male dominance, unsuitable for bourgeois women, desiring of greater freedom of movement with the post-Unification Italian metropolis.

(9,331 words, including notes)