

## Research Article

# From the poor's 'faint traces' of memory to their punctuated presence: The extraordinary archetypal case of Rabito's *Terra matta*

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Vincenzo Rabito's *Terra matta*, published posthumously by Italian publishing house, Einaudi, in 2007, almost 40 years after being typewritten by its author is one of the most extraordinary cases of 20<sup>th</sup> century Life writing 'from below'. In 2022, Einaudi published another more fictionalised version of his autobiography based on a second typescript, *Il romanzo della vita passata*. As an autodidact, Rabito was the first 'writer' in his lineage to document his life using an unconventional language and grammar, a hybrid of Sicilian dialect, Italian and oral vernacular via a peculiar and unique use of the typewriter. A peasant and worker, Rabito sees himself ceaselessly pitted against fate yet retains an uncanny understanding of his own agency to shape and determine his life. While 'Life writing' is a commercially and viable genre for well-known cultural, political, or sporting celebrities, rarely does 'peasant' or 'vernacular' writing, attract widespread attention in both scholarly and popular spheres. Exceptionally, Rabito's life narratives enjoyed unexpected literary, historical, and commercial success after their publication, followed by several theatre and film adaptations, together with a dedicated online website, becoming a cultural phenomenon. This paper focuses on how we can account for Rabito's unexpected success. The main factors include: the historiographical contribution of Rabito's writings – a 'history from below' of some of the key socio-political and cultural events of Italian society throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Rabito's literary style, with its forceful, ironic, hybrid language, overlayed with the epic patterns of the oral storytelling traditions and puppet shows of Sicily; and the cultural and symbolic value the texts and books have accrued from their origins as unconventional yet award-winning typescripts that were able to open doors in artistic and literary circles not usually afforded to personal memoirs 'from

below'. Finally, the paper suggests that the success, impact, and significance of Rabito's narrative rests on its intrinsic *archetypal* and mythological character. Rabito's story resonates because he so capably articulates in an almost alchemical manner his own transformation as the society around him transformed. As an unlikely and almost unwilling 'hero', he depicts the psychological journey and rite of passage of individuation. An archetypal perspective not only helps account for Rabito's surprising success but provides a mode to better understand, analyse and illuminate its story and that of its main protagonist. An archetypal approach may also offer a framework for a deeper understanding of Life writing in general.

## 1. Introduction

In the posthumously published autobiographical novel *The First Man* by the French existentialist Albert Camus, the protagonist Jacques Cormery, breaks with the intellectual and cultural poverty of his forebears in becoming a writer. In reminiscing about the past with his ageing mother, he observes:

*Poor people's memory is less nourished than that of the rich; it has fewer landmarks in space... and fewer reference points in time...the memory of the heart that they say is the surest kind... wears out with sorrow and labour, it forgets sooner under the weight of fatigue. Remembrance of things past is just for the rich. For the poor it only marks the faint traces on the path to death.*<sup>1</sup>

Camus was acknowledging that the voices of the poor and socially underprivileged have been largely silent in what Lyons and Marquill have referred to as 'scribal culture'.<sup>2</sup> Committing life's memories and events to paper was neither feasible nor desirable in social classes where culture and meaning were primarily transmitted orally.

The growth in the interdisciplinary field of Life writing 'from below' has helped turn the 'faint traces' of the poor's memory into a more profuse and punctuated presence.<sup>3</sup> Memory is not only central to the endeavour of narrative writing and storytelling, but 'part [of] our capacity to imagine, and our imagination is in part our capacity to remember'.<sup>4</sup> The study of life writings and memoirs 'from below', has helped shine a light on the collective experience through the individual voice/s of their narrators.<sup>5</sup> In the diaries and narratives of the unknown or 'subaltern'<sup>6</sup> classes, memory takes on the

role of filling the gaps left by official histories to create a kind of 'collective diary of all sections of society: between past and present, an authentic society seen from below without any intermediary'.<sup>7</sup>

While 'Life writing' is an 'eminently saleable genre...[for] the lives of the rich and famous, [and] the doyens in various spheres of human achievement'<sup>8</sup>, rarely does 'peasant' or 'vernacular writing', attract widespread attention in both scholarly and popular spheres, let alone become part of the literary cannon.<sup>9</sup> Despite the growing interest in Life writing 'from below', the object/s of study, whether in the form of letters, diaries, poems, or autobiographical memoirs, like their authors, remain largely unknown. Although a minority may become of interest to historians, sociolinguists, anthropologists, and philologists, such writing does not 'easily fit the expectations of literary autobiography...[it is] laconic rather than reflective, pragmatic rather than introverted.'<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Lyons also notes that some examples of Life writing 'from below' are 'ordinary exceptions' – 'ordinary because they were modest peasants, and because some of their experiences were shared by thousands like them...exceptional, both because they wrote and because their extraordinary writings have survived.'<sup>11</sup>

The focus of this paper is on what can be termed an 'extra-ordinary exception' in the field of Life writing from below: the autobiography by the unknown autodidact Vincenzo Rabito. While it is not the only autobiographical account of the period by people with similar cultural and educational backgrounds, it is one of the few that has become a prized literary, historiographical, and cultural work.<sup>12</sup> *Terra matta*, was published posthumously by Italian publishing house, Einaudi, in 2007, almost 40 years after being typewritten by its author.<sup>13</sup> It recounts the life story of a Sicilian peasant and worker, who sees himself ceaselessly pitted against fate and the power of 'malefic planets' yet retains an uncanny understanding of his own agency to shape and determine his life. Like the protagonist in Camus' novel, Rabito, despite his lack of formal education, was the first 'writer'<sup>14</sup> in his lineage to document his life using an unconventional language and grammar, a hybrid of Sicilian dialect, Italian and oral vernacular via a peculiar and unique use of the typewriter. *Terra matta* became a literary bestseller and a cultural and linguistic cause celebre, that has been compared to other Italian literary masterpieces such as di Lampedusa's *Il Gattopardo*, and to the works of Luigi Pirandello, Giovanni Verga, and Andrea Camilleri.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Vincenzo Rabito has been acclaimed as a modern Homer with *Terra matta* his *Odyssey*.<sup>16</sup>

*Terra matta*'s publication was followed by a series of conferences in Italy and elsewhere, an adaptation for the stage first performed in Catania in 2009 and subsequently internationally, an award-winning documentary film in 2012, and other stage and performance adaptations, including an online narrated series during the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in 2022, Einaudi, published another more fictionalised version of his autobiography based on a second typescript, *Il romanzo della vita passata*, that continues Rabito's story for another decade from where *Terra matta* ends in the summer of 1970.<sup>18</sup> Its release in September 2022, generated a similar wave of interest, with a series of discussions and media reviews and interviews, culminating in a day-long live-streamed symposium.<sup>19</sup> The publication of these fascinating memoirs has catapulted Rabito's unique and powerful narrative voice onto the Italian and international literary, film and theatre worlds.

This paper focuses on how we can account for this unexpected success. The next section provides a brief precis of some of the key themes that have emerged from the field of Life writing 'from below' relevant to framing this discussion. Section 3 gives the background to Rabito's two published autobiographical accounts: *Terra matta* and *Il romanzo*.<sup>20</sup> Section 4 summarises the main reasons for the literary and cultural success of these accounts. In Section 5, I suggest that the *archetypal nature* of *Terra matta* is also another critical factor in understanding its success, impact, and significance. While *Terra matta* provides socio-historical insights and a certain literary uniqueness, its 'extraordinariness' comes from the fact that Rabito's account also bears witness to those powerful, mysterious, and often numinous forces known as archetypes, meaning the 'basic powers of nature as they are experienced through the human psyche, powers that are conveyed in the core themes present within all myths'.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. From the poor's 'faint traces' of memory to their punctuated presence

Ashplant has observed that 'Life writing from below' is a broad and 'capacious' term that refers to the low and marginal social status of the authors as well as to the wide and varied forms of text that comprise the genre of the writing.<sup>22</sup> The factors that have contributed to its growth as an academic field and among the wider public include: the desire to be more inclusive of diverse and usually excluded groups and sources in the telling and writing of history; the role played by public and private archives dedicated to collecting, preserving and publicising the various genres of writing by the semi-

literate; and the increase in local political initiatives concerned with publishing autobiographies that address particular local issues and concerns.<sup>23</sup>

An organisation that played a critical role in facilitating the eventual availability of *Terra matta* to the general public, for example, the *Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* (ADN) in Italy, was founded in 1984 to give power to the underprivileged and disinherited segments of society, with the belief that even the smallest of stories can be significant in the wider narrative of history.<sup>24</sup> These ‘unorthodox and continually surprising’<sup>25</sup> stories and writings often provide a powerful counter narrative to official histories with their focus on the role of political, military, corporate and civic leaders often to the exclusion of the common people. Such writing ‘from below’ nevertheless remains a form of what the translator Laura Brignon has termed ‘*litterature brute*’ or ‘outsider literature’, to parallel the more familiar genre of ‘art brute’, which describes the work of artists who were primarily self-taught, had little interaction with the mainstream art world or did not consider themselves ‘artists’, and were often discovered or became famous posthumously.<sup>26</sup> While the work of ‘brute’ artists and writers often contains a genius, unconventional, eccentric, or Promethean quality, its ‘outsider status’ may partly explain why academic interest in life writing from below has been largely restricted to specialized debates among linguists and historians.<sup>27</sup>

Life writing scholarship has been concerned not only with analysing the nature, content, and context of texts, but also understanding the role and contribution of the various factors that may influence how and why works by non-traditional writers come to light. In addition to the already mentioned role of specialised archives, this often includes, for instance, the role of intermediaries, gatekeepers to publishing houses, patronage, cultural value and at times serendipity. The interplay and relationship of these factors within the society of the author/s of interest invariably shapes not only the writing of an original diary or memoir for example, but the transformed and edited version that eventually becomes public in the form of a book or cultural event.<sup>28</sup>

There is also the theme of what motivated technically illiterate people such as peasants and other socially marginalised groups to ‘plough with the pen’ to tell their story.<sup>29</sup> Afterall, the act of writing for such people was not only an unfamiliar practice, but ‘an intense and ambiguous experience’<sup>30</sup>, often driven by an inner need to narrate one’s life or realise a sense of ‘self’, combined with the ‘ability to inscribe the personal with the script of history’.<sup>31</sup> As Ashplant has aptly observed, to better understand life writings from below, it is useful to ‘think about their authors’ motivations as located

within a field of force between two poles: an exteriority pole constituted by the state (or by organisations of civil society, or informal community pressures) which compel or otherwise elicit life writings from below, and an interiority pole of the impulse of someone hitherto excluded to narrate their life in some public sphere'.<sup>32</sup>

In the two autobiographies that form the subject of this paper, for example, the motivation to write emerged from a deep-seated disappointment – the night Rabito was duped into what became an unhappy marriage circumscribed by an ongoing battle with his wife's toxic in-laws.<sup>33</sup> For Rabito, 'that was the night that led me to write this book...and if it wasn't for that deceitful evening, I would not be full of this poison, because it ended all my hopes and ruined my future dreams'.<sup>34</sup> Rabito's pride for a book of poems published by his youngest son Giovanni in 1968, may also have influenced his decision to write what became *Terra matta*.<sup>35</sup>

Related to the question of motive is the often-contentious theme in Life writing of autobiographical accuracy and veracity. For Rabito, the act of writing his memoirs was certainly on one level about recounting the true 'facts' and 'events' of his life as he saw and experienced them. While Rabito began his memoirs when he was almost seventy, he displayed an amazing ability to recall exact times, locations, and feelings of the events he recounts. Whether describing his battlefield experiences in WWI, or discrimination faced because of his social class and status, Rabito states that what he writes, even if poorly expressed, is the 'truth' and supported by evidence.<sup>36</sup> At a deeper and inner level his act of writing was also a means to connect with his unconscious self, to grapple with issues of his life's purpose, meaning and legacy, to make sense of the bigger and mysterious forces of fate, destiny and freewill.

Writing one's memoirs often leads to a fuller and deeper understanding of one's psyche that was not evident before writing.<sup>37</sup> As Jung stated, 'when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside as fate'.<sup>38</sup> For the semi-literate Rabito, the act of *typewriting* was partly a way for him to unearth his unconscious mind, to understand the dance between fate, destiny and personal agency in his own life story. While it has been suggested that *Il romanzo* may be more an 'autobiographical novel', embellished with themes that would resonate with Southern Italian popular culture, such as jealousy, revenge, envy, hatred for the oppressing classes, love and romance, generosity, solidarity, and camaraderie, Rabito still reassures the reader that what he writes is based on the 'truth'.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, a key insight from the recent Life writing from below scholarship is that a person's subordinate position in society did not necessarily mean that they would remain inarticulate. Indeed, a deeper analysis and understanding of such writing often illustrates the 'creative subjectivity – in action and in writing' of the authors.<sup>40</sup> Narratives of the self are no longer the preserve of literary auto/biographies but can be found in a much wider (and richer) genre of 'inscribed culture'. Researching these texts has thus contributed 'to rethinking questions about autobiographical practices in general, and the possibilities of self-representation from below', together with an assertion of the 'presence and value of the self, and of the community from which one comes'.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Background to *Terra matta* and *Il Romanzo della vita passata*

*Terra matta* was published posthumously almost 40 years after being typewritten by Vincenzo Rabito over three years from the end of 1967 to the middle of 1970.<sup>42</sup> The serendipitous and fantastical story of how an almost discarded, unreadable typescript went on to be published to literary and historical acclaim is now part of the *Terra matta* legend.<sup>43</sup> Noteworthy in this mythologising was Rabito's use of his son Giovanni's former *Olivetti* typewriter, as an almost 'organic extension of his own body' facilitating his rhythmic and forceful storytelling voice, creating a narrative tour de force without precedent.<sup>44</sup> This also led to a typescript that was visually dense and claustrophobic, with its repetitive and incessant use of punctuation marks, especially the semi-colon, comma or full-stop after every word, spelling and grammatical errors, the absence of capital letters, and the lack of paragraph breaks and minimal spacing.

Despite the linguistic barriers his typescript posed, it was awarded the *Premio Pieve – Banca Toscana* prize of the ADN in the year 2000.<sup>45</sup> The panel of judges that decided the prize-winner was of the view that Rabito's autobiography represented a unique work compared to previous prize winners and other texts in the archive, with one member of the judging panel describing it somewhat ironically, and as it turned out, incorrectly, as the 'masterpiece you will never read'.<sup>46</sup> The final communique that announced the prize winners, described Rabito's text as:

*Vivid, impetuous, untameable, the humanity of Rabito's story leaps out from the pages of his autobiography. It is written in an oral language full of 'sicilianisms' with semi-colons to separate each word. Rabito wrestles with the writing down of his life covering almost the entire 20th century, doing battle with the history of Italy and with his typewriter but sketching*

a panorama of his Sicily to be compared to a working-class Gattopardo. The roughness of the writing...suppresses any hope of seeing the work published, to the delight of linguists, as it stands.<sup>47</sup>

There then followed a careful two-year editing of the typescript, first by the ADN's Lucca Ricci, and then by Einaudi's editorial consultant, the Sicilian writer Evelina Santangelo, to ensure that the published version 'respected in every way the author's style, from the combative spirit that animates his pages from the first to the last, to the expressive and linguistic spontaneity that is a unique and unavoidable feature characteristic of the entire text'.<sup>48</sup> While acknowledging that Rabito's text held great historical, sociological and linguistic interest, the editors were guided by a desire to respect the authenticity of Rabito's 'voice' as narrator and storyteller, with Santangelo coining the term *rabitese* to describe Rabito's unique use of language and story-telling, which was a synthesis between Italian (often borrowing bureaucratic and military expressions), Sicilian dialect and his own unique linguistic style, which achieved, 'a vividness of expressive power and rare intensity in the images he evokes that very often gives his 'mistakes' a deeper meaning behind their apparent randomness.'<sup>49</sup>

Another version of his autobiography, based on a second typescript Rabito commenced in 1970 and continued until his death in February 1981, was published by Einaudi in 2022 (*Il romanzo*).<sup>50</sup> The last 200 pages of this second typescript continues his story for just over another decade from where *Terra matta* ends in the summer of 1970. Aside from the chronological length and content, important differences exist between the two typescripts and their respective published versions. *Terra matta*, based on the first typescript, is clearly autobiographical and factual in nature. The intended readership, if any, was most likely himself and his family, to tell his story and to make sense and meaning of the life of Vincenzo Rabito. In *Il romanzo*, based on the second typescript, Rabito sees himself more as a writer and narrator, perhaps envisaging a wider readership outside his immediate family. *Il romanzo*, was edited from the original typescript by Giovanni Rabito, who followed a similar approach to that taken in the preparation of *Terra matta*, namely, to facilitate the readability of the story while maintaining the unique narrative voice of the author's expression.<sup>51</sup> According to Giovanni Rabito, *Terra matta*, written in the first-person, is 'instinctual and spontaneous', whereas *Il romanzo*, written in the third-person tense, embellishes and fictionalises elements of his life story, adding details or modifying facts in the hope of captivating the reader.<sup>52</sup>



#### 4. Accounting for *Terra matta*'s success

While the two typescripts and the subsequent published books based on them are a unique literary and cultural phenomenon, the events that Rabito documents were not necessarily unique to him, but also shared with his socio-cultural cohort, millions of whom emigrated to other continents in the post-war period. This may also account for the popularity and interest in *Terra matta* among the extensive Italian diaspora.<sup>53</sup> So why have Rabito's memoirs, a supposedly illiterate peasant, resonated so strongly and widely, beyond the cultural intricacies and sensibilities of Sicilians, beyond Italians of all social and cultural classes, and indeed, internationally to Europe, North and South America, and beyond even without the availability of an English translation. This section outlines three acknowledged factors that partly account for *Terra matta*'s unexpected commercial, literary, and cultural success.

First, is its historiographical contribution. It has been described as an unlikely 'dream come true for historians'<sup>54</sup>. The memories and events depicted in the life of Vincenzo Rabito provide a collective history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian life seen 'from below', more precisely, through the eyes of an unschooled Sicilian 'peasant' and later 'worker', holding a 'mirror' to 80 years of Italian life – a 'true autobiography of the nation'<sup>55</sup> (through two world wars, the attempt to colonise parts of North-eastern Africa, poverty and emigration, as well as the key political, socio-cultural inflection points of the post-war period through to the unrest of the 1960s and 70s).

The importance of *Terra matta* to Italian historiography is especially salient with respect to Rabito's account of the trench warfare of WWI. Rabito belonged to the youngest and least prepared cohort to be drafted in the war, the quickly mythologised 'ragazzi del '99' (the boys of 1899).<sup>56</sup> The renowned Italian historian, Sergio Luzzatto, has highlighted the historical and scholarly importance of *Terra matta*, which he sees as 'one of the greatest books of 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy', for our understanding of the role that WWI (and trench life in particular) played as the 'first Italian melting-pot'. Through the war, young soldiers like Rabito not only discovered and confronted fear, trauma, death, and brutality, but encountered Italy and the 'Italies' of various regional identities and dialects that made up the nascent post-unification Italian nation-state.<sup>57</sup> Rabito's account of war, with its raw language, that 'brings us into the trenches', also provides a counter to the more refined, cultured and rhetorical language of letters written by the upper ranks of the military that have been prominent in official and scholarly histories.<sup>58</sup>

Second, *Terra matta*'s success is due to the power and uniqueness of its literary style. There has been a certain attraction to the paradox of a so-called 'illiterate writer' whose narrative and prose has been variously described as lively, ironic, forceful, graphic, picaresque, or as one of the editors of *Terra matta* stated, a 'river and volcano that carries with them anger, pain, suffering, lyricism, sweetness, and tenderness'.<sup>59</sup> The hybrid nature of its literary style is one of its great strengths, leading the Italian historian Paolo Muri, to declare that the language and writing of *Terra matta* is the real protagonist of the story, 'an Italian taken down from the empyrean where it was placed by the great poets and storytellers of our tradition and scrambled together with the soil of the trenches and the blasphemies of the soldiers'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, *Terra matta* represents the 'complete defeat of proper Italian', and one finds a unique language (*rabitese*) that should serve as a guide to those wanting to write moral narratives.<sup>61</sup>

Rabito's literary style owes much to his skill and talents as an oral storyteller and raconteur, for which he was known and admired by family and friends, with his popular dictum that 'If one has no adventures in life, there are no stories to tell'.<sup>62</sup> While the spread of written and visual technologies has traditionally been seen as marking the end of oral cultural transmission, it is Rabito's 'persistent and pervasive' use of the oral vernacular speech patterns that is one of *Terra matta*'s strengths.<sup>63</sup> *Terra matta* was after all written in a style that borrows from the great oral traditions of Sicilian storytelling, the '*contastoria*' or *il cuntu*, which may also account for the relative ease and success of the various narrative performances of *Terra matta* since its publication.<sup>64</sup> This oral tradition was based on the telling of chivalric tales through the famous Sicilian puppet theatres (*l'opera dei pupi*) and street performances by professional *contastoria*.<sup>65</sup> These oral stories were documented by several people at the time, the most popular and influential being Giusto Lodico's *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, and most likely the version Rabito was familiar with.<sup>66</sup>

Scholars of the folkloric tradition in Sicily have highlighted how the oral storytelling was instrumental for transforming heroic characters into mythic ones, and constructing a cultural worldview characterised by the themes of trials, challenges, separation, and the restoration of order. Sicilian oral narratives had the ability to counterpose and synthesise some of life's big themes among the general community: justice and injustice, righteousness and immorality, loyalty and disloyalty, wealth and poverty, good and evil, life and death, piquing the ordinariness of reality with an epic and extraordinary flavour.<sup>67</sup>

Third, David Moss has convincingly argued that *Terra matta*'s success can be understood in anthropological terms if it is seen as a 'cultural valuable' rather than just a book.<sup>68</sup> Through the process of 'value addition', what began as a bundled typescript with no intrinsic economic value became the repository of significant cultural and symbolic value, through the translation and preparation of the original typescript, that was intended at best for household or domestic use, to a literary product with its own mythological status and currency in the commercial economy. Indeed, Lyons has shown that authors, 'do not write books; they write texts, and the way those texts become physical objects and the means by which they arrive in a readable form before an audience are crucial elements in creating meaning.'<sup>69</sup> Spurred by the key role played by the ADN, which gave Rabito's typescript an important historical status and access into the world of elite literary circles, the subsequent and on-going additions and 'representations' of *Terra matta* (by academics, cultural events, film, theatre and so on) have both shaped and increased the cultural value of Rabito's original text. In this sense *Terra matta* has become an ongoing phenomenon of symbolic and cultural capital that continues to evolve as it takes on different artistic forms and mediums.

## 5. The Archetypal nature of *Terra matta*

With few exceptions, much writing and scholarship about *Terra matta* is often narrowly focused on a discussion of its 'parts' – the grammatical errors, the spelling (or misspelling), the punctuation (lack of or excessive and unnecessary use of), and so on, as if in explaining the part we can explain the whole.<sup>70</sup> Traditional literary and linguistic analysis often falls prey to a reductionist literalism, with some analyses seeing the hyper use of punctuation marks in Rabito's typescript, for instance, as a random error, or grammatical ignorance. This reductionism is illustrative of what Iain McGilchrist refers to as the dominance of left-brain hemispheric thinking, which in reducing a text or work of art to its parts to understand the whole, ignores the role of the right-brain hemisphere in fully comprehending what kind of whole is being discussed.<sup>71</sup> There is a need for what James Hillman called 'psychologizing', seeing through the literal events to their deeper, interior symbolic meaning using an 'Archetypal eye'.<sup>72</sup>

This section proposes another and perhaps more important factor for understanding *Terra matta*'s success, namely, its archetypal nature, one that evokes core universal patterns that resonate with the human psyche.<sup>73</sup> While *Terra matta* provides socio-historical insights and a certain literary uniqueness, Rabito's account also bears witness to those powerful, mysterious, and often numinous

forces which Carl Jung re-introduced to the world through his analytical psychology based on archetypes, understood as those 'basic powers of nature as they are experienced through the human psyche, powers that are conveyed in the core themes present within all myths'.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, archetypes are 'patterns and themes that derive from the collective unconscious and have universal meanings in all cultures'.<sup>75</sup> Through the influence of the *opera dei pupi*, Rabito's autobiographical accounts are pregnant with archetypal themes and characters, and innately parallel Joseph Campbell's 'hero's journey' archetype.<sup>76</sup>

In his seminal *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell articulated the universal patterns of symbolism and archetypal meaning found in myths and fairy tales across cultures, labelling it the *monomyth* – the one-story arc common across many hero tales.<sup>77</sup> Influenced by the psychological ideas of Carl Jung and anthropological writings on rites of passage, Campbell outlined the archetypal nature of the Hero's journey according to a tripartite structure comprising a series of stages: Separation or Departure, Initiation, and Return.<sup>78</sup> The cycle begins with the 'hero' being called or roused to adventure from his or her everyday world, then crossing a threshold into a different and often challenging and traumatic environment where they are tested, challenged, learn new skills and knowledge, before returning 'home' to share their 'gift/elixir' or skills and insights with their wider family and community.

This is not to suggest that Rabito's story is 'myth' in the sense that what he wrote was a fantastical make-believe fiction, but that it was *mythological* in the archetypal sense that he described his life according to universal structures and rituals found in myth, and through that was able to articulate the transformation that occurred in his own life as the society he was a part of also transformed. Mythic stories provide us with a means to orient and give meaning and purpose to our lives, they pair the individual journey to the collective zeitgeist, but they also depict the psychological transformation of the individual 'hero' as they do battle with their inner demons and outer barriers (that may manifest in the form of prejudice, hardship, ordeals). They provide a structure and larger frame within which we can place our own selves, with our own individual strengths, wounds, and life challenges.

All writing is in some dimension mythic because myths give shape and coherence to aspects of our lives which when seen in isolation may often appear as random events.<sup>79</sup> This mythic quality is particularly evident in Rabito's writing given the influence of the Sicilian oral and puppet traditions discussed previously, with their implicit monomythic structure, and was formative in enabling him as an autodidact to translate his narrative oral 'voice' into the written medium. Indeed, it is likely that

Rabito portrayed himself in the style of a French paladin knight<sup>80</sup>, with his narrative drawing upon the 'Carolingian cycle of chivalric deeds and heroic confrontations which itself blends history and myth'.<sup>81</sup>

The journey also symbolically depicts the hero's psychological transformation of the process that Jung described as 'individuation', the 'process by which a person becomes a psychological "in-dividual", that is, a separate, indivisible unity or "whole"'.<sup>82</sup> According to Campbell, the archetypal journey is a metaphor for people's inner spiritual journey, where the 'hero is symbolic of that divine creature and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.'<sup>83</sup> For Campbell, the journey was as much about the individual moving from the conscious to the unconscious realm to discover and explore their hidden potential gifts and talents.

There is not scope in this paper to outline fully Rabito's autobiographical accounts according to the stages of Campbell's monomyth, but rather it provides an entrée into the archetypal realm of his 'heroic journey'.<sup>84</sup> The archetypal heroic journey usually begins with the 'hero' introduced against the background of his or her everyday world, often in a way that will engender a sympathetic response from the audience or reader. The environment is sometimes a difficult one, where the main protagonist faces poverty and hardship, at other times, it is a situation of monotony and routine, the calm before the storm.

His life, Rabito tells us in the *incipit*, '*was very abused, troubled, and looked down upon*'.<sup>85</sup> The second eldest of seven children left to be raised by their mother due to his father's death from pneumonia at age 40, he was sent to work from the tender age of seven. Rabito's 'ordinary world' is that of poverty, hunger, and illiteracy. Vincenzo was full of courage, however, and tells of his love for finding work, whether picking grapes, weeding crops, or being an errand boy for wealthier families. We also get a sense for his cunning, his strong love for his mother, his socialist roots and leaning. Furthermore, we also catch a glimpse of Rabito's *daimon*, that inner, innate image, of one's unknown calling and destiny, that for him was his curiosity and love of learning, which despite the lack of schooling, eventually leads him to become a 'writer'.<sup>86</sup>

Part of the 'Separation' stage is the call to adventure, an external shock that shatters the certainty of daily routine and signals the start of the heroic journey, the awakening of the inner Self.<sup>87</sup> The 'call to adventure' in *Terra matta*, occurs with the Carabinieri literally knocking on the household door on the feast day of Carnevale (18<sup>th</sup> February 1917), announcing that those born in the first four months of

1899 are to be drafted into the army to assist Italy's war effort. What should have been tears of joy for the festivities and food of Carnevale, became those of fear and sadness, with Rabito reluctantly leaving on his 'adventure'.

After the 'call', usually follows the hero's *encounter with the mentor*, which marks the transition between the Separation and Initiation stages. The mentor, acting in a protective role, provides the hero with advice, wisdom and courage that will assist their journey.<sup>88</sup> Traditionally, the mentor figure appears in the role of a wizard, hermit, guide, teacher, ferryman, or in the guise of archetypal or religious figures such as Hermes-Mercury, the Holy Ghost, or Dante's Virgil, a kind of *aide militaire* to the hero's inner *daimon*.<sup>89</sup> The mentor's role is to prod the reluctant hero on their path, however usually only journeying with them for a brief period, leaving the hero to move forward into unknown territory to face the various trials and challenges.

Rabito's description of his encounter with the mentor is one of the most significant, memorable, and archetypally rich 'episodes' in his story. While walking through rain, mud and thick fog towards the front, his young battalion gets their first taste of Austrian fire power, and they fall to the ground crying with fear, with Rabito trembling 'like a leaf', evoking a hellish, dark, and opaque atmosphere.<sup>90</sup> Upon reaching their destination, Rabito is paired with the older more experienced soldier 'Ciampietro'<sup>91</sup>, who amidst the pre-dawn darkness and fog, places his hand on Rabito's shoulder in an effort to quell Rabito's fear and elicit his bravery.<sup>92</sup> Rabito notes that although Ciampietro is only aged thirty, he seemed closer to sixty in appearance, and who with his long beard, unkept hair, and weakened state, felt more like his father, someone that he should refer to as 'uncle' Pietro.<sup>93</sup>

As a mentor, Ciampietro shows the inexperienced Vincenzo the survival skills needed to negotiate trench warfare, how to create a safe and comfortable hideout, keeping food rations, the likely unfolding and nature of upcoming battles, and the importance of camaraderie and engendering a sense of safety and resilience in adversity. In response to Rabito calling him 'Uncle Pietro' as a sign of respect, Ciampietro replies that they must greet each other informally (by first name), even with the Sergeant Major, because in the trenches, 'time stands still'.<sup>94</sup> To Rabito, Ciampietro was someone who calmly, fearlessly, and sincerely spoke the 'truth'.<sup>95</sup> Similar to mythological narratives, Rabito must continue on without his mentor, as Ciampietro later dies in the Italian re-capture of Montefiore from the Austrian forces, what was to be Rabito's first and Ciampietro's last bloody battle.

The archetypal symbolism of this actual encounter between Rabito and Ciampietro is striking, with the latter embodying the Senex archetype.<sup>96</sup> Even his age corresponds to the well-known Saturnian cycle, which is approximately twenty-nine to thirty years, marking the first real transition to adulthood and maturity. As Hillman notes in his celebrated essay, the archetype of the Senex manifests or is personified as the father, mentor, the wise old man, or crone, the traditional image of the omniscient God ruling from Heaven, together with ideas and feelings about time, adversity, and fear.<sup>97</sup> Rabito's reference to Ciampietro as 'Uncle Pietro', also evokes the traditional image of St Peter adjudicating at the gates of Heaven!

Rabito's meeting with Ciampietro provides a segue way into what becomes the paradigmatic hero's journey in Rabito's autobiographies – his experience as a *zappatore* (trench and grave digger or 'sapper') in the Italian Infantry during WWI. His trench warfare experience is one of the most significant themes not only in terms of length, but for its socio-historical contribution and archetypal resonances.<sup>98</sup> Psychologically, it also symbolises his physical and metaphorical 'descent' into the plutonic and inferno like realms of the shadow side of the human psyche and unconscious. Soon after Rabito 'crosses the threshold' into his first battle, where more than half his battalion are killed, he could not arrive at the base of the mountain without stepping on the bodies of dead and wounded soldiers.<sup>99</sup>

As a *zappatore*, Rabito had the gruesome task of digging the holes into which the cadavers of fallen soldiers were laid, identified, and remembered with a simple crucifix. And so Rabito not only lost his innocence but his fear, 'looking for the dead even at night', so that he together with the other young 'boys of '99', became 'executioners' and 'butchers of human flesh', no different to a wild animal, or an escapee from an insane asylum.<sup>100</sup> The bloody, brutal, and primal nature of life in the trenches, his relationships with the local civilian populations, and the camaraderie with his fellow soldiers, forged the young Rabito's character through the encounter with his own as well as humanity's shadow side.

The remaining Stages of the 'hero's journey' usually involve navigating a 'road of trials' that mark the hero's venturing into ambiguous, often dangerous exchanges, that symbolize the unexplored regions of the protagonist's unconscious, containing the possibility of death, whether physical or metaphorical.<sup>101</sup> It is a road strewn with several symbolic or archetypal figures, that point the hero forward to undergo the 'process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of

our personal past'.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, for Campbell, and as was the case for Rabito, real life comprises a series of on-going heroic journeys, continually being called to adventure, creativity, and growth.<sup>103</sup>

In the 'Initiation' stage of the Campbellian narrative journey, the 'hero' encounters, collaborates with and at times is challenged by various 'allies' and 'villains.' Important in this respect are the various female protagonists in his story.<sup>104</sup> Given the socio-historical context which Rabito's life spanned, it is not surprising that women were often portrayed in very traditional roles and at times as objects for male pleasure and gratification, and generally reflect the 'virgin-mother-whore' archetypal triad.<sup>105</sup> Rabito's narratives, however, usually lack moralistic overtones and remain a rich treasure trove of the archetypal feminine in its various forms and guises, a theme of great historical and socio-cultural significance.

Rabito's account is valuable for studying the history of gender because as an autodidact he was largely immune from the influence and moralism of the Catholic Church or petit bourgeois respectability in terms of how he understood or wrote about sexuality.<sup>106</sup> Rabito did not 'have the filter of self-censure', when discussing his relationship with women.<sup>107</sup> He is not shy, for instance, in providing details of his sexual molestation by an older woman when he was a young boy,<sup>108</sup> his experience of brothels, whether at the age of twelve, or as a young soldier on leave in Palermo or Florence.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, his clinical description of the institutionalisation of prostitution by the military as well as the disturbing scenes of violence and rape against women has provided a unique historical source on the (mis) treatment of women during war, which is largely absent in official accounts.<sup>110</sup>

For Jung, the archetypal female was tied to his concept of the *anima* (the unconscious image of the female within males), which could appear for instance as the young maiden, the wise crone, the mother, the evil witch or whore among others.<sup>111</sup> Jung also noted how the mother archetype, for example, could appear on the one hand, as loving, nurturing, protecting, and caregiving or on the other, as a terrible, suffocating, child devouring, matriarch lacking compassion.<sup>112</sup> In Rabito's autobiographies, one sees this dual aspect in his relationship with his mother, who is sanctified and worshipped, and for whom he tirelessly provided, in contrast to *Donna Anna*, his mother-in-law, who is despised as an evil, toxic, and heartless character.<sup>113</sup>

The feminine archetypal principle is ever present, for example, in the many references to the Marian cult of the *Madonna di Gulfi*, the patron saint of Chiaramonte Gulfi, to whose shrine Rabito's mother (and Rabito himself) make countless pilgrimages. Indeed, Rabito achieves his ultimate dream job as a



*cantoniere* when he is given charge of the road-side worker's cabin named in honour of the Madonna di Qulfe in 1945.<sup>114</sup> Elsewhere I have also discussed several depictions of female protagonists that resonate with the seminal typology of feminine archetypes developed by Toni Wolff: Mother (spouse and life-giver); Hetaira (companion); Amazon (independent woman); and Medial (mediator).<sup>115</sup>

Finally, the 'Return' Stage of *Terra matta* is signaled by Rabito's move to the provincial city of Ragusa signaling Rabito's mastery of the 'two worlds', for in establishing an engineer's 'studio' for his eldest son, he also created the physical and psychological space ('a room of one's own') that would facilitate his decision to write his life story. It marked a new beginning for Vincenzo Rabito, who at age 67, was now liberated from the constrictions of familiarity imposed by life in a small village, to the relative anonymity afforded by a metropolitan environment, where he would reinvent himself, albeit secretly, as 'Rabito the writer'. Urban Ragusa was more removed from the world of the oral storyteller, and led to his discovery of the typewriter, which 'provided a stimulus to experiment, to realize his story-telling talent in new ways'.<sup>116</sup>

In the best tradition of the Campbellian 'hero's journey', Rabito goes from 'illiterate peasant' to 'self-educated' writer, who has leaves us the gift of his typewritten 'punctuated life' as the elixir from his odyssean journey. Perhaps what Rabito could not have imagined is that his storytelling was not only a ritual form of therapy for himself but would become part of his enduring 'therapeutic gift' for many of his eventual readers.<sup>117</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

While most autobiographies contain a journey narrative, few have the power and literary force to break through the confines of the particularity of their story to tap into a wider universal realm. The ability for an individual life story to resonate with the collective has usually been the preserve of the great mythic and epic literature, Greek tragedies, and Shakespearian plays. These mythopoetic epics do not only transcend the personal, but cultural, literary, and social boundaries by connecting with something primordial, something that speaks to our sense of what it means to be human, to our sense of meaning and purpose. In other words, they resonate because of the archetypal nature of their narratives.

This paper provided a brief background and overview to *Terra matta*, the unique, powerful, and extraordinary autobiography by Vincenzo Rabito, a Sicilian autodidact whose life spanned some of the

key events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The books enjoyed unexpected literary and commercial success after their publication in 2007 and 2022 respectively, followed by several theatre and film adaptations, together with a dedicated online website, becoming a cultural phenomenon.

The paper then outlined some of the key factors accounting for this surprising success. These include its historiographical contribution, the 'history from below' of some of the key socio-political and cultural events of Italian society throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including rural poverty and illiteracy, war, Imperialism in Africa, migration, and social mobility. Another important factor is the literary style, with its forceful, ironic, hybrid language, a unique *rabitese* which is overlayed with the epic patterns of the oral storytelling traditions and puppet shows of Sicily. Central also to understanding *Terra matta*'s success is the cultural and symbolic value it has accrued from its origins as an unconventional yet award-winning typescript that opened doors in artistic and literary circles not usually afforded to personal memoirs. Finally, the success, impact, and significance of *Terra matta* rests on its intrinsic archetypal and mythological character. Rabito's story resonates because he so capably articulates in an almost alchemical manner his own transformation as the society around him transformed. As an unlikely and almost unwilling 'hero', he depicts the psychological journey and rite of passage of individuation.

An archetypal perspective not only helps account for *Terra matta* and *Il romanzo*'s surprising success but provides a mode to better understand, analyse and illuminate its story and that of its main protagonist. Taking an archetypal approach may also offer a useful framework for undertaking a deeper understanding of Life writing in general.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, *The First Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1995, p.62. This is the English translation based on the unfinished manuscript of the autobiographical novel Camus was working on at the time of his accidental death in 1960, aged 46. Camus' daughter, Catherine, later transcribed the handwritten manuscript which was published as *Le premier homme* in 1994.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lyons & R. Marquilha, 'A World Inscribed — Introduction'. In M. Lyons & R. Marquilha (eds.) *Approaches to the History of Written Culture – A World Inscribed*. London: Palgrave, 2017, pp. 1–20.

<sup>3</sup> On the growth of Life Writing 'from below' see Ashplant, *Life writing from below: an Introduction*; Edlund et. al, *Reading and Writing*.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Patrick Slattery, 'Face to Face with Dennis Patrick Slattery', No BS Spiritual Book Club podcast, February 15, 2022

<sup>5</sup> On the field of Life writing, see Jolly, 'Defining a Field'; and Jolly (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*; Lyons & Marquilha (ed) *Approaches to the History of Written Culture*.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'subaltern', meaning someone "of inferior rank", was adopted by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to describe those elements of the working-class subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subalterns may include peasants, workers, and other socially marginalized sectors of society. Gramsci, who was interested in analyzing the historiography of the subaltern 'classes', saw their history as being as complex as the history of more dominant classes, although the latter usually have the power to make their history stand as the "official" history. See Nasrullah Mambrol, 'Subaltern (Postcolonialism)', *Literary Theory and Criticism*, 8/4/2016 (<https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/subaltern-postcolonialism/>) accessed 5/2/2022.

<sup>7</sup> Corrado Stajano, '...la memoria assume la funzione di compensare i buchi della storia ufficiale e dà vita a una specie di diario collettivo: il diario di tutta una società, tra passato e presente, una società autentica, vista dal basso, senza alcuna mediazione' 'Il guerrigliero della memoria', *Primapersona*, n. 25, March, 2012, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Kukku Xavier, Special issue on Life Writing.

<sup>9</sup> For an unusual case of how autobiographies by French peasants became best sellers in the 1970s, see Farmer, *Progress and Nostalgia*.

<sup>10</sup> Lyons, *Do Peasants Write*, p.48. For other 'peasant writers' that can be compared in cultural and linguistic terms to *Terra matta*, see Bordonaro, *La spartenza*; Paternostro, *Per un Archivio siciliano*.

<sup>11</sup> Lyons, *Do Peasants Write*, p.55.

<sup>12</sup> For other autobiographical accounts by people with similar sociocultural backgrounds to Rabito, see for example Paternostro, *Per un Archivio siciliano*; Lyons, *Do Peasants Write*; Ashplant, *Life Writing "from Below"*; and the collection of manuscripts and typescripts held in the ADN (<https://catalogo.archiviodiari.it/diari/>).

<sup>13</sup> Vincenzo Rabito, *Terra matta*, Einaudi, Torino, 2007. *Terra matta* sold 15,000 hardcover copies within three months of publication (cited in Moss, Introduction, p.223). In 2015, 40,000 copies of the book had officially been sold (cited in an interview with Giovanni Rabito, 'Intervista a Giovanni

Rabito' di Enzo Fragapani, October 2015 (<https://diacritica.it/storia-dell-editoria/intervista-a-giovanni-rabito.html>) (accessed 29/5/2021). Ottaviano (*Il caso Terramatta*) states that a total of 66,000 copies sold across the 16 published editions. All page references to *Terra matta* are to the 2008 paperback edition.

<sup>14</sup> The place of his home in Chiaramonte Gulfe as well as his tombstone bears a plaque with the epitaph 'writer'.

<sup>15</sup> All four of these authors are Sicilian, *Il Gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), a novel published in 1958, charted the changing nature of Sicilian society during the Risorgimento from an aristocratic perspective. Luigi Pirandello, born in 1867, a Nobel Prize winning playwright and novelist, whose work often depicted the reality of Sicilian peasant life and culture; Giovanni Verga, born in 1840, was a novelist and playwright, known for his Realist (verismo) representations of Sicilian peasant life; Andrea Camilleri, born in 1925, and who like Rabito, began writing his internationally successful Inspector Montalbano series set in Sicily at the age of 70.

<sup>16</sup> Paola Gallo, Head of fiction at Einaudi, stated that *Terra matta* was a masterpiece, and the closest thing she has read to Homer's *Odyssey* 'la cosa piu simile all'Odissea che io abbia mai letto', cited in Saverio Senni, 'Rabito, il nuovo Omero del punto e virgola', (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com>) 19/2/2021 (downloaded 28/2/22).

<sup>17</sup> The documentary film, *Terramatta; Il Novecento italiano di Vincenzo Rabito analfabeta siciliano*, was presented at the Venice Film Festival and awarded several prizes. For accounts of the book's adaptation to stage and film, see Luciano & Scarpato, *Performing the invisible past*; Luciano & Scarpato, *Directing Terramatta*; Ottaviano, *From Terra matta to Terramatta*. See the *Terra matta* official website (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/>) for a summary and review of the film as well as of the various stage adaptations. In 2020, a 30 episode online performance of *Terra matta* by Mario Perrotta was produced during the COVID-19 lockdown, 'Manuale di Sopravvivenza' sponsored by the Piccolo museo del Diario, ADN, RaiRadio3, (<https://www.piccolomuseodeldiario.it/manuale-di-sopravvivenza-mario-perrotta-legge-terra-matta-di-vincenzo-rabito/>).

<sup>18</sup> Vincenzo Rabito, *Il romanzo della vita passata*. (Testo rivisto e adattato da Giovanni Rabito). Torino, Einaudi 2022.

<sup>19</sup> The symposium, 'Festagante; Vincenzo Rabito ritorna in libreria', was held in Chiaramonte Gulfi on 16 October 2022. The proceedings can be viewed at,

(<https://www.facebook.com/comunechiaramontegulfi/>) or the official *Terra matta* website (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com>).

<sup>20</sup> Unless otherwise stated, discussion of *Terra matta* also includes *Il Romanzo*.

<sup>21</sup> Le Grice, *The Archetypal Cosmos*, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Ashplant, *Life writing from below: an introduction*, p.1

<sup>23</sup> Ashplant, *Life writing from below: an introduction*; On the role of archives see Ashplant, *Life Writing "from Below"* in Europe.

<sup>24</sup> Commenting on Saverio Tutino's role in establishing the ADN, Natalia Cangi, the Director of the ADN, stated, '(Tutino) wanted in some way, to apply to real life the revolutionary idea he had always cultivated: to give power to the powerless, using a means whereby even the shortest, and tiniest of stories, could in reality be important for everyone'.

*Ha voluto (i.e. Tutino), in qualche modo, applicare alla vita reale l'idea di una rivoluzione che aveva sempre coltivato: dare potere a chi il potere non lo ha, attraverso un luogo dove anche le storie più piccole, più minute, potessero essere, in realtà, importanti per tutti'*, cited in Enzo Fragapane, 2014, pp.68-9.

<sup>25</sup> Lyons, *Do peasants write*, p.54.

<sup>26</sup> See Brignon, *Traduire la littérature brute*.

<sup>27</sup> David Moss, *Introduction*, p.224

<sup>28</sup> Ashplant, *Life Writing "from Below"* in Europe, p.23.

<sup>29</sup> Kuismin, *Ploughing with the Pen*.

<sup>30</sup> Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus*, p.48.

<sup>31</sup> Kukku Xavier, *Special issue on Life Writing*.

<sup>32</sup> Ashplant, *Life Writing "from Below"* in Europe, p.19.

<sup>33</sup> On this point see also Scarpa, *L'oralità in scrittura*.

<sup>34</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, 'E quella fu la serata che mi ha fatto scrivere questo libro...e a causa di quella sera mascherata, io tutto questo veleno nella mia persona non l'avesse, perché si hanno finito tutte le mie speranze e si ha conzimato tutto il mio avvenire', p. 225.

<sup>35</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, ‘...io magari aveva un figlio che voleva diventare poeta, e io certo, che vineva del niente, era tutto priato, e mi cominciava assentire uno di quelle buone’, p.382. See also, Giovanni Rabito, ‘Come e’ nato Terra matta – Storia di un insolito memoriale’, January 2008. (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/tesi-e-relazioni/come-e-nato-terra-matta/>) (accessed 10/12/2021). In the preface to *Il romanzo*, Giovanni Rabito also states that he promised his father that he would edit and prepare his life story after his death (p.vii-viii).

<sup>36</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, ‘...per raccontare queste fatte, quello che scrivo non sono bucie, ma sono fatte vere’, p.77; and ‘E io tutto quello che scrivo, magari che si capisce poco, è tutta verità, perché ci ho tante e tante prove’, p. 347.

<sup>37</sup> Dennis Patrick Slattery, ‘Face to Face with Dennis Patrick Slattery’, No BS Spiritual Book Club podcast, February 15, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Jung, *Aion*, para.126, pp.70-71.

<sup>39</sup> Rabito, *Il romanzo*, p.vii.

<sup>40</sup> Ashplant, *Life writing from below in Europe*, p.27

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> The official reviews state that *Terra matta* was written over 7 years between 1968 – 1975, however, his son, Giovanni Rabito, corrected the record in 2008, stating that his father began the work on his typewriter after Giovanni left for university to Bologna at the end of 1968, and he took the completed typescript back with him to Bologna following a visit to his father in Ragusa Sicily toward the end of 1970 or early 1971. See Giovanni Rabito, ‘Come e’ nato Terramatta’, 2008. In 2015, he provided further detail suggesting Vincenzo had use of the typewriter from late 1967, when Giovanni first went to study at the University of Messina, ‘Intervista a Giovanni Rabito’ di Enzo Fragapani, October 2015 (<https://diacritica.it/storia-dell-editoria/intervista-a-giovanni-rabito.html>) (accessed 29/5/2021).

<sup>43</sup> See the various contributions in the special *Terra matta* issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 19(3), 2014, as well as the official *Terra matta* website (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/>).

<sup>44</sup> On how the typewriter shaped the literature and prose of the 20th century, including how some writers were ‘liberated by the typewriter and used it almost as an organic extension of their own bodies’, see Lyons, *The Typewriter Century*. In this fascinating account of how the typewriter

influenced the creative process, Lyons draws on Friedrich Nietzsche's adage that our writing equipment takes part in forming our thoughts.

<sup>45</sup> Gerola-West, *Representations of language*, has pointed out that the visual density of the text was further accentuated by the photocopies used by the selection panel, as the black and white copies reduced the definition of the background grid lines and contrast between the letters, adding further to the reading effort.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Ricci & Santangelo, *From Fontanazza*, p.254.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Ricci & Santangelo, *From Fontanazza*, pp.254-5.

<sup>48</sup> Editor's note, *Terra matta*, pp. v-vi 'Che si è voluto rispettare in ogni modo lo stile dell'autore, così come lo spirito battagliero che anima le sue pagine dalla prima all'ultima: l'immediatezza espressiva e linguistica che caratterizza l'intero testo è tratto peculiare e ineludibile...'; See Ricci & Santangelo, *From Fontanazza*, pp.255-59 on the approach taken to editing and preparing the text for publication.

<sup>49</sup> Ricci & Santangelo, *From Fontanazza*, p.261; Santangelo states, 'It was essential that I preserve his irony, sarcasm and intelligence, and his notable story-telling ability, all expressed in his inimitable literary language', *ibid*, p.262.

<sup>50</sup> The existence of a second typescript was revealed by Giovanni Rabito in 2008 (Rabito, *Come e' nato Terra matta*).

<sup>51</sup> This involved normalising the punctuation and grammatical lexicon; dividing the story into four 'books', each with separate chapters and titles; removing episodes that were either incomprehensible, repetitious, or overly personal in nature, as well as several episodes already present in *Terra matta*; correcting spelling errors clearly due to hitting the wrong letter key of the typewriter; and separating words that had been joined together. Rabito, *Il romanzo*, pp.v-ix.

<sup>52</sup> Moss, Vincenzo Rabito's autobiography #2.

<sup>53</sup> See for example the success of the international theatrical tour of *Terra matta* performed by Stefano Panzeri (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/>)

<sup>54</sup> Luzzatto, *Ragazzo del '99*.

<sup>55</sup> Scarpa, *L'oralita' in scrittura*.

<sup>56</sup> See for instance, Thompson, *The White War*.

<sup>57</sup> Sergio Luzzatto, 'Sergio Luzzatto racconta Vincenzo Rabito', *Aula di Lettere – percorsi nel mondo umanistico*, Zanichelli, 20 May 2014, <https://aulalettere.scuola.zanichelli.it/interventi-d-autore/sergio-luzzatto-racconta-vincenzo-rabito/> (accessed 25/4/2022)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Luca Ricci, 'un fiume e un vulcano che trascinano con se rabbia, dolore, sofferenza, lirismo, dolcezza, tenerezza' (Interview by Enzo Fragapane with Luca Ricci, "'Terra matta" di Vincenzo Rabito: vicenda editoriale e aspetti letterari – intervista a Luca Ricci', (<https://diacritica.it/storia-dell-editoria/terra-matta-di-vincenzo-rabito-vicenda-editoriale-e-aspetti-letterari-intervista-a-luca-ricci.html>), 2015; (accessed 8/12/2021); See also Mazzucco, *Questa è la bella vita*.

<sup>60</sup> Muri, *Una vita senza grammatica*. 'questo italiano tirato giù dall'Empireo dove lo hanno collocato i grandi poeti e narratori della nostra tradizione e rimescolato con la terra delle trincee e con le bestemmie dei soldati'.

<sup>61</sup> Scarpa, *L'oralità*'

<sup>62</sup> Rabito, *Terra Matta*, p.159. 'se all'uomo in questa vita non ci incontro avventure, non ave niente darraccontare'. See also the interview with Giovanni Rabito, 'Intervista a Giovanni Rabito' di Enzo Fragapani, October 2015 (<https://diacritica.it/storia-dell-editoria/intervista-a-giovanni-rabito.html>) (accessed 29/5/2021), where he describes how his father loved to tell his children stories from his life as well as the books he had read, such the Count of Monte Cristo.

<sup>63</sup> Lyons & Marquilhas, *A World Inscribed*, p.14

<sup>64</sup> Guastella, *Il capolavoro*. On the narrative performances of *Terra matta*, see the international tours of Stefano Panzeri. (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/>)

<sup>65</sup> Croce, *The Chivalric Folk*.

<sup>66</sup> See Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.181. Croce, *The Chivalric Folk*, (p.191) states that Lodico's *Storia* was originally published in Palermo between 1856 and 1860 and was subsequently republished in several volumes into the 20th century.

<sup>67</sup> Venturini, *A occhi chiusi*; Bonanzinga, *Le forme del racconto*.

<sup>68</sup> Moss, *The creation of value*.

<sup>69</sup> Lyons, *The Typewriter Century*, p.21.



<sup>70</sup> See Gerola-West, *Representations of language* and Chiara Ottaviano's work for such exceptions from a sociolinguistic and historiographical perspective respectively.

<sup>71</sup> Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*.

<sup>72</sup> James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, pp.115-164.

<sup>73</sup> This was the topic of my presentation at the symposium, 'Festagrante; Vincenzo Rabito ritorna in libreria', held in Chiaramonte Gulfi on 16 October 2022. Available through the *Terra matta* website (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com/>) or via (<https://www.facebook.com/comunechiaramontegulfi/>).

<sup>74</sup> Le Grice, *The Archetypal Cosmos*, p. 59.

<sup>75</sup> M. Meade, 'A Time of Transformation on earth', 2021 (<https://www.mosaicvoices.org/a-time-of-transformation-on-earth>) (accessed 29/3/21).

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*.

<sup>77</sup> While other 'heroic biography' frameworks exist, Campbell's monomyth remains the most well-known and influential in scholarly, professional, and popular circles. See Sonnenburg & Runco, *Pathways to the Hero's Journey*.

<sup>78</sup> The popularity of Campbell's monomyth structure has meant it has been modified and adapted over time as it has been applied to various fields and mediums, such as film, literature, psycho-spiritual growth and development, leadership, and organizational studies. See for example the various contributions in the Joseph Campbell special issue of the *Journal of Genius and Eminence*, 2(2), Winter, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Dennis Patrick Slattery, 'Face to Face with Dennis Patrick Slattery', No BS Spiritual Book Club podcast, February 15, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Luciano & Scarparo, *Directing Terramatta*; p.287.

<sup>81</sup> Moss, *The creation of value*, p.328. In addition to Lodico's *Storia*, the only other books Rabito mentions as having ever read are the classic archetypal heroes' journeys of Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), and the 15th century chivalric romance of *Guerrin il Meschino* originally written by Andrea da Barberino (see *Terra matta*, p.181).

<sup>82</sup> Jung, *The Archetypes*, p.275. For an excellent account of the hero's journey as metaphor for individuation, see, Le Grice, *The Rebirth of the Hero*.

<sup>83</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, p.39.

<sup>84</sup> For a fuller account of the 'Hero's journey' in Rabito's narrative, see Zappalà, *Discovering the 'Unknown Calabria'*. I also analyse Rabito's life using Campbell's Hero's journey framework in *A punctuated life; – An Archetypal Analysis of Vincenzo Rabito's Terra matta* (in progress).

<sup>85</sup> *Terra matta*, p.3, 'Questa e' la bella vita che ho fatto il sotto scritto Rabito Vincenzo, nato in via Corsica a Chiaramonte Qulfe, d'allora provincia di Siracusa, figlio di fu Salvatore e di Qurriere Salvatrice, chilassa 31 marzo 1899, e per sventura domiciliato nella via Tommaso Chiavola. La sua vita fu molta maletrata e molto travagliata e molto disprezzata'.

<sup>86</sup> See Hillman, *The Soul's Code*., where he outlines his acorn theory of the daimon.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, p.58.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p.69

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, pp.72-3.

<sup>90</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.49, 'Ma dove ci vogliano portare queste, all'enferno? C'era una nebia che paremmo dentra a una calleria senza luce, e poi macare piuveva, poi che erino li prime momente che erimo in quelle brutte luoche ed erimo spaventate, e poi che di querra ancora non ni capiemmo'.

<sup>91</sup> The Italian would be either Gianpietro or Giampietro.

<sup>92</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.50, 'Coraggio, picciotto mio, non ti prentere di paura, che solo una volta si può morire, mannaia a san Nicola! Che sei siciliano?'

<sup>93</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.50, 'io vedeva che questo era un vechio con la barba lonca e ni dimostrava non 30 anne, ma mi pareva che ni aveva 60 anne, di come era ridotto, povero calabrese.

<sup>94</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.51, 'li anni qui non passeno'.

<sup>95</sup> Rabito says of Ciampietro: 'E questo parlava senza paura, che pare che era nella Calabria, tanto era pacifico', p.51; 'e' così, tutto quello che diceva Ciampietro era vero', (*Terra matta*, p.52)

<sup>96</sup> Senex is Latin for old or wise man, hence the derivation of terms such as senator or senility.

<sup>97</sup> Hillman, *On Senex Consciousness*.

<sup>98</sup> His five years as a soldier during and immediately after WWI account for 7 chapters or almost one-third of *Terra matta*.

<sup>99</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.54, 'di quanto morte e ferrite che c'erino, non avemmo dove mettere li piede'.

<sup>100</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.54-5 'E cosi', amme, tutta la paura che aveva, mi ha passato, che antava cercando li morte magare di notte, che diventaie un carnifece'...'ma erimo tutte li ragazze del 99, che avemmo revato piancento, perche avemmo il cuore di piccole, ma, con questa carneficina che ci ha stato, diventammo tutte macellaie di carne umana'.

<sup>101</sup> Campbell, *The Hero*, p.79.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.101.

<sup>103</sup> Campbell, *Pathways to bliss*.

<sup>104</sup> I disagree with Luciano & Scarparo (*Directing Terra matta*, p.290), who suggest that Rabito's world is 'one without women'.

<sup>105</sup> See for instance, Burrows, *Virgins, Mothers, and Whores*; Schleich, *Hollywood and Catholic women*; Knapp, *Women in Twentieth-Century literature*; Warner, *Alone of all her sex*.

<sup>106</sup> Ottaviano, *From Terra matta*.

<sup>107</sup> Luciano & Scarparo, *Directing Terra matta*, p.288.

<sup>108</sup> Rabito, *Il romanzo*, pp.10-11; *Terra matta*, p.12.

<sup>109</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, pp. 5, 25, 73-4, 137.

<sup>110</sup> Ottaviano, *TERRAMATTA*. Un'autobiografia.

<sup>111</sup> Jung, *The Psychological Aspects of the Kore*, p.182. (para.306)

<sup>112</sup> Jung, *Psychological aspects of the Mother*, pp.26-34. (para.172-186)

<sup>113</sup> The inherent duality of the 'mother' archetype is also illustrated in relation to other female characters that have the 'caregiver' inflection of the 'mother' archetype. For instance, in one scene Rabito says 'I saw that the woman was not a shrew but a housekeeper, and so said to myself: 'this is the home I was hoping to find for my son', *Terra matta*, p.362, 'Io vedeva che la signora non era umpezzo di butana e videva che era una femmina di casa, e tra di me diceva: "Questa e' la casa che io cercava per mio figlio"

<sup>114</sup> Rabito, *Terra matta*, p.313

<sup>115</sup> Wolff, *Structural forms*; Zappalà, *Discovering the unknown*. In *Il romanzo*, Rabito describes one female character, Rosalia, as a confident, strong-willed, independent, and wise woman in her mid-thirties, who was separated from her husband, and eager and desirous for romantic liaisons, ‘...era una donna troppo presentusa e troppo sapiente’.

<sup>116</sup> Moss, *The creation of value*, p.329

<sup>117</sup> Like all classic mythopoetic literature, Rabito’s writing allows the reader to explore their own personal myth and see its power in action in relationship to the text. As one ‘rabitista’ revealed, he keeps a copy of *Terra matta* by his bedside to turn to for comfort during life’s more challenging moments, consoling himself with the thought that his own difficulties pale into insignificance when compared to those faced by Vincenzo Rabito! Saverio Senni, ‘Rabito, il nuovo Omero del punto e virgola’, (<https://www.vincenzorabito.com>) 19/2/2021 (downloaded 28/2/22).

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