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Ritual, Rapture and Remorse

A Study of Tarantism and *Pizzica* in Salento

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Introduction

The well-known British travel writer H. V. Morton published his book *A Traveller in Southern Italy* in 1969. In this volume, he gives the following account of an event he says he witnessed on his way up the Ionian coast to Taranto, in the Southern Italian region of Apulia (Puglia):

> On the way to Taranto I stopped in a small town to look at a church, and on my way back to the car I heard the sound of music. It was a quick kind of jig tune played on a fiddle, a guitar, a drum, and, I think, a tambourine. Looking round for the source of this sound, I saw a crowd standing in a side street. Glancing over the heads of the spectators, I saw a countrywoman dancing alone with a curiously entranced expression on her face, her eyes closed. She held a red cotton handkerchief in her hand which she waved as she undulated round the circle with more grace than I should have expected. I was surprised by the gravity of the crowd. There was not a smile. There was something strange about this. I wondered whether the dancer was mad, or perhaps – unusual as this would be – drunk. Glancing round at the set faces, I did not like to ask any questions, and, not wishing to intrude upon what was obviously a rather painful scene, I turned away. I shall always regret having done so.
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> Some days later, I recollected the dancer and happened to mention her to a friend in Taranto. 'Do you realize what you have seen? The woman had been "taken" by a tarantula spider and she was dancing, and might dance for days until completely exhausted, to expel the poison. I have only seen this twice myself and I have lived in Salentino all my life. It is a matter of luck. Sometimes you will come across the tarantolati in village streets, at cross-roads, but generally in the houses, and though most people imagine that the tarantella ceased to be danced for serious reasons long ago, it is still danced by hundreds of peasants in the region of Lecce who believe themselves to have been poisoned by the spider.'
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> 'When you say the woman was "taken" by the tarantula, what do you mean?'
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> 'Simply that she was bitten. [...] Women are particularly exposed to tarantula bites because they work in the harvest fields after the corn has been cut, when these spiders are common.'
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> 'But I have read that the tarantula is not poisonous, or that it is no more dangerous than a bee-sting.'
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> My friend lifted his shoulders.
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> 'Perhaps', he conceded. 'This has been going on for centuries. Who can say what is at the back of it?' (Morton, 1969: 180–1)

Morton was later informed that the woman had danced all that night and the next day, before sleeping. When she awoke, she said that she felt well again.

What Morton is describing is an example of the ritual known as tarantism, or *tarantismo* in Italian. This ritual has been performed over many centuries as a cure for someone bitten by the tarantula spider (*la taranta* in the Salentine dialect, or *la taràntola* in standard Italian). The person who is bitten, known as a *tarantato* (or *taràntolato*) if male, and *tarantata* (or *taràntolata*) if female, falls into a state of illness as a result of the poison from the bite. Symptoms can include nausea, paralysis, lethargy, spasms, headaches, irregular pulse and breathing, and fainting. If this happens, the family or friends of the *tarantata* will call for musicians who are skilled in playing an indigenous form of music called the *pizzica*. When the musicians arrive, they try out different melodies, rhythms, and types of songs until they begin to see a response from the ill person, such as the hand beginning to move in time to the music. Sometimes they will also respond to certain colours such as red, green or yellow. The particular melodies and rhythms, as well as the specific colours which affect the *tarantato*, are supposedly connected to the type and nature of the spider which bit them, so that in this way the symbol and embodiment of the spider[1] becomes the agent of both the illness and the cure.[2] The musicians continue to play in a crescendo, as the *tarantato* gradually becomes more and more active, seeming to 'wake up' from a state of trance, crawling along the floor, beating the ground in time to the rhythm of the *tamburello* (tambourine), sometimes arching into a bridge position, imitating the movements of a spider. As

1 The symbol of the spider is often an ambivalent one within mythology and folklore. It can represent cunning, fate, illusion, mystery, creativity, fertility, impregnation and death. As with snakes, spiders are sometimes seen as coming from the underworld, thus moving between the earthly and unearthly realms.

2 The notion of 'like cures like' is the foundation of the practice of homoeopathy. One of the homoeopathic remedies is made from the tarantula, and is used to cure extreme restlessness, hyperactivity, hysteria and convulsions. The paradigm of 'like cures like' will also be seen in Chapter Two in relation to the use of music and medicine to balance the humours in the body.

the music rises, the *tarantato* gets up from the floor, and begins to dance in hopping, skipping and circling movements, the musicians encouraging them to keep going. They may continue this for many hours before resting, and then beginning the dance again. The ritual can last for three days, until the *tarantato* feels well again, and does not need to dance any longer. The bite led to the *tarantato* being 'possessed' by the spider, and the cure is one of a fight with this possession which leads to the expelling of the spirit of the spider from the body. If this does not happen, or if the music and dance cure is not undertaken, then the *tarantato* may die from the effects of the bite. In this way, the ritual is often described as being one of both possession and exorcism.

As well as this private ritual, there was a more public and collective display caused by the symptoms of the condition reoccurring, usually during the summer months, and often around the period of the festival of St Paul on 29 June. As discussed in Chapter Two, St Paul is associated with the ritual of tarantism. The chapel dedicated to him in Galatina became the focus for the annual repetition of the cure, where the *tarantati* (male and collective plural) would be brought by their families from surrounding areas to relive the dance of the ritual cure within the chapel. Oral, written and film records give examples of *tarantate* (female plural)[3] dressed in white, symbolically becoming the brides of St Paul, dancing in the chapel, climbing over the altar, crawling on the ground, and sometimes attacking the crowds who gathered to witness the spectacle during the annual repetition. In the same way as the spider is the cause and cure of the condition, so St Paul also becomes a magical-religious symbol who both curses and heals the *tarantata*. Chapter One contains an ethnographic 'moment' of my experience of the festival of St Paul in Galatina in 2008, where the

3 Throughout its history, there have been cases of both men and women undertaking the ritual. In Chapter Two, I discuss the 'feminisation' of tarantism, with an emphasis on the women who became *tarantate*. Partly because of this discussion, and also due to the particular changes in socio-cultural circumstances for women in Salento, there is a tendency for this study to focus on the *tarantate*. However, this does not deny or ignore that men have become *tarantati*, and this will also be seen during the discussion of the historical documents in Chapter Two.

sacred and secular intersected, and the brief glimpse of a former *tarantata* affected all those watching, bring-ing the past histories into collision with contemporary identities and practices.

Throughout its history, there have been questions as to whether the condition of tarantism is 'real' or not, and if the *tarantata* is 'faking' rather than being genuinely ill, or even in a state of madness or hysteria. Although there is often no evidence of an actual bite from a spider,[4] the 'bite' and subsequent illness and cure can be seen as a culture-specific means of coping with socio-cultural and economic difficulties found within Salento. As Horden states,

> the spider's symbolism is more potent than its bite [...]. We are dealing with a culture-bound syndrome, or folk illness; with social and psychological 'poisoning' rather than a biological threat. (Horden, 2000: 250)

In this way, it is important to frame tarantism as being a culture-specific phenomenon.

There have been records of the use of music to cure the poison from the bite of a tarantula dating back to the fourteenth century.[5] These records,

4 The dialect word '*la taranta*' can be used to describe not only a tarantula, but any type of spider or scorpion which inflicts a poisonous bite. It can even include other types of biting insects, such as ants, as well as snakes and vipers. There have been recorded incidents of tarantism being induced by all these types of venomous bites. There are two types of spider that have been prevalent in Salento which have been discussed in relation to tarantism. One is the *lycosa tarantula*, or wolf spider, which is considered to be harmless. The other is the much smaller *latrodectus tredecimguttatus*, or European black widow spider. Though less fearsome to look at in comparison to the *lycosa*, it is the bite from this spider that can cause symptoms similar to those found in tarantism. As the *lycosa* appears larger and more menacing, it is often this species that is seen to be the spider that is the cause of the illness, even though its bite would not result in the same adverse effects as those from the bite of the *latrodectus*. In this way, the symbol of *la taranta* can be seen as a combination of the appearance and effects of both *lycosa* and *latrodectus* (Bartholomew, 2000; Lewis, 1991; Lüdtke, 2009; De Martino, 2005).

5 Although this study is focusing on the phenomenon of tarantism within Apulia, there are records of its occurring in other locations, particularly in the South of Italy, as

some of which are discussed in Chapter Two of this book, are written by an array of doctors, scientists, ecclesiastical figures and curious visitors, each imposing their own viewpoint on the condition, defining the ritual and those who undertake it according to their own paradigm of seeing and understanding the world. As such, what these records offer is a fascinating debate on the shifting discourses of the body, medicine, science, religion and philosophy over a period of seven hundred years. What is not heard are the voices of the *tarantati* themselves. Their own stories, and their personal experiences of the performance of the ritual, are not overtly visible, but they are rather appropriated and debated by the writers as a means for expounding their own framework of thought. The ritual itself began to decline during the nineteenth century, and by the middle of the twentieth century, and at the time that Morton was writing, there were only a few instances of performances of the ritual. According to anthropologist Karen Lüdtke, who has undertaken a long-term ethnographic study of contemporary Salento, there were only five or six former *tarantati* still alive in 2006 (Lüdtke, 2009: 12), though these are not seen publicly performing the ritual any longer. However, the occasional glimpses of one of these prior *tarantati* can recall a past into the present, offering a glimpse of a vestige from older times that has a strong resonance for the younger generation of Salentines today, an example of which is described in Chapter One.

Although the ritual as such no longer takes place, there was a revival of interest in *pizzica* music and dance beginning in the 1970s, and gaining momentum through the 1980s and 1990s. This, along with an increasing amount of research and publications on tarantism, has led to a growth in both tourists and researchers visiting the region, as well as the development of music and dance festivals, sometimes under the label of the so-called 'neo-tarantism' movement. This resurgence, which is discussed in Chapter Four, offers an example of the revival or reinvigoration of a form of 'folk' or 'traditional' music and dance, which raises questions of authenticity, ownership, and performance forms as cultural products. Above all, the

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well as in Spain. For an account of medical histories of tarantism within Spain during the eighteenth century, see León Sanz, 2000, and Doménech y Amaya, 1998.

case study of both historical and contemporary Salento shows the complex relationship of past and present, and a multiple layering of times, places, practices and identities in each of the 'moments' explored in this study. History should not be seen as a single, linear trajectory, with a clear origin and straight line to the present, but rather as many histories, often contradictory, which contribute to the wider understanding of the development of the ritual and performance forms. Likewise, a place or site cannot be seen without reference to both the histories and socio-cultural conditionings of which it is formed, as well as the embodied presences of those who are playing the music and dancing within it. It is their actions that are creating the experience of the site, as much as the site is informing their experience of the performance.

This book offers an overview of both the history of tarantism, and the contemporary phenomenon of neo-tarantism and performances of *pizzica* within Salento today, and questions the connections between them. Although there have been many studies written about each of these, though very few in English, none has yet undertaken an extended discussion and comparison of both to the extent placed within this book. Additionally, most of these contemporary studies, either reviewing the historical documents or conducting field research, have tended to be situated within the fields of anthropology and ethnography, cultural studies, history, sociology and the medical sciences. What I am hoping to contribute in this book is a perspective on both past and present through the discipline of performance studies. By its nature interdisciplinary, this will allow for a focus on both my historical and ethnographic research, as well as on the performance forms themselves, partly through the use of the understanding of the performance experience found in the work of a range of performance practitioners. In particular, there is an emphasis in my approach on attempting to understand these phenomena through the body, and the processes of embodiment and experience of those who undertake the performances. This notion of embodiment encompasses both a phenomenological, or 'inner', experience, as well as an understanding of the socio-cultural and historical 'outer' environment. My attention lies on the inherent interconnection between the two, on how they operate together to generate the particular nature of the experience in the specific spatial-temporal moment of the

presence within the action of the music and dance. This focus on the body and embodiment has the potential to offer new insights into an understanding of the experience of both the historical ritual and contemporary expressions. Such insights may be of benefit to those working in the social sciences, who can find the use of such notions as 'presence' and 'liveness' difficult to incorporate in their own work, as discussed in Chapter One. In this way, I hope that this book will contribute to the study of tarantism and *pizzica* in Salento that has already been undertaken, and perhaps provide new frameworks of thought that can be of use beyond this in a wider context of the study of ritual, efficacy and experience in forms of cultural performance.

Book structure, problems and ethics

The remainder of the Introduction offers a brief contextualisation of the land of Salento; its history and mixture of cultures, and its positioning within Southern Italy in relation to the idea of the 'Southern Question', magic and superstition. There is also a discussion of *pizzica*, and a description of the dance and music of the social form, the *pizzica pizzica*, as well as a brief exploration of the differences between this and the 'tarantella'.

The book is divided into four chapters. As the intention is to provide an interdisciplinary approach to its subject matter, Chapter One offers an examination of the methodological frameworks that will be used. Based in performance studies, and drawing on other disciplines including anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, there is a discussion of the importance of exploring tarantism and *pizzica* through the embodied experience of the participants, whilst also having an understanding of how the specific socio-cultural positionings of the individual and community will have an impact on this experience. Culture is seen as something that is inscribed on and in the body, as well as in the process of the embodiment of the ritual in the past, and the contemporary experiences of playing and dancing *pizzica*

today. The chapter ends with an ethnographic 'moment' of my observation and participation in the festival of St Paul in Galatina in June 2008, to illustrate the points made.

Chapters Two, Three and Four are a chronological examination of the history of the ritual of tarantism, and the revival of interest in *pizzica* music and dance leading to the 'neo-tarantism' movement in the late twentieth century. Chapter Two is an extensive historical overview of the many and diverse writings on tarantism by doctors, scientists and travel-writers from the fourteenth through to the twentieth centuries. These writings demonstrate the appropriation of both tarantism and those who perform it in a gradual medicalisation, feminisation and christianisation of the ritual. The documents discussed offer a fascinating account of the changing attitudes towards the body, religion, medicine and science over the periods examined, most particularly from the vast paradigm shift brought about by the Age of Enlightenment.

Chapter Three focuses on the work of Italian historian Ernesto De Martino, whose book *La terra del rimorso* [*The Land of Remorse*] is so significant in the history and changing views of tarantism in the twentieth century. De Martino conducted an ethnographic study of tarantism in 1959 for which he gathered an interdisciplinary team to examine features of the ritual. The title is a play on words, for '*morso*' is the Italian word for 'bite', hence '*ri/re-morso*' has the sense of both 'remorse' in a religious context, and 're-bite' in terms of the *tarantati* re-experiencing the symptoms of tarantism and needing to repeat the cure each year. This book has been of great importance in reframing the understanding of tarantism and cultural practices in Southern Italy; however, it has also been criticised more recently for its reductionist approach, despite De Martino's own development of the notion of 'critical ethnocentrism'. This chapter examines some of De Martino's key ideas, and how these were framed in his writing on tarantism, as well as ways in which his work has been used by others in different contexts, and some of the critiques that have been made of his approach. I then offer an examination of the experience of the ritual through aspects of performance studies. The purpose of this is to suggest ways of exploring the ritual through the body and the processes of embodiment, and aims to provide a framework to discuss such issues as 'presence', 'liveness' and

'embodied experience' in relation to forms of cultural performance, whilst also needing to take account of the particular socio-cultural features of tarantism in its specific context.

Chapter Four is an examination of the revival of interest in *pizzica* music and dance which began in the 1970s, and the development of the neo-tarantism movement. This covers a range of areas including the sense of local identity in relation to the music and dance, as well as the history of Salento and a connection to the land, and how these are manifested in the present; the notion of 'neo-' traditions; the development of new music and dance festivals as part of the burgeoning tourist industry; and the debate between authenticity and contamination which is often central to the idea of 'revival'. There is also a discussion of the *pizzica scherma* and its performance at the festival of San Rocco in Torrepaduli. Although this may not be seen as necessarily having a direct connection to tarantism, this unique form of dance contributes to the overall debate on contemporary Salento. It is a fascinating combination of martial arts and dance, performed by different communities, and can be a means to resolve disputes through the space of the *ronda*, the circle in which the dance is performed. There has been very little written about this in English, so this section investigates the history of the *scherma*, as well as analysing some of the movements of the dance.

The Conclusion brings together of some of the ideas and themes from throughout the book, questioning what the notion of 'healing' might mean in the different contexts discussed.

With a book of this nature, which offers both an historical and ethnographic study of a specific location over a long period of time, there are many considerations which are involved. I first encountered tarantism as a practitioner in January 2000 when making a piece of dance-theatre, and this initial interest led to further research and visiting Salento for the first time in 2001. This research, both documentary and field trips, has continued over the years and contributed to the writing of this book. Having been initially introduced into Salento as a practitioner, and then occupying a shifting role into being a researcher, there have clearly been ethical issues which I have had to address. In the context of the research and writing of this book, when undertaking field studies I see myself as a being a participant-observer, and have been very fortunate in my encounters

with local people who have been immensely generous both with their time in conducting interviews, as well as their skill and openness with playing and dancing the *pizzica*. There have been times when I have felt that being seen as a practitioner as well as an 'academic', thereby joining in with the playing and dancing, as well as sharing my own practical work, has perhaps led some informants to being more open with me than might have been the case otherwise. Therefore, it has also been important to be clear about the times when I am gathering information for the book, and how I am going to use this material. The shifting position between practitioner and researcher has proved both interesting, and at times difficult: when do I put down the camera at a festival and join in the dance? It is my hope that my understanding of music and dance from both an academic as well as practical perspective,[6] will offer an interesting viewpoint to the discussion. I note in Chapter Two that during the time of the early Christian Church, the playing of music became separated from its study and understanding. I would like to suggest that within academia today, it is possible and useful for this division to be reconsidered, and that it can be acknowledged that a practitioner can think and write, and that an academic can engage with practice. With an increasing number of practitioners entering academia in the fields of performance, there seems to be a great opportunity for this form of interrelated dialogue, understanding and approach to be undertaken and accepted.

Although I have conducted field research at points over a period of eight years, there is never a sense that this is 'enough', either in terms of time, or the range and breadth of people I have interviewed, and the places and events I have visited. Nevertheless, I trust that the amount of time I have spent in Salento is sufficient for the purposes of this book, and that the field work will continue, leading to further discoveries. The historical research for this study has encompassed the whole of Apulia, including

6 I have a BA in Drama and Music from the University of Bristol, and an MA in Physical Theatre from the University of Surrey and Royal Holloway, University of London, which included studying dance anthropology. I have trained in and practised a range of forms of theatre, dance and music, and therefore move between and across these performance forms in my academic and practical work.

the important sites of Taranto and Brindisi in the history of tarantism. However, my field research is centred on Salento, partly in order to create a focused area for study, and also as this is where so much of the contemporary revival has taken place.

In terms of language, I have chosen mainly to use English translations of Italian places and words, for example Apulia for Puglia. I have also decided to place the Italian text of quotations first, followed by the English translation. This seemed very important in relation to using material from interviews with informants; I wanted their voice in the original language to be heard first, and for the sake of consistency, this practice is followed throughout the book. Therefore, the English translations are placed in square brackets afterwards. Unless otherwise stated, I have undertaken these translations myself, with help from Bianca Mastrominico, John Dean and Antonella Rizzo. However, I have made the final decisions on the English versions myself, and I take full responsibility and apologise for any errors or misunderstandings with the translations as a result.

The study of tarantism and *pizzica*, and the research and writing for this book, have embraced and engulfed me for the past nine years. I hope that this book may spark interest in the reader for further research of their own, and encourage the first-hand reading of the texts discussed, as well as personal experience of the music, dance, culture and people of Salento. I have only been able to offer my own glimpse into this rich world, and many other views are available.

Context and background: Salento and *pizzica* in perspective

Where worlds collide: Salento as a site for study

> In this land whose name means 'never-ending silence' and 'land between two seas', the ancient and the modern blend together. Land of sea, land of different peoples, dialects, voices that cover the echo of other voices, other sounds. [...] We must find the right time, the right shades of colours in the sky where the crescent Turkish moon

> is a white, dazzling comma on a carpet of lights, and when the north wind blows the horizon is clear on the coast looking over the East. (From the tourist brochure 'Salento: all year round', produced by Viaggiare and the Azienda di Promozione Turistica di Lecce, Apulia, 2008)

Salento is indeed the 'land between two seas', and one that faces and inhabits both 'West' and 'East' in its geography, history and culture. However, this is far too simplistic a duality for the complexity and layerings found within this comparatively small area. The region of Apulia covers the 'heel' of the 'boot' of Italy, and Salento lies in the bottom half of this 'heel' (see Illustration 1). It is also known as the Province of Lecce which, along with the Provinces of Brindisi, Taranto, Foggia, and Bari, make up the region of Apulia. This is part of the South of Italy which is also known the *Mezzogiorno, Italia Meridionale* or *Meridione*. Salento covers an area of approximately 2,500 square km, a narrow peninsula at the tip of Western Europe, with 200 km of coastline, ending at its bottom point in the town of Santa Maria di Leuca, also known as *Finibus Terrae*, or the end of the earth. To the east is the Ionian Sea, and to the west, the Adriatic. The coastline is a combination of rocky cliffs, sandy beaches, and deep caves, some of which contain the remains from previous civilisations. The land in-between the seas is mainly a flat plain, home to the region's main traditional industry of agriculture, with an abundance of olive groves, grape vines and almond trees. Hundreds of kilometres of dry-stone walls snake the landscape, interspersed with *masserie*, farm buildings, and more glimpses of past inhabitants in the shape of dolmens and menhirs. As well as rural hamlets and villages, Salento hosts some larger towns and cities, including the region's capital Lecce, also known as 'the Florence of the South' for the splendour of its seventeenth-century Baroque architecture, designed by Francesco and Giuseppe Zimbalo, and Cesare Penna, amongst others. As the former Roman settlement of Lupiae, the *centro storico* also contains a large amphitheatre, only part of which has been excavated, as well as a smaller Roman theatre where performances still take place. The statue of one of the city's patron saints, San Oronzo, stands on a tall column that was once part of the Appian Way, which ended near Brindisi.

As well as agriculture, one of the other important Salentine industries, that of fishing, is found along the coastline, and the two ports of Gallipoli on the west and Otranto on the east act as both gateway and guard to the two-way facing peninsula, which has seen many invasions from both directions. Otranto lies only 70 km by sea from Albania, and contains evidence of the many cultures that have lived there, with a Norman cathedral which has a Romanesque facade, an Aragonese Castle, a Byzantine Church, and white-washed houses reminiscent of Greek villages amongst narrow streets, winding up from the harbour. It was in Otranto in 1480 that Mehmed II's Ottoman soldiers landed and attacked the city. When eight hundred of the inhabitants refused to convert, they were decapitated on top of Minerva Hill. Alfonso of Aragon managed to liberate the city the following year, and the bones of the martyrs now lie for viewing in the chapel of the cathedral in the city. This cathedral also houses an extraordinary mosaic floor, made by the monk Pantaleo in the twelfth century, which covers the aisle and transepts of the building. The central feature which runs along the middle from the doorway to the altar consists of the image of the Tree of Life. Branching out from this are a mixture of images taken from Greek mythology, the Bible, mythological legends such as King Arthur, the signs of the Zodiac, and real and fabulous animals including elephants, lions, centaurs and unicorns. This floor seems to symbolise the merging of different peoples, cultures and stories which is so much a feature of the land of Salento, and indeed of the passageway of the Mediterranean itself, where people and worlds collide, whether in war, colonisation, trade, marriage, or artistic exchange, creating a mixing-pot of diverse and shifting cultures and identities (see Illustration 2 for some images of Lecce, Santa Maria di Leuca, and Otranto).

The Mediterranean, or 'Middle Sea', has operated as a linking point, the central passageway between different lands. The Romans called it *Mare Nostrum*, or 'Our Sea', and for Horden and Purcell in their extraordinary history of the Mediterranean, *The Corrupting Sea*, this 'claim of the Romans to 'their' sea was part of a political and cultural process by which they progressively defined the place of Rome at the heart of the Inhabited World – an *Oecumene* or *Orbis Terrarum* with the Mediterranean at its centre' (Horden and Purcell, 2000: 12). Certainly for the many empires

Illustration 2. Clockwise from top left: the castle in Otranto; the Roman amphitheatre in Lecce; a detail of the Baroque ornamentation on the rose window from the Basilica di Santa Croce, Lecce; the caves at Santa Maria di Leuca, or *Finibus Terrae*. (Photographs: Jerri Daboo)

and cultures which have been based on its shores, the Mediterranean acts as the connector and travel-way between not just countries, but continents. For Horden and Purcell, in 'the ancient geographical tradition the sea shapes the land, not the other way about' (ibid.: 11). Abulafia states that this 'fundamental geographical feature of the Mediterranean is thus the enormous complexity of the region. Complexity means richness, diversity in a very positive sense, facilitating exchanges over short and long distances' (Abulafia, 2003: 19).

The region of Salento shows just such diversity, partly due to its geographical location as being a 'territory of passage', a stepping-stone between East and West, as well as North and South. As such, throughout history it has been vulnerable to attacks and colonisation, becoming a battle-ground for warring countries and rulers attempting to gain power and control of passageways and territories. The many invaders and settlers in the land of Salento have each left their mark on the landscape and culture, as well as in the memories and identities of the people, through to the present. Evidence of megalithic civilisations is found in the stone structures of menhirs, dolmens and *specchie*, or funeral cairns, as well as the prehistoric cave paintings seen in some of the caves, including those in the Grotta dei Cervi, the Cave of the Deer, in Porto Badisco, one of which has been appropriated as a symbol of the neo-tarantism movement, which is explored in Chapter Four. A significant group of early settlers were the Messapians, who possibly came from Illyria, and whose name means 'land between two seas', which was adopted by the tourist brochure cited earlier as the name for Salento as a whole. The word 'Messapi' itself is potentially an essentialist term for what were actually many tribal groups, and as Edward Herring suggests, they were seen as one collective by the later Greek inhabitants, and thus the term represents 'an etic perspective' (Herring, 2007: 271) which places them in opposition to the 'civilised' world of the Greeks. They were also known as the Iapyges, and the region was called Iapygia or Messapia. The Messapians left behind an array of artefacts, including pottery with distinctive geometric patterns, statues and jewellery. In addition, there are the remains of some large-scale settlements, including the vast stone walls outside Ugento, in the south of Salento. The Messapians are perceived as being part of the land and identity by many Salentines today, with some of the geometric patterns being repeated on contemporary art works. In Ugento, one local pointed to the great walls, telling me that they had been built by the ancestors of the land, and that today people walk in the footsteps of those former giants who are part of their history and culture. The famous fifth-century large bronze statue found in Ugento is often attributed as representing Zeus, however the local informant insisted on pointing

out to me that instead he considers it to be Poseidon,[7] the god of the sea, which is such an important feature of surrounding area.

The next main civilisation to invade and settle in Salento had a far-reaching effect on its culture. From around the eighth century BCE, there was a colonisation of Southern Italy by various Greek city states. In Salento, the Greek influence lasted much longer than in other parts, which will be seen in the history and discussion of the origins and manifestations of tarantism in Chapter Two. The Roman Empire replaced the Greek, and this in turn was followed by the strong influence of the Byzantine Empire from the East. Additionally, during the Iconoclastic Wars, monks from Greece and Eastern Europe fled to Salento for refuge, and founded monasteries in the region. The impact of this Greek and Eastern infiltration held sway until the arrival of the Normans, bringing Catholicism with them, in the early eleventh century. However the Greek influence managed to continue beyond this, and was found in a swathe of towns and villages across Salento from Gallipoli to Otranto, which became known as the Grecìa Salentina. Today, this area still exists, but has been reduced to consisting of nine small towns situated south-east of Lecce. This area still holds particular festivals and rites which show the Greek influence, and many of the elders speak Griko, a dialect which resembles modern Greek. Although this language had been dying out, its survival has been strengthened recently in part as a response to the revival of interest in *pizzica* and traditional songs in Griko. Remains from the Greek era have been discovered throughout Apulia, one example being the red-figure vase-paintings found especially in the Greek city of Taras, later called Tarentum by the Romans, and now known as Taranto. It is this city that supposedly gives its name to both the *taranta* or *taràntola* spider, and the condition of *tarantismo*. Taras became an important city for the Greek diaspora, and there is evidence of many plays being performed in its theatres, whether imported from the homeland,

7 Poseidon was an important god in the region. It was his son, Taras, who reputedly gave his name to the city which eventually became Taranto. There have been coins found in the city which depict Taras carrying a trident and riding a dolphin, and this image is also found on the city's coat of arms.

or adaptations that became popular in the colonies, sometimes creating new dramaturgical forms:

> In Apulia (notably Tarentum and other towns nearby) another comic theatrical form came to enjoy great popularity in the early fourth century, the so-called *phlyax* farces, perhaps derived originally from Laconian tradition in the Pelopennese. Several scenes from these plays are preserved on vase-paintings. [...] With padded, phallus-wearing actors wearing grotesque masks, as well as some straight heroic-looking characters too, these plays were performed on temporary wooden stages which could be set up quickly and transported from one town to another. [...] In any case, it is clear that the language in which these plays were performed was Greek; and from c. 300 Rhinthon and others produced written versions of some *phlyax*-plays, as the genre adopted a more highbrow tone, combining farce with more serious mythological themes. (Griffith, 2007: 28–9)

After the demise of the Roman Empire, theatrical performances still continued until theatres were closed by Justinian in 526, and the Byzantines were defeated by the Lombards in 568, which 'spelled the end of classical drama in the West for the next eight hundred years or more' (ibid.: 33).

In the early part of the Christian era, Salento was fought over by the Roman (Western) and Byzantine (Eastern) Empires as an important landing-place between both, eventually being won by the Eastern Empire. The influence of both Greek and Byzantine, along with later invasions by the Saracens, Arabs and Turks, have resulted in Salento being identified as a place of being between, and also embodying a mixture of, both West and East, Occident and Orient. This was seen as much in religion as in culture, which became a mixture of Christian and 'pagan', a feature found in the writings of tarantism in Chapter Two, as well as between Roman and Orthodox forms of Christianity:

> In Puglia, e in Salento in particolare, si é verificata per lungo tempo la prevalenza della civiltà cristiana bizantina, che, nonostante in conflitti culturali con il cristianesimo romano e le alterne supremazie politiche, ha connotato il territorio con una serie notevolissima di giacimenti culturali. (De Giorgi, 1999: 255)

> [In Apulia, and particularly in Salento, the civilization of Byzantine Christianity prevailed for a long time and, in spite of its cultural conflicts with Roman Christianity and successive political supremacies, defined the region with a very notable series of cultural deposits.]

De Giorgi describes this meeting of Orient and Occident in Salento as being a 'concordia discordante' (ibid.: 256), in that the different worlds live together in both unity and tension. The blending of East and West is found in the food and culture, with the Greeks spreading the cultivation of olives for oil and grapes for wine, both of which are now such a fundamental part of Salentine industry and identity; Arabic influences in some foods, particularly sweets; the architecture of Greek, Byzantine and Arabic features and buildings; and the festivals and rites with the Springtime carnival processions in some parts reminiscent of those found in Greece today, alongside those of the Roman Catholic processions of religious statues around towns at Easter. Later invaders and settlers have likewise influenced culture, language and practices in their adding to the melting-pot of Salento. These include the Lombards, Visigoths, Swabians, Normans, Aragonese, French and Bourbons, up to the time of the Risorgimento and the unification of Italy in 1860. This was also reflected in the changing names for the region, which at various points has been known as or part of the Terra d'Otranto, the Kingdom of Naples, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

The many battles fought over the territory of passage of Salento, the different rulers, and traces of the cultures left behind, have both contributed to the identity of Salentines, whilst also leading to a strong sense of regional pride and independence in their being 'Salentine', rather than Italian. The Salentine dialect is still spoken throughout the region, though today mainly Italian is commonly heard, with Salentine phrases or words being included in a conversation, with the exception of the elders who often still tend to speak Salentine rather than Italian. There are actually many different variants of the dialect in local areas, such as Leccese in Lecce, and this is sometimes reflected in the singing of *pizzica* and other traditional songs, which in their modern transcription can have several different versions of the lyrics. The identification of being Salentine is not just with the language and culture, but also with the surrounding environment of the land and sea, which is discussed further in Chapter Four. This can lead to a romanticising of the idea of local and community identity and the relationship to the land, as was seen in the description of Salento by the tourist industry brochure cited above. However, this has also been a means of local resistance to the many invaders of the land who have threatened this

identity, and more recently has been used as a way to bring together the younger generation of Salentines. This is seen in the work of Salentine poet Antonio Verri (1949–93) who has become a symbol of Salentine identity and creativity. He is known for writing on the notion of '*il sibilo lungo*', or the 'long' or 'deep murmur' or 'hiss' which is heard in the sound of the sea and land, as well as the sibilant 's' sound in speech, thus connecting the people to the echo of the land. As Del Giudice explains, this extract of Verri's writing

> focuses attention on the land, on man's communion with that land, and on the silent, barely audible sound of the bond: 'Cambia, cambierà di molto il volto della campagna, degli aggregati umani, di interi paesi ... quel che non cambierà mai sarà l'idea del dialogo con la terra che l'uomo ha stabilito dal tempo dei tempi, il grosso respiro, il "Sibilo lungo" che si può udire solo di mattina, mirando nella vastità dei campi, con accanto sentinelle silenziose gli alberi d'argento ...' ('It changes, it will change much, the face of the land, of gathered humanity, or entire towns ... what will never change is the idea of dialoguing with the earth, that humanity has established from time immemorial, the long breath, "the deep murmur" which can be heard only in the early morning, while looking out over the vast fields, while standing next to the silver trees, the silent sentinels ...'). (Del Giudice, 2005: 264–5, fn. 68)

If, as is suggested in Chapter Two, myths were used as a means to unite the diaspora during the time of the Greek colonisation, then the identification with the sound and pulse of land and sea, as well as the music and dance as will be seen in Chapter Four, are the ways through which Salentines today may find a sense of unity both within the community, and to the *terra*, meaning 'earth', 'land' and 'country' of Salento, with all its diversities as a point of passageway in the wider territory of the Mediterranean.

The 'Southern Question': orientalism, politics and magic

In his Introduction to *La terra del rimorso*, Ernesto De Martino discusses the perception of Southern Italy found in the writings of some of the Jesuit missionaries sent to the Mezzogiorno during the sixteenth century. They described this part of the country as being the 'Italian India', and De Martino

cites some examples from correspondence by the monks who had been sent to this seemingly remote and foreign land:

> Branca, replying to Nadal, considers it opportune that the college be established there 'for the needs of this Italian India.' Giovanni Xavier [...] bemoans the condition of the people: 'These people are so accustomed to evil, so licentious, arrogant, without justice and government, it is as if they were all from the backwoods. As for the priests, I do not want to even begin on the subject: word of mouth will be sufficient to give our brothers the chance to come to this India'. (De Martino, 2005: 4)

Michele Navarro suggested that those missionaries who were due to travel to the Indies should be sent to Southern Italy first as a testing ground, as '"anyone who proves himself worthy in these Indies of ours [*Indias de por acá*] will also be suited to those across the Ocean, and that he who finds it difficult to travel and endure in these Indies will not find it very easy in the others"' (in ibid.: 5).

The correlation of the South of Italy, despite being part of Western Europe, with the 'dark lands' of the Indies, is representative of some of the ways in which the South has been perceived and defined, particularly in relation to the North, that has become known as the 'Southern Question'. Although this term usually refers to the period around and after the Risorgimento, the origins of the division between North and South existed much earlier. The idea that the North was the place of learning, culture, industrialisation and modernity, whereas the South was the land of poverty, the rural peasant, corruption, the Mafia, and a world filled with superstition and magic, has contributed to some of the ways in which the practice of tarantism has been discussed. The South was the place that contains the 'primitive', evidence of an older world, often the classical world with the remains of the Greek and Roman civilisations. It was also a place seemingly at the very outer perimeter of the known world, its people and way of life equated more with Africa and Asia than Europe. Goethe, in his *Italian Journey (1786–1788)* stated that: 'To me Sicily implies Asia and Africa' (Goethe, 1962: 212), and the well-known Italian saying reinforces the view that 'at the end of Naples, begins Africa'. It is the land that western civilisation has seemingly not reached, seen in Carlo Levi's book *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, the very title defining that religion and civility have not

reached the small village in Lucania to which he was exiled, and that for Levi, it was 'that other world, hedged in by custom and sorrow, cut off from History and the State [...] where the peasant lives out his motionless civilization on barren ground in remote poverty, and in the presence of death' (Levi, 2000: 11). The South was the place of the hot sun, where the temperament of the people was reflected in the landscape and climate. They were people of nature, as opposed to those of cultured learning from the North. They were also people who were seen as being inherently, and some believed racially, different from those of the North. Mary Gibson discusses the work of the late-nineteenth-century criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who based his theories on the reasons for a greater criminal tendency by people in the South to their racial connection with those groups who were from other places. In his work *Criminal Man* from 1896–7, he states:

> It is to the African and Eastern elements (except the Greeks), that Italy owes, fundamentally, the greater frequency of homicides in Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia, while the least occur where the Nordic races predominate (Lombardy). (Lombroso, Vol. 3: 30, in Gibson, 1998: 99)

Gibson points out that Lombroso's ideas on positivist criminology were based in social darwinism, and he divided the people of the North and South between lighter and darker colourings. In this way, he posited that the 'darker' people of the South had greater criminal tendencies and levels of immorality in comparison to the 'whiter' and more civilised people of the North (Gibson, 1998: 102). He analysed these differences in facial features, and even in skull measurements, to show that those from each side of his divided Italy had racial origins from different regions. Gibson states that the 'attempt to identify race based on the measurement of skulls was typical of the period throughout Europe' (ibid.: 103), and this is also an uncomfortable presage of what was to come in Europe during the succeeding decades.

The notion of the 'Southern Question' is inherently relativistic, as the South is seen in relation to the North, thereby reinforcing the perceived dichotomy between the two. After the time of the Unification of Italy, this division was highlighted by the claim that the modernised North was being

held back and drained by the impoverished and backward South, which still held remnants of feudalism, as well as organised crime, along with a lack of education and infrastructure. This perception continued, and was further increased during the twentieth century with mass emigration, particularly to America, as well as increasing unemployment, causing further poverty. Despite efforts during the 1950s to help develop the South, this view by the North never completely left, and in the 1990s, the Northern League began an anti-Southern campaign, wanting to create a separate North from the South that was seen to be draining its resources. Not only is this binary view relativistic, it is also essentialising of the 'South' which, as Petrusewiczm suggests, should be seen instead as being many 'Souths' rather than one (Petrusewiczm, 1998: 28).

In addition to those from outside the South having such opinions, there have also been instances of some from within and sympathetic to the South, most particularly from the political left, who have also contributed to the division in terms of suggesting that it should be the peasants who create a socio-political revolution, and empower and free themselves. The discussion in Chapter Three on the work of Gramsci and De Martino illustrates such views. However, it was a disappointment to many of the Marxist-influenced writers supporting the South that it appeared that the peasants were incapable or not energised into such a revolution, thereby effectively aligning themselves with seeing the South as a primitive and impoverished 'other', and reinforcing the stereotype. The work of Pasquale Villari, particularly in his *Lettere Meridionali* (1875), is an example of someone who is both situating themselves within the South, and yet is an intellectual élite who is also highlighting the poverty and problems of the region, thus contributing to the reinforcement of the idea of the 'Southern Question.' Carlo Levi likewise suggests that the inherently passive nature of the peasant, unlike the active and engaged people from cities, leads to a political powerlessness:

> This passive brotherliness, this sympathy in the original sense of the word, as suffering together, this fatalistic, comradely, age-old patience, is the deepest feeling the peasants have in common, a bond made by nature rather than by religion. They do not and can not have what is called political awareness, because they are literally

> *pagani*, 'pagans', or countrymen, as distinguished from city dwellers. [...] They live submerged in a world that rolls on independent of their will, where man is in no way separate from his sun, his beast, his malaria. (Levi, 2000: 78–9)

For Levi, the downtrodden subaltern of the peasant had the ability, but not the will, to create a Marxist overturning of power: 'Unless there is a peasant revolution we shall never have a true Italian revolution, for the two are identical' (ibid.: 239).

One of the key features which was part of the view of the South as 'other' and even 'exotic' was the practice of magic and rituals, of which tarantism was a part. Examples of this include the notion of the evil eye (*malocchio*), studied and written about by De Martino, as well as the use of magical charms, spells, amulets and potions. Some of this will be discussed in Chapter Two through the historical records of tarantism, which became a battleground between magic and medicine. Levi notes that in his small village in Lucania, magic was used to 'cure almost any ill, and usually by the mere pronouncement of a spell or incantation' (ibid.: 225), the most common spell being 'abracadabra', written in the geometric pattern of a triangle on an amulet. Barbara Littlewood, who conducted field research on practices of magic in Apulia in 1969, tells of witnessing cases of locals who were described as being affected by the evil eye, or by being given a magical potion. She frames these practices, as well as that of tarantism, as being part of a particularly female world dominated by Catholicism and clientelism (Littlewood, 2007: 236). Both these, she explains, foster concepts of misfortune, victimhood, and the establishment of notions of honour and shame, particularly in relation to women, which will feature in this study in the history of tarantism. The language and ideas of magic can still be found in some of the discourses surrounding the performance of tarantism and *pizzica* today: many informants spoke to me about the 'magic' that can take place within the circle, the *ronda*, in which the dance takes place, even if the notion of 'magic' has perhaps changed in meaning and context. However, the perception of the world of magic found in the South, even if understood somewhat differently today, reinforces the idea of Southern Italy as a place of alterity. Bearing in mind the notion of the 'Italian India' from several centuries before, it could indeed be suggested, as Schneider

states, that 'Italy was certainly affected by Orientalism' (J. Schneider, 1998: 5), and that this has been a feature of the history of tarantism.

Pizzica: a way of seeing the world

The form of music and dance which is commonly perceived to be connected to the ritual of tarantism is the tarantella. The very word appears to imply an origin in the city of Taranto, the *taranta* which bites, and the *tarantata* who is bitten. There are many forms of the tarantella throughout Southern Italy, each with regional variations, the most famous being found in Naples. The final section of the Introduction will discuss some of the ways in which the tarantella has been perceived and used by writers, musicians and choreographers, but it is important to make a distinction between this dance and the particular use of music and dance within Salento, both socially and in connection to the ritual of tarantism. In Salento, the word 'tarantella' is hardly heard. Instead, it is the *pizzica* which is the basis of the ritual of tarantism, as well as being of great significance in the revival of music and dance in Salento as part of the neo-tarantism movement.

The term '*pizzica*' is used to describe a genre of popular traditional music and dance found within Salento. There are many different kinds of *pizziche*, such as songs connected to work, love and religion, including funeral laments, each with particular characteristics. There are other traditional forms of music within Salento, but the *pizzica* is significant as being the music and dance used within the ritual of tarantism. It has become common practice to talk of there being essentially three forms of *pizziche*: the *pizzica pizzica* (sometimes called the *pizzica de core* (*pizzica* of the heart)): the social form of the dance, which will be discussed in this section; the *pizzica tarantata*: the particular music and dance used therapeutically within the ritual of tarantism, which are analysed in Chapters Two and Three; and the *pizzica scherma*: a fighting form of the dance seen particularly at the festival of San Rocco in Torrepaduli, which will be examined in Chapter Four. These three categorisations are usually attributed to the ethnomusicologist Giorgio di Lecce (1953–2003), and although potentially being a reduction of the complexities found with the broader genre

of the *pizzica*, also offers a convenient way to discuss the forms through these divisions, even whilst acknowledging that this is artificially imposed on the variety of music and dance that can be found.

The word '*pizzica*' comes from the verb '*pizzicare*', which means to bite, nip, sting or pinch. The movement implied within this translates into the fast hopping and skipping movements within the dance, and the rapid rhythmical beat found in the music. The movement of a violinist performing a *pizzicato* plucking of the strings also gives a sense of this light, fast, uplifting dynamic. The most common instruments used in playing *pizzica* today are the violin, guitar, flute and pipes, bagpipe (*zampogna*), accordion (*organetto*), and probably the most important, the *tamburello*. This is essentially a large wooden frame drum with bells, variations of which can be found throughout the Mediterranean. The *tamburello* has come to represent the essence of *pizzica* music, and for Salentine historian Aldo D'Antico, its physical structure as well as its sound is the symbolic representation of life itself. He describes *pizzica* as being 'a way of seeing life' (D'Antico, 2001), in that it reflects the play of human life as moving between order and chaos, an idea found within classical Greek philosophy. He states that this can be seen within the *tamburello* itself, with its circular structure representing order, and the bells as chaos. Likewise, the beating of the hand on the drum skin is the sound of order, and the shaking or rattling of the bells is that of chaos. The rhythmic pattern which the *tamburello* player makes is the rhythm of life, the heartbeat, which increases when someone is faced with the chaos of a state of crisis, and returns to normal when order is restored. This is reflected within the ritual of tarantism where the condition that arises from the crisis of the 'bite' results in an irregular pulse, which is then altered by the dancing in response to the rhythm of the music to an increased rate,[8] then finally returning to a normal, regular pulse-beat when the cure has taken place, leading to a state of order within the bodymind. For D'Antico,

8 Kay Gardner suggests that the time signature of such music used in the ritual of tarantism is dotted crotchet equals 216, which corresponds to the pulse-rate of someone who is in a high fever (Gardner, 1997: 99).

the *tamburello* both represents and expresses this way of seeing life, of the movement between order and chaos, wellness and crisis.

The specific rhythmic beat of the *tamburello* contributes to the particular quality of *pizzica* music. The rhythmic pattern is usually in 6/8, with the accent on the first and last beats of the sequence, a lighter accent on the final beat and a heavier one on the first, matching the pattern of the heartbeat. This 6/8 or triple rhythm often accompanies a melody that is essentially in 4/4 or duple beat, thus leading to an ambiguity within the rhythmic framing. The regular ostinato beat of the tambourine contrasts with a much freer, often improvised melody with varying accented beats, whether sung or played by an instrument. This also leads to a feeling of order and chaos, or structure and freedom within the music, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three in relation to the experience of the dance within the ritual. Ambiguity is also found within the melodic and harmonic nature of the music, which is mostly tonal, 'though sometimes revealing a modal origin of a vocal character (diminished fifth, augmented fourth, tritone, etc.)' (Carpitella, 2005: 299). This leads to a play between major and minor keys, and the use of the interval of the tritone, which is often heard within *pizzica* music, can be sustained for a length of time before being resolved into a diatonic chord, giving a poignant, and what is often described as a painful or sorrowful quality to the music. Chapter Two observes that the songs used within tarantism were often noted as being in the Phrygian mode, which is sometimes seen as the most 'Eastern' sounding of the modes, particularly when turned into the Phrygian Dominant which is used in flamenco, Arabic and Jewish music, and this play between 'Western' and 'Eastern' sounds is also a feature of *pizzica*. The melodic lines within the songs are often freely improvised with particular forms of ornamentation around the basic notes of the melody. Salentine musician Roberto Raheli states that when he first heard the local elders singing the songs, he observed that their style of singing contained 'many grace notes and embellishments, rhythm which was very changeable, and singers who often did not express some notes, but defined the notes by circling around them' (Raheli, 2005: 125). This particular vocal quality is created by singing from the throat rather than the chest, which Raheli suggests is due to the songs being sung by workers in fields who were bending over, leading them

to sing from their throat rather than the chest. However, this particular style of singing is also found in parts of Eastern Europe, as is the tendency to embellish notes in a similar way to that found in *pizzica*.

The movements of the dance found within the *pizzica pizzica* are strongly connected to the rhythms of the music. The *pizzica pizzica* is a social dance, traditionally performed at weddings and festivals. As these events were some of the few occasions were women were allowed to be seen dancing in public, this has led in part to the *pizzica pizzica* becoming a particular form of expression for women. It is often a couple-dance between a man and a woman, though also sometimes danced between two women, and very rarely two men. When danced by a man and woman, it is seen as a dance of *corteggiamento* or courtship, with flirtation and enticement between the couple. Although the dance is improvised, there are some established steps and movements which are often used. These mainly reflect the triple and syncopated beat of the music, with the foot-work embodying a contrast between both stamping firmly onto the ground, and light hopping or skipping movements that move away from the ground. There is a promenade step which consists of one foot stamping flat, followed by the other stepping lightly on the toes, mimicking the triple accented and unaccented beat. The skipping movements include one foot hopping in place, whilst the other leg crosses over and back with the toes lightly touching the ground; one foot crossing over the other with the whole body turning to the side, and back; as well as skipping and hopping in place and in circles. In addition, there are turning, circling and spinning movements using the whole body. The woman will often lift up and swirl her skirt, and hold a *fazzoletto*, a handkerchief or head-scarf which she uses to tease and entice the man. Her arms can also be held above the head, sometimes both waving together from side to side; alternating with one arm up, the other down at the side or behind the back; outstretched in front of her, the hands moving from the wrists; or else with her hands on her hips. The head will sometimes shake from side to side whilst dancing. The posture of the man is quite unusual, in that it often consists of him leaning forward from the waist with bent knees towards the woman, with his arms outstretched to her, whilst performing the hopping and skipping movements. He moves in circular patterns around the woman, whilst she stays in the middle,

thus both encouraging and supporting her to dance (see Illustration 4). Traditionally, they would never touch each other, as this is a dance of flirtation and seduction rather than resolution, although today it is possible to see couples who will take each other's hand or dance in closer proximity to the other than would have been the case in the past.

Salentine dancer and musician Ada Metafune describes the relationship between the movements performed by the man and woman by stating that the woman must be like a flower, which the man as the bee dances around (Metafune, 2001). This image reinforces the aspect of courtship, as well as providing a space for the woman to express herself through the dance at the centre of the circle. Ada explains that the music of the *pizzica pizzica*, by its very nature, makes a person want to dance. She uses the verb *scazzicare*, a word from the Salentine dialect which will be discussed further in Chapter Three, to explain the excitement and enticement that the music produces in the body, which leads to an irresistible urge to dance in response: '"pizzica-pizzica" penso che significhi questo, una danza che senti dentro e ti spinge a saltare, ti "scazzica"' (in Tarantino, 2001: 89) ['I think that "pizzica-pizzica" means this, a dance that you feel inside and that drives you to skip, to "scazzica" yourself']. In other words, the body is excited or urged (*scazzica* from *scazzicare*) to dance by the music. The dance takes place in the configuration of a circle, a *ronda*, usually defined by the musicians and onlookers at the circumference, with the dancers stepping into the middle of the *ronda* to perform, and then stepping out afterwards to allow for new dancers to enter. These *ronde* are seen as being transformed into 'magical' spaces through the action of the dance in response to the music. As Lüdtke explains, in 'the Salentine musical traditions, such rounds, Daniele Durante writes, "were attributed with a magical valence, which assured a cure from any kind of illness to all active participants"' (Lüdtke, 2005: 46), thus connecting the social form of *pizzica* to both magic and efficacy. Lüdtke states that some elders in Salento today feel that this element of magic has been lost in the different types of performance contexts in which the *pizzica* is played (ibid.: 46), and this will be examined further in Chapter Four. The inherent joy and freedom of expression that can be found in playing and dancing the *pizzica pizzica* forms an important part of the embodied experience of those taking part, as well as potentially

creating a sense of liberation and efficacy, particularly for women, in the movements of the dance in response to the urgings of the music.

The Tarantella: secularising the sacred

In the published proceedings from the Congress held by the International Folk Music Council in Venice in 1949, the summary of Paolo Toschi's paper is titled: 'A Question about the Tarantella'. In this, he states:

> Almost all students of the matter have confused the Tarantella with a dance which, on therapeutic grounds, is danced by those who have been bitten by the tarantula, a large, poisonous spider of the Apulian countryside.
>
> It is therefore necessary to point out some of the differences. The Tarantella is a courtship dance with all the figures inherent to this, its character. It is danced by a couple and is graceful and elegant. It is, furthermore, of fairly brief duration and has its own music.
>
> On the other hand, the dance of those who have been bitten by the tarantula has the character and object of being curative, in that it is supposed to neutralise the effect of the poison. It is danced by one person alone and has a very agitated, sometimes violent movement in accordance with what it is proposed to achieve. It has a duration not only of several hours, but often of whole days. Then, also, the music is quite different.
>
> One is therefore bound to ask whether these are not two completely different dances. The confusion which has arisen up till the present comes from the fact that both the courtship Tarantella and that of the 'tarantolati,' or person bitten by a tarantula, derive their name from the city of Taranto. (Toschi, 1950: 19)

Toschi points out that there is a difference between the dance that has become labelled as the 'tarantella', found throughout the South of Italy[9] in

9 It has been suggested that the tarantella possibly originated in some forms of Spanish dance, particularly the fandango. With the influence of the Spanish occupations in Southern Italy, there may well have been a level of impact of Spanish music and dance on the Italian. However, there may also be some confusion caused by the fact that there is a form of song accompanied by guitar within the genre of flamenco from Andalusia called the 'taranta'. This is quite different to the tarantella and *pizzica*, but the name may have implied a connection. Additionally, the Spanish 'taranta' is

various forms, most particularly in Naples, Sorrento, Sicily and Calabria, and the form of *pizzica* music and dance used in the ritual of tarantism. De Giorgi describes the *pizzica pizzica* and *pizzica tarantata* as being 'un tipo arcaico di tarantella' (De Giorgi, 1999: 88) ['an archaic type of tarantella'], whereas ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella distinguishes between what he proposes should be called the 'liturgical' tarantella which is used in tarantism, and the 'profane' version which he suggests is probably the origin of the modern-day tarantella (Carpitella, 2005: 286). This establishes a 'sacred' and 'secular' division between the forms of the dance and music, depending on the context. Toschi posits that part of the confusion that exists is to do with the name. 'Tarantella' means 'little *taranta*', or 'little spider', so this appears to establish a connection to the symbol found within the ritual. However, the tarantella is essentially a social dance, usually understood as relating to courtship, rather than being used in a therapeutic context in the way that the *pizzica* is within tarantism. As previously indicated, there is a social form of the *pizzica*, the *pizzica pizzica*, however musically and choreographically this is very different to the Neapolitan, Sicilian and Sorrentine forms which are the most commonly recognisable styles of what is now called the 'tarantella'. De Giorgi gives a range of examples in his book to indicate these musical differences in terms of rhythm, melody and harmony (De Giorgi, 2004: 245–52).

It is not completely clear at what point a dance called the 'tarantella' became established as something separate to the music and dance used within the ritual of tarantism, or when a distinctive form that came under this generic label that covers dances from the different regions of Southern Italy became common use. Chapter Two indicates that the word 'tarantella' was used in relation to the ritual from the seventeenth century, however the word is used within the songs to indicate the spider, the *taranta*, rather than the actual music or dance. It is possible that this word was then used by

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'derived from or similar to the fandango' (Katz, 2001: 922), so this might also have resulted in the assumed link between tarantella and fandango. Although there are some external characteristics that may be appear similar, such as the arm positions and circling movements, the two forms are also quite distinct.

the range of writers on the ritual to describe the particular music and dance within the ritual. Whether it was through this that this type of dance spread throughout the South, or if the name, derived from Taranto as Toschi suggests, became attached to previously existing traditional social dance forms found in variations throughout the South in 6/8 time and incorporating hopping and skipping movements, is not clear. What is apparent is that by the end of the eighteenth century, a dance called the 'tarantella', found particularly in Naples, Sorrento and Sicily, had become widely known for its nature as a courtship dance, which extended into often being perceived as erotic, and particularly licentious in relation to the exhibition of women within the dance. The 'story' of the bite of the tarantula may still have been known in these regions outside Apulia, but the performances of the dance were not for reasons of efficacy, but rather for social enjoyment at festivals and weddings, and increasingly, as performances for travellers and tourists as part of the Grand Tour.

Henry Swinburne, in his *Travels in Two Sicilies*, recounts his experience of witnessing a performance of the tarantella in Naples in the late 1770s:

> They do not even dance to music, but perform the Tarantella to the beating of a kind of tambourine, which was in use among their ancestors, as appears by the pictures of Herculaneum. The Tarantella is a low dance, consisting of turns on the heel, much footing, and snapping of the fingers. It seems the delight of their soul, and a constant holiday-diversion of the young women, who are, in general, far from handsome, although they have fine eyes and striking features. (Swinburne, 1790: 94–5)

He later describes seeing an example of the ritual of tarantism in Lecce, quoted in Chapter Two, which gives a very different description of the movements and music, even if what he observed appears highly staged. He does not use the word 'tarantella' to describe the dance in this ritualistic context, but instead states that the woman danced the 'tarantata' (ibid.: 304), thus naming the dance after the word given to the person who has been bitten, indicating a difference between the two forms which he saw.

Swinburne's reference to Herculaneum was very much part of the sensibility of those undertaking the Grand Tour. This became a feature of the education of the aristocracy from the North, mainly Britain, but also France and Germany, touring to and around the South, particularly Italy.

Travel for leisure was still a very expensive activity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and bearing in mind the retinue which often accompanied them, was essentially the domain of the wealthy. Chloe Chard indicates that the most common features of the Tours were that they were undertaken by a member of the British aristocracy, following an itinerary that could last for several years, always included Rome, and moved in the direction of travelling from North to South. This was part of the Enlightenment idea of the need to know and understand through seeing and observation. In this case, the knowledge to be seen and witnessed was the remains of the Classical world which could be found in Italy and Greece. It was a land that was 'other' to the educated and modern North; it was instead a place of rural civilisation, where the character of the people matched the landscape and climate (Chard, 1999: 14–38). The Northerners came to see the past in the present, or as Horden and Purcell explain: 'At the climax of their Grand Tour, travelers from the North came upon a world hardly industrialised in comparison with their own, and therefore perhaps inevitably more redolent of an earlier age' (Horden and Purcell, 2000: 29). Thus the Grand Tour was both a geographical and historical journey, travelling back in time by visiting places which held the remains of the past.

It was as part of this travel experience that writers such as Swinburne and Goethe observed performances of the tarantella in Naples and Sorrento, and the beating of tambourines and free expression of the women within the dance seemed to bear a resemblance to not only a Classical world, but also one dominated by the excesses of the erotic and wine, connecting it to the followers of Dionysus. Women in particular became the representation of the South, as creatures of sensibility and emotion rather than the intellectual and objective 'male' world of the North. It was one woman in particular who gave performances of the tarantella in Naples that entranced her audience, and became the emblem of the act of bringing the past to life. She was not an Italian, but rather an English woman who had reinvented herself throughout her life, and when in Naples at the end of the eighteenth century, was married to the British Ambassador, and had the title of Lady Emma Hamilton. The Hamiltons were living in Naples in the period following the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum which had revived interest in the Classical past, as remains of its prior civilisations were

revealed. Travellers came to see not only the ruins of buildings, but also the images found in mosaics, paintings, sculptures and vases. After seeing these, some would then travel to the home of the Hamiltons, and observe Emma dressed up in imitation of the images, performing what became known as the 'Attitudes', where she would animate the statues and vase-paintings in her presence and movements. One of those visitors who became part of her captive audience was Goethe, who travelled to Naples in 1787, and

> found the acme of these delights in the person of an English girl of twenty with a beautiful face and a perfect figure. [Sir William Hamilton] has had a Greek costume made for her which becomes her extremely. Dressed in this, she lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses, gestures, expression, etc., that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees what thousands of artists would have liked to express realized before him in movements and surprising transformations – standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose follows another without a break. She knows how to arrange the folds of her veil to match each mood, and has a hundred ways of turning it into a head-dress. The old knight idolizes her and is enthusiastic about everything she does. In her, he has found all the antiquities, all the profiles of Sicilian coins, even the Apollo Belvedere. This much is certain: as a performance it's like nothing you ever saw in your life. We have already enjoyed it on two evenings. (Goethe, 1962: 199–200)

He uses the word *attrattiva* to describe the magnetic force which a person such as Emma can exert in drawing someone towards them, a notion of magnetism which will also be found in Kircher's philosophy in relation to tarantism in Chapter Two. However, when not performing, her brightness soon tarnished, and later Goethe candidly said:

> I must confess that our fair entertainer seems to me, frankly, a dull creature. Perhaps her figure makes up for it, but her voice is inexpressive and her speech without charm. Even her singing is neither full-throated nor agreeable. Perhaps, after all, this is the case with all soulless beauties. People with beautiful figures can be found everywhere, but sensitive ones with agreeable vocal organs are much rarer, and a combination of both is very rare indeed. (ibid.: 312)

Whatever Goethe might have ultimately thought of her, Emma still held sway over her own court in Naples. The Attitudes were her fanciful

reconstructions of the poses seen in the images amongst the remains, thus seeming to bring to life what had long been buried. As well as the Attitudes, she was renowned for her rendition of the tarantella. According to Kate Williams, Emma went on a trip to Apulia in 1789, and when in Brindisi, she

> watched the women in the town perform the tarantella, a dance inspired by the energetic movements of a tarantula. The performer shook a tambourine as she twirled and danced in a circle. She became more and more frenzied and sometimes collapsed at the end. When Emma returned to the Palazzo in May, she incorporated the tarantella into her Attitudes, much to the delight of her audience. The Comte d'Espinchal decided that the beauty and voluptuousness of her performance could inflame the 'most insensible man'. (Williams, 2007: 145)

These performances of the tarantella became famous, and she was painted as a Bacchante doing the dance by the artist Elisabeth Vigée le Brun, and sketched in various poses of the tarantella by George Romney. After she returned to London, Emma continued to perform for the aristocracy, though she eventually died in poverty and loneliness. However, she left her own traces on the performance of the tarantella, and even if not a direct influence, over one hundred years later, the dancer Isadora Duncan also dressed in imitation Greek tunics embodying poses from the Classical past, which became the beginnings of modern dance.

The tarantella as a dance originally performed in rural settings, became appropriated into the social dances performed at court and in salons. This happened to many 'traditional' dances from the time of the Renaissance onwards, and was a particular feature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when dance was seen as an essential accomplishment by the upper classes. Dance masters and manuals gave instruction as to how to perform these dances in the correct way, removing them from the streets and popular festivals into the indoor arena of palaces and ballrooms. One example of the notation of the tarantella in this way was by the dance teacher Madame Michau, born as Sophie D'Egville into a dynasty of dance instructors. Her version of the tarantella was seen in London in 1844 and published in 1860, and became the established form of the dance. She chose a select number of steps which she choreographed together into a sequence, to

represent the way in which the tarantella should be performed. This version was a couple dance, and included gallop steps, *jettés* and *chassés*, thus providing a highly choreographed and stylised version of the improvised 'traditional' form of the dance. Michau herself was the *Maitresse de ceremonies* at the court of George IV and William IV based in the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. An example from later in her life showed that she was still teaching the tarantella, but to daughters of wealthy families at schools in Brighton. Debra Teachman, in her book *Understanding Jane Eyre*, quotes from the diary of Frances Power Cobbe, writing of her experience of taking dancing classes, essential to the all-round education of young ladies, in her expensive school in Brighton:

> The famous old Madame Michaud [sic] and her husband both attended us constantly, and we danced to their direction in our large play-room ... till we had learned not only all the dances in use in England in that anti-polka epoch, but also almost every national dance in Europe, the Minuet, the Gavotte, the Cachucha, the Bolero, the Mazurka, and the Tarantella. To see the stout old lady in her heavy green velvet dress, with furbelow a foot deep of sable, was a sight not to be forgotten. (in Teachman, 2001: 41)

This demonstrates the transferring of these 'traditional' dances to being social and court dances. They were stylised and choreographed, removed from the place of their local performance and transformed into set forms which imitated the 'country' and 'folk' dances of the original, but in a controlled and 'civilised' environment for social pleasure, and exhibition of skill and good breeding. It was this stylised version of the tarantella, imbued with hints of the exotic and the sensual, which began to be used in literature, music and ballet. One example of this, which also contains traces of Emma Hamilton, is found in Madame de Staël's 1807 novel *Corinne, ou l'Italie* [*Corinne, or Italy*]. This book creates the figure of Corinne as a 'genius', a free spirit, imaginative and proactive, one of the first female characters to embody this duality of both male and female qualities. Corinne represented the sensibility of the Italian South, although as is discovered in the book, she actually has part-British ancestry and, like Emma, has reinvented herself. At one point in the novel, she dances the tarantella

in a ballroom in Naples, where she entrances the British Northerner, Lord Nelvil, with her passionate and exotic dancing:

> Shaking her tambourine in the air she began to dance, and in all her movements there was a graceful litheness, a modesty mingled with sensual delight, giving some idea of the power exercised by the temple dancing girls over the Indian imagination. They are, as it were, poets in their dancing, expressing so many different feelings by their ritual steps and the charming tableaux they presented to the eye. Corinne knew so well all the poses depicted by the ancient painters and sculptors that, with a slight movement of the arms, placing her tambourine now above her head, now in front of her with one hand while the other ran along the bells with incredible skill, she brought to mind the dancing girls of Herculaneum and aroused, one after another a host of new ideas for drawing and painting. (De Staël, 1998: 90–1)

Just as Emma had been painted by Elisabeth Vigée le Brun, so the artist also did a portrait of De Staël in the guise of her character, Corinne.

The process of the feminisation of the dance, which is seen also in the ritual of tarantism discussed in Chapter Two, includes the freedom of expression by a woman dancing the tarantella, which was also found in one of the most important plays of the late nineteenth century, often seen as the first feminist and modernist play, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Ibsen spent some time travelling to and writing in Naples, Sorrento and Pompeii, and it is possible that whilst there, he witnessed performances of the tarantella, and Nora herself says that she dressed up as a Neapolitan fisher-girl to dance the tarantella which she had learnt in Capri (Act II). It was whilst he was in Rome in 1878, that Ibsen wrote 'Notes for a Modern Tragedy' which became the beginning points for *A Doll's House*:

> There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man. [...]
>
> A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine viewpoint. (in Meyer, 2004: 321)

It was this aspect of a woman not being able to be herself that makes the dancing of the tarantella by Nora so significant. When practicing with

Torvald, she drapes herself in a shawl and uses a tambourine. Her fast and frenetic dancing alarms Torvald, and after her hair falls free and she dances even faster, he stops the performance, saying that she has forgotten everything that he has taught her. However, after Nora has performed the dance publicly, and she and Torvald arrive home, it becomes clear that through the embodiment of the dance, he has a transformed view of her from little girl to woman: 'And as I watched you darting and swaying in the tarantella, my blood was on fire ... I couldn't bear it any longer ... and that's why I brought you down here with me so early' (Ibsen, 1981: 70 (Act III)). It was through the dance that Nora expressed who she is as a woman, leading to the moment of her being able to finally leave her husband. Issues of shifting power structures in relation to the position of women in society will be prevalent throughout this study, as the embodied presence of women both within the dance, and within their community, creates a space where their voices are heard and their faces are seen, leading to a temporary sense of agency. Whether or not this can create a more permanent change is questioned in Chapters Three and Four.

As well as in literature and theatre, the stylised version of the tarantella was used by classical composers, including Chopin, Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky, Mendelssohn, Verdi, Rossini and Debussy. It also became incorporated into classical ballet and popular dance. The ballets range from the performance of a tarantella within the ballet *Napoli*, created by the Danish choreographer August Bournonville in 1842, through to George Balanchine's famous *Tarantella* first performed by the New York City Ballet in 1964. In addition, there were some classical ballet versions which influenced stage-dance performances, one of the most renowned being that by Fanny Elssler (1810–84) in her dance *La Tarantule*, which inspired the notorious *Spider Dance* created by Lola Montez (1821–61), where plastic spiders would fall out of her skirt as she performed what was in effect a striptease. These exotic and provocative dances were seen as the embodiment of the Italian South. Smith cites from *La France Musicale* which, on 30 June 1839, noted that 'Elssler's way of dancing a tarantella in *La Tarantule* was said to portray "with wonderful intelligence that ardent character only found on the volcanic soil of Italy"' (Smith, 1997: 301).

The performances of the 'profane' tarantella still take place for tourists in Southern Italy. With the advent of mass tourism, which has enabled a greater number of travellers to the region to enjoy the weather and culture, these dances can be found taking place in hotels, clubs and restaurants, most particularly in Sorrento. Tourists will go to see performances of the tarantella in the South of Italy just as they would expect to see the flamenco in the South of Spain: it is still on tourist itinerary for those heading to the deep South to see that which is 'exotic' and 'other'. However the differences in the form of what is now known as the tarantella have arisen, this has to an extent clouded the understanding of the therapeutic use of *pizzica* music and dance in the 'sacred' form within Salento, which is the focus for this book. The elements of the erotic, of sexual and licentious expression by women, and the use of tambourines, ribbons and castanets, have become the dominant understanding of the notion of the tarantella, with the mysterious story of the battle with the spider which has bitten the dancer. Although it is important to acknowledge these versions of the tarantella, it is the long history of the culturally conditioned use of music and dance as a form of efficacy within the ritual of tarantism that is the subject of this study. This emphasis will hopefully enlarge the understanding of ways in which the dance of the little *taranta* has developed and been embodied by those from Salento.