

# SICILIAN LETTERS

Written and directed by

**FABIO GRASSADONIA** and **ANTONIO PIAZZA**

INDIGO FILM and RAI CINEMA  
present

  
MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2024  
Selezione Ufficiale

# SICILIAN LETTERS

## (IDDU)

written and directed by

**FABIO GRASSADONIA** and **ANTONIO PIAZZA**

with

**TONI SERVILLO, ELIO GERMANO,**

**DANIELA MARRA, BARBORA BOBULOVA, GIUSEPPE TANTILLO, FAUSTO RUSSO ALESI**

and **ANTONIA TRUPPO** with the participation of **TOMMASO RAGNO, BETTI PEDRAZZI, FILIPPO LUNA**

a production by **INDIGO FILM** with **RAI CINEMA**

in coproduction with **LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**

with the support of **CANAL+** with the participation of **CINÉ+ OCS**



## CREW

written and directed by **FABIO GRASSADONIA & ANTONIO PIAZZA**  
image **LUCA BIGAZZI**  
editing **PAOLA FREDDI**  
production design **GASPARE DE PASCALI**  
music **COLAPESCE**  
costumes **ANDREA CAVALLETTO**  
sound **STEFANO CAMPUS**  
sound design **MIRKO PERRI GIULIO PREVI**  
make-up **FRÉDÉRIQUE FOGLIA**  
hairstyle **SAMANKTA MURA**  
produced by **NICOLA GIULIANO**  
**FRANCESCA CIMA**  
**CARLOTTA CALORI**  
**VIOLA PRESTIERI**  
coproduced by **ALEXIS DANTEC**  
associate producer **STEFANO D'AVELLA**

a coproduction  
a production  
in coproduction with  
with the support of  
with the participation of  
with the contribution of  
with the support of

**ITALY-FRANCE**  
**INDIGO FILM with RAI CINEMA**  
**LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**  
**CANAL +**  
**CINÉ+OCS**  
**MiC – Direzione generale Cinema e Audiovisivo**  
**REGIONE LAZIO**  
Fondo Regionale Cinema e Audiovisivo  
(Programma FESR Lazio 2021 – 2027)

Italian distribution  
international sales

**01 DISTRIBUTION**  
**LES FILMS DU LOSANGE**

runtime **130 mn**  
year **2024**  
nationality **Italian**  
language **Italian/ Sicilian dialect**



## CAST

**TONI SERVILLO**

Catello Palumbo

**ELIO GERMANO**

Matteo

**DANIELA MARRA**

Rita Mancuso

**BARBORA BOBULOVA**

Lucia Russo

**GIUSEPPE TANTILLO**

Pino Tumino

**FAUSTO RUSSO ALESI**

Emilio Schiavon

and

**ANTONIA TRUPPO**

Stefania

with the participation of

**TOMMASO RAGNO**

Papacena

**BETTI PEDRAZZI**

Elvira

**FILIPPO LUNA**

Giovannino

**ROSARIO PALAZZOLO**

Don Gaetano

**ROBERTO DE FRANCESCO**

Senatore

**VINCENZO FERRERA**

Assessore

**MAURIZIO MARCHETTI**

Maresciallo Di Graziano

**GIANLUCA ZACCARIA**

Appuntato Battaglia

**LUCIO PATANÈ**

Sindaco Manciaracina



## SYNOPSIS

### SICILY, EARLY 2000s

After serving several years in prison for Mafia-related crimes, Catello, a long-serving politician, has lost everything. When the Italian Secret Service “persuades” him to help capture Matteo, the last major Mafia boss still on the run, whom Catello has known since he was a boy, he sees an opportunity to stage a comeback. A shrewd man of a hundred masks, a tireless illusionist who turns truth into falsehood and falsehood into truth, Catello begins a correspondence with the fugitive, as unique as it is improbable, exploiting the younger man’s emotional emptiness. A gamble which, with one of the most wanted criminals in the world, is always going to involve a degree of risk...

## HISTORICAL NOTES

In 2004, the year in which *Sicilian Letters* is set, the Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro was the third most wanted fugitive in the world according to *Forbes* magazine. He was a suspect in dozens of murders, as well as the bombings that terrorised Italy in 1992 and 1993. “*I’ve killed enough people to fill a cemetery all by myself*”, he boasted before going on the run. From then on, though, he avoided any unnecessary ostentation. Reflection, concealment, a pervasive complicity within his territory of western Sicily laid the foundations for his 30 years of invisibility.

In the autumn of 2004, a correspondence began between him and a former mayor of his hometown, who had been convinced by the Italian Secret Service to start an exchange of letters with the fugitive Mafia boss. The former mayor exploited his relationship with Matteo’s father, the Mafia boss Francesco Messina Denaro.

Thanks to the exchange of letters between the fugitive and the former mayor, the investigators were able to uncover the network of “postmen” who protected and assisted the boss while he was on the run. His capture appeared to be only a matter of time, but in 2006 the correspondence came to an end because — as often happens in Sicily — a treacherous insider involved in the investigation revealed to the press that the former mayor was collaborating with the secret services. Matteo went underground again, until January 2023 when he was arrested in a Palermo clinic where — for two years — he had been receiving treatment for intestinal cancer.

He died of this illness eight months after his arrest and took to the grave some of the murkiest secrets in recent Italian history.



## AUTHORS' NOTE

Loosely inspired by real events,  
though the film's characters are the fruit of the authors' imagination.  
Reality is a point of departure, not a destination.

We started developing *Sicilian Letters* in 2020, three years before Matteo Messina Denaro was arrested.

On 16 January 2023, the day of his arrest, we were already in pre-production. From that moment what was revealed about his life confirmed our insights from the years spent studying the man, when, for many, he was an incomprehensible phantom and others even doubted he was still alive.

In reality, Matteo Messina Denaro's letters provided a surprising and unexpected glimpse into the private life of this notorious criminal who appeared to be both an enthusiastic and cultured reader —confirmed by the number and range of books found in his final hideouts — and something of a cinephile.

*"Today I find I've read an awful lot, reading being my favourite pastime",* he wrote.

The 'pizzini' (written or typed messages by Mafiosi) he used to organise his life in hiding and run his criminal empire, transcended their practical function of communicating with his underlings, and displayed a certain enthusiasm in their use of language as well as an ability to modulate both tone and style depending on the recipients.

In fact, the screenplay of *Sicilian Letters* is freely inspired by his pizzini — in particular from the 2004 correspondence between the fugitive and the former mayor of Castelvetro — and the tragic and ridiculous, paradoxical yet very real context those messages reveal.

The protagonists are **Matteo** and the fictional **Catello Palumbo**, based on documentation from the investigations and biographical information in the public domain relating to Matteo Messina Denaro.

The themes that emerge in the correspondence are echoed in the events involving the protagonists and provide them with an ironic counterpoint. Flashbacks reveal some of the fundamental moments of Matteo's "emotional upbringing", darkening the development of the story in the present, while offering a key to try to understand a meaningless world that continues – tragically and ridiculously – to reproduce itself.

Matteo is a reluctant Hamlet in an empty and ludicrous world, a mirror which reflects a people. But all that is reflected is the great emptiness in which that people wallow, while believing they live in a beautiful sea kissed by the sun and blessed by the gods.

A black comedy that develops, tragically and ridiculously, from the different tone of the protagonists' stories: that of the exuberant Catello, an acrobat and wordsmith, who wears a mask that is comic, grotesque, sublime and tender in its cheerful amorality; and the more claustrophobic one that explores Matteo's infantile and pathological narcissism.

There is a relationship in structural, thematic, sensory and chromatic terms between the evolution of Catello's mise-en-scène and Matteo's, a transfer between their two worlds dictated, by their epistolary correspondence. A progressive reuniting of the two different tones of the mise-en-scène that establishes the rhythm of the plot in a progressive acceleration, binding the fate of the protagonists and rendering inevitable the finale in which Catello finds himself inexorably trapped in the same fatal dimension as Matteo.

***Sicilian Letters*** is the final chapter in our trilogy which began with ***Salvo*** and continued with ***Sicilian Ghost Story***. It is a thematic exploration, articulated in three films and cinematic genres, that re-elaborates the meaning and feelings generated by our experience of living in Sicily in the 1980s and 1990s, the years of the Mafia's claustrophobic domination and the anthropological and social consequences of this domination in the present.

Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza



## **FABIO GRASSADONIA and ANTONIO PIAZZA**

Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza, directors and screenwriters, made their debut in 2013 with the film *Salvo*, which triumphed at Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival, winning the Grand Prix and the Prix Révélation. The film was distributed in 20 countries and won the Silver Ribbon for Best Cinematography and the Italian Golden Globe for Best Actress.

In 2017, Grassadonia and Piazza returned to Cannes with *Sicilian Ghost Story*, which was selected as the opening film of Critics' Week. The film, previously awarded the Sundance Institute Global Filmmaking Award for its screenplay, won the David di Donatello for Best Non-Original Screenplay as well as Silver Ribbons for Best Cinematography and Best Set Design. The film was screened at the most prestigious international film festivals and distributed worldwide.

### **Filmography**

2024 SICILIAN LETTERS (Iddu)

2017 SICILIAN GHOST STORY

2013 SALVO



## TONI SERVILLO

Toni Servillo was born in 1959 near Naples into a family that was passionate about theatre. He directed various plays and operas (including *The Misanthrope*, *Tartuffe*, *La Traviata*, and *La Tosca*) around Italy in the 1980s and 1990s. Alongside his work in theatre, Servillo made his cinematic debut under the direction of Mario Martone in *Death of a Neapolitan Mathematician*, followed by roles in *Rasoi* (1993), *The Vesuvians* (1997), and *Rehearsals for War* (1998).

His collaboration with filmmaker Paolo Sorrentino, with whom he first worked in 2001 on *One Man Up*, and then in 2004 on *The Consequences of Love*, helped establish him as a film actor in Italy.

In 2008, he was acclaimed for his performances in *Gomorrah* by Matteo Garrone and *Il Divo* by Paolo Sorrentino (both in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival). For his portrayal of Italian politician Giulio Andreotti in *Il Divo*, he won the David di Donatello Award for Best Actor, as well as the European Film Award for Best Actor, establishing him as one of the best Italian actors of recent years.

Employing his impressive transformative gifts, he portrayed Silvio Berlusconi in the biopic *Loro* (2018), again directed by Sorrentino.

In 2013, his portrayal of Jep Gambardella in *The Great Beauty*, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, earned him his fourth David di Donatello Award and another European Film Award.

In 2021, he collaborated for the eighth time with Sorrentino on his autobiographical film *The Hand of God*, as well as playing the lead in Mario Martone's biographical film *The King of Laughter*, in which he portrayed the famous Neapolitan theatrical actor Eduardo Scarpetta.

More recently, in 2022, he played Pope Paul VI in Marco Bellocchio's series *Exterior Night*, which focuses on the kidnapping of the politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades.

A child of commedia dell'arte, Toni Servillo's talent for portraying archetypal characters as diverse as a worldly and world-weary writer, a Neapolitan Camorrista, a clergyman, and iconic Italian politicians like Giulio Andreotti and Silvio Berlusconi, has allowed him to personify the many transformations of power that have shaped Italy over the last few decades.



## ELIO GERMANO

Elio Germano was born in Rome in 1980.

He began acting at the age of 14 in amateur theatre groups in Rome. He then continued his career moving between television and cinema, under the direction of Giovanni Veronesi in *Che ne sarà di noi*, for which he was nominated for the David di Donatello Award for Best Supporting Actor, and then Gabriele Salvatores in *Quo Vadis, Baby?*

In 2006, he portrayed one of the gang members in Michele Placido's ensemble film *Romanzo Criminale*. The actor then appeared in Paolo Virzi's *Napoleon and Me* alongside Daniel Auteuil and Monica Bellucci.

Among his most notable roles was that of the protagonist in Daniele Luchetti's *My Brother Is an Only Child*, selected in the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival, and for which he earned the David di Donatello Award for Best Actor. Again directed by Daniele Luchetti, he starred in *Our Life*, shown in Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010; he received the Best Actor Award in Cannes and the David di Donatello for Best Actor.

In 2012, he starred in Ferzan Ozpetek's *A Magnificent Haunting*. He was also seen alongside Valeria Bruni Tedeschi in *The Landlords*, nominated for a Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. In 2013, he portrayed Giacomo Leopardi in Mario Martone's film *Leopardi*, earning him another David di Donatello Award for Best Actor.



# SICILIAN LETTERS

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