

THE MOTHER, THE BELOVED, AND THE THIRD WOMAN—SYMBOLIC EXCHANGES:  
A LITERARY MODEL IN NIEVO, TARCHETTI, AND SVEVO

by

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## **Abstract**

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The Mother, the Beloved, and the Third Woman—Symbolic Exchanges: A Literary Model in  
Nievo, Tarchetti and Svevo

Thesis directed by Professor Valerio Ferme

The process of representation, which has been diagnosed at the root of our Western drive to know, according to modern thinkers, is inseparable from the imperial speaking subject. Such realization has led to a crisis in subjectivity that has forced us to question notions that in the past have anchored our sense of legitimacy. In literature, this crisis has been articulated as the dissolutions of the paternal fiction, understood as the guarantor of our heritage. In response to this crisis, however, we have turned away from the parental metaphor and searched for new spaces in which this loss can be reaffirmed—and these spaces, which are often represented as disruptive, have been ironically gendered feminine. This research project explores a literary model whose mechanics in the text position the feminine via forms of negation or plot inconsistencies. The purpose is to lay bare a crucial preoccupation that can be traced back and interrelated to the political, social, literary, and/or religious problems that are plaguing authors who unconsciously incorporate this model in their text. In constructing and displacing gender relations, these writers not only lay bare the problems of their society, but at the same time displace them in order to propose more democratic options for the unsatisfactory state of current affairs. The point at issue is how this model operates, on both overt and covert levels, to unveil

and displace the dominant ideology and how it accomplishes this by appropriating and displacing specific gendered power relations in order to promote something new. It is therefore no coincidence that the unconscious textual mechanics found in these texts lend themselves to a psychoanalytic reading that centers on trauma and repression, as evidenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Gilles Deleuze's theories on repetition.

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## Introduction

This research project began as an attempt to redeem a heroine that was traditionally collapsed by critics with the *Femme Fatale*. Although at first sight, this figure—which from now on I will refer to as the third woman—appears to share some of the qualities of the *femme fatale*, upon closer scrutiny she fulfills a different role.<sup>1</sup> While in literature the *femme fatale* functions as a blood-sucking female figure, the seductive woman who ensnares her lovers, leading them into compromising and dangerous positions, the third woman, instead, reveals an ideal that functions as a model for the male protagonist. In the texts in which this third woman appears, she is placed vis-à-vis another archetypal female figure—the Angel of the House—a figure that in literature is often portrayed as the faithful mother and wife who unselfishly devotes herself to these duties. For authors whose views coincide with those promoted by the dominant culture, this figure embodies their ideal.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, in works in which the author's views go against those promoted by the dominant culture, the third woman is the figure who becomes invested with their ideal. In light of the fact that the aim of authors who appropriate this third heroine is to promote a more democratic space—one that enables them to mitigate differences that are an outcome of the problems their society is experiencing—it is not surprising that the third woman is invested with contradictory qualities that make her appear similar to both the *Femme Fatale*

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<sup>1</sup> The figure I am calling the third woman is a figure that Freud aligns with the Medusa. For a more in-depth discussion on each of the archetypal figures I mention, see Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> In works where the author's ideals coincide with those promoted by the dominant culture, the Angel of the House is placed vis-à-vis the *Femme Fatale*. In works in which the author is trying to undermine the dominant culture, the Angel of the House is placed vis-à-vis an archetypal figure that in literature and psychoanalytic theory is associated with the figure of the Medusa, who appears similar to the *Femme Fatale* but instead turns out to embody the author's ideal.

and the Angel of the House. As these contradictory qualities unite in her, the third woman reveals a space that enables these authors to mitigate differences and move beyond the dialectic. What this third woman reveals is that it is not necessary to privilege one position over another. By privileging both contemporaneously, instead, she points to the fact that each position is relative to a point of view and that both are motivated by the common good. In so doing, she enables readers with different views to unite under a common goal.

What I did not realize at the time is that this third woman is part of a model that recurs in literature; that this model had already been identified by Gilles Deleuze in Sacher-Masoch's work; and that the transpositions that Deleuze outlined in relation to Masoch's texts offered me the key for a model of repetition that Deleuze discussed in greater detail in *Difference and Repetition*. In reading Deleuze, I realized that Freud had also examined a similar pattern, which he had aligned with trauma.<sup>3</sup> As I began to compare the work of Freud and Deleuze to what I was seeing in the texts I was examining, I realized that these authors were appropriating a maternal space in order to displace a paternal space that was aligned with culture. These three maternal figures embodied an ideal that had not been fully actualized by these authors' society and had been repressed; these authors were incorporating these models in their texts to mitigate the differences that were plaguing their society to make this ideal operable again.<sup>4</sup>

Deleuze is unlike other poststructuralist thinkers, whose theories center on ways in which life, presence, being, or the real are constituted through systems of language. Unlike other

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<sup>3</sup> (New York: Routledge, 2006); *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: George Braziller, 1971).

<sup>4</sup> Freud discusses this model in "The Theme of the Three Caskets," trans. J. Strachey, *SE* (1913) v. 12; and again in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." Trans. J. Strachey *SE* (1920) V. 18. Critics have already addressed the way these two essays deal with the way death and repetition are connected with such values as constancy and also fragmentation. See Elizabeth Bronfen, "Death Drive," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992) 52-57. However, no one has yet explored the way these processes of repetition might be related to two very different models that recur in literature. The same can be said about Deleuze, whose work on repetition has not yet been applied to literature.



poststructuralists, Deleuze forwards a philosophy of life that is based on a concept of difference. Difference for Deleuze is what promotes a process of thought that does not offer the promise of a specific vision but enables us to experience what has not yet been given form.<sup>5</sup> In many ways, Deleuze thus shares the modernist project, which places faith in the power of art to plunge us into chaos in order to escape from commodification. However, for Deleuze, unlike modernists, chaos does not produce forms that are reducible to something that has already been lived. The return to the past that we see in the authors I analyze in the following chapters is not a return to a past that enables artists to live in a present that has already been experienced. Instead, it looks to a future filled with possibility that has not yet been actualized. Although it is without a doubt that Deleuze acknowledges that a work of art is a product of a historical or cultural set of conditions and relations that are an outcome of the period in which the artist lived, he insists that the work of art is not reducible to those relations, precisely because art reconfigures preestablished relations to promote new perspectives. If history produces man or the subject as a particular image that has been enslaved and subordinated life, the work of art has the ability to release the subject from preestablished forms by introducing a variance that had been subsumed but that was already present in these forms. The more images vary in a work of art, the more history is liberated from a supposed victory of man over reality. The power of art, as Deleuze sees it, thus does not rest in its ability to perfect a specific technique or provide resolutions to particular problems (as suggested by Deleuze's modernist counterparts), but in its ability to vary that which exists, in order to celebrate in a life of sensations that has not yet been synthesized or ordered in

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed comparison between Deleuze and other poststructuralists, see Clair Colebrook's discussion in *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

a meaningful way.<sup>6</sup> Unlike modernist artists, who appeal to history, tradition, or culture as a broader life that enables us to overcome commodification, Deleuze expands on the prior's notion of a "broader life" by placing it within a larger context of humanity: the power to think difference, in which thought is nothing other than a flow of durations whose relations move us beyond the movement in which they are located.

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical framework that enables me to explain why this model appears in literature and how it functions. Rather than beginning with Deleuze, who can be highly enigmatic and difficult to understand, I begin my discussion by outlining the similarities between a pattern evidenced by Robert Graves and Freud—first in relation to literature and then in relation to trauma. This evidences the similarities and differences between these thinkers that enable us to understand what Deleuze is trying to convey, but also enables us to place Deleuze in a tradition of thinkers who were trying to evidence the way this creative process of repetition can disrupt our lives.

Chapters 2 through 4 examine how this model functions in the work of three Italian 19th-century writers. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the historical, political, and/or social contradictions that motivated these authors to incorporate this model in their work. The 19th century is a period in Italian history that coincides with Italy's unification—a political and historical process that was motivated by the same democratic goals that promoted the French Revolution. These democratic goals inspire the work of all the writers I analyze. Chapter 2 examines how this model functions in a novel written by Ippolito Nievo, who wrote in the years that preceded Italy's unification. Nievo's intent is to promote a space in which a linguistically, economically, and culturally divided nation can unite under a common democratic goal, one that

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London: Verso, 1994) p. 202. Also see Clair Colebrook's discussion on poststructuralism and modernism as it pertains to Deleuze in *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

privileges the rights of all citizens regardless of class, gender, or political conviction. The aim of Igino Ugo Tarchetti, the author I examine in Chapter 3, an author who wrote during the early years that followed Italy's unification, is to introduce a new sentimental genre to the Italian reading public that can address realistically, even more than realism, the problems his country is experiencing in light of its economic changes; and yet, at the same time, unlike realism, still fulfill the same democratic and utopian goals evidenced by his predecessor. As the century progressed and as authors became disenchanted with the conservative leaders who were heading the Italian nation—whose conservatism they saw as a hindrance to the progress of the nation—they became more skeptical. This is the case of the nostalgic Italo Svevo, whose sentimental and democratic ideals constitute a dream that can no longer be fulfilled by a society driven by mere greed. While the same utopian, democratic, and nostalgic dreams continue to tempt the artist's imagination by way of the third woman, this ideal no longer inspires the disenchanted artist, who, like his society, is driven by a similar thirst for money and greed.

This research project marks a preliminary attempt to establish that this model exists in literature and to explain why authors use it in their works. To accomplish this, I have tried to look at the similarities among works of three Italian authors who have produced works in which this model appears. To get a better reading of this model, perhaps this research project should be expanded to include other Italian 19th-century authors who also use this model in their work. Beyond the scope of this project, it would be helpful to compare the model I outline with that which appears in the works of authors from different nationalities—who might have written during the same period or even during different periods. Although at first sight their goals appear to be similar to the ones I outline—undermine the dominant culture to promote more democratic options for the unsatisfactory state of affairs—the historical, political, social, and/or religious

contradictions that motivate these authors might differ from those I have outlined.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, a more detailed study would have to be undertaken by someone other than myself, who specializes in the author's particular era and scholarship. Although the model appears in the works of certain female writers, a closer analysis of these works would have to be undertaken to determine if this model fulfills the same function and if it is used the same way. I am thinking, in particular, of the work of Angela Carter, whose heroines all appear to be third women. What is clear is that a lot of work still lies ahead.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I see this same mode, for example, operating in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Deleuze also provides us examples from the 20th century such as the one he gives us from Proust. I see the same model function in the work of James Joyce, in some movies by Amalovarov. It also appears in authors who were writing in the 16th century.

<sup>8</sup> I am very grateful to my dissertation committee for asking about some of the issues that I have addressed. However, I am sure that there are still many others issues that I have not yet addressed.

## Chapter 1: The Model

### The Mother, the Beloved, and Death



I am the Triple Mother of Life, the mistress of all elements, the original Being, the Sovereign of Light and Darkness, the Queen of the Dead, to whom God is not subject. I rule the starry skies, the boisterous green seas, the many-colored earth with all its peoples, the dark subterranean caves. I have names innumerable. In Phrygia I am Cybele; in Phoenicia, Ashtaroth; in Egypt, Isis; in Cyprus, the Cyprian Queen; in Sicily, Proserpina; in Crete, Rhea; in Athens, Pallas and Athena; among the pious Hypoboreans, Samothea; Anu among their dusky serfs. Others name me Diana, Agdistis, Mariannaë, Dindymene, Hera, Juno, Musa, Hecate.<sup>9</sup>

Speaking is the white Goddess, the triple female deity, who functions as inspirational source for Robert Graves's poetic imagination. The imagination for Graves was structured in *a priori* masochistic experience, which he set in a frame of female archetypes: the Mother, the Maiden, and the Crone. This triad of maternal figures functioned as catalysts for a creative process of repetition that enabled the poet to come face to face with the conflicts of his society. He overcame these conflicts through an evolutionary process promoted by these female figures that did not lead to transcendence, but that provided him with the freedom to relive a transformed experience so that he could serve as an example for his society.<sup>10</sup>

Graves believed that society was organized around a binary dichotomy and that the family unit served as its structuring device. Historically, according to Graves, two kinds of love

<sup>9</sup> Richard Perceval, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess* (London: Weidenfeld, 1995) 60.

<sup>10</sup> Devinidra Kohli, "The Necessary Trance and Graves's Love-Ethics" in *Graves and The Goddess: Essays on Graves's The White Goddess*, ed. Firla and Lingop (London: Susquehanna U. P., 2003) 54.

structures informed our society. The first is aligned with a matriarchal order, whose “impartial distribution of food” functions as a model for a bond that promotes trust among its members, binding communities in a democratic exchange of free gifts.<sup>11</sup> This model was displaced by a patriarchal order that disrupted the harmony of the matriarchy through a rigidity motivated by greed.<sup>12</sup> The true poet, however, was one who was unwilling to give up this maternal ideal. True poetry rested on the ability of the poet to regain this past space—a space that was deeply connected to the “image of the mother.”<sup>13</sup> The poet could accomplish this through a mythic pattern of love.<sup>14</sup>

Robert Graves wrote *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* in 1948. Although Graves’s ideas on the triple White Goddess and lunar symbology were immediately dismissed by historians and intellectuals—who perceived Graves’s work as a contribution to modern pagan witchcraft—Graves’s cult-like notions continued to have a lasting impression on thinkers. From feminist theory to literature, Jungian psychology, film theory, and literary criticism, intellectuals continued to be fascinated by Graves’s notions of the poetic imagination.<sup>15</sup> Although the present study does not aim at redeeming Graves’s work, a closer examination of Graves’s phenomenological observations from the point of view of the theories forwarded by Gilles Deleuze reveal that the inspirational process that Graves outlined points the reader to a

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Graves, *Mammon and The Black Goddess* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Dustan Ward, “God and the Goddess, the Muse and the” Muses,” in *Graves and the Goddesses*, ed., Firla and Lindop (London: Sasquachanna, 2003) 90

<sup>15</sup> See Andrew D. Radford, “The Lost Girls: Demeter, Persephone and the Literary Imagination 1850-1930,” vol. 53 in *Studies in Comparative Literature*, pp. 127-28. Feminist readings: Jane Addison Roberts, “Shade of the Triple Hecate, Proceedings of the PML Conference 12-13 (1987-88) 46-66. Abstracted in John Lewis Walker, *Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition* p. 248, revisited by the author in *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994) *passim*, but especially pp. 142-143; or Margaret Atwood, *Negotiation the Dead: a Writer on Writing* (New York: Cambridge UP. 2002). For film see Norman Norwood Holland, *Meeting Movies* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006) or Roz Kaveney, *From Alien to Matriz* (New York: I B Tauris, 2005). For Jungian psychology see Jung, CG., and Jerényi, C. *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949) 25.

model that recurs in literature. In the literature in which it appears, it is related to the reader by way of three archetypal female figures—the same ones outlined by Graves—who serve as signposts for a process of repetition. This process promotes creative thought that does not reinforce monolithic notions; rather, it enables us to imagine, think, and create something new.

### **Freud, Difference and Repetition**

Graves was not the only thinker who was inspired by this triad of women. Years before, the same female figures captured Freud's imagination. For Freud, as for Graves, in the literature he examined, this triad of women pointed to an evolutionary process that enabled authors to reconcile the traumatic conflicts of their society. This evolutionary process was communicated to the reader through a mother-and-son relationship that delineated an evolutionary process beginning with birth and ending with death. For this reason, whenever these three figures appear in a text, as Freud evidenced, they represent the three relationships that man has with woman—the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and is fashioned after the maternal figure, and the third woman who destroys him.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the same pattern appears in myth, in fairytales, and in daydreams.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Moerae, the Parcae, or the Norns, although depicted as three sisters, these deities were known as spinners, not only because the clouds were spun, but also because they were

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<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," *SE* (1913) 12, 301.

<sup>17</sup> Freud first speaks of fantasy in relation to dreams. He finds that the diurnal reverie, like the nocturnal dream, is a scenario for the fulfillment of a wish. Like the dream, much of the material of the day dream originates in early childhood as daydreams "stand in much the same relation to the childhood memories from which they are derived." The main difference between daydreams and nocturnal dreams is that the former are subject to conscious processes, which impose a coherence lacking in dreams. In dreams, unlike in daydreams we see a mutability of the subject position that we do not see in daydreams. Dreams in fact, rely on similar transpositions as those that Freud outlines in the literature in which these three maternal figures appear, which he further elaborates in "A Child is Being Beaten." This leads Freud into suggesting that fantasy rests on a complex articulation of both the subject and its unconscious desire in a shifting field of wishes and defenses, which are constitutive of our identity.

responsible for spinning human fate, which revolved around an “irrevocable” and “inalterable” law and a “divine order” that begins with birth and ends with death.<sup>18</sup> In light of this, Freud comes to the conclusion that these figures point to an “irrevocable law that makes the same thing recur” in an “inalterable” sequence.<sup>19</sup> Something odd, however, appears in these works that breaks up this sequence.

Although the male hero is free to choose among any of the three women, he always seems to choose the third maternal figure, who represents death. When this happens, the male protagonist, at the same time, erects a parallel fantasy that turns this figure into the Goddess of Love. This is not unusual because “[u]nder normal circumstances, no one would choose death voluntarily” precisely because “it is only by a fatality that one falls victim to it.”<sup>20</sup> The fact that this figure becomes invested with this dual reality (she embodies an ideal and the real) turns this figure into the most desirable of all the three women. This leads Freud to the conclusion that this pattern in literature functions is a “reaction formation” against a reality imposed from the outside, over which man has no control, and against which he appears to be struggling because it does not coincide with his wishes.<sup>21</sup> Because this pattern reenacts wishful scenarios that cannot be fulfilled in real life, Freud thinks that it must function as a coping mechanism that enables individuals, whether in real life or in dreams—or in literature and myth—to cope with something over which in real life they have no control. As in the case of the three deities, the triple goddesses were created as a result of the discovery that warned man that he, too, was part of nature, and that he was also subject to the immutable law of death. It is against some kind of

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<sup>18</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 297.

<sup>19</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 297.

<sup>20</sup> Parenthesis mine.

<sup>21</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 289-99.



reality that these authors are struggling, and they succeed in overcoming it by erecting this fantasy in their work.<sup>22</sup>

For Freud, the fear of annihilation or death and the fear of separation represent two of the most basic primal anxieties. These fears elicit a massive gesture on the part of the individual for self-preservation, aimed at conquering and controlling something over which the subject has no control.<sup>23</sup> As in the case of trauma patients, this fear gives way to repetition compulsion very similar to the one that Freud saw in myth, literature, daydreams, and fantasy. It returns the individual to the site of trauma in order to conquer it.<sup>24</sup> As in literature, although trauma patients recognize the certainty and inevitability of their reality, they circumvent it by erecting a parallel fantasy that enables them to cope with this reality. Although Freud does not make this connection directly, we can infer that his pattern functions as a coping mechanism not only in literature but in real life scenarios, where it unconsciously enables individuals to cope with a reality that in real life they cannot change.

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<sup>22</sup> We will recall that for Freud all fantasies rest on the illusion of recovering a hallucinatory object that is bound to one of our earliest experiences of the resolution of an internal tension. Fantasies are modeled after our first hallucinatory cathecting memory of satisfaction. Our first hallucinatory cathecting memory of satisfaction is one that is closely bound to the maternal body. Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," *SE* (1900) v. 4,5.

<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," trans., J. Strachey, *S. E.* (1920) v. 18. Although Freud attempts to leave literature behind in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," he still returns to it to provide his readers with examples. In order to give an example of the process of repetition, in which what is repeated is the same, Freud gives an example from a scene in *The Gerusalemme Liberata*, in which the main hero, Tancredi, several times throughout the poem, wounds his beloved Clorinda. p. 22. I am not the first to make a connection between Freud's "Theme of the Three Caskets" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." See Elizabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body* (New York: Routledge, 1992) or look at Bronfen's discussion on the death drive in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. Elizabeth Wright (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) pp. 52-57.

<sup>24</sup> We will recall that in "Beyond The Pleasure Principle" Freud's general assumption is that psychic processes are inscribed by a principle of constancy. Spurred on by unpleasurable tension, their trajectory is lowering of this tension, so that the most fundamental aim is the avoidance of displeasure or the production of pleasure. Forced to recognize that unrestrained pleasure would be ineffectual and dangerous to the collective social group, he introduces the reality principle, which dictates the deferral of pleasure, which is perpetually inhibited. However, there are times when the individual cannot bind these dangerous external energies. The result is a compulsion to return mentally to the situation in which the trauma occurred, in an endeavor to master the external stimuli retrospectively. This compulsion to repeat unpleasurable experiences is what Freud locates in the "beyond." Interestingly, even though we do not realize it until we read Deleuze, what Freud identifies in this essay are two very different patterns of repetition. We have only focused on one.

Interestingly, the same pattern Freud notices in literature, fairytales, daydreams, myth, and trauma patients can also be observed in living cells, which are trying to change. Under normal circumstances, as Freud explains, elementary living entities have no wish to change. This is because “all organic instincts are conservative... and tend toward the restoration of an earlier state of things” so that if conditions remained the same, they would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life.<sup>25</sup> Changes, however, occur “when external influences alter it in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and make more complicated detours before reaching its aim of death.”<sup>26</sup> In these kinds of instances, germ cells “work against death and succeed in winning it by lengthening the road to death.” They accomplish this “by coalescing with another cell similar” to themselves “and yet differing from” them—in other words, by employing the same pattern of repetition that Freud saw in literature, myth, dreams, and trauma patients.<sup>27</sup>

According to Freud, what makes these cells act this way are two different instincts, which Freud aligns respectively with the death instinct and the life instinct, and then later with the “ego instincts” and the “sexual instincts.”<sup>28</sup> Although Freud admits that more research needs to be done on instincts before bringing his discussion of an end, he explains that the first instinct—the death instinct or the conservative instinct, which leads to a repetition of the same—is aligned with sadistic tendencies which, if taken to an extreme, can become “independent” and can lead to a “perversion” that dominates the individual’s entire activity,” as in the case of sadism proper.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the second pattern, the one that Freud observes in cells that are tending toward change, “the same sadistic tendencies, which are aligned with the death instinct appear to take a

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<sup>25</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 37-8.

<sup>26</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 39.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 40.

<sup>28</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 56.

<sup>29</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 56.

very different turn.” they are turned around, and as they come under the influence of a “narcissistic libido,” or the sexual instinct, it makes them appear as if they have been internalized or as if they are being turned around against the self.<sup>30</sup> As Freud points out, it is this pattern of repetition (even though he never uses the words “pattern” or “repetition”) on which the progress of humanity depends, even though Freud appears to be very skeptical about progress, since all life ultimately always leads to death.<sup>31</sup> This is the pattern that Freud locates in the beyond—the same pattern that he associates with masochistic tendencies, the same pattern he evidenced in literature, myth, dreams, and cells that are trying to change, and that in literature enables author to promote alternative options for their existent reality. This pattern is of interest to us because this is the pattern we will be analyzing in the literature we will be discussing in the next two chapters, where it appears as a reaction formation against a reality that authors cannot change. Incapable of changing their reality, these authors introduce a fantasy in their work that is related through three female figures, who engage the male hero in a process of repetition that brings about a refashioning of the self.<sup>32</sup> The male hero accomplishes this by displacing in these female figures his reality, which he compares with some kind of ideal he wishes to regain. He succeeds in recuperating this ideal by engaging in a process of repetition, where with each repetition what reemerges is the contradiction that had originally been erased in negating this prior ideal. By reintegrating difference in their thought process, the difference that had been initially erased, these male heroes, who are stand-ins for the author, are finally able to imagine, create, and think something new that enables them to promote a new ideal that can better serve society.

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<sup>30</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 54-5.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 37.

<sup>32</sup> These three female figures correspond to Kant’s concepts of understanding. For a more detailed explanation see Dorothea Olkowski, *Postmodern Philosophy and the Scientific Turn* (Bloomington: Indiana U. P. 2012) 67-68.

## **Repetition, Difference, the Mind, and our Thought Processes**

Jilles Deleuze, as Claire Colebrook argues, sees literature as a “machine that charts the ways in which bodies imagine and produce fictions, ideas or assemblages, which appear to be transcendent, but that, in reality, merely reproduce the flow of life.”<sup>33</sup> Literature mirrors real life, because just like real life, literature is a flow of becoming and interactions that create distinct beings and human subjects. For Deleuze, literature mirrors life because in literature we find the same patterns of repetition that inform our thought processes, which influence the way we perceive our reality, the way our reality informs our ethical and political views, and the kind of power relations that are an outcome of these views. For Deleuze, the way we think influences every aspect of our lives.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze identifies two different patterns of repetition that shape the way we think and the way we behave. The first pattern leads to a rigidity of thought because negation is its motor and its driving force. Unfortunately, as Deleuze argues, this type of thought pattern informs the ways we normally think and the way we normally act. It is precisely this pattern of thought that leads us into making false representations that we mistake as truths.<sup>34</sup>

As Deleuze explains, whether in philosophy or in psychoanalysis, we are inheritors of an “organic logic that has been handed down to us [from] Aristotle”<sup>35</sup> This type of logic informs most of our political, economic, scientific, linguistic, and philosophical practices. It promotes a thought process whereby all “must measure up to the rule of the equivalent, the same, or at the very least,” it “must be similar,” as Dorothea Olkowski indicated in her interesting book, *The*

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<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze (New York: Routledge, 2006) 89.

<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Dorothea Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999) 134.

*Ruin of Representation*.<sup>36</sup> This implies that all that cannot measure up to the standard “is rejected as imitation, as false, as simulacrum.”<sup>37</sup>

The “I think” for Deleuze is the most general principle of representation—the source of the elements of the unity of all of the faculties: I conceive, I judge, I imagine, I remember, and I perceive—as though these were four branches of Cogito. These form the quadripartite fetters under which only that which is identical, similar, analogous, or opposed to what is considered different. Difference following these principles of thought becomes an object of representation always in relation to a concept of identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition, or a perceived similitude. The latter form the dogmatic image of thought that crushes thought under an image which is that of the Same and the Similar in representation, but which also profoundly betrays what it means to think because it alienates the true powers of difference and it is difference that enables us to imagine, think, and create something new.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, the biggest problem with this type of thought process is that it sets up fixed standards that serve as norms, as in the case, for example, of the meaning of “minority”—Olkowski points out that we associate this term with falling below the standard of a norm or something that fails to “represent the standard in all its perfections and completeness.”<sup>39</sup> Any attributes of specific groups that do not fit into the schema of genus, species, and anything that is different must be assimilated to one of the accepted categories (as inferior copies) or denied and suppressed.<sup>40</sup> Within this type of schema of thought, the mind is given priority over body, reason over emotion, activity over passivity. It is this type of thought that engenders a logic of identity according to which group natures are defined as essential and/or substantial, and it is this type of

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<sup>36</sup> 185.

<sup>37</sup> Olkowski, 218.

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 12.

thought process that leads to stereotypical associations that give light to notions such as “rational or emotional and public or private, which can be used by one group to create essentials or substantive differences that then can be used to subjugate another group.”<sup>41</sup> The obvious problem with this kind of logic is that whatever group tends to dominate and have the most privilege and power “will represent themselves as active human subjects and represent everyone as ‘others’” not up to the level of the individual or citizen established by the dominant group.<sup>42</sup> As the “long history of colonization attests,” explains Olkowski, those who have been colonized or enslaved have found themselves judged “lacking” in relation to the dominant group, whereby “the privileged and dominating group defines its own positive worth by negatively valuing the other and projecting into them an essence or nature with attributes of evil and filth.”<sup>43</sup> One of the major problems with this type of thought process is that it consolidates power in the hands of a ruling class. Power thus becomes exercised according to a set of protocols that best serve their interests. This type of thought process has led to group-based oppression and conflict, which have been the most extreme when grounded in this kind of conception of difference as otherness and exclusion.<sup>44</sup> By limiting that which differs and by opposing its own force to it, negation’s ultimate aim is to erase difference, and in so doing, sets in motion a machine of repression that extends to all aspects of life. This repressive machine has been described psychoanalytically in terms of the affinity or coefficient between what Freud called the Pleasure Principle or what Deleuze calls desiring machines and the Reality Principle, or Deleuze’s social machines, all of

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<sup>41</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 11-12.

which function through a system of representation and whose aim is to master and repress all that differs in our process of thought.<sup>45</sup>

If repetition is possible, explains Deleuze, it is as “much opposed to moral law as it is to natural law. There are two ways to overturn the law.”<sup>46</sup> One is by “ascending towards its principles: challenging the law as secondary, derived, borrowed or ‘general;’ denouncing it as involving a second-hand principle which diverts an original force or usurps an original power,” in other words, by adopting the kind of transpositions we see in sadism proper, as seen in the work of deSade.<sup>47</sup> The other way, by contrast, is to overturn the law “by descending towards its consequences to which one submits with a too-perfect attention to detail.” The latter can be seen “in forms of masochistic behavior which mock by submission,” as seen in the work of Masoch.<sup>48</sup> Masoch’s heroes overcome the law by engaging in a process of repetition, whose aim is to redeem the sadistic tendencies promoted by the Oedipal prohibition. The latter accomplish this by engaging in a process of repetition that is very similar to the one Freud identified in the literature in “The Theme of the Three Caskets”—the same pattern he outlined in relation to trauma patients and in cells that are trying to change in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.”

What makes Sade and Masoch particularly interesting for a thinker such as Deleuze is that these two authors are not just great writers; they are also great anthropologists and clinicians of our society. They not only unveil the symptoms that plague our society, but in their hands, literature takes on the function of collective and “revolutionary enunciation.”<sup>49</sup> These authors unveil and succeed in overcoming the problems of their society by undoing previous

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<sup>45</sup> *Anti-Oedipus*, trans., R. Hurley, M. Seem and R. H. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004) 201.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5

<sup>48</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 5

<sup>49</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: An Introduction to Coldness and Cruelty*, trans, Jean Mc Neal (New York: George Braziller, 1971) 6.

concatenations on which normal processes of thought rely in order to promote new associations that, particularly in the case of Masoch, pave the way for “a new way of thinking and feeling.”<sup>50</sup> Sade and Masoch are part of a select group of writers that Deleuze calls “minor.” Unlike major authors, whose intent is to leave intact the dominant social code, minor authors wish to undo it because they find that our social order is unacceptable to them.<sup>51</sup> In their work, Sade and Masoch begin to undermine dominant codes of social relations by displacing the very family power relations that engender them, so that the family unit in their work functions as a structuring device.

As Freud evidenced, as Lacan has reiterated, and as Graves had also tried to evidence, the Oedipal prohibition serves as structuring device that submits the subject to signification. Within the Oedipal context, the paternal figure is associated with the law and with culture; while the maternal figure is associated with an enjoyment that is deferred to a beyond.<sup>52</sup> This happens because, according to Freud, during puberty, infantile sexual aims diminish. With this shift, the first phase, which occurred “during infancy” and which is associated with the figure of the mother, is “brought to a halt, where it retreats” to the unconscious “as a mnemonic memory trace.”<sup>53</sup> This is the way the ego, as Freud would have it, is able to negate contradictory images in order to produce stable and coherent images. In fact, although Eros aids the imaginative reproduction of images, without repression, production would not lead to recognition. More importantly, for Freud, repression is what prevents the activation of painful memories that leave permanent facilitations or cracks in the neural system, which are responsible for generating the repetition compulsion that Freud placed in the “beyond.” In the empirical sense, following

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<sup>50</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Mystique e Masochisme,” *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 25 (1967) 12-13.

<sup>51</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze On Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 109.

<sup>52</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 76.

<sup>53</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. J. Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 119.



Freud's model, the past turns into all that is forgotten. It turns the past, as Deleuze argues, into that which cannot be grasped a second time by memory, which searches for it in a too-far-removed past, which forgetting has effaced or has separated.<sup>54</sup> In Freud's model, the past, in fact, is relegated to a space in the mind where it is not useful anymore; since it is repressed, it has been negated. The past, thus, in Freud's model, functions "as a complex point or as an original term, which remains in place and exercises a power of attraction" which, from the point of view of the Oedipal stage, makes the pre-Oedipal appear as "an auto-erotic drive that has been lost."<sup>55</sup> This is problematic for Deleuze because by negating the past, what we erase from our thought process is the very difference that motivates all of our creative thoughts. More importantly, this process is problematic for Deleuze because it engenders power relations that fuel sadistic feelings that prevent people from reaching out to one another—because they are too busy protecting themselves.

As Freud has suggested, the resolution of the Oedipal complex is brought to an end through identification with the paternal figure. By internalizing the father's prohibition (or by negating the maternal figure), the child copes with "destructive effects upon the nervous system" by diverting instincts outward so that the child can master objects in the external world.<sup>56</sup> Although for Freud this process leads to constructive ends because it redirects energies away from sexuality so that they can be used toward more productive endeavors such as intellectual or artistic work, for Deleuze it is problematic precisely because, although identification with the paternal figure enables the child to internalize the paternal prohibition, in order to accomplish this, the child needs to redirect this aggression away from the self and project it onto something

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<sup>54</sup> *Difference and Repetition*, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Faulkner, *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 38.

<sup>56</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis," trans. J Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 418.

else it wishes to master. In so doing, the child redirects the same violence as that which was directed against itself toward another, who in turn, internalizes the same violence as that which was imposed on the child.<sup>57</sup> This process, for Deleuze, is dangerous because it sets in motion a repressive mechanism that extends to all aspects of daily life. Repressive machines are problematic because they give rise to all kinds of “crises” that they provoke, “anxieties” that they engender, as well as “the infernal operations” that they generate.<sup>58</sup>

The Sadean hero, as Deleuze explains in *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, identifies perfectly with the paternal figure and with the law imposed by him, so that “in an ironic twist” he “assumes the aggressive features of the law.” Thought, for the sadist, is for the sake of self-mastery, and expresses itself in a violent, unjust, and aggressive nature. For this reason, the Sadist is always faced with the task of destroying something outside of the self again and again, since his ultimate aim is to affirm his power over the world.<sup>59</sup> However, the sadistic hero appears to have internalized not only the law associated with the paternal figure, but also its implied guilt. All the actions of the Sadean hero are thus motivated by an overactive superego, which he cannot control. The Sadean hero appears to instinctively understand that the “man who obeys the law does not become righteous;” on the contrary, he obeys the law because he feels guilty—the stricter the obedience, the greater the guilt.<sup>60</sup> The tyrant, for Sade, speaks the language of the law precisely because he lives in the shadow of the law. It is the law that enables the tyrant to exist, who uses the law for his own purposes.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, the violence promoted by the law of the paternal figure, according to the Sadean hero, does not take the sadist hero far enough. The law promoted by the paternal figure is problematic because it ties the

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<sup>57</sup> Faulkner, pp. 45-48.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 166.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 126.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 76.

individuals to secondary nature. Secondary nature is problematic because it places the individual in an ambivalent and contradictory position in between good and evil. For the sadist, explains Deleuze, “it is irrelevant whether the law is the expression of the rule of the strongest or a product of the self-protective union of the weak. Masters and slaves, the strong and the weak, the good and the evil merely favor secondary nature.”<sup>62</sup> The aim of the sadist is to overcome secondary nature, since it enchains him to an ambivalent state that oscillates between “destruction,” “creation,” and “change,” and to the notion that there is still some good operating in the world.<sup>63</sup> By erasing the difference that emerges, the Sadist thinks that he can finally put an end to desire. The existence of a desire to regain some kind of ideal means that there is still some good in society, and this prevents the sadist from dwelling in his ideal state, one of total negation. For this reason the sadistic hero, as Deleuze explains, appears to have set himself the task of thinking the Death Instinct as pure negation in a demonstrative form, and is only able to achieve it by multiplying and condensing negation to destructive ends.<sup>64</sup>

Sade equates the maternal figure with secondary nature and the father with primary nature.<sup>65</sup> Since in the Oedipal structure the maternal figure also has an active role—precisely because she embodies the hope of regaining this ideal—the father can only take his rightful place if he dissolves the family unit. In sadism, we thus see “an active negation of the mother and the inflation of the father,” who is placed above the law.<sup>66</sup> Sade’s ultimate goal is to put an end to all procreation, since it is procreation that competes with primary nature. The sadist’s ultimate fantasy is to destroy the family by inciting the daughter to torture the mother.<sup>67</sup> The family

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<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 52.

structure that drives the sadist's fantasy is thus based on an incestuous union between the father and daughter. The mother, in Sade's novels, functions as the victim *par excellence*, while the daughter is elevated to the position of incestuous accomplice.<sup>68</sup>

The masochist's fantasy, by contrast, involves a totally different story than the one related by the sadist. It tells how superego was destroyed and by whom, and what was the sequel to its destruction.<sup>69</sup> The masochist, unlike the sadist, does not feel responsible for the crimes of society.<sup>70</sup> On the contrary, he sees himself as a Christ-like figure, who needs to redeem all the sins of the world, for which he blames the paternal figure and his society. The trauma the masochist experiences as an outcome of the repression promoted by the paternal figure is so profound that it literally disrupts his equilibrium. Unable to let go of his ideal, he engages in a process of repetition that repeatedly returns him to the site of trauma, which he tries to master retrospectively, by engaging in a process of disavowal. Disavowal, as Deleuze points out, is not a negation and not even a partial destruction. It is, rather, an operation that enables the masochist to "radically" contest the "validity of" his reality, in order to suspend "belief in," so as to neutralize "the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it."<sup>71</sup> The clearest example, explains Deleuze, is fetishism. The constant return to this object, the point of departure in which it was still possible to believe, enables the masochist "to validate" a reality that is in "dispute." Masochism is a "protest of the ideal against the real."<sup>72</sup> In order to overcome the trauma that is an outcome of this negation, the masochist erects a fantasy in which he reintegrates in his thought process the difference that had been erased in the first place. He accomplishes this by masochistically returning to the site of trauma in order to master it, and he

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<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 52.

<sup>69</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 112.

<sup>70</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 74-75.

<sup>71</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 29.

succeeds in doing this by engaging in a process of repetition that, through several transpositions, enables him to question “the validity of his existing reality” so that he can “create a more ideal reality” that he relates to his readers through his work.<sup>73</sup>

While the sadistic fantasy is structured around an alliance between the father and the daughter, the masochist’s is erected, instead, on an alliance between mother and the son. It is the maternal figure, instead of the paternal figure, who drives the masochistic fantasy on which the protagonist’s “ideal ego” is erected, since it is through the maternal figure that the masochist expresses himself.<sup>74</sup> These maternal figures are already known to us. They correspond to the three beloveds identified by Freud in “The Theme of the Three Caskets:” the first is the “primitive ... mother;” the second the Oedipal mother, the image of the beloved, who becomes linked with the sadistic father as a victim or as accomplice;” and the third is the “oral mother ... who nurtures and brings death.”<sup>75</sup>

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze provides his readers with an alternative model for the way in which the mind generates thought, one that differs from the one promoted by our representational model. This process takes place in three stages, each one of which is “constitutive of the unconscious.”<sup>76</sup> As Gilbert Ryle has pointed out, we live simultaneously in two distinct worlds: one mental, private and internal; the other physical, public, external.<sup>77</sup> However, a mysterious transaction connects the two, and it is in this mysterious transactional area that psychoanalysis locates the unconscious—“in an in-between space between perception and consciousness.”<sup>78</sup> It is in this transactional area that we find the three maternal figures we

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<sup>73</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 55-6.

<sup>75</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 49.

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 114.

<sup>77</sup> Gilbert, Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 14.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans., Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1976) 56.

have outlined. They are the in-between figures, who connect the male protagonist's unconscious perceptions so that it can emerge in his consciousness. These female figures are what enable the male protagonist to fulfill the outlines of his reality, and it is through them that he experiences a refashioning of the self that is brought about by an expansion of his thought process—so that he is able to imagine and create something, and can serve as an example for his society. This is the pattern that, according to Deleuze, “we find in the work of great novelists.”<sup>79</sup> This is the same pattern Deleuze analyzed in the work of Masoch; the same outlined by Graves; the same that Freud located in the beyond. This is the pattern we will be exploring in the literature we will be analyzing in the following chapters.

### **The Model**

For Deleuze, our minds function as a network that gathers up information in order to accumulate knowledge. Information is gathered by the mind and synthesized by two centers: one passive and unconscious, which draws on the past to expand our present perception; and the other active, which draws on our present perception, to expand the way we perceive the future. Both of these centers gather information and are interconnected in the form of the figure eight by the ego, which makes these two series resonate. As the mind gathers information, it expands and changes not only the way it perceives the past, but also the way it perceives the future from the point of view of the present reality. The mind, however, does not accumulate information instantaneously. It integrates information through partial connections that are fixed in the mind in some kind of temporary form by binding it to a virtual object.

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<sup>79</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 114.

For Deleuze, binding integrates the unbound excitation by organizing it through a series of mini contractions, which at the level of each binding, forms a passive, contemplative and larval ego that accumulates information.<sup>80</sup> Binding causes a hallucinatory or virtual object to emerge, which acts as an aim of desire for actions, since it is this object that enables the organism to fill the outlines of reality. The archetypal figures that arise in our model function as virtual figures that enable the male protagonist to fix thought in some kind of partial form. Thus, they function as signposts for a process of thought that takes place through several stages, whereby each stage engenders a partial thought that acquires a global integration and a global coherence in the third and last stage of the model, in the form of a global active synthesis. In this last stage, reality, as Deleuze explains, mobilizes drives and inspires all the activity of the ego so that it can move beyond binding in the direction of a “substantive,” which serves as a support for all the connections.<sup>81</sup>

What Deleuze calls a germinal flux represents a flow that has not yet been bound or has not been coded because it has not generated an equivalent of some type or something that can supplement the original in the sense of taking its place. In other words, it represents a flow that has not multiplied or accumulated information. An unbound flow remains unattached because it is not yet been directed to an object, and for this reason, it remains differentiated. The maternal figure in these texts represents an ideal that has not yet been bound because it has not yet generated an equivalent that can take its place. Since she embodies an ideal that has not yet been fixed in some kind of stable form, in the mind of the protagonist, she emerges as embodying a prenatal space that he fantasizes as a union with the all, a democratic utopian space that he has

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<sup>80</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 97. We will recall that Freud refers to an object in the sense of a love object, which could also designate a parental figure. The object is modeled in relation to affection on the part of the child towards the caretaker, who helps the child in its state of helplessness and satisfies its need (La planche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 33).

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 98.

had to repress and that he wishes to regain. Since this ideal has not yet been fixed, the maternal figure can be endlessly displaced with each repetition in order to engender something new. The fact that this ideal can be endlessly displaced with each repetition and that this ideal becomes invested in the maternal figure turns the mother into a “symbolic image” capable of drawing “together the totality of time.” The maternal figure functions as a past that fuels the male hero’s imagination, but she also reemerges in the present as the desire to regain this ideal—and if this were not enough, she also emerges in the future because she represents the possibility of reintegrating this ideal in the present reality so that it can function again.<sup>82</sup>

The maternal figure, in these texts, for this reason, embodies an intangible ideal that has been repressed because it has not been successfully implemented by society. As in Ippolito Nievo (see Chapter 2), whose work precedes Italy’s unification, this ideal represents the possibility of uniting a divided Italy under one common goal. It is an ideal that had been promoted as an outcome of the French revolution, but which had not been successfully actualized in light of Italy’s new shifting economic and political reality. With our second author (see Chapter 3), this ideal becomes displaced in a new sentimental genre, one that can better fulfill this author’s democratic dream, while at the same time, also represents Italy’s present reality better than realism, which functioned as the dominant literary mode of production in Italy during this time. In the case of our third author, Italo Svevo (see Chapter 4), even though the male hero wishes to regain this ideal, the process of repetition promoted by the model has no redeeming qualities, since the male hero appears to be operating under a representational model of thought that prevents him from imagining or thinking anything new. In a society driven by egotistical goals, Nievo mourns the loss of this past sentimental ideal which had fueled the artist’s imagination but which, in the present reality, cannot function any more.

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<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 89.



Whenever we encounter this pattern in literature, the male hero repeats “because he has been separated from an essential” and “infinite knowledge.” This knowledge is in him; it is immersed in him and acts in him but “acts as something hidden, like a blocked representation, which cannot be represented without enacting it out.”<sup>83</sup> In some texts in which this model appears, the male hero experiences this in the form of a formidable act that is both forbidden and predicted by the superego, as in the case of Oedipus. Although in most of these texts the male protagonist (who is a stand-in for the author) has had to give up this ideal because it is no longer upheld by his society, he cannot quite give it up altogether. It thus reemerges during dream-like states, as a specter from the dead, informing and fueling his imagination. In the texts in which we find this model, the spectral mother, for this reason, functions as an absent sign, whose absence metaphorically points to what has not yet been represented as a real aspect of human experience, and which becomes invested in her.

At the beginning of the texts in which this model appears, the maternal figure is usually absent. She is not there: she is either already dead or is about to die. At times, she is not in the text even though she should be there and the reader is not given an explanation as to why she is not there. The maternal figure is an absent sign that functions as a reminder of something that has been blocked from perception. She acts as a reminder of some kind of “tremendous event” that has deeply affected the protagonist’s life. In her association with death, her absence not only functions as a reminder of the absence of an ideal that has been repressed, but at the same time, she also points to the hero’s desire for a resting place which will be attained when he finally reconnects with this lost ideal.

In the works we will be analyzing, this ideal becomes temporarily fixed in the three female archetypal figures, who resemble the mother and yet differ from her because, with each

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<sup>83</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 15.

repetition, they gain an added element that this original ideal did not possess in the repetition before. As all the difference that emerges from the various stages of the model unites in the third, the unrealized ideal that this maternal figure embodies takes a form of its own. What is united in the last part of the model is the difference of the first repetition and that of the second which, in uniting, reconstructs this ideal so that it can be resuscitated again. In the literary works in which this model appears, death, for this reason, appears twice: first at the beginning of the text in the form of the dead maternal figure and again at the end as this ideal is resuscitated and displaced once again in the third woman. In the texts we will be examining, this phenomenon causes a disturbance in time that is often related in terms of mechanical gaps, as in the form of plot inconsistencies. For example, in Svevo's novel (see Chapter 4), the third woman is a woman about whom the male protagonist had written even before he met her in the text. In Nievo's novel (see Chapter 2), the third woman appears before the male hero is born and yet, as if by sleight of hand, she is younger than he. In Tarchetti's novel (see Chapter 3), the maternal figure dies at the protagonist's birth, yet reemerges at the end of the novel to nurse him back to life again. In most of these works, the maternal figure was dead prior to the male protagonist's birth, and yet the male protagonist appears to remember her. The reader, however, never really comes to know what this maternal figure was really like. We only come to know her retrospectively through the biased opinions of the other male characters, who often misjudge her. Death, in this model, does not function as a negative principle. As it becomes associated with the maternal figure, it gives way to a process that does not lead to "negation" or to the "limitation of opposition" nor to "the negative of limitation."<sup>84</sup> Death is not the "limitation imposed by matter upon mortal life," which would merely lead to entropy, as in the sadistic model. In this model, death, instead, represents "the last form of the problematic, the source of problems and

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<sup>84</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 112.

questions,” and “the sign of their persistence.”<sup>85</sup> As in the works that Freud analyzed, this process of repetition functions as a reaction formation against a reality that is imposed from the outside, which these authors are unwilling to accept. Unable to really change their reality, these authors circumvent it by erecting a fantasy that enables them to explore different options. As Freud suggested, this is the way man makes use of his imagination in order to gain something that in real life has been denied.

In order to offer us an example for the way this model functions in literature, Deleuze provides us an example from Proust’s novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. The construction of the self in this novel takes place in between a fragment of the pure past, in its double irreducibility to the present that has been (perception) and to the present present, in which it reappears to reconstitute (involuntary memory). In this novel, a former present (as in the Combray as it was lived) and a present present succeed each other; but at the same time they also coexist within each other. What makes these different time frames resonate is the fact that the mother functions as the middle term of the protagonist’s “intersubjectivity:” she represents the male protagonist’s alter-ego.<sup>86</sup> The maternal figure in these texts functions as the dark precursor, an unbound flux, object=x, the virtual object who represents difference in itself, a difference that connects the two repetitions or heterogeneous series, as Deleuze calls them, so that they can resonate in the hero’s imagination.<sup>87</sup> By projecting himself the maternal figure, these two realities begin to unfold in terms of Combray, since it is through her and all the maternal figures who resemble her that the male hero begins to define himself by way his own difference—that qualitative difference which, according to Proust, does not exist on the surface of the Earth but can be found in the depth.

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<sup>85</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 112.

<sup>86</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 105-6.

<sup>87</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 120.

The past, explains Deleuze, becomes active when something fails to resemble a past element. The more we delay, the more we think. Human consciousness is produced in the delay or in an interval between being affected by an image and activity. As Deleuze evidences, only when the mind encounters contradictory sensations does it reflect. As Olkowski describes it, the clash with an unrecognizable sign, “which is perceived as a coexistence of more or less, precisely because it is an unlimited qualitative becoming that does not yet have a sign, causes a disjunction between perception and comprehension.”<sup>88</sup> Contemplations motivate questions such as, “what difference might there be?”<sup>89</sup> The passive “to think,” compelled by such questions, is forced to pose a problem in order to make sense out of what is utter nonsense. It is not surprising that when the male hero encounters the first woman in these texts, who resembles the mother, he is sometimes surprised as if he has mistakenly stumbled onto something that by right should not be there. The contradictory feelings evoked by the first woman are motivated by the fact that the male protagonist feels as if he has seen her or felt her before but cannot quite pinpoint where. The displacement that the male hero feels from this encounter does not leave him indifferent, and is grasped in a range of affective contradictory tones—wonder, love, hatred, pleasure, and suffering—all of which prompt the main hero to think, express ideas, and create memories to temporarily resolve problems. This encounter, as Deleuze evidences, is not figured as something already mediated. Instead, it is an encounter that is capable of carrying the faculties to their respective limits.<sup>90</sup>

In light of the kind of repressive state in which these authors appear to be functioning at the beginning of these novels, we are not surprised to find that the first woman, who serves as an alter ego for the male protagonist, reflects the hero’s repressive state. When the reader meets the

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<sup>88</sup> *The Universal* (New York: Columbia U. P., 2007) 97.

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 78

<sup>90</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 144.

first woman, she appears as a conservative figure who has masochistically given up all her freedom on behalf of her duties to her loved ones and to society as a whole.<sup>91</sup> The archetypal nature of the first maternal figure has already been noted by theorists who have not failed to align this figure with the domestic “angel of the house;” it is a saintly, self-sacrificing, frail vessel that tends to find its prototype in the figure of the Virgin Mary. In imitating the Virgin Mary and Christian martyrs, she is the *Mater Dolorosa* lamenting over the dead body of Christ that allegorizes the nourishing and healing mother, the redemption from the flesh, sin, and guilt, as Elizabeth Bronfen explains.<sup>92</sup> Robert Graves equates the first woman with the goddess Vesta, who represents love in its old-fashioned form of affection and companionship. In Greek myth, she was often represented as a veiled virgin holding the flowered branch of the tree of chastity. This figure was associated with the hearth and the home, where she was in charge of the cooking of bread and preparing the family meal. With Christianity, she was replaced by the figure of the Virgin Mary, who was represented as embodying characteristics that made her appear “beautiful, tender, true, patient, practical, and dependable.” As Graves saw it, even though countless “Catholic poets have been inspired by her, since her sudden rise during the Crusades,” this figure cannot serve as a true inspirational source because she inflicts the same respect for legality promoted by the patriarchal structure, which enslaves women by tying them to the idea that womanhood remains incomplete without a child.<sup>93</sup> It is this type of mentality that, according to Graves, is responsible for pushing women into marriage, where they have settled for a simple and affectionate husband who does not understand them, but who, with the excuse of protecting them—the weaker sex—has enslaved them to the idea that women should serve “their fathers or

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<sup>91</sup> She reflects the fact that what the protagonist has repressed is precisely the pleasure principle, which reemerges to haunt his imagination.

<sup>92</sup> *Over Her Dead Body*, 67.

<sup>93</sup> Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 106.

husband's domestic needs" and, in consequence of that, "were deemed as spiritually and mentally inferior to" them.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, as Graves explains, this kind of mentality is not kinder to men because it also enslaves them to the laws that they themselves promulgate; it also "shackles" them "to a well-paid job," a "house," a "garden, a swimming pool, ... children, and to the "hope of advancement" that eventually leads to "a pension." Any sign of "noncompliance" is scored against them both.<sup>95</sup>

In the texts we examine, the same sense of helplessness is reflected in the male protagonist who, at the beginning of these texts, also feels enslaved by the conservative values promoted by his society—values which bind him to a repressive cycle of negativity that, in these texts, has no redeeming qualities because it also renders him incapable of overcoming this state. Incapable of overcoming his sense of helplessness, the main hero remains in an ambivalent position in relation to the historical, political, and social events that are plaguing his society, which he is also incapable of overcoming.

However, while at first sight the maternal figure and the first woman appear to be similar (in other words, the ideal coincides with the real), as the hero begins to compare them, he realizes that they are not. The contradiction that emerges, as the male protagonist compares his ideal to the reality evidenced by the first woman, perplexes the male hero and forces him to pose a problem, which is translated as thought. As Deleuze explains, "the transcendental memory forces thought to grasp that which can only be thought: not by the intelligible but the unintelligible." Rather "than all the faculties converging and contributing to one common project of recognizing the object, divergent series emerge as each faculty gains a presence of its own."<sup>96</sup> What the male protagonist realizes is that, while at first sight, the first woman appeared as a

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<sup>94</sup> Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 104-9.

<sup>95</sup> Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 107.

<sup>96</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 141.

figure who had internalized all the sins of the world, which she carried as a cross on her shoulder since it is the sins of the world that she wishes to redeem, her attempts are not redemptive at all. The first woman, in fact, wants to redeem all the sins of the world by denying herself and others all enjoyment and gratification, which she perceives as the main problem of her society. The first woman believes that the root of the problem of her society is that individuals are unwilling to assume responsibility for their actions because they have been led astray by unbridled and irrational passions, which they are no longer capable of controlling. The repression this sacrificial figure imposes upon herself is not redemptive because it binds her to a vicious cycle of negativity that is fueled by her resentment. In fact, although the first woman appears to have fully internalized the prohibitions that have been prescribed to her by society, she also ambivalently feels enslaved by them. Incapable of rebelling, she sadistically avenges herself by inflicting upon others, who she wishes to subjugate, the same wounds as those that have been inflicted upon herself. It is precisely the turning around of the sadistic aims away from the self and towards others that prevents the first woman from fulfilling the male hero's goals, which are, instead, to overcome the egotistical tendencies promoted by society so that the individual is able to reach out to others in spite of their difference, in order to fulfill these authors' democratic dream.

While at first the first woman appeared very similar to his ideal, the male protagonist realizes that she really is the representative of the good in a world that has more or less forsaken it.<sup>97</sup> At this point in the model, the disjunction that arises between the real and the ideal engenders a contradiction that reemerges in the second stage of the model that, from the point of view of recognition, or from the point of view of an empirical exercise, at first could not be

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<sup>97</sup> Deleuze, *Masochism*, 71.

understood.<sup>98</sup> What reemerges in the second stage of the model are the sadistic traits that were barely visible in the first woman but come to the forefront as they become displaced in the second woman. When we encounter the second woman in the text, she consequently exhibits qualities that contradict those of the first. If the first woman is faithful and submissive, the second is rebellious and irreverent. If the first woman embodies a sacrificial nature, the second is self-serving and self-centered. With the second woman, the sadistic tendencies, which were barely discernible in the first phase, come to the surface as the second woman tries to remove all that she hated about herself in the first woman: contradiction. The second woman has been traditionally portrayed in literature as the diabolic outcast, the destructive and sexually vain fatal demon woman, whose prototype is Eve or what has often been referred to as “La Femme Fatale.” In myth she is Ishtar who, as Graves outlined, was associated with sexuality and war, known for her numerous lovers, most of whom had dreadful fates. Derived from Eve, as Bronfen would have it, she functions as “allegory” of “evil, sin, deception, destruction, and negation: polluted and fatal to the masculine touch, an agent and carrier of death.”<sup>99</sup>

The qualities of the second woman are mirrored in the male protagonist who, at the second stage of his evolutionary process, is driven by the same sense of superiority and arrogance we find in the second woman. In Nievo’s novel (see Chapter 2), for example, during this second phase the male hero begins to identify with Napoleon, whose real goals were masked by illusory notions of equality and sacrifice, beneath which lurked imperialistic goals. The second synthesis is thus perceived by the male hero—an infinite becoming-equal appropriate to the ego ideal.<sup>100</sup> It represents the present of metamorphosis, which rests in a becoming-equal

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<sup>98</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139-140.

<sup>99</sup> *Over Her Dead Body*, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 110.



event so that the act can possess some kind of coherence.<sup>101</sup> At this stage, explains Deleuze, the hero becomes capable of performing an action because he has become equal to the image of that action. To become similar or equal is always to become similar or equal to something that is supposed to be identical in itself or supposed to enjoy the privilege of an “originary” identity. However, it appears that the image of the action to which one becomes similar or equal to stands here only for the identity of the concept, which still ties the male hero to a model of representation that prevents him from overcoming his repressive state.<sup>102</sup>

As the male protagonist again begins to compare his ideal with the one promoted by the second woman, what reemerges in the third and last stage in the form of the third woman are nothing other than the first two women, who unite in the third. What reemerges in the last stage is a contradiction the male hero had tried to erase in the first stage and in the second stage of his evolutionary process, which now comes to the forefront. It is not surprising in light of what we have said that when we encounter the third woman, she embodies contradictory qualities that make her appear as both caring and selfish, as both the Madonna and Eve, as both good and evil, and as both masculine and feminine. This figure has been traditionally associated with the Medusa who, for Freud, stood as a metaphorical figure that embodied the terror of castration, as in the case of something that is missing and yet not.<sup>103</sup> For both Robert Graves and Freud, she is an in-between figure, who in myth is represented by the figure of Proserpina, the goddess of springtime, who was not only the queen of the upper world but also of the underworld. In light of the position she plays in the text, Graves describes her as embodying both good and evil, love

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<sup>101</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 89.

<sup>102</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 255-6.

<sup>103</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Medusa’s Head,” *SE* 18, 273-4.

and hate, and truth and falsehood, which she experiences through her two prior sisters, whom she resembles.<sup>104</sup>

Her contradictory nature in some texts is displayed in the form of a contradictory political, religious, or ethical position, which she embraces simultaneously.<sup>105</sup> In others it is instead externalized and projected in her physical characteristics. Sometimes, the third woman possesses both feminine and masculine qualities. In others yet, her contradictory nature is related to the reader through a liminal position that associates her with death: the third woman is sometimes anorexic, in a coma, in a near-death state, or silent (she is silent just like the maternal figure that has been silenced at the beginning of the text).<sup>106</sup> As Bronfen explains, if this Medusa-like figure is enigmatic or inaccessible owing to her own self-sufficiency and her indifference, she falls into the narcissistic type and turns into the cold oral mother described by Deleuze in *Coldness and Cruelty*. If this figure instead acknowledges that her silence is the cause of her illness and is willing to collaborate with the protagonist in a process where disclosure means cure, she belongs to the hysteric type, such as in the case of *Fosca* in Igino Tarchetti's novel (see Chapter 3).<sup>107</sup> In *Fosca*, the reader hears about the third woman, knows about her hysterical attacks through the screams that are described in the text and understands that she is a real character, since a place is set nightly for her at the dinner table and which she leaves empty. However, the reader does not come to know her at the beginning of the novel. The reader comes to know the third woman through her own absence. Her absence and silence in this novel are metaphorical for the position she occupies in the text: Fosca has literally been silenced by a society that misinterprets and misjudges her actions. Fosca has withdrawn because she cannot

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<sup>104</sup> Graves, *Mammon and The Black Goddess*, 164.

<sup>105</sup> Think of Clorinda in Torquato Tasso's epic poem.

<sup>106</sup> Think of Cordelia in *King Lear* or think of Miss Havisham, in *Great Expectations*. Another good example, perhaps, is Alicia in Pedro Amaldivar's movie, *Talk to Her*.

<sup>107</sup> Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 266.

function in a society driven by egotistical goals that prevent people from reaching others who differ from them. In these novels, just as with the maternal phantom, the reader comes to know the third woman through the opinions of the other male characters who have misjudged her actions. In some of the other literary texts, the reader comes to know the qualities of the third woman through an omniscient narrator who unveils the egotistical motives of the other characters including the male hero, who repeatedly misjudges the third woman, as in Svevo's novel. It is precisely this heroine's silence that, for Elizabeth Bronfen, creates an excess of mystery. In search of truth, the male hero tries to decipher this mystery. When the third woman is finally given narrative voice in the text, she reveals a totally different perspective than the one that had been put forth by the other male characters. However, it is not as if her opinion necessarily emerges as truth in comparison to that of others. Instead, by introducing her point of view while upholding that of the other, she points to the fact that truth is never stable, since truth is relative to a point of view. The third woman, in fact, reveals a truth that is totally different than the one perceived before.

Faced with these contradictory perspectives, the male hero also begins to reevaluate his own point of view. As the reality promoted by the other characters comes in contact with that of the third woman, two divergent stories unfold simultaneously, preventing the male protagonist from privileging one over the other. It is a case in which everything is equal and everything is real. What the male hero realizes at this point in the text is that regardless of the point of view and regardless of the fact that the third woman's point of view differs from his, what motivates the third woman is an internal goodness that she has had to repress. That goodness finally comes to the surface and reconnects the male protagonist to his original ideal that is reborn through her. By promoting a democratic ideal that fuels all of her actions, the third woman promotes a

process of rebellion aimed at a society driven by selfish goals, whose sins, unlike the first two archetypal figures, she is capable of redeeming. It is at this point that the male hero realizes that, just like him, the third woman is a victim of a society that has misunderstood her. By reaching out to the third woman and by forging a connection with her—one that is forged over a common experience of pain (the loss of an ideal) in spite of their differences—the male hero is finally able to reconnect with his own internal goodness which, just like her, he also has repressed and now finally resurfaces. Energized by her sense of rebellion, which the third woman gains by the fact that she is able to verbalize her concerns about her society and promote different options in the text, the male hero is inspired to engage in his own process of rebellion. Just like the third woman, he can achieve rebellion by writing his own text to provide his readers with different options for the present crisis. As Graves observed, although in the eyes of the poet's friends, the third woman is a figure who is viewed as "a vixen, a bitch, a bird of prey" because she disrupts the social order. The true poet recognizes her true aim, and he is willing to accept from this figure what "he would refuse from other women" although he "suffers when she uses her light of glory with which he invests her to shine in an anti-poetic and even criminal world."<sup>108</sup> The ambivalence the third woman evokes is precisely what inspires poetic thought, according to Graves. The third woman functions as the muse because she introduces an uncertainty in the text that promotes an emotional struggle, which tears the artist apart.<sup>109</sup> Even though many poets have broken under the strain of indecision, it is the struggle she promotes that makes them stronger.<sup>110</sup>

In this last stage of the model, what the male hero finally becomes equal to is "the unequal" in himself.<sup>111</sup> This realization promotes a cosmic expansion similar to a chain reaction

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<sup>108</sup> Graves, *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, 155.

<sup>109</sup> Graves, *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, 155.

<sup>110</sup> Graves, *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, 155-6.

<sup>111</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 90.

that awakens the male protagonist out of this narcissistic fantasy, so he can experience a metaphysical rebirth that brings about a refashioning of the self. While in the first stage the male hero's repressive state prevented him from reacting to an event, and while in the second, his reactive forces enabled him to rise to the event but still prevented him from overcoming the repression of the first, as the male hero enters the third stage he finally experiences a doubling of the self. This experience of multiplicity places him in touch with the infinite and endlessness so that he can reconnect with a universal goodness that was always in him and enables him to connect and reach out to others. What reemerges in this last stage of the model is nothing other than the maternal figure herself. It is the maternal figure, as Deleuze reminds us, who "expresses possible worlds unknown to us." Although manifested "in a single loved being," her love can be repeated in all "successive loves and in each love taken in isolation."<sup>112</sup> This is because each single love and each successive love contributes to a difference that was included in a preceding love, a love that began with a primordial image, the mother herself.<sup>113</sup> The poet unwilling to give up an ideal that becomes deeply connected to the maternal figure, an ideal that binds his community in a democratic exchange, searches for it in the past and revokes through the work of art.<sup>114</sup> To fall in love with a work of art is to become sensitive to these signs, to undergo an apprenticeship in them, and to undergo an apprenticeship in art.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 88.

<sup>114</sup> Graves, *The Black Goddess*, 108.

<sup>115</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 7.

## Chapter 2: Beyond Good and Evil: Pisana and the Birth of the Italian Nation



Oh tu sei ancora con me, tu sarai sempre con me; perché la tua morte ebbe affatto la sembianza d'un sublime ridestarsi a vita più alta e serena. Sperammo ed amammo insieme, insieme dovremo trovarci là dove si raccolgono gli amori dell'umanità passata e le speranze della futura. Italy as Woman, "The Meditation," Francesco Hayez, 1851.<sup>116</sup>

As John Davis has explained, Italy's unification, like that of other European countries, was a process linked to broader forces that were shifting European politics. These forces were themselves tied to the power relations at the epicenters of new-rising industrial economies that had transformed the political, economic, and cultural institutions of the ancient régime. However, the process under which Italy was unified was unlike that of other nations because it was not conceived in political-territorial terms. It was instead, "the result of a national revolution that mobilized the energies of all Italians irrespective of their political persuasions, around the goals of independence and unity"—a unity that was forged around the same democratic goals that spearheaded the French revolution.<sup>117</sup> The problem arose when the time came to decide what

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<sup>116</sup> Ippolito Nievo, *Confession of an Italian*, ed. Marcella Gorra (Milano: Arnaldo Mondadori Editore, 1981). All citations are from this text. "Oh you are still with me, will always be with me, because your death had the effect of a sublime reawakening to a heigher and more sublime life. We hoped and loved together, together we will find ourselves there where the love of a humanity that has passed and the hope of those of the future can be gathered." Translations mine.

<sup>117</sup> John Davis, *The Short Oxford History of Italy: Italy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford U. P., 2000) 2.

shape this democratic and united Italy should take. What at first appeared as a united front soon became polarized as Italian patriots could not come to any consensus as to the shape that this united Italy should take.

Conservative patriots conceptualized reform in the shape of a form of government that would allow the country to retain its monarchical constituency in order to eliminate foreign dominion. The more progressive and liberal faction, instead, perceived reform as the liberation from prior political orders. It believed in creating new institutions that exercised continuous and conscious control over government activity so as to ensure equal opportunity for all citizens. Its aim was to eliminate the concentration of wealth, which remained in the hands of a select few, in order to close the social gap. This more liberal faction, for this reason, advanced various reforms that included a welfare system and the redistribution of church lands. It believed that the social changes brought on by these reforms could generate enthusiasm among the masses and motivate them to unite to participate in the creation of the country. The first group consisted of Catholics and Christians; the second, of positivists, scientists, and freethinkers.<sup>118</sup> In the end, these democratic ideals fell into the hands of a revolutionary group. The red flag, the symbol of the proletariat and the social republic, frightened and disgusted the bourgeoisie, pushing both liberals and conservatives to the point of reaction and dictatorship. While Italy's nationalistic movement was first inspired by the same democratic ideals that gave way to the French Revolution, the political crisis that was brought on when the conservative faction finally came into power came close to overwhelming the very liberal democratic forces that had originally spearheaded Italy's unification.

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<sup>118</sup> Davis, 104.

## Romanticism, Sentimentalism, and the Birth of a Nation

Romanticism was a European cultural and aesthetic current that spread to Italy in the 1820s after *The Journal of the Biblioteca Italiana* published Madame de Staël's article, "Sulla maniera e l'unità della traduzione" (On the Manner and Utility of Translation, 1816).

Commenting on the fact that Italy had lost its rightful place at the center of European culture and realizing that, unlike other European nations, which "looked to glory in war and politics," Italy "acquired prestige from culture and the arts," de Staël urged Italians to translate the sentimental works of German and English authors.<sup>119</sup> Sentimentalism, according to de Staël, could emancipate Italians from their "obedience to traditionalism," which was reflected in their love for the classics.<sup>120</sup>

Negative stereotypes of Italians had been circulating in Europe since the Middle Ages. These stereotypes typically represented Italians as a "morally corrupted" people, repressed by Catholic superstitions. In the late 1700s, these stereotypes had been further promulgated by Napoleon's agents, who had viewed Italians as an untrustworthy race that had acquired the character and habits of women—the subjected sex—while at the same time harboring in their hearts strong male passions. In the mid 1800s the vast literature of the *Grand Tour* contributed its own set of unflattering images which, notwithstanding the pleasures that travelers often found in some of the characteristics of the Italian people, often described the inhabitants of the peninsula as indolent, morally and sexually lax, and exhibiting a "laziness and effeminacy" that was typical of people living in southern climates.<sup>121</sup> Romanticism added yet another layer to this

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<sup>119</sup> *Biblioteca Italiana* January, 1816.

<sup>120</sup> Adrian Lyttelton, "Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento," in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of Identity Around the Risorgimento*, ed., Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (New York: Berg, 2001) 42.

<sup>121</sup> Silvana Patriarca, "Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes of Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism," *The American Historical Review*, Vol., 110, Number 2 (2005) 9.



complex edifice. As de Staël's most influential text of early romanticism, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), evidences, as the plight of Italy becomes personified in the tragic destiny of the half-Italian Corinne, the character herself admits in asserting to her compatriots that "Italians" are not only "indolent as Orientals in their daily lives," but "life" for them "is nothing more than a dream-filled sleep in a beautiful sky."<sup>122</sup> De Staël's message sparked a heated debate on the part of Italian intellectuals, who rushed to defend Italy's cultural uniqueness.<sup>123</sup>

In the search for a literary point of reference that could emancipate Italy from its obedience to traditionalism, new forms of literary expression took on a crucial role. Conservative patriots sided with Classicism, rejecting sentimentalism as a German innovation that would promote Austrian hegemony. The latter insisted that Latin classicism, with its roots in ancient Rome, needed to serve as a source of the imaginary for the nation.<sup>124</sup> More progressive Italian patriots sided with sentimentalism and dismissed the perspective of the eternal Italy that tied it to Roman classical roots because it gave Classicism a mask of decay. Since cultural independence could no more be secured by adherence to ancient forms than political independence could be achieved by loyalty to ancient institutions, sentimentalism served as a perfect metaphor for revolt against established authority.<sup>125</sup>

### **Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian Nation, and the Birth of Democracy**

Inspired by de Staël's message, the literary journal *L'Indicatore Genovese* (The Genovese Indicator, 1928), which addressed the most avant-garde literary issues of its time,

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<sup>122</sup> Madame de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans Syliva Raphael (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1998) 97.

<sup>123</sup> Glenda Sluga, "Passion, Patriotism and Nationalism and Germain de Staël, *Nations and Nationalism* 15(2) [March 2009]: 303.

<sup>124</sup> Lyttelton, 33.

<sup>125</sup> Lyttelton, 32. The connection between romanticism or sentimentalism, which is a subgenre of romanticism and democracy, will become clearer as we engage in a more in-depth discussion on sentimentalism in Chapter 3.

argued against classicism on the premises that the classicists had kept Italy culturally isolated while the rest of Europe had embarked on an exciting intellectual journey. Giuseppe Mazzini, who was the editor of the journal at the time, firmly believed that national styles of literary expression were in no way threatened by international dialogue and that the Classicists were doing a disservice to the development of Italian culture by creating artificial barriers of communication.<sup>126</sup>

For Mazzini, the lack of industriousness and lack of impotence that had rendered Italians lazy in the eyes of foreigners were not traits that were inherent to the Italian people. On the contrary, these had been instilled by many years of foreign oppression, which was at the basis of all of the problems that Italy was experiencing. Foreign rule had distorted the natural pattern of institutional relationships in Italy, leading to the emergence of local elites, whose position of authority depended upon foreign political patronage. It had, thus, pitted city-states and individuals against each other, preventing Italians from producing independent and vital political movements capable of mobilizing the whole population.<sup>127</sup> The Italians' lack of industriousness was an outcome of the lack of faith that was exhibited toward any government's emancipatory measure. This lack of faith had tied Italians to municipalism and to a "piccola patria" (the city or village of birth) that had prevented them from reaching out to others who differed from them.<sup>128</sup> In order to awaken Italians out of their lethargy, Mazzini urged citizens to take destiny in their own hands, rather than entrusting it the privileged class or foreign powers.

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<sup>126</sup> Roland Sarti, *Mazzini: A Life for the Religion of Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1997), 35. L'Indicatore was suppressed by authorities in December 1828, just a few months after its onset, for promoting radical ideas that were considered unpatriotic.

<sup>127</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, "D'alcune cause che impediscono finore lo sviluppo della libertà in Italia," Articolo 2, in *Interessi e principii*, Michele Rago, ed. (Milano: E. Sormani, 1944). Originally published in *La Giovine Italia*.

<sup>128</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1994) 18-19.

Unlike authoritarian reactionaries of his time, Mazzini saw government as an entity that must not only be for the people but must also be created by the people who were motivated by a propensity for the spontaneous good and had the capability to instinctively choose good over evil. Up until his death, Mazzini continued to see the Italian Risorgimento as an ongoing evolutionary process that was tied to the dissolution of the Hapsburg and Turkish Empires, which had led to the national reconstruction of the people of Poland and Greece.<sup>129</sup> Mazzini saw the Italian campaign toward unification as another step in the liberation of European nations, whose development had also been stilted by dynastic and imperial rivalries. The lesson was clear for Italy: “[t]he specific history of nations” was “ending,” European history” was beginning, and Italy could not allow herself to be isolated.<sup>130</sup> Italy could regain its own rightful place in the history of the European nations by serving as an inspirational source for other emerging nations—by leading the way to a positive future that would enable all nations to forge a union in which countries are prevented from asserting claims against each other.<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, as I have indicated, as the century progressed, with the rise of a more radical faction, Mazzini’s democratic goals were undermined by an antimonarchical opposition that gained a more overtly revolutionary tone.<sup>132</sup>

Oddly enough, to implement the desired economic, social, and ethical transformation of the new Italian civil society, conservatives also appropriated a similar rhetoric. In the hands of the latter, the same notions of goodness were used to impose moral virtues that had to be instilled

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<sup>129</sup> The Ottoman wars in Europe were a series of military conflicts relating to the Ottoman Empire’s attempt to expand its territorial holdings in Europe. These began as early as the 13<sup>th</sup>-century and continued up to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century. Internal rebellion such as, the Second Serbian Uprising (1815-1817) and the Greek War of Independence (1831-1832), coupled with continuous wars from Russia and Poland, atrophied the empire till it eventually collapsed at the end of WWI.

<sup>130</sup> Brackets mine.

<sup>131</sup> Haddock, 65.

<sup>132</sup> As the century progressed, Mazzini’s democratic notions became appropriated by leaders from the communist faction, who instead promoted more aggressive revolutionary measures as the means of overcoming the social and political problems that Italy was experiencing.

in the Italian people if Italy were to produce healthy citizens that could serve the nation. It was precisely this rhetoric of natural goodness with its complex network of ideological apparatuses that enabled the *destra storica* (the historic right) to consolidate its hegemony. The conservative fringes believed that the economy of the home served as the perfect means through which values could be taught and learned. For the latter, mothers and women in general acquired special status during this time, since it was they who were invested with the task of inculcating “good feelings,” a sense of “parsimony,” “charity,” and “respect for authority” to their children, so that they could serve as ethical examples for the nation.<sup>133</sup> As Lucia Re points out, when subordinates such as servants or peasants were present in the household, women’s benign influence could also be extended to them.<sup>134</sup> The delicate mission of forestalling, in the microcosm of the home, the development of any potential class resentment or conflict that centered on egalitarian issues was a task that was assigned to women. By teaching good work ethics based on self-sacrifice and parsimony of savings, class differences could be overcome so that Italians could produce citizens capable of competing economically with more advanced European nations in order to overcome the lack of productivity that Italy was experiencing. In the end, however, instead of promoting more liberal and equal measures for women, the historic right assigned more authority to male heads of the family while relegating even more women to the sphere of the home.

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<sup>133</sup> Lucia Re, “Passion and Sexual Difference: The Risorgimento and the Gendering of Writing in Nineteenth-Century Literature,” in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity Around the Risorgimento* ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Von Henneberg (New York: Berg, 2001), 82. As Re makes clear, one of the first goals of the moderates in the aftermath of 186 was the education of women, which was seen as fundamental to the reconstruction of the Italian community. These goals nonetheless were overshadowed by the Catholic Church’s deeply rooted prejudices of an Italian patriarchal culture, which prevented Italians from truly actualizing these goals.

<sup>134</sup> Re, 163.

### **Giuseppe Mazzini, Ippolito Nievo and *Confession of an Italian***

Literature, according to Mazzini, provided the perfect medium through which democratic goals could be promoted, precisely because literature had the capability of shaping the collective will. It was Mazzini's belief that along with times of profound decline during which Italians had been schooled to accept backwardness with perverse regularity, there occurred many phases of genial developments that had enabled Italians to withstand and overcome these periods of decay. This was evidenced in Italy's literary and cultural history, whose great artists, beginning with Dante and continuing all the way to Foscolo, illustrated what was to be expected of a reborn Italian civilization.<sup>135</sup> There was no doubt that for Mazzini the greatest contemporary writer of Italian literature was Alessandro Manzoni, who had introduced the historical novel to the Italian reading public. In spite of his enormous success both in Italy and abroad, Mazzini felt that Manzoni had failed to move his readers to action, since the message he related to his readers was one of resignation.<sup>136</sup> In fact, although Manzoni provided readers with a repertoire of images that could be inspirational for the birth of a nation, they lacked the kind of incitement that, according to Mazzini, could promote the much-needed social, educational, and economic reforms that were necessary to build the Italian nation. The ideal Italian writer, for Mazzini, was instead Ugo Foscolo, who inspired Italians to action by providing his readers with examples of heroic

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<sup>135</sup> Antonio Gallega, *Italy Past and Present*, 2 Vol (London: 1848) 1:419, 421. We will recall that both Dante and Foscolo refused all moral compromise with the political and religious powers of their time.

<sup>136</sup> Lyttelton, 45. Alessandro Manzoni is said to be the first author to break away from classical principles. Nonetheless, for Nievo, who appears to side with Mazzini, Manzoni functions as an example of the glorification of conservative Christian values of justice, which for Nievo, appear to be at the heart of all the problems that Italy was experiencing at this time.

deeds.<sup>137</sup> Given the nature of the writer's work, it was easy in the early 19th century for Mazzini to turn Foscolo into a symbol of political and cultural resistance against the foreign oppressor.<sup>138</sup>

Foscolo's *Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortiz* (The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortiz, 1802) is a passionate, fragmentary, and contradictory epistolary novel narrated by the title's namesake, who functions as the author's alter ego. Jacopo nurtures a melancholic attachment to his motherland, which in this novel functions as a primary inspirational source for the author and for the main protagonist. Such is also the case in the writings of Ippolito Nievo, the author we will be discussing in this chapter. Both in Foscolo and in Nievo, this nostalgic space is related to the reader through a nexus of female figures, so that the womb, the cradle, the mother, the nation, and the beloved all constitute a single erotic force that not only inspires the main protagonist to political actions, but also serves as an inspirational source for the artistic work.<sup>139</sup>

Foscolo's work, as we can see, serves as a point of reference for Ippolito Nievo, who not only appropriates Foscolo's sentimentalism but also puts Mazzini's democratic utopian notions into action in his own novel, *Confessioni di un Italiano* (Confessions of an Italian). The loss of Mazzini's democratic ideals, in the concession to the monarchy, and the need to recuperate these

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<sup>137</sup> Andrea Ciccarelli, "Dante and the Culture of Risorgimento: Literary, Political or Ideological Icon," *Making and Remaking Italy: Identity and the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Kystina von Henneberg (New York: Berg, 2001) 80.

<sup>138</sup> The parallels between Mazzini and Foscolo's own life and Foscolo's political/ethical message, as they are related through the main protagonist of Nievo's novel, *Confessions of an Italian*, are endless. Just to mention a few, Mazzini spent the last years of his life in exile in London, just as Carlo does, the main protagonist of Nievo's novel, who serves as a stand-in for the author. Mazzini was also involved in revolutionary movements in Naples just as Carlo is in the novel. Foscolo, like Carlo, was a feverish citizen of Venice who believed in taking arms at the risk of death to protect national liberty. Nievo's work, like that of Foscolo, appears to be directly inspired by the political upheavals of Venice and Northern Italy, events that ignite the author's fierce sensibility. The picture of Italy that both Foscolo and Nievo, appear to be depicting for the reader is that of an Italy trapped between two foreign oppressors (France and Austria), and whose parts can be sold by one oppressor state to another through fraud and force. Italy's revitalization for all three of these thinkers is thus dependent on overcoming a state of slavery and resignation, something that plagues the main character of Nievo's novel, who reflects the state of the Italian people, a state that prevents them from emerging as a free nation.

<sup>139</sup> The same theme and the same sentimental attachment for the motherland is found in Foscolo's *Dei Sepolcri* (On Tombs, 1807). In this poem, political action is inspired by the deeds of great men, whose tombs act as past reminders of their great deeds. Their inspirational tales are kept alive against the erosion of time by the women, who care for these tombs, and who ensure that their tales are transmitted to future generations.

ideals are central to Nievo's plot. As is the case for Foscolo, the same archetypal figures that constituted our theoretical model in the previous chapter engage the male hero in a process of reconstruction that leads to a refashioning of the self that will enable him to reach out to others who differ from him—so that he can serve as an example for the nation.

Nievo, as with all the authors discussed in this dissertation, promotes this democratic space through a maternal figure that is significantly absent in each of the texts we analyze. As I indicated in Chapter 1, the maternal figure functions as a metaphorical space that points to an unrealized ideal that the author has repressed because it is no longer upheld by the author's society. In the case of Nievo, it points to a democratic ideal that has been lost, since it does not function in a society where economic growth has shifted the balance of power and has redirected the goal of individuals from the common good to the fulfillment of personal goals. The maternal figure, thus, not only acts as a reminder of a space that predates repression, it also acts as a reminder of some kind of tremendous event that has deeply affected the author's life. Not surprisingly, every author discussed here has had to give up this ideal because it has not been successfully implemented by his society; and yet he is unable to let go of it altogether. In fact, no matter how much these authors try to repress it, it reemerges during dream-like states as a specter from the dead (hence the dead maternal figure, who metaphorically embodies a union with the all) that enlightens and fuels their imagination. By unconsciously returning to this past ideal, they engage in a process of repetition that allows them to resuscitate this ideal from its death by comparing it with their present reality. The difference that emerges in this comparison enables them to promote something new that expands with each repetition, in order to come to the surface in its unity in the third.

*Confessions of an Italian* narrates the story of a Venetian foundling, whose adolescence and adulthood coincide with the years that precede Italy's unification; and, whose death coincides with the birth of the nation. Death in this novel appears at the beginning and at the end, thereby uniting the past and the present. Nievo's mixture of time frames has not failed to puzzle critics, who have noticed that the past history of the nation, which is narrated through Carlo's present perspective, intermingles with Carlo's own past in order to influence his future perception.<sup>140</sup> As the past and the present fuse and unite, and as these time frames become displaced in the three women who make up our model, this experience of multiplicity promotes such an expansion of the mind that it enables the male protagonist to imagine, think, and promote new options for the country. Energized by such optimism, the male hero is inspired to write his memoir so that it can serve as an example for the way a divided people can unite as a nation.

In light of the conservative majority that lead Italy into unification, and in light of Nievo's democratic and liberal views, it is not surprising that Nievo's novel was not well received at the time of its publication. Six months after having completed his novel, in 1858, and unable to find a publisher, Nievo wrote to his friend Arnaldo Fusinato: "My novel will not find success at this time, it would only encounter censorship."<sup>141</sup> After several attempts at finding a publisher, Nievo finally abandoned his work in a drawer, which would not be opened until after his death. Nievo died in 1861 (a few months before Italy's unification) on a return trip from Sicily where he was serving as "viceintendente" under Garibaldi.<sup>142</sup> Nievo had not yet reached the age of 30.

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<sup>140</sup> See Francesco Olivari's *Ippolito Nievo Lettere e Confessioni: Studio Nella Complessità Letteraria* (Torino: Genesi, 1993) or Emilia Mirmina, *La Poetica Sociale del Nievo* (Ravenna: A Longo editore, 1972).

<sup>141</sup> Claudio Milanini. Foreword. Ippolito Nievo, *Le Confessioni d'un italiano*, ed., Milanini (Milano: Rizzoli Libri S.p.A: 2001) p. xxi. Translation mine. "Il mio romanzo non va per ora perchè non incontrerebbe alla censura."

<sup>142</sup> Romano Luperini, Pietro Cataldi, Lidia Marchiani, ed. *La Scrittura e l'Interpretazione: Storia e Antologia della Letteratura Italiana nel Quadro della Civiltà Europea*. Vol 4, secondo tomo (Firenze: G. B. Palombo & Co., 1997) 713, 938.



*Le Confessioni* was published posthumously in 1867 thanks to the efforts of Erminia Fuà Frusinato, the curator of two volumes of Nievo's work for La Biblioteca Nazionale, and of the critic Eugenio Checchi, who persuaded Felice Le Monnier to publish the novel. Le Monnier requested that changes be made to the text prior to its publication and changed the title from *Le confessioni di un italiano* (*Confessions of an Italian*) to *Le confessioni di un ottagenario* (*Confessions of an Octogenarian*) since, according to this publisher, Nievo's title appeared too politically charged for the period.<sup>143</sup> In the text, he deleted some derogatory remarks aimed at the ruling class, whom Nievo called "a society of eunuchs, egoists ... and bastards ... to which I belong." However, even years after its publication, his work was not well received. Luigina Codemo, a respectable Venetian writer, whose rigidly conservative views, aimed at renewing Italy's nationalism as late as 1872, warned readers against the dangers of Nievo's novel. "A literature of this kind," she wrote, "distanced" France from Italy. "The restraint of our authors," she continued, "has so far saved [us]. If the literature of our present country has no ideals, it is without a future." In relation to the main character Pisana who functions as the third woman, she wrote: "On the ideal that Pisana supposedly represents, it is preferable not to comment ... Carlino is free to love her with all his heart and describe his passion with tender verses, and with the kind of transparenence that captivates and captures the soul of the poet." But an affection "for such a woman ... is something that cannot be flaunted in public ... it would lead the reader

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<sup>143</sup> The title is transgressive because, by aligning Italian with confession, the title suggests that Nievo was pro-unification at a time when the Pope was advocating against it. In fact, by uniting confession with Italian, Nievo appears to be aligning himself with more moderate Catholics who were trying to reconcile a commitment to Italian independence (promoted by more progressive patriots) with loyalty to the church (promoted by the more conservative faction). In so doing, Nievo places himself right at the center of a heated debate that was fought between more conservative forces, who sided with the monarchy and the church, and more liberal ones, who fought for an independent nation free of any foreign alliance with the monarchy or the church. Nievo, however, does not privilege either position. Instead, he tries to mediate between the two.

toward an immoral path.”<sup>144</sup> Two years later, Nicolò Tommaseo, another well-known Italian writer who was working for the newly founded *Italian Society Against Unethical Literature*, placed Nievo’s novel on a list of texts that needed to be excluded from libraries because they threaten the wellbeing of ethical families.<sup>145</sup>

What was transgressive about the novel, and what is so transgressive about Pisana? Perhaps what is so transgressive about this sentimental novel are its democratic undertones, which aim at forging a union between individuals regardless of class, gender, political affiliation, or religious affiliation. Moreover, Pisana becomes a transgressive and “difficult” woman, indeed the third woman in the novel, because she is not only invested with Nievo’s hopes for a truly democratic nation, she is invested with the fears that are associated with these more progressive political ideals. One thing is clear: Very few critics recognized or maybe even wanted to admit that beneath Pisana’s “transgressive” nature lurked an ideal that was supposed to serve as a guiding light for the future of Italy.

## The Plot

*Le Confessioni* is a long and complicated novel that spans approximately 80 years of Italian history, beginning before the French Revolution with the fall of the *ancien régime* in 1775, and ending in 1855 just before the rise of Vittorio Emanuele II to the throne of Italy in 1860. It is narrated by Carlo Altoviti, an 80-year-old Venetian patriot who revisits the bloody

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<sup>144</sup> Introduction, Ippolito Nievo, *Le Confessioni d'un italiano*, ed. Marcella Gorra (Milano: Arnaldo Mondadori Editore, 1981) ix. Translation mine. “Una letteratura di quel genere, perdette la Francia. Il ritegno dei nostri autori, ha invece preservato fino adesso l’Italia. Se la letteratura della presente democrazia non ha ideale, essa è senza avvenire. Della Pisana come ideale è meglio tacere. Carlino è libero di amarla svisceratamente e descrivere la sua passione con versi soavissimi, e con una trasparenza che innamora, e in cui si sente animo di poeta. Ma un affetto per una tal femmina...è cosa da non mostrarsi con troppa evidenza al pubblico...perchè esercita un male ascendente sui lettori.”

<sup>145</sup> Gorra, x.

events that lead to Italy's unification. The first part of the novel spans from 1775 to 1793 and narrates the historical events that gave way to the early uprisings that preceded Italy's unification and that brought an end to the ancient regime. This period coincides with the protagonist's childhood and youth. In this first section, the reader is introduced to the main protagonist, Carlo, a foundling, who lives in the ancient medieval castle of Fratta. We are not surprised to find out that Carlo's mother died after having given birth to Carlo. Carlo's mother had fallen in love with a Turkish merchant, who was living on the island of Torcello. Out of wedlock, she had run away with this merchant to Corfù, against the will of her family. After a few months, unhappy and pregnant, she had returned home to seek the help of the family that, by this time, had disowned her. Alone and destitute, Carlo's mother had died in a hospital. However, before her death, she had entrusted Carlo to her sister, the countess of Fratta. Carlo is thus raised by his aunt and uncle, though for the aunt, Carlo is a constant reminder of her sister's transgressions, which had become a source of embarrassment for the whole family. The aunt thus distances Carlo by relegating him to the kitchen, where he dwells in the company of several faithful servants. Half way through the novel, however, Carlo receives a letter from his father (whom he believed dead), which relates the true events that brought his mother to him. Carlo realizes that, contrary to the rumors he heard, his mother was a very ethical woman, whose actions, unlike those of others, were driven by an internal goodness that enabled her to reach out to others, regardless of status or ethnicity.

Carlo has two female cousins: the calm and holy and maternal Clara (the representative of the first woman, and the flirtatious, flighty, but also maternal Pisana (who functions as the third woman). Clara, who is now 19, endures the pursuit of multiple suitors. She neglects the attention of Giulio del Ponte and Raimondo Venchierendo and falls in love instead with Lucilio

Vianello. Pisana, who is nine, is depicted—especially when compared to her reserved and pious sister—as someone who continuously draws the attention of the suitors away from her sister, shamelessly flirting with all of them, including Carlo. Her behavior angers Carlo who, from his early childhood, is clearly attracted to the heroine. The result is that, in relation to Carlo, Pisana functions as both the maternal figure and the beloved, and as a metaphorical figure for the nation. She fuels Carlo's passion and provides him with the kind of mentorship the foundling needs, one that motivates him to engage in the heroic actions that will eventually lead him to overcome his inferior status in the Fratta household.

The second half of the novel spans from 1792 to 1800, or from the death of Louis XVI until the French Revolution. As Carlo matures, the plot, which at first took place within the enclosed space of the kitchen, now takes us beyond the enclosed walls of the feudal castle. As Carlo's view of the world expands, the reader is progressively introduced to characters that live outside of the castle in nearby towns. The young people of the town congregate at a nearby fountain, where they meet to socialize and flirt. It is at this enchanting and nearly idyllic site that the naïve and proud Leopardo Provvedoni meets the haughty and selfish Doretta Venchierendo (who functions as a prototype for the second archetypal figure in our model).<sup>146</sup> Unfortunately, blinded by her beauty, Leopardo falls in love with the manipulative, blood-draining, and domineering Doretta who, from the very beginning, wishes to snare Leopardo in a self-serving relationship that is detrimental to him. Failing to see beyond her physical beauty, the shallow but

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<sup>146</sup> It is interesting to note that in works in which this model appears, the male protagonist's evolutionary process, as we indicated in Chapter 1, is usually related through two female heroines who embody three archetypal positions mirroring the three evolutionary phases of the male protagonist. In Nievo's novel, instead, as is the case of our last author, Italo Svevo, although this evolutionary process is related through two female characters who embody the three archetypal positions, there appears to be an extra heroine who, along with the other two, further evidences the detrimental effects of the second stage of the model. Doretta, in fact, functions as an example of how a more conservative position, if placed in the hands of manipulative people, can be detrimental not only for the character itself but for the rest of the people.

good-hearted Leopardo marries Doretta and becomes entangled in a relationship that ultimately leads to his death.

Carlo, who is now 21, has left the castle to complete his studies in Padua. When he returns to Fratta, he is hired as chancellor by the old count. This position earns him the right to sit at the dining table with the rest of the family. However, overwhelmed once more by a possessive jealousy for the flirtatious Pisana, he chooses to distance himself by leaving this position and turns to Padova. In Padova, under the direction of the trusted Father Pendola (a friend of the Fratta family), he begins to work for a corrupt attorney named Ormenta. In time, Carlo finds out that his aunt, the countess, has moved to Venice with Clara to prevent Lucilio from marrying her.

Carlo decides to visit the countess to seek help for a schoolmate, who has been imprisoned for his revolutionary ideals. Meanwhile, Clara, who everyone believed was madly in love with Lucilio and wanted to marry him, has instead joined a convent. During the visit, Carlo finds out that the aunt has developed a gambling habit and has wasted both of her daughter's dowries. Plagued by creditors, she has convinced Pisana to marry her wealthy, old, and decrepit uncle, Count Navagero, in order to save the family from financial ruin. Napoleon has just invaded Italy and his troops are destroying towns and cities, pilfering churches and buildings, including the castle of Fratta, as his soldiers work their way to the kingdom of Sardinia. While history impinges on the life of the characters, Carlo is informed that the father he believed dead is alive and has come to Venice to meet him. During their meeting, Carlo's father vouches to leave him all his wealth if Carlo promises to become Doge of Venice. At the same time, Father Pendola and Natalino Venchierendo, Doretta's father, accuse Carlo of illegal operations against Venice and have him arrested. Carlo escapes by moving to Milan. Through the wiles of Pisana,

he marries Aquilina, Leopardo's younger sister, and creates a family of his own. He then leaves for Naples to participate in the new insurrections and is taken prisoner—but is freed, once more thanks to Pisana's intervention.

In the third and last part of the novel, which spans from 1800 to 1857, the reader is introduced to a more mature Carlo, who is now nearing his 30s. He is in exile in England in the company of Pisana, who has left her husband to care for him (with Carlo's wife's permission). Having lost his eyesight during a period of incarceration, he depends on Pisana for help. She procures for them by tutoring, begging, and even selling personal items. Eventually, Carlo is healed by Lucilio, who is now practicing medicine in England, and regains his eyesight. At this time he realizes that what drives Pisana all along is an internal goodness that enables her to reach out to others in spite of different ethical values.<sup>147</sup> Carlo thus realizes that Pisana is not a blood-sucking femme fatale, but that she has sacrificed herself on behalf of others throughout her whole life. As Carlo's eyesight improves, Pisana's health worsens until she eventually dies. Carlo returns to Italy to care for his family and children, who now have families of their own.

### **The Model**

In all the works, the evolutionary process of the main protagonist is mediated to the reader through the three archetypal figures who, for the reasons we just outlined, both mirror and differ from the maternal figure—precisely because they embody not only a prior ideal that has been repressed and that is evoked through them, but also the displacement that occurs as this ideal becomes compared with the present reality. In the contemplative mind of the protagonist, who reflects on the displacement that these figures reveal, the contradiction that emerges enables

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<sup>147</sup> Notice the similarities between Carlo's mother and Pisana.

him to draw something new that was not visible before. As the main protagonist integrates the contradiction that emerged from the first and the second stage of the model, the protagonist's thought process begins to expand—not only in the way he perceives his past but also in the way he now perceives his future from the point of view of his present reality.<sup>148</sup> The third repetition—which, as Deleuze suggests, is not constituted from one present to the next, but by the fact that the present of the first repetition coexists in the present of the second repetition, on which it expands—enables the male protagonist to integrate all the difference of the prior phases so that the male protagonist is finally able to, as Deleuze would have it, experience “a cosmic extension that coincides with the amplitude of a forced movement,” which leads to the epiphany we will see in Nievo's novel. By integrating the contradiction of the first repetition and the second, as these become displaced in the third woman who, for this reason, mirrors the qualities of the first woman and the second, what the third woman embodies is difference in itself. As the contradiction unites in the third and last phase of the model, and as both become displaced in her, the third woman becomes invested with a plethora of meaning. Since Nievo's goal is to promote a democratic ideal that can serve as a source of the imaginary to build the Italian nation—one that will enable Italian patriots to reclaim their country's cultural prestige among European nations by peaceful means—Pisana, the third woman in this novel, becomes invested with the same stereotypical characteristics outlined at the beginning of this chapter. These stereotypes portrayed the Italian people as morally corrupt, repressed by Catholic superstitions, untrustworthy, and having acquired the same habits as women while harboring strong male passions. Pisana is now redeployed with these characteristics to redeem the political ideal of the nation.

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<sup>148</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans., Paul Patton (New York: Columbia U. P., 1994), 79.

It is not surprising that Nievo portrays Pisana as a rebellious and sexually lax maternal figure who possesses masculine qualities; and as a transgressive woman, whose ambivalence reveals an internal goodness that motivates all of her actions and that fuels her sense of rebelliousness—a rebellion, I should note, that is aimed at the selfish goals of an egotistical society that keeps individuals isolated and prevents them from reaching out to others. It is Pisana, the third woman, the maternal figure, the beloved and the transgressive figure, who, by exposing the male protagonist to a purely female space, functions as the source of the imaginary. The latter, energized by her presence, is finally able to overcome the lethargy that keeps him in a state of subservience—so he can engage in his own process of rebellion and also function as a source for the imaginary for the Italian nation. Energized, the main hero finally engages in a creative process of reconstruction that enables him to imagine, to think, and to create something new, which he communicates to his readers through his memoir. This literary expression also serves as the source of the imaginary for Italian patriots, enabling them to unite beyond difference to continue building the Italian nation.

### **The Three Women**

In the position of the first woman, Clara is portrayed as a typical maternal figure who has given up all of her personal desires to sacrifice herself on behalf of her society. In Nievo's novel, she is described as a tranquil and pious maternal figure who has given up every joy that life dispenses in order to sacrifice herself on behalf of her religious beliefs. For this reason, although Clara is born to an aristocratic family, she chooses to deny herself the very comforts that would be appropriate for someone of her class. She thus chooses to sleep in "a cubbyhole that"



resembles “the little cell of a nun.”<sup>149</sup> However, although Clara appears to blindly accept her faith, the type of conservative religious values she promotes have no redeeming value in a society where scientific discoveries are now displacing old conventions and are shifting the way individuals perceive their political, social, and religious reality. Indeed, Clara’s sacrifices further bind her to unproductive conventions that prevent her from reaching out to others whose opinions differ from hers. Unable to overcome her repressive state, the best Clara can do is to remain in a stagnant and unproductive state of indecision that prevents her and others from overcoming the state of stagnation that is reflected in the patriots of the Italian nation.

Clara is known by the people who live in the nearby village as “the saint” from the day she “received the mystical body of Christ” and nearly fainted because she believed that she had been singled out by God as his “bride.” Clara lives a sheltered life behind the walls of the Fratta castle, where she spends her days nursing her elderly grandmother: “She lived in the castle simply, tranquil and as innocently as a sparrow ... She reigned and shined as a Madonna among the candles of an altar. Her appearance emanated a near religious and celestial peace; it was obvious by seeing her that beneath her gentle and harmonious exterior the fervor of devotion was stirring.” They called “her the saint.”<sup>150</sup> Clara thinks that she possesses “the gift of sight” and can read the soul of others in order to “guess” their afflictions.”<sup>151</sup> Clara’s sensitivity extends to her inability to have mouse traps around the house or to step on flowers or on a green patch of grass for fear of killing them. In spite of her pious attitude, as the narrator reminds us, Clara’s humility is not like one that a maid or a housekeeper displays; it is like one found in “a countess who has

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<sup>149</sup> “uno stanzino che somigliava la celletta d’una monaca” (81).

<sup>150</sup> “Viveva nel castello semplice tranquilla e innocente come una passera...Regnava e splendeva come una Madonna fra i ceri dell’altare. Infatti le sue sembianze arieggiavano una pace e religiosa e quasi celeste; si comprendeva appena vedendola che sotto quelle spoglie gentili e armoniose il fervore della divozione si mescolava...la chiamavano la santa” (83-4).

<sup>151</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 84.

derived from God a social disproportion.”<sup>152</sup> As Carlo suggests, Clara’s humility, in fact, is driven by status and feeling of superiority rather than genuine piety.

Clara appears to be in love with Lucilio, who frequently visits the castle of Fratta to pay homage to Carla’s feeble grandmother—even though he is truly there to see the younger woman. One afternoon upon leaving the castle, Clara runs into Lucilio. It is the first time after a long drawn-out courtship that the two meet alone; and it is the first time that Lucilio openly declares his love for her. Although Lucilio is in love with Clara, he hesitated to ask Clara’s hand because he feels that he is unworthy of her.<sup>153</sup> In fact, even though Lucilio is studying to be a doctor, he is not of noble birth. More importantly, as Carlo explains to his readers, doctors at this time were viewed as medicine men instead of physicians, as medicine was still considered an imperfect science. On this particular day, however, unable to control himself, and after admitting that he is in love with her, Lucilio instinctively takes Clara’s hand. The innocent and virginal Clara is so perturbed by the desires that Lucilio evokes in her, which she perceives as sinful, that she withdraws to keep herself from fainting: “... an ancient anxiety never before experienced forbid her from answering ... and while she was trying to withdraw her own hand from his, she had to search for support because she felt faint for this sinful act of pleasure.”<sup>154</sup> Realizing that Clara is upset, Lucilio asks her forgiveness. Though Lucilio does not share Clara’s religious beliefs or her political inclinations, Lucilio still admires Clara’s moral and religious beliefs because he believes them to be sincere and he is truly in love with her. After regaining her composure, Clara vouches her eternal love to the young man.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 87.

<sup>153</sup> Lucilio is studying to be a doctor, but he is not from a noble family.

<sup>154</sup> “...un turbamento arcano e non provato mai le vietò di rispondere...e mentre cercava di ritrarre la propria mano dalla sua, fu costretta di cercarvi un appoggio perché sentiva venir meno d’un deliquio di piacere” (217).

<sup>155</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 219-20.

Despite Clara's vow to Lucilio, the trusted family priest, Father Pendola believes he can convince her to change her mind and marry Raimondo Venchierendo, a richer and more socially prominent young man. Indeed, Clara's pious nature, her respect for religion and her superiors, and her fervent belief in God are what lead the priest to this belief. However, the reason Father Pendola wants Clara to marry Raimondo has nothing to do with religion, but is attributable to the political alliances that such a relationship would promote—alliances that would not only be beneficial to the Fratta family and to the whole town but to Father Pendola himself. In the past, Raimondo's father, the Count of Venchierendo, had asked Carla's father to support his petition to transfer the chaplain of Fratta to another parish because the latter was protecting an outlaw who was fighting for the rights of the poor, thus interfering with Venchierendo's own bullish and threatening intimidation of the local people. In order to sway Carla's father into siding with him, the Count of Venchierendo had threatened the Frattas by sending his *bravi* to surround the Castle and cut off their supplies.<sup>156</sup> An alliance between the two families would have erased old family feuds and eradicated the Fratta family fears of the Venchierendo's repeated sieges. The person, however, who was to gain the most from this situation, was Father Pendola: He was hoping to get into the good graces of the count of Fratta and land a prestigious position with senator Frumier, the count's brother-in-law.

Father Pendola realized that unlike Lucilio, Raimondo is not in love with Clara. However, the priest also knows that the scion of the Venchierendo family is too immature and gullible to withstand his persuasive manipulations. He thus starts working on the young man's feelings rather than Clara's, and convinces him to propose to Clara by awakening both his

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<sup>156</sup> *Bravi* were men who took the law into their own hands against the will of the government in power. Some, as Nievo evidences, protected the common citizen and were similar to Robin Hood figures. On the other hand, there were also outlaws that were hired privately by wealthy families to protect their personal interests. Manzoni provides us with an interesting example of the latter; in Nievo, we see an example of both.

entrepreneurial spirit and sexual appetite: “Think about the beatitude you will experience in hugging in the heart of this castle, in this same room a so beautiful little bride, so obedient, so aroused by you! ... Oh God! You have never experienced anything like it.”<sup>157</sup>

Swayed by Father Pendola, the immature and superficial Raimondo “slowly comes to his senses,” even though he continues to be distracted by the flirty Pisana, who attracts him more than the cold and distant Clara. Raimondo, at times, appears to be so distracted that he does not notice that there is a great age difference between the two sisters.<sup>158</sup> At one point, while Father Pendola is trying to convince Raimondo that he is in love with Clara, the young man becomes convinced that the priest is talking about Pisana. His excitement grows to frenzy until Father Pendola, realizing that Raimondo has mistaken one sister for the other, reminds him that he would have to wait a few more years if he wished to marry Pisana.

Conversely, Father Pendola feels that Clara respects “the law of conscientious daughters ... who fear God.”<sup>159</sup> He knows that if she should marry Raimondo, Clara would be sacrificing herself on behalf of her family, the town, and her religion. One thing that the priest does not realize—and this is unknown to the reader at this point in the novel—is that by marrying Raimondo she would be betraying the vow she made before God, on behalf of her religion, which is not to marry at all to dedicate herself to her religion. Father Pendola begins to convince Clara by appealing to her religious inclinations rather than to her more base instincts, her entrepreneurial spirit, or her sexual appetite as he had done with Raimondo. However, Father Pendola mistakenly believes that Clara is as “simple” and “innocent” as Raimondo. Much to Father Pendola’s surprise, the meek and timid Clara immediately sets the Father straight. She

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<sup>157</sup> Pensate alla beatitudine che proverete nello stringervi sul cuore in questo castello, in questa stessa camera una sposina così bella, così docile, così infiammata per voi! ... Oh Dio! Non avrete mai provato nulla di simile (325).

<sup>158</sup> Given the model in question and the evolutionary process that it unveils, it is not surprising that Raimondo is confused by the two heroines.

<sup>159</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 330.

explains that if she were to agree to marry Raimondo, she would be lying before God because she is not in love with him. Furthermore, she explains that she “does not feel particularly attracted to marriage” since “God” appears to have “taken her on a different path.”<sup>160</sup> The “good” Father, taken aback by Clara’s words, and overwhelmed by her strength, reminds her that if she really wishes to honor her God, she needs to honor her parent’s wishes: “[O]bedience obeys,” and “obedience makes no exceptions for the passions of the heart.”<sup>161</sup> The “good” priest, thus, tells her, as a devout Catholic, “the road to perfection lies in “abnegation and sacrifice.”<sup>162</sup> He then reminds her that Raimondo is of noble birth and that he would make a better suitor for her than Lucilio, since the influence of his family would have a beneficial effect not only on her family but on “the whole town.”<sup>163</sup>

It is at this juncture that the Frattas receive a letter from Count Frumier warning them that the Venetian government has asked him to keep an eye on the count Venchierendo. In light of this development, the Countess decides that Clara should marry Gherardo of Partistagno instead. Clara also refuses him, setting in motion an avalanche of negative consequences. Firstly, the Baron of Partistagno, Gherardo’s uncle, having realized that Lucilio is pursuing Clara, takes offence to Clara’s refusal and vouches vengeance against the Fratta family. Secondly, Clara’s mother, angered by her daughter’s refusals (unusual for a girl of her age in a 19th-century society, as the narrator Carlo aptly reminds us), moves her daughter to Venice to keep Lucilio away from her. The countess, however, has ulterior motives of her own for the move. As we later find out, by preventing Clara’s marriage (to Lucilio or anyone else) and allowing her to enter a convent, she will retain half of Clara’s dowry, which she needs to fuel her gambling habit.

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<sup>160</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 332.

<sup>161</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 332.

<sup>162</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 333.

<sup>163</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 335.

Up to this point, the reader believes that Clara is unwilling to marry the other suitors because she is in love with Lucilio. Yet, when Lucilio finally follows Clara to Venice to ask her hand in marriage, she also refuses him, even though at this point in the novel there is absolutely nothing that prevents her from doing so. In fact, Lucilio has become a successful doctor who, under the new democratic laws which have shed the caste divisions, would appear to be as worthy a suitor as any. Instead of marrying Lucilio, the man she loves, Clara decides to enter a convent with her mother's consent because she believes that it is people with beliefs similar to those held by Lucilio who are ruining her country.

The second time Lucilio asks Clara's hand, the heroine has entered the convent. When Lucilio visits her, she explains her refusal to marry him as being caused by the fall of the city into the hands of "foreigners" (the French), who are spreading liberal beliefs that have turned the whole world upside down and have undermined her religion.<sup>164</sup> Given these liberal ideals, which are altering the political, social, and religious climate of Venice, Clara has decided to sacrifice her relationship. She hopes that her sacrifice will serve as an inspiration for others for redeeming Venice and other cities from the atrocities being committed in the name of Lucilio's own liberal ideals:

The vows that I will solemnly take Sunday before the altar of God, I have already pronounced before the same God during that fatal night the nemeses of religion and of Venice entered in this city. We were right to offer to him our freedom, our life in order to ward off that slaughter, and if those disgraceful, those villains are forced to abandon their prey so cowardly earned, God will have favorably looked at our sacrifice!<sup>165</sup>

Lucilio believes that Clara's sacrifice cannot resolve the problems that Venice is experiencing; instead, their union has redeeming qualities for everyone involved. Therefore, he

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<sup>164</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 549.

<sup>165</sup> "I voti ch'io pronuncerò domenica solennemente dinnanzi all'altare di Dio, li ho già espressi col cuore dinnanzi al medesimo Dio in quella notte fatale che i nemici della religione e di Venezia entrarono in questa città. Fummo otto ad offerire la nostra libertà la nostra vita per l'allontanamento di quel flagello, e se quegli infami quegli scellerati saranno costretti ad abbandonare la preda sì vilmente guadagnata, Dio avrà forse benignamente riguardato il nostro sacrificio! (550). The nemeses she is referring to are the French.

begs her to reassess the decision, suggesting that a truly moral God would never deny love for abject reasons: “Think about what you are saying Clara,” he begs. “The Republic has fallen, religion is in danger? ... But what does all of this have to do with the promise you vowed me? ... God abandons and condemns perjury; God refuses sacrifices at the expense of tears and of bloodshed! ... But why, why, Clara? ... Why do you want to kill me when you could bring me back to life?”<sup>166</sup> Fearing that Clara might change her mind, the Mother Superior intervenes, reminding Lucilio that she and the sisters are the only ones defending the public morality of the country from the “mundane perversities” encouraged by the liberal ideals promoted by the “foreigners.”<sup>167</sup> Unable to change Clara’s mind and feeling betrayed by her, since it was her promise to marry him that had inspired every step he had taken in his life, Lucilio leaves the convent. Before leaving, however, he accuses Clara of being a manipulative coward who uses others (a second woman) to hide in an unproductive state of inertia, behind the enclosed walls of the convent.

One should note that Lucilio asks Clara’s hand twice in the novel: the first time approximately in 1797; the second in 1848. These historical dates become important if we read them in relation to the role that Clara plays in the novel. In 1797, while other European countries were experiencing democratic upheavals that were shifting their political and social landscape, as Carlo reminds his readers, the complacent Republic of Venice continued to maintain the same form of government it had held since the seventh century. In actuality, as one study suggests, by the early 1800s the constitution of the Republic of St. Mark was very similar to its original form established during the Renaissance. The only difference was that in the 1800s, the ruling class,

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<sup>166</sup> “Pensate a quello che dite, Clara;...La Repubblica è caduta? La religione è un pericolo?...Ma che ha a far tutto ciò con le promesse ch’io ebbi da voi?...Dio abbandona e condanna i spergiuri; Dio rifiuta i sacrifici offerti a prezzo delle lagrime e del sangue altrui!...Ma perché, perché mai, Clara?...Perché volete uccidermi mentre potreste risuscitarmi?” (546-47).

<sup>167</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 502.

rather than becoming more liberal, had become more conservative and inward-looking.<sup>168</sup>

Unable and unwilling to adapt to the new democratic ideals that were shifting the balance of power in other countries, Venice, which in the past had been one of the most vibrant economic centers in Italy, had become increasingly isolated until its economy had finally dried up.

In early 1796, French forces led by the 26-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte had entered Lombardy, causing the Austrians to cross through Venice to protect Milan, their last stronghold in the peninsula. Angered by the fact that Austrian troops were allowed to move with impunity on Northern soil, Napoleon threatened to occupy Venice unless the Republic agreed to become his ally. As Carlo explains to his readers, instead of being proactive and taking a stance, those in power adopted a foreign policy that was no policy at all—they tried to remain neutral at all costs:

The democratic party, that could be called and was in fact French, did not dominate Venice in number, but in vigor of soul; by the strength of its actions and above all, by the strength of its aid. The opposing party was made up of an inert body of cowards and of impotents that from its quantity did not receive its strength. The nerves obey the soul, the arms the idea, and when there are no ideas and no soul, there is lethargy ...<sup>169</sup>

On May 1 of the same year, Napoleon declared war on Venice. The last act on the part of its senate was to issue orders for the defense of the city. Less than half of the members of the Council, thus not even a quorum, assembled to make this decision.<sup>170</sup> Those who were present decided to dissolve the Venetian Republic after a thousand years and surrender the city to the French. On May 16, 1797, a proclamation announced the end of the old institutions and the recognition of the people as sovereign under a temporary emergency government. The people of Venice regarded these events as a long awaited revolution worthy of joyful demonstrations.

Their happiness was short-lived, as in October of the same year, Napoleon signed the Treaty of

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<sup>168</sup> Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento*, 17

<sup>169</sup> Il partito democratico, che allora poteva chiamarsi ed era infatti francese, non predominava forse a Venezia in numero; sebbene per gagliarda d' animo; ma per volume inerte di viltà e d' impotenza, che della grandezza non riceveva alcun accrescimento di forza. I nervi ubbidiscono all' anima, e le braccia all' idea, e dove non ci sono né idee né anima, o intorpidisce il letargo o la vita stultizza. I parrucconi veneziani eran nel primo caso ( 499).

<sup>170</sup> Hearder, 21.



Campo Formio, which handed Venice to the Austro-Hungarian empire while neglecting the pleading of the new democratic Venetian government (of which Lucilio had become a member) to allow its citizens to join the Cisalpine Republic.

The French left in 1798 as the Austrians took over. Soon after, Napoleon occupied Rome and proclaimed it a republic. Although he initially sought to come to terms with Pope Pius VI, he ultimately took harsh measures against the Catholic Church and, in 1798, forced the pope to leave Italy. French occupation in the other areas of the Italian peninsula lasted from 1796 until 1814. During this period, Church properties were seized and auctioned, and religious orders that were not meeting public needs were disbanded.<sup>171</sup> Anti-French sentiments, such as those that are exhibited by Clara, ran high as the more conservative faction of the Italian population began to align themselves with the hostile clergy—which was already backed by disenchanted peasant and urban poor—in order to fight the French.<sup>172</sup>

Historically speaking, the end of the Napoleonic Wars left a large part of the peninsula under Austrian control. Austrian authorities, who were eager to return the Italian states to their previous stature as “colonies” of the empire, refused to accept any reform. However, the religious climate in the peninsula had changed. Pius IX, a more progressive pope than his predecessor, offered hope for change to moderate Catholics (whom, in the novel, Carlo supports) who were trying to reconcile a commitment to Italian independence with loyalty to the Church, in the hope of mitigating their differences.<sup>173</sup> Three years earlier, Vincenzo Giobetti, a follower of Mazzini in exile, had caused a sensation by publishing a two-volume work that called for Italy

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<sup>171</sup> Lyttelton, 186.

<sup>172</sup> Davis, 157.

<sup>173</sup> Pope Pius’s progressive measures were well-known, since it was Pope Pius who tried to mitigate differences by reaching out to others whose opinions differed from his. He opened papal charities to the needy, living as a pauper himself. He freed all political prisoners by giving amnesty to them, a move that horrified the conservative Austrian authorities. As sovereign ruler of the Papal States, he conducted diplomatic relations with other states. He also initiated the construction of railways and installed street lights throughout Rome. Finally, he abolished the requirements for Jews to attend Christian services.

to achieve independence through consideration of existing rulers under the guidance of the pope. The Austrian authorities, skeptical Pope Pius IX's liberal measures, decided to keep a watchful eye by occupying the town of Ferrara in Emilia Romagna, part of the Papal States. As a response, Pope Pius personally protested against Austrian measures to European powers. Support on behalf of the Pope came not only from France but also from revolutionary patriots who, incited by Pius's call, revolted against Austrian authorities. Pius's measures, though, found opposition internally not only from the Italian nobles, who sided with Austrian authorities to maintain control, but also from conservative members of the Vatican, who viewed Pius as an example of how liberal ideals had contaminated and vitiated people, including the church itself.<sup>174</sup> The same view is shared by Clara, who views Lucilio as an example of the way liberal ideals promoted by those who sided with Lucilio had contaminated and vitiated the populations, including the Catholic faction.

Caught between favoring the Italian cause or going against it by aligning himself with Austria, Pius made no decision at all. He merely locked himself behind the Vatican walls, proclaiming himself a self-willed prisoner of his own state (a move reminiscent of Clara's own). Eventually, Pius fled Rome, leaving it in the hands of the revolutionaries and shattering the hope of the Catholic liberals.<sup>175</sup> Just like Clara's, Pius's measures were unproductive, as Carlo reminds us, because they failed to mobilize citizens to action. The second time Lucilio asks Clara's hand is approximately 50 years later. The convent where Clara was situated has been dismantled, and Clara is living at home with her mother. By this time, however, whatever sympathies the church had received from liberal reformers had evaporated. Upon his return, Pius himself took on more

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<sup>174</sup> Davis, 186.

<sup>175</sup> Davis, 189.

conservative stances, asking Catholics to abstain from voting in national elections because he refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Kingdom of Italy.

Diametrically opposite Clara stands Doretta, the character who embodies the second woman in the novel.<sup>176</sup> While Clara is described as a saint willing to sacrifice herself and others for her religion, Doretta is portrayed as an egotistical and selfish woman who wishes to sacrifice others to satisfy her own personal interests. Leopardo Provedoni is in love with Doretta. She does not love him, though she pretends to return his love because “[i]t would have been stupid not to take advantage of” Leopardo.<sup>177</sup> Leopardo is rich, handsome, and in love, and indeed vulnerable to her wishes. In the hands of the manipulative Doretta, he turns into “a dog that follows his owner even after having been shoed away.”<sup>178</sup>

Unlike Clara who, when faced with a suitor, withdraws into a silence that renders her almost invisible, Doretta thrives on the prospect of attracting the attention of as many suitors as she can. She thus flirts with Gaetano, the captain of the Venchierendo’s *bravi* while, at the same time, attracting the attention of Clara’s old suitor, Raimondo Venchierendo. Although her behavior embarrasses Leopardo, she neglects his feelings in order to fuel her own and attracts the attention of all the men, as Carlo points to the reader in observing her: “Often even Raimondo came to the fountain. If he conversed or joked with Doretta, he did it without restraint and in a

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<sup>176</sup> Clara functions in the position of the first woman, who, in the course of the novel turns into a second woman who fetters Lucilio in an unproductive relationship that is detrimental to him; Doretta, who embodies the second phase of this model, from the very beginning is a femme fatale who is driven by sadistic tendencies that are detrimental to all those who engage in a relationship with her. Doretta serves as an example for how conservative beliefs, if placed in the hands of manipulative people such as Father Pendola, the Attorney Fermenta, or the Count of Venchierendo, can be harmful to the overall population.

<sup>177</sup> “sarebbe stata una vera sciocchezza il non approfittarsene” (177).

<sup>178</sup> “un cagnolino che tien dietro al padrone anche dopo essere stato cacciato” (172).

way that made your stomach turn; and then if he paid no attention to her ... the insolent did not avoid pursuing him always to the disadvantage of her husband.”<sup>179</sup>

While prior to their marriage Doretta viewed Leopardo as an opportunity to improve her social status, once she is married, she feels trapped by the marriage because, if she had not married Leopardo, she could have secured a richer suitor.<sup>180</sup> Blinded by her own egotistical pursuits, Doretta cannot appreciate Leopardo’s good qualities. In fact, unlike the shallow and self-centered Raimondo, with whom she falls in love, Leopardo is a kind and giving individual who places the interest of others before his own. Judging him by her own standards, she instead dismisses Leopardo’s goodness as a sign of weakness.

The results of Doretta’s sway on her husband are terribly damaging. Once a kind and outgoing individual, Leopardo progressively turns into an embittered and withdrawn man. As Carlo explains to his readers: “[a]rrogant, cantankerous, unhappy with everything, her husband tricked and incited always by her, became in turn unjust, rough and cruel. One could not explain how his nature could have changed under the direction of his wife. He was unrecognizable. Everyone struggled to understand what drug Doretta had administered that affected him in this manner.”<sup>181</sup> Unable to change his life, the embittered Leopardo kills himself toward the end of the novel. Before dying, however, Leopardo relates to Carlo, his only trusted friend, the events that brought about his death. That morning, Leopardo had found Doretta in her bedroom in the company of Raimondo. Having lost faith in her, and having lost faith in his country, which he believes is now led by people whose egotistical pursuits are similar to Doretta’s, Leopardo

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<sup>179</sup> “Raimondo veniva talvolta anche lui alla fontana. Se conversava o scherzava colla Doretta lo faceva senza alcun riserbo, e in modo quasi da muovere lo stomaco, se poi no si curava di lei ..., allora la sfacciata non si curava dal perseguitarlo, sempre a rimorchio del marito.

<sup>180</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 368.

<sup>181</sup> “...costei, arrogante, bisbetica, malcontenta di tutto; suo marito infinocchiato e aizzato sempre da lei, ingiusto, zotico e crudele a sua volta; non è a dire quanto l’indole di lui s’era cambiata sotto l’impero della moglie. Non lo si conosceva proprio più, e tutti stolicavano per sapere qual droga avesse filtrato la Doretta per affattuarlo a quel modo” (368). Brackets mine.

decides to take his life by poisoning himself.<sup>182</sup> Forgotten by all except his good friend Carlo, Leopardi dies a slow and painful death, while Doretta embraces her lover in the room next door. Later, she is so worried that Raimondo has run off without her that she entrusts the funeral plans for her husband to a total stranger. The only person who mourns Leopardi after his death is Carlo, who reminds his readers that the honest, sincere, and heroic friend died “indignantly betrayed,” leaving not even his enemies with feelings of remorse for his death.<sup>183</sup> Leopardi dies around 1815, as Austrian authorities, in accordance with central duchies of the peninsula, reestablish their dominion over former territories by instating the same prerevolutionary, conservative powers as before.

Clara’s religious stance and Doretta’s egotistical pursuits enable Carlo to reflect on how the conservative values of the time, shared by a large percentage of the Italian population, were erroneously leading people into believing that “Paris and hell” were synonymous and that “the Republic of St. Marc and Christianity” were the same<sup>184</sup>—and how the same were giving manipulative people such as Father Pendola the opportunity to promote their own interests. For Carlo, the new democratic ideals promoted by the French Revolution and the new rising scientific discoveries that had changed the way people understood life and religion made a mockery of Clara’s sacrificial stance. The latter, anchored on the same religious beliefs that in the past had given people the “courage to sacrifice themselves” could no longer inspire the same outcomes. In light of the new advancements in science, people could no longer be expected to embrace religion with the same blind faith they had in the past.<sup>185</sup> Having lost this overarching

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<sup>182</sup> Vedi amico...fino a ieri...aveva una patria da amare e sperava quandomocchessia di servirla, e di scordare il resto. Ora anche quell’illusione è svanita.” (581).

<sup>183</sup> “Io indovinei le lunghe torture di quel povero cuore tanto onesto e sincero; le angosce di quell’indole aperta e leale si indegnamente tradita; la delicatezza di quell’anime eroica deliberata di non veder nulla, e di morire senza lasciare ai suoi assassini neppur la punizione del rimorso” (581).

<sup>184</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 502.

<sup>185</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 86.

anchor, which literally “kept people ethically in line,” how could religion still instill “a sense of moral duty in a population that no longer feared God?” asks Carlo of his readers, in order to seek alternative options. “I am not saying to stop believing [in religion], if this is your conviction; I am only saying that you need to find another anchor for your beliefs [besides fear] so that society can again place faith in your religious teachings, which as all of you see it, in these times of religious change and of lack of sacrifice, lacks assurance.”<sup>186</sup>

As Carlo begins to reflect on his own past and seeks answers for this dilemma, he realizes that, having grown up without parents and without religious education, he also experienced moments when he was tempted by selfish pursuits. Although he often fell prey to these, he was able to overcome their temptations by engaging in a period of introspection that reconnected him to his own internal goodness. This allowed him to develop the “steadiness of the stoic” while still maintaining the “charity of an evangelist”:

The matter of fact is that ... even though a poor Christian in words, I was scrupulously a good Christian in actions, in all those infinite circumstances where Christian morality unites with instinctual morality ... Life is what our own instinct makes it, that means, one’s own nature and education ... as a moral act, as a minister of justice that in temperament and persuasion is altogether right toward the self and toward the entire humanity. This kind of man is the most innocent and the most generous in the world. His life will be good for him and for all, and will leave an honored and profound areola in the history of his country.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> “Non vi dico che cessiate dal inculcare questa, se lo portano le vostre convinzioni; dico soltanto che aggiungete un’altra caparra perché la società possa fidarsi della vostra educazione, che così come la intendete voi e nei secoli di subite conversioni e di scarsi sacrifici in cui viviamo, è affatto manchevole di sicurezza.” 981. Bracketed words mine.

<sup>187</sup> “... tutto il merito ne viene da quel freno invincibile della coscienza che mi trattenne anche dopo che cessai di credermi obbligato a certe formule. Il fatto era che non credeva più ma sentiva sempre di dover fare a quel modo, e poco cristiano alle parole; lo ero scrupolosamente nei fatti in tutte quelle infinite circostanze nelle quali la moralità cristiana concorda colla naturale ... La vita è quale ce la fa l’indole nostra, vale a dire natura ed educazione ... come fatto morale, ministro di giustizia chi per temperamento e persuasione propria sarà in tutto giusto verso se stesso verso gli altri verso umanità intera, colui sarà l’uomo più innocente più utile, generoso che sia mai passato al mondo. La sua vita sarà un bene per lui e per tutti, e lascerà un’orma onorata e profonda nella storia della patria. Ecco l’archetipo dell’uomo vero ed intero ... s’ispirino a quel esemplare dell’umanità trionfante, e troveranno quella pace che la natura promette ad ogni particella ... La felicità è nella coscienza ... La prova più ardua della spiritualità, qualunque ella sia, risiede nella giustizia” (984, 1070-1).

As Carlo reflects on his past, perhaps one of the most bewildering scenes takes place when Carlo returns home late one evening, after having wandered for the first time beyond the walls of the castle. Angered by Pisana's actions because she pays more attention to other male cousins, Carlo leaves for the first time the premises of the castle. Outdoors, inebriated by the freedom he experiences, Carlo for the first time in his life comes in touch with the beauty of a nature that allows him to "breathe according to" his own natural "worth." It is in this idyllic and democratic space where all beings function as equal that Carlo discovers in himself an ethic of equanimity and equality that he believed he had lost in entering the Fratta's household.<sup>188</sup> When he returns to the castle early the following morning, the countess relegates him to a room in the basement until she can decide how to punish him. That evening, it is not the countess's punishment that concerns Carlo, but the fact that, for the first time, he is not going to sleep in the same room as Pisana. Since childhood, Pisana and Carlo have shared the same bedroom with a nanny assigned to the children. In this enclosed and private space, the two children have shared their most intimate fears and their most intimate joys, away from the watchful eyes of the family members and the maid, who falls asleep before them. For Carlo, who is an orphan and who appears to be forgotten by everyone in the Fratta family, Pisana's support provides the kind of mentoring that the neglected foundling needs. Lo and behold, later that evening, the barefooted and bold eight-year-old Pisana braves the darkness of the castle to provide Carlo the support he needs. In one of the most sensual and unusual scenes in Italian literature (a scene that has bewildered most critics), Pisana (who is described by Nievo more as a real woman than a child) joins Carlo in bed "half naked in her little camisole."<sup>189</sup> She first licks his wounds (a detail reminiscent of a crusader who has just returned from a difficult mission, as Carlo reminds us)

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<sup>188</sup> "...se nella cucina viveva da suddito, lì fuori...mi sentia padrone di respirare a mio grado." (108).

<sup>189</sup> "...la Pisana, mezzo inguda nella sua cammicina" (132).

and comforts the young hero by telling him that she is so proud of him and that she loves him in his plain clothes, just as he is.

The night the young heroine visits Carlo, she asks him to tear a lock of hair from her curly and unruly black mane. She wants Carlo to keep it as a sign of her bravery, sacrifice, compassion, and rebellion. In Carlo's words:

That cluster of black, uneven and tangled hair that still preserves the initial tears was like the first cross that hung in an empty space of the domestic memorial chapel of my memory. I often came back to pray, to meditate, to smile, to cry before this cross, whose meaning, intermingled with joy and distress, served as an example for the kind of acute enjoyment, disheveled and spasmodic that fortunately haunted my renewed soul.<sup>190</sup>

Pisana's black and unruly lock, which Carlo places as a marker in his empty diary, not only functions as the starting point of Carlo's diary, but also becomes a point of reference to which the narrator returns several times in the novel, even after Pisana's death:

The fact of the matter is that those symbols of the past remain in the memory of man like national monuments for future generations ... they celebrate, they reward, inflame: they are Foscolo's sepulchers that with their return initiate a discourse with the dear who have perished; since every day that passes is similar to the loss of a dear one for us, an urn full of flowers and ashes ... People that have great monuments which inspire them will never die altogether, moribund they will rise to a fuller and vigorous life ... Like the religious man who before the memory of his achievements is able to recapture the time he has lost and reverses youth into virility by gathering them both in the tired memories of old age ... the roses and the thorns and all the various experiences of our destiny align themselves before us by way of symbols and emblems" ...<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> "Quella ciocca di capelli neri ineguali e avviluppati, che serbano ancora i segni dello strappamento, furono come la prima croce appesa a segnare lo spazio vuoto d'un giorno nel sacrario domestic della memoria. E sovente venni poi a pregare, a meditare, a sorridere, a piangere dinanzi a quella croce, dai cui significato misto di gioia e d'affanno potevasi forse pronosticar fin d'allora il tenore di quei godimenti acuti, scapigliati e convulsi che mi dovevano poi logorar l'aniam e fortunatamente rinnovarla" (139).

<sup>191</sup> "Il fatto si è che quei simboli del passato sono nella memoria di un uomo, quello che i monumenti cittadini e nazionali nella memoria dei posteri. Ricordano, celebrano, ricompensano, infiammano: sono i sepolcri di Foscolo che si rimenano col pensiero a favellare coi cari estinti: giacché ogni giorno passato è un caro estinto per noi, un'urna piena di fiori e di cenere. Un popolo che ha grandi monumenti onde ispirarsi non morrà mai del tutto, e moribondo sorgerà a vita più colma e vigorosa che mai...così l'uomo religioso al memoriale delle sue fortune, non perde il tempo che scorre; ma riversa la gioventù nella virilità e le raccoglie poi ambedue nello stanco e memore della vecchiaia...e tutta la varia vicenda della sorte nostra si schiera dinnanzi per via di figure e d'emblemi..." (138-9).



As I hope to show, what unites Carlo to Pisana, the third woman in this novel, is a bond that runs deeper than blood ties. Pisana is such an essential part of Carlo that she not only functions as the figure who incites the hero to action by mentoring him throughout the novel, but more importantly, she represents an alter-ego of sorts that has been part of the narrator's being from birth, even though she was born years after he was: "Yes, I love her; ... because I became accustomed to her from birth, because that love is not a sentiment but is part of my soul, because it was born before I could reason before I developed a sense of pride."<sup>192</sup>

Given the role that Pisana plays in the novel, the jealousy she evokes in the main protagonist as she flirts with all the young pretenders is not detrimental to the functioning of Carlo. On the contrary, by heightening Carlo's emotions, she awakens the male hero out of a lethargic apathy that ties him to a state of resignation and servitude—so that he can engage in his own process of rebellion and overcome his inferior position in the Fratta household. As we will see, it is Pisana, as the third woman in the novel, who through her flirtatious games, pushes the young Carlo to venture beyond the enclosed walls of the medieval Castle. And this experience will inspire him to heroic deeds during the castle's siege to help the old count and function as a valuable member of the Fratta family.<sup>193</sup> Later, Pisana's flirtatious games will once again lead the adult Carlo to move to Padua and study jurisprudence where he learns a valuable lesson in ethics.

During his stay in Padua, Carlo learns first-hand about the insurrections that are changing the nation in the aftermath of the French Revolution and even comes face to face with the self-centered and arrogant Napoleon. Caught in the spirit of the revolution and wanting to participate in the uprisings, Carlo gets involved in the aftermath. So, when one day, after having finished his

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<sup>192</sup> "Sì, io l'amo ... perché quell'amore non è un sentimento ma una parte dell'anima mia, perché esso è nato in me prima della ragione, prima dell'orgoglio" (432).

<sup>193</sup> Knowing his way out of the castle enables Carlo to serve as messenger during a siege.

studies in Padova he shows off his accomplishments to Pisana, reporting that he is about to gain a prestigious and well-salaried seat in government, the transgressive and rebellious Pisana reminds him of the democratic ideals that had originally guided him—and that he must uphold if he wishes to promote positive social changes in his country: “Were we not in agreement that you were supposed to promote equality?” says Pisana to him.<sup>194</sup>

Father Pendola, the manipulative Jesuit priest who occupies a privileged position in the Fratta household, does not share the same perception as Pisana. Realizing that Carlo is in love with the heroine, he asks Carlo to break off the relationship by convincing the latter to leave the Fratta household and abandon his pursuit. Carlo’s problem is that he has become invested in an amorous relationship that diverts him from his real aims and has “vitiated” his senses. In order to rescue the young man, Father Pendola urges Carlo to redirect his goals away from pleasure and invest them in his obligations: “Do you want to rot in indifference without a thought and without dignity?” he asks Carlo.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, Father Pendola suggests that “[r]ational life ... and the victory of the soul” are “essential.” One must adhere to “asceticism,” to “the negation of conscience,” and to the “anarchy of passions” in order to abandon “bestial life with all its vile consequences.” Carlo must “search for the good” and, in order to do this, “must engage in the good in order for it to triumph.” The only way to accomplish this, he tells the young man, is by delivering to the enemies the “same damage that they try to procure us ... disseminating among them corruption and disagreement.” It is this necessary evil that “needs to be used with courage” and “with the skill a surgeon.”<sup>196</sup> In this manner, “religion and country shake hands, preparing you for the battleground where you can sacrifice yourself with dignity” rather “than in mere

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<sup>194</sup> “Io intanto non poteva resistere al piacere di pavoneggiarmi alla Pisana colle mie future spenditezze, e lasciava travedere che nel nuovo governo ci sarebbe stato un bel seggio anche per me.” “Ma non siamo intesi che dobbiate metter sul trono l’eguaglianza?” (524)

<sup>195</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 385.

<sup>196</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 390.

idolatry. If you do not follow my advice,” he finally warns Carlo, your “friends and enemies will fall in the hands of those malicious others who preach this senseless liberty in order to impose on us true slavery.”<sup>197</sup> Father Pendola thus urges Carlo to move to Padova, where he is to study under the protection of a friend, the corrupt and manipulative attorney Ormenta, so that he can learn to fight evil with the same tenacity as his enemy. In doing so and separating Carlo from Pisana, Father Pendola forces the young man to repress the most intimate part of himself. Nevertheless, although Carlo diligently tries to erase all thoughts of Pisana so as to live up to the priest’s expectations, “beating himself on the chest” any time thoughts of Pisana arise, she, the third woman, reemerges as an irresistible force that cannot be contained or restrained by anyone, not even Carlo.

Throughout the novel, Pisana is described as a contradictory figure that cannot be easily categorized. She is as “voluble as a butterfly who cannot remain two minutes on the crown of a flower without batting her wings and tasting different one.” Pisana is so voluble that she can change “in the bat of an eye from domesticity to haughtiness, from the loudest garrulity to an obstinate silence, from happiness to madness and to near cruelty.”<sup>198</sup> In light of her contradictory nature, even Carlo is at times confused by her “undefined” and “flighty” nature. When Pisana comes to Carlo’s rescue, as Carlo is about to be transferred to a prison in Naples, Carlo describes her as “a good angel, ... a friend, a guide” and “a nurse.” Again, after having saved Carlo, who now lives in England, she is described as “a sister of charity,” coming finally to share the same qualities as Clara.<sup>199</sup> Yet, though Pisana’s “bizarre nature” makes her appear similar to the first woman, in the eyes of other male characters, Pisana also often embodies the qualities of the

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<sup>197</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 390.

<sup>198</sup> “volubile come una farfalla che non può ristar due minuti sulla corolla d’un fiore, senza batter le ali per succhiarne uno diverso,” “ella passava dalla dimestichezza al sussiego, dalla più chiassosa garrulità ad un silenzio ostinato, dall’allegria alla stizza e quasi alla crudeltà.” (115).

<sup>199</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 894.

second woman.<sup>200</sup> For this reason, just like Doretta, Pisana is described as cold and distant. For the spurned Giulio, Pisana appears as manipulative “torturer” who embodies pure evil, since she waits to attack her prey.<sup>201</sup> So that when she pits Raimondo against Giulio by flirting with both, the latter describes her as someone who “loves without a heart ... without a soul, born a woman in cruelty and in the stupidity of her lasciviousness.”<sup>202</sup> Even for Carlo, who is in love with her, Pisana at times appears as a self-serving, manipulative, and narcissistic woman: “Have you noticed the extreme coldness that she demonstrates?” he suggests one day to Lucilio.<sup>203</sup>

However, beneath Pisana’s contradictory nature appears to be a goodness that serves as the locus of Carlo’s attraction:

Those two people, so different and so well integrated into one, though, spoke, and worked with equal sincerity, in turn. The first, I am sure, would have criticized the second, just as the second did not remember the first at all, and so they lived together in perfect balance like the sun and the moon. But the strangest thing was that I was in love with both, unable to give preference to either. One because it copied life, and the other for its high sentiments, for worthiness, the other for fondness, for trust ...<sup>204</sup>

Influenced by the opinion of others, however, Carlo at times seems to suffer from a metaphorical and physical state of blindness that prevents him from seeing Pisana as she really is and thus misjudges her actions. The same can be said of the readers, who come to know Pisana through the eyes of the male characters. Consequently, it is not until Pisana is finally given a voice that the reader really comes to understand what motivates the heroine’s actions. As she explains to Carlo one day in speaking about her flirtatious games with Giulio and Raimondo, the

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<sup>200</sup> Pisana’s contradictory characteristics mirror those of Carlo’s real mother, who at the onset of the novel, is described as a transgressive woman, but who in reality was truly an ethical and caring individual, as we are informed by Carlo’s real father.

<sup>201</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 427.

<sup>202</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 432.

<sup>203</sup> Gorra, *Confessions*, 894.

<sup>204</sup> “...quelle due persone, così diverse e compenstrate in una sola, pensavano, parlavano, operavano, coll’uguale sincerità, ambedue nel suo giro del tempo. La prima, ne son sicuro, avrebbe disprezzato la seconda, come la seconda non si ricordava guari della prima, e così vivevano fra loro in buonissima cerimonia come il sole e la luna. Ma il caso più strano si era il mio, che mi trovavo innamorato di tutte e due non sapendo a cui dare la preferenza. L’una per copia di vita, per altezza di sentimento, per fecondia di parola, l’altra per tenerezza, per confidenza...” (462).

aim of her games was not to enslave either one of the men (as Doretta had done with Leopardo or as Clara had done with Lucilio). In fact, she was well aware that the two men were not really attracted to her and that they flirted with her because she was accessible and congenial with them. Thus in order to repulse Giulio, she began flirting with Raimondo. In the process, however, she complicated matters because her actions merely fueled Giulio's jealousy, and he continued to make her life unbearable. Although she could have taken advantage of Raimondo (as Doretta had done with Leopardo), she decided to give him up because she was not really in love with him and did not want to fetter him to an unhealthy relationship just to upset Giulio. And while she found Giulio somewhat attractive, she was not in love with him. For this reason, she could not "[k]eep deceiving and leading him on" (as Clara and Doretta had done with their mates) and decided to "cut it off ... before it got out of hand." She "broke up with him and that was the end of it."<sup>205</sup>

The three women we have discussed respond quite differently to their suitors and, however, as I have shown, the only one who repeatedly sacrifices herself on behalf of her beloved, of her family, and of her nation is Pisana. Although she loves Carlo, Pisana marries the old and decrepit Mauro Navagero to rescue her mother from her accrued debt, a sacrifice that the saintly Clara was unwilling to make. Realizing that she cannot fulfill the role of the traditional wife, since she is already married, she gives Carlo up to her friend Aquilina, who also loves him and who can better fulfill that role (this is a sacrifice that neither Doretta nor Clara could make). When Carlo and Pisana move to England, it is Pisana who sacrifices on Carlo's behalf, working long hours and selling personal valuables to provide for them both. Poor and destitute, Pisana loses all of her personal belongings but also her health. And because she repeatedly leaves the

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<sup>205</sup> "mi faceva compassione; ma cosa doveva fare? seguire ad ingannarlo e a menarlo in palo in frasca? Fu meglio come ho pensato io, tagliar il male alla radice; la ruppi affatto con lui, e buona notte" (436).

blind Carlo alone at home, the latter repeatedly misjudges her absence as neglect while he imagines her flirting with other men—transforming his physical blindness in a metaphorical inability to appreciate her for who she really is.

What prevents Carlo from seeing Pisana for who she really is are Carlo's preconceived notions, which he mistakes for truths. To overcome this status, Carlo would have to reintegrate into his thought process the very difference he erased earlier in life (it is the erasure of difference in others to domesticate and make them similar to him that leads him into pre-established notions that prevent him from thinking, imagining, and creating anything new). He is set straight on a day he complains to Lucilio (who has now moved to England, which is more accepting of his liberal views), as the lucid and democratic doctor tells him: "Carlo open your eyes before such heroism and adore the virtues of a woman whom you trusted ... this virgin strength of nature ... elevates disordered pursuits of a soul to the sublimity of a miracle and keeps it suspended through her strength."<sup>206</sup> Only then Carlo finally comes to terms with the fact that beneath the indifference and coldness that motivated the actions of the transgressive Pisana lurks a regenerative space, whose torments were steps that enabled him to reconnect with an ideal that he had repressed:

No mother, no lover and no bride could have done more for the object of her love. If then her behavior was judged, even by me, very bizarre and if she were accused of traces of craziness, as some who knew her in Venice suggested, indeed for the magnanimous unselfishness of all of her sacrifices, I would bless, then, her craziness. I would like to destroy the altar of wisdom in order to erect one on her behalf that is a thousand times more saintly and a thousand times more deserved.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> "Carlo aprite gli occhi sopra tanto eroismo, e adorate la virtù d'una donna a cui voi osaste fidarvi... Adorate, vi dico, questa vergine potenza della nature che innalza gli slanci disordinati di un'anima alla sublimità del miracolo, e la trattiene là sospesa per la sua stessa forza" (916).

<sup>207</sup> "Né madre, né amante ne sposa potea fare di più per l' oggetto dell' amor suo. Se poin la sua condotta fosse giudicata molto balzana e irregolare, e le fosse data traccia di pazzia, come da taluno de' suoi conosciuti a Venezia, appunto per la magnanima spensieratezza di tanti sacrifici, io benedirei allora la pazzia e vorrei abbattere l' altare della sapienza per innalzarne un altro ad essa mille volter più santo e meritato" (899).

Pisana is unusual because she reveals a different thought process than the one that drives Carlo's thoughts. Unlike Carlo, Pisana is able to uphold both sides of an issue. This becomes obvious in how they related to Rosa, Pisana's mother's maid. Rosa has devised a plan to take a percentage of the money the countess borrows from Pisana's husband. In Carlo's notion of justice, Rosa is an evil woman who should be shunned and avoided. Carlo is consequently shocked when one day he finds Pisana leisurely speaking with Rosa, after she has repeatedly stolen money from her. Pisana explains to Carlo that she had stopped to speak with Rosa "without even thinking" about it because she had seen her "dressed in rags." Saddened by the woman's "misery," she "felt sorry for her."<sup>208</sup> Although Pisana realizes that the maid's actions toward her were improper, she nonetheless can reach out to the woman, even though her class status and ethical outlook in life differ from hers. Although Pisana is aware of this reality (she knows that the maid is being unethical) and knows that the maid's ethics do not coincide with her own, she moves beyond a dialectical position that would force her to choose between good and evil. By embracing these apparently contradictory perspectives, Pisana moves beyond their limiting outlooks. As she puts herself metaphorically in the maid's shoes, she can maintain her point of view about the unethical nature of her deed while realizing that what drives the maid's actions are issues of poverty and need. Her ability to move beyond the boundaries of the self and reach out to someone who is different from her drives Pisana's internal sense of justice: a sense of justice that motivates her actions, her heroic acts and, fuels her sense of rebellion. Pisana's inner sense of justice enables her to overcome the dogmas imposed on her by society or religious beliefs, so that she can live life to its fullest, without fears, inhibitions, and resentments. Given Pisana's disposition, we are thus not surprised when she leaves her husband (who seems to

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<sup>208</sup> "si era fermata senza pensarci e che in quanto alla Rosa le avea fatto compassione il vederla coperta di cenci e intristita in viso per miseria" (683).

betray her patriotic ideals) to live with Carlo out of wedlock, without fearing how others might judge her; or when she insists that Carlo marry another woman (another symbolic act of sacrifice), even though she is in love with him. Nor are we surprised when, toward the end of the novel, she moves to England to live with and take care of the married Carlo, with the approval of his wife (another act of sacrifice), so that the latter can remain in Venice with the children. And though Carlo does not realize this until the end of the novel, Pisana's sense of internal justice is what draws him to her and allows him to reconnect with a similar sense of justice that lies hidden in his unconscious mind. Carlo finally realizes that what motivated all of Pisana's actions were not selfish pursuits, but an interior sense of goodness that enabled her to reach out to him and that now enables him to reach out to her:

Vile, ungrateful, I paid no attention to your sacrifices, I forced myself into believing in your indifference maybe so as not to feel indebted to you and to your devotion and in the admirable way in which you demonstrated it to me through a sublime and delicate seal on which you only know how to imprint sacrifices making them appear ordinary and devoid of merit! ... Curse me Pisana! Curse the first moment you met me which induced you to waste so much heroism on me that could reward the virtue of a saint, the fruitful pain of a martyr! ... Damn my stupid arrogance, my ungrateful distrust and the vile egotism with which I lived for two years drinking your blood, and sucking from your flesh so as to live!... Until I will have repaid with tears of blood for all the crimes I have committed against you, all the past humiliations I have imposed on you, I will not find peace nor the courage to raise my head and call myself a man!<sup>209</sup>

As Carlo's health improves, Pisana's worsens until she finally dies. Even after her death, though, Pisana's words continue to reverberate throughout the narrator's description: "Carlo, I recommend you! Live so that your life will be worthy of being imitated by those who will

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<sup>209</sup> "tu mi strazi l'anima, che mi rinfacci con queste parole la cecità colla quale in questi ultimi anni ho voluto credere alla tua apparente freddezza?... Infame, sconoscente che non badava a tutti i tuoi sacrifici, che mi sforzava a credere vera la tua indifferenza forse per indebitarmi a poco prezzo con te, che non volli conoscere nella tua devozione e nel modo ammirabile con cui me la dimostravi quel suggello sublime di delicatezza di cui tu sola sai improntare i sacrifici e farli comparire azioni affatto comuni e prive di merito!... Oh maledicimi, Pisana! Maledici il primo momento in cui mi hai conosciuto, e che ti ha condotta a sprecare per me tanto eroismo quanto avrebbe bastato a premiare la virtù di un santo e fecondi dolori di un martire!... Maledici la mia stupida superbia, la mia ingrata diffidenza, e il vile egoismo con cui son vissuto due anni bevendo il tuo sangue, e suggendoti dalle carni mia vita!.. Finchè non avrò scontato a lagrime di sangue tutto il mio delitto contro di te, tutti i dolori le umiliazioni che ti ho imposto, non avrò né pace né ardire di sollevar il capo e chiamarmi uomo!" (320).



follow. I hope that my suggestions will be lucky enough to leave an inheritance of great and noble actions!”<sup>210</sup> As Carlo’s own life nears the end, “abandoned by friend and enemies,” he is left with a renewed hope for a better society that enables him to face death without fear and without regrets:

My temporal existence as a man is now nearing the end; happy for the good that I have disseminated and sure of having repaired all the evil in me committed, I have no other hope and other desire except to reach out and unite with the great sea of being. The peace that I enjoy now is like the one found in a mysterious bay in the heart of which the bold sailor finds an entrance to the infinitely calm ocean of eternity. But my thoughts, before diving in that space without time, turn once again toward the future of man; and in them I entrust the task of expiating their sins...<sup>211</sup>

## Epilogue

By the time Nievo wrote *Le Confessioni*, the democratic “Risorgimental” ideals that had propelled Italy toward unification had begun to fade. The lower classes were poorer than ever. The middle class was so politically polarized that no one could come to any consensus about the direction the country should take. Resignation and apathy had settled over the disenchanted country, bringing the process of unification to a screeching halt. Nievo blamed the Italian ruling classes for the problems of the nation. He labeled them as comprised of “egotists and weak” personalities who were only capable of protecting their own personal interests and as egotistical men who were incapable of searching “in the most hidden and intimate part of their heart ... to interrogate it ... to measure the strength of their faith and keep alive a spark of hope.” For him,

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<sup>210</sup> “Carlo te lo raccomando! Vivi perchè la tua vita sarà degna di essere imitata da quella che verranno. Spero che i miei consigli ebbero la fortuna di lasciare un’eredità di grandi e nobili azioni!” ( 938).

<sup>211</sup> “...questa io addito ai miei fratelli più giovani come il più invidiabile tesoro, e l’unico scudo per difendersi contro gli adescamenti dei falsi amici, le frodi dei vili e le soperchierie dei potenti...l’umiltà ci consenta di considerare noi stessi come artefici infinitesimali della vita mondiale, e la rettitudine dell’animo ci avvezzi a riputare il bene di molti altri superiore di gran lunga al bene di noi soli. La mia esistenza temporale come uomo, tocca ormai al suo termine; contento del bene che operai, e sicuro di aver riparato per quanto stette in me al male commesso, non ho altra speranza ed altra fede sennonché essa sbocchi e si confonda oggimai nel gran mare dell’essere. La pace di cui godo ora, è come quel golfo misterioso in fondo al quale l’ardito navigatore trova un passaggio per l’oceano infinitamente calmo dell’eternità. Ma il pensiero, prima di tuffarsi in quel tempo che non avrà più differenza di tempi, si slancia ancora una volta nel futuro degli uomini; e ad essi lega fidente le proprie colpe da espiare...” (6).

they were men who withdrew “the attention away from the dramatic and depressing reality” of the “political situation,” to divert others from real issues, and protect their own gains.<sup>212</sup>

In order to renew the national fervor that had driven Italy’s unification process in its early years, Nievo writes a novel that describes the private events and personal growth of an Italian patriot as they intertwine with the life of the nation. As his destiny and that of the nation develop through the narration, the three women described in my model—the maternal figure, the beloved who mirrors her, and the third woman—function as a foil against whom the spiritual growth of the protagonist is accomplished. Writing provides Nievo with a therapeutic space that is not so much concerned with aesthetics, but with the types of ideals that it can promote. Pisana, the sentimental heroine, in the end encompasses each stage of this process: the maternal figure, the beloved, the country, and the third woman; the past, the present, and the future. All unite in her as she provides the start and the end points of Carlo’s diary and as she emerges as an irrepressible force that cannot be controlled. By introducing in the novel a purely female space that promotes a different thought process, Pisana emerges as a force that not only fuels Carlo’s imagination, but also that of an Italian nation that, long after Carlo’s death, continues to be inspired by Nievo’s memoir.

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<sup>212</sup> Cesare de Michelis, “Adolescenza di Ippolito,” *Ippolito Nievo: Tra Letteratura e Storia*, ed. Simone Casanini, Enrico Ghidetti, Roberta Turchi (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2004) 17-18. “distogliere lo sguardo dalla drammatica o angosciante realtà.... A ruling class of “[e]goisti” and “eunuchi”... “più ascosi penetrati del cuore e di interrogarlo... per misurare la fermezza della fede e tener vivo lo slancio della speranza.”

### Chapter 3: *Fosca (Fosca): A Study in Genre (Gender)*



The constitutional monarchy that came into being after Italy's unification in no shape or form embodied the democratic ideals that Ippolito Nievo had tried to promote in the novel we discussed in Chapter 2. After unification, Italy became a constitutional monarchy, whose sovereign body was the king. Voting was restricted to males who were at least 20 years old, literate, and paid at least 40 lire per year in taxes. This meant that less than 2% of the population voted in the first election of 1861.<sup>213</sup>

By 1820 the national debt, in spite of the privatization of national assets, which included both the sale of Piedmont's railways and many of its lands, had reached 8,200 million lire.<sup>214</sup> Consequently, while initially lands confiscated from the clergy—a controversial topic even during Nievo's time—were to be sold to encourage the formation of a large class of independent farmers, sorting out the budget deficit took on a higher priority. Although between 1862 and

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<sup>213</sup> John Davis, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford U. P., 200) 172.

<sup>214</sup> Davis, 160.

1865 the government received revenues through government-owned monopolies such as tobacco and industry, direct taxation of consumable goods accounted for the majority of taxes collected (54%).<sup>215</sup> The most oppressive and hated tax instated during this time was the tax on grist (*tassa sul macinato*). Its impact was especially felt by the lower classes, who took their corn and chestnuts to be ground at the mills. As a tax, it was so detrimental that it brought a decline in living and nutritional standards to millions of people.<sup>216</sup> In light of these economic measures, by the end of the century, the economic and social gap between the wealthy and the poor, instead of decreasing, had grown to astronomical proportions.

As peasant hunger increased and as the population's discontent grew, riots broke out, town halls were sacked, and tax records were burned. Things got so out of hand that it became hard for those in power to control the majority of the population.<sup>217</sup> In Palermo, for example, a series of popular insurrections brought bandits, republican supporters, and supporters of the Bourbon restoration together in riots that took several days to crush. What made matter worse is that in 1860 about 10,000 criminals, mostly brigands, were released or escaped from prison, swelling the number of lawless bands that operated on horseback and who swept into villages, killing officials of the new regime.<sup>218</sup> In response, the newly created Italian government found it necessary to instate mandatory conscription to increase the size of its army and deploy soldiers to control social unrest.

These measures taken by the government, however, made matters worse. As disenchantment against the government increased, citizens, instead of seeking help from government officials, sought help from outlaws, who they felt better served their interests. When

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<sup>215</sup> Davis, 172.

<sup>216</sup> Davis, 172.

<sup>217</sup> Harry Hearder, *Longman History of Italy: Modern Italy 1871-1995*, 2nd Edition. (New York: Longman, 1996) 71.

<sup>218</sup> Hearder, 241.

ordinary citizens refused to collaborate with the governmental efforts to control this lawlessness—both for fear of vendettas from brigands and because they despised the government itself—they were punished either by crucifixion or hanging. Farmers and small business owners, fearing for their well-being, abandoned agricultural lands, shops, and business, increasing the unemployment rolls throughout the country.<sup>219</sup> Things got so bad that those in power proclaimed a state of siege 10 times between 1861 and 1922, as military rule and martial laws began to replace ordinary courts.<sup>220</sup>

### **La Scapigliatura and the City of Milan**

The *Scapigliatura* was an avant-garde literary movement that developed during the first 15 years that followed Italy's unification.<sup>221</sup> Although a short-lived artistic movement, the *Scapigliati* “managed to challenge the status quo, artistically, socially, and politically, by attracting the attention and scandalizing Italy's more conservative faction of the population” through such publications as Cletto Arrighi's *Cronaca Nera* and Antonio Ghislanzoni's *Rivista Minima*.<sup>222</sup> The *Scapigliati* were disenchanted with the distribution of political power in newly unified Italy, since the country, although free from French and Austrian control, was now dominated by the northern bourgeoisie. A political section of this movement, known as the *Scapigliatura Democratica*, became politically active and was central to the founding and growth, in the latter part of the century, of the Socialist party. In its extreme incarnation, instead, the movement became anarchical, as was the case of the poet Felice Cavallotti, who entered the Italian parliament as a member of the extreme left and attracted the support of many radicals.

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<sup>219</sup> Hearder, 241.

<sup>220</sup> Mutton, 490.

<sup>221</sup> Scapigliatura literally means disheveled hair.

<sup>222</sup> Lawrence Venuti, introduction to *Passion* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994) viii. All English citations of *Fosca* are from this text.

Iginio Ugo Tarchetti emerged as one of the leading figures of this avant-garde movement during the four short years of his literary career (1865-69). Tarchetti was born in 1841 in San Salvatore Monferrato, but lived most of his life on the fringes of the literary world of Milan, the city where the movement began. Milan in the mid-1800s was unlike other cities on the peninsula. A vibrant and bustling city, it served as the center of Italy's industrial revolution. Milan's Polytechnic Institute was inaugurated in 1863, providing Italy with its best engineers and, in 1865, the economist Luzzatti created the famous Banca Popolare. At the same time, Eugenio Cautani transformed his cotton factory into a modern company, offering the first stock options. The first central stations were added in 1864 and 1865. In 1872, Gian Battista Pirelli opened the first functioning tire company, while in the following years Ernesto de Angelis turned an old dry cleaner into a textile factory and the Bocconi brothers inaugurated the first department store. In spite of its economic boom, the strikes that took place in 1867 against the high cost of living evidenced that there was a less privileged class that made up the city's rich social fabric. For this reason, Milan was not only the center of Italy's industrial revolution by the mid-1800s, but also the home to early socialist reform movements that would eventually gave rise to the kind of cooperative organizations, societies, and trade unions that we will be discussing in Chapter 4.<sup>223</sup>

The changes that took place in Milan during the middle and later part of the 19th century had a profound effect on commerce and on the way commerce changed the social fabric of the country. More importantly, for my analysis, they altered the way books and novels were being published and disseminated to the public as a whole. In 1859, Emilio Treves, inspired by the economic opportunities offered by the Lombard capital, left Trieste to establish a publishing company in Milan. That same year, he introduced *Il Pugnolo* to the literary scene, a journal that

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<sup>223</sup> Giovanna Rosa, "La Narrativa Scapigliata," *Liber Liber Biblioteca* (Laterza, 1997)  
<http://www.readme.it/libri/Letteratura%20Italiana/LA%20NARRATIVA%20SCAPIGLIATA>.

under the direction of Leone Fortis emerged as the most diffused publication in northern Italy. Treves's move, in turn, inspired Sonzogno to publish the newspaper, *Il Secolo*, in 1861, which reached an unprecedented amount of readers, selling more than 30,000 copies in a day.<sup>224</sup> By 1865, with the help of the Chamber of Commerce and other financial companies, the first business journal, *Il Sole*, was published.

With Treves and Sonzogno as guides, a new and experimental literary hybrid emerged that was a mixture of novel, magazine, and newspaper, and it placed Milan's publications at the forefront of the peninsula's literary scene. The new publications catered to a public that was no longer interested in traditional literature in book format, but wanted to be informed and entertained. Following the lead of the French *feuilleton*, the British serial novels, they also contained novels in installments at a fraction of the cost of one book. To compete with these changes, book publishers cut printing costs by using cheaper paper and making books smaller so that they could be more easily carried while traveling. In turn, these changes spurred the exponential growth of the translation industry, promoting the rich exchanges of foreign literature that gave way to the first copyright laws established during the Berne Convention of 1886. While on the one hand the *Scapigliati* criticized this new way of diffusing literature, which they believed was driven by a society that had suppressed the disinterested value of art, on the other hand they also took advantage of it to promote their own views on literature and to critique the decaying state of Italian literature.

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<sup>224</sup> Rosa, 7.

## Tarchetti's Literary Career

Between 1861 and 1863, Tarchetti served as an officer in the Italian army. He was sent by Victor Emanuel II to southern Italy to repress brigandage. After his military discharge, Tarchetti embarked on a short but prolific literary career in Milan, writing both fiction and journalism. Most of Tarchetti's fiction addresses the plight of the poor and the working class while satirizing the aristocracy and protesting against the repressiveness of military discipline. Tarchetti was particularly disenchanted with the state of Italian literature, which was dominated by historic aesthetics on the heels of Alessandro Manzoni's "great" novel, *The Betrothed*, which had popularized the historical novel in Italy.<sup>225</sup> For a writer such as Tarchetti, who was attuned to literary currents from abroad, Italy's fascination with Manzoni seemed exaggerated:

There is no doubt that *The Promessi Sposi* has been until now the best Italian novel ... but in comparison to masterpieces from other nations, it is nothing other than a mediocre novel. For those who have read Tom Jones,<sup>226</sup> Gil Blas,<sup>227</sup> Don Quijote and *the Life of Martin Scribler*,<sup>228</sup> who serve as examples of great novels from England, France and Spain, and for those who have read Walter Scott, who is the greatest novelist in the world and all those moral and marvelous novels owned by the United States and Germany, Italy's admiration [for Manzoni] appears exaggerated and ridiculous.<sup>229</sup>

Manzoni's historical novel, in fact, achieved such enormous success that it dominated the Italian literary scene until the end of the century, when it was supplanted by the *verismo* of writers such as Luigi Capuana and Giuseppe Verga.<sup>230</sup> For Tarchetti, Manzoni's enduring success was due to

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<sup>225</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (New York: Routledge 1992) 196-7.

<sup>226</sup> Henry Fielding (1707-1754) *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 1749.

<sup>227</sup> Alain-René Lesage (1715-1735) *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillana*.

<sup>228</sup> He is referring to *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, a collection of travel literature written by Pope Swift and Gay, who collaborated with John Arbuthnot, who edited the published text in 1741.

<sup>229</sup> Translation and parenthesis mine, "Non vi ha luogo a dubitare che *I Promessi sposi* sieno finora il migliore romanzo italiano, ma non occorre dimostrare come esso sia che un mediocre romanzo in confront dei capolavori delle altere nazioni. Per chi ha letto Tom Jones, Gil Blas, il Don Chisciotte e *La Vita di Martino Scribler*, che sono del lato dell'arte di grandi modelli del romanzo inglese, francese, e spagnolo, per chi ha letto Walter Scott, che è il più grande romanzziere del mondo, e quei tanti romanzi meravigliosi e morali che possiedono l'America e la Germania, questa cieca ammirazione degli italiani cade nell'esagerato e nel ridicolo." Igino Tarchetti, "Idee Minime sul Romanzo," addendum to *Paolina: Misteri del Coperto di Figini* (Milano: Gruppo Mursia Ed, 1994) 174.

<sup>230</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to the Italian Novel*, ed, Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P. 2003) 42.



factors beyond the quality of the work. Indeed, he believed that this success was favored by the glut of realistic novels being translated from abroad, which better represented Italy's more conservative dominant political ideology and prevented the translation of novels that would have contributed to the progress of "humanity."<sup>231</sup>

Tarchetti's issue with the historical novel was that, just like history, it narrated "the story of man's subjection to man," and thus reflected the same political inclinations that were responsible for the type of class division that Italy was experiencing. The novel, instead, needed to draw on emotions that came from the heart (in a bow to Romanticism) and serve as a guiding light for the individual, inspiring him to positive social change.<sup>232</sup>

From the first confidences, from the first revelations man made to men, from the first emotions, the first pain, the first hope, is born the novel, which is the history of the human heart and the family, just as history properly named is called the novel of society and public life. But how vague and superficial are those connections that we can draw from history in terms of the characteristics and the nature of the human heart ... affections, passions, the family, all are forgotten, it is a sad tale of overthrown thrones, of defeated armies of shed blood, lost lands, it is nothing other than an odyssey of crimes; one could say that the life of the nation exists only in these pages of blood and that history has the sad duty of recoding them. I have many times grown pale before such volumes and have been overtaken by deep discouragement, I then threw the book away exclaiming ... this is the history of the proud! ... I held a novel in my hands, and in a little while I was tempted to reconcile myself to [men]; I shall not say how different they appeared to me from those I encountered in history, I shall not note the marvelous world that opened to me at a glance.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Tarchetti specifically says: "...quando io vedo che ogni scritto politico avverso ai principii del governo, ma conforme a quelli dell'umanità e del progresso, è tosto impedito nella sua diffusione, io domando a me stesso: a che giovea la libertà della stampa?..." Igino Ugo Tarchetti, "Idee Minime sul Romanzo" appendix to *Paolina* (Milano: Gruppo Ugo Mursia, 1994) 182.

<sup>232</sup> Perhaps Tarchetti was correct in his criticism of Manzoni; in fact as Andrea Ciccarelli points out in an essay, even before Manzoni's death, this novel was turned "into a static example of moral values promoted by a single dominant class rather than an incitement to much needed social, educational, and economic reform." After Manzoni's death, his novel, in fact, was appropriated by the political establishment as an educational tool capable of imposing Risorgimental value such as, "one religion, one language" and "one nation." As Andrea Ciccarelli points out, "Whose Italy: The Cult of Dante in the Culture of the Risorgimento," in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity Around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (New York: Berg, 2001) 85.

<sup>233</sup> Tarchetti, *Idee minime*, 168, "Dalle prime confidenze, dalle prime rivelazioni che gli uomini fecero agli uomini, dal primo affetto, dal primo dolore, dalla prima speranza, nacque il romanzo che è la storia del cuore umano e della famiglia, come la storia propriamente detta è il romanzo della società della vita pubblica. Ma quanto sono vaghe e

Tarchetti viewed the author as not only a writer. The author had become a preacher who professed “a great religion,” which he had to follow and had to pass on “to the great human family” in order “to illuminate it and direct it toward great destinies.” Authors, for this reason, had to ignite the reader’s imagination, to “multiply, ... increase,” and “invigorate ... in the spirit the thousand and infinite sensations that fuel the reader’s passion ... in which the gigantic sentiment of life manifests itself.” By igniting the reader’s imaginative faculties, the author could thus serve as a guiding light, illuminating the reader’s path in the process of promulgating positive social change. Literature that was moved by the heart or sentimental literature was better suited to meet these goals:<sup>234</sup>

... our hearts turn to Germany and England who have created more tender, warm-hearted, and moral novels of all human literature. Galt,... Pincher,<sup>235</sup> Miss Owenson,<sup>236</sup> Miss Edgeworth,<sup>237</sup> Daniel De Foe,<sup>238</sup> and more than all the author of Clarissa,<sup>239</sup> are names that we pronounce with veneration, nor would I not speak of that good Lafontaine,<sup>240</sup> which every kind soul cannot help but remember with tenderness and thankfulness. Whose heart has not been educated by his books? Who after having read one of his books has not felt better? When I read *Das bekenntniss am grabe*, I could have kneeled at his feet ... if this book moved me, if it made me a better man, then I say that this book is good.<sup>241</sup>

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superficiali quelle congizioni che noi possiamo attingere dalla storia sull’indole e sulla natura del cuore umano! L’uomo individual, l’uomo pesante scompare; gli affetti, le passion, la famiglia, vi sono dimenticati; è un triste racconto su troni rovesciati, di eserciti debellati, di sangue versato, di terre conquistate e perdute, non è che una terribile odissea di delitti; si direbbe che nella vita delle nazioni non esistano che pagine di sangue, e che la storia non abbia ch eil triste ufficio di registrarle. Per me ho impallidito più volte su questi volume, e mi sentii invaso da uno scoraggiamento profondo, e buttai il libro esclamando...questa è la storia delle fiere!...ebbi tra le mani un romanzo, e per poco io fui tentato di riconciliarmi con essi; non dirò quanto mi apparissero diversi quelli conosciuti nelle storie.. nel romanzo conobbi l’uomo libero, nella storia avava conosciuto l’uomo sottoposto all’uomo.”

<sup>234</sup> Notice that my study differs from that of Lawrence Venuti, who mainly focuses on Tarchetti’s fantastic tales and who places Fosca within this genre. It is without a doubt that Tarchetti experimented with the fantastic and the gothic, but in his *Idee minime sul romanzo*, I am convinced that he is not referring to the fantastic but to sentimentalism instead. It is within a dichotomy of sentimentalism versus realism that I am grounding my argument.

<sup>235</sup> Karoline Pichler (1779-1843), Viennese author of *Lenore*, 1804; *Agatocles*, 1808, and others.

<sup>236</sup> Lady Morgan Owenson (1785 or 1783-1859) author of *St Clair*, 1804; *The Wild Irish Girl*, 1806, *O’Donnel*, 1814; *Memoirs*, 1863.

<sup>237</sup> Mary Edgeworth (1767-1849) author of *Castle Rackrent*, 1800, *Ormond*, 1817, *Helen*, 1863.

<sup>238</sup> Daniel Foe (1660-1731) *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robison Crusoe*, 1719.

<sup>239</sup> Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) *Clarissa*, 1748.

<sup>240</sup> The German author August Heinrich Julius Lafontaine (1758-1824).

<sup>241</sup> Tarchetti, “Idee Minime sul Romnazo,” 176. ...il nostro cuore si rivolge subito alla Germania e all’ Inghilterra chehanno creato I romanzi più dolci, più affettuosi e più morali di tutta la letteratura umana. Galt, Miss Porter, la

Influenced by writers from abroad such as Hoffman, Poe, Nerval, Gauthier, Erickmann-Chatrian, and Beecher Stowe, Tarchetti experimented liberally, borrowing from and imitating them, even to the point of reproducing and plagiarizing some of their scenes. As such, Tarchetti was the first practitioner of the Gothic tale in Italy. In addition, he wrote humorous tales modeled on Sterne, and a social novel, *Paolina* (1865), in the manner of Eugène Sue. Between 1866 and 1867, he also wrote his first antimilitaristic novel, *Una Nobile Follia*—part fiction, part documentary essay, in which he describes the fight against brigandage as a colonialist war that Piedmont was waging against the recently annexed poor southerners.<sup>242</sup> *Una Nobile Follia* had such a profound effect on the Italian reading public that, in military barracks, officers lit bonfires with the novel to discourage other young men who identified with the artist's protest.<sup>243</sup>

His last novel, *Fosca* (1869), is perhaps the most creative of all. This highly experimental novel which some have classified as romantic, others as realistic or even naturalistic, has attracted the attention of many critics who have either appreciated Tarchetti's literary inventiveness or have dismissed it.<sup>244</sup> For example, while Benedetto Croce praised Tarchetti for his naturalistic innovations, he criticized him for the confusion engendered by his residual and persistent romanticism. Similarly, Folco Portinari suggests that the problem with this novel is that the psychological anomalies are introduced with inadequate and outdated techniques which are neither psychiatry nor psychology or symbolism, but a mixture of them all.<sup>245</sup> For Lawrence Venuti, instead, Tarchetti's literary experimentation arises as an attempt on the part of the author

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Pincher, Miss Owenson, Miss Edgeworth, Daniele Di Foe, e più di tutti l'autore della *Clarissa*, sono tanti nomi che profferiamo quasi con venerazione; né vorrei tacere di quel buon Lafontaine, di cui ogni anima gentile non può ricordarsi mai senza tenerezza e senza riconoscenza. Chi non ebbe il cuore educato da i suoi libri? Chi dopo la lettura d'uno de' suoi romanzi non si è sentito migliore? Quando io lessi *Das bekenntniss am grabe*, mi sarei inginocchiato a' suoi piedi.. se quel libro mi ha commosso, se quel libro mi ha reso migliore, io dico che quel libro `e buono."

<sup>242</sup> Ann Caesar, "Construction of Character in Tarchetti's *Fosca*," *MLA* 82: 76.

<sup>243</sup> Martin Clark, 48.

<sup>244</sup> See Ann Caesar's article "Construction of Character in Tarchetti's *Fosca*" *MLA* 82 (1978) 84-5.

<sup>245</sup> Folco Portinari, *Un'idea di Realismo* (Napoli:Guida, 1976) 199.

to intervene in Italy's cultural situation. As Venuti evidences, Tarchetti's innovations are aimed at resolving "the crisis" that he "diagnosed in Italian fictional discourse," which was the "inadequacy of realism to serve a democratic cultural politics."<sup>246</sup> A closer analysis perhaps reveals that Tarchetti in this novel accomplishes even more than this. Through the lenses of the model we have outlined, Tarchetti not only manages to displace realistic discourses but, in the process, also manages to introduce the Italian reading public to a new kind of sentimental novel that fulfills Tarchetti's democratic goals; it also addresses the contradictions that resulted from the political changes that Italy was experiencing in a more realistic manner than realism itself.

Tarchetti accomplishes this objective by engaging his readers in a creative process of repetition that, as in all the works we have examined, is motivated by a comparison between an ambivalent ideal (ambivalent because not yet realized) and the present reality (realism). In the contemplative mind of the male protagonist, who often is a stand-in for the author, the difference that emerges between the two engages the male protagonist on a creative process of repetition in which the contradiction that emerges from this difference encourages thought. Tarchetti's experimentalism in *Fosca* reveals an intertextuality that does not appear by chance, but is driven by an internal coherence in which the intentional blending of genres provides the readers with new solutions to the issues that had already been addressed by these previous genres (both realism and sentimentalism). Not surprisingly, Italo Calvino, an author who was in tune with the latest literary trends, believes that Tarchetti's innovativeness evokes a comparison with "pulp fiction." As Calvino suggests, *Fosca*/Fosca (both the novel and the third heroine) is so out of the ordinary that it appears on the Italian literary scene as "a visitor from another planet" or "a mutant in the evolution of the species," whereby "whoever sees" her is "both distanced and attracted, as always happens before facts—whether in art or in life—that tells us that something

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<sup>246</sup> Rethinking Translation, 204.

is changing.”<sup>247</sup> Tarchetti’s *Fosca*, as Calvino would have it, is so unusual that this author merits the same kind of literary acclaim given to canonical 19th-century writers such as Maupassant, Dostoevsky, Henry James, and Tolstoy.<sup>248</sup> It is without a doubt that Tarchetti’s experimentalism managed to shock 19th-century readers; and it is without a doubt that it continues to fascinate us today, as it has inspired a director like Ettore Scola to film *Passion* (1981), a movie based on this novel; and American-born, composer Stephen Sondheim to write “*Passion: A Musical*” (1991), for which he won Tony Awards in the same year for Best Musical, Best Book of a Musical, and Best Original Score.

### Sentimentalism and the Novel

In order to understand how Tarchetti appropriates prior sentimental codes in order to promote a new kind of sentimental novel, we need dedicate a few pages to examine how the sentimental genre changed throughout the later part of the 18th century and the first part of the 19th century. Sentimentalism, a subgenre of Romanticism, spread to France by way of England and dominated the literary scene from 1740 (beginning with Richardson’s *Pamela*) until approximately 1852 (when Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*).<sup>249</sup> In Italy, sentimentalism lost its appeal because it progressively became associated with the kind of liberalism that promoted the cultural and social transformations that, toward the end of the century, became aligned with the rise of socialism and communism.

The dilemma that drives most sentimental novels is inspired by a tension that troubled Enlightenment thinkers: how to construct a form of government that is both egalitarian and

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<sup>247</sup> Calvino cited in Lawrence Venuti’s introduction to *Passion* with no reference, xi-xiii.

<sup>248</sup> Venuti, *Passion*, xiii.

<sup>249</sup> Margaret Cohen, *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, ed. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2002) 106.

libertarian, but that still enables individuals to fully exercise their private freedom without impinging on the freedom of others. This conflict in sentimental novels appears in the dilemma that tears the protagonists apart between their right to participate in the collective, as epitomized by family obligations (a right that expresses positive freedom), and the negative countering right to dispose of one's own person, epitomized by the rights of the heart.<sup>250</sup> Positive rights in these novels thus become aligned with duty to parents and are contrasted with ties of friendship and love. Similarly, the virtues of justice, prudence, and economy are placed in competition with generosity, benevolence, and compassion, which represent negative rights.<sup>251</sup> While in sentimental novels, the protagonist's aesthetic-moral judgment may run directly counter to the judgments of others, as we saw in the case of Pisana in Nievo's novel, this diversity is in no way limiting. It is, rather, an affirmation of the nature of the aesthetic democratic collective, which can be constituted through discussion and debate.<sup>252</sup> The contradiction that arises from this dilemma is one that is built around a tragic plot—in recognition of the fact that tragedy is based on the encounter of two valid ethical imperatives that meet in a situation of mutual contradiction.<sup>253</sup> As we saw with regard to Pisana, sentimental novels do not privilege one of the rights at the expense of the other. They instead show that each imperative is destructive when pursued to the exclusion of the other, since neither imperative suffices to define morality on its own.<sup>254</sup> Overwhelmingly, however, in these novels, the duties of the heart are repressed on behalf of the collective.

A novel that serves as a point of reference for all sentimental novels and also functions as a point of reference for Tarchetti's *Fosca* is Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Julie, the main

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<sup>250</sup> Cohen, *Literary Channel*, 108-9.

<sup>251</sup> Cohen, *Literary Channel*, 109.

<sup>252</sup> Margaret Cohen, *the Sentimental Education of the Novel* (New Jersey: Princeton U. P., 1999) 114.

<sup>253</sup> Cohen, *Literary Channel*, 109.

<sup>254</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 36.

protagonist of Rousseau's novel, falls in love with a man whose position runs counter to the interests of the family. After considerable anguish, she attempts to abolish the conflict between freedom of love and family welfare with a sophisticated sleight of hand: she freely chooses to be unfree, acquiescing willingly to marry Wolmar. The rest of the novel, however, makes clear that Julie cannot cheat the demands of the heart. Rather than extinguishing the conflict, her marriage raises it to a tragic pitch. By giving up the person she loves, Julie freely sacrifices her individual rights on behalf of her society. As becomes obvious from Rousseau's example, in spite of the fact that both rights are privileged equally in these novels, the dilemma that plagues the individual is usually resolved in an uncompromising sacrifice of private freedom on behalf of the collective, which sometimes can even lead to death, as in the case of Pisana. Sacrifice in these novels emerges as an important aspect of the plot precisely because by partaking in the protagonist's sacrifice, readers are encouraged to follow the same path. By training readers in the proper reaction, sentimental novels are thus able to point readers toward proper values.<sup>255</sup>

Authors who felt that politics were not fulfilling the liberal democratic ideals often appropriated sentimentality. For this reason, during the century in which Richardson, Rousseau, Bronte, and Sand were writing, sensibility and sentimentality became associated with physiological and emotional states that were supposed to endow characters and readers with sympathy or empathy: emotions that would enable them to participate directly in the feelings and experiences of others, especially their suffering, as if they were one's own.<sup>256</sup> Authors appropriated this genre to promote interior, emotional qualities that did not reinforce monolithic

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<sup>255</sup> Lynn Festa, "Sentimental Bonds and Revolutionary Characters: Richardson's Pamela in England and France," 81, in *The Literary Channel*. See footnote 249.

<sup>256</sup> April Alliston, "Transnational Sympathies, Imagined Communities," p. 134, in *The Literary Channel*. See footnote 249.

notions of national identity, but that united different people under a common bond, beyond difference.

Tracing the roots of sentimentalism all the way back to the 17th century, Marianne Noble explains that sentimentalism arose in the late 17th and early 18th centuries as a challenge to the belief that feelings and the body were sites of corruption that evinced the presence of the devil inside human beings.<sup>257</sup> A growing reaction against this idea caused a group of clergymen to reject and propound the idea that people in general were attracted to good actions, since these provoked pleasurable feelings. In 1711, the third earl of Shaftesbury, a student of John Locke, published a book called *Charakteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. This book was influential in giving rise to the belief that, above and beyond the five physical senses, man possessed an innate ability to determine right from wrong. Francis Hutcheson (Shaftesbury's protégé) further explored this idea in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), where he drew attention to the relationships among sympathy, morality, and the community. Hutcheson claimed that sympathy could be evoked in an impartial spectator witnessing someone else's suffering by mere (visceral) feelings, rather than by reason. The transference promoted by sympathy was important because it allowed a person to move beyond the limits of one's self to reach out to another, precisely because one was able to place the sufferer's interests before one's own:

His agonies, when they are thus brought home to themselves ... [when] we conceive ourselves enduring all the torments, we enter as if it were into his body, and become in some measure the same with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something, which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike him.<sup>258</sup>

By drawing on a sympathy that rested in the spectators' ability to place themselves in the victim's place, even when suffering differed from their own, sentimental authors promoted a space that united readers and characters. This bond gave readers access to an idealized, imagined

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<sup>257</sup> Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 2000) 63-5.

<sup>258</sup> Francis Hutcheson, cited by Noble, 63. Brackets mine.



sentimental community, in which all citizens had equal rights, regardless of rank, social status, age, gender, or nationality, since all that was required was the ability to be moved. Tears in these texts are suggestive because they are indicative of human responses that extend the individual's point of view to the universality of a potential community, whose membership is very similar to the one that makes up emerging liberal societies. By appropriating these emotional codes, "sentimental" authors were able to promote in their texts an imagined and idealized community centered on "sensibility" that could exceed the limits defining a nation. These sensibilities are based on national language, class distinction, kinship relations, or legitimate sexuality. A trope most often used by sentimental authors to represent this utopian space is the sorrow experienced by a child as it separates from the mother. This ontological moment, which is imagined as a primordial space that united the individual with the all, but, now lost, is the space these authors wish to regain. Significantly, this maternal space can function as a trope for the idealized nation because it enables all, regardless of gender, class, religious, social, or political difference to unite in one common, maternal space, which is imagined as a space without difference. Finally, by portraying the ability to sympathize with another's pain as either an inheritable trait that could be passed on from one generation to the next or could be learned, sentimental writers were able to displace normal kinship relations that normally serve as founding imperatives for the nation. By reshaping perceptions of the community to which people are entitled to belong, sentimental novels enabled readers to embrace a greater category of humankind in order to extend humanity to the disenfranchised—so as to dilate the notion of human rights to also include those placed outside of purview.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Lynn Festa, "Sentimental Bonds and Revolutionary Characters: Richardson's Pamela in England and France," in *The Literary Channel*, 89.

## The Social Sentimental Novel and Realism

The rapid expansion of modern industrial society, accompanied by “the spectacle of entrepreneurs who exploited workers,” created a new dilemma that the sentimental novel could no longer sustain: how democratic ideals “could be put to social practice in the domain of economic production.”<sup>260</sup> In light of this shift, two new subgenres emerged that competed for literary and cultural dominance in a market where the novel reigned as an authoritative form of social and cultural analysis: the sentimental social novel and realism.<sup>261</sup>

The sentimental social novel, a subgenre of sentimentalism, was a genre that was competing with realism for top literary and cultural honors at the same time Balzac and Stendhal were entering the literary scene. The sentimental social novel is a literary form that was perfected by George Sand, who became the most celebrated writer among sentimental social authors.<sup>262</sup> This subgenre continues interest in the conflicts between social rights and the human heart that were present in its predecessor, the sentimental novel. However, it does not translate this conflict into a balanced opposition at the level of the plot. In the sentimental social novel, individual rights are instead pitted against duties to society. The protagonist of the social sentimental novel, rather than being torn between two equally valid options, resists duties to society in the name of the heart—but no matter how strong the resistance, the former inevitably reasserts itself. Consequently, while the sentimental social novel’s narrative revolves around the same conflict as the sentimental novel, it undergoes one major change in how the lovers deal with the obstacles they encounter in their path. While in the prior form of the genre the dilemma that motivated the plot revolved around the conflict between the individual’s rights and the rights of the parents or community, in the sentimental social novel, individual rights become associated with the

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<sup>260</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 104.

<sup>261</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 122.

<sup>262</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 123.

oppressed.<sup>263</sup> In its sentimental forbearer, the protagonist uses the analysis of the heart to underscore his or her suffering. In the new one, the protagonist's dilemma shifts from a moral question to longing for freedom from the tyranny of the codes. Although in these novels, as its sentimental predecessor, courage is a force that derives from the heart (the organ that epitomizes subjectivity); by identifying moral rights with the heart against the code, sentimental social novels dissolve the insoluble conflict that gave the sentimental novel its grandeur. For this reason, although the sentimental social novel continues the conflict outlined in its forbearer, this subgenre does not translate this conflict into a balanced opposition on the level of the plot, but pits human rights against the code, which abuses social rights.

The sentimental social novel exploits the suffering of individuals in a subordinate social role, in a society ruled by the respect of force and the glorification of success. Naturally, many of these novels focus on the feminine condition, as women were the most likely to suffer from the changed societal values. Many sentimental social novels deal with the unhappy lives of women, who are alternatively the playthings and the slaves of marriages to which they have been sacrificed, as we will see from Tarchetti's example. Although the family, as in the sentimental novel, functions as a microcosm for social relations, in this new subgenre, the protagonists experience the bonds of marriage and society as oppressive, rather than as positively constituted ethical obligation.<sup>264</sup> For this reason, the protagonists of social sentimental novels display their courage by transgressing morality. In fact, if the protagonist of these novels consummates love outside of marriage, the significance of this gesture differs markedly from its effect in the sentimental novel. For the sentimental novel's protagonist, sex outside the bonds of marriage violates the sentimental double-bind and thereby threatens the entire social order—particularly if

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<sup>263</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 130.

<sup>264</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 128.

it is adulterous—and often brings the plot to end. In the sentimental social novel, sex outside marriage illustrates the heart striving for fulfillment against the code, as the heroine's fault is merely viewed as reaction to a long history of oppression.<sup>265</sup> In light of these changes, it is not surprising that sentimental social novels gained the reputation of being dangerous to readers—especially female readers—because, by awakening passion, they ignited instincts that otherwise should have been repressed.

Social sentimental novels resolve the dilemma that drives their plot in ways that differ from how they were resolved in the sentimental novel. More conservative social sentimental authors promote a pious and religious view of woman; more progressive authors instead call for complete gender equality. The idea driving the former is that women, oppressed by materialist society, can best resist by exercising private, feminine duties and by devoting themselves to religion.<sup>266</sup> Novels voicing radical ideas, instead, stress the idea that women have no way to escape from domination because they have been denied all access to the foundations of contemporary social power.<sup>267</sup> In contrast to the restrained portrayals of women found in more conservative sentimental social novels, the more progressive ones promote the idea that women's blatant inequality must be revoked through ongoing legal and social transformation. An example of both appears in Tarchetti's novel, as Clara, in the position of first woman, points to a more conservative view; while Fosca, the third woman, points to a more liberal one. Notwithstanding these two varying perspectives, all sentimental social novels are united by one idea: an

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<sup>265</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 141.

<sup>266</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 136.

<sup>267</sup> Cohen, *The Sentimental*, 138.

indictment of materialism as the greatest evil that risks swallowing up individuals, which is an idea that is clearly voiced in Tarchetti's novel.<sup>268</sup>

As Cohen evidences, the sentimental novel took on two different trajectories that not only gave rise to the sentimental social novel, but also to the realist novel. As a result, the English preference for melodramatic sentimentality and the French preference for tragic sentimentality gave way to two trajectories in sentimentalism. The first resulted in the Gothic, the domestic novel, the novel of manners, and the national tale or the historical novel, which separated prosentimental Victorian realism from antisentimental Balzacian realism. The second gave way to the social sentimental novel, also known as the novel of private life or the novel of manners, which we have already discussed.<sup>269</sup>

As Cohen points out, realism found its success in Europe via the domestic *Bildungsroman*, the Gothic, and the historical novel when the novels by Sir Walter Scott were exported to other countries. Scott's popular success abroad was aided by the favorable reception he received from John Fenimore Cooper, who was considered Scott's American imitator, and from Alessandro Manzoni in Italy, whose novel, *The Betrothed* (1827), heightened the prestige of the historical novel not only in Italy but abroad. In spite of its initial success, however, as Cohen evidences, the historical novel declined after reaching its apogee in 1831 with Hugo's *Notre-Dame the Paris*, when it was supplanted by realism. After 1830, realism and the

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<sup>268</sup> What is meant by materialism, as becomes evident by Tarchetti's example, is a society in which all social relations turn around power and money and where individuals pursue self interests that render them incapable of reaching out to anyone.

<sup>269</sup> As Cohen convincingly argues, two different kinds of sentimental novels were popular during the time that the sentimental novel dominated the literary scene. The first was a sentimental novel, based on a tragic plot, while the second was a novel constructed around melodrama. This latter form was appropriated by realist writers, who enriched it as a response to a post-revolutionary society. Sentimental novels driven by a melodramatic plot, unlike those driven by a tragic plot, portray negative freedom much more ambivalently than we have seen thus far. Here, the protagonist who espouses negative freedom is an amoral figure, even a libertine, whose exercise of personal freedom is more strongly wound up in the desire for sheer possession, whether sexual or economic, than in the sentimental novel counterpart. In fact, in the melodramatic novel, natural and social freedoms are evinced concretely in two opposing characters, whereas in the tragic sentimental novel's typology, they are united in one character who anguishes over the impossibility of choice.

sentimental social novel emerged as two subgenres of sentimentalism, which competed against each other in a market that was seeking the most persuasive way to renew the novel at a time when this literary genre already exuded immense prestige as an art form.<sup>270</sup>

Given the trajectory identified by Cohen, the dilemma that drives the realist plot seems to be the same that drives the plot of sentimental novels. As Balzac's novels evidence, the conflict between the two rights persists. However, in the hands of the realist authors, negative freedom is represented as a *de facto* description of a contemporary society utterly devoid of ethical force; a society where individuals who succeed do so because they short-circuit the system by asserting their negative freedom as the amoral right to anything that tempts them, and which they can freely take.<sup>271</sup> In a society where careers are "suddenly open to talents, where the strong dominate the weak, freedom" is "seized rather than accorded as a founding human right;" and virtue, which was tied to an uncompromising sacrifice in the sentimental novel, loses its appeal as the emphasis turns instead to commerce.<sup>272</sup> In realist novels, for this reason, the dilemma that drives the plot is not posed in the same symmetrical terms with which it is posed in the tragic sentimental novel. If such symmetry exists, it is illusory, for the primacy of negative freedom is never at issue. In fact, even when the plot of the realist novel privileges individual freedom, it does not reveal the same insoluble task as sentimental plots. Realist plots, instead of reconciling the two contradictory imperatives, are motivated by the goal of how to check and channel negative freedom so that it does not become socially destructive.

In the traditional sentimental novel, the sentimental bond promoted by the aesthetic community enabled individuals to overcome the difficulty encountered in accommodating

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<sup>270</sup> Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, 23-4. Manzoni read Scott's *Ivanhoe* in French translation just as Scott's novel was being translated into Italian in 1820, p. 108.

<sup>271</sup> Cohen, *The Literary*, 122-3.

<sup>272</sup> Cohen, *The Literary*, 118.

negative and positive rights, even if this occurred in the imagination, and even though it ultimately led to a negation of the rights of the heart on behalf of society. In realist texts, instead, the bond established by the text and the reader is one that is driven by a “realist contract,” which provides its readers with a realistic understanding of a society that is driven by power relations regardless of whether the main characters fail or succeed in their worldly struggles.<sup>273</sup>

Consequently, what the realist contract offers its readers is nothing other than the understanding of a structure that is founded on the interpretation of knowledge and power.<sup>274</sup> By shifting the focus away from ethics, as in the sentimental novel, and into a society that is founded on relations of power, the realist novel makes major changes to the sentimental genre, whose *topos* it appropriates. At the same time, it reveals a gender divide that did not exist in the sentimental novel, where heroes and heroines struggled alike with the agony of liberal subjecthood in the enclosed universe of sentimental romance. As it shifts the emphasis from ethics to commerce, the realist novel reveals a gender divide because it opens up the possibility for the male hero to become anything, as the world of commerce and power is predominantly his; on the other hand, by situating the heroine squarely within the realm of family and marriage, it precludes her access to the political arena and to the kind of self-realization available to men. Not surprisingly, around 1840, gender emerges as a powerful symbolic weapon that was appropriated by realist writers as they began asserting the importance of their practice; but also by social sentimental writers, who used it to displace realistic codes, as will see with Tarchetti.

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<sup>273</sup> Cohen, *The education*, 110, 112.

<sup>274</sup> Cohen, *The education*, 11.

## The Debate Between Realism and Sentimentalism

A common practice that arose during this time, one that was promoted by writers and critics alike and seems central to the displacements that we see between realism and sentimentalism in Tarchetti's novel, was that sentimental novels, by focusing on intimate life where women excelled, represented an amateur observation of private life.<sup>275</sup> Since "love" was merely an "episode in the existence of men" but was the "entire existence of women," realist writers aimed at redeeming this "feminized genre" by fusing it "with masculine empirical essence of real history, in order to create a narration that combined strong characterization with historical background."<sup>276</sup>

In England and France, novels by women and about women formed a substantive tradition dating back to the early part of the 18th and 19th centuries. In Italy, however, a country where writing and reading were perceived as essentially male activities, reading and writing in the hands of women became progressively more suspect as more women became literate and entered the literary scene as writers.<sup>277</sup> Indeed, toward the end of the century, with the rise of socialism in Italy, anxieties about female authorship and readership became progressively more symptomatic of the cultural and political crisis experienced by Italians as they articulated the important question of "whether revolutionary entitlement should extend to the revolution daughters." The question of women's passion for reading and writing became thus superimposed with the social and cultural transformations experienced by the new country. These in turn became associated with the death of the "old" woman—the angel of the house, corresponding to

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<sup>275</sup> Cohen, *The education*, 113.

<sup>276</sup> Cohen, *The education*, 112.

<sup>277</sup> Just to mention a few: Marchesa Colomi (1840-1920), who wrote in the style of Sand; Emma pseudonym for Emilia Ferretti (1844-1929), who was a follower of Anna Maria Mozzoni; Erminia Fuà Fusinato (1834-1876). Luigina Codemo (1828-1898); Caterina Percoto (1812-1884) who also wrote for journals that catered to women readers, such as, "Mode e Amena Lettura," popular in 1850 and others as well.



the first woman in our model—and with the advent of a new feminine threatening type—the femme fatale, or the second woman in our model—which seems to correspond to the instability of a new political, economic, and social reality. The “feminization” implicit in sentimental literature, as a result, became progressively viewed as a sign of rebellion that led to the exploration of feelings beyond its legitimate sphere—as we will see in the case of Fosca. Nor surprisingly, by the end of the century, reading and writing in the hands of a woman emerged as a sight of contradiction and anxiety, wherein opposing gender ideologies put into question a large number of stereotypes about sexuality, class, the family, and marriage—for which the Italian authors offered conflicting solutions as they appropriate either the realist or the sentimental genre.<sup>278</sup>

As the century came to a close, in Italy sentimental novels became viewed as more dangerous to society and in particular to women, since, by awakening the imagination, they ignited instincts and passions that otherwise should have been repressed.<sup>279</sup> As early as 1845, Carlo Cattaneo wrote to warn readers of the effect that sentimental novels—such as those written by George Sand—have on women, especially as they expose their vulnerability to passion. Sentimental novels are dangerous because they provoke a “restlessness” that, in women, leads to acts of rebellion aimed at “their position in society,” and ultimately to demands of “emancipation.”<sup>280</sup> These ideas were widespread in Italy and abroad, as revealed from the many examples of realist literature that relate the devastating effects of sentimental literature on women—a *topos* that was firmly established within the publication of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), a novel that also serves as a point of reference for Tarchetti’s text.

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<sup>278</sup> Lucia Re, “Passion and Sexual Difference: The Risorgimento and Gendering of Writing in the 19th-Century Italian Culture,” in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, ed. Albert Russel Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (New York: Berg, 2001) 176.

<sup>279</sup> Re, 158-9.

<sup>280</sup> C. Cattaneo, *Scritti storici e geografici*, eds. G. Salverini and E. Sestan, 2 vols. (Florence: Le Monier, 1845).

Writing in the hands of women became progressively associated with subversion as one century drew to an end and another began. As women demanded more rights through the suffragist movement and the ideals of socialism and communism, Italian intellectuals fretted more and more in a debate that was battled over the appropriation of these two genres. In a long review entitled “Letteratura femminile,” published in the prestigious journal, *La Nuova Antologia*, in 1907, Giovanni Capuana, the chief theorist of *verismo* writes: “Should we worry as some do [about] the intrusive competitiveness of women in narrative literature? I don’t think so.” Capuana further suggests that “when there is no need for reflection and imaginative intellect women can succeed very well, [but] the imaginative intellect is masculine.” He thus concludes “let women write,” for there is nothing to fear, since women can never be original. Women can only put their femininity on display and nothing else, and what is femininity, after all, Capuana asks—nothing other than a false sentimentalism or a weak sense of kindness, compassion, tenderness, and enthusiasm, characteristic of a woman’s heart.<sup>281</sup> Similarly, in discussing Matilde Serao (1856-1929), an immensely successful writer and journalist who was known for exposing the corrupt world of politics and denouncing it in her fiction, Giovanni Verga, another “master” of *verismo* explains that Serao is an exception to the rule of women being bad writers, ascribing this exception to a sexual aberration or monstrosity. In fact, in a letter he wrote to a friend, he suggested that she must be a “hermaphrodite.”<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> G. Capuana, *Letteratura femminile*, ed. G. F. Chimirri (Catania: CUECM, 1907) 19-22.

<sup>282</sup> Giovanni Verga, *Lettere a Paolina*, ed. G. Rayan (Rome: Fermenti, 1980) 157. Grazia Deledda won the noble prize for literature in 1926 and Serao came close to winning it. In spite of their differences, both women were socially and politically committed.

## The Plot

*Fosca*'s plot revolves around the main protagonist, Giorgio, who functions as the narrator and the author of the memoir; and, perhaps, as a stand-in for Tarchetti.<sup>283</sup> Giorgio is a 33-year-old, well-compensated officer of the Italian army, who, at the beginning of the novel, does nothing all day except parade pompously in his uniform around his native town. Suffering from an ailment "of the heart" that prevents him from functioning, the arrogant Giorgio asks to be transferred from his native, oppressively small town which, just like any small town, represents the backwaters of society to the city of Milan. While in Milan, Giorgio meets Clara, for whom he feels an immediate attraction. After a brief love affair, Giorgio is transferred from Milan to another small town, where he is placed back on active duty. Upon his arrival, he is invited to dinner at his colonel's house, where he meets the ugly, anorexic, and hysterical Fosca, who suffers from epileptic attacks.<sup>284</sup>

Fosca exudes an irresistible attraction and repulsion on the male protagonist. Giorgio is attracted to Fosca because he realizes that, like him, she possesses an unlimited potency for affection that she has had to repress; at the same time, he is also repulsed by her because he believes that Fosca is a manipulative woman who uses her illness and ugliness to entrap men (in other words, he classifies her as a second woman). As the novel progresses and Giorgio comes to understand what motivates the heroine, he finds himself becoming more and more invested in her—until he finds himself entrapped in a relationship that he feels is detrimental to him.

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<sup>283</sup> The autobiographical affinities between the author and the male protagonist of the novel have led critics to view Giorgio as an alter-ego of Tarchetti. Tarchetti, like Giorgio, was an officer in the army. In 1864 he ended a tempestuous relationship with a woman in Varese and left on sick leave for Milano. There, he met a woman under the same circumstances as those in the novel. In November 1865, he was transferred to Parma where he met Angiolina (Fosca in the novel). Angiolina suffered from epilepsy and was disfigured. Tarchetti developed an obsession for her just as Giorgio did for Fosca. See *Convegno Nazionale su Igino Ugo Tarchetti e la Scapigliatura* (San Salvatore Monferrato: Il Comune e la Borsa di Risparmi di Alessandria, 1976) 170.

<sup>284</sup> In Tarchetti's novel, the male hero's three evolutionary stages are related through two women, who embody the traits of the three archetypal figures we outlined in Chapter 1. Since this is an evolutionary process, Clara functions as both a first woman who turns into a second, and Fosca as that of a second woman who turns into a third.

Worried about Giorgio's well-being, the doctor, a friend of Fosca's cousin, asks Giorgio to leave. The night before Giorgio leaves, Fosca divulges her passion for him in front of her cousin, the colonel. At the same time, Giorgio receives a letter from Clara informing him that she wishes to end their relationship. The difference that emerges between Clara's letter and Fosca's declaration sends Giorgio into a crisis that brings about his transformation. It is at this point in the novel that Giorgio comes to the realization that Fosca is the only one who truly loves him, since Fosca was the only one willing to sacrifice her *amour propre* (pride or self-preservation) in order to reach out to him. This realization finally enables Giorgio to reach out to the heroine and overcome his own *amour propre*. Able to let go of the feeling that fueled his own egotistical feelings, he can finally reconnect with a passion that, just as was the case for Fosca, he has had to repress. In turn, this allows Giorgio to reconnect with a prior space that he associates with freedom, one that enables him to overcome the sense of oppression and isolation that had prevented him from reaching out to others. Energized by this new-found freedom, Giorgio is finally inspired to finish his memoir so that he can finally publish *Fosca*. The novel ends with the tragic death of Fosca, too weak to withstand a love affair between her and Giorgio; a duel between Giorgio and Fosca's cousin, the colonel; and Giorgio's return to his birthplace due to illness, where he is nursed to health by his mother, who oddly reemerges in the novel after the reader had been informed that she passed away at his birth.

### **The Model**

What attracts Giorgio to Clara is the fact that she resembles his mother at her age. Significantly, throughout the novel Clara either wears the same perfume or clothes as Giorgio's mother, shares her voice, or is as beautiful as her: "I ... discovered the secret of the immediate

fascination she exercised upon me. She resembled my mother. My mother possessed her same beauty, and at just the age I was born” (20). The same can be said of Fosca, the third woman, who not only resembles Giorgio’s mother but resembles Clara as well. Giorgio’s “real” mother, significantly, appears twice in the novel: at the beginning, when she dies soon after his birth and at the end, when she suddenly reappears to nurse the protagonist to health.

In my model, as I explained in Chapter 1, the maternal figure embodies a prior ideal that the author has had to repress and, for this reason, he has relegated it to a distant past where it lays statically—since it is no longer valued by society. In Tarchetti’s case, the maternal figure points to a sentimental ideal that no longer functions in a society driven by egotistical values that privileges mere personal gain. Within this analysis of repression, the maternal figure thus embodies a space that predates repression and functions as a reminder of a tremendous event that has deeply affected the author’s life. Although the authors have had to give up the ideal, they are unable to let go of it altogether. For this reason, no matter how much they try to repress it, it reemerges during dream-like states as a vision that enlightens and fuels their imagination. By unconsciously returning to this ideal and comparing it with their present reality, they engage in a process of repetition that time and again returns them to this ideal and displaces it with something new.

Deleuze reminds us that this is the way the mind functions when it engages in a creative process that does not subscribe to previously established notions. By engaging in this creative process of repetition, the individual does not “acquire thought,” nor does this process show that “thought is innate;” but rather this process engenders thought. This, for Deleuze, represents “the act of thinking itself.”<sup>285</sup> Through this process of repetition, the main protagonist creates something new because he is able to reintegrate the difference he had originally erased in

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<sup>285</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 114.

repressing his original ideal. And as this prior ideal (sentimentality) is compared to the protagonist's present reality (in Tarchetti's case, realism), and as these become displaced in the first woman who, for this reason, mirrors and yet does not mirror the mother, the hero, faced with these contradictory perspectives, is forced to think not only of the way he perceives his past but also how this past influences his future from the point of view of his present reality. Indeed, only by gathering up all the traces of the former present can the mind model a new present upon the old.<sup>286</sup> For this reason, with each repetition, the protagonist's thought process expands—because with each he is able to integrate more and more difference into his thought process, a difference that comes to the forefront in the third and final stage of the model. This involves the third woman, who embodies the characteristics of the first and second woman, because she represents the union of the contradictions of the prior two stages, which unite in her.<sup>287</sup> The third repetition, as Deleuze cautions, is thus not constituted by one present to the next, but by the fact that these two presents (the past present and the present present) coexist within each other. It is precisely the integration of all this difference that, in the third phase, engenders “a cosmic extension that coincides with the amplitude of a forced movement.” This brings about the kind of epiphany we witness, for example, “in Stephen's ‘No’ which is not the non-being of the negative but the (non) being of a persistent question to which the cosmic ‘Yes’ of Mrs. Boom corresponds.”<sup>288</sup> It was precisely this plethora of difference that promotes the organic explosion we witnessed in Carlo at the end of Nievo's novel. By integrating all this difference in the self, Carlo was able to engage in a process of reevaluation that led to the refashioning of his self, which ultimately not only enabled him to reach out to others who differed from him, but also

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<sup>286</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 102,

<sup>287</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 79.

<sup>288</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 121-22.

enabled him to think, imagine, and create something new—which he communicated to his readers through his work.

It is Deleuze again who reminds us that, as the mind begins to gather up and integrate all the difference in the self, it abstracts time. From the point of view of repression, at first, time appears in the form of an empirical succession that moves from the past to the present and to the future. “Now,” however, it “all coexists” in one space.<sup>289</sup> This happens because the maternal figure recirculates. Through this process, the maternal figure is not only “displaced in relation” to “herself,” but also “determines” the transformations of terms and the “modification of” the “imaginary relations” that occur “within the two series in which” she “appears”—and in which she reemerges as the maternal figure herself. In Tarchetti’s novel, this process is evidenced in the maternal figure who is already dead and again in the second woman, Clara, who is fashioned after her; lastly, she emerges in Fosca, mother earth who receives us once again, the silent Goddess of death who takes us in her arms and makes death return. Death was present at the beginning of the novel in the loss of the maternal figure, who acts as the reminder of both the “annihilation of ... difference” and the possibility of reintegrating it through the process I have described. As this maternal figure becomes reintegrated through this process, she is reborn and dies a second death so that she can be finally resuscitated in the third phase, where she returns to nurse Giorgio back to health. She reemerges in this last stage because Giorgio is finally able to dwell in a “free state of difference,” a free difference that releases the “subject” from preestablished “forms.” In this last phase, Thanatos reemerges one last time “all the more exclusive,” as Deleuze suggests, because it derives from Eros, constructed as it is upon “her remains.”<sup>290</sup> At the end of this novel, death is thus not an act of negation because it is “neither

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<sup>289</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 125.

<sup>290</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 125.

the negation of opposition nor the negation of limitation.” Indeed, it is not “the limitation imposed by matter upon mortal life, nor the opposition between matter and immortal life, which furnishes death with its prototype; but rather the last form of the problematic, the source of problems and questions, the sign of persistence over and about every response, it is now that which designates a non-being where every affirmation” is born again.<sup>291</sup> Death, in the last stage of this model, emerges as a positive force because it does not function as an “originary principle,”<sup>292</sup> but as the very “repetition” that is constitutive of the self and which gives way to a “selective game of ... illnesses and ... health,” and of “loss and salvation” that promotes in the main protagonist the realization that he is “free,” precisely because the death of the I has liberated him.<sup>293</sup>

As I showed in Chapter 2, this process of repetition fulfilled Nievo’s democratic dreams because by creating a sentimental bond, Nievo was able to forge an imaginary space in which all were entitled to belong—since the ability to be moved was all that was required to achieve harmony. By drawing on a prior maternal space that embodied Nievo’s democratic dream (the union with the all), Nievo extended the notion of humanity to a larger category of human beings and thus shaped a different and broader perception of community to which individuals could belong. Sentimentalism fulfills Nievo’s democratic dreams because democracy is a political system that, just as the model I am discussing, is based on the struggle to broaden the base of those who count as citizens and thus enjoy full access to the entire range of basic rights. Democracy expands the rights of citizens because, like this literary model, it is a system that rests on a process of consensus-building of different opinions that is established on behalf of the common good. The model I have outlined fulfills these author’s democratic dreams because it

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<sup>291</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 112.

<sup>292</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 16.

<sup>293</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 19.



shares the same goals as democracy, which are to unite individuals as equals on the basis of the difference.<sup>294</sup> More importantly, democracy, like the model I have evidenced, is a system without a foundation that is forever expanding and therefore can never be fully achieved because it is forever evolving and thus cannot be fixed in stable form.<sup>295</sup> Becoming democratic is a process that, like our model, and as Paul Patton evidences, thus points toward a future that has not yet been realized.<sup>296</sup> Given the similarities between our model, sentimentality, and its democratic aims, the work of each author I analyze can be understood as an attempt to participate in an ongoing democratizing process whose evolution is never finished.

### **The Three Women**

As all first women, Clara is described as a traditional maternal figure who embodies the bourgeois ideal of femininity. Clara is healthy, domesticated, pure, robust, pious, and serene. In Tarchetti's novel, however, Clara also shares some of the same characteristics as Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Clara is described as the bored and neglected wife of a government official who, like Emma, spends her day reading and playing the piano. Again like Emma, Clara is addicted to sentimental novels that exalt her feverish passions and divert her from her true goals: her duties to her family, husband, and child.<sup>297</sup> Unlike Flaubert's narrator, however, Giorgio/Tarchetti does not maintain his ironic narrative detachment from the heroine. Instead, he celebrates Clara's illicit love by justifying her actions "with Rousseauistic" sentiments, which blame society

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<sup>294</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41.

<sup>295</sup> Paul Patton, "Becoming-Democratic," In *Deleuze and Politics*, ed., Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburg: Edinburg U. P., 2008) 186.

<sup>296</sup> "Becoming Democratic," *Deleuze and Politics*, ed., Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn. I am summarizing in several brief sentences what is a very complicated argument. For a more detailed explanation of how democracy fulfills the same goals as Deleuze's model, read both works cited above. What I have added to this equation are the similarities between sentimentalism, whose aims are democratic, and our model. Essentially what all of these share is the same goal: to make one on the basis of the different, in opposition to the erasure of difference in order to subsume it to one, as in the case of representation.

<sup>297</sup> From the perspective of realism, she represents the second woman.

instead of woman: “What we consider the greatest possible fault in women—adultery—is often only a vindication of the most sacred rights that nature gave them, and for which society has oppressed them.”<sup>298</sup> As Giorgio points out, Clara suffers because she has had to prematurely give up her youth. Having married at the tender age of 16, Clara is tied in a bond with “a cold and indifferent man” she does not love.<sup>299</sup> Like other women, she is a victim of a society that prescribes marriage as the only alternative for women.

At first, Clara hesitates to engage in a relationship with Giorgio because she is painfully aware of her marital and maternal duties. Unlike the traditional sentimental novel’s heroines (such as her homonym in Nievo’s novel), however, when she engages in an extramarital relationship with the protagonist, Clara is able to temporarily overcome her feelings of oppression because she feels that she can reconnect to a sentimental space that predates her marriage—a space she associates with youth and that fuels her illusions of freedom, as Giorgio explains:

Why did we love differently from everyone else? Our most burning pleasures often consisted of a few nameless puerilities, baby talk that would have brought a smile to the lips of anyone who was not so blindly in love ... Everything was divided in half ... she displayed the foolish whims, all the crazy and bizarre likings of a child. “This is my vindication,” she would sometimes say ... “They did not give me enough time as a girl, so now I’m claiming my due. Better enjoy it at twenty-five than never at all!” “How childish we were! ... My room was sheer chaos, swarming with birds, strewn with flowers, ribbons, paper sashes, wrappers from sweet boxes. She threw everything in confusion ... It all seemed rather childish to me at the time. Yet I have since thought of these incidents on many occasions, even in years when my acquaintances with life was more real and more frightening, and I always felt the urge to exclaim: ‘Happy are they who love in this fashion!’” (22-24)

Despite the influence of Milan as a center for the corrupting values of greed and egoism, the connection works from Giorgio’s perspective because it makes him feel as if, by reaching to another, he is forgetting himself: “In a huge center of corruption like this city, we were still

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<sup>298</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 30.

<sup>299</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 20.

spotless, pure, virginal, rich in dreams and trust—the bliss and grandeur of such love cannot be related.”<sup>300</sup> In his relationship with Clara, Giorgio is able to temporarily overcome the sense of isolation that kept him tied to egotistical feelings. Giorgio achieves this temporary relief because by reaching out to the heroine, he moves beyond the limits of his immediate self and reaches out to another (whose suffering is motivated by different causes than his). Giorgio is thus able to reconnect with a prior sentimental ideal, which he thought he had lost, one that appears more “pure” and “virginal” because it fulfills his democratic illusions so that he can “dream” again.<sup>301</sup> Significantly energized by the connection he forges with Clara, Giorgio is inspired to reread the epistolary work of Ugo Foscolo: “I spent the first night in a sort of delirium; I read the correspondence of Ugo Foscolo—that venerable man.”<sup>302</sup> This rereading fuels Giorgio’s creativity and inspires him to write a sentimental letter to Clara, in which he openly declares that he is “sick” and that he “suffers.”<sup>303</sup> Giorgio’s letter, in turn, inspires the heroine to open up to Giorgio in a letter of her own in which she exposes the reasons of her own suffering. However, Clara’s rebellion has no redeeming qualities. Fettered by her values (like other sentimental heroines before her) in spite of her short-lived rebellion, Clara negates duties to the heart on behalf of her obligations toward her society.

Like other traditional sentimental heroines, Clara appears to be torn ethically between her duty to the heart and that to the collective, epitomized by her family. Unable to mediate between the two, Clara ultimately succumbs to the pressures of society, which force her to negate her rights of the heart to privilege those of the collective. Given their different response to the relationship, it is not surprising that during its course the robust and healthy Clara becomes more

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<sup>300</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 22.

<sup>301</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 22.

<sup>302</sup> Foscolo’s *Epistolario*, as we explained in Chapter 2, is an epistolary novel that deals with the pain and pleasure evoked over the loss of the beloved, which, also for Foscolo serves as inspirational source for the democratic nation.

<sup>303</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 17.

progressively ill, while the sick and sensitive Giorgio is restored to health.<sup>304</sup> Wracked by guilt, at the end of the novel Clara gives Giorgio her diamond cross, a symbol of the “abnegation” and “sacrifice” that Clara willingly makes on behalf of her family, Giorgio, and society as a whole.<sup>305</sup> As the disappointed Giorgio points out, “we loved each other, she out of pity, I out of gratitude.” It was “pity ... esteem, sympathy and the profound knowledge of our souls” that “led us to passion” and it was “guilt that eventually separated her from me.”<sup>306</sup> As Deleuze would certainly remark, the first repetition binds Clara to a repressive cycle of guilt from which she cannot emerge.

In spite of his short-lived rebellion, the same can be said of Giorgio, who is also incapable of carrying his rebellion all the way through because, just like Clara, he remains tied to an unproductive state of stagnation that prevents him from overcoming his repression. Incapable of overcoming his repressive state, he tries to overcome it through reactive forces that enable him to rise to the event, but which still prevent him from overcoming his repression.

Even before Clara ends their relationship, Giorgio is called back to active duty and is transferred from Milan to a small town. As soon as Giorgio arrives and all subsequent evenings after that, he is invited for dinner at his officer’s house, where he dines in the company of two majors, a colonel, a doctor from the regiment, and two civilian doctors. Significantly, the place next to him, which has been set for the only woman in the group, is repeatedly empty. Fosca, the colonel’s cousin, is unable to join the men because she suffers from anorexia and hysteria as well as epileptic attacks. However, since the source of her illness is psychological, the men dismiss

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<sup>304</sup> Giorgio’s perspective aligns him with the views promoted by more progressive social sentimental novels, in which marriage is viewed as oppressive rather than constituted as a positive ethical obligation, as in more traditional sentimental novels, which is clearly Clara’s stance.

<sup>305</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 175.

<sup>306</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 19. Unlike Lawrence Venuti, I have chosen to translate “colpa” not as “sin” as it appears in Venuti’s translation, but rather as “guilt.” This is how it appears in the original Italian text: “Fu la sua pietà che la condusse all’amore, in quei giorni le nostre anime si unirono; fu l’amore che la indusse alla colpa” (39-40).

Fosca as a “fickle” and manipulative woman (the standards applied to a second woman) who uses her illness to gain the attention of others, as the doctor points out to Giorgio:

We can grasp a symptom, an effect, a particular result, but not the totality of her illness, not their aggregate, nor their basis. We can cure her like empiricists, but not like doctors. It is a malady that surpasses science; the actions of our remedies are paralyzed by a series of phenomena and complications, which our art cannot foresee. And the medical art, you realize, is imperfect—it proceeds through induction. (38)

Fosca’s absence does not seem to bother the male characters because they view her as a walking “curiosity” who embodies all the diseases that are “fashionable with women her age.”<sup>307</sup> Her absence, instead, bothers the already sensitive Giorgio who, from the very beginning, is taken back by the fact that the seat next to his is always empty:

Her seat remained constantly empty, although her place was always set. Every day a fresh flower stood in one of her glasses. And, what I found not less troubling, although I could not imagine the reasons—and there were none—the vacant seat was always located next to mine, now on one side, now on the other, but always next to mine. This worried me: I seemed to be missing something, I could not be at ease, I felt she would enter at any moment to come and take her place at my side.

This preoccupation was exclusively mine, however; my table companions did not give the slightest thought to the sick woman, and seemed to consider the current state of affairs quite natural. (37)

Consequently, the “heartrending,” “horribly loud,” and piercing “screams” that resonate from Fosca’s room during one of her hysterical attacks are perceived as such only by the sensitive Giorgio. Indeed, he realizes that these are the screams of a “horribly tortured creature” who is similar to him (though at this point he does not yet realize it). As a result, Giorgio finds it “impossible to restrain his emotions.”<sup>308</sup>

Though moved to pity for the heroine, Giorgio is repulsed by her since, like the rest of the men, he believes that Fosca is a manipulative woman who uses her illness and ugliness to draw him into a detrimental relationship. Consequently, when Fosca opens “her soul” to him and

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<sup>307</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 54-5.

<sup>308</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 18.

“desperately” begs for “his friendship” upon meeting him for the first time, Giorgio, believing that friendship between the sexes always leads to something else, uses “every stratagem” possible to avoid being alone with her<sup>309</sup> In reality, Giorgio tries to avoid repeated meetings with the heroine because he fears that being seen with an ugly woman such as Fosca will “render” his position “equivocal” and “embarrassing” in the eyes of the other men—whereas the company of a beautiful woman, such as Clara, was flattering his vanity.<sup>310</sup>

One day he is finally coerced into taking a stroll by the “manipulative” Fosca. Unable to refuse because he fears that a rejection will bring on one of her hysterical attacks, he is overwhelmed by her scent, which is similar to Clara’s and to the scent he smelled on his mother’s handkerchief. Attempting to overcome the disgust he feels in her presence, he fantasizes that he is walking with Clara, a woman who flatters his “egoism,” instead of the ugly and anorexic Fosca:<sup>311</sup>

I thought of Clara, I could not detach my thinking of her. Having a woman at my side, an elegantly dressed woman who placed her arm in mine—light, slender, delicate arm—and touched me with the sleeve of her dress, as we walked in a solitary place, beneath the trees, augmented my dream twofold. Not only could I not stop thinking about Fosca, but I employed her as a guide in a restless search through my memories. That this woman was ugly, hideously ugly, did not occur to me. I knew enough to flatter myself into forgetting it. One thing ... helped me to maintain my illusion ... : a kind of scent, soft, delicate, voluptuous, which emanated from her person, and which I often smelled near Clara (48-9).<sup>312</sup>

As Venuti has already pointed out, if Giorgio is a victim, he is not of Fosca’s vampirism, but of his “own heavy investment in the prevailing ideal of beauty, which combined with his middle-

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<sup>309</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 58.

<sup>310</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 66.

<sup>311</sup> It is interesting that Giorgio at this point is using his imagination to fuel his own egotistical feelings.

<sup>312</sup> Notice how Giorgio returns to a prior space in order to fulfill his own egotistical goals instead of using it to forge a connection with Fosca. Giorgio, in fact, at this point in the novel mirrors Clara, who reached out to Giorgio to vindicate herself against her society.

class sense of propriety motivate his condescending pity for her.”<sup>313</sup> Giorgio’s problem is that he cannot place aside his *amour propre* to fully reach out to the heroine.

Conversely Fosca is very aware that all the men “ridicule her” behind her back. Unlike all the other characters in the text, she possesses the ability and the “courage to judge herself” precisely because, as Giorgio himself explains, Fosca calls “things by their proper name.”<sup>314</sup> Even though Fosca realizes that these men are “uncouth and coarse” and “are ignorant ... in the science of the human heart,” she excuses them because she realizes that they could never sympathize with her suffering.<sup>315</sup> In a society where “sorrows, hopes, affections, jubinations,” and all “energy” have become “essentially individual,” she explains that it is “from the laws of nature a voice seems to rise” that shouts to all of us: “no one can shoulder the weight of your sorrows, or bestow upon you the sweetness of their joys; no one can remove or add an atom to your being: devote our attention solely to yourself.”<sup>316</sup> Fosca is also painfully aware of how much she deviates from the preestablished ideal of beauty promoted by her society because she has the capability to realistically see things for what they are. However, she also possesses the courage to question this ideal and point out to her readers that beauty is a cultural construct that is harmful to women because it limits and narrows their possibilities, as she explains in a letter to Giorgio:

You cannot know what not being beautiful means to a woman. For us, beauty is all, since we live only to be loved, and are apt to be loved only on the condition that we are lovely, an ugly woman’s existence becomes most horrible, the most anguished of all torments. A man’s life contains no misery comparable to this one. A man, even if deformed, even if unloved, commands a thousand distractions, a thousand compensations; society indulges him; blocked from aspiring love, he aims at ambition; he formulates a goal. But a woman cannot even depart from the path that her heart and her vanity have marked for her; she cannot aim for any goal but pleasure and love. (97)

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<sup>313</sup> Venuti, *Passion*, xi.

<sup>314</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 99.

<sup>315</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 54.

<sup>316</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 101-2.

Realizing instead that love and passion are essential not only to women but to all individuals, and that these feelings have been denied to her because she is an ugly woman, Fosca overcomes the limitations that have been imposed on her by her society by using her ugliness to circumvent the limiting condition of being a woman, and an ugly one at that:

If this very day, the first day I met you, I dared to engage you, most provocatively, in several conversations wherein no other woman would take part, I did so because my ugliness vouched for me against the dangers of such parleys, and against the suspicion that I was forsaken her for a blameworthy purpose. My deformity has at least this advantage. (55)

In spite of the repulsion he feels toward Fosca, Giorgio finds her intelligence, frankness, and clarity of vision refreshing. He is also drawn irresistibly toward her beautiful hair, whose rich mass (the thickest he has ever seen) stands out in contrast to her plainness:

God! How to express in words that woman's horrendous ugliness! ... A slight effort of the imagination would permit a glimpse of her skeleton. Her cheekbones and temples protruded fearfully, and her slender neck formed the most striking contrast with the bulk of her head, whose rich mass of hair, black, thick, longer than I had ever seen on a woman, further augmented the disproportion. (42)

David Del Principe has pointed out that, at a time when women wore their hair tied in a *chignon* or "crocchia," loosening one's hair implied rebellion, a deviation from the norm, and, ultimately, an allusion of erotic abandon.<sup>317</sup> Fosca's choice to wear her hair loose and disheveled emerges as a symbol of her rebellion and as a self-inscribed symbol of the rebelliousness of the *Scapigliatura*, an "illness" that she transmits to Giorgio. That Fosca would then threaten repeatedly to cut off her tresses horrifies Giorgio, not only because this act is symbolic of castration, but also because cutting her hair would be like cutting off the blood that runs through her veins: that of rebellion.

Realizing that Fosca is a "learned" and "intelligent" woman who possesses "passions, sentiments," and "ideas" that are "quite exceptional," and that it is from this "vantage point" that

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<sup>317</sup> David Del Principe, "Heresy and Hair-esy in Ugo Tarchetti's Fosca," *Italica* 71.1 (1994):54.



“she should be judged,” Giorgio lends her three novels: two by August Heinrich Julius La Fontaine and one by Jean Jacques Rousseau.<sup>318</sup> Fosca returns these novels to Giorgio a few days later with a note in which she explains that she did not like the first novel because it was too sentimental. She was, however, “enraptured” by Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, even though she is averse to discussing it, since a close examination of this novel would cause her psychological damage.<sup>319</sup> “Meditating on” such novels, she writes to Giorgio, “has no other effect but to render” people’s ideas “doubtful.” Such meditation is particularly “dangerous” to women, as it is “dangerous to our peace.”<sup>320</sup> Although Fosca believes, just as Giorgio explains, that novels should promote the kind of “love that one feels at a young age,” the “passionate, imaginative, love that is superior to all, that dares all, that is all,” and helps us perceive others as “noble and pure,” thus serving as “an impulse to noble action,” literature should not “delude” people.<sup>321</sup> It is one thing to experience this intoxication and quite another to experience and be conscious “of a true blessing.” “Once upon a time,” explains Fosca, “I would have accepted any misery, any spasm, provided I could dream every night, dream forever,” so that I could “live only in my own illusions (as Clara had before her). But such illusions did not provide me the kind of pleasure I sought, they merely led me to disgust and boredom.”<sup>322</sup> Fosca points out to Giorgio that “we live in a real world.” For this reason, “we must seize the real, the concrete,” in spite of the fact that the “real is always inferior to the ideal.”<sup>323</sup> The goal of literature, consequently, should not be to plunge us further into our “sorrows;” rather, it should make us “forget” so that we can acquaint ourselves with the “joys that the world dispenses” and “delight

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<sup>318</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 57.

<sup>319</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 7.

<sup>320</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 42-3.

<sup>321</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 73.

<sup>322</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 51.

<sup>323</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 51.

in their echo.”<sup>324</sup> Literature “should serve as an escape” that enables us to “rise above” our “dismal reality.”<sup>325</sup>

By engaging in an exchange with the heroine over literature, Giorgio indirectly empowers Fosca with the ability to break a long period of silence, just as he had been empowered by Clara earlier. He also motivates her to write several letters that empower her with the ability to rewrite, reinterpret, and reject those readings of her offered by the other men. As Fosca explains in a second letter she writes Giorgio, illness has always been a normal state of being for her: “Did I say I was ill? That is an abuse of language. I always do it; recovery would require me to depart from the normality of this state, to enjoy an interval of health.”<sup>326</sup> Later she explains:

I was born sick: one of the most serious, and profound symptoms of my infirmity, was the need I felt to be fond of everyone about me, although in a violent, sudden extreme way. I cannot recall a period in my life when I did not love something ... My potency of affect knew neither means nor limits ... The need to be loved was the secret of all my sufferings—this I realized. Nature endowed me not only with a sensitive heart, but with an infirm, nervous, irritable constitution; I was given neither the passive strength that yields to apathy, nor the natural chastity that yields to robustness: love had to be the means and purpose of my entire existence. (93-98).

Unbeknownst to him, Giorgio had described himself thusly earlier in the novel:

Throughout my life I have acted as I have thought—convulsively. They say that lions are in a constant state of fever. I do not know what doctor might be qualified to ascertain this phenomenon, or how it could be done at the patient’s bedside; but whether true or not, whether my nature is weak or strong, there can be no doubt that I have always experienced a febrile, convulsive agitation. I was consumed with life ... I am now quite calm and tranquil ... My indifference assures me that the sources of my enthusiasm are exhausted. One thing comforts and elates me—the feeling of coldness. For my heart is cold, terribly cold. (9-10)

As Fosca explains in the same letter, her illness is an outcome of a disposition that has been fueled by a passion similar to a “fever” or an “expansion” that has always illuminated her and

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<sup>324</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 44.

<sup>325</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 99-100.

<sup>326</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 43.

has always prevented her from loving anything or anyone in moderation.<sup>327</sup> Her ability to love all and everyone unconditionally has been so immense that she could have loved “the entire universe ... without exhausting” herself.

Realizing that Giorgio is very similar to her and that he is the only man that can understand her, she openly seeks his affection and his compassion: “that loving, generous, sincere compassion which” she has “never found” in anyone else and for which” she feels such a great need:

Giorgio—I write to you even though the doctor forbade it. I cannot believe my happiness, cannot believe myself ... To have a person to whom I can say what I think, what I feel, what I suffer! And to know that these sensations, sentiments, sufferings are shared! I could have never hoped for it, never! ... The doctor told me that I must be in bed for another eight days; I shall utilize this time to tell you my story. (90-2)

By engaging Fosca in a process of reading, supported by an exchange of literary texts and a rich epistolary exchange, Giorgio empowers Fosca to initiate her rebellion; a rebellion that is able to carry all the way through with her own writing. Through the epistolary exchange with the male protagonist, Fosca unmask the true goals that motivate her society: power, success, and money, all of which are not only detrimental to women, but to individuals as a whole. In the hands of Fosca, writing functions as a powerful weapon because by interweaving various texts, she paves the way for a new kind of sentimental novel. This novel, unlike more traditional sentimental or realistic novels, does not further plunge readers in their sorrows, but enables them to clearly see their reality for what it is—even more realistically than realistic novels themselves. At the same time, this enables readers, unlike traditional sentimental novels, to rise above this dismal reality and delight in the joys that life dispenses.

As Fosca explains in one of her letters, from a very tender age she has always been driven by an irrepressible passion that has motivated all of her actions. Without this passion, she would

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<sup>327</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 91.

have been “devoid” of all “goals” and ambitions, since without passion these could have not have been “sustained” and would have eventually “vanish[ed] one by one.”<sup>328</sup> As Fosca makes clear, although society would have us believe otherwise, passion is never evil because it is always motivated by a “desire to make” others “happy.” Passion, for this reason, only appears in “good and generous natures” precisely because it is never “selfish.”<sup>329</sup> Driven by a passion that she could not repress, but also able to realistically assess situations for what they were, the contradiction evoked by her own passion vis à vis the reaction of others repeatedly left Fosca in a state of confusion and contradiction that tore her apart. This eventually led her to the state of depression and illness into which she now finds herself: “all was contradiction within me, all was conflict and antithesis, heart, nature, isolations, infirmities drove me to love, ugliness, pride, the demands of honor, duty dragged me away from it; never was a longer or fiercer battle waged in a soul.”<sup>330</sup> Willing to love all but reciprocated by none, and unable to repress her own passion because she was unwilling to give it up, Fosca began distancing herself from others because she realized that they were “ungrateful” and “apathetic” people, who could never reach out to her, since no matter what she did they would have always been “indifferent” toward her.<sup>331</sup>

Her problems began at an early age when she developed several morbid attachments for things and persons. These were detrimental to her because they evoked drastic reactions on the part of others, who repeatedly misinterpreted her motivations and, for this reason, misjudged her actions. Fosca’s earliest attachment was for a nurse who lived in her family’s home until she was

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<sup>328</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 99.

<sup>329</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 100.

<sup>330</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 115.

<sup>331</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 94. Notice how Fosca displaces the dilemma that motivates the plot of traditional sentimental novels in which the two rights are upheld equally. By pitting the rights of the heart against the code and by associating the prior with oppression, she displaces topos that were associated with more traditional sentimental novels by introducing more progressive ones.

12. Separating from her before then would have been fatal to the heroine.<sup>332</sup> Once in school, Fosca developed another obsessive attachment for a schoolmate, though the girl possessed such a “cold” and “pitiless” disposition that she could not fully reach out to Fosca. This caused Fosca to feel alone and “desolate” in her relationship with her. As Fosca realizes now, this “vacuous” girl lacked the depth and the maturity to “understand the ... nature” of “her affection.”<sup>333</sup> Nevertheless, their friendship was brought to an end by the girl’s parents who, intuiting the potentially transgressive nature of the relationship, prevented Fosca from seeing their daughter. The disappointment Fosca felt was “fatal” because it brought her to the realization that it would be difficult for her to find in the hearts of others the same “burning and boundless affection” she found in her own.<sup>334</sup>

This experience notwithstanding, at the age of 14 Fosca developed another obsessive attachment for one of her father’s friends—a married 40-year-old judge, whom she loved to “distraction.” Motivated by the passion she felt for this man, Fosca wrote him a letter in which she revealed her feelings. In spite of her sincerity, this letter became a source of embarrassment for Fosca when the man showed it to her parents. While her father laughed, her mother, recognizing the beginnings of a true passion, asked the man to stop frequenting their house.<sup>335</sup> Fosca thus became sick with shame for how her family and others had reacted, overwhelmed by her inability to contain her passion, and overwhelmed by the sense of confusion that these feelings caused her (at the time, she did not fully comprehend the true nature of her sentiments). As a result, she became resigned to the fact that she would never gain comfort from loving

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<sup>332</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 94-5.

<sup>333</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 54.

<sup>334</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 95.

<sup>335</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 96.

someone because she could not inspire in others the same kind of passion that possessed her and drove her to follow her heart.<sup>336</sup>

At the age of 20, fearful of losing the passion that had motivated all of her actions and fueled all of her goals, Fosca withdrew from society and decided to shift her energies from people into novels, which became her new passion. Fosca hoped that in the literature she read she would find answers she was seeking so that she could put an end to her quest: “for the next two years, I lived ailing, brooding, absorbed, and enthusiastic only about solitude and books. During that period of meditation ... I abandoned myself to the passion of reading, a passion that never left me ever since.”<sup>337</sup> Although these novels helped her intellectual growth and developed her “heart,” Fosca did not find the answers she was seeking in the literature she read. On the contrary, these novels further plunged her into “memories” she was “trying to forget.”<sup>338</sup> They caused her febrile periods of “drowsiness” during which, in her imagination, paraded “every possible scene, vision, and complication” that could occur in this “immense world of dreams,” which were an outcome of her guilt.<sup>339</sup> Motivated by the novels she read, Fosca decided, like Clara, to “sacrifice” herself to religion. It was her hope that such sacrifice would ultimately lead to the fulfillment she was seeking—which was to overcome the “thirst for love that had consumed her so long without remedy.” By examining her sins (as Clara had done before her), Fosca hoped to overcome “the contradiction that had haunted her for so long:” “I became religious; I entered that period of asceticism—sincere, exalted, profound—which all women of heart, even if happy, eventually experience ... I felt that it could give purpose to my life ... Many women were led to God by this dream. Did they find peace? That is what I could not

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<sup>336</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 98-9.

<sup>337</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 96.

<sup>338</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 99.

<sup>339</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 51.

experience.”<sup>340</sup> This experience led into a period of introspection during which Fosca began asking herself whether in a society that is oppressed by materialism, a passive devotion to religion really enables people to overcome the kind of oppression that haunts them and prevents them from reaching out to anyone else. Unable to find answers to her questions in religion, unlike Clara she abandoned religion, left the convent, and returned to her parents’ home.

Soon after returning home, her cousin introduced her to one of his friends, a gentleman by the name of Ludovico, whose beauty surpassed that of any ideal lover Fosca could have ever imagined.<sup>341</sup> Deceived by the idea that someone as handsome as Ludovico finally loved her, she married him and moved to Turin. A few months later, however, Fosca realized that Lodovico not only had a wife and children, but his gambling habit had depleted both her dowry and her parents’ estate, which they had willingly given up on behalf of their daughter. Pregnant and heartbroken, Fosca lost her child and, shortly thereafter, her parents, who died over their daughter’s mishaps. Unable to comprehend Ludovico’s behavior, Fosca decided to confront him directly. His response was dismissive and completely utilitarian:

You and I were bound by a contract. You gave me money, I gave you my charm, my youth, my talent; (I do not wish to be disrespectful toward you, but you know quite well, Fosca, that you are not beautiful). We were equals: well, we lived together eleven months; our trade went well ... I do not think we need to quarrel about this. You will return to your family ... I shall resume wandering through the world, searching for distractions. (112)

Although Fosca realized that Lodovico was a vile and selfish man who lacked scruples, and that his motivations were different from hers, she did not blame him. Instead, she was able to rise above the repulsion she felt for him by understanding that behind Ludovico’s actions was not Ludovico himself (as in realist novels in which the desire for possession becomes a de facto description of society), but the “ethical” standards that society imposes on individuals, driving

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<sup>340</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 100-1.

<sup>341</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 102.

them into a “honeyed cruelty” that they “mask through contempt and “apathy”—an apathy that keeps them “isolated and divided” in their “self-absorbed ... interests” so that they become a steadfast center on their own and are no longer able to reach out to anyone else.<sup>342</sup>

At this point in the novel, Giorgio receives a letter from Clara in which she explains that she is ending her relationship with him. Clara’s intent is to repress the passion she feels for Giorgio so that she can channel her energies to more productive ends. After reading Clara’s letter, Giorgio feels as if the “entire edifice of” his “faith” is crumbling right before his “very eyes.”<sup>343</sup> Giorgio thus begins to compare Clara to Fosca, and the differences he sees between the two sends him into a crisis that metaphorically splits him in half: between the man he was and the man he has become (between the first stage and the second). The setting for the novel, which initially was situated Giorgio in Milan’s outdoor spaces, now finds him closed up in a dark room, where a candle casts two shadows. As Giorgio moves in front of a mirror, he catches a glimpse of himself. The images he sees solidify his fears. The shadows are independent of each other and one of them takes a life of its own and crawls over the floor to the wall, reflecting in the protagonist’s mind the dichotomy between the man he was and the second the man he is now:

Passing before a mirror, I glimpsed the reflection of my person and paused to contemplate myself. I felt terrified: that seemed that my face, I should have looked different ... There was a moment when the mirror seemed to reflect the face of another person, who was standing behind me, bending over my shoulder to gaze at his image.<sup>344</sup>

The comparison that Giorgio makes between the two women is precisely what promotes in Giorgio “a universal ungrounding” through which “a secret coherence” is finally revealed to him.<sup>345</sup> Giorgio realizes that Fosca is not a blood-sucking evil woman as he had believed, but that she is the only woman who truly loved him. Unlike Clara, she braved “ridicule, scorn, and

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<sup>342</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 101.

<sup>343</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 177.

<sup>344</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 176-7.

<sup>345</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 91.



anger” in order to “implore” from Giorgio what “other women” willingly give” out of weakness” or “vanity of vice.”<sup>346</sup> Fosca was the one who willingly renounced to her “woman’s pride” and her own *amour propre* to reach out to him. Overwhelmed by this realization, Giorgio is finally able to reach out to her.

Yet, while during his relationship with Clara, Giorgio’s health improved, as Fosca’s passion becomes infused in Giorgio, the virile and energetic Giorgio progressively weakens, until he becomes totally enslaved by Fosca’s love. As Fosca ruffles the protagonist’s hair and invites Giorgio to see his reflection in the mirror, Fosca captures in Giorgio’s the image the beauty of the illness of passion:

She slipped her hand beneath my hand, and turned my face towards hers; she looked at me, and smiled, her eyes bathed in tears. “How beautiful you are, sick like this!” she said. “If you were not suffering, I would always like to see you so. I would agree to anything to spend my entire life in this way, at your bedside, looking at you.” She ruffled my hair, let a few locks fall on each side of the pillow, stood up, took a hand mirror, and said to me: “Look at yourself.” (141)

As Fosca’s rebelliousness, which was revealed through her unkempt mane, is evoked in the hero through Giorgio’s own disheveled hair, as he himself now truly becomes a young *Scapigliato*. As the heroine’s rebelliousness, latent in Giorgio’s psyche, is finally brought to surface in the form of an illness that spreads from one character to the other, Giorgio experiences a transmutation of the self.<sup>347</sup> This transformation enables Giorgio finally to reconnect with his own passion that once before had inspired him to a process of rereading and writing and rewriting through which he had once reached out to Clara, and now, finally, enables him to reach out to Fosca.

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<sup>346</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 184.

<sup>347</sup> Notice that at the beginning of the novel Clara had become sick; in the second part of the novel Fosca emerges as the personification of illness, an illness that is passed on from Clara to Fosca and finally transfused to Giorgio himself.

Writing and literature in Tarchetti's novel provide the means through which the characters first become acquainted; and it is literature that enables each protagonist to reach out to the other so that they can engage in an exchange that ignites their passion. In turn, this exchange allows Giorgio to reconnect with his own internal goodness that liberates him from his own repressed psyche. Now free to express itself, the passion that had once been repressed reemerges to ignite Giorgio's imagination and creativity.

It is not by chance that Fosca's death—the death of the third woman—coincides with the moment when Giorgio/Tarchetti has “command of all the characters in his drama”—a moment when he is able to bring them together in one final repetition whose “ceremony” functions as merely an “external envelope.”<sup>348</sup> By appropriating this purely female space, what Giorgio recaptures is his repressed ideal in the form of difference in itself, which is brought back to life to ignite his imagination again. Invested with the hope of a better future, Giorgio/Tarchetti is finally energized to write again. Since *Fosca*/Fosca (within whom are present representations of the mother, the beloved, and death that takes us back into her arms, the third woman, the medusa herself) functions as the vehicle through which Giorgio initiates his own rebellion against the ruling class of 19th-century Italy—a class of egotistical people who are driven by personal interests that prevent them pursuing motives dictated by the heart. He accomplishes this goal by publishing his memoir, a memoir that realistically unveils the true motivations of an egotistical society. Additionally, the memoir fuels the reader's passion so they can rise above their dismal reality and reach to another. The sentimental bond they form rekindles their passion so that they can dispense and rejoice from the wonderful echoes that life provides them.

Once Giorgio returns to the home of his birth, he receives a letter from the doctor informing him that Fosca died three days after their last encounter and that she sent him a

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<sup>348</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 18.

package containing her hair. In cutting her hair, Fosca has committed one final act of sacrifice, one final communication that recalls the many and various exchanges that occurred in the novel (books, voices, illnesses, letters, and gifts). This last interchange, which is coded with a difference that is brought to the surface through this feminine space, provides Giorgio, the symbolic stand-in for Tarchetti, the invigoration and the necessary strength to write his final text—a text that will ensure the survival of *La Scapigliatura* and of his rebellion:

Before withdrawing from the world, before isolating myself in the midst of the crowd—a much more painful isolation than the vast solitude of nature—I want to remember once again, remember fully and faithfully. I am now at peace with myself. The profound agitations of my soul, the feverish unrest of my mind, have ceased. I now understand their cause. Many fail to find peace in life because they have yet to discover their equilibrium. (7)

Giorgio tells his reader that *Fosca* was not written for the masses, nor was it to “be flung into the sewer of publicity” or be sacrificed “to the empty satisfaction of fame.”<sup>349</sup> Tarchetti, the *scapigliato* who participates in the same rebellion as his characters (and feels the same sense of isolation from a world driven by common standards and selfish pursuits), uses his novel to promote a new kind of sentimental space that, maternal and not, sentimental and not, unveils—with realism that exceeds literary realism itself—the underlying problems that are plaguing his country in the midst of political and social change. His goal is to invite all individuals to unite in one common space of suffering, a redeeming space that enables individuals to reach out to others who are different from them and unite in a common experience of pain. This commonality of experience is recaptured through the maternal figure herself, a unifying figure with the whole and through whom, by reintegrating difference, enables us to overcome differences so that we conceive the “same” “on the basis of the different.”<sup>350</sup>

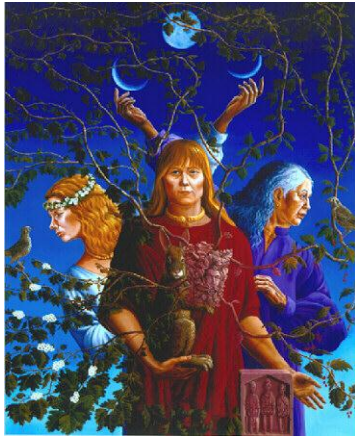
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<sup>349</sup> Tarchetti, *Passion*, 6.

<sup>350</sup> Deleuze, 41.

The hair of Fosca, the third woman in the novel, acts as a reminder of this textual utopia: a marker of unity in difference and ambivalence in wholeness (*i.e.* both female and male, castrated and whole, absent and present, sentimental and realistic, etc.). *Fosca*/Fosca emerges as a sign for a purely female space that, however, can be appropriated by Tarchetti to leave his own personal mark on the Italian novel.

## Chapter 4: Misrepresentations, Misconceptions, and the Absence of Truth



**Se|nile** (sě`nīl, nel), adj., n.—**adj.** **1** of or belonging to old age. **2** showing the weakness often characteristic of old age; characterized by senility: a senile condition. **3** caused by old age: senile deceases. **4** *Geology*. Having reached an advanced stage of erosion; made flat or level ... **Senile psychosis** or **dementia**, a mental disorder caused by atrophy of the brain due to old age, characterized by loss of memory, depression, confusion, delusions, and irrational behavior.

**Se|nil|i|ty** (se nil`e tē), n. **1** the mental and physical weakness often characteristic of old age ... **2** old age.<sup>351</sup>

In spite of Italy's initial political polarization, which divided citizens between those who favored a monarchical Italy and those who supported Mazzini's democratic ideals, Italian liberalism enjoyed a fragile existence toward the end of the century. In 1876, a new left, so called to distinguish it from Mazzini's old democrats, entered the political fray under the leadership of Agostino Depretis, a Piedmontese who had taken part in the 1860 Garibaldi expedition to Sicily. This left, which was far removed from Mazzini's democratic utopian ideals, was in favor of a loose programmatic and down-to-earth political program that took on the interests of the southern land owners, the working classes, and the professional classes.

Depretis, who was prime minister on a number of different occasions between 1881 and 1887, tried to devise a solution for Italy's political polarization by creating an alliance between the Left and the Right to establish a center block, whose aim was to isolate the extremes, in order to promote gradual and democratic changes to the country. This alliance marks the beginning of

<sup>351</sup> World Book Dictionary vol., 24.

what is usually referred by Italianists as *trasformismo*, the political maneuvering by which a majority is established in Parliament on the basis of private agreements with individual deputies. For the first time since Italy's unification, Italian liberalism was able to survive, albeit in a peculiar and "distorted" form, since such an alliance did not really bring about any change to the party in power; it merely gave way to a reshuffling of the established majority, who joined groups of deputies from political minorities.<sup>352</sup> Not surprisingly, this political tactic was criticized for many years to follow because it led to periods of political stagnation.

When in July of 1887 Depretis died, Francesco Crispi, who was his Minister of the Interior, was selected as Prime Minister and governed from 1887 to 1891 and again from 1893 to 1896—he was re-elected after a short period led by DeRubini. Compared to his predecessors' unifying projects, Crispi's conservative political measures took the country in an opposite direction. Crispi's initial aim was to overcome both territorial and class distinctions by promoting democratic notions that were superimposed over old democratic ideals founded on an imagined community he called nation. In truth, Crispi's measures ended up favoring the elites. Crispi's aim, in fact, was not democratic at all; he wanted to turn the country into a powerful nation with expansionist and colonialist aims. Italy thus entered a new conservative phase characterized by the effort to forge a national culture based on patriotism and colonialism, while *trasformismo* faded to the background.<sup>353</sup> By the time Crispi became prime minister the second time, his expansionist aims were complicated by political tendencies that had gained political clout under DePrentis: socialism and Catholicism. The two had gained political traction and the support of the population when they had demanded a thorough investigation of the banking

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<sup>352</sup> Anna Cento Bull, "Social and Political Cultures from 1860 to the Present," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Rebecca J. West (New York: Cambridge U. P., 2001) 41-2.

<sup>353</sup> Cento Bull, 42.

scandals that were threatening to discredit the entire Italian ruling political class.<sup>354</sup> By the time the century drew to a close, a new Left had begun to coalesce into a real political party that had strong union ties.<sup>355</sup> In 1898 the country fell into the hands of General Luigi Pelloux's extremely conservative government, and the latter was met with resistance by the Left, which managed to unseat it in 1899.

### **The Italian Economy at the End of the Century**

Between 1870 and 1913, Italy experienced economic growth at an annual rate of 6% as the engineering, chemical, metalworking, hydroelectric, and textile industries, along with the banking sector, led the way. Agriculture, which was still the major driving force of Italy's economy, also experienced massive growth. As foreign demand for Italian products such as grain, olive oil, citrus fruit, spices, and wine increased, agriculturalists found it necessary to adapt more modern methods of production to keep up with the increased demand from abroad. In the regions of the upper Po Valley, where intensive farming methods were already well established, large farms began to grow at the expense of smaller independent farmers. The same occurred in the textile industry, as Italian wool, silk, and cotton products were sought from abroad. To keep up with these increased demands, different industrial sectors also found it necessary adjust to more modern methods of production. This was accomplished by relocating factories from the cities to rural areas where they had access to water, which often served as a source of power for their new machinery. By relocating their factories to rural areas, they also

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<sup>354</sup> During the 1880s a number of banks had compromised dozen of politicians. A number of banks had speculated in the property market and had been left holding worthless bits of paper. To avoid bankruptcy, many of them had resorted to printing money illegally. They had also given large loans on very favorable terms to politicians and other prominent people. When the scandal broke out, the suspicion was that these deputies had effectively been paid to keep silent about bank activities. Some of the intensity of the scandal derived from the fact that the king himself was implicated in the scandal.

<sup>355</sup> John Davis, *Short Oxford History of Italy: Italy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford U. P., 2000) 178.

had the added advantage of drawing from a ready-made workforce of farmers who lived in the countryside and provided these factories with a huge surplus of cheap labor. By the end of the century, most Italian industries were located in the countryside, and the majority of people who worked in these factories were young, peasant women.

One such venture was that established by the entrepreneur Alessandro Rossi, whose wool mills at Schio in the upper Veneto area made him the largest single employer in the 1880s.<sup>356</sup> Rossi's mills were organized as a utopian rural community that was closely supervised by nuns. Most of the mill workers were women and girls from the surrounding rural villages, who lived in dormitories, but also maintained close contact with their peasant, farmer families. By drawing on these workers, employers such as Rossi could avoid the problems posed by a fixed labor force—because during times of recession or falling demands, their workers could be sent home to their families and reabsorbed in the farms. Another added advantage was that the wages earned by these factory workers often went to the families, where they were reinvested in more modern machinery, chemicals, and fertilizers. This, in turn, also helped boost Italy's industry. By working together, agriculture and industry helped spur the Italian economy: Funds collected from trade were reinvested in banking, insurance, and other industrial ventures, providing work for an endless array of carriage builders, tailors, seamstresses, and domestic servants.

The changes in patterns of production that we have outlined gave rise to a new class of laborers that did not exist before in Italy. These laborers, in light of their poor working conditions and menial salaries, began to organize in leagues and cooperatives whose aims were to improve the workers' condition. As workers from different areas of Italy began to organize, unrest spread from the Po Valley to other sharecropping regions in Tuscany and Central Italy so that, by the end of the century, Italy's most advanced agricultural regions had become the theater

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<sup>356</sup> Davis, 245.



of violent confrontations between landowners and militant leagues of landless *braccianti*.<sup>357</sup> It was in this context that socialism found its rural following—a following that quickly spread to most parts of Italy.<sup>358</sup> The clergy responded to the rise of socialism—which in its view posed a threat to the family unit—by promoting their own Catholic cooperatives and leagues. The result was that at the turn of the century, workers were divided along three general political lines: those who adhered to anarchical measures, those who adhered to socialism, and those who instead joined Catholic organizations.<sup>359</sup>

### La Questione Femminile

Even though feminism emerged later in Italy than in Britain or France, early philanthropic interventions on behalf of women had already begun in the first half of the century. The aim of early interventionists was to improve the standards of education for girls to combat illiteracy. Although early interventionists were rooted in Mazzini's ethical and democratic ideals, as the "questione femminile" gathered momentum with the entrance of women into the marketplace, emancipationists began aligning themselves with the socialist party. The industrial transformations that had brought women out of their houses and into factories were particularly favorable to the formation of socialist groups. Yet, a large majority of female workers still viewed progressive socialist measures as a major threat to the family, which, in their eyes, was disintegrating rapidly. As a result, many instead joined Catholic organizations because the Church played a large role in their lives and better represented their beliefs.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Seasonal workers who were hired during times of increased production.

<sup>358</sup> Davis, 239.

<sup>359</sup> Sharon Wood and Joseph Farrell, "Other Voices: Contesting the Status Quo," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* see footnote 352, p. 143.

<sup>360</sup> John M. Fort, "Socialist Alliances in Gender, Work, War and the Family in Milan and Lombardy 1914," in *Social History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan, 1996) 39

Beginning in 1878, the Catholic movement became aligned with Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903), who had been elected to the papacy following Pious IX's death. In 1891, Leo tried to promote more modern measures by openly rejecting socialism and calling on Catholics to actively engage in solving the social and economic problems that faced Italian society, urging them to join Catholic peasant and workers organizations.<sup>361</sup> Romolo Murri, the priest who the promoted Christian political ideas that eventually would coalesce in Don Sturzo's Partito Popolare and the Christian Democratic party, hoped to defeat socialism by linking strong Catholic social activism to politics. In 1891, Murri founded *Cultura Sociale*, a journal that was supposed to rival *Critica Sociale*, a magazine started by the founder of the Italian Socialist Party, Filippo Turati, to spread socialist ideals. Murri believed that Catholics would be the real winners in the struggle between socialists and the State because the Catholic social movement could mobilize a much larger mass of people than its rivals. Murri did not push revolution as a means of destroying the State, but advocated Catholic political intransigence to fight the State in the name of Catholicism.<sup>362</sup> In this panorama, the role of women was fluid and controversial. As we have seen, women's political and social engagement was divided along three political lines. There were those who aligned themselves with the democratic ideals promoted by Mazzini. Then there was a second group, which instead aligned itself with the more progressive measures promoted by the socialist party; and then there women who, under the sway of more traditional values, chose to join Catholic organizations.

Feminist ideas were introduced into Italy through the women's magazine, *La Donna*, founded in 1868 by Gualberta Beccari, who at the time was only 18. The magazine began as a four-page weekly journal that by 1871 had grown into a 16-page bimonthly magazine. Although

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<sup>361</sup> Davis I. Kertzer, "Religion and Society, 1789-1892," in *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, see footnote 355.

<sup>362</sup> Spencer M. Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to Present* (New York: Westview Press, 2008) 157.

Beccari's personal views were more in line with the democratic ideals promoted by Mazzini, she provided women on both ends of the political spectrum with a platform through which they could voice their views, as long as they dealt with women's issues. This publication, consequently, appealed to a variety of classes of women. Women from the lower classes, who could not afford to purchase it, had access to it through their workers' association; while women from middle and upper classes directly subscribed to it. The magazine also had several foreign subscriptions, including from the Italian provinces that were subject to Austrian control.<sup>363</sup>

Another early feminist was Anna Maria Mozzoni, whose ideals were more in line with the democratic notions promoted by Mazzini. Feminists, who followed Mozzoni's line of thinking, placed faith in the ability of democratic ideals to bring about the moral and social regeneration of all of citizens, including women. In 1870, Mozzoni translated John Stuart Mills's "On the Subjection of Women" into Italian and analyzed women's social, economic, and judicial inferiority—arguing, as Mazzini had before her, that for the Risorgimento to be made complete, women had to be absorbed as active participants of the modern progressive state through education, work, and the introduction of divorce. She also founded "The League to Promote Female Interests" (Lega Promotrice degli Interessi Femminili) which, along with the "National Council of Women" (Consiglio Nazionale Donne Italiane) and "The National Suffrage" Committee (Prosuffraggio), promoted women's ability to acquire equal entrance in public areas such as law, education, and work. In one article she published in *La Donna*, entitled, "La Donna in faccia al progetto del nuovo Codice civile italiano," Mozzoni berated the failure of the new government's social code to measure up to the standards of development of women's rights, such as standards already existing in countries as diverse as England, Prussia, Austria, and the United

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<sup>363</sup> Judith Jeffrey Howard, "Patriotism, Mothers in Post-Risorgimento: Women After the Revolution," in *Women, War and Revolution*, ed., Carol R Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Homes and Meier Publishers, 1980) 237-39.

States. She viewed this as a betrayal of Risorgimental ideals, since the code aimed at halting the progress of women and consequently that of the nation.<sup>364</sup> Mozzoni believed that the ideal of “the Angel of the Hearth” invoked by the legislation of the new Italy was a stereotyped construct merely set in place to justify the government’s discriminatory policies. Such a view of woman was anachronistic because in reality, women had been working outside the home for decades—especially women from the lower classes—and would undoubtedly continue to do so out of necessity even though they received salaries inferior to those of men. Mozzoni argued against socialist feminist leaders by suggesting that women’s emancipation needed to be considered apart from class discourses and that feminists needed to retain their own agenda that could not be subsumed to a wider class struggle. She thus criticized socialist militants for trying to solve the feminist issue in economic terms, instead of anchoring it on issues of dignity and morality, which applied to women of all classes and to society as a whole. Unlike socialist feminist reformers, she felt that female emancipation should not be limited to lower-class women, but must also address the interests of middle-class and upper-class women, who were relegated to an exclusively domestic role with few possibilities for growth into the professional world.<sup>365</sup> In light of her views, she was criticized by socialist reformers for organizing a bourgeois movement, one that was also criticized by Catholic groups as being subversive. Furthermore, because the women’s movement was often divided among different social classes, Mozzoni was not very successful in improving women’s economic and social status—precisely because Italy never really developed a flourishing middle-class culture that could have supported these changes.

By the 1880s, a considerable shift in the politics of emancipation occurred. What had been a predominantly philosophical and elitist movement that had kept a political neutral

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<sup>364</sup> “La Donna in Faccia al progetto del Nuovo Codice Civile Italiano” cited by Lucia Re in, *Making and Remaking Italy*, 161.

<sup>365</sup> Wood and Ferrell, *Modern Italian Culture*, 144.

position turned into a revolutionary left-wing movement closely aligned with the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>366</sup> Although Marxism had been known in Italy since 1848, it was not until the late 1880s that it took hold among Italian intellectuals. The cultural environment in which it had grown was largely rooted in “positivistic and anti-clerical” ideals promoted by the philosopher-anarchist Antonio Labriola and by Filippo Turati, who eventually became the leader of the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>367</sup> Anarchists, who sided with Labriola, preached the destruction of bourgeois-controlled government and the passage of power to workers. They advocated immediate social revolution without much thought to the conditions that would favor its success or to the changes that it would bring to Italian society. Although Labriola’s ideas had a lasting influence on Italy’s socialist movement, they were defeated by those promoted by the more moderate Turati, who questioned whether a violent revolution was necessary and inevitable if the party wanted to adhere to the tenets of Marxism.<sup>368</sup>

The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was formed during the Second Congress of the Italian Worker’s Party held in Genova in August of 1892 and marked a definite break between anarchists and Marxists.<sup>369</sup> Filippo Turati was its leader. Originally a democrat, he joined the Socialist Party later in life. Turati graduated with a degree in law from the University of Bologna in 1877, and prior to his involvement in politics, he participated in the *Scapigliati* movement as a poet. His “Inno di Lavoratori” (Worker’s Hymn) became the most popular song of the nascent labor movement. Turati was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1896. During the repression that followed the popular protests in 1898, he was stripped of parliamentary immunity and was imprisoned. The experience of martial law and prison convinced him that a fundamental step to a

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<sup>366</sup> Winalls and O’Neill, in *Modern Italian Culture*, 175.

<sup>367</sup> Dombroski, *Modern Italian Culture*, 114.

<sup>368</sup> Dombroski, *Modern Italian Culture*, 114.

<sup>369</sup> Dombroski, *Modern Italian Culture*, 113.

socialist program was the democratization of the country. Turati thus turned away from a more revolutionary form of socialism in order to promote a view of socialism that was based on evolutionary democratic notions. This view, in contrast to that promoted by more orthodox revolutionaries, did not resort to authoritarian measures but engaged workers in an organized and peaceful class struggle in the political arena or in relation to the then-dominant form of government.<sup>370</sup> For Turati, in fact, socialism was a process that could be achieved gradually, primarily through the action of the Italian parliament, labor organizations, and education. Consequently, unlike Labriola, he rejected revolutionary forms of socialism to emphasize a peaceful struggle that would lead to social and political reforms that relied on parliamentary methods to achieve socialist changes, and which also included agreement with the bourgeoisie as a party tactic.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Dombroski, *Modern Italian Culture*, 114.

<sup>371</sup> In order to clarify our discussion we should probably try to define some of the basic differences between democracy, capitalism, socialism, and communism, as we are interpreting them throughout this work. Both socialism and communism are based on principles whereby the goods and services produced in an economy should be owned publicly and controlled and planned by a centralized organization. But while socialism is mainly an economic system, communism is both an economic and a political system. As an economic system, socialism seeks to manage the economy with deliberate and collective social control, while communism, instead, seeks to manage both the economy and society by ensuring that property is owned collectively and that control over distribution of property is centralized to achieve both a classless and stateless society. Although both socialism and communism are based on a principle that the goods and services produced in an economy should be owned publically and controlled and planned by a centralized organization, socialism asserts that distribution should take place according to the amount an individual's production affords, while communism suggests that goods and services should be distributed among the population according to individuals' needs. Socialism believes in a strong centralized welfare state, but unlike communism, it supports the rights of individuals to own private capital. Communism asserts that both capital and private ownership of means of production must be done away with as soon as possible in order to make sure a classless society—the communist ideal—is formed. Socialists, instead, see capitalism as coexisting with the ideal state. In fact, one of the ideas of socialism is that everyone within the society will benefit from capitalism, as long as capitalism is controlled by a centralized planning system. Democracy, on the other hand, ensures that equal rights to effective participation in the political process are maintained. It also sets limits to what majorities can decide by protecting basic civil and political rights and ensuring the maintenance of a rule of law. In the broad philosophical sense, democracy refers to an egalitarian political society without privileges of class or caste, in which no person's life, beliefs, or values are inherently worth more than those of anyone else. Such a political system is an association of equals in which there is no justification for the exclusion of individuals or groups from the widest possible system of basic civil and political liberties; nor is there any justification for arbitrary exclusion of particular individuals or groups from the benefits of social and political cooperation. In democracy, it is the conception of individuals of equal moral worth that is fundamental. The political conception of justice is immanent in the sense that it is derived from no higher source of authority. Capitalism instead is a political system in which investments in an ownership of

In 1885, while working in Naples, Anna Maria Mozzoni introduced Turati to Anna Kuliscioff, a Marxist, militant feminist. The two immediately fell in love and lived together until her death in 1925. In 1889, Turati and Kuliscioff created the Milan Socialist Party, which was established in 1893. Anna Kuliscioff, a Jewish Russian revolutionary, was a doctor with a specialty in obstetrics and gynecology. She operated a medical practice outside Milan and catered to working women and the poor. Kuliscioff did not view feminism as an abstract principle, but envisioned a socialist historical evolutionary process based on a natural fight for existence that was naturally shifting social dynamics and had pushed working-class women and men into competition with other classes.<sup>372</sup> Throughout her life, Kuliscioff continued to promote the women's vote and to remind Turati of the gender equality envisaged by Marxism. Due to the women's movement's internal polarization mentioned above, however, giving vote to women proved to be a tricky issue for Turati, since it meant handing over votes to less progressive parties—a move that would have not been greeted with enthusiasm by socialist supporters.<sup>373</sup>

In 1891, Turati and Kuliscioff founded *La Critica Sociale*, a newspaper, which became the most influential Marxist review in Italy until 1898. It tracked all the serious problems that Italy was experiencing, beginning with anarchist insurrections in Sicily, all the way to the banking scandals that were plaguing the country. Convinced of the importance of education, *Critica* also published literary works of authors that included Ada Negri and Italo Svevo, whose work I discuss in this chapter. In presenting the literature, *Critica Sociale* adapted a positivist and Marxist critical approach to the texts, but often also tried to promote other progressive ideas that

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the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is maintained chiefly by private individuals or corporations, especially as contrasted to cooperative or state-owned means of wealth.

<sup>372</sup> Eugenio Garu, "La Questione Femminile" *Belfagor* 17 (1962) 35.

<sup>373</sup> Davis, 143-44.

ultimately benefitted society, such as Nietzsche's philosophical ideas which were unknown in Italy at this time.

In 1897, an interesting parable written by Svevo, titled *La Tribù* (1897), appeared in this publication. Although neglected by critical works that focus on Svevo, this work offers important insights into Svevo's political views—views that are further elaborated in *Senilità*, the novel at the center of my analysis. *La Tribù* is a short story that relates the tale of a nomadic tribe as it moves from an agrarian to a capitalist society and as it ultimately entertains the prospects of a revolution that will bring about a socialist awakening. Given the economic changes that the tribe is experiencing, as it moves from a nomadic tribe to an agrarian society, Hussain, the leader of the tribe, is faced with the dilemma of how to protect the right of the individual without impinging on the rights of others. Unable to come up with a satisfactory democratic solution, he sends Achmed, a young warrior, to see how more advanced European nations have dealt with these issues. When Achmed returns from his voyage, he sees that the tribe has undergone economic changes, which have brought about a shift in the balance of power. There is now a marked difference between the rich, who live in large dwellings and adorn themselves with lavish clothes, and the poor, who live in rundown shacks and dress in rags. Informed by his European venture, Achmed comes to the conclusion that his leader has instated the correct laws, since his tribe is now experiencing a similar evolutionary process as what he saw in Europe, wherein the stronger have gotten stronger by taking advantage of the weaker. The one thing that Achmed does not yet see, which was prevalent in the European landscape, are the chimneys that adorned the factories.

Hussain asks Achmed how he thinks he can improve the present evolutionary process of his tribe in light of what he has learned in Europe. Since Achmed's aim is to reclaim the riches



he lost while serving the common good of his tribe, fueled by his newly acquired entrepreneurial spirit from abroad he tells his leader that in exchange for this information, he needs to be compensated in gold. When the leader acquiesces, Achmed explains to Hussain that the tribe will continue on the same path until a new era will come in which man, elevated from all his sorrows, will aspire for a new order in which everyone will have bread, happiness, and work; and the land will belong to everyone who will work it, since the struggle for survival will have no goal other than satisfaction of having served one's tribe. Hussain asks Achmed if any of the European countries have achieved such perfection; Achmed says no. A few years later, a European, unhappy with what is happening in his country, knocks at Hussein's door wishing to join his happy tribe. Hussain explains that there is no space in his tribe for a European because Europeans were responsible for educating one of their tribe members—an education that had ended with the tribe member's repulsion. In fact, rather than waiting patiently for the evolutionary process to reach the end, Hussain tells the foreigner that he had found it necessary to expel Achmed and change the evolutionary process by beginning at its end.<sup>374</sup>

Within the context of my model, the parable highlights Achmed's problematic understanding of modernization. Achmed realizes that industrialism is one of the stages of an evolutionary process that leads to capitalism and, a priori, decides to align himself on the side of power. By consciously aligning himself with power, Achmed becomes trapped in thought processes that bind him to a vicious and violent cycle of repetition in which what he repeats is nothing other than guilt, castration, and resentment. Having erased the very difference that is essential to thought, Achmed engages in thought processes that not only enslave him to a repetition of the same, but also enslave others to the same—since Achmed not only tries to erase

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<sup>374</sup> Italo Svevo, "La Tribù," in *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Mario Lavagetti, vol. 2, "Racconti Scritti e Autobiografici" (Milano: Arnaldo Mondadori, 2004).

all that differs in himself but also all that differs in others to make them similar to him. It is precisely this process of thought that leads to the kind of logic of identity that, as Deleuze has evidenced, is detrimental not only to the individual but to society as a whole because it promotes a hierarchical conceptualization that, as Olkowski explains, demands “intelligibility, rigidity and hegemony of thought.”<sup>375</sup> On a political level, this way of thinking promotes a hierarchical distribution of power that also uses intelligibility and rigidity to rationalize its existence. As Olkowski explains in *The Ruin of Representation*, this has led to group oppressions as attested by our history of colonialism and racism—those who have been colonized or enslaved are enslaved because they have “found themselves judged as ‘lacking’ in relation to the dominant group, who defines its own positive worth by negating or devaluing the others.”<sup>376</sup> Following this kind of logic, “whatever group tends to dominate” or “to have the most privilege and power, represent themselves as active human subjects” and represent “everyone else as ‘others,’” which they exclude as not being “up to the level of the individual or the citizen” which has been “established by the dominant group.” Any attribute that does not fit into this preestablished schema must be either “assimilated to one of the accepted categories, denied or suppressed.” Capitalism is a sociopolitical system that, according to Deleuze, also contributes to this same system of thought.<sup>377</sup> It accomplishes this by “having a ‘ready labor force’ that gives way to the demand that there be a group or groups of so-called despised persons ready to be hired when they are needed, and fired when over production threatens, and generally available to do the dirty work the privileged group does not want to do, or at least do not want to do cheaply.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Dorothea Olkowski, *The Ruin of Representation* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999) 28.

<sup>376</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 28.

<sup>377</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 12.

<sup>378</sup> Olkowski, *The Ruin*, 13.

Motivated by a will to power, what Achmed desires above all is success. In order to achieve this success, he adapts to the living present of his chosen environment, which requires that he renounce the restlessness of the soul (evoked by the seduction of a democratic dream).<sup>379</sup> The problem with Achmed is that he has lost faith in his democratic dream, precisely because it is no longer upheld by his society. He has thus relegated this dream to a distant past where it is repressed and no longer useful. However, by repressing this past ideal, Achmed closes himself off to a difference that would have engaged him on a creative course of thought promoted by the contradictory feelings evoked by this difference, as outlined in the analysis of our prior novels. By negating his past, Achmed erases the contradiction that would have enabled him to extract, imagine, and create new options and alternatives for his tribe. By negating his past, Achmed's thought process crystallizes, since it prevents him from perceiving his future as an immediate future of anticipation but turns it into a future of prediction; conversely, the past is no longer a past of retention but becomes a past of representation.<sup>380</sup> What Svevo appears to be implicitly asking is whether a new enlightened social order is possible—even though he does not explicitly say it either in this short story or in *Senilità*—a social order in which an individual's aims can be motivated by the mere satisfaction of having served the common good of society rather than by the more selfish ethics that fuel the individual's will to power at the detriment of the rest of society. There is no doubt that Svevo still upholds the same democratic ideals as the authors of our prior novels. Unfortunately, as we will see in *Senilità*, even though we witness that same play of dichotomies—which become invested in an imaginative game of love/hate and pain/pleasure that become displaced in usual archetypal figures—the displacements that this

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<sup>379</sup> This becomes obvious during the course of the tale, since the leader's goal is to create a democratic system of government that protects the rights of all citizens as equals. And as we have already indicated in the prior chapters, according to these authors it is not communism.

<sup>380</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xix.

model promotes do not give way to a democratic reawakening. In the end, what the novel reveals are nothing other than the hero's true motives, living in a city such as Trieste, where the need for success has not only become the ultimate goal of his society, but the protagonist's sole aspiration—an aspiration that imprisoned the author to thought processes that no longer enable him to imagine, create, or write anything new.

### **Italo Svevo and his Native City of Trieste**

Italo Svevo is best known for his late novel, *La Coscienza di Zeno* (*The Conscience of Zeno*, 1923), a novel that eventually assured him a prestigious position in the Italian literary canon. Yet, many of Svevo's admirers, including James Joyce and Eugenio Montale, preferred his earlier novel, *Senilità* (*Emilio's Carnival*, 2001).<sup>381</sup> Perhaps this is because, as Daniele Del Giudice explains in his introduction to the novel, *Senilità* is one of Svevo's most autobiographical novels and therefore best reflects this author's most intimate fears, hopes, and desires.<sup>382</sup> Heron Hector Schimtz, pen name Italo Svevo, was born in Trieste in 1861 to an upper-middle-class family; his father was Jewish and his mother Italian. In 1873, Svevo was sent by his father to Germany, where he remained for five years to study business and to perfect the language. While in Germany, Svevo developed a passion for literature and for philosophy through the study of Goethe, Shiller, Richter, Shakespeare, and Schopenhauer.

Upon his return to Trieste, though, he enrolled in the Istituto Superiore di Commercio at his father's urging; he asked his father's permission to study in Florence to perfect his Italian and to continue to study literature. His father refused. In 1880, his father's glass factory went out of

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<sup>381</sup> Victor Brombert, introduction to *Emilio's Carnival* (London: Yale UP, 2001) vii. All citations of *Senilità* are quoted from Brombert's translation.

<sup>382</sup> It is interesting that after writing *Senilità*, in light of the fact that both his prior novel, *Una Vita*, and *Senilità* had not evoked any comments from critics, they were not very well received, and they had to be published at Svevo's expense since he could not find a publisher, Svevo decided to never write again for 25 years.

business, and Svevo was forced to find employment in a bank where he began to work as a clerk. Six years later, he befriended a sculptor by the name of Umberto Veruda who is thinly disguised as the figure of Balli in *Senilità*. After a brief love affair with Giuseppina Zergol, “una donna del popolo” (a woman of the people) that appears as Angiolina in the novel, he met his future wife, Livia Veneziani, the daughter of a flourishing business man, whose factory made antirust varnishes for boats. Bored by his bank job, Svevo began to write and it is during these years that he published *Una Vita* (1892) and *Senilità* (1898) at his expense, since both novels were rejected by publishers. At the same time, he also submitted articles to *L’Indicatore*, a publication that was sympathetic to Mazzini’s democratic ideals and to the Irredentist cause, which also published a serialized version of *Senilità*.<sup>383</sup> He also submitted to the socialist publication, *Critica Sociale*, which, as we have seen, was run by Kuliscioff and Turati; in it appeared portions of his novels, as well as the short story I have previously discussed. In 1896, he married Livia Veneziani, joined her father’s business, and moved with his wife into the in-law’s villa.

During the years that Svevo wrote *Senilità*, Trieste was still under the rule of the Hapsburg Empire—it was not annexed to Italy until 1916. As such, the city was the main port of the Hapsburg Empire and one of the largest in the Adriatic. The port itself, at a time when interport commerce had grown exponentially, housed some of the world’s most renowned shipping companies: Cosulich Lines, Lloyd Triestino, Tripovich Society Sitman, Marittima, and Navigazione Libera Pollich. In such a climate, the Veneziani’s local business experienced the kind of growth that, in a matter of a few years, enabled Svevo to turn the company from local to international. Dealing with international businessmen forced Svevo to travel to England and

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<sup>383</sup> The term “irredentismo” was used during the Risorgimento in reference to city-states that had not yet been annexed to Italy.

France and, for this reason, he decided to learn a third language.<sup>384</sup> By chance, while at the Berlitz Institute in Trieste where he was taking classes, he met James Joyce. The latter was living abroad in self-imposed “exile” and earning money by teaching courses at the Institute; the two became good friends.

Trieste during Svevo’s time was an international city that stood at the crossroads of three cultures: Italian, Germanic, and Slav. It had one of Italy’s largest Jewish communities as well as its largest Slav population, one that remained willfully monolingual to retain its antigovernment attitude. The Slavs differed among themselves, though Slovenes and Croats abounded.<sup>385</sup> Trieste also attracted immigrants from other parts of Europe, wooing them with the promise of employment and profit. In this potpourri of cultures, languages, and religions, the city’s official language, spoken by the authorities and taught in schools, was Italian.

Trieste’s economic boom during the years in question was extraordinary. What had been a small town, whose main commerce were fisheries, turned in a matter of years into one of the wealthiest commercial ports on the Adriatic; its population in 1824 stood at a mere 27,000, increasing to 155,000 by 1924. Not surprisingly, by the middle of the century the city’s location and economic boom had produced the growth of an affluent, culture-hungry middle class, along with some of the same class struggles that other Italian cities were experiencing. In Trieste, these problems were compounded by the call for unification of Italy, thus giving rise to strikes and violent uprisings that, toward the end of the century, caused great damage to the city’s economy and were forcibly squashed by the Austrian army.

For women, Trieste was a good place to be. Feminism, which in Italy was stalled by repressive political and educational policies, flourished in Trieste because under the Austrian

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<sup>384</sup> Ivan M. Tchok, *The Problem with Trieste* (Ridgefield: Acoma Press, 1943) 8.

<sup>385</sup> Katia Pizzi, “Gender, Confessions and Ethnicity: Women’s Writers and Trieste,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 7 (Spring 2007) 71.

model, women enjoyed sustained access to education and cultural outlets. Educational organizations such as *Il Ginnasio* and *Liceo Femminile*, which opened their doors in 1872 and 1881, respectively, served as political cradles for middle-class women. Boasting a larger middle class, emancipation was more readily pursued in Trieste than in Italy. As in Italy, however, feminist sympathizers in the Austrian Empire were not a coherent movement; they were divided along two major political lines. The so-called soft-hand feminists were for more gradual and progressive emancipation while the hard-handed ones, as was the case in Italy, aligned themselves with their working-class brothers rather than their middle-class sisters because they perceived that their problems were more similar to those of the working class.<sup>386</sup>

Given its linguistic and cultural differences, prior to World War I the city of Trieste divided along four major political lines. A considerable part of the population perceived itself as Austrian and was loyal to the Hapsburg monarchy. A second faction thought itself Italian, although it was torn between the myth of national deliverance and economic interests more closely bound with the commercial wealth of Austria and Mitteleuropa. Its members belonged to an undecided mercantile class that was not fully committed to the Irredentist roadmap and was hesitant to accept its ultimate goal, which was to break ties with Austria. A third faction was made up of socialists opposed to joining Italy. Their internationalist agenda entailed an economic collaboration among various ethnic groups in a reformed empire, where every national group could enjoy more cultural autonomy. The fourth and last group was made up of a small group of fervent nationalists called the Irredentist, who wanted to free the city from Austrian control.<sup>387</sup> Their goal was unification with the newly created Italian Kingdom. For these nationalists, Italy served as a quasireligious inspiration that took on mythical dimensions; it found a point of

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<sup>386</sup> Katharine Anthony, *Feminism in Germany and Scandinavia* (New York: H. Holt and Co, 1915) 179-81.

<sup>387</sup> *Prospero*, 16 (2011) 68.

reference in Mazzini, who had become so popular with this group that it was not uncommon to find his portrait adorning the homes of these ardent believers. Along with Mazzini, this group literally worshipped Giuseppe Verdi's famous choruses from the *Nabucco* and *Ernani* despite the Austrian government's censorship. In a similar esteem were held the patriotic poems of Giosuè Carducci, whose work was also banned by the Austrian government (Svevo himself joined the Irredentist in the illegal reading of Carducci's poems). Pro-Italianist aspirations in Trieste, however, were not only fostered through literature, music, and the arts, but also by associations such as the *Società di Ginnastica* (1863) to which Ettore Schmitz belonged.

Proof of Svevo's pro-Italian sympathies abound. In 1887, he served as pallbearer at the funeral of Enrico Jurettig, a journalist for *l'Indipendente* and noted Irredentist, whom the Austrian authorities had imprisoned for 18 months. Nonetheless, it seems that Svevo somewhat contradictorily was also sympathetic to the socialist cause, though he was never open about it. Indeed, as Salvatore Pappalardo suggests, throughout his life Svevo strategically refused to participate in political debates that animated this city.<sup>388</sup> As more recent studies on this author suggest, though, it would appear that Svevo, like many other intellectuals in this city, realized that a dismemberment of the empire would have had disastrous economic consequences for his city. He was thus torn between dreams of democracy inspired by Mazzini, which he aligned with Italy, and socialist reforms that could bring about gradual shifts in power without toppling the economic power structure of the city promoted by Austria. His contradictory stance emerges clearly in *Senilità*, where Trieste is portrayed as a city that functions "under a double colonial

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<sup>388</sup> Salvatore Pappalardo, "One Last Austrian Cigarette: Italo Svevo and Habsburg Trieste," [http://villanova.academia.edu/SalvatorePappalardo/Papers/1224482/One\\_Last\\_Austrian\\_Cigarette.\\_Svevo\\_and\\_Habsburg\\_Trieste](http://villanova.academia.edu/SalvatorePappalardo/Papers/1224482/One_Last_Austrian_Cigarette._Svevo_and_Habsburg_Trieste), 67.



yoke” that “defies both the imperialism of the Hapsburg and the nationalism of the Irredentists, and yet at the same time, does not fully reject Austria or Italy but tries to embrace both.”<sup>389</sup>

## The Plot

The plot of *Senilità* is quite simple. Emilio Brentani, the protagonist of Svevo’s novel, is a 35-year-old insurance agent and writer who appears torn between a nostalgic longing for past democratic ideals reflected in his propensity to write sentimental novels and a society that privileges middle-class values, to which he also adheres. To overcome the boredom of his daily work routine, which prevents him from creating or imagining anything new, Emilio continues to invest his energies in writing romances, in the hope that, through them, he will regain the creative force he once possessed and has now lost. Amalia, Emilio’s sister (the first woman in the novel), leads as boring a life as Emilio; her life ties her to household duties and to a brother whom she watches over as if he were a child. Emilio’s life appears to enliven with the appearance of Angiolina (the third woman in the novel), a working woman who struggles to earn a living and with whom Emilio falls in love. Emilio’s feelings toward Angiolina also lighten up Amalia’s life, fueling her own amorous feelings for Stefano Balli, a sculptor and a dandy, who is Emilio’s best friend. Amalia is unable to fully repress these amorous feelings, and she reveals them to her brother by talking about them in trance-like dreams in her sleep. Emilio questions Stefano to find out what his true intentions are with regard to his sister. The sculptor, embarrassed that he is loved by such an insignificant woman as Amalia, reveals to Emilio that he does not love her and distances himself from the Brentani household—despite the fact that he had frequented their home regularly to attend informal dinners at the expense of the brother and

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<sup>389</sup> Pappalardo, 67.

sister. Realizing that Stefano does not reciprocate her feelings, Amalia, overtaken by anger, asks her brother to give up his friendship with Stefano. When Emilio does not comply, she withdraws into the confines of her room and copes with the rejection of both men by turning to ether. The novel ends with the death of Amalia and Emilio's loss of Angiolina, who leaves Italy to visit relatives in another country at approximately the same time of Amalia's death.

### The Model

As the character who occupies the position of the first woman, Amalia serves as an example of how physical weakness and self-denial, qualities that once served as expressions of spiritual purity, can no longer redeem the individual. As the first woman, Amalia is described as a sacrificial maternal figure who has given up her life to dedicate herself to others. Amalia spends most of her day cleaning and cooking for her brother, as if he were a her child: "For years Amalia had spent a good part of her day at the stove and had become an excellent cook, to satisfy Emilio's delicate palate."<sup>390</sup> A saintly and self-sacrificing maternal figure, Amalia has internalized her role so perfectly that it even shows in her outward appearance: "outside she looked even drabber ... dressed all in black;"<sup>391</sup> her usual attire was gray, symbolically replicating her figure and her fate.<sup>392</sup>

Although Amalia is in love with her brother's friend, Stefano Balli, she feels that she has had to repress her feelings because she fears that a relationship might divert her energies away from her true duties to her brother and to their home. Love, however, turns into a dangerous game for Amalia when she realizes that, in spite of her impeccable reputation and the fact that

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<sup>390</sup> *Emilio's Carnival* (64). It is interesting that even in this novel, the figure of the "real" mother is absent but is resented through Amalia, who resembles her.

<sup>391</sup> All quotes are from Italo Svevo's *Emilio's Carnival*, trans., Beth Archer Brombert and Victor Brombert (London: Yale University Press, 2001) 68.

<sup>392</sup> Svevo, 134.

she has followed all the dictates mandated by her society, Balli does not want to have anything to do with her because he considers her an “insignificant ... spinster” who is unsuitable for him:

“How seriously she had taken the injunction that had been directed into her ears since childhood. She had detested those who disobeyed it, and had suppressed everyone of her impulses to rebel. She had been cheated.”<sup>393</sup> Resentful of her fate and resentful of Balli’s rejection, Amalia demands that Emilio give up his friendship with Balli in order to defend her reputation. When Emilio does not comply, she threatens her brother by suggesting that she will abandon the household and seek a position as a maid.

Incapable of reacting in any other way, Amalia falls prey to her own resentfulness, which turns her into a vicious second woman. This same resentfulness ties her to a cycle of repetition in which what is repeated is nothing other than the same feelings of guilt and castration that led to her repression. This vicious cycle of repression not only entraps Amalia, leading to her alienation and ultimately her death; but it also entraps Emilio who, just like Amalia, wants to repress others as he himself is being repressed. In the position of first and second woman, Amalia serves as an example of the way repression can lead to feelings of resentment that are detrimental not only to the individual but to society as a whole because it leads one onto a path that distracts from one’s true goals (in the case of Emilio and his sister, the distraction are the feelings of self preservation that are erected to protect the coherence in the self). It is precisely this vicious cycle of resentment that leads to the kind of violence that, as Deleuze has evidenced, is handed down from one generation to the next, thus becoming detrimental not only to the individual but to society as a whole.

Emilio, like Amalia, feels that he has sacrificed his whole life. For a long time, he has been tied to a job he abhors in order to provide for his sister. Therefore, he has been unable to

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<sup>393</sup> Svevo, 64.

enjoy anything else in life, including Angiolina. Like Amalia, at the ripe old age of “thirty-five,” he has not yet experienced love. All that he knows about love he has learned from “novels,” which have taught him nothing other than to “regard his peers with great distrust and contempt.”<sup>394</sup> Given his repression, immediately after meeting Angiolina, the woman who feeds his longing and gives meaning of the “unsatiated feelings” that motivate “his soul,”<sup>395</sup> he is overwhelmed with guilt. Bound by his duties to his sister and family, and since he believes that Angiolina diverts him from his true goals and duties, he says to her: “I like you a lot, but you could never be more than a plaything in my life. I have other obligations. I have my career, my family.”<sup>396</sup>

Emilio and Amalia’s guilt and resentment are on display throughout the novel. One day feeling that he has neglected his sister in order to spend time with Angiolina, Emilio asks Amalia to join him for an evening at the theater. It is Emilio’s hope that the music they will hear will serve as an escape for his sister, as it has done many times in the past. However, Amalia is so consumed by resentment that she can no longer appreciate the healing effect of music. For this reason, the new sounds that she hears that evening at the theater with Emilio, instead of soothing her, threaten her sensibility. As Amalia explains, “The strange music whose details escaped her but whose boldness and power felt threatening to her.”<sup>397</sup> Amalia is so resentful that she cannot even appreciate the attention she receives from the wealthy ladies, whose admiration in the past had fueled her self-esteem: “Her eyes did not brighten once during the performance. Her thoughts were so concentrated on the injustice done her that she was unable to notice all those lively, elegant women who, at other times, had interested her so much that merely talking about

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<sup>394</sup> Svevo, 8.

<sup>395</sup> Svevo, 2.

<sup>396</sup> Svevo, 1.

<sup>397</sup> Svevo, 132.

them had given her pleasure.”<sup>398</sup> The same can be said about Emilio who after the performance, to rid himself of the apathy that ties him to a state of stagnation and unproductivity, decides to relate to Amalia his own love story with the working-class Angiolina. As he relates it, Angiolina’s desire has significantly “brighten[ed]” his life, since thoughts of her have enabled Emilio to dream again. Through her, he has been able to overcome the “solitude” that for many years now has tied him to his “egotistical pursuits” with the promise of a “future” full “of joys,” so that he can again fulfill his “unfulfilled pursuits” and overcome “his sorry ... yearning” for the “past.”<sup>399</sup> In relating his love story with the “real”<sup>400</sup> Angiolina, even though Emilio stays close to the truth, he withholds from Amalia “his true intentions,” which are to use Angiolina and then discard her as a “toy.” Amalia, enticed by Emilio’s tale, listens to him with the same avidity and interest with which she had previously “read hundreds of novels” which now are “stuffed in the old cupboard” that serves as a bookcase. Yet, while reading those she had felt like a “passive auditor,” now she feels as if “her own destiny” is being “resuscitated.”<sup>401</sup> Emilio’s tale manages to awaken Amalia’s desires, so that she feels as if, in “one breath,” love has finally entered their house and is cohabitating with them, blowing “away the stagnant environment in which they had spent her life.” Through Emilio’s story, Amalia is able to live the “romanzo” (the novel) that she has not been able to live in real life.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Svevo, 131. The original text, unlike the translation, emphasizes the sense of pleasure that Amalia, a member of the middle class, received by the attention of the wealthy ladies, which in the past seemed to fuel her self-esteem: “Nella serata il divertimento non le animò gli occhi neppure una sola volta. Il pensiero era sempre rivolto all’ingustizia che le era stata fatta..., ella non poteva neppure trovar piacer nel parlare... Mentre nel passato lei s’inuperbiva quando le ricche donne la salutavano ora non se n’importava (103).

<sup>399</sup> Svevo, 3.

<sup>400</sup> I have put real in quotes because the point I am trying to make is that Emilio is so blinded by his own misconceptions, which he mistakes for truth, that he really has no idea of what is real and what is not.

<sup>401</sup> Svevo, 11.

<sup>402</sup> Giuliana Minghelli, *In the Shadow of the Mammoth: Italo Svevo and the Emergence of Modernism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 118-19.

That evening, inspired by his own romantic tale, Emilio decides to write a novel. His hope is that writing will “animate his life” as it had many years “before,” keeping him “from” falling into “the state of inertia” into which he repeatedly finds himself.<sup>403</sup> Before beginning the novel, Emilio decides to revisit another novel he had written several years earlier.<sup>404</sup> This novel related the story of “a naïve and sensitive young man,” who he had fashioned after himself and whose health and talent had been destroyed by a young woman with cat-like qualities (in other words, a second woman). He had fashioned the female protagonist after the literary style of the time—half human, half animal; part woman and part tiger—in part because he had not yet had an intimate relationship with a woman, nor had he met Angiolina, so he did not really understand love. Unknowingly, however, he had fashioned the heroine after the Angiolina he had not yet met. “With what conviction he had described her!” She was so convincing that “her pain” and her “joy ... had” enabled him to significantly experience “that same hybrid mix of tiger and female.”<sup>405</sup> Interestingly, the female character’s feline characteristics he had described mirrored Angiolina’s movements and perhaps even her temperament, though now, in rereading his former work, Emilio realizes that no animal as complicated as she could have ever been born, nor could it have survived in real life. In retrospect, the heroine in the novel does not resemble Angiolina at all, since she lacks the vitality of the “real” Angiolina.<sup>406</sup> And yet, as Emilio remembers, at the time he had written this novel he had tried to render her so real that even he had bought into his own lies. Now, Emilio realizes that his lies do not move him anymore.

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<sup>403</sup> Svevo, 135.

<sup>404</sup> As Daniele Del Giudice points out, the description of this prior novel relates the story of *Una Vita*.

<sup>405</sup> Svevo, 135-6.

<sup>406</sup> Svevo, 136.

Inspired by “a new artistic path,” which is motivated by his willingness to capture the “truth,” Emilio decides to write a second novel.<sup>407</sup> This time, instead of relating the old lies, which he had tried to pass for truths, he decides to write about the “real” Angiolina, whom he has just met. He proceeds by describing “his own ... violent and irate” feelings, starting with the most recent ones, to relate his “own first impressions of Angiolina,” whose “spoiled,” “base, and perverse soul” clashes with the descriptions of the “beautiful landscape.”<sup>408</sup> Inspired by the “real” Angiolina, Emilio writes the first chapter in one sitting. At the end of the evening, exhausted, he abandons it and decides to return to it the following day. After rereading it, he notices that the male hero, who he had fashioned after himself, does not resemble him at all. Conversely, although the female character still embodied the characteristics of the cat woman in the prior novel, she still seems to lack the vitality of the “real” Angiolina. Unhappy and dissatisfied with the fact that the novel he was writing (which was supposed to mirror the truth) is less convincing than the illusion he tried to pass for truth, he abandons the novel because to improve it he needs to master up “the courage” to examine himself. Wishing to spare himself “the pain” of having to analyze “his own inaptitude,” an inaptitude that now makes him feel “despairingly sluggish,” Emilio abandons literature and decides to turn to “real” Angiolina instead.<sup>409</sup> His hope is that, by seeking the “real” Angiolina, he will be regain “the animation” he could not find by himself and which he now seeks “from without;” and this animation will help him to overcome the atrophy that “his brain is experiencing,” which makes him feel as if he is staring “at the blank page ... in a trance” so that he may again “talk and think with fervor” in

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<sup>407</sup> I believe that here Svevo is sarcastically toying with realism.

<sup>408</sup> Svevo, 136.

<sup>409</sup> Svevo, 137.

order to live in “real life “the novel he had been unable to lay down on paper.”<sup>410</sup> Emilio leaves the house to find the “real” Angiolina.

There is no doubt that Emilio, the artist, the writer, and the successful businessman, unlike our prior heroes, is convinced that the prior democratic ideal, promoted by romantic novels, does not function anymore. Consequently, he differs greatly from the male heroes I analyze in the previous chapters. Carlo and Giorgio turned away from reality by unconsciously placing themselves in the past in order to reactivate this democratic ideal. They were able to recapture it by comparing it with their present reality so as to capitalize on the contradiction that emerged—in order to fix this ideal in some kind of temporary form that took a new shape with each repetition and which achieved coherence with the last. Emilio, instead, relegates this ideal to a distant past where it is no longer usable and, in the process, erases the contradiction that would have led him into a similar creative thought process.

As many critics have observed, Emilio appears to be functioning within two time frames: youth and old age.<sup>411</sup> Emilio appears to be caught in a present that he associates with lethargy, egotism, unproductivity, and old age. This prevents him from regaining his youth, which instead he aligns with health, freedom, and creativity.<sup>412</sup> Old age is a condition Emilio would like to overcome by chasing Angiolina, who makes him feel as an “old man” who is trying to regain “his youth.”<sup>413</sup> Emilio, though, has become so good at negating his past that he cannot even “remember with any degree of accuracy what this” prior “state of mind” was like.<sup>414</sup> This negation has rendered his past “opaque,” depriving him of the “light and intensity” that would

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<sup>410</sup> Svevo, 138.

<sup>411</sup> See, for example, Giovanna’s Benvenuti’s *La Coscienza di Zeno* (Milano: Principato, 1985), or Daniele Del Giudice’s introduction to *Senilità* (Milano: Feltrinelly, 2006).

<sup>412</sup> See for example, Giovanna’s Benvenuti’s *La Coscienza di Zeno* (Milano: Principato, 1985); or Daniele Del Giudice’s introduction to *Senilità* (Milano: Feltrinelly, 2006).

<sup>413</sup> Svevo, 138.

<sup>414</sup> Svevo, 135.



have enabled him to see “how grotesque his exaggerated emotions had become.”<sup>415</sup> Emilio has become so good at repressing his past that he has turned himself into an agent of his own repression. In this state of affairs, youth is a state of mind that Emilio cannot regain because he is “senile.” This senility has crystallized not only his thought processes, but also his soul, just as was the case for Achmed in Svevo’s short story. Emilio is entrapped in a perpetual present that has required him to repress that very same past ideal that once enlightened his imagination and fueled his desire, because it is no longer upheld by society. By negating this prior ideal, Emilio erases the contradiction that would have led him into a creative process of thought and becomes a victim of a limited thought process that leads him into making false analogies. These analogies are erected on erroneous preconceived notions that he mistakes for truths, and which, in turn, lead him into making incorrect future predictions.

This becomes obvious when one day Emilio runs into a friend by the name of Soriani, who is acquainted with Merighi, Angiolina’s ex-boyfriend, and questions him about Angiolina’s prior relationship. Soriani, who seems to adhere to Emilio’s same ethical value and to the same restrictive process of thought, tells the protagonist that Angiolina’s boyfriend was a wealthy gentleman who was experiencing financial problems. He had thus taken advantage of Angiolina by treating her as if she were a toy who could be set aside after repeated use; something he felt was perfectly appropriate for a harlot such as her. When Emilio later questions another acquaintance, Merighi’s friend Leardi, another version of the story emerges. Leardi explains that even though Merighi was in love with Angiolina, his family prevented him from pursuing a relationship with her. Emilio finally confronts Angiolina with both accounts, and her story coincides with Leardi’s. However, she explains the facts a little more clearly, revealing to Emilio the true motivations that led her to ending the relationship with Meringhi. Angiolina tells Emilio

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<sup>415</sup> Svevo, 138.

that it was not Merighi who abandoned her, but it was she who abandoned Merighi, since his family “had gotten on her nerves in every way, letting her understand that they considered her a burden.” Merighi’s mother had suggested that, in light of her socioeconomic position, she would have “ruined” her son’s life and theirs: in her absence, “who knows what” woman with a substantial dowry the son would have been able to attract.<sup>416</sup> Disgusted by his family’s ethics, Angiolina ended the relationship and vouched never to see him again.

Faced with these contradictory stories, Emilio, without hesitation, dismisses Leardi and Angiolina’s version in order to accept Soriani’s account because it best coincides with the way he views the heroine. This leads him into making erroneous predictions about the heroine based on his erroneous preconceived notions: Emilio thinks that both the heroine and Leardi are lying because they are having an affair (which is not true). Leardi, as far as Emilio is concerned, is protecting Angiolina because he is having a relationship with her. In reality, though, Emilio is well aware that if there is one flaw to Angiolina’s personality, it is that she is a petty “liar.” Angiolina, unlike Emilio, does not “possess the art of lying,” since, when caught in a lie, as Emilio himself admits to his readers, it is “easy to catch her in contradictions.”<sup>417</sup> Although Emilio knows that the heroine is incapable of lying without revealing herself, he dismisses this fact and proceeds to make false assumptions, which are built on illusions that he mistakes for facts and which render him blind to the truth. Emilio is “senile” because he is incapable of perceiving reality for what it really is—his ability to think has been obfuscated by illusions that he now mistakes for truths.

Emilio appears to be on a mission, and that mission is to negate all that differs in him and in others in order to make them similar to himself. By negating the difference in the self, Emilio,

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<sup>416</sup> Svevo, 14.

<sup>417</sup> Svevo, 153.

just like his sister, becomes entrapped in a cycle of repetition that turns him into a victim of his own repression. It is precisely his ability to repress all contradiction that prevents Emilio from regaining his youth—a youth that was once fueled by democratic illusions, whose aim was to reach out to everyone in spite of their difference rather than erasing difference to preserve the coherence in the self. Ultimately, this ability to maintain the coherence of the self is what enables Emilio to erect his illusions of grandeur, which make him think that he is better, stronger, and smarter than anyone else—even though deep down he suspects that this is not true. Emilio's restrictive thought process informs his own ethical and political views and prevents him from appreciating Angiolina for who she is and for what she really represents.

Given Emilio's myopic view of life, what Emilio cannot believe is that an exceptionally beautiful woman as Angiolina would engage in a relationship with a mediocre, middle-class insurance agent such as himself. In Emilio's ethical system, smart women are ones who are capable of finding "a buyer at the highest price."<sup>418</sup> These women are smart because they do not "yield to love until the bottom line" has turned out right."<sup>419</sup> The fact that Angiolina yielded to him so easily and that she was immediately interested in him when she could have had a man who could give her more and enable her to gain more out of life makes Emilio think that she cannot have a better man; if she could, she would. Who would settle for less when they could have more?

More importantly, in Emilio's ethical system, women who are smart are smart because they "know" their "worth," or at least "that is" the "secret" to their lies. A smart woman, thus, must "give" the "impression" of being honest, even if she is not.<sup>420</sup> Consequently, Angiolina is honest even though she often gives the impression of lying, and this means that she is dumb. Not

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<sup>418</sup> Svevo, 16.

<sup>419</sup> Svevo, 16.

<sup>420</sup> Svevo, 17.

only is Angiolina dumb, but she must also be lying, and what she lies about is her reputation because it is her reputation that prevents her from finding a man better than Emilio. Incapable of allowing Angiolina to educate him, Emilio proceeds to educate Angiolina so that she can conform to his line of thought, and in so doing, gain the most out of her situation.<sup>421</sup> As our wise narrator notes to his readers, this is the reward that Emilio gives Angiolina for the unselfish love that she gives him: he repays her by teaching her how to acquire the fortune he could not provide her. Unfortunately, unable to make his dreams comply with reality, Emilio proceeds to make reality comply with his illusions.

Unlike Amalia, however, Emilio is conscious of his lies, which he tries to pass for truth because he wishes to manipulate others. The reader realizes this because unlike the other novels I discussed, here the narrative voice and the male protagonists are not the same. Although the narrator appears to function as Emilio's alter-ego, unveiling all of Emilio's machinations and deceptions (we assume it is a "he") provides the reader with a double perspective—that of Emilio and that of the narrator. By highlighting the gap wherein the perspective of the author/narrator differs from that of Emilio, the reader is alerted that there is no awakening on the part of the main protagonist. Oddly enough, in this narrative structure it is the narrator who appears to be experiencing a process of evolutionary awakening, instead of the hero himself. In addition, this double perspective reveals to the reader not only that Emilio lies and he is conscious of his deceptions, which he uses to manipulate others, but also that he is coherent with himself, realizing that he always tries to pass lies for real truths in order to manipulate others, as he has done in writing the first novel. Emilio is sick precisely because he lives an actualized state of perpetual deception on which he erects his fictions—fictions that he tries to pass for reality even though he is well aware that they are nothing other than lies.

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<sup>421</sup> Svevo, 16-7.

The same can be said of Balli, the artist and dandy, who also appears to be entrapped in the same restrictive thought processes as Emilio. As such, he is tied to the same illusions: Stefano also mistakes them for truths and also makes erroneous predictions that he thinks are true because he is guided by his myopic misconceptions. What Stefano finds compelling about the “real” Angiolina is the fact that in the “purity of those lines he had discovered an undefinable expression, not directly inspired by those lines—somewhat awkward and vulgar—which Raffaello would have suppressed, but which he was eager to copy” and “accentuate.”<sup>422</sup> Like Emilio’s aim, Balli’s is to “capture” the “real” Angiolina. As a result, he ends up creating a model that complies with his own preconceptions instead of capturing the real essence of the heroine. Unable to have the “real” Angiolina in front of him because the jealous and insecure Emilio has kept her from him, Balli decides to sculpt her as he remembers her. He begins by setting up “the armature” and then covers “it with clay” in order to “model the outline of the nude figure,” which at the end of the each day he wraps with a wet cloth, as if preparing it for a “funeral shroud.”<sup>423</sup> When he unwraps the figure the following day, he is unhappy with his creation because it looks nothing like the “real” Angiolina he had imagined, and he tears the copy apart.

He is resentful toward Emilio, who is keeping him from creating the masterpiece of his life since, as the narrator tells us, he thinks that if he had “the model of his dreams” in front of him, he would have been renewed “with energy” and able to sculpt her as she really is.<sup>424</sup> So he decides to try sculpting her again, but “gives up in disgust” after a few sittings.<sup>425</sup> At last, however, he succeeds in getting the “real” Angiolina to pose for him. Yet, rather than allowing

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<sup>422</sup> Svevo, 164. It is interesting that Raffaello would have portrayed her as the first woman, while Stefano instead wishes to portray her as the second.

<sup>423</sup> Svevo, 163.

<sup>424</sup> Svevo, 164.

<sup>425</sup> Svevo, 164.

her to pose naturally for him, he sets her up in a pose that is difficult for her to maintain.

Interestingly, in the pose, Angiolina is supposed to have a “supplicating expression on her face,” which makes her look more like Amalia than the harlot he is trying to portray. Angiolina, struggling to maintain this pose, sacrifices herself on behalf of the artist even though he knows that she will never be able to “capture perfectly this pose” because she is “a slut” that “does not have a clue of how to pray,” and throughout the sitting, instead of “filling her eyes with pity, she” casts “them upward saucily.”<sup>426</sup>

Ironically, when one day Emilio visits the studio in order to see Stefano’s creation, the rendition he sees looks nothing like the “real” Angiolina, which Emilio thinks he knows. When Stefano tries to point to Emilio the similarities between the “real” Angiolina and the model, Emilio ironically only sees the resemblance if he views “the head from a particular fixed angle.”<sup>427</sup> Even “from this fixed perspective, the head, where a few thumb strokes had hallowed the temples and smoothed the forehead,” looks “like a skull meticulously covered with earth, so as not to scream.”<sup>428</sup> Emilio is able to discern an “amorphous” figure on which rests “a kneeling” and “almost human figure” that has “something tragic about it,” since it appears to “be buried in clay and making superhuman attempt to” set herself “free.”<sup>429</sup> As Stefano explains to Emilio, although the statue is not finished, since the idea is still missing, the base will “remain rough,” although it will “increasingly” become more “refined as” it moves to “the top,” and the “hair” on top will be “arranged in a coquettish style of the most modern hairdresser.”<sup>430</sup> Stefano explains to Emilio that this will negate “the prayer expressed by the face.”<sup>431</sup> At the end, not fully convinced

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<sup>426</sup> Svevo, 169.

<sup>427</sup> Svevo, 170.

<sup>428</sup> Svevo, 168.

<sup>429</sup> Svevo, 168.

<sup>430</sup> Svevo, 168.

<sup>431</sup> Svevo, 168.

by his own explanation since, even for Stefano the model looks nothing like the real Angiolina he was trying to sculpt, Stefano abandons the copy, covers it with a wet cloth, and never returns to it again.<sup>432</sup>

The only person who has a difficult time seeing a resemblance between her and the rendition of her created by other men is Angiolina herself. When she sees the rendition of her that Stefano has created, Angiolina concludes that the model does not resemble her at all. The narrator wisely points out that not only did Angiolina not collaborate with their construction, she also resisted any attempt to comply or adhere to the rendition they created. Indeed, the model that they had created mirrored the artists themselves instead of the heroine. Angiolina, as our narrator explains, is a beautiful and solar woman who comes from a poor family plagued by health and financial problems. She lives with siblings who are unemployed; a mother who cares for her crazy father; and a father himself whose illness prevents both parents from procuring for their children. The duties consequently fall on Angiolina, who carries the financial responsibilities of her family. In spite of this, Angiolina, unlike Emilio or her sister, does not resent her situation but takes her responsibilities seriously and carries them through without resentment. Realizing that Emilio is incapable of fully committing to her, she makes no demands on him and willingly accepts the relationship on his terms, providing him with a love that does not bind with ties of any sort, including financial ones.

In the position of third woman, Angiolina is described as a “paradoxical” figure that embodies contradictory characteristics: at times, she is described as “selfish;” at others as “giving.”<sup>433</sup> Her contradictory qualities are precisely what fueled Stefano and Emilio’s imaginations, even though they make Emilio feel as if he is lowering himself “to her level or”

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<sup>432</sup> Svevo, 170.

<sup>433</sup> Svevo, 34.

stooping “even lower.”<sup>434</sup> Not surprisingly, in Emilio’s imagination Angiolina sometimes emerges as a first woman who turns into the second; while in other dreams, she appears to share the characteristics of a second woman who then turns into a first. In the former version (first to second), Angiolina appears as a “sweet and defenseless” person who then turns into a “corrupt” creature that wishes to take advantage of him. In these dreams, Emilio imagines himself incurably sick so that Angiolina can take “care of him.” It is during these times that he calls “Lina,” “Ange,” “Angèle.”

She seemed to have the composure and the sobriety of a good nurse, and every time she came close to him, she brought him cooling relief, touching his burning forehead with a cool hand, or kissing him on the eye and on the brow ... And only a few hours earlier he thought he had lost the capacity to dream.<sup>435</sup>

When she appears in role of the “castrated” first woman, Angiolina appears very similar to his sister even though she does not belong to the same class. In the semblances of a working-class woman, she emerges as a figure that Emilio can easily subjugate, since she is financially indebted to him. But as soon as she changes form from the first to the second woman, she becomes a subjugating figure who wishes to “suck the little blood” that remains in Emilio’s “veins.”<sup>436</sup> In these instances, Angiolina puts Emilio to “shame” because she adds “to the weight of his” own “conscience,” which makes him feel more “remorseful” for having “bonded ... to” a woman who makes him feel as if “his own life” has been “compromised.”<sup>437</sup>

At other times, she appears in reverse: she materializes as embodying the characteristics of the second woman, who then turns into the first. In these states, Emilio imagines her as Angiolona, a woman who prostitutes herself in order to earn a living for them both.<sup>438</sup> In this

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<sup>434</sup> Svevo, 161.

<sup>435</sup> Svevo, 145.

<sup>436</sup> Svevo, 145.

<sup>437</sup> Svevo, 144.

<sup>438</sup> There is a remarkable similarity between Pisana and Angiolina at this point. But then it is obvious that Svevo is subtly playing with all kinds of literary topos. In fact, even in relation to the cat woman that appears in his novel,



light, she inspires Emilio to “heroic acts in service of socialism” since “their whole misadventure” is nothing other than “a result of their poverty.”<sup>439</sup> She thus motivates Emilio’s democratic illusions, which enable him to speak of “the hideous struggles” that have “erupted between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots,” and whose “outcome” will “bring freedom to all, including them.”<sup>440</sup> It is in these dreams that he imagines the “elimination of capitalism” which will bring about changes in work schedules, where a “short workday” will “be” the norm for “everyone.” In this kind of society “men and women” will be “equal,” and love” will “be a gift” that will be “shared by all.”<sup>441</sup> It is in this kind of “society” that Emilio “will be able to love” Angiolina “openly.” Yet, in these dreams, it is Angiolina who points out to Emilio that “if everything were shared, there would not be enough for everyone.” Workers would “become envious” and “lazy” and “would not accomplish anything.”<sup>442</sup> Surprised that “this child of the working class was defending the rich,” Emilio realizes that this would have never happened, precisely because Angiolina would have never taken “advantage of a” work “situation”—because it was “not in her character to exploit power or to use it in order to prove it, but rather to enjoy it so as to live better and more.” In these dreams, in fact, Angiolina points to an ethical system that is capable of elevating individuals so they can reach the same enlightened state predicted by Achmed—a state of perfection where there is no other goal than the common good of all individuals, a goal that fully captures the writer’s wishes to reach a socialism through a slow democratization of the country.

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critics have suggested that he might be alluding to *Tigre Reale*, an early novel written by the “Verista” Giovanni Verga that was published in 1887. In fact, it would be interesting to compare this heroine with the ones that we are analyzing. Unfortunately, time prevents me from doing so here, but it is something that I might revisit in the future.

<sup>439</sup> Svevo, 157.

<sup>440</sup> Svevo, 157.

<sup>441</sup> Svevo, 157.

<sup>442</sup> Svevo, 157.

Graziana Minghelli, in looking at other novels written by this author, explains that Svevo's ideal hero is one who defines himself through potentiality and change and one who questions his limits so as to move beyond preestablished borders drawn by gender, class, race, ethics, religion, politics, and nationality. Imperfection, the inability to adapt, and the desire for change are weaknesses that, for Svevo as well as for Nievo and Tarchetti, function as strengths because they offer the individual the opportunity for growth that is otherwise unknown to the man who successfully adapts.<sup>443</sup> Svevo appears to imply that, spurred on by mutability and change, evoked by the restlessness of the soul or the unhappiness of the created being, and unlike that of the adjusted and happy individual who is bound to a blind obedience to preestablished paths of successful adaptation, Emilio, like our prior heroes, could gain the ability to dream again. In order to accomplish this, he would have to delay an already preestablished evolutionary process that would alter his own existence and that of others, even if albeit through a fantasy.<sup>444</sup> By warding off successful adaptation, which is promoted by a more linear thought process that crystallizes the soul (as Freud will point out a few years later in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"), the individual, like individual cells, can ward off the end through an ongoing "existential" process of "contamination." In *Senilità*, although this prospect fuels the idle writer's imagination with illusions of brighter future, Emilio, unlike our previous protagonists, does not experience any evolutionary awakening from this process. The reason for this difference is that Emilio appears to be functioning in what Deleuze and Guattari call a "hermeneutically charged blockage of time" in which the I that would like to live "a present transition and mutation" that would take him into a "new epoch" where he could "pursue a new anthropological promise" is a

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<sup>443</sup> *In The Shadow of the Mammoth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 23.

<sup>444</sup> Minghelli, 20.

fantasy that still motivates the artist, but will never be fully actualized in reality.<sup>445</sup> For this reason, once awakened from his dreams, Emilio again falls prey to usual misconceptions. Blinded by his normal senility and overtaken by a false sense of jealousy, because he sees Angiolina as a flirtatious woman who uses men to gain the most out of any given situation, he ends his relationship with her (significantly, at the end of the novel Angiolina disappears at the same time as Amalia).

As Daniele Del Giudice shows, Emilio's most radical struggle in this novel is neither based on a Darwinian fight for survival, nor a crusade against the individual's egotistical pursuits, nor a struggle that centers on class-conscious pursuits that are promoted by the infancy of socialism; even though all of these issues come into play in this novel, Emilio's biggest struggle is against the phantasms that emerge in his dreams and haunt his imagination—phantasms he cannot fully repress no matter how much he tries.<sup>446</sup> Emilio "does not repeat because he represses; he represses because he repeats."<sup>447</sup> The problem with Emilio is that, by grounding himself in his present reality, he relegates his ideal to a distant past where it functions as an essential and infinite knowledge that is in him and acts in him; a knowledge, however, that needs to be overcome, and one that, for this reason, functions as a blocked representation.<sup>448</sup> Yet, no matter how much Emilio tries to repress this past ideal, it reemerges as a phantom from the dead that continues to haunt his psyche, whether in real life, in his dreams, in writing, in art, or in music.

With the disappearance of the two women, Emilio feels "disoriented and dissatisfied" precisely because losing them means losing his desire and his ability to dream. Without them,

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<sup>445</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 10.

<sup>446</sup> Daniele Del Giudice, intro to *Senilità* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2006) xvi.

<sup>447</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York, Columbia U. P. 1994) 275.

<sup>448</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 15.

Emilio is left with nothing other than his loneliness and the “memories of his own guilt.”<sup>449</sup> As he reflects on his past experience, he realizes that although “[l]ove and pain” had several times “crossed his life,” now deprived of those elements, he feels as if an important part of his body had been amputated.<sup>450</sup> Consequently, as the senile Emilio ponders on the past events of his life “the way an old man remembers youth,” a “terrible sadness” falls over him. In revisiting the events from his past, however, a new perspective arises in the mind of the idle author that enlivens Emilio’s imagination with a glimmer of hope.<sup>451</sup> As he ponders the past and his relationship with Amalia from the present perspective, he realizes that this relationship “had not” made a difference in “his life” at all, since, as “he remembered,” she had not “shown any desire for closeness when he had tried to make the relationship more affectionate, in order to free himself from Angiolina.” Amalia’s death, on the other hand, emerges as a “meaningful” event in his mind. It “was her death” that “had liberated him from” a disgraceful attachment to a “passion” that had tied him to his romanticism.<sup>452</sup> In “the mind of the idle writer” who ponders the past, it is not Amalia that, consequently, “undergoes a metamorphosis,” but Angiolina herself. Although in this dream Angiolina reappears “intact” in “all of her beauty,” she also acquires “the characteristics of Amalia, who” dies “a second time, in her.” As these two figures unite in Angiolina who at the same time is Lina, Angéle, Angiolona, and Angiolina, the third woman materializes as an artistic icon whose “downcast” eyes make her appear “inconsolably inert.” In this light, she acquires “a candid and intelligent look,” a liveliness he had never been able to capture in his romance with her and, suddenly, evokes the admiration and the love of the artist, who realizes that he will “love” this icon forever, since she represents “everything noble

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<sup>449</sup> Svevo, 228.

<sup>450</sup> Svevo, 232.

<sup>451</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>452</sup> Svevo, 228.

that he had thought and observed” from his “past” which, from the perspective of the present, endows new meaning to Emilio’s life.<sup>453</sup> This symbol’s eyes, in fact, point Emilio toward “the horizon,” from which emanates “red rays” that are “reflected on her pink, yellow, white face.”<sup>454</sup> It is in this future that Angiolina patiently waits “for him.”<sup>455</sup>

Unwilling to erase his dream, for this reason, Angiolina reappears one last time at the end of this novel to ignite Emilio’s imagination: erasing her would lead to inertia, emptiness, a state more painful than death, the death of fantasy, and the death of the writer himself. As an artistic icon—a religious figure, the Madonna, the mother he never had, the beloved and Eve who resemble her, and finally, the third woman, in whom the past and the future unite in this present—Angiolina enables Emilio to experience one final epiphany as the meaning of life is finally revealed to him. What Emilio understands, something that this “lower-class girl understood” all along, is that she possesses “the secret of the universe and of her own existence,” which is finally revealed to Emilio through “her.”<sup>456</sup> What she reveals to Emilio is that in a world of disjunctions and lies, truth perhaps can still be found in a *Buldungsroman*’s theology of selfhood. As if reborn, Emilio realizes that “on this particular day ... if he” had chosen “to do so, he would” have been “able to turn his life around” through Angiolina, who enables Emilio to overcome “the elements that constituted his drab life.”<sup>457</sup> However, in this last image, the “sad and thoughtful” Angiolina also reveals to the idle artist that in this vast world she will never again find another individual who will see her in this light—because moral revolutions against the actual bases of society and dreams of democratic social utopias, accompanied by senility,

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<sup>453</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>454</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>455</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>456</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>457</sup> Svevo, 230.

render the individual incapable of any radical change.<sup>458</sup> Emilio, in fact, might be one of the last heroes of “a now impossible romance,” and possibly the initiator of a new genre, one in which the past is perceived as “a time that” the protagonist “knows well he never possessed, but one that he only dreamed of and hopes will come.”<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Svevo, 233.

<sup>459</sup> Minghelli, 118-19.

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