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**Italy and the European *Fin de Siècle*: the  
Century's Turn in the Printed Media of  
the 1890s-1900s**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Italian

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## Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Material included in this thesis has appeared in the article 'Regenerating at the turn of the century', in *The Poetics of Decadence in Fin-de-siècle Italy*, ed. by Stefano Evangelista, Valeria Giannantonio, and Elisabetta Selmi (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018), pp. 49-89.

## Abstract

The thesis examines the self-definition of the end of the nineteenth century as 'fin de siècle' and as an epochal turning point. It investigates the circumstances that generated new time perceptions and representations in this timespan, with particular reference to late-nineteenth century Italy. The study provides an analysis of essays, treatises, literary works, conference presentations, speeches, and articles of the periodical press, which discussed and thematized the main features of the nineteenth century and of the early years of the twentieth century. While analogous works were produced elsewhere in Europe and overseas, where they have been recognized as a genre, equivalent works that were composed in Italy have never been addressed as a *corpus*. The thesis responds to the need of such a scrutiny and it explores the Italian end-of-the-century economy of 'discursive fields' (Foucault) and conceptual 'constellations' (Benjamin).

The research has been inspired and informed by the approach suggested by the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*), Koselleck's studies, and Stephen Kern's research. A comparative and an interdisciplinary perspective have been jointly adopted. The former has served to ascertain cross-currents in cultural discourses between Italy and other European countries, namely France, the UK, Germany, Sweden, alongside Russia and the US. The interdisciplinary perspective has proved necessary to reflect the cross-fertilization between forms of knowledge typical of the fin-de-siècle cultural production and has allowed the investigation of the disciplinary variety of the works herein examined addressing philosophy and literary criticism (Chapter 1), history and politics (Chapters 2 and 3), psychology (Chapter 4, namely with regard to Sante De Sanctis's *I Sogni* and his research on the unconscious, in connection with Freud's psychoanalytical studies), literature (Chapter 5, with specific reference to D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, and Chapter 6 with regard to the Italian reception of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Zola's *Fécondité*, and Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*).

## Introduction

This thesis examines the processes that brought the European, and more specifically the Italian, cultural milieu at the end of the nineteenth century to feel an impelling need for self-definition and for establishing a cultural and historical identity. The period we consider coined for itself the appellation of ‘fin de siècle’ as early as in the 1880s, much prior to the anticipated ‘end’, thus engaging in a mostly unique attempt to define and reach an untimely verdict about itself. At the turn of the century – perceived as a moment of transition – people felt the necessity, on the one hand, to assess the elapsing century and, on the other hand, they built expectations about the coming one. This thesis proceeds to examine not only the origin of this cultural phenomenon but also the numerous attempts, peculiarities, and contradictions that characterized the Italian cultural climate throughout this process. It investigates the circumstances that in this timespan generated new time perceptions and historical representations, while identifying their originating key-factors.

In the present work, I analyse a number of essays, treatises, literary works, conference presentations, speeches, and articles of the periodical press that discussed and thematized the main features of the nineteenth century and of the early years of the twentieth century. While analogous works were produced elsewhere in Europe and overseas, where they have been recognized as a genre, similar works that were composed in Italy have never received appropriate scholarly consideration nor have they been addressed as a *corpus*. My study responds to the need of such a scrutiny and explores the Italian end-of-the-century ‘economy of the discursive constellations’ as well as of discursive fields,<sup>1</sup> to speak in Foucault’s terms, and has been carried out by ‘thinking in constellations’, by following Benjamin’s example.<sup>2</sup> A comparative and an interdisciplinary perspective have been jointly adopted. The former has served to ascertain cross-currents in cultural discourses between Italy and other European countries, namely France, the UK, and Germany, alongside Sweden and Russia whose literatures, as it will appear in the last chapter of the thesis, exercised a remarkable influence on the end-of-the-century Italian cultural milieu. Multiple references have also been made to the US fin-de-siècle culture. The interdisciplinary perspective has proved necessary to reflect the cross-fertilization between forms of knowledge typical

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Thinking in Constellations: Walter Benjamin in the Humanities*, ed. by Nassima Sahraoui and Caroline Sauter (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2018).

of the fin-de-siècle cultural production and has allowed the investigation of the disciplinary variety of the works herein examined, addressing history, politics, literature, and the newly emerging human sciences. The macro-themes tracked down via discourse analysis have been used as clusterization fulcra and have informed each of the thesis chapters which probe, on the one hand, nineteenth-century self-consciousness and unconscious research, and myths of death and dreams of regeneration, on the other. The aim of this study is twofold: firstly, it sifts the collective experiences and beliefs that shaped in the Italian cultural context the conceptual category of the fin de siècle and of the notion of the nineteenth century as ‘inventeur de lui-même’;<sup>3</sup> secondly, it shows how the spread of this concept via contiguous forms of expression (essayistic, scientific – namely psychological – and artistic) moved from one medium to another, while nurturing and moulding the idea itself in such a powerful way that it gradually became not only a cultural frame but an ‘active agent for historical thought’.<sup>4</sup> I have addressed the fin de siècle as a concept by drawing on the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*), namely as defined by Reinhart Koselleck’s studies.<sup>5</sup> I have also applied the notion of ‘conceptual distance’ as devised by Stephen Kern, stating that the more heterogenous the sources, the higher the chances are of identifying links between them and the main trends of their age.<sup>6</sup>

In the thesis a wider outlook coexists and alternates with a detail-oriented perspective. The former serves the purpose of providing an extensive overview of the texts devoted to the turn of the century, whose significant number testifies to the profuse consideration that the topic received at the time and makes a case for the scholarly perusal that it deserves today, namely from researchers interested in the history of concepts. The latter perspective is aimed to offer a close reading of a few texts that I have selected because of their representativeness of the fin-de-siècle Italian ‘mood’ – to say it with Hans Gumbrecht’s phrase – as well as of the end-of-the-century

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<sup>3</sup> Stéphane Michaud, ‘Préface’, in *L’Invention du XIXe siècle. Le XIXe siècle par lui-même (littérature, histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre Georgel, Stéphane Guégan, Stéphane Michaud, Max Milner, and Nicole Savy (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. VII-XIII (p. VIII). On a related topic, see also the second volume of the same series *Le XIXe siècle au miroir du XXe*, ed. by Alain Corbin, José-Luis Diaz, Stéphane Michaud, and Max Milner (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Century’s End. A cultural history of the Fin de Siècle from the 90s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of time: on possible histories*, trans. and ed. by Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and crisis: enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Kern, *The culture of time and space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 7.

Italian 'atmosphere' – in Gernot Böhme's terms.<sup>7</sup>

This Introduction establishes the historical and cultural background of the grand narrative of the fin de siècle, the bibliography that has proved pivotal in conducting the present research and the overarching methodology that frames the thesis. In addition, it articulates the rationale that has guided the retrieval and the selection of the texts herein scrutinized. In addition, it presents the internal structure of the thesis and delineates the interdependent thematic connections linking the six chapters.

The turn of a century might at first appear to be a matter of mere numbering; however, calendric shifts have often been regarded as possessing an intrinsic value of change for society. At the end of the 1890s, the perception that a turning point was fast approaching was particularly strong, warranting even the creation of a specific phrase to identify this time: 'fin-de-siècle'. The phrase started to be employed in France in the second half of the 1880s, and 'since the writ of French fashion swayed the Western World, the term came to mark the close of the nineteenth century as it had not that of any other'.<sup>8</sup> As Eugen Weber has remarked, the attention centred on the century's end was 'a one-shot affair'<sup>9</sup> because 'no other century had made so much ado about its passing' since the end of the first millennium.<sup>10</sup> The sentiment of exceptionality attached to the turn of the century was widespread across the Western world which, despite being politically as well as socially divided and diverse, in this specific time could be seen as stranded together and, metaphorically speaking, as standing on a ridge overlooking two behemoths, the old century on the one side and the new century on the other. The moment of transition from the dying to the dawning century was deemed crucial. This emphasis can be explained in light of a marked awareness of time boundaries, which are fictitious constructs and yet very powerful, especially when socially shared.

In the Western tradition, the notion of a hundred-year span as a time unity dates back to the Classical world where two traditions of *saeculum* can be found: the Roman and the Etruscan one, as recalled at the turn of the century by Antonio Labriola who

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<sup>7</sup> See Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, edited by Jean-Paul Thibaud (London: Routledge, 2017). 'Mood' should be intended as 'Stimmung', see Hans Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). The phrase 'fin-de-siècle mood' is also a reference to a coeval source, which is Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle*, p. 1.

identified the origins of the notion of century in 'una molto oscillante tradizione romana, ereditata forse da cosmologiche ideazioni e superstizioni etrusche'.<sup>11</sup> The Roman tradition had two different declinations to be identified in the Claudian and the Augustan way of relating to the century. The difference between the three temporal architectures is that the Etruscans were mainly focusing on the *end* as a conclusive moment; in the Claudian epoch a major importance was instead given to recurrences and topical moments, whereas during the Augustan empire the stress was on the advent of a new Age. In the course of time, 'we have embraced all three [notions], abandoned none', as highlighted by Hillel Schwartz who has drawn a correspondence between the three Classical and three most modern meanings of the word: 'the Etruscan *saeculum* is our inexact "end of the century" or *fin de siècle*, taken also as the end of a generation'; 'the Claudian *saeculum* is our "turn of the century," a more specific calendrical moment when we tend to look back and forth by hundreds'; and finally 'the Augustan *saeculum* is our "dawn of a new age", allied to but not bound by the strict arithmetic of centuries'.<sup>12</sup> These three different time conceptions can be used as clusterization tools, thus also useful when analyzing time perceptions of different epochs, and it is precisely in this capacity that we have used them in the present thesis.

Despite having its roots in ancient times, the term 'century' started to acquire the current meaning in the early modern period. As recalled by Weber, 'centuries, in our calendric sense, appear to be an esoteric sixteenth-century invention, a hesitant usage of the seventeenth century'.<sup>13</sup> It was indeed in the sixteenth century that in Western Europe there took place a massive shift from a qualitative to a quantitative perception of time<sup>14</sup> and it was only in the seventeenth century that calendars started to be used by a large number of people.<sup>15</sup> Still in 1757, however, there was need to explain to the crowds, as a French almanac did, how long a year was, and of how many months, weeks and days it was constituted.<sup>16</sup> When calendars entered the general usage, the count of the centuries gradually became of primary attention. The eighteenth century saw the proliferation of treatises published across Europe and North America questioning whether the actual beginning of the century was marked by the year 1700 or 1701. Far

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<sup>11</sup> Antonio Labriola, *Da un secolo all'altro (1897-1903)*, ed. by Stefano Miccolis and Alessandro Savorelli (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2012), p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, *Century's End*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Weber, *Apocalypses*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> See Alfred W. Crosby, *The measure of Reality. Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600*, (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jacques Le Goff, 'Calendario', in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. II (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 503-534 (namely, p. 529).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gaudet, *Almanach des graces* (Paris: Gueffier, 1757), f. Bivv (Ars., 8<sup>o</sup> Bl 1121) quoted by Francesco Maiello, *Storia del calendario. La misurazione del tempo, 1450-1800* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), p. 174.

from falling exclusively within the academic domain, such issues became of collective as well as of individual interest: the awareness that in order to truly know oneself, everyone had to be aware of the specific chronological moment in which one was living, and of the chronological phases which has preceded, started to emerge. In the early eighteenth century, the idea that the knowledge of oneself passed through the knowledge of the history of humanity was asserted by the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, who concluded with the phrase 'Nosce te ipsum' his *Scienza nuova prima* (1725), where he offered his reflection on the philosophy of history which he considered as 'una propria filosofia dell'umanità'.<sup>17</sup> His perspective on the science of time differed from the view adopted by Newton, to whom he sent a copy of the *Scienza nuova*. Vico asserted that in order to understand history as a whole, it was necessary to embrace the study of myths and poetry insofar as they reflected 'the human consciousness at a particular stage of development and revealed deep truths of the human past' when 'the basic structure of language and human interaction took shape'.<sup>18</sup> Through the Socrates's dictum 'Know thyself', Vico aimed to stress that to 'comprehend human nature one must first become aware of the collective history of humanity', as explained by Sabrina Ferri in her brilliant investigation of the origins of modernity.<sup>19</sup> The eagerness of studying and collating all the components of human history was crucial in eighteenth-century Europe and is embodied by the titanic venture of the *Encyclopédie* designed to be the ultimate *summa* of the world knowledge. Regarding the definition of century, the *Encyclopédie* presents different entries of 'siècle', as many as the meanings attached to the word in six different domains, namely 'Chronologie', 'Histoire moderne', 'Arts and sciences', 'Mythologie', and 'Critique sacrée'. The first one briefly defines the century as a one-hundred period and then provides a temporal division in four ages: 'les anciens poètes divisoient le tems en quatre siecles', which are the 'sielec d'or', the 'sielec d'argent', the 'sielec d'airain' and the 'sielec de fer'.<sup>20</sup> It surprises that this definition, which should be the most mathematical and objective one – as it concerns the field of chronology – offers a definition which is literary-framed, thus it does not differ much for the others provided, namely from the one concerning

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<sup>17</sup> Giambattista Vico, *Scienza nuova prima*, in Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, ed. by Andrea Battistini (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), p. 526. With respect to this hoped-for process of acquiring historical self-knowledge, Vico had given his contribution to the Italians through his work *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* (1710).

<sup>18</sup> Donald J. Wilcox, *The measure of Times Past: pre-Newtonian chronologies and the rhetoric of relative time* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 216.

<sup>19</sup> Sabrina Ferri, *Ruins past: modernity in Italy, 1744-1836* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Louis de Jaucourt, s.v. 'sielec' [*sic*], in *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. XV (Neufchâtel: Faulche, 1765), p. 171 [in the entire entry 'siècle' is consistently written without the accent].

the domain of arts and sciences which describes four great ages corresponding respectively to the reign of Alexander the Great's father Philip the Macedonian, the rule of Julius Caesar and August, the age of Popes Julius II and Leo X, and finally that of Louis XIV.<sup>21</sup> The eighteenth century appeared to then-contemporaries to be a similar prosperous age for arts and sciences.<sup>22</sup> Louis de Jaucourt concluded the entry by stating 'disparoît le génie des arts & des sciences, jusqu'à ce que la révolution des *siecles* [*sic*] le vienne encore tirer une autre fois du tombeau, où il semble qu'il s'ensevelisse pour plusieurs générations'.<sup>23</sup> A few years later, another voice joined the century-praising choir: 'on citera le nôtre, comme un siecle [*sic*] profond de Science, de Philosophie, fécond en découvertes, et plein de force et de raison', Pierre Beaumarchais wrote in the 'Preliminar discourse' of his *Tarare*.<sup>24</sup> The new time awareness emerging from Beaumarchais's words is indicative of a feeling of *belonging* to the century, which he further emphasized by stating: 'Je ne connais point de siècle où j'eusse préféré de naître'.<sup>25</sup> Such a claim testifies a shift in time perception: the connection with the century ceased to be hieratic and remote, and became strictly personal. Beaumarchais felt to be living in such a peculiar time that he could not have imagined himself to be born in any other epoch, a feeling not unfamiliar to the fin-de-siècle sensibilities. The above excerpt shows that the term 'century' was already being used in the 1700s. It had, however, limited diffusion while it gained wider adoption, also outside of literary circles, only in the 1800s, when time was accurately quantified into chronological sequences, a process eventually leading to the widespread use of diaries and calendars.<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Anno Domini calendar, which up until then had been employed mainly in official documents, started to gain widespread use. Shortly after, its use was challenged in the aftermath of the French revolution when the decision of revolutionizing the calendar was taken in order to mark a detachment from the monarchy and the Church and to solemnize 'a complete rupture

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<sup>21</sup> On these four ages and their variations, cf. Jochen Schlobach, s.v. 'siècle', in *Dictionnaire européen des Lumières*, under the direction of Michel Delon (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis of the concept of 'century' during the Enlightenment period, see Werner Krauss, 'Der Jahrhundertbegriff im 18. Jahrhundert', in Werner Krauss, *Studien zur deutschen und französischen Aufklärung* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1963), pp. 9-40.

<sup>23</sup> De Jaucourt, s.v. 'siecle' [*sic*], in *Encyclopédie*, p. 172 [original emphasis].

<sup>24</sup> Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Tarare. Opéra en cinq actes* (Paris: P. de Lormel, 1787), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Beaumarchais, *Tarare*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> See Maiello, *Storia del calendario*.

with past time'.<sup>27</sup> Starting a year-counting anew was a way to linguistically annihilate the past as there is nothing more powerful than starting a time count from scratch and to cut off every link with previous times in order to stress the beginning of what was hoped to be a brand-new era. The history of the modern Western culture had never before witnessed such a disruptive effort to unhinge the time measurement system concerning year-, month- and week-counting and naming. This effort was also aimed at the replacement, which however was hardly implemented, of the 24-hour day with a 10-based division, an attempt whose challenging character equalled the defying character of the political disruption actualised in France in the 1790s. The revolutionary calendar stayed in place for only fourteen years (as it became less used following the Concordat with Pope Pius VII and then was eventually abolished in 1806 by Napoleon which re-established the use of the Gregorian calendar); however, this time-management change had a great ideological impact. It reflected the radical innovations carried out in hierarchies and governmental structures which had been so powerful to foster millenarian-like expectations reaching out to countries far beyond the French borders. This time-innovation echoed, for instance, at the beginning of the twentieth century in the words of Swedish playwright August Strindberg who in his *Days of Judgment* (1905) wrote: 'the Revolution was a Last Judgment which had to come, just as it came in England exactly a hundred years before, in 1689'.<sup>28</sup> Italy was among the closest countries, both geographically and culturally, where the French influence had a significant resonance. Here, the use of the revolutionary calendar had been extended to the areas under French control, and across the peninsula a messianic-like 'palingenesia politica dell'universo' was expected after the 'baptism' of liberty officiated by the French revolutionaries.<sup>29</sup> The legacy of the French revolution was inherited by Italian jacobins and built on the apocalyptic expectations emerged – or, it would be more appropriate to say, *re-emerged* – after the dissolution of the Society of

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Ballard, s.v. 'Revolutionary Calendar', in Richard Ballard, *A New Dictionary of the French Revolution* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2012), pp. 585-586 (p. 585). See, also: Bronislaw Baczko, 'Le calendrier républicain', in *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. I: *La République*, ed. by Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 37-83; Mona Ozouf, s.v. 'Calendar', in *Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. by François Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 538-547; Elizabeth Liris, 'Calendrier révolutionnaire', in *Dictionnaire historique de la révolution française*, ed. by Albert Soboul, published under the scientific direction of Jean-René Suratteau and François Gendron (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2006), pp. 179-180; Matthew Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution: The Republican Calendar, 1789-Year XIV* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> August Strindberg, *Days of Judgment*, in August Strindberg, *Historical Miniatures*, trans. by Claud Field (London: George Allen & Company, 1913), pp. 350-362 (p. 357).

<sup>29</sup> Stefano Nutini, "Rigenerare" e "rigenerazione": alcune linee interpretative', in *Idee e parole nel giacobinismo italiano*, ed. by Eluggero Pii (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1990), pp. 49-63 (p. 53).

Jesus (occurred in 1773) which worked as 'detonatore delle tensioni profetico-apocalittiche e dell'atmosfera di attesa miracolistica e di entusiasmo religioso che erano destinate a montare di fronte alla rivoluzione francese e a condizionare le vicende politiche e religiose dell'età rivoluzionaria e dei primi decenni dell'Ottocento'.<sup>30</sup>

Not only had the French revolution fostered millenarianist expectations in Italy, but it had also been considered as a watershed between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. 'Il secolo del quale cerchiamo le caratteristiche, a spiegazione del presente', Labriola wrote in his lecture 'Da un secolo all'altro', 'non comincia veramente in modo meccanico dalla prima pagina del calendario del 1801; ma [...] dal 14 luglio 1789'.<sup>31</sup> This idea had been circulating for a decade already. In his conference 'Questa fin di secolo' held in 1892, offering a global assessment of the century elapsed so-far, Ruggiero Bonghi claimed that the actual end of the eighteenth century had, in fact, been anticipated by eleven years and had been heralded by the French revolution. He added that the 'impronta' of the French revolution on the Italian history had been so deep that its legacy had been emerging for the years to come in a number of occasions. One of these had surely been, although Bonghi does not openly mention it, the Neapolitan revolution taking place in the 'fatidico 1799', a short-lived experiment imbued with Vico's philosophy of history which had profoundly marked Italian history at the dawn of the nineteenth century. As Vincenzo Cuoco wrote in his *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli*, even though the destiny of Italy was still enshrouded by the 'darkest night' and the most 'impenetrable shadows',<sup>32</sup> the Neapolitan revolution had lighted the way, a way to be taken up again in the future, hopefully with greater success. This did, in fact, happen, for instance, during the 1859 'Italian revolution', as Manzoni aimed to highlight in one of his unfinished works where he adopts a comparative perspective between the Italian events of those years and the French revolution, when 'diffuso risuonava dappertutto il grido della palingenesi, del "secolo si rinnova"'.<sup>33</sup> The 1789 revolution was considered crucial for the following a hundred

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<sup>30</sup> Marina Caffiero, 'La fine del mondo. Profezia, apocalisse e millennio nell'Italia rivoluzionaria', in *Chiesa italiana e Rivoluzione francese*, ed. by Daniele Menozzi (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1990), pp. 287-357 (p. 288).

<sup>31</sup> Labriola, *Da un secolo all'altro*, p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> 'Quale sarà il destino di Napoli? dell'Italia [sic]? dell'Europa [sic]? Io non lo so: una notte profonda circonda e ricopre tutto di un'ombra impenetrabile' (Vincenzo Cuoco, *Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli*, vol. III (Milan: Tipografia milanese in Strada nuova, Anno nono repubblicano [1800-1801]), p. 56).

<sup>33</sup> See *La rivoluzione francese del 1789 e la rivoluzione italiana del 1859. Saggio comparativo di Alessandro Manzoni*, ed. by Ruggiero Bonghi and Pietro Brambilla (Milan: Fratelli Rechiedei Editori, 1889) which offers the existing extracts of the work that Manzoni had started to write about the 1859 insurrectional movements in a comparative perspective with the French revolution. The quotation is from Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* (Bari: Laterza, 1932), p. 14.

years, so much so that it was metaphorically depicted as the ‘father’ of the nineteenth century by polymath Paolo Mantegazza in his volume *Il secolo tartufo* (1889) published at the same time as the centennial of the storming of the Bastille.<sup>34</sup> The legacy of this ‘father’ was not, however, the most desirable one as it consisted in a ‘neurosis’, which made the nineteenth century a ‘secolo nevrosico’, as Mantegazza lamented in his book titled, precisely, *Il secolo nevrosico* (1887).<sup>35</sup> This belief was kept alive throughout the fin de siècle and resurfaced intact at the turn of the century, in 1901, as testified by the words of writer and critic Federico De Roberto who recounts that the century ‘patì sin dal principio per un disquilibrio nervoso congenito, ereditato dal predecessore, inasprito dalle circostanze’.<sup>36</sup> Similarly to Mantegazza, he ascribes the primary origin of this distress to the French revolution and to the wars that followed, which contributed to make this discomfort grow higher, with the effect of undermining the already fragile century’s fiber: ‘le perdite di sangue sofferte durante le stragi della Rivoluzione e delle Guerre produssero uno stato d’anemia per la quale la fibra sensitiva restò impressionabile e vulnerabile’.<sup>37</sup> The identification of the source of this sickness in the French revolution was, nevertheless, the product of a retrospective construction. In fact, by shifting the focus back to the late eighteenth century, one finds hope for renewal, which was spread not only in Europe but across the ocean as well. In 1789, the American Constitution had just come into force, an act which represented a further step towards the achievement of the dream of freedom cultivated since the 1776 Declaration of Independence and celebrated in 1782 in the Great Seal of the United States. Here, the newly adopted Virgil-inspired motto chosen by the Congress Secretary Charles Thomson was announcing a ‘novus ordo seclorum’, an Augustan-like ‘new order of the ages’ that was believed to mark the beginning of a new era of happiness and prosperity for future generations worldwide and that was celebrated through a Horatian-inspired *carmen saecularis*.<sup>38</sup>

In light of the symbolical implications of the above-mentioned ground-breaking events and of the time-awareness that they engendered, it is not surprising that it was

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<sup>34</sup> Paolo Mantegazza, *Il secolo tartufo* (Milan: Treves, 1889), p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Se è vero che il nevrosismo è un fatto tutto moderno, quando è nato? È nato coll’89, e per l’89. Vi furono in tutti i tempi individui nevrosici [...] ma il nevrosismo costituzionale, nazionale, europeo; ma il nevrosismo di tutti i popoli civili moderni è figlio di quella grande rivoluzione umana, i cui germi erano latenti dappertutto, ma che trovarono nel suolo della Francia e più ancora a Parigi il terreno migliore per nascere, prosperare, fiorire e fruttificare’ (Paolo Mantegazza, *Il secolo nevrosico*, with a preface by Bruno Maier (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1995 [1st edn 1887]), p. 47).

<sup>36</sup> Federico De Roberto, ‘La malattia del secolo morto’, *Corriere della Sera*, 19-20 March 1901.

<sup>37</sup> De Roberto, ‘La malattia del secolo morto’.

<sup>38</sup> [Mathew Carey] *Carmen pro Americani incolumitate imperii, aliquantulum more carminis secularis Horatiani* (Philadelphia: 1800 or 1801).

precisely in the eighteenth century that exchanging new-century greetings became a widespread habit, especially among European and American élites. These greetings were nurtured by the joy of saluting the new century, which coexisted with the sadness of having to bid the elapsing one farewell. The end of the century was even compared with the departure of a beloved one and accompanied by an analogous grief and sorrow. In 1801 people mourned the passing away of 'that good *old Lady* known by the name of the 'Eighteenth century', who resigned all sublunary cares' on 1 January 1801 and 'was quietly buried in the family vault of *Eternity*', wrote *The London Chronicle* in its first issue of the century.<sup>39</sup> At the dawn of the eighteenth century, people looked backwards and scrutinized their past with a particular attention to the previous fifteen years, amazed by the fast pace of the transformations occurred, in particular thanks to Napoleon. The historical and cultural memory of the figure of Napoleon traversed the entire nineteenth century, which he 'baptized' with his quick rise to power and his coronation as Emperor, and with the stopping of the Jubilee celebrations. He was alternatively seen as the Redeemer or the Antichrist, whose wars brought about such turmoil that in 1800 Pope Pius VII found himself in the position of not being able to announce the Holy Year. The centennial Jubilee was not celebrated, which resulted in 1800 being the only hundredth year (since 1300) without a jubilar celebration, an event whose highly symbolical significance stayed impressed in the public consciousness until 1900, when the *porta sancta* was eventually opened.

At the century's turn, the memory of the *mal du siècle* which had been affecting the European society in the early nineteenth century got mixed with current fears of degeneration widespread in Western society. A detailed and intimate description of this malaise is provided by Flaubert in his *Mémoires d'un fou*, a short autobiographical novel written in 1838 but published only in 1900. Flaubert made his voice heard again 'ora, non appena spirato il secolo del quale egli fu una delle figure più singolari', wrote De Roberto in 1901 in reviewing Flaubert's work. De Roberto described the condition suffered by the romantics, which he reconstructed also thanks to Leopardi's *Pensieri* – whose publication had started in 1898 (on the occasion of the centenary year of the writer's birth) – as a compound of 'noia, disgusto, eccitabilità, irritazione, esaurimento' and of a pervasive doubt. Altogether these elements formed 'quello stato morboso che fu detto, antonomasticamente, il *male del secolo*' counting among its victims 'da Chateaubriand ad Alfredo de Musset, da Ugo Foscolo a Giacomo Leopardi, da Byron a Shelley'.<sup>40</sup> Referring to de Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), De

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<sup>39</sup> [Unsigned] [untitled] *The London Chronicle*, vol. LXXXIX, no. 6523 (1-3 January 1801), 11.

<sup>40</sup> De Roberto, 'La malattia del secolo morto'.

Roberto wrote: 'un *Figlio del secolo*, confessandosi, ne [of the *mal du siècle*] fece la diagnosi'.<sup>41</sup> The publication of Flaubert's *Mémoires d'un fou* proved a fantastic occasion to go back, at the turn of the century, to the affliction that had severely troubled the previous a hundred years. Since De Roberto was writing in 1901, when the nineteenth century had officially been declared 'dead', he titled his article 'La malattia del secolo morto'. He considered, however, that the aftereffects of this sickness were actually still affecting those who had witnessed the burial of the old century and the birth of the new one. Although the former was elapsed, the *mal du siècle* perturbing it had not disappeared but rather had transmitted on to the latter, as the conclusion of De Roberto's article emphasizes: 'che vogliono da noi questi morti di una morta età?' De Roberto asks with reference, in particular, to Flaubert and Leopardi, 'vogliono ammonirci, vogliono insegnarci che *le età non muoiono a un tratto quando scocca una certa ora, che il secolo nuovo è ancora troppo simile al vecchio, e che il loro male è anche il nostro? Ne siamo noi veramente guariti, o non ci conviene studiarne ancora i sintomi per combatterlo e vincerlo?*'.<sup>42</sup> The parallel drawn between the early and late-nineteenth century spiritual disquiet is based on two features shared by them both: pessimism and discontent. 'Moralmente, questo male si chiama *pessimismo*' and derives from 'disinganni, *scontento*, inquietudine',<sup>43</sup> De Roberto observed with regard to the *mal du siècle*. The words he uses to describe the atmosphere of the 1890s echo the same themes: 'il figurino intellettuale, ai nostri giorni, è il *pessimismo*', indeed, 'se questo scorcio di secolo avrà in avvenire una denominazione, si può scommettere che sarà chiamato *il tempo dello scontento universale*'.<sup>44</sup> Of course, the reasons of the crises of the two historical moments were different, as the discontent of the nineties descended from the crisis of positivism and from the disturbing realization that science was not able to answer all the questions about life and death that it had promised to address, thus leaving them unsolved after having put religion offside. Despite this difference, equal was in both these historical periods the level of pervasiveness of the trouble permeating society at all levels. The *mal du siècle* was indeed a form of *maladie du temps* that spared nobody. The French revolution, then the Terror and the Napoleonic rule that followed had been tremendously disruptive for the uttermost conservatives; at the same time the revolution proved not to be up to the expectations of the most fervent republicans, and turned out as disappointing for the romantics who turned to dreams, mystic visions, mesmeric fluids, and gothic fantasies to satisfy their

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<sup>41</sup> De Roberto, 'La malattia del secolo morto'.

<sup>42</sup> De Roberto, 'La malattia del secolo morto' [my emphasis].

<sup>43</sup> De Roberto, 'La malattia del secolo morto' [my emphasis].

<sup>44</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Maupassant e Tolstoi', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 31 August 1890.

thirst for great ideals. The political disillusionment of this epoch generated a disappointment encompassing all aspects of life. The anxiety of an entire generation translated into a widespread feeling of the failure of History. Disenchanted with the past, unsatisfied with the present and hopeless about a better future, the generation of the *enfants du siècle*, was torn between melancholy and withdrawal.

Once the 'Napoleozoic'<sup>45</sup> era ended, it left a sense of void and instability to which the contemporaries responded in various ways, including by looking for the 'sublunary cares' under whose auspices the nineteenth century had opened, as testified by the unprecedented diffusion during the Restoration period of almanacs and yearbooks.<sup>46</sup> In 1831, in his essay 'Characteristics' Thomas Carlyle stressed that 'never since the beginning of time was there, that we hear and read of, so intensely self-conscious a society'.<sup>47</sup> He described the shift from a 'paradisiac unconsciousness'<sup>48</sup> into a profound form of introspection, 'self-sentience' and 'self-survey'.<sup>49</sup> 'We are now passing', he asserted, 'from that first or boastful stage of self-sentience into the second or painful one',<sup>50</sup> bringing about the self-awareness that 'the spirit of the age' could be in favour as well as not inclined to 'the improvement of the age'.<sup>51</sup> Carlyle had commented on future expectations also two years earlier, in his 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times', where he had explored the 'bright lights' as well as the 'gloomy shadows'<sup>52</sup> of the age. He had analysed the millenarianist religious prophecies of those years, which some hoped could provide forebodings on the outcome of the then-current social crisis, and compared them with what was considered a 'secular' form of prophecy, that of the so-called 'Millites' prompted by the followers of John Stuart Mill.

Mill himself provided his own view on the current time. In 1831, the same year of Carlyle's 'Characteristics', Mill presented his thoughts on the 'Spirit of the Age' in a homonymous essay. He emphasized the novelty of the phrase itself, which could not be found 'in any work exceeding fifty years in antiquity', and observed that if comparing one's age with previous ones was a common practice in philosophy, 'it never before

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Schwartz, *Century's End*, p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Elide Casali, *Le spie del cielo. Oroscopi, lunari e almanacchi nell'Italia Moderna* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 256-70. The circulation of calendars on a large scale was preceded by that of almanacs providing forecasts, prognostications, and astrological predictions (see, Émile Biémont, *Rythmes du temps. Astronomie et calendriers*, with a preface by Jean-Claude Pecker (Paris-Bruxelles: Du Boeck, 2000)).

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Characteristics* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1877), p. 42. This essay had first appeared in *The Edinburgh Review*, 54, December 1831.

<sup>48</sup> Carlyle, *Characteristics*, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Carlyle, *Characteristics*, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Carlyle, *Characteristics*, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Carlyle, *Characteristics*, p. 40.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times', in Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and miscellaneous essays* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1855), pp. 187-196 (p. 195); previously appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, 48 (1829).

was itself the dominant of any age' as it was, instead, in the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> He acknowledged that the reason lay in the awareness of that time being 'distinguished in a very remarkable manner from the times which preceded them' and recognized that 'the present times possess this character', in fact although the journey to this realization has proceeded by 'insensible gradations', men had progressively become 'conscious of their new position'.<sup>54</sup> Being such an 'age of change', the then-present was described as a 'fountain of prophecy' and as the 'only key to the history of posterity'.<sup>55</sup>

The process of gaining time-awareness gradually translated into language. '19<sup>th</sup> century-ism' was added to long list of *-isms*, besides imperialism, symbolism, decadentism, aestheticism, just to mention a few.<sup>56</sup> The media world saw the birth of a number of periodicals boasting in their nameplates a reference to the century, which had never been the case previously. The first journal to salute the century was *Eunomia: eine Zeitschrift des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* in 1801. In 1877, British monthly *The Nineteenth century* saw the light. In 1866, eleven years earlier, in Italy the Milanese periodical *Il Secolo* had sold its first issue and by the 1890s had become the most sold newspaper in the nation. Another Italian newspaper, founded in Genoa in 1886 had then meanwhile chosen *Il Secolo XIX* as its masthead.<sup>57</sup> The obsession with the century triumphed across the Channel as well, where journals such as *La revue du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, appeared in 1836, and *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, whose first issue was published in 1871, aimed to provide the photograph of the present century and in the literary field Victor Hugo offered in *La Légende des siècles* his own picture of the historical evolution of humanity from Adam and Eve to the eschaton.

Such anticipations fell within a vaster process of autopoiesis of the nineteenth-century identity. The nineteenth century has indeed been considered by scholars as 'inventeur de lui-même [...] comme nul autre avant lui'.<sup>58</sup> The first identity-making act consisted in choosing a name and, indeed, the nineteenth century was 'the first century

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<sup>53</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', in John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture*, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 1 (first published in the *Examiner*, January 6 – May 29, 1831). Mill's remark about the use of the expression 'the spirit of the age' confirms what has been previously observed concerning the first attestations of the phrase.

<sup>54</sup> Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 1, 3.

<sup>56</sup> In 1846, when discussing some remarks about the Scripture, Tennyson observed that they were 'very clever and full of a noble 19<sup>th</sup> century-ism (if you will admit such a word)' (Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, a Memoir by his Son*, vol. I (London-New York: Macmillan, 1897), p. 238).

<sup>57</sup> At the turn of the century, the *The Nineteenth Century* changed its title to *The Nineteenth Century and After* and, eventually, in 1951, to *The Twentieth Century* until its closure in 1972. The *Secolo XIX* never changed its nameplate neither at the turn of the nineteenth nor at the turn of the twentieth century; it still exists today.

<sup>58</sup> Michaud, 'Préface', in *L'Invention du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. VIII.

to be thought of by most people as possessing a number',<sup>59</sup> as highlighted by Asa Briggs, the first to be 'identified as such in its own time', as stressed by Weber,<sup>60</sup> and the first to adopt 'un numéro d'ordre au défilé des siècles', as recalled by Stéphane Michaud.<sup>61</sup> Although until the nineteenth century's end the Gregorian calendar was considered as a Christian calendar only, and thus was used only in Europe and in the European colonies, it could not, however, 'be regarded any longer as an exclusively Catholic institution'. In fact, 'the push toward standardizing temporal reference at the global level was gradually gaining momentum', as underlined by Eviatar Zerubavel.<sup>62</sup> Already a few years before its actual arrival, the nineteenth century claimed its position in the horizon of history and posited itself not only as a time-unit but also as a distinguished 'espace-temps d'observation'.<sup>63</sup> The starting focal point of this observation was the past and the technique adopted consisted in 'mobiliser le passé' with the aim of 'afficher et promouvoir une originalité'<sup>64</sup> of the present. This mobilization was accomplished through the summoning of secular non-religious anniversaries which were 'an invention of the nineteenth century',<sup>65</sup> as Weber has stressed and Hobsbawm recalled.<sup>66</sup> The solemnization of major events that had occurred in the previous one hundred years responded to the need of emphasizing the valuable legacy that the eighteenth century had left to its heir and, meanwhile, to provide a self-celebratory image of the nineteenth-century present. Among the most important events recalled by the secular anniversaries, there was the one hundred-year anniversary of the American Independence in 1876, the centennial of the French revolution in 1889, and the secular anniversary *par excellence*: the turn of the century (which some considered taking place in 1900 and some others in 1901, as we will see), whose value as a turning point was so deeply felt that it was preceded by a long transition time, the *fin de siècle*. The term started to be employed in France in the 1880s and came to mark the end of the nineteenth century as it had never happened for any other century.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, several centennial conferences engaged scholars in a new reflection on that period and fostered both nationally-focused and transnational

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<sup>59</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Past, Present and Future in Headlines', in *Fins de Siècle. How Centuries End. 1400-2000*, ed. by Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 157-195 (p. 159).

<sup>60</sup> Weber, *Apocalypses*, p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Michaud, 'Préface', in *L'Invention du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. VIII.

<sup>62</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms. Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1985 [1st edn 1981]), p. 99.

<sup>63</sup> Claude Duchet and Isabella Tournier, 'Le «siècle» dans le siècle', in *L'Invention du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp. 57-88 (p. 79).

<sup>64</sup> Michaud, 'Préface', in *L'Invention du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. VIII.

<sup>65</sup> Weber, *Apocalypses*, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. the chapter 'The centenarian revolution' in Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire (1875-1914)* (New York: Random House, 1989 [1st edn 1987]), pp. 13-33.

comparative studies. These studies share a theme-centered perspective and an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>67</sup> Some of them, especially those focusing on the arts and on psychology, do take into consideration the Italian culture, but rarely explore the specificity of the Italian case on which I will focus in the present thesis.

Chapter One is devoted to the discussion of the ‘self-consciousness’ and self-awareness of the century. The focus is mainly on philosophical texts and writings of literary, as well as philosophical, criticism, in light of the fact that the question of the self-consciousness involved a meta-reflection process, which developed within the philosophical and critical domains, respectively. The departing point of our analysis has been the article ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’ by the philosopher and Professor of philosophy Alessandro Chiappelli, published in the *Nuova Antologia* on 16 April 1900. This article provides an accurate representation of the heated debate about the sense of time. We have used it as the starting point of our path: every chapter starts with a reference to a specific passage of Chiappelli’s text, which then becomes the core of the chapter itself. At the end of each chapter, we gradually go back to the point of departure and focus on a different aspect tackled in the article which will, similarly, provide another track for investigation. The analyses carried out in every single chapter starting from a prompt that we have taken from Chiappelli’s text, can be compared to the roads which radiate off from a square: all go in different directions but stay tightly connected with the centre.

The second direction in which Chiappelli’s article had led us, in Chapter Two, is the analysis of the core issues of debate at the turn of the century. There was no consensus about the actual beginning of the end of the nineteenth century, which meant that the twentieth century was welcomed in different moments. This issue was only apparently a merely numerical question, as it in fact brought to light a whole system of beliefs and disbeliefs, which reflected the most intimate and deeply rooted – and sometimes unconscious – opinions and feelings both of singular individuals and of the collectivity. These beliefs often derived from a discourse of dark forebodings about

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<sup>67</sup> *Degeneration: the dark side of progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) ed. by J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman; *Fin de Siècle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*, ed. by John Stokes (Basingstoke UK: Macmillan, 1992); Shearer West, *Fin de siècle. Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993); *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Fin de siècle. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Comparisons and Perspectives*, ed. by Jürgen Kleist and Bruce A. Butterfield (New York: Peter Lang, 1996); John W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason. European Thought, 1848-1914* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2000); *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); *Internationalism and the Arts in Britain and Europe at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Grace Brockington (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2009).

the 'End of Time', originating in the Christian religious milieu; thus, in the second part of the chapter, we have explored the religious implications of such a rhetoric. Moreover, since the turn-of-the-century religious celebration, that is the 1900 Jubilee, was celebrated in Rome, we have deemed necessary to show the links between the laic and the religious celebrations, and the exploration of such relations has been all the more interesting, as it has allowed us to bring to light one of the biggest peculiarities of the Italian nation compared to other countries, due to the presence of the Vatican on the Italian territory, to the tense relationship between the Holy See and the Italian government, and to the historical events of the previous thirty years involving them both. It became apparent that the end-of-the-century celebrations have proven to be an occasion to slightly smooth some of the frictions between the Pope and the Italian government, which at the time was dealing with a complex transitional phase, which we have illustrated in Chapter Three. During the fin-de-siècle period, Italy was facing a crisis, the so-called 'crisi di fine secolo', due to the concurrence of multiple factors which all came together in a fast sequence: the 1896 Adua defeat led to a government crisis due to Crispi leaving the office of Prime Minister, which shook the majority leading the Parliament; meanwhile, a financial crisis, coupled with an unwise financial policy, fueled social distress, which broke out on several occasions from the North to the South of the nation. This happened while Socialist parties were starting to organise themselves as political forces. The two events combined hit an already unstable government, which, on that specific occasion, decided to demand all its power to the military by proclaiming a 'stato d'assedio', which led to violent conflicts between the population. The situation gradually settled starting in 1900 till the turn of the century, which marked the beginning of a new phase for the country.

1900 marked a turning point not only in the political, but also in other domains, namely in that of psychology, where it was commonly referred to as the 'Great Year'. Within psychology, the area which benefitted the most from the research that had been conducted in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was that of unconscious manifestations relating both to neuro-pathological cases and oneirological studies. In the latter field, a turning point was undoubtedly marked by the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* by Freud who presented himself as the only scholar to have opened up the way to a new course for psychology. In Chapter Four, it has been our intent to show that in the same period much research was being carried out in Italy as well, and to draw attention particularly to the studies of Sante De Sanctis, whose *I sogni* saw the light in 1899. The investigation of this treatise, as well as other works of De Sanctis, has helped shed light on the perception of the unconscious and dreams in the

fin-de-siècle society and beyond, and provided evidence that Freud's self-fashioning as the only pioneer of dream studies should be demounted.

Dreams and psycho-pathological studies strongly influenced the fin-de-siècle artistic and, specifically, literary production, and it is in order to explore this aspect that in Chapter Five we have provided a close-reading of Gabriele D'Annunzio's play *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*. D'Annunzio's play responds to the widely felt 'bisogno del sogno' at the end of the century and has allowed us to explore the strong fascination of the fin-de-siècle society for the mystical, meta-empirical and meta-spiritual aspects of life which were typical of Decadentism as an age of 'transition'. As Giovannetti has remarked, despite the countless interpretations that have been given of the term 'decadence' and 'Decadentism',<sup>68</sup> it is beyond any doubt that the Italian 'età del decadentismo' (which Giovannetti identifies as a period spanning from 1883 – date of publication of D'Annunzio's *Intermezzo di rime* – to 1903 – when the Roman Crepuscolarismo set the beginning of a new era in poetry) was a time of transition possessing its own distinctive characters and 'la specificità d'una età di transizione'<sup>69</sup> which gave birth to a cultural trend which Gino Tellini has appropriately defined 'cultura della crisi', whose various manifestations we will analyse.<sup>70</sup>

The centrality of death in this age of crisis and obsession with death was, however, counterbalanced by an equal interest for myths of regeneration, which we have explored in Chapter Six. The analysis of this *topos* has allowed us to show that the Italians felt in short supply of such forward-looking texts and hence felt the need to look beyond the national borders. We have identified three specific texts, namely Zola's novel *Fécondité*, Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, and Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken*, which have offered us the opportunity to explore a still little-studied uncharted aspect of the Italian cultural fin-de-siècle, which is normally mainly associated with

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<sup>68</sup> On the definition of the concept of decadentism, see Marina Paladini Musitelli, 'Il concetto di decadentismo nella critica italiana', *Problemi*, 59 (September-December 1980), 221-245 and Giuseppe Petronio, 'Il «decadentismo»: la parola e la cosa', *Quaderni del Vittoriale*, 36 (November-December 1982), 9-24. For a wider overview of the notion, see Enrico Ghidetti, *Il Decadentismo. Materiali e testimonianze critiche* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984) and Paolo Giovannetti, *Decadentismo* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1994), p. 57. About the complexity of the periodization of the decadent cultural phase, see Romano Luperini, *Il Novecento. Apparati ideologici, ceto intellettuale, sistemi formali nella letteratura italiana contemporanea*, vol. I (Turin: Loescher, 1981), pp. 3-13. For a wider definition of the concept, cf. Elio Gioanola, *Il Decadentismo* (Rome: Nuova Universale Studium, 1977) and Giuliano Landolfi, *Per un'interpretazione del decadentismo* (Novara: Interlinea, 2001). About the relationship between the concepts of decadentism and modernism, see Romano Luperini, 'Il modernismo italiano esiste', in *Sul modernismo italiano*, ed. by Romano Luperini and Massimiliano Tortora (Naples: Liguori, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Giovannetti, *Decadentismo*, p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> Gino Tellini, 'I "cavalieri" dello spirito e la cultura della crisi', in Gino Tellini, *Il romanzo italiano dell'Ottocento e Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 210-46.

decadent motifs of death. Starting from Alessandro Chiappelli's article 'Sul confine dei due secoli' we have been able to track a number of other texts fostering hopes of regeneration rather than myths of decadence, a point of view which has allowed us to provide what we consider a more complete overview of the Italian culture in the dynamic transitional phase of the fin de siècle.

# CHAPTER 1

## The Self-awareness of the Turn of the Century

*Il seme fecondo della coscienza critica [...] ha reso possibile e quasi connaturato al pensiero del nostro secolo, ciò che mancava ai secoli precedenti [...], l'analisi di sé stesso, la diagnosi delle proprie forze e della loro direzione e del fine a cui intendono.<sup>1</sup>*

### 1.1 'Sul confine dei due secoli'

On 16 April 1900, less than four months after the world's first electric bus became operational in New York, less than a month after Nikola Tesla received the first patent for wireless transmission of electrical power, and two days after the grand opening of the Paris World Exhibition, an Italian philosopher writes:

Da ogni parte, nei periodici e nei fogli quotidiani, in pubblici discorsi, e in libri speciali si va ragionando oggi del «bilancio», del «testamento», della «eredità» del secolo che tramonta, delle «speranze» di quello che sorge. Se la Chiesa di Roma chiama i fedeli alla celebrazione d'un rito secolare, la nazione che un secolo fa segnò col sangue la fine della vecchia società, oggi si dispone a consacrare il secolo morente, e ad inaugurare il nuovo, con una solenne manifestazione civile. [...] Nonostante le antitesi acute in cui sul morire rinvolve il secolo, le sue benemerienze positive sono, senza dubbio, molteplici e grandi. Secolo di lavoro umano e di operosità intensa in ogni ordine del pensiero e della vita, quanto forse nessun altro mai. Il settimo fra i peccati mortali, quello dell'accidia, non gli si potrà mai rimproverare da alcuno.<sup>2</sup>

He praises the extraordinary technological advancements made during the industrious and hard-working nineteenth century that were openly celebrated in the 'solemn civil ceremony' of the Exposition Universelle and by the 'celebrazione secolare' of the 1900 Jubilee held by the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> He also implicitly refers to the earlier exhibition in

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 620).

<sup>2</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', pp. 620, 624.

<sup>3</sup> For a close analysis of the symbolical meaning that the 1900 Jubilee had for the consciousness of the century, cf. Chapter 2 of the present thesis.

Paris of 1889, which had been expressly planned to celebrate the centenary of the storming of the Bastille, the event that, as the author underlines, marked the 'bloody end' of the old society and that was deemed as important as to be considered by many as the actual beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The World's Fair of 1889 was a highly debated event because of the construction of the Tour Eiffel and because it was organised to commemorate the French revolution, therefore it was boycotted by most of the European monarchies, which refused to participate.<sup>5</sup> This was no more the case in 1900s France where representatives from all over the world gathered in order to partake in an event expressly aimed at celebrating the 'synthesis', the 'philosophy' and the 'balance' of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> At the time, there was a lot of discussion about the 'balance' of the ending century, as the Italian philosopher highlights by pointing out that reflecting upon the 'will', the 'testament', and the 'legacy' of the 'fading' century was perceived as an imperative urgency: regardless of cultural differences and social classes, the 'end' was a major concern in the late nineteenth century. The issue, indeed, recurred very frequently in public speeches and in the printed media, as testified by the increasing number of books and articles in periodicals and daily newspapers explicitly devoted to this subject.

In this group it is also possible to include the text from which the opening quotation of the present chapter is excerpted: the article is entitled 'Sul confine dei due secoli' and was published in the Italian journal *Nuova Antologia* on 16 April 1900. The author was the Italian philosopher Alessandro Chiappelli (1875 – 1931) who, at the time of publication of this article, was already 'socio corrispondente' of the Accademia delle Scienze in Turin and would later become also 'socio nazionale' of the Accademia dei Lincei and academician of the Accademia della Crusca. Little-known nowadays, he was an influential intellectual in the late-nineteenth century and was eventually

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, what philologist and historian Ruggiero Bonghi argued in his conference speech 'Questa fin di secolo': 'Alla fine del secolo scorso – una fine, che, preparata da più anni innanzi, principì, si può dire nel 1789, undici anni prima che il secolo morisse – tutto un ordinamento politico e sociale si disciolse' (Ruggiero Bonghi, *Questa fin di secolo* (Milan: Treves, 1893), pp. 4-5 [my emphasis]). The physician, physiologist, and anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza also attached a special meaning to the French revolution in his volume *Il Secolo nevrosico* (1887); indeed, he maintained that the 'neurosis' of the nineteenth century originated precisely in 1789 (see above note 35 of the Introduction).

<sup>5</sup> See Florence Pinot de Villechenon, *Les expositions universelles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1992), p. 76; Pascal Ory, *1889. La mémoire des siècles: l'expo universelle* (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1989), pp. 12, 13.

<sup>6</sup> 'L'Exposition constituera la synthèse, déterminera la philosophie du dix-neuvième siècle' said the politician and journalist Jules Roche (quoted in Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting cities. Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Basingstoke of Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 62). According to the official documents, the aims of the exposition were to do 'il bilancio del secolo' and 'inaugurare degnamente il XX secolo e celebrare in tal modo la nuova tappa seguita dal cammino progressivo della civiltà contemporanea' (*La vita, le conquiste e le scoperte del secolo XIX. L'Esposizione mondiale del 1900 in Parigi* (Milan: Vallardi, 1900), p. 32).

appointed senator in 1914. In the 1880s, he was a professor of Philosophy at the University of Padova and Florence where he had been previously trained in neo-Kantian philosophy, which strongly influenced his future career.<sup>7</sup> In 1887 he transferred to the University of Naples where he taught History of Philosophy until 1908 while specializing in ancient Greek and philosophy of Christianity: indeed he was one of the first Italian scholars to study early-Christian papyri. He was also fascinated by history of art and literature: he authored works about Renaissance art, Leopardi, Schiller, and particularly Dante. In the meanwhile, he cultivated his political passion for socialism both through research about workers' movements and by running for the radical party, although without electoral success.

In the present thesis, I am going to examine a sample selected among Chiappelli's extremely prolific and varied oeuvre for being a specimen of the fin-de-siècle production that focuses on the turn-of-the-century discourse and use it as a 'prism' to shed light on several aspects – relating to philosophy, history, psychology, literature – of the fin-de-siècle society.

The discussion about the end of the century had already been on intellectuals' agenda since the 1860s, but only in the 1890s and especially, as one could expect, during the second part of that decade did it grow into a widespread debate spanning across various disciplines. This phenomenon permeated all discourses in humanities and in sciences from a transnational perspective. As for Italy, it is possible to find evidence of its pervasiveness in many Italian end-of-the-century periodicals, among which the *Nuova Antologia* represents a remarkable case, as it was interdisciplinary by nature, as one could easily infer from the subtitle 'Rivista di Scienze, Lettere e Arti'.<sup>8</sup> The articles, authored by politicians, scientists, renowned academics, writers, and critics, can be considered as proper essays dealing with a variety of subjects, ranging

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<sup>7</sup> Chiappelli is mentioned by Giovanni Gentile in an article devoted to the end of neo-Kantism: Giovanni Gentile, 'La filosofia in Italia dopo il 1850. La fine del neokantismo italiano', *La Critica*, 9.5 (1911), 338-368 (subsequently reprinted in Giovanni Gentile, *Le origini della filosofia contemporanea in Italia*, vol. III. I: *I neokantiani e gli hegeliani* (Florence: Sansoni, 1957), pp. 127-138). Later on, Chiappelli was also mentioned by Benedetto Croce in *Conversazioni critiche. Serie prima e seconda* (Bari: Laterza, 1942), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> The *Nuova Antologia* was established in Florence in 1866 by Francesco Protonotari, professor of Political Economics at the University of Pisa, and published by Le Monnier. Until 1878, the journal was issued monthly; afterwards, the editorial office was moved to Rome and the journal became fortnightly, bearing the length of two hundred pages per volume as in the monthly version. It was distributed nationwide and was targeted to a learned readership. See Antonio Carrannante, 'Centotrenta anni di discussioni sulla scuola: la *Nuova Antologia* (dal 1866 al 1966)' – Part 1, *I Problemi della Pedagogia*, 4-6 (2003), 449-504; Antonio Carrannante, 'Centotrenta anni di discussioni sulla scuola: la *Nuova Antologia* (dal 1866 al 1966)' – Part II, *I Problemi della Pedagogia*, 1-3 (2004), 119-176; Cosimo Ceccuti, *Antologia della Nuova Antologia: 1866-2000* (Florence: La Loggia, 2001); Ricciarda Ricorda, *La "Nuova antologia" 1866-1915: letteratura e ideologia tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Padova: Liviana, 1980).

from science to poetry, touching on history, philosophy, and religion. This is precisely the case of Chiappelli's article, which is particularly rich in references across different disciplines.

'Sul confine dei due secoli' presents itself as a review of a group of books: indeed, the subtitle is simply 'A proposito di libri recenti', followed by a list of books that are all devoted to the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, this article is far more than a review; it is twenty pages long, more than a review usually is, and it is structured as a proper essay tackling a vast array of topics and issues related to the conceptualization of the main features of the nineteenth century. The first threshold<sup>9</sup> crossed by the reader is the list of seven books listed as follows: Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Wonderful Century. Its successes and its failures* (London, 1899 [1st edn 1898]); Ludwig Stein, *An der Wende des Jahrhunderts [Versuch einer Kulturphilosophie]* (Freiburg [Mohr], 1899); Theobald Ziegler, *Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des XIX Jahrhunderts* (Berlin [Bondi], 1899); *Die Wissenschaften und Künste der Gegenwart*, ed. by Ludwig Weber (Gütersloh [Bertelsmann], 1898); Hippolyte Fierens-Gevaert, *La Tristesse Contemporaine. Essai sur les grands courants moraux et intellectuels du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris [Alcan], 1899); John Theodore Merz, *History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh-[London] [Blackwood & Sons], 1896); Enrico Morselli, *L'eredità materiale, intellettuale e morale del secolo XIX. Discorso letto addì 6 novembre 1894* (Genoa [Martini], 1895).

It is worth remarking that only one Italian book is mentioned: Morselli's *L'eredità materiale, intellettuale e morale del secolo XIX*. Enrico Morselli (1852-1929) was a physician and professor at the University of Turin; he was very well-known because of his publications about mental illness, psychiatry, mediumship, and, above all, for his book *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics* (1881) in which he stated that suicide was one of the effects of the evolutionary struggle for life. In *L'Eredità*, Morselli deals with a large number of questions about industrial progress, and its moral, economic, sociological and cultural consequences during the late nineteenth century. The uniqueness of the volume is to be found in its scope, in the very peculiar perspective Morselli adopts as a psychiatrist, and in the way he engages with foreign literature; presumably, it is precisely because of these reasons that Chiappelli's attaches a high relevance to *L'Eredità* and chooses to place it side by side with the more recent books, published and/or reprinted in 1898-1899, that he reviews, although it dates back to five years before, or in fact six, since the volume stems from a conference

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'threshold' here refers to Genette's concept of 'seuil' (see Gérard Genette, *Seuils*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002). In the book list that follows, we have provided the details as displayed in Chiappelli's article to give a precise idea of the 'threshold' that his readers would cross; we have then provided additional bibliographical information in square brackets.

delivered in November 1894.

On the other hand, a brief survey of the titles listed above brings out the fact that it is the foreign philosophical and historical production in German, English and French that garnered most of the attention. This tendency is also confirmed by looking at the other publications mentioned throughout the article,<sup>10</sup> which registers many of the Italian and foreign texts about the nineteenth century and, by closely examining many of them, provides a precise account of the most noteworthy questions of the critical debates going on at the time, with a particular attention to the biennium 1899-1900. Since this essay is an accurate representation of the fin-de-siècle heated controversies about the turn of the century, it proves to be an excellent starting point for my investigation. Each chapter of the thesis will present a reference to each of the core issues and leitmotifs emerging from Chiappelli's article and from the publications he builds his discourse upon; each motif is to be regarded as a 'discursive field' and functions as a thematic 'cluster' around which other texts are gathered.<sup>11</sup> As already mentioned in the thesis Introduction, 'Sul confine dei due secoli' will serve as a medium for introducing the discursive areas that will be explored all along the thesis, such as: the motif of self-consciousness and critical examination of the century; the reflection on the sense of time; the fin-de-siècle interpretation of the main historical events of the

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<sup>10</sup> As for the historical field, Chiappelli refers to Ernst Hallier's *Kulturgeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart [Verlag von Ferdinand Enke], 1889) and Charles William Oman's *England in the Nineteenth Century* (London [Arnold], 1900 [1st edn 1899]) (a former edition of this text had already appeared in 1899 and it had been published simultaneously in New York and London (as testified by the indication on the cover 'New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., London: Edward Arnold, 1899') by Oman who was, as one can read on the cover page, 'Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and Lecturer in History at New College, Oxford; author of *A history of Greece from the earliest times to the death of Alexander the Great, A history of England, etc., etc.*'). When dealing with the evolutionary theory, he echoes William Hurrell Mallock's *Aristocracy and Evolution* (London [Adam and Charles Black], 1898); Ferdinand Brunetière's *L'évolution de la poésie lyrique* (Paris [Hachette], dated by Chiappelli '1875', but in fact '1895' [1st edn 1894]); and Yves Guyot's 'La loi du progrès', *Journal des Économistes*, 15 December 1899. As for the literary production, in Chiappelli's article Gabriele D'Annunzio's play *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* vies with Henrik Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken*, Émile Zola's novel *Fécondité* and Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* (we will analyse in depth D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* in Chapter Five of the thesis and the relevance in the Italian context of Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, Zola's *Fécondité* and Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection* in Chapter Six). The philosophical and religious debate Chiappelli deals with features William James's *The Will to Believe* (London [Longmans Green and Co.], 1897); Arthur Balfour's *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* (London [Macmillan & Co.], dated by Chiappelli '1898' [1879, 1st edn]); Joris-Karl Huysmans's *Pages catholiques* (Paris [P.-V. Stock], 1900 [1st edn 1899]); George Tyrrell's 'Through Art to Faith', *The Month* (July 1898), 23-35 and, eventually, Chiappelli's own article 'Il Cristianesimo e il Progresso', *Rivista italiana di filosofia*, 2.2 (1897), 3-32. Great importance is also attached to the articles 'Il bilancio del secolo che muore' by Ercole Vidari, *La Vita Internazionale*, 20 June 1899, 353-358 and 'Il secolo che muore' by Guglielmo Ferrero, *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 January 1900, 2-5 (both specifically devoted to the leitmotif of the 'dying century').

<sup>11</sup> Here I combine the methodological approach suggested by Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (London-New York: Routledge, 2002) and that by Stephen Kern, *The culture of time and space. 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

nineteenth century; the idea of decadence as opposed to the myth of progress; the contrasting metaphorical fields of the century's death and the century's rebirth. In the present chapter, I will focus the attention on the motif of self-consciousness and critical examination alongside the reflection on the sense of time.

## 1.2 Self-analysis and the 'critical spirit' of the century

Egli è che nessun tempo ha avuta come il nostro *la coscienza precisa della responsabilità che gl'incombe dinanzi alla storia*, nessun altro secolo ha potuto fare il proprio *esame di coscienza* con occhio scrutatore di giudice. Il *seme fecondo della coscienza critica*, germinato sullo scorcio del secolo XVIII, diramandosi in tutto il grande albero dello scibile, e penetrando ogni forma della vita, ha reso possibile e quasi *connaturato al pensiero del nostro secolo*, ciò che mancava ai secoli precedenti, almeno nelle forme e nelle intensità a noi proprie, *l'analisi di sé stesso, la diagnosi delle proprie forze e della loro direzione e del fine a cui intendono*. Nessun altro secolo ha creduto e potuto fare, come il nostro, il suo rendiconto materiale e morale dinanzi al gran *tribunale della storia, che, se anche a lunga scadenza e fra molti errori, riesce, come disse il filosofo tedesco, a rendere la giustizia finale*.<sup>12</sup>

In the opening paragraph of 'Sul confine dei due secoli' the key-words 'consciousness', 'self-consciousness', 'self-analysis', 'auto-diagnosis' stand out as representative of the discourse about the end of the century. The first step of self-analysis is a moment of self-identification: people living in the nineteenth century identified their own century by giving it a name, indeed the nineteenth century was 'the first century to be thought of by most people as possessing a number', as Asa Briggs has pointed out, and as we have shown in the Introduction.<sup>13</sup> Many scholars agree in identifying one of the key-features of the *fin-de-siècle* precisely in the self-consciousness by considering the striking number of publications, books, journals, and conferences all centered on reflecting about the sense of time during the turn of the century. 'Never was there a time when people were so conscious of living on the verge of a new era', Damian Thompson has observed; the accelerated rhythm of changes occurring engendered 'an increasing awareness of the temporal units of this modern understanding of time, such

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<sup>12</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620 [my emphasis].

<sup>13</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Past, Present and Future in Headlines', in *Fins de Siècle. How Centuries End. 1400-2000*, ed. by Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 157-195 (p. 159).

as a “century”, as Aris Mousoutzanis has remarked, and, speaking about the fin-de-siècle period in particular, Charles Townshend has highlighted that the 1890s were ‘the most self-conscious decade so far’ when it became evident that the century was not only a time unit but it also acted as a ‘vessel of awareness’.<sup>14</sup> All echoed what Holbrook Jackson had already observed in the 1910s when describing the atmosphere of the 1890s: ‘one cannot avoid the temptation to speculate on the meaning of such *fin de siècle* occurrences, for we are actually made more conscious of our standing towards time by the approaching demise of a century’, Jackson wrote, ‘just as we are made conscious of our ages on birthday anniversaries and New Year’s Eve [...] so a similar [...] instinct towards unique activity may come about *at so impressive a period as the close of a century*’.<sup>15</sup>

The debates ranged over a wide variety of subjects, from whether the century would have ended in 1900 or 1901 to how to deal with dark apocalyptic expectations. The historian Hillel Schwartz underlines how what started as an ‘empty reference to some vague anticipations of the century’s end’ made ‘possible a way of thinking about one’s time *that had been unavailable before*’; from being at the beginning just ‘an allusion to indeterminate feelings, fin de siècle had become *an active agent for historical thought*’.<sup>16</sup> I claim that this ‘agent’ was particularly active in the Italian cultural panorama. In this respect journals represent the best source for understanding and reconstructing the way this agent was able to create a new ‘historical thought’.

As Chiappelli argues, the creation of such a new historical perspective was made possible by a ‘fecund’ self-analysis skill leading to a ‘material and moral account’ of the epoch that would have been inconceivable in the previous centuries. The only exception was represented by the late eighteenth century where the roots of the critical consciousness were to be located: here the implied reference is to the Enlightenment and to the power of reason as described by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Judgment*. When commenting on ‘The Self-image of the Enlightenment Thinkers’, Reinhart Koselleck has stressed in his study about the ‘critique’-*Begriff*, that the way in which the Enlightenment thinkers self-fashioned themselves as rational and impartial judges was by self-positioning themselves on an ideal crest between present

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<sup>14</sup> Damian Thompson, *The End of Time. Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Random House, 1999), p. 118; Aris Mousoutzanis, *Fin-de-Siècle Fictions, 1890s/1990s. Apocalypse, Technoscience, Empire* (Houndmill-Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp. 24-25; Charles Townshend, ‘The Fin de Siècle’, in *Fin de Siècle: The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Alex Danchev (London-New York: Tauris Academic Press, 1995), pp. 198–216 (p. 200 and p. 198); see also Hillel Schwartz, *Century’s End. A cultural history of the fin de siècle from the 990s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 156-197.

<sup>15</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties. A review of art and ideas at the close of the nineteenth century* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1913), pp. 18-19 [my emphasis].

<sup>16</sup> Schwartz, *Century’s End*, pp. 162-163 [my emphasis].

and future: ‘in every instance’, Koselleck explains, ‘the self-made link to the future enabled the rational judge to become a critic on the present’ which ‘made available a sphere of absolute freedom in the present to the executor of criticism’.<sup>17</sup> Chiappelli, who had closely studied the Kantian neo-criticism philosophy,<sup>18</sup> recalls that Kant was viewed as the continuer of Galileo and Newton, and was therefore considered the initiator of a new epistemological paradigm and the promoter of the infusion of ‘spirito critico’ into the scientific culture that led to scientific and industrial revolutions. Much was written about the glorification of the inventions of the second industrial revolution in books such as Morselli’s *L’eredità materiale, intellettuale e morale del secolo XIX*, Wallace’s *The Wonderful Century* and Hallier’s *Kulturgeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* where several chapters feature the description of the telegraph, the telephone, intercontinental railways, and the discovery of anesthetics, antiseptics and bacteria, and the elaboration of cellular theories.

Nevertheless, according to Chiappelli – who echoes Mertz’s *History of European Thought* – rather than in the brand-new technological devices themselves, the grandeur of the nineteenth century lies in two other elements. The first consists in the ‘coscienza critica’, also said ‘disciplina critica della mente’, which is the critical attitude to scientific and philosophical research arisen towards the end of the eighteenth century, and could be regarded as the main legacy of Kant, who is frequently evoked.<sup>19</sup> The second element bears a more hidden reference to another philosopher who is never expressly mentioned and who is conjured up in an implicit way: Hegel.

Hegel is, indeed, the ‘filosofo tedesco’ Chiappelli alludes to in the above-

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<sup>17</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and crisis: enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> See an article published by Chiappelli just one year before ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’: Alessandro Chiappelli, ‘Le trasformazioni della filosofia neo-critica in Germania’, *Rivista filosofica*, 1899 subsequently included in Alessandro Chiappelli, *Dalla critica al nuovo idealismo* (Milan-Turin-Rome: Bocca, 1910), pp. 272-282.

<sup>19</sup> This ‘disciplina critica della mente’, to be understood as the awareness of the need for a continuous process of revision of every supposed truth, was considered by the historian, sociologist, and novelist Guglielmo Ferrero as a manifestation of a ‘divine humility’. In his article ‘Il secolo che muore’, which was published in *La Vita Internazionale* in January 1900, although at the bottom of the article one can read ‘December 1899’, Ferrero argues: ‘la facile e continua confutazione di opinioni che parevano solidissime, la rettificazione incessante e infaticabile fatta di tutte le verità per avvicinarle sempre più all’archetipo della verità ideale e perfetta, hanno indotto in tutte le menti una umiltà divina, che è il più gran pregio della nostra età: una facile disposizione a riconoscere il proprio errore; una consapevolezza dell’infermità delle nostre forze intellettuali, paragonate all’immensa opera d’investigare, pesare e misurar l’universo, che cresce a mano a mano che crescono i meravigliosi successi della ragione’ (Guglielmo Ferrero, ‘Il secolo che muore’, *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 January 1900, 2-5 (p. 2) [my emphasis]). Like Mertz, Ferrero acknowledges the most remarkable merit of the century to be not in the technological achievements themselves, but rather in the acquisition of a new methodology grounded in the recognition of the human intellectual limits and in the appreciation of the falsifiability – we might say by anachronistically employing a term which only came into use later – of all scientific theories.

mentioned passage as one can infer by considering the terms used to refer to history and the great importance accorded to self-consciousness throughout Chiappelli's essay. Self-consciousness plays a key role in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, originally titled *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*. It is not our intention to delve into this topic in depth and to analyse in detail the fourth section of Hegel's volume where it is explored, but nonetheless it is worth recalling that Hegel conceives the phenomenology as the 'history of consciousness'. Indeed, the first part of the *Phenomenology* is divided into three phases: Consciousness (also considered the moment of thesis), Self-consciousness (antithesis) and Reason (synthesis); in the second moment the focus is on the subject which reaches the full understanding of his autonomy through a master-slave dialectic conflict. In the first instance, it is the Master who fully grasps his self-consciousness, but in a second phase, the Slave is also able to gain knowledge of the position he holds in the world thanks to his work and the 'fear of death'. Both these elements, as far apart as they may seem, contribute to the same results: by creating a product endowed with its own identity, the Slave is able to perceive himself as autonomous and independent from the objects of the reality he is in; similarly, after having experienced the fear of dying, the Subject is able to detach himself from the reality in which he previously identified himself uncritically. This brief sketch of the dynamics of the Self-consciousness as conceived by the German philosopher aims at showing how the kind of Self-consciousness Chiappelli ascribes to the century is to be understood against the backdrop of Hegel's philosophy. Chiappelli highlights that, like the Slave-Subject, the nineteenth century became fully self-conscious thanks to the impressive amount of work accomplished (it is worthwhile remembering Chiappelli's praise of the untiring activity 'in ogni ordine del pensiero e della vita', not comparable to that of any previous century) and thanks to the awareness of its impending death (which is evident from the very beginning of 'Sul confine dei due secoli' where the stress is put on the testament and the legacy of the 'dying' century).

The Hegelian framework also needs to be applied when analysing the reflection on history carried out in Chiappelli's essay through the lenses of a recurring metaphor concerning the legal and judiciary system; this is made up by phrases such as: 'occhio scrutatore di giudice', 'esame di coscienza', 'giustizia finale', 'tribunale della storia'. Although Chiappelli does not specify the origin of the expression 'tribunale della storia', I believe it originates from the dictum 'tribunal of history' (*das Gericht der Geschichte*) employed by Hegel in the introduction to his lectures of 1822-1823<sup>20</sup> and in the well-

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<sup>20</sup> See Peter Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom: Hegel's Philosophy of World History in Theological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 168.

known passage of the *Philosophy of Right* where he talks of ‘world’s history’ (*die Weltgeschichte*) in terms of ‘world’s court of judgment’ (*das Weltgericht*). In this section the philosopher is speaking about the mutual relationships among States; after having laid out the conducts of States during wartime and peacetime, he affirms that ‘the universal spirit, the *spirit of the world*, produces itself in its freedom from all limits, and it is this spirit which exercises its right – which is the highest right of all – over finite spirits in *world history* as the *world’s court of judgment* [*Weltgericht*]’.<sup>21</sup> The phrase ‘World history is the world’s court of judgment’<sup>22</sup> has been frequently attributed to Hegel himself, but it is in fact a quotation from the penultimate stanza of the poem *Resignation* by Friedrich Schiller (1794), as the German philosopher points out in a note in the *Philosophy of Right* where he writes:

World history is this divine tragedy, where spirit rises up above pity, ethical life, and everything that in other spheres is sacred to it... World spirit is unsparing and pitiless. Even the finest, highest principle of a people is, as the principle of a particular people, a restricted people, left behind by the advancing spirit of the age. *Nothing profounder can be said than Schiller’s words, “World history is a court of world judgment.” No people ever suffered wrong; what is suffered, it had merited. The court of world judgment is not to be viewed as the mere might of spirit.*<sup>23</sup>

I believe that Chiappelli’s persuasion that the tribunal of history ‘se anche a lunga scadenza e fra molti errori, riesce, come disse il filosofo tedesco, a rendere la giustizia finale’ is grounded precisely in Hegel’s statement that, no matter how wrong or painful it may seem, ‘No people ever suffered wrong’, that is to say that a final justice is eventually reached, although through mistakes and sometimes unpleasant events. Indeed, according to Hegel the ultimate aim of history is the fulfillment of the Freedom of the Spirit, which is attained through the progression of different national spirits (in the last section of the *Philosophy of Right* devoted to the World History he expounds the Oriental, Greek, Roman and Germanic realms). This fulfillment could require a certain amount of suffering that peoples must accept, even if they cannot understand the rationale behind it because it is beyond their limited understanding skills. The sense of

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<sup>21</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood, trans. by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), § 340 [original emphasis].

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 475; see also Georg W. F. Hegel, *The philosophy of right*, trans. by Alan White (Newburyport, MA: Focus Library, 2002), § 340.

<sup>23</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on Natural Right and Political Science* of 1817-18 quoted in Hodgson, *Shapes of Freedom*, p. 168 [my emphasis].

resignation was somehow intended differently by Schiller's in his homonymous ode, and it is likely that Chiappelli was aware of the shift this idea had undergone in Hegel's philosophy, bearing in mind that the Italian scholar had written some articles on Schiller himself, such as *Gli dei della Grecia di F. Schiller ed E. Haine*;<sup>24</sup> nevertheless here he adopts this idea in Hegelian terms. Similarly, the stress on the process of self-knowledge that the Italian philosopher attributes to the century ('l'analisi di se stesso, la diagnosi delle proprie forze e della loro direzione e del fine a cui intendono') could derive from and could be elucidated by the emphasis in the Hegelian philosophy on the 'Know thyself' dictum. The Delphic oracle's injunction is quoted by Hegel in the section 'World History' of the *Philosophy of Right* and also recalled in the *Philosophy of mind* where he writes that 'self-knowledge is nothing other than the absolute law of spirit itself'.<sup>25</sup> According to Chiappelli, the task of self-investigation that Hegel assigns to the Spirit must be undertaken by the nineteenth century, or better still by the Spirit of the century.

If the association between the World History and the nineteenth century – that is only a small fraction of it – might seem to be far-fetched, it could be helpful to recall that this was not an original correlation devised by an Italian philosopher but a widespread idea at the turn of the century. As Gentile has remarked, the turn of the century was rich in 'significati simbolici, soprattutto perché si collocava nel corso dell'età più movimentata e più rapinosa nell'intera storia dell'umanità'.<sup>26</sup> As an example, we could mention the preface of Alfred Wallace's *The Wonderful Century* where the author praises the 'great material and intellectual achievements which especially distinguish the nineteenth century from any and all of its predecessors' and underlines 'how fundamental is the change they have effected in our life and civilization'. He concludes the opening paragraph of his book by claiming:

A comparative estimate of the number and importance of these achievements leads to the conclusion that *not only is our century superior to any that have gone before it, but that it may be best compared with the whole preceding historical period*. It must therefore be held to constitute *the*

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<sup>24</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Gli dei della Grecia di F. Schiller ed E. Haine', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 1 August 1880, subsequently reprinted with the title 'Gli dei della Grecia (Schiller ed Haine)' in Alessandro Chiappelli's essay collection *Saggi e note critiche* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1895), pp. 231-242.

<sup>25</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. by William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), addition to § 377.

<sup>26</sup> Emilio Gentile, *L'Apocalisse della modernità* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), p. 33.

*beginning of a new era of human progress.*<sup>27</sup>

The nineteenth century is described as unique not only when compared to the previous centuries, but also with respect to the 'whole preceding historical period': this reflection on the uniqueness of the epoch in historical terms is far more telling since it comes from the biologist and natural scientist who contributed to the elaboration of the theory of evolution; indeed, Wallace published a milestone paper jointly with Darwin in 1858.<sup>28</sup> The stress on the 'new era' derives from the new conception of time elaborated in the nineteenth century following the anthropological, geological and biological discoveries that revolutionized and lengthened the human and the global history timespan from thousands to millions of years, suffice it to say that the word 'prehistory' was first used in the year of the Great Exhibition, entering the language in 1851.<sup>29</sup> In the first chapter of *The Wonderful Century*, Wallace reiterates the concept anticipated in the preface by increasing the hyperbole. The biologist claims that 'in order to estimate its full importance and grandeur more especially as regards man's increased power over nature, and the application of that power to the needs of his life today, with unlimited possibilities in the future' the comparison should be '*not with any preceding century, or even with the last millennium*, but with the whole historical period perhaps even with the whole period that has elapsed *since the stone age*'.<sup>30</sup>

These kinds of discourses resonated all over the printed media, as testified, for example, by an article titled 'Alla fine del Secolo' published in the fortnightly *La Vita Internazionale* in December 1900. Here the editorial staff – collectively signing the article – stressed the exceptionality of the progress made during the century compared to the previous millenniums in terms of technological advancements by claiming: 'nessun secolo va altero di tante scoperte come questo [...] non si può ragionevolmente negare il progresso compiuto in questi cento anni, superiore a quello che *il genere umano poteva in passato compiere durante interi millenni*'.<sup>31</sup> The contributors were amazed by the broadening of horizons both geographically and temporally: as for the

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<sup>27</sup> Alfred R. Wallace, *The Wonderful Century. Its successes and its failures* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1899), p. vii [my emphasis].

<sup>28</sup> A good synthesis could be found in the chapter 'Evolutionism' in the collected volume he edited: Alfred Russell Wallace *et alii*, *The Progress of the Century* (New York-London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1901), pp. 3-29.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Briggs, 'Past, Present and Future in Headlines', p. 157 and Peter Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: the Victorians and the Past* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Wallace, *The Wonderful Century*, p. 2 [my emphasis].

<sup>31</sup> 'La Vita', 'Alla fine del Secolo', *La Vita Internazionale*, 20 December 1900, 737-738 (p. 738), this article was written by the editorial staff under the supervision – and most likely, direct intervention – of the founder and editor-in-chief, the pacifist Ernesto Teodoro Moneta who a few years later – in 1907 – will receive the Nobel Peace Prize [my emphasis].

former respect, they referred to the colonization of Australia and New Zealand, and the explorations in Africa and Asia; as for the latter, they evoked the newly acquired knowledge about ancient civilizations, such as Egyptians and Aryans.

The article 'Alla fine del Secolo' brought into sharper focus that the organisation of the cultural system also underwent a profound revolution during the nineteenth century: 'si è diffusa la coltura e resa a tutti accessibile col libro a tenue prezzo, con le biblioteche pubbliche, con la rivista, col giornale'.<sup>32</sup> The role played by the printed media in the spreading of the culture was crucial, as well summed up by the well-known British journalist William Thomas Stead who famously stated: 'the press is at once the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people'.<sup>33</sup> This sentence bears even more significance since it is uttered by the pioneer of the New Journalism, the founder of numerous publications that went global such as the *Review of Reviews*, which drew on both European and American reviews, in other words by a journalist who surely was fully aware of the influence that the press could wield on the public opinion.<sup>34</sup> The fast-growing diffusion of journals fostered a new conceptualization of the categories of time and space<sup>35</sup> and revolutionized human relations in many respects as highlighted, among others, by the sociologist Jacov Novikov.

Novikov's reflection is of particular interest to us insofar as it is elaborated by a non-European intellectual – belonging to the Russian Empire – who was a supporter of the creation of a federal government in Europe as showed in his book *La fédération de l'Europe* (1901), reviewed in the same issue of *La Vita Internazionale* in December 1900 where the article 'Alla fine del Secolo' was published. Novikov's faith in the idea of a federation stemmed from the awareness of the ever stronger transnational interconnection among countries on an economic, political and cultural level, also thanks to the press. After having recalled how rotary presses had improved since the beginning of the century – allowing for an increase in the production of journal copies from 450 to 7000 per hour – Novikov argues: 'quale follia credere che questa colossale accelerazione delle idee nella trasmissione dei pensieri, non dovrà apportare immancabilmente una trasformazione dei pensieri, una trasformazione radicale nelle relazioni umane!'.<sup>36</sup>

While this process was global to Europe, it is interesting to explore its peculiarity

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<sup>32</sup> 'La Vita', 'Alla fine del Secolo', p. 738.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by Briggs, 'Past, Present and Future in Headlines', p. 157.

<sup>34</sup> For a contemporary account of the 'New Journalism' see E. M. Phillips, 'The New Journalism', *New Review* (August 1895).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Kern, *The culture of time and space. 1880-1918*.

<sup>36</sup> Jacov Novikov, *La fédération de l'Europe* (Paris: Alcan, 1901) quoted in the article by Alessandro Tassoni, 'La Federazione dell'Europa', *La Vita Internazionale*, 20 December 1900, 755-759 (p. 755).

in the Italian context. As suggested by Hallamore Caesar, Romani and Burns the development of cultural initiatives after 1860 led to a process of democratization that deeply changed the panorama of the Italian cultural milieu now populated by best-selling authors and by an expanded readership of books and journals.<sup>37</sup> The power of reading profoundly transformed the Italian society and contributed to the material and moral uplifting of the nation. In 1875, in his survey devoted to *La stampa periodica, il commercio dei libri e la tipografia in Italia*, Giuseppe Ottino extols the function of the media by declaring: 'Niuno penserà certamente a mettere in dubbio l'immensa parte avuta dalla stampa periodica nel progresso materiale morale della nazione [...] In questa nobile opera, che la stampa nelle sue presenti condizioni può aiutare facilmente, è racchiuso il germe di una grande trasformazione sociale'.<sup>38</sup> Ottino provides data concerning the number of periodicals printed in Italy in order to show the strong correlation between the growth of printed journals and the modernization of the nation. His analysis also touches upon the increasing production rates of the book industry, which are, once again, directly and positively correlated with the maturation of a collective and national consciousness. Nonetheless, this process could not be complete without the development of public libraries, the venue par excellence of knowledge transmission. In Post-Unification Italy, there was a lively discussion about how to increase the presence of public libraries all over the nation, in order to fill the gap with other countries. Italy perceived itself as lagging behind in this respect, especially in comparison with other countries, such as the United States and England, whose prosperity and imperialist vocation, according to many, was also apparent in the widespread presence of free and public libraries. This debate has been reconstructed by Lolla through a careful study of a number of articles published on the *Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Among the texts she analyses, a particularly telling one is an article by the writer and historian Pompeo Molmenti, in which he calls for an expansion of public libraries. Provocatively, the historian asserts that, if necessary, this should happen at the expense of schools and universities since 'La scienza vera – quella pratica – non si insegna nelle aule delle Università, ma si attinge nei libri [...] Nelle biblioteche si forma quella media cultura generale che, più della scienza profonda di pochi privilegiati, è l'indice della forza

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<sup>37</sup> See *The Printed Media in Fin-de-siècle Italy. Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, ed. by Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani and Jennifer Burns (London-Oxford: MHRA, Maney and Legenda, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Giuseppe Ottino, *La stampa periodica il commercio dei libri e la tipografia in Italia* (Milan: Brigola, 1875) pp. 11 and 19, quoted in Maria Grazia Lolla, 'Reader/Power: The Politics and Poetics of Reading in Post-Unification Italy', in *The Printed Media in Fin-de-siècle Italy. Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, pp. 20-37 (pp. 22-23).

intellettuale della nazione'.<sup>39</sup> The intellectual strength of a nation is directly related to the level of knowledge the population is endowed with, argues Molmenti in 1902 and in this respect he agrees with the idea we have already encountered in the article 'Alla fine del Secolo' published two years earlier. These intellectuals identify the uniqueness of the turn-of-the-century culture not only in the mastery mankind has reached over Nature, but also in the fact that this mastery and this knowledge are shared among a growing number of people leading to a progressive empowerment of mankind as a whole.

Along the same lines, Chiappelli emphasizes the empowerment and the self-consciousness the man of the late nineteenth century is subject to by quoting two lines from the *Divine Comedy*:

Noi vigiliamo tanto su noi stessi e sul nostro cammino, che ben  
possiamo dire col poeta:  
*Sì che notte nè sonno a noi non fura*  
*Passo, che faccia il secol per sue vie.*<sup>40</sup>

It is noteworthy that the quoted passage includes the word 'secolo': the term is used by Dante to refer to the historical time in general,<sup>41</sup> yet it also bears a symbolical significance in the context of the discourse about the century that Chiappelli is conducting. By employing the first-person plural ('Noi vigiliamo'), he aims to speak for the whole mankind as a whole; the use of the verb 'vigilare' is not accidental, rather it derives from the line 'Voi vigiliate ne l'eterno die', which precedes the two lines of *Purgatorio XXX* quoted in the above-mentioned passage. These lines are excerpted from the speech in which Beatrice scolds Dante for having behaved improperly when he was young. She does not address him directly but instead she speaks to the angels present in the scene who act as intermediaries: angels are described as always awake in an 'endless day', so that neither the night nor sleep can prevent them from witnessing what happens in the world. Angels are also able to do what humans cannot: being eternally awake, that is to say having a full awareness and control over historical

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<sup>39</sup> *Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi*, 13 (May-June 1902), pp. 69, 71 quoted in Lolla, 'Reader/Power: The Politics and Poetics of Reading in Post-Unification Italy', p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 621 [my emphasis].

<sup>41</sup> The meaning of the word 'secol' is commented on by Lorenzo Martini in the following way: «*secol* si prende in più sensi: rispetto al tempo, in due; ora esprime tempo determinato, altra volta tempo indeterminato; e quanto al determinato sovente si adopera per la vita caduca. Tuttavia leggiamo in Dante *secolo immortale*. In altri casi secolo vuol dire *mondo*, nel senso di corruzione dell'umanità. In questo luogo vuol dire *vita caduca*, o meglio *mondo sensibile*» (*La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri dichiarata secondo i principii della filosofia per Lorenzo Martini* (Turin: Giacinto Marietti, 1840), p. 211).

events. The way Chiappelli uses this passage is peculiar because he inverts its original meaning by quoting just two lines out of context and by substituting the pronoun 'noi' for 'voi' (used by Beatrice when she addresses the angels);<sup>42</sup> in so doing, he attributes to mankind the prerogative that is, instead, explicitly reserved to angels. Chiappelli makes a personal use of Dante's poetry in order to bring into sharper focus the new kind of empowerment he believes the end-of-the-century mankind is endowed with. This shift in the meaning of the lines is not due to a poor understanding on the part of Chiappelli who, in fact, had extensively studied the *Divine Comedy*; it is rather due to a deliberate reinterpretation aimed at reinforcing the idea of the exceptionality of man's condition at the turn of the century.

It is interesting that Dante's masterpiece, full of symbolism contemporary to its author but not up to the challenges of the coming twentieth century, rises above its historical transience and, in the words and minds of modern people, becomes in itself a distinguished symbol of man's empowerment through knowledge. Every time the fin-de-siècle man expresses their will to power through intellectual endeavor, one is *de facto* compelled to mention Dante's simultaneously spiritual, intellectual, and physical voyage. The theme appears as if it were the thinker's skull in the secluded background of a baroque depiction of a classical sage: a peripheral but nevertheless an integral element of the composition.

This is what happens when Dante is mentioned in many of the articles about the end of the century. To stay close to the case studies considered so far, I would like to draw the attention to the journal *La Vita Internazionale* which, since the publication of its very first issue in January 1898, had the famous tercet from *Inferno* XXVI, lines 118-120 'Considerate la vostra semenza: / Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / Ma per seguir virtude e conoscenza [sic]' as its exergue.<sup>43</sup> The aim of the editorial staff who chose the exergue was to consolidate the idea that man had an innate tendency towards a moral and intellectual uplifting through the enhancement of knowledge. Interestingly enough, this concept is highlighted in another article published in *La Vita Internazionale* through the quotation, once again, of a few lines from the *Divine Comedy*: 'La civiltà, nella sua ascensione, subisce talvolta delle soste ma subito dopo non può a meno di tendere nuovamente in alto: Come la fronda che flette la cima / Nel transito del vento e poi si leva / Per la propria virtù che la sublima'.<sup>44</sup> The lines 85-87 from *Paradiso* XXVI are quoted to support the idea that civilization has set off on an

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<sup>42</sup> The original tercet is: 'Voi vigilate ne l'eterno die, / sì che notte né sonno a voi non fura / passo che faccia il secol per sue vie' (*Purgatorio* XXX, 103-105).

<sup>43</sup> *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 January 1898, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Tassoni, 'La Federazione dell'Europa', p. 758.

ascendant route and is destined to successful and unrestrainable progress.

As we have seen, Chiappelli is of the same opinion and has a progressive view of history: concerning the century, he claims that the 'analisi di se stesso, la diagnosi delle proprie forze e della loro direzione e del fine a cui tendono'<sup>45</sup> would secure an informed self-analysis of the past and of the present and would pave the way for a brilliant future. However, he is also aware of the downside of this condition of prolonged and unceasing self-analysis:

Condizione, questa [l'autoanalisi], tormentosa e gloriosa ad un tempo; la quale se talora ritarda, quando non trattiene, le nostre energie creatrici nel mondo dell'arte e della vita, dà tuttavia ai nostri prodotti riflessi quella maturità di elezione consapevole che li rende più durevoli e saldi, nell'ordine del pensiero come in quello della vita. A noi anzi è lecito istituire questo esame di coscienza del secolo in grazia della stessa complicità e mutabilità di questo.<sup>46</sup>

I think that the two-fold perspective underpinning Chiappelli's reflection bears the signs of a double influence: a German and a French one. The former can be found in the stress laid on the process of self-examination and on art as a medium for self-consciousness, which have to be understood, once again, against the backdrop of the Hegelian philosophy. According to Hegel, self-recognition is a three-step process of which art is the first stage, followed by the religious and philosophical phase. As William Desmond suggests, according to the German philosopher 'the artist becomes conscious of himself, aesthetically self-conscious, in and through the work he has created', therefore art could be valued as 'a form of man's self-knowledge'. The main purpose of the aesthetic product is to foster man's self-contemplation,<sup>47</sup> indeed in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel maintains that art contributes to increasing man's self-knowledge, and that 'aesthetic innovation in modernity is inseparable from individual self-consciousness', as Andrew Bowie points out.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620.

<sup>46</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620.

<sup>47</sup> William Desmond, 'Art as "Aesthetic" and as "Religious" in Hegel's Philosophy of Absolute Spirit', in *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. by Peter G. Stillman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 170-196 (p. 173).

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 127.

### 1.3 Analytical spirit and malaise of the century

The greater level of maturity and 'elezione consapevole' of which artistic products are endowed is counterbalanced by the negative effects that the excess of self-reflection might have on creativity in the artistic field. This possible drawback is one of the factors identified by the commentators of the malaise of the second half of the nineteenth century as leading to a decay of the soul.<sup>49</sup> The fin-de-siècle is described by Chiappelli as a 'tempo in cui lo spirito d'analisi e il male del dubbio fanno talora vacillare la volontà e rendono spesso incapaci di operare' and therefore a moral decay is highly probable. Chiappelli reinforces this point by remarking that the presence of 'uno spirito critico che penetra in ogni forma del pensiero e in ogni atto della vita' is often conflicting with the 'spontaneità creatrice'.<sup>50</sup> The reference to the 'energie creatrici' and the 'spontaneità creatrice' entails an allusion to a form of art in particular, namely literature which is blamed for having a negative impact on real life when over-encouraging a self-analytical process (the implicit target of this critique is French literature, specifically the naturalist and the psychological novel, as we will soon explore more in depth).

In his essay Chiappelli praises *Fécondité* (1899), the recent novel by Zola, because it bears the signs of a progressive detachment of the French writer from the rigid naturalistic dictate. Chiappelli was not alone in criticizing the excessive determinism of Naturalism and in connecting it with a negative influence on the fin-de-siècle. Indeed, seven years before, in the conference speech 'Questa fin di secolo', held at the Circolo Filologico in Naples, the philologist and historian Ruggiero Bonghi advanced the same kind of criticism. Speaking about French novelists, he claimed:

Voglion sapere, farvi sapere, come una condotta di uomo o di donna si è sviluppata, per quali passi s'è fatta tale quale è bisognato che si facesse per generare quella serie di atti, di cui è tessuto il racconto. *Il forte o il debole di*

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<sup>49</sup> The literature about myths and fears of degeneration is extremely vast and tackles a variety of aspects addressing historical thought, politics, literature, and society. When commenting on specific elements relating to the degeneration rhetoric, we have referred to specific sources which we regularly mention and account for in the footnotes. For a more comprehensive overview of the degeneration discourse, see *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. by J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-c.1918* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Kelly Hurley, 'Hereditary Taint and Cultural Contagion: the Social Etiology of Fin-de-Siècle Degeneration Theory', *Nineteenth-century Contexts*, 14.2 (1990), 193-214; William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End. Studies in the European Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>50</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 623.

*cotesti scrittori o scrittrici è l'analisi del processo dell'agire umano. Per lo più è un agire perverso quello di cui vi vogliono rappresentare come sia succeduto. [...] Questo Romanzo, che non è più quello del Walter Scott nè del Manzoni, ha ucciso, si può dire, l'uomo per veder com'era fatto [...] Pure è questo prezioso germe del volere e del fare che cotesti romanzieri soffocano, presentando allo spirito d'analisi, per lo più immaginarie, capricciose, corrotte, false, di una natura umana che moncano e lasciano inerte, affranta, dubbiosa, esanime, dissanguata, povera, mollemente disperata e incuriosa di tutto.*<sup>51</sup>

The core of Bonghi's critique is the immoderate 'analisi del processo dell'agire umano' carried out by French naturalist writers, which results in two deleterious consequences concerning respectively the social and the literary level. As for the former, the criticism of the 'spirito d'analisi' and its overrated representation in French novels is regarded as the main origin of a general prostration of human will. This analytical spirit is considered dangerous on the social level, because it encourages an apathetic attitude and brings forth a negative portrait of the human nature, which is depicted as lifeless, exhausted, and involved in a degenerative process consistent with the one described by Max Nordau in his treaty *Degeneration*, which was published in the same years.<sup>52</sup> Concerning the literary level, the strong disapproval of the French novel should not surprise, especially if reconnected to the ideas expressed by Bonghi a decade before in *Perché la letteratura italiana non sia popolare in Italia* (1884) where he pays attention to French literature, and especially novels, and judges them very harshly. The critic underlines that the interest of the French writers in fully reconstructing the chain of motivations and impulses of human actions determined a twist in the history of the novel, leading towards a degenerate form of literature. By claiming 'questo Romanzo, che non è più quello del Walter Scott nè del Manzoni', Bonghi implicitly testifies his preference for Scott and Manzoni as opposed to the naturalist authors who are

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<sup>51</sup> Bonghi, *Questa fin di secolo*, pp. 16-18 [my emphasis]. The volume derives from a conference held at the Circolo Filologico in Naples, of which Bonghi was President of, on 11 December 1892.

<sup>52</sup> Bonghi was one of Nordau's many Italian popularizers. Nordau's most famous book was originally published in German in two volumes between 1892 and 1893 with the title *Entartung* 2 vols (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1892-93). The two volumes were promptly translated in Italian respectively in 1893 and 1894: Max Nordau, *Degenerazione - Versione autorizzata sulla prima edizione tedesca per G. Oberosler*, 2 vols (Milan: Dumolard, 1893-94). Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century the book was reissued twice: Max Nordau, *Degenerazione: Fin de siècle, il misticismo, l'egotismo, il secolo ventesimo. Traduzione dal tedesco di G. Oberosler*, 2 ed. riveduta sulla seconda originale con nuova prefazione in risposta a C. Lombroso (Turin: Bocca, 1896); Max Nordau, *Degenerazione: Fin de siècle, il misticismo, l'egotismo, il secolo ventesimo. Traduzione dal tedesco di G. Oberosler*, 3 ed. ridotta col consenso dell'autore (Turin: Bocca, 1907).

metaphorically described as having 'killed' man in order to grasp his profound essence.

The metaphor of the autopsy was a transnationally widespread *topos* in the nineteenth century literature that had success in the Italian literature also before the fin-de-siècle, suffice it to mention Arrigo Boito's *Lezione d'anatomia* (1865) and Camillo Boito's *Un corpo* (1870). It is interesting to remark a parallel between this image of human dissection carried out by means of the novel and a resembling analysis of the ending nineteenth century, very often described as 'dying' and 'agonizing'. The image of the *post-mortem* examination, often coupled with the one of the vivisection, reaches greater success in the late 1870s-1880s, when frequently employed by writers and critics of the kind of novel that massively affected the diffusion of the analytical spirit in the culture of the nineteenth century: the psychological novel.

The major representative of this literary trend in the 1880s is the French author Paul Bourget who made the application of psychology to the novel the main characteristic of his literary and critical production. In 1872, when exploring the entangled relationship between novel, psychology and 'esprit d'analyse', he claims: 'le roman offre cet avantage énorme qu'il permet de formuler avec netteté des hypothèses psychologiques', and then he clarifies that he considers the novel 'pas comme une œuvre d'art', but as 'une planche d'anatomie morale'.<sup>53</sup> Years later, in the dedication of his novel *André Cornélis* (1887), he draws on the same idea defining his work as 'une planche d'anatomie morale' and 'un roman d'analyse exécuté avec les données actuelles de la science de l'esprit'.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly enough, this dedication was originally a letter that Bourget addressed to the philosopher, historian and critic Hippolyte Taine. Indeed, the reference to the 'planche d'anatomie morale' and to the 'science de l'esprit' should be read in the light of the application of psychology to literature suggested precisely by Taine, according to whom literature should be intended as 'psychologie vivante'.<sup>55</sup> In his treatise *De l'intelligence*,<sup>56</sup> Taine claims that there is not such a fixed substance that we could name 'I'; the 'I' is described as a series of events ('petits faits') that follow one another in a Heraclitean perpetual process of becoming. In order to discern the essence of the human psyche, one should classify each single event, and analyse it, thus applying

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<sup>53</sup> The quotations are taken from Michel Mansuy, *Un moderne : Paul Bourget de l'enfance au Disciple* (Paris: Belles lettres, 1960), p. 154.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Bourget, *André Cornélis* (Paris: Lemerre, 1887), pp. VII-VIII.

<sup>55</sup> 'La littérature est une psychologie vivante' Bourget says in the preface of his *Essais* by quoting Taine (Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine. Édition définitive augmentée d'appendices*, Paris: Plon, 1920, p. XI); the same concept was already expressed in the essay about Taine present in the first edition of Bourget's *Essais* in 1883 (Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine. Baudelaire - M. Renan - Flaubert - M. Taine - Stendhal* (Paris: Lemerre, 1883), p. 225).

<sup>56</sup> Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, *De l'Intelligence* (Paris: Hachette, 1870).

to the 'science de l'esprit' the same methodology of natural sciences. In his time, Taine was regarded as one of the most respected philosophers of the Second French Empire and was also considered an inspirer of the Naturalism literary movement for his theories about 'race', 'milieu' and 'moment', and his thoughts about the 'documents humains'. Moreover, due to his application of psychology to literary criticism, he had a significant impact on psychologist novelists and critics, first of all on Bourget, who devoted one of his *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (1883) to him. Furthermore, Taine is a crucial figure because he is one of the very first critics to fully appreciate the author who could be considered the pioneer of the application of the self-analytical process in literature: Stendhal.

In the preface of his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863), Taine considers Stendhal 'le plus grand des observateur'<sup>57</sup> and argues: 'Il [Stendhal] expliquait les plus compliqués des mécanismes internes, [...] il mettait le doigt sur les grands ressorts, [...] il importait dans l'histoire du cœur [...] l'art de chiffrer, de décomposer et de déduire'.<sup>58</sup> Due to his original ideas, perhaps too premature for his time, Stendhal was considered too eccentric and was not appreciated by his contemporaries. Nevertheless, according to Taine, Stendhal's texts, which had been considered too obscure and bizarre for thirty years, were a noteworthy example of 'analyse intime' and still had a lesson to teach: 'c'est dans ses livres qu'on trouvera encore aujourd'hui les essais les plus propres à frayer la route que j'ai tâché de décrire'.<sup>59</sup> And if Taine had just tried to cut a path, Bourget had taken up the task, as acknowledged by Nietzsche, who considered Bourget Stendhal's 'most vital pupil'.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Bourget had a great appreciation towards Stendhal to whom he devoted one of his *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* (1883, reprinted with a new introduction in 1899). In a section of the essay titled 'esprit d'analyse', Bourget gives Stendhal credit not only for having refined the analytical method, but also for having employed it as a discovery method of the inner workings of the human soul. The critic regards those inner workings as the real 'heroes' of Stendhal's novels where the main characters – specifically Fabrizio del Dongo in *La*

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<sup>57</sup> Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, vol. I (Paris: Hachette, 1863), p. 495, note 1.

<sup>58</sup> Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, p. XLIV.

<sup>59</sup> Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, pp. XLIV-XLV.

<sup>60</sup> Talking about the 'rougistes' in a 1885 letter to Resa von Schirnhofen, Nietzsche writes: 'Dovrebbe esserci in Francia una sorta di entusiasti stendhaliani e, a quanto mi si dice, ve ne sono taluni che si fanno chiamare "rougistes". La pregherei di mettersi un po' sulle loro tracce [...] E cercate di fare la conoscenza dell'allievo più vitale di Stendhal, col Sign. Paul Bourget, e raccontatemi quali saggi ha scritto di recente (- qui a Nizza vi ho mostrato la raccolta dei suoi essays [*sic*] di psychologie contemporaine). A parer mio è davvero l'allievo di quel genio che i francesi hanno scoperto con quarant'anni di ritardo', quoted in Giuliano Campioni, 'Introduzione' to Paul Bourget, *Décadence. Saggi di psicologia contemporanea*, ed. by Francesca Manno, with an introduction by Giuliano Campioni (Turin: Aragno, 2007), pp. v-xxv (p. XXI).

*Chartreuse de Parme*, Octave de Malivert in *Armance* and Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le Noir* – put great effort into conducting a self-analysis of themselves in such minute detail, that Saint-Beuve considered them as ‘problèmes de mécanique morale’.<sup>61</sup> Stendhal used to carry out the same process on himself first of all, although this became known only about forty years after his death with the publication of his journal. In reviewing it, the critic and writer Federico De Roberto observes that ‘a leggere certe pagine di questo *Giornale* dell’autore, si prova l’illusione di aver per le mani uno dei suoi romanzi’, considering that ‘nella finzione artistica egli porta lo stesso interesse per tutto ciò che è analisi d’idee, di sentimenti, di volizioni; la stessa sincerità, a volta brutale, di confessione’.<sup>62</sup> The analytical inquiry that informs both Stendhal’s life and art started to be fully understood and appreciated only in the 1880s, precisely as the writer himself had foreseen; indeed, his *Œuvre posthume. Journal de Stendhal (Henri Beyle), 1801-1814*<sup>63</sup> was published in 1888. The publication of this work is the result of a revival in the interest in the writer who had not been valued by his contemporaries,<sup>64</sup> as testified by the negative remarks of influential writers and critics such as Saint-Beuve and Flaubert.

The later positive appraisal of Stendhal’s work stems from the fact that the strong interest in ‘la dissection intime’ is a typical characteristic of the second half of the century, as Bourget highlights: ‘et nous autres, qui venons après de lui [Stendhal] et souffrons comme lui de cette excessive acuité de l’esprit d’analyse, nous arriverions pour soutenir que les curiosités, ou plutôt les cas psychologiques, par lui décrits, sont bien les nôtres’.<sup>65</sup> Bourget brings into sharper focus this idea by stressing the brotherhood of all the ‘sons’ – both real and fictional –<sup>66</sup> of the nineteenth century: ‘et si nous aimons, nous, ces personnages, c’est qu’ils sont nos frères par ce mélange, presque impossible

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<sup>61</sup> The phrase is mentioned by Bourget in his essay about Stendhal (Bourget, *Essais*, 1883, p. 279).

<sup>62</sup> Federico De Roberto, ‘Il giornale di Stendhal’, *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 30 September 1888.

<sup>63</sup> Stendhal, *Œuvre posthume. Journal de Stendhal (Henri Beyle), 1801-1814*, ed. by Casimir Stryiński and François de Nion (Paris: Garnier-Charpentier, 1888).

<sup>64</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche argues that Stendhal was to be considered a forerunner: ‘Henri Beyle, quell’uomo singolare, anticipatore, precorritore, che con un “tempo” napoleonico passò attraverso la sua Europa, attraverso parecchi secoli dell’anima europea, come braccatore e scopritore di quest’anima – furono necessarie due generazioni per poterlo, in qualche modo, raggiungere, per decifrare alcuni degli enigmi che lo tormentavano’ (quoted in Campioni, ‘Introduzione’ to Bourget, *Décadence*, pp. v-xv (p. xix)). Actually, Stendhal’s reception by his contemporaries was more nuanced than is suggested by Nietzsche; for instance, Balzac was a great fan; however, a detailed analysis of Stendhal’s reception goes beyond the focus of the present work.

<sup>65</sup> Bourget, *Essais*, 1883, p. 281 [my emphasis].

<sup>66</sup> In a section of the essay devoted to *Le Rouge et le Noir* Bourget states that Stendhal had the final word about the group of the ‘enfants du siècle’: ‘J’admire plus encore la force d’analyse grâce à laquelle Stendhal a dit le dernier mot sur tout un group au moins de ceux que l’on appelait, après 1830, les enfants du siècle’ (Bourget, *Essais*, 1883, p. 319 [my emphasis]).

avant notre XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle si compliqué, de naturel et de raffinement, de réflexion et de sincérité, d'enthousiasme et d'ironie'.<sup>67</sup> The critic deems this mix of cultural trends unique to the nineteenth century and inconceivable in the previous times. In this 'competition' between epochs, the only partial exception is represented by the Renaissance, the only historical moment that is considered worthy of vying with the nineteenth century in terms of scientific and artistic achievements:

C'est parmi ces âmes que se recrute la légion des grands artistes modernes, et si nous sommes les rivaux des siècles plus jeunes, c'est par quelques œuvres où ces âmes ont fixé un peu de l'Idéal [...] dont les anges et les prophètes du plus profond visionnaire de la Renaissance, Léonard de Vinci, paraissent déjà éprouver les affres alliées. Il y a du Vinci dans Beyle, comme dans M. Renan, comme dans Baudelaire, comme dans Henri Heine, comme dans tous les épicuriens mélancoliques de cet âge étrange, où les métaux les plus précieux de la civilisation et de la nature se fondent, dans la tête de tout jeunes homes, ainsi qu'en un creuset incandescent et intelligent.<sup>68</sup>

'Les grands artistes modernes', such as Stendhal, Renan and Baudelaire – it is no chance that these are three of the five to whom Bourget devotes his *Essais* – are described as suffering from the same 'fièvre cérébrale'<sup>69</sup> which had infected the prophetic geniuses of the sixteenth century, such as Leonardo Da Vinci. The choice of the Italian scientist and artist as term of comparison stems from the outstanding spirit of analysis he was credited with, as Bourget had already stressed in a previous chapter by including Da Vinci amongst the 'grands analystes de la Renaissance'.<sup>70</sup> If on the one hand the analytical spirit has a positive impact on artists, on the other it has a weakening effect on the vast majority of people. Bourget describes the analytical spirit as a force that takes root in the human mind during the very early stages, as he aims to show through the metaphor of the nineteenth century as a crucible of civilization and nature where the crucible is placed in the 'head of youngsters'. The same *topos* is further exploited by Bourget in the description of the formation process of the 'esprit d'analyse':

Les enfants qui naissent parmi nous ont déjà dans les rides de leur petit

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<sup>67</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 285 [my emphasis].

<sup>68</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 288.

<sup>69</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 287.

<sup>70</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 60.

visage, et dans les plis de leurs inertes mains, l’empreinte définie d’un caractère. Ils bégayent, et la langue que leur nourrice leur apprend est déjà un instrument d’analyse affiné par des siècles de civilisation. Ils grandissent, et les livres d’étrennes qu’ils feuilletent déjà aux repliements de la conscience sur elle-même. Aucun contrepoids ne vient corriger ce que cette hérédité, jointe à cette éducation, imprime de profondément retors à la pensée. Les événements, autour de l’adolescence, se font de plus en plus rares. La spontanéité rencontre de moins en moins l’occurrence de s’exercer. A vingt ans donc, et lorsqu’au sortir de la lettre écrite nous abordons la vie, que nous le voulions ou non, notre âme est subtile et complexe, notre sensibilité n’est pas simple. Les moralistes peuvent déclamer contre précocités de l’esprit de recherche.<sup>71</sup>

Bourget tracks back the origins of the analytical spirit in childhood and then maps it out across adolescence and adulthood. The first analytical device children are familiarized with is language, the most powerful result of centuries of civilization; once language is mastered, it gives access to a superimposed level of reality through reading. This undoubtedly mind-opening activity is nevertheless regarded as more of a risky than an empowering exercise, because the universe of the possible worlds often ends up overcoming the real world, thus giving supremacy to the fictional dimension and encouraging social withdrawal.<sup>72</sup> When the threshold of adulthood is passed and one starts living one’s real life, the ‘intoxicating’<sup>73</sup> process of rumination he has been subject to for twenty years has endowed him with a level of sensitivity so high that he has already lost all sorts of spontaneity. Bourget argues that analysis operates as ‘un élément meurtrier de toute naïveté ou de toute sincérité’,<sup>74</sup> along the same lines of Chiappelli who, more than a decade later, stresses how the ‘spontaneità creatrice’ is

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<sup>71</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 287.

<sup>72</sup> In the preface of his *Essais*, Bourget describes a scene featuring a young man reading a book who voluntarily cuts himself off the rest of the world by ignoring the other people who are with him. Bourget claims that ‘les sages’, the so-called wise people, argue that the young man should enjoy his real life instead of obliterating himself in a fictional world, but he is of the opinion that, on the contrary, literature plays a crucial role in the moral life of society and should therefore be valued.

<sup>73</sup> Bourget talks about a process of ‘intoxication’, especially referring to Stendhal’s main novel: ‘J’ai dit que sa puissance d’analyse, sa sensibilité fremissante [...] avaient conduit Beyle à concevoir [...] quelques vérités profondes sur la France du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. *Le Rouge et le Noir* renferme l’énoncé le plus complet de ces vérités, – livre extraordinaire et que j’ai vu produire sur certains cervaux de jeunes gens l’effet d’une intoxication inguérissable’ (Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 309 [my emphasis]). The stress on the ‘young brains’ resounds the metaphor of the crucible that is placed in the ‘head of youngsters’ we came across before.

<sup>74</sup> Bourget, *Essais* [1883], p. 287.

seriously undermined by an overabundance of critical spirit. Chiappelli appreciates this downside, yet, as I have emphasized before, he also estimates the critical attitude as a beneficial result of the 'seme fecondo della coscienza critica'<sup>75</sup> and considers it a key-feature of the epoch: no century, he claims, had made a 'self-diagnosis' and outlined a material and moral account of itself as the nineteenth century did in the scientific, philosophical and literary field.

#### **1.4 'La smania distruttrice dell'analisi': the perils of the 'surfeit' of criticism**

The above-mentioned ambivalence towards the critical analysis is echoed by many authors of the time, among whom stands out the voice of the writer and critic Federico De Roberto. In 1900 he edited a collection of articles he had previously published between 1899 and 1900 in the *Corriere della Sera* and *Rivista di Roma*, and meaningfully titled it *Il colore del tempo* as it was expressly aimed at depicting the 'shades of the time'. According to De Roberto, every epoch should be regarded as a 'fleeting' moment, as an 'attimo fuggente; non già perché bello – noi siamo, ahimè! altrettanti Fausti a questo riguardo; – ma perché notevole, singolare ed insolito'.<sup>76</sup> In describing the singularity and uniqueness of the nineteenth century, De Roberto attaches great importance precisely to the practice of criticism by arguing the following:

In verità *questo secolo, se non fosse il secolo della scienza, sarebbe quello della critica*. [...] Certo il fenomeno si spiega con la grande facilità della critica paragonatamente [*sic*] alla difficoltà della creazione; ma poiché esso, quantunque antichissimo, *pure si è tanto aggravato ai nostri giorni*, conviene vedere se non c'è un'altra ragione, presente, attuale, che spieghi la recrudescenza.<sup>77</sup>

Criticism is described as a widespread activity practised both by experts and not-experts, and its dissemination is understood in the light of its relative easiness compared to the difficulties entailed in creating a new work of art. If, on the one hand, the above-quoted passage underpins a somehow negative judgment in agreement with the reserves expressed by Bourget and Chiappelli, which I have explored, on the other hand, it is balanced by a closer and more careful scrutiny of the question carried out by

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<sup>75</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620; cf. *supra*.

<sup>76</sup> Federico De Roberto, *Il colore del tempo* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1900), pp. 9-10.

<sup>77</sup> De Roberto, *Il colore del tempo*, p. 251 [my emphasis].

De Roberto in the article 'La Critica – A proposito di un critico' published in the *Corriere della Sera* three years before in 1897.<sup>78</sup> Here De Roberto had already introduced the idea of the nineteenth century as the century featuring a pervasive critical practice: 'non si dice che oggi si critica tutto, che il nostro secolo è il secolo della critica?'.<sup>79</sup> After having made a distinction between the misleading sense of 'censorship' commonly associated with the word 'critica' and its originally correct meaning of 'accurate perusal', De Roberto distinguishes two groups of critics: the ones who subjectively and improperly bring their own biases into their critical judgements, and the ones who objectively aim at explaining and reconstructing the works they examine. De Roberto applauds the latter group by praising the 'objective criticism', but at the same time he cannot help recognizing that professional criticism could be rather pernicious in itself, though being well practised. Recalling Taine's opinions, he answers the question 'what is a critic?' as follows: 'è un distruttore: la sua analisi minuta conduce al dubbio'; nevertheless, the question remains open, since he adds: 'certo, il dubbio è cosa sacra, e senza il dubbio la scienza non avrebbe avuto principio'.<sup>80</sup>

The same way of feeling torn also recurs in another essay of the collection *Il colore del tempo* titled 'Il secolo agonizzante' (the reference is, of course, to the nineteenth century). This essay was originally published as an article in the *Corriere della Sera* on 30-31 December 1898 with the title 'Studi sul secolo XIX' since it was a review of the volume *Nouvelles études sur le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* by the French writer and critic Édouard Rod. The book is a collection of Rod's essays about different authors,<sup>81</sup> and De Roberto specifically lingers over the critics. The old literary criticism is described as 'dead' and superseded by a new kind of scientific criticism pioneered by Hippolyte Taine and carried on by Émile Hennequin, which was based on a triple level of analysis: aesthetic analysis, psychological analysis and sociological analysis. De Roberto is slightly skeptical about this trident-like analytical examination obsessed with scientific paradigms, but he is way harsher with the opposite tendency towards a renaissance of idealism whose supporters are Antonio Fogazzaro, Octave Feuillet and the champion of

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<sup>78</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'La Critica – A proposito di un critico', *Corriere della Sera*, 6-7 November 1897.

<sup>79</sup> De Roberto, 'La Critica – A proposito di un critico'.

<sup>80</sup> De Roberto, 'La Critica – A proposito di un critico'.

<sup>81</sup> As stated in the subtitle, the volume concerns: 'Alphonse Daudet – M. Anatole France – Victor Hugo et nos contemporains – Emile Hennequin – M. Arnold Boecklin – Schopenhauer et ses correspondants – une tragédie de M. Sudermann – M. A. Fogazzaro – l'Idéalisme contemporain – Les Mœurs et la littérature d'information' (Paris: Perrin, 1898). The adjective 'new' is employed to distinguish this collection from a previous one entitled *Études sur le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* that was devoted, as indicated in the subtitle, to: 'Giacomo Leopardi – Les Préréphaélites anglais – Richard Wagner et l'esthétique allemande – Victor Hugo – Garibaldi – Les véristes italiens – M. E. de Amicis – La jeunesse de Cavour' (Lausanne: Payot, 1888 [2nd edn]).

the idealistic revival Ferdinand Brunetière, who had famously declared the 'banqueroute de la science'.<sup>82</sup> Through a meta-critical study of Rod's critical volume, De Roberto illustrates how both these approaches appear to be potentially specious in some respects and how they have been fostering a lively debate for a long time, although without reaching any kind of agreement. He also shows how rather than being disheartened by these seemingly ineffective arguments about the meta-level of artistic creation, writers engage more and more with criticism, so much that criticism is viewed as the way forward in literature. As Rod and De Roberto highlight, this is well testified by the French novelist, poet, and journalist Anatole France (1921 Nobel Prize for Literature-to-be) whose novels met with amazing success during the 1880s and 1890s due to them being largely imbued with critical discourse; indeed, the writer maintained that: 'La critica è in ordine di data l'ultima forma letteraria: probabilmente essa assorbirà tutte le altre'.<sup>83</sup>

The hybridization of literary genres was a widely talked-about controversial matter at the time. Rod himself adopts a double stance towards the issue as emerges from his *Le Sens de la vie*<sup>84</sup> published a decade before the *Nouvelles études sur le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. The work was acclaimed as a brilliant example of philosophical novel, as reported by De Roberto who reviewed it in the *Fanfulla della Domenica*: 'Eduardo Rod [...] sdegnava di scrivere un trattato di filosofia o un romanzo, ma [...] stampa il suo romanzo filosofico'.<sup>85</sup> The novel is a *mise en abyme* of the dilemma faced by the author himself about whether to write a novel or rather opt for a philosophical treaty; eventually, a more nihilistic solution is suggested: not to write at all. The reasons for this draconian stand are to be found – once again – in the side effects of the overindulgence in self-analysis. Talking about the protagonist of Rod's novel, De Roberto claims:

La filosofia è impotente; egli ne mette in caricatura i sistemi [...] Ciò di cui più soffre è [...] *la mania distruttrice dell'analisi. A forza di rivoltare il senso delle parole, a forza di interrogare il senso delle cose, ha visto disegnarsi troppe contraddizioni [sic] che vorrebbe rischiarare, e queste contraddizioni lo stimolano e lo perseguitano, costringendolo ad andare tastonando*

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<sup>82</sup> The phrase 'banqueroute de la science' comes from the famous article 'Après une visite au Vatican' by Ferdinand Brunetière, the main editor of the French *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 65.127, 1 January 1895, where the dawn of a new idealism era is announced.

<sup>83</sup> The quotation is taken from De Roberto's article (Federico De Roberto, 'Studi sul secolo XIX', *Corriere della Sera*, 30-31 December 1898).

<sup>84</sup> See Édouard Rod, *Le Sens de la vie* (Paris: Perrin, 1889).

<sup>85</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Il senso della vita', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 10 February 1889.

*nell'oscurità a cui è riuscito per aver acceso troppe luci. Allora, spaventato dagli effetti della sua critica, ma non potendo rifiutarne le conclusioni negative, pensa di scrivere un trattato per dimostrare che bisogna agire come se la critica non esistesse [...] Un romanzo sarebbe più adatto allo sviluppo di questa tesi: ma egli non ne scriverà né trattato né romanzo, e crede che farà meglio.*<sup>86</sup>

I have pointed out before how critics were considered 'destroyers' and how the only landing of a critical journey was an endless stream of doubt;<sup>87</sup> similarly, in the above-quoted passage, analysis is depicted as a 'smania distruttrice', leading only to never-ending contradictions. The protagonist of Rod's novel is portrayed as being relentlessly reflecting on himself and on the events occurring to him in the vain attempt of solving the inner contradictions of his soul. The adverse reaction he has to face is that instead of finding a way out, he becomes more and more tangled up in them and loses faith in his dreams of love, glory, and happiness. Analysis coupled with criticism guides him to extremely discouraging conclusions, as the metaphor of ending up in the dark after having lit too many lights well represents. However, he resolves to continue living by pretending he had never practised self-analysis. This 'resistance' decision jars with the solution hinted at by Rod some years earlier in his novel *La Course à la mort* published in 1885.<sup>88</sup> As the title suggests, the main character of this novel judges giving up life as the best option to relieve his malaise, which originates – anew – from an excess of analysis, defined by De Roberto in his review of the book as 'il sottile ed aguzzo strumento di tortura' that the hero mercilessly 'volge e rivolge contro sé stesso'.<sup>89</sup> The self-torture depends on the prevalence of the rational part over the sentimental one, which prompts the protagonist to see himself not as a person, but instead as a pure 'mécanisme', an idea which recalls the concept of the 'problèmes de mécanique morale' that Saint-Beuve used in his critique of Stendhal's heroes, as I have illustrated before.<sup>90</sup> Saint-Beuve's remark about reasoning being the real hero of Stendhal's novels might equally be applied to Rod's alter ego, who is a pure abstraction made up of the 'petis

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<sup>86</sup> De Roberto, 'Il senso della vita', [my emphasis].

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *supra* De Roberto's article 'La Critica – A proposito di un critico', *Corriere della Sera*, 6-7 November 1897.

<sup>88</sup> Édouard Rod, *La Course à la mort* (Paris: Frinzine, 1885).

<sup>89</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Romanzi e racconti. "La Corsa alla Morte" di E. Rod', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 16 August 1885.

<sup>90</sup> This does not surprise considering Rod's great interest in Stendhal's work testified by the book he entirely devoted to Stendhal in 1892 and subsequently reprinted several times (Édouard Rod, *Stendhal*, Paris: Hachette, 1892); see also Gian Carlo Menichelli, *Édouard Rod critico di Stendhal*, in *Studi di letteratura francese a ricordo di Franco Petralia* (Rome: A. Signorelli, 1968), pp. 147-156.

faits de conscience' – we could say using Taine's terms – and of whom we do not even know the name. Indeed, the novel is poor in terms of plot, but rich in accurate descriptions of the inner workings of the soul. Therefore, as stressed by De Roberto in his review, it could be classified as a 'libro di pura filosofia'<sup>91</sup> which testifies the ongoing shift of novels 'verso la pura analisi'.

This literary trend echoes a pessimistic current of thought in the philosophical field and mirrors the centrality of the self-analytical paradigm featuring the second half of the nineteenth century I have explored so far. The whole picture of this cultural panorama is effectively delineated by De Roberto in his review of Rod's novel *La Course à la mort* whence it is worthwhile recalling the following passage where the philosophy of history is at stake:

[Rod] ha raccolto in un fascio formidabile tutti gli argomenti su cui può contare la dottrina del pessimismo, ha scagliato contro la Vita, la gran *colpevole*, una *requisitoria* di fuoco, ammassando i *documenti*, chiamando a *deporre* la storia, che attesta come in ogni tempo gli uomini si sieno *querelati* del giuoco crudele di cui sono le *vittime*. In questo senso può dirsi che il Rod abbia fatto opera nuova, e si giustifica l'asserzione del De Biez che i libri come la *Corsa alla morte* appaiono solo ad ogni quarto di secolo. Egli è che ad *ogni quarto di secolo cambia la disposizione dominante negli spiriti*, è che opera di letterato, di filosofo e di storico a una volta il *contribuire a fissare in pagine definitive la fisionomia morale del proprio tempo*.<sup>92</sup>

The judiciary metaphor brilliantly sums up the typical fin-de-siècle moral feeling and is to be understood in the light of a pessimistic view in terms of philosophy of history. Man considers himself a victim of Life seen as guilty of having forced him to live a painful existence; in reaction, mankind lodges a complaint against Life, which is subject to a full-scale trial complete with proper bill of indictment and witnesses. The major witness is History, which takes the stand to testify how in every epoch mankind has sued Life charging it with the same criminal count. All the terms related to the judiciary field, such as 'vittima-colpevole', 'requisitoria', 'deposizione' and 'querela', bring to mind the metaphor concerning the same semantic field I have highlighted in Chiappelli's essay, although there are some differences between the two. Chiappelli

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<sup>91</sup> De Roberto, 'Romanzi e racconti. "La Corsa alla Morte" di E. Rod'.

<sup>92</sup> De Roberto, 'Romanzi e racconti. "La Corsa alla Morte" di E. Rod' [my emphasis].

employs the Hegelian image of the court of judgment where History does not appear as a witness, but instead as the judge who is liable to make mistakes, but who in the end manages to be finally just ('gran tribunale della storia, che, se anche a lunga scadenza e fra molti errori, riesce, come disse il filosofo tedesco, a rendere la giustizia finale').<sup>93</sup> In Rod's novel there is a recursive and ineffective complaint, while in Chiappelli's essay we find a more progressive view enlightened by the hope that ultimately there will be a place for justice. Despite these differences, the two authors share the same effort in striving to grasp the true meaning of their time which is the same 'time' (they write only fifteen years apart) if we believe what De Roberto and the French critic Jacques De Biez suggest, that is to say that the 'disposizione dominante degli spiriti' undergoes a profound change only every twenty-five years. Every intellectual, whether man of letters or philosopher or historian, is described as eager to comprehend the moral physiognomy of his epoch and to fix it in 'pagine definitive'.

This obsessive preoccupation of portraying the essence of the time and of 'il colore del tempo', we might say using De Roberto's words, was astonishingly popular. The writing-mania is publicly blamed by the Italian psychologist and sociologist Scipio Sighele who in an article titled 'Nell'arte, nella scienza e nella vita' published in *La Vita Internazionale* in 1899 examines the issue from a sociological perspective and points out that 'l'epoca attuale pare afflitta dalla "tarantola della penna", tanti sono coloro che sentono l'imperioso bisogno – e non avrebbero forse il diritto! – di dare alle stampe libri ed opuscoli'.<sup>94</sup> This habit is described as a chronic 'disease' that afflicts everyone – even those who most probably are not well-versed in the art of writing – pressed by the seemingly impelling need of passing on their own trouble to the entire society. On top of that, criticism increases in a hypertrophic way.

This obsession for writing is trans-nationally widespread and sought-after, as highlighted by the French writer and literary critic Antoine Albalat in his book *Le mal d'écrire et le roman contemporain* (1895).<sup>95</sup> Le 'mal d'écrire' is included amongst 'les maladies décadentes' and identified as one of the main features of the nineteenth century. Albalat maintains that 'à aucune époque cette épidémie n'a si violemment éprouvé le public' and elucidates the reasons of the exceptionality of this phenomenon by setting a thought-provoking contrastive comparison with the two previous

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<sup>93</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620.

<sup>94</sup> Scipio Sighele, 'Nell'arte, nella scienza e nella vita', *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 July 1899, 5-9 (p. 4).

<sup>95</sup> Antoine Albalat, *Le mal d'écrire et le roman contemporain* (Paris: Flammarion, 1895). Albalat was also the author of numerous works about writing, such as: *L'art d'écrire: ouvriers et procédés* (Paris: G. Havard fils, 1896); *La formation du style par l'assimilation des auteurs* (Paris: Colin, 1900); *Le Travail du style enseigné par les corrections manuscrites des grands écrivains* (Paris: Colin, 1903).

centuries:

Exceptionnelle autrefois et seul apanage des gens d'esprit, même au *dix-septième* siècle où l'on a publié tant de Mémoires et où la pédanterie littéraire fut si à la mode, la manie d'écrire est devenue aujourd'hui universelle parce qu'elle est en quelque sorte le résultat de notre civilisation. *Le dix-septième siècle* a été le triomphe du goût et de l'autocratie royale ; le *dix-huitième* a été le siècle de l'émancipation politique et religieuse ; *la démocratie et l'instruction à outrance caractériseront notre dix-neuvième siècle. On peut discuter si ce sera sa force ou sa faiblesse, mais je crois que c'est bien son originalité.*<sup>96</sup>

Albalat highlights that the writing-mania is a universal practice by the end of the nineteenth century, as also emphasized by Sighele, due to the high level of civilization reached in all cultural fields. The seventeenth century saw a conspicuous production of *mémoires* and literary texts that were, nevertheless, compiled with an aristocratic intention; the eighteenth century witnessed a process of emancipation in the political and religious field , which were finally unchained from the strict constraints of the previous epochs, but it is only in the nineteenth century that the triumph of democracy and the setting up of compulsory education allowed for a consistent and diffused upgrade in the cultural field. This transformation also affected and modified the perception of the sense of time by fostering a new historical awareness. The development of a widespread 'sens historique nouveau'<sup>97</sup> highlighted by Albalat coincides with the 'coscienza precisa della responsabilità che gl'incombe [al diciannovesimo secolo] dinanzi alla storia' of which Chiappelli would talk five years later. Similarly to Albalat, Chiappelli would set up a juxtaposition between the nineteenth century and the earlier ones and, as I have shown, he would bring into sharper focus the uniqueness of the former, as testified by the recurring insistence on phrases such as 'nessun altro secolo', 'ciò che mancava ai secoli precedenti'.<sup>98</sup> If the disseminated culture unquestionably gave the nineteenth century its 'originality', nevertheless it is subject to debate whether it made its force or rather its feebleness. 'La science s'est tellement élargie, les progrès matériels et les moyens de s'instruire ont si subitement activé *la soif de connaître*', Albalat points out, 'que les *esprits les plus ordinaires* se sont trouvés capables sans trop d'efforts, non pas de *bien savoir* certaines

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<sup>96</sup> Albalat, *Le mal d'écrire*, p. 2 [my emphasis].

<sup>97</sup> Albalat, *Le mal d'écrire*, p. 39.

<sup>98</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620.

choses, mais de *savoir beaucoup trop de choses*'.<sup>99</sup> Albalat further underlines that the quantity turns out to be detrimental to the quality: a large number of people can learn much more compared to the past, yet in a superficial way that would probably end up producing negative consequences in the long run. This belief is shared by Chiappelli who in 'Sul confine dei due secoli' reinforces that if it is true that liberal democracies break down differences among classes by promoting the dissemination of culture through compulsory education, it also true at the same time that they work as a 'forza adeguatrice' and end up obstructing 'quella concentrazione delle energie, dalla quale sorgono e nella quale si maturano le grandi figure nella vita del pensiero, dell'arte, e della società civile'.<sup>100</sup> These claims may be blamed for poorly concealing an elitist attitude, though they should also be interpreted as urged by a genuine and diffused concern for the general well-being of society.

A comparable anxiety could already be found in 1887 in the book *Il secolo nevrosico* by the physician, physiologist, and anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza. Bearing in mind Albalat's words about the risk of being bombarded with 'trop de choses', it is significant to remark the presence in Mantegazza's work of a section tackling precisely the same issues entitled 'L'ambiente del troppo' where the author ironically claims 'la scuola ci ha fatti nevrosici'.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly enough, this paragraph is next to a passage focused specifically on the 'Lavoro eccessivo e lavoro malfatto nell'educazione moderna' where the author criticizes the education system, which in the previous pages he had already roundly but also sarcastically condemned by claiming:

L'istruzione obbligatoria pone il sugello all'apoteosi del pensiero sopra tutte le altre forze umane, e malgrado la libertà data a tutti [...] nessuno è libero di essere ignorante. Liberi tutti; ma nessuno libero di non sapere leggere, nessuno libero di non aver libri [...] e di rifiutare il frutto dell'albero del bene e del male. Prometeo fu legato allo scoglio e divorato dall'avvoltoio per aver voluto sapere, Adamo scacciato dal Paradiso terrestre, perché volle mangiare di quel frutto. Oggi sarete invece punito, se rifiuterete quel frutto [...] Liberi sì, ma sapienti tutti; eguali sì, ma in biblioteca e nell'assemblea.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Albalat, *Le mal d'écrire*, p. 2 [my emphasis].

<sup>100</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 627.

<sup>101</sup> Mantegazza, *Il secolo nevrosico*, p. 60.

<sup>102</sup> Mantegazza, *Il secolo nevrosico*, pp. 52-53. As Sighele and Albalat, Mantegazza is ironic about the writing-mania that seems to be affecting everyone: 'una volta gli scrittori non erano che genii singolari e rarissimi; oggi chi non è autore di un bozzetto, di una commedia, di un articolo di giornale, pur che sia, non è un uomo civile' (Mantegazza, *Il secolo nevrosico*, p. 53).

The 'apotheosis of thought' over the other faculties is identified as a hallmark of the nineteenth century and as one of the reasons why the century is 'neurotic'. The same rhetoric grew stronger in the early 1890s, as testified by Vittorio Pica's insistence on this topic in his 1892 influential conference speech 'Arte aristocratica', which we will analyse more in depth in Chapter Five. Pica denounces neurosis as the 'terribile flagello del secolo nostro'<sup>103</sup> and describes the nineteenth century as a 'secolo malato di nevrosi',<sup>104</sup> a form of 'malattia spirituale'<sup>105</sup> deeply engrained in the fin-de-siècle culture. Historywise, Mantegazza tracks back the origins of this neurosis to the French Revolution and devotes several paragraphs to the scrutiny of the paradoxes that according to him are inherent to the values of 'liberté', 'égalité' and 'fraternité'. The above-quoted passage is to be interpreted precisely against the backdrop of this demystifying critique. He deliberately stretches the inner contradictions of those values to the extremes by arguing that, for the sake of equality, everyone is forced to receive a sound education and thus no one has the liberty of refusing to 'pick a fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Deeply rooted in the collective imagination, the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the Greek myth of Prometheus represent the human everlasting quest for knowledge, and Mantegazza refers to them in order to stress the contrast he sees between this symbolization of a genuine longing for knowledge and the thirst for knowledge artificially instilled in the nineteenth century society.

Mantegazza's closing remark 'liberi sì, ma sapienti tutti; eguali sì, ma in biblioteca e nell'assemblea' prompts us to rethink the statistics about public libraries and the Italian publishing market. Starting from the 1870s, the Italian book and journal industry saw a massive increase in terms of publications and reached out to a growing target readership; as a matter of fact, Mantegazza's words 'nessuno libero di non aver libri' is a parodistic way to acknowledge that, indeed, book sales were soaring and that the community of readers was expanding. This process was commonly held accountable for the moral uplifting of society and for the maturation of a collective and national consciousness; however, Mantegazza, as many other thinkers alike, perceived this overflow of books and journals as detrimental to men's psyche and even threatening to the equilibrium of the entire society. If Molmenti called for an expansion in the number of public libraries, Mantegazza mocks the belief that the process of civilization would eventually end up making all men equal, which he deems to be a false

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<sup>103</sup> Vittorio Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', in Vittorio Pica, *«Arte aristocratica» e altri scritti su naturalismo, sibiritismo e giapponismo (1881-1892)*, ed. by Nicola D'Antuono (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1995), pp. 243-270 (p. 244).

<sup>104</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 238.

<sup>105</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 244.

hope.

This two-faced stance towards the question of the diffused knowledge seems to lead to a harsh divergence between two opposite points of view. The key element to explain the coexistence of these two opposite visions is to be found in the changes that the politics and the poetics of reading were undergoing. As Lolla correctly observes,<sup>106</sup> writers felt dis-empowered when writing for the mass audience and were reluctant to give up their rights – which they felt as ‘exclusive’ – in favour of the empowerment of an ‘ordinary’ reader. Nevertheless, it is exactly this devolution of rights from authors to readers that marks the beginning of the literary modernity, as Spinazzola argues.<sup>107</sup> And indeed literary modernity started to be reached in Post-Unification Italy precisely thanks to compulsory education and to the ‘compulsory desire of possessing books’, we could say mimicking Mantegazza’s words.

New horizons were opened up and the public mind-set was deeply changed by the widespread thirst of knowledge that can be identified beyond any doubt as one of the chief hallmarks of the nineteenth century. It is indeed not by accident that, as I stressed earlier, in 1898 *La Vita Internazionale* chooses Dante’s tercet ‘Considerate la vostra semenza: / Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / Ma per seguir virtude e conoscenza [sic]’ (*Inferno* XXVI, lines 118-120) as the motto of the journal. And, similarly, it is indeed not by coincidence that in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* Bourget lingers over the effects of the process of civilization, along the same lines of Albalat, and highlights that it is precisely during the nineteenth century that ‘l’extrême civilization a peu à peu aboli la faculté de créer, pour y substituer celle de *comprendre*’ and then he comments that Virgil, ‘le plus moderne des anciens’, had a foreboding of this phenomenon ‘s’il a vraiment laissé tomber cette parole qu’une tradition nous a transmise: «On se lasse de tout, excepté de comprendre...»’.<sup>108</sup>

It is indeed not by chance that talking about Bourget and the psychological novel in vogue during the second half of the century, Nietzsche points out that this literary trend is grounded in a strong ‘*passione della conoscenza*’, in a peerless ‘disciplina critica [...] che conduce alla purezza e al rigore nelle cose dello spirito’, in ‘un piacere [...] nello smembrare, nonché una certa accorta crudeltà che sa usare il coltello con sicurezza ed eleganza, anche quando il cuore sanguina’.<sup>109</sup> The ‘passion for knowledge’ is depicted as

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<sup>106</sup> See Lolla, ‘Reader/Power: The Politics and Poetics of Reading in Post-Unification Italy’.

<sup>107</sup> See Vittorio Spinazzola, ‘Da romanzo popolare alla narrativa di intrattenimento’, in *Manuale di letteratura italiana*, vol. IV, ed. by Franco Brioschi and Costanzo di Gerolamo (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993), pp. 635-700.

<sup>108</sup> Bourget, *Essais*, 1883, p. 61 [my emphasis].

<sup>109</sup> The quotation is taken from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*, quoted in Campioni, ‘Introduzione’ to Paul Bourget, *Décadence*. p. XVI.

an agonizing and ungovernable hunger that needs to be assuaged, even if it entails a (metaphorical) component of self-harm. Commenting on the *Essais*, De Roberto also refers to the same metaphor when remarking Bourget's concern of conducting an accurate examination with 'un occhio clinico straordinariamente penetrante'.<sup>110</sup> Here, again, we come across the metaphor of vivisection I have referred to previously in this chapter when dealing with the psychological novel.

The medical examination imagery also recurs in the volume that could be considered one of the most important works of reference concerning the study of the nineteenth century published at the time: *Une maladie morale: le mal du siècle*, published in 1880 by Paul Charpentier. Among the causes of the malaise of the century Charpentier attaches great importance exactly to the insatiable thirst for knowledge and to the surfeit of self-analysis I have tackled so far. In his review of this volume, De Roberto emphasizes these two elements when commenting on the chapters that Charpentier devotes to Flaubert and Baudelaire. Concerning the former, De Roberto recalls that Flaubert was somehow used to the 'spettacolo quotidiano della distruzione dell'essere', insofar as he had seen 'squartare i cadaveri sul tavolo anatomico di suo padre, un grande chirurgo'<sup>111</sup> before starting his career as a writer. Regarding Baudelaire, De Roberto alongside Charpentier summons up that the poet maudit used to abandon himself in 'orgie [sic] dei sensi e dello spirito' spurred by 'la furia di godere e di comprendere, caratteristica del nostro tempo [...] quanto più acuto è lo spirito di analisi'.<sup>112</sup> Again, 'la furia di comprendere' and 'l'[acuto] spirito di analisi' are indicated as outstanding features of the nineteenth century. In his massive volume, Charpentier scrutinizes in depth especially the former and maps out its development throughout the centuries starting from antiquity and the early-Christian period; he identifies the beginning of the 'modern way' of conceiving the self-analysis in the works by Goethe, Rousseau and Chateaubriand and outlines a *fil rouge* stretching from *Werther* to *René* and *Les Mémoires d'outre-tombe* passing through the needle's eye of the *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*.

## 1.5 Conclusions: 'esser nato troppo tardi o troppo presto'

In thinking precisely of the Romantic hero Chateaubriand, deviser of the 'mal de siècle' notion, a passage from *Les Mémoires d'outre-tombe* comes to mind that perfectly tallies with Chiappelli's essay 'Sul confine dei due secoli' from which we started the present

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<sup>110</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Psicologia contemporanea', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 21 February 1886.

<sup>111</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Intermezzi. Una malattia morale', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 28 July 1888.

<sup>112</sup> De Roberto, 'Intermezzi. Una malattia morale' [my emphasis].

analysis:

Je me suis rencontré entre deux siècles, comme au confluent de deux fleuves; j'ai plongé dans leurs eaux troublées, m'éloignant à regret du vieux ravage où je suis né, nageant avec espérance vers une rive inconnue.<sup>113</sup>

The feeling of being 'sul confine', 'on the edge' between two centuries is brilliantly portrayed by this image. Although it refers to the turn between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century – which Manzoni had viewed as 'due secoli, / L'un contro l'altro armato' – the man of the nineteenth century could still relate to this simile at the dawn of the twentieth century, because in the end 'il secolo decimonono non è poi tanto singolare quanto sembra; si può dimostrare che somiglia non poco al diciottesimo, e si può scommettere che il ventesimo gli somiglierà', as De Roberto argues in his article 'Studi sul secolo XIX'.<sup>114</sup> Despite the controversial opinions about the connections linking Romanticism and Decadentism, emphasized on the one hand by critics like Mario Praz but denied, on the other, by critics like Walter Binni,<sup>115</sup> it is possible to observe a certain proximity between Chateaubriand's bewilderment at the turn of the eighteenth century and the bewilderment due to the feeling of 'esser nato troppo tardi o troppo presto'<sup>116</sup> lamented at the turn of the nineteenth century by many contemporaries of D'Annunzio, who described such an upsetting feeling by saying that many felt trapped in a time of 'decadenza irreparabile' and puzzled by the distress deriving from the fear of running out of time or, on the contrary, of being too ahead of time. As Judith Schlanger had remarked, it was widespread the feeling of being born 'trop tôt ou trop tard dans u univers qui n'est pas le bon' while 'on revendique d'être étranger à son temps'.<sup>117</sup> As Koselleck remarked,<sup>118</sup> the classic idea of the 'Historia

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<sup>113</sup> François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe; nouvelle édition avec une introduction, des notes*, ed. by Edmond Biré, in François-René de Chateaubriand, *Œuvres complètes de Chateaubriand*, tome 17 (Nendeln: Kraus reprint, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>114</sup> Federico De Roberto, 'Studi sul secolo XIX', *Corriere della Sera*, 30-31 December 1898.

<sup>115</sup> 'La parte maggiore di questo volume', Mario Praz wrote in the introduction to his volume *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica*, 'si propone di studiare la letteratura romantica (di cui il decadentismo della fine del secolo scorso non è che lo svolgimento)' (Mario Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (Florence: Sansoni, 1948 [3rd expanded edn]), p. xi); on the contrary, according to Walter Binni there is no authentic continuity between Romanticism and Decadentism (cf. Walter Binni, *La poetica del decadentismo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968 [1st edn, 1949 and 1936 with the title *La poetica del decadentismo italiano*]), pp. 16-17, p. 44).

<sup>116</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', *Nella vita e nell'arte*, 23 June 1893, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, ed. and with an introduction by Annamaria Andreoli, texts gathered by Giorgio Zanetti (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp. 201-207 (p. 201).

<sup>117</sup> Judith Schlanger, 'Le moment présent dans les philosophies de l'histoire', in *L'Invention du XIXe siècle. Le XIXe siècle par lui-même (littérature, histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre

Magistra Vitae' had ceased to be valid in the first half of the nineteenth century, the reason being that the present was incommensurable with the past. The only response could become, a then-contemporary wrote, 'giudici di noi stessi' and becoming aware of 'quegli errori, di quelle follie, di quelle contraddizioni, di quelle nequizie' of which 'abbiamo piena coscienza'; he concluded 'la sorte non ci ha fatto, proprio, un regalo mettendoci a cavallo a due secoli, che devono essere, necessariamente, l'uno contro l'altro, armati'.<sup>119</sup>

This feeling of malaise described by D'Annunzio was coupled with an 'eccesso della vita cerebrale'<sup>120</sup> which he considered, in the wake of Taine whose philosophy we have previously explored, as a 'fondamentale ingrediente dello *Zeitgeist*' of the late nineteenth century.<sup>121</sup> In *Il Piacere* (1889) D'Annunzio makes Andrea Sperelli undergo a self-confession imbued with Romantic-evoking *topoi* and, at the same time, of the end-of-the-century obsession for self-analysis which in *L'Innocente* (1892) he would push even further when working on the character of Giorgio Aurispa tormented by the excess of 'terribili facoltà analitiche'.<sup>122</sup> There appears to be no univocal way of interpreting the 'bilancio' of the century: for those equipped with a progressive view of the present and the future, the burden of the historical and moral legacy of the nineteenth century was bearable; on the contrary, for those who have a more decadent-oriented and pessimistic view that burden was too heavy. There is no agreement about the time that 'In mille forme, in mille avvolgimenti / Muti e trasmuti al guardo degli umani';<sup>123</sup> however, every single opinion is worth being taken into consideration to draw a complete profile of the self-consciousness of that epoch since every 'vague anticipation of the century's end' could become 'an active agent for historical thought', as Schwartz pointed out.<sup>124</sup>

It is precisely through the blending and the clashing of different views about the century's turn that the concept of the fin de siècle was formed as a 'historical narrative'. I am borrowing this expression from the work of the historically oriented literary critic

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Georgel, Stéphane Guégan, Stéphane Michaud, Max Milner, and Nicole Savy (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. 125-140 (p. 130).

<sup>118</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, 'Historia Magistra Vitae: the dissolution of the topos into the perspective of a modernized historical process', in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 26-42.

<sup>119</sup> Giuseppe Cimbali, *L'agonia del secolo* (Rome: Casa editrice italiana, 1902 [1st edn 1899]), pp. 35-36.

<sup>120</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Per la gloria d'un vecchio', *Il Mattino*, 26-26 July 1892, in D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, pp. 47-51 (p. 51).

<sup>121</sup> We will analyse more in detail D'Annunzio's relationship with time in Chapter Five.

<sup>122</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, *L'Innocente*, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Prose di romanzi*, vol. I (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1964), p. 428.

<sup>123</sup> Francesco Bonavita, 'Al tramonto del secolo', *La Vita Internazionale*, 20 December 1900, 753-754 (p. 753).

<sup>124</sup> Schwartz, *Century's End*, pp. 162-163; cf. *supra*.

Hayden White according to whom ‘the historical narrative [...] reveals to us a world that is putatively “finished,” done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only *imagine*, never experience”.<sup>125</sup> White’s words perfectly describe the stance towards history adopted by many of the authors and works addressed in the present chapter. And along the same lines, the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander highlights that: ‘Every historical period needs a *narrative* that defines *its past in terms of the present*, and suggests a *future that is fundamentally different*, and typically “even better”, than contemporary time’.<sup>126</sup> By defining the role of intellectuals as interpreters of the different phases of history, Alexander also points out that:

If intellectuals are to define the ‘meaning’ of their ‘time’, they must identify a time that preceded the present, offer a morally compelling account of why it was superseded, and tell their audiences whether or not such a transformation will be repeated vis-à-vis the world they live in.<sup>127</sup>

The creation of a ‘narrative’ is exactly what the authors whose works I have explored in the present chapter were seeking to achieve while interpreting the legacy of the past in the light of their present condition, and by attempting to foreshadow their future.

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<sup>125</sup> Hayden White, ‘The value of narrativity in the Representation of Reality’, in *On Narrative*, ed. by William J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 1-25, p. 20 [original emphasis].

<sup>126</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Fin de Siècle. Social Theory. Relativism, Reduction, and the Problems of Reason* (London-New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 10-11 [my emphasis].

<sup>127</sup> Alexander, *Fin de Siècle. Social Theory*, p. 13.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Century and the Fin de siècle as psychologically necessary time divisions

*C'è pure alcunché di effettivamente vero in questa coscienza che abbiamo del chiudersi che fa un periodo storico e dell'aprirsi uno nuovo.<sup>1</sup>*

#### 2.1 The turn of the century between calculation conundrums and ominous forebodings

The present and the following chapter should be considered together, as they both examine how the turn of the century impacted time perception, albeit by focusing on different aspects. The present chapter explores the value of the century as a 'psychological necessary division' and offers an overview of the foreign and Italian debates revolving around the actual beginning of the twentieth century, while also investigating the forebodings – both stemming from science and religion – which soon entered the discourse and the rhetoric about the dying century. Chapter 3 provides a close-up of the Italian political, economic, and social end-of-the-century context, and highlights specific times which were perceived as turning points; finally, the conclusions suggest an overarching theoretical frame accounting for the ways in which these time divisions were experienced by the then-contemporaries.

In 1901, the author of the article 'Our annus mirabilis' of the *California University Chronicle* stated: 'our centuries, as we know, are mere fortuitous units of measure'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a decade earlier, an editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* had admitted: 'we are apt to forget that a century is a purely arbitrary division, so that there can be no moral or material difference between 1900 and 1901'.<sup>3</sup> Across the ocean, the editor of the London based *Fun* voiced a different opinion and emphasized the importance of what the journalist of the American periodical had called 'fortuitous units of measure', by stating that: 'the people who tell us that a century is merely an arbitrary division of time with no ethical significance are poor observers'.<sup>4</sup> One year earlier, a similar stance had been taken in 'Sul confine dei due secoli' by Chiappelli, who affirmed:

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 621).

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius B. Bradley, 'Our annus mirabilis', [*California*] *University Chronicle*, 4 (1901), 148.

<sup>3</sup> [Unsigned] 'Fin de siècle', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 67 (1891), 859-860 (p. 860).

<sup>4</sup> [Unsigned] 'The Dramaphone', [London] *Fun*, 73.1861, 12 January 1901, 22.

Ragionando di un secolo come di un periodo in se stesso compiuto, noi obbediamo, senza dubbio, ad una convenzione cronologica che ha della comodità artificiale, sebbene psicologicamente necessaria. Ma c'è pure alcunché di effettivamente vero in questa coscienza che abbiamo del chiudersi che fa un periodo storico e dell'aprirsi di uno nuovo; poiché quando parliamo d'un secolo, non adopriamo soltanto un simbolo d'orientamento, bensì esprimiamo un ritorno periodico nella continuità del tempo, una pausa nel pulsare perenne della vita del genere umano.<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand, he acknowledged that the century was a 'chronological convention' and that the change of figures in the calendar was not going to produce a tangible effect; however, on the other hand, he stressed that the calendar number-change would exert a substantial impact on a psychological level. To master the uninterrupted time flow, or at least to have the impression – or rather the illusion – of doing so, its continuity needed to be subdivided into centuries which worked as 'ritorni periodici', Chiappelli stated with a phrase echoing Vico. As we have seen in Chapter One, this psychological necessity was, indeed, pressing and felt highly symbolical. In the above-quoted passage, Chiappelli explored more in depth the value of this symbol and of the century-time division, which he considered two-fold: firstly, he emphasized that the century worked as a 'simbolo d'orientamento', which was deemed crucial to keeping track of historical time; secondly, he stressed that the end of this time lapse was conceived, in itself, as a symbol, as it worked as a disruptive and yet necessary 'pause' in the relentless 'pulsare perenne' of the life of humankind, a point of view which can be added to the ones expounded in the several studies on the history of time perception.<sup>6</sup>

'Verità o artificio, fatto universale o particolare, circostanza permanente o fuggevole, alla distinzione del tempo in secoli noi attribuiremo, già, per un adattamento, che dura da lungo [...] un valore reale, quasi un'anima ed un corpo. È vano negarlo', wrote author Giuseppe Cimbalì in his volume *L'agonia del secolo*.<sup>7</sup> 'Sul finire di questi periodi artificiali, che noi abbiamo segnati, eppure ci si impongono con un non so che di

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<sup>5</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 621.

<sup>6</sup> See Francesco Maiello, *Storia del calendario. La misurazione del tempo, 1450-1800* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994); Alfred W. Crosby, *The measure of Reality. Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *The Oxford companion to the year. An exploration of calendar customs and time-reckoning*, ed. by Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Stevens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Leofranc Holford-Stevens, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005). See also Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: the social analysis of time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Giuseppe Cimbalì, *L'agonia del secolo* (Rome: Casa editrice italiana, 1902 [1st edn 1899]), p. 27.

fatale, c'è veramente qualche cosa che muore, cioè una forma caratteristica di vita sociale giunta all'estremo ed esaurita',<sup>8</sup> wrote Professor Pier Luigi Chelotti in a conference titled 'Fin de siècle', which he delivered on 2 May 1895. Chelotti emphasized the 'artificiality' of time boundaries (which shows that the same feature, which Chiappelli discussed in 1900, had already been part of the debate on the century for quite some time). This 'artificialità', nonetheless, went hand in hand with a certain 'fatalità', Chelotti highlighted. By 'fatalità' he meant that the century's turn was bound to happen and was an ineluctable occurrence, coming together with substantial weariness of energies and the end of a certain type of society and human relationships as conceived until then. The reference to the 'vita sociale giunta all'estremo ed esaurita' shall be framed within the fin-de-siècle rhetoric and understood as a social and cultural concern with decadence – here we employ the term in its etymological sense and not only as a reference to the homonymous literary trend which we will address closely in Chapter Five. The turn of the century consisted in 'l'addio al passato e il presagio dell'avvenire, tramonto e crepuscolo insieme', Chelotti added, and his choice of the word 'crepuscolo' is a sign of him having in mind – although not openly mentioning – the debate launched by Nordau a few years earlier in *Degeneration* about the 'crepuscolo dei popoli'.<sup>9</sup> Although the Western world shared the same anxiety about the century's turn, there was no agreement about the exact timing in which this 'dusk' and 'sunset' would take place. Some people rightfully waited until 1901 to celebrate the arrival of the twentieth century, whereas others paid less attention to the mathematics of historical counting and considered the year 1900 as already marking the beginning of a new age: in fact, they deemed that the passage of the hundreds from eight to nine on the calendar was a change whose symbolical meaning was powerful enough to afford them permission to overlook the year calculation accuracy.

A correspondent of *The Illustrated London News* lamented 'the unreasoning habit of arithmetic, which will not allow a hundred to be ninety-nine'; concurrently, in *The Times* many asked for the start of the century to be on 1 January 1900, which, being a Monday, would have been a perfect start; to those who disagreed, the former replied by saying that 'a short Act of Parliament' should have settled the question by formally

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<sup>8</sup> Pier Luigi Chelotti, *Fin de siècle. Conferenza tenuta il 2 Maggio 1895 nel R.[egio] Collegio Principe di Napoli in Aosta* (Aosta: Tipografia Luigi Mensio, 1895), pp. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Max Nordau, *Degenerazione – Versione autorizzata sulla prima edizione tedesca per G. Oberosler*, vol. I (Milan: Dumolard, 1893), pp. 3-15. It must be emphasized that Chelotti delivered his speech in 1895 and that the Italian translation of Nordau's *Degeneration* had been issued the previous year, hence its memory in the scholarly community was enjoying its position on the crest of the wave and was at the centre of countless debates.

establishing 1900 as the new century's beginning date.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1896, *The London Times* as well as *The New York Times* had launched a survey on when the twentieth century would actually start and received a high number of responses, so many that in 1900 *The London Times* picked the question up again, and from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> January published around sixty letters that it had received from its readers on the issue.<sup>11</sup> In most of Europe – Italy included – the first day of the twentieth century was considered 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901, except in the German Empire and in the Kingdom of Prussia, where the Kaiser Wilhelm II used his power – and his decision was supported by the king of Sweden – to decree that 31<sup>st</sup> December 1899 was to be regarded as the last day of the nineteenth century and that the new century should be welcomed on 1 January 1900 with the firing of thirty-three guns.

The problem of when the hundred years would exactly be over was indeed troublesome and the question was referred to as the 'battle of the centuries', as Arthur Hobhouse titled an article which appeared in the English *The Contemporary Review* in January 1900. Hobhouse compared the debate about the turn of the nineteenth century with the lively debate that took place at the end of the seventeenth century and concluded ironically by stating that the very same questions would very likely be found again at the turn of the twenty-first century, in a sort of never-ending cycle.<sup>12</sup> He drew on the survey held by *The London Times* and compared it with a similar debate, which had occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, with the difference that after this 'controversy abated', 'there was no great disturbance of the peace till there came the fatal change of eighteen into nineteen, which caused the same amount of bewilderment'.<sup>13</sup> Despite what arithmetic and usage hold, there have been circumstances in human history in which people had not hesitated to modify time counting, such as what happened in France after the French revolution, when the National Convention 'ordained a new era' and people 'did not think of postponing their year 1 till after an unnumbered year had elapsed'.<sup>14</sup> Another difference with the debate on the century which had occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century, was that back then it involved a restricted circle of erudites and scholars and was not at all comparable to the magnitude of the debate going on in 1900. In this respect, in the

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<sup>10</sup> L. F. [sic] Austin, 'Our Note Book', *The Illustrated London News*, 6 January 1900, 2; Alfred Austin, 'The passing of the Century', *The London Times*, 31 December 1900.

<sup>11</sup> See 'When the century begins', *The New York Times*, 20 September 1896, followed by the letters to the editor on 23, 27, 29, 30 September 1896, then on 1 and 2 October and then 15 December 1899; see also 'Letters to the editor', *The London Times*, 1-6 January 1900.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Hobhouse, 'The battle of the centuries', *The Contemporary Review* (March 1900), 397-410; at the bottom, the article however bears the indication 'January 1900' (p. 410).

<sup>13</sup> Hobhouse, 'The battle of the centuries', p. 399.

<sup>14</sup> Hobhouse, 'The battle of the centuries', p. 409.

above-mentioned article of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the contributor sarcastically stated: 'I see no trace of our grandfathers considering their times exceptionally bad, or of their being anxious to reach 1801'.<sup>15</sup>

In Italy the question had been at the centre of a similar debate, which generated publications expressly devoted to the question about the actual starting date of the century. Despite acknowledging that the emphasis which was put on the issue was unprecedented, some of these publications openly reconnected to the polemics which had occurred a century earlier, such as *Il 1900 se sia l'ultimo anno del secolo 19. o il primo del secolo 20.: ristampa di un opuscolo pubblicato per analoga questione nel 1800* (1899).<sup>16</sup> Other texts addressed the issue with specific reference to the turn of the twentieth century, such as *Fine del secolo 19. e principio del 20., quando!!!* or *I tre augurii del nuovo anno 1899 fine di secolo*.<sup>17</sup> The subject had been discussed in newspapers and often occupied front pages throughout all of 1899. On 28 December 1899, the foreign correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera* telegraphed from Berlin that 'l'Imperatore ha dichiarato che il secolo nuovo principia col primo gennaio del 1900, e per non perdere tempo, il ben venuto solenne al «nuovo secolo» si dovrà dare alla mezzanotte'.<sup>18</sup> The journalist described all the arrangements that had been made in Germany to hail the new century at midnight of 31 December 'con pompa straordinaria e grande numero di persone' and specified that the Kaiser had not only invited to the new century's celebrations 'gli ambasciatori delle grandi Potenze' and 'i funzionari superiori', but had extended the invitation also to 'tutti i capi delle missioni diplomatiche, tutti gli addetti militari e tutti i signori che vengono invitati a Corte'.<sup>19</sup> The journalist did not comment openly on the ostentatious *grandeur* of these celebrations and on the reasons driving the Kaiser's choice of holding the New Year's festivities so ahead of time compared to other countries of the Western world 'in barba ai calcoli di tutti i matematici ed anche di chi semplicemente va sicuro che una centuria qualsiasi deve cominciare dall'uno', as he ironically wrote, but hinted that the idea behind such a stance was that the renewed German Empire should be the first to welcome the twentieth century – which was the

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<sup>15</sup> [Unsigned] 'Fin de siècle', *The Atlantic Monthly*, p. 860.

<sup>16</sup> [Unsigned] *Il 1900 se sia l'ultimo anno del secolo 19. o il primo del secolo 20.: ristampa di un opuscolo pubblicato per analoga questione nel 1800* (Rome: Tipografia vaticana, 1899).

<sup>17</sup> Andrea D'Ettore, *Fine del secolo 19. e principio del 20., quando!!!* (Naples: Stab. Tip. di Michele Gambella, 1899); Andrea Busiri Vici, *I tre augurii del nuovo anno 1899 fine di secolo* (n.p.: s.n., 1899).

<sup>18</sup> Y [Ernesto Gagliardi], 'Il principio del «nuovo secolo» a Berlino', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 December-1 January 1899. It is highly likely that the author of this article is the journal Ernesto Gagliardi, who used to sign his articles simply with the letter "Y" and who was appointed *Corriere della Sera*'s Berlin correspondent by the *Corriere della Sera*'s founder Eugenio Torelli Viollier (cf. *Il «Corriere» e la costruzione dello Stato unitario. Documenti, 1876-1899*, ed. by Alberto Malfitano (Milan: RCS Libri, 2011), p. 261).

<sup>19</sup> Y [Ernesto Gagliardi], 'Il principio del «nuovo secolo» a Berlino'.

first century to see the newly united German nation. The front page of the same issue of the *Corriere della Sera* bore a two-column article titled 'Il secolo ventesimo comincia il primo gennaio del 1901', which discussed the erroneous belief that the new century would start in 1900. The author openly expressed his disagreement with the Kaiser's stance and equally with the President of the Italian Senate, Saracco, who, during the beginning-of-the-year greetings' speech, which he had addressed to King Umberto I at the beginning of 1899, had declared that 1899 was the last year of the century, a point of view which, in light of Saracco's stand, was shared by the vast majority of Italians. The journalist shared with his foreign colleagues the feeling that the discussion about the end of the century had reached a level of feverish tension, as testified by the sarcastic emphasis he put on the 'millesimo di milionesimo di milionesimo di minuto secondo' that was supposed to denote the closure of an age and to herald the dawn of a new era: 'quando si sprofonderà nella notte dei secoli quel millesimo di milionesimo di milionesimo di minuto secondo che dividerà un anno dall'altro, finirà un secolo e ne comincerà un altro'.<sup>20</sup> The journalist had already tackled the question in January of the same year, and his article had spurred a debate and prompted many readers to send him letters to engage in the discussion, similarly to what had happened abroad in the New York or London periodicals, as we have seen. In this January article 'Il secolo XX comincerà l'1 gennaio 1901', bearing almost a homonymous title to the December one, he manipulated the received letters, in light of the fact that they mostly expressed an opinion contrary to his own.<sup>21</sup> The article is a detailed and extensive account – that drew on a report released by the Académie française – of the reasons why the opinion according to which the century started on 1 January 1901 – made clear in the title – was deemed correct. The article also supplied a chart to help readers do calculations so that they could verify the truthfulness of the statement by themselves.

The support to 'Sua Maestà l'Aritmetica' against 'Sua Maestà' the Emperor of Prussia's stance on the issue,<sup>22</sup> was also expressed by Ottavio Zanotti Bianco in the front page of the daily newspaper *La Stampa* on 1 January 1901. 'Dunque coll'anno 1901 siamo entrati nel secolo ventesimo, e non c'è dubbio, *Roma locuta, causa finita* [...] e in questo caso', Zanotti Bianco added, 'Roma non è soltanto il Vaticano; ma il *Bureau des Longitudes*, del quale fa parte Poincaré, il più grande fra i matematici viventi; e la massima parte delle Società astronomiche del mondo'.<sup>23</sup> By drawing on the reports

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<sup>20</sup> a. b. [Bione], 'Il secolo ventesimo comincia il primo gennaio del 1901', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 December-1 January 1899.

<sup>21</sup> Bione [*sic*], 'Il secolo XX comincerà l'1 gennaio 1901', *Corriere della Sera*, 13-14 January 1899.

<sup>22</sup> a. b. [Bione], 'Il secolo ventesimo comincia il primo gennaio del 1901', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 December-1 January 1899.

<sup>23</sup> Ottavio Zanotti Bianco, '1901', *La Stampa*, 1 January 1900.

released by this and other international astronomical societies, the journalist provided details about the movements of the planets and hoped for the beginning of the twentieth century to bring a groundbreaking astronomical discovery similar to the one that had marked the beginning of the nineteenth century in 1801, when the Italian astronomer Giuseppe Piazzi had identified a still unstudied star which, on New Year's Eve 31 December 1801, turned out to be in fact a planet. The discovery of this planet, named Ceres, was deemed as highly symbolical in terms of time perception, and can be considered, as Schwartz has remarked, a 'keynote' to 'the end of 19th century, whose citizens looked out [...] with a dreadful curiosity, and who found themselves caught up in the toils of many geometric progression'.<sup>24</sup>

Geometric progression also led people to interpret symbolically – by seeing a connection between political events and astronomic influences – the eclipse that had occurred in 1871, the first year in which Italy was considered truly unified after the taking of Rome. The beginning of the twentieth century was anticipated to be similarly rich for astronomic research: on 28 May a solar eclipse obscured the nation;<sup>25</sup> meanwhile, astronomers waited for two 'periodical' comets (comets which approach the Earth at regular intervals), the Denning and the Encke ones, but the hope was that many other comets would be discovered thanks to the patient search carried out by 'cercatori di comete', as these researchers had been friendly nicknamed.<sup>26</sup> The biggest comet-related discovery, actually, occurred no sooner than a decade later, with the identification of the Halley comet in 1910, which was compared to a 'palla di cannone attraverso la nebbia', as described in an article of the *Corriere della Sera* of 15 May 1910 commenting on the interview given by Camille Flammarion<sup>27</sup> to the foreign correspondent of the *Giornale d'Italia*, who wanted to defend himself against the widespread opinion that he had announced that the end of the world would occur on

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<sup>24</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End. A cultural history of the fin de siècle from the 1890s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), pp. 156-157. Schwartz has also emphasized the interest of the fin-de-siècle society in the planet of Mars, testified by H. G. Wells's *The war of the worlds* (1897). For the reception of the volume and, more in general, for the interest of Italians in this topic, cf. [Unsigned] 'Un viaggio sul pianeta Marte', *Corriere della Sera*, 10-11 October 1900. It must be recalled that one of the astronomers pioneering the studies about Mars was an Italian, the Director of the Brera Observatory Giovanni Schiaparelli (see Giovanni Schiaparelli, *La vita sul pianeta Marte* (Milan: Vallardi, 1895)).

<sup>25</sup> Rhaeticus, 'L'eclissi di sole del 28 maggio 1900', *Corriere della Sera*, 27-28 May 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Ottavio Zanotti Bianco, '1901', *La Stampa*, 1 January 1900 [original emphasis].

<sup>27</sup> [Unsigned] 'Anche Flammarion contro i timori per la cometa di Halley', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 May 1910. The *Corriere* devoted a series of articles to the event: [Unsigned] 'La cometa in America', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 May 1910; Gueranico, 'La sparizione della Cometa', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 May 1910 which offers mini-illustrations of the phenomenon; Gueranico, 'La giornata della cometa. A che cosa si ridurrà il finimondo', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 May 1910 which presents additional illustrations of the phenomenon; Arnaldo Fraccaroli, 'Come non finì il mondo. L'"ultima notte" di Milano', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 May 1910.

19 May 1910. Despite Flammarion having dismissed such rumors and stressed that the transit of the comet was going to be barely noticed by most people on Earth, the panic that the tail of the comet would inundate the Earth with a poisonous gas spread: gas masks and anti-comet pills started to be sold, in the United States people were praying in the streets; in London people feared fires and floods, while mourning the passing of Edward VII, which had occurred a few days before the passage of the comet (on 6 May); in Russia some people were obsessed with the section 'End of the World' of the booklet *War and Revolution* (1906)<sup>28</sup> published by Tolstoy, who would die at the end of exactly the same year.<sup>29</sup> The Halley comet flanked the Earth in 1910, but apocalyptic expectations had already been in place about possible clashes with other comets at the end of the 1890s. Despite the fact that many people dismissed these doldrums as unjustified, fears were spreading among people in 1899 with reference to a supposed prophecy by a certain Mr. Falb, self-defining himself as an astronomy expert, who indicated that on 13 November 1899, between 2 and 5am, the Temple comet would collide with the Earth. In case the collision would not take place, Falb specified, people on Earth would still have the opportunity to see a series of shooting stars, as never before. On 8-9 November 1899, the front page of the *Corriere della Sera* titled 'La paura delle comete. La profezia del finimondo'. The author of the article stated that:

Nell'anno di grazia 1899 (il penultimo del «secolo dei lumi»), c'è della gente paurosa che teme prossima la fine del mondo! Questo avvenimento così poco piacevole per l'umanità sarebbe prodotto dall'urto immane di una cometa la quale, dalle profondità dello spazio, ci verrebbe incontro con una velocità prodigiosa e nelle prime ore del mattino dal 13 novembre dovrebbe mandar il mondo a soqquadro.<sup>30</sup>

The journalist traced a brief history of the past situations in which the transit of comets had stirred forebodings about the end of the world. In the eighteenth century, Halley had thought of the possibility that a comet orbit could intersect the orbit of the Earth

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<sup>28</sup> On Tolstoy's writing *War and Revolution*, cf. Chapter 5 of the thesis. See also Alberto Cavallari, *La fuga di Tolstoj* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986 and subsequently Milan: Skira, 2010) who recalls Tolstoy's reflection on the approaching of the comet which he interpreted as ushering the end of the world.

<sup>29</sup> See Umberto Nistri, 'La cometa di Halley', in *Strenna dei romanisti. Natale di Roma 1962* (Rome: Staderini, 1962), pp. 247-249; Roberta B. Etter and Stuart Schneider, *Halley's Comet* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985); Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1999), pp. 196-197; Emilio Gentile, *L'apocalisse della modernità* (Milan: Mondadori, 2008), pp. 151-153.

<sup>30</sup> Rhaeticus, 'La paura delle comete. La profezia del finimondo', *Corriere della Sera*, 8-9 November 1899.

and, later on, the French astronomer Lalande gave a lecture at the Académie des Sciences in Paris about the possible destructive effects of high tides provoked by the passage of a comet very close to the Earth. That lecture was misinterpreted and generated a widespread dread which stopped only after a comet partially approached Earth on 12 May 1773 without any negative consequence whatsoever for the Earth. Similar millenarianist anxieties spread in 1832 at the passage of the Biela comet and, once again, in 1899, despite being based on untrustworthy sources, such as Mr. Falb's studies, which had been openly discarded by eminent scholars like American astronomer Newcomb and Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli, who had been Director of the Brera Observatory since 1862 and who had studied comets.<sup>31</sup> If it was easier to find easily frightened souls in the past, the *Corriere* journalist pointed out, in past epochs due to the low level of literacy, 'si capisce meno, a primo aspetto, come le comete abbian potuto incuter timori e suscitare talvolta dei veri parossismi di terrore, anche nei tempi moderni', he observed; nevertheless, 'la cosa è avvenuta più volte e probabilmente si ripeterà nel futuro', he concluded.<sup>32</sup> And he was indeed right, as the approaching of the Halley comet in 1910 would confirm.

In fact, manifestations of the same fearful attitude also occurred earlier than 1910 and in relation to another devastating event: earthquakes. In 1908, apocalyptic-like tones were used to describe the destruction following the earthquake which hit the city of Messina and Reggio Calabria on 28 December. The death toll reached more than one hundred-thousand. The event was so tragic that the news was reported in international media around the globe and the first rescuers were indeed foreigners, being Russian seamen. The echo was also international because just two years earlier a similar event had occurred across the ocean, when the city of San Francisco was destroyed by a terrible earthquake, which was followed by fires. Apocalyptic terms were used to describe such events,<sup>33</sup> and connections with the Lisbon earthquake which occurred in 1755 were made, which led to a resurgence of the belief that natural events were to be interpreted as prophecies for civilization.<sup>34</sup> Speaking of fires and

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<sup>31</sup> Schiaparelli was indeed a specialist in comet studies; see Giovanni Schiaparelli, *Le stelle cadenti, 3 letture che riportano le osservazioni sulla pioggia di meteore della sera del 27 novembre 1872* (Milan: Treves, 1873).

<sup>32</sup> Rhaeticus, 'La paura delle comete. La profezia del finimondo'.

<sup>33</sup> *The End of the World*, ed. by Lewis H. Lapham (New York: Thomas Dunne Book, 1997), pp. 190-196.

<sup>34</sup> For a wider account on the meanings attached to the Lisbon earthquake, see Russell Rowe Dynes, *The Lisbon Earthquake in 1755: Contested Meanings of the First Modern Disaster* (University of Delaware: Disaster Research Center University of Delaware, 1997); Nicholas Shrady, *The Last Day: Wrath, Ruin, and Reason in the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755* (New York: Viking, 2008); Edward Paice, *Wrath of God: The Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755* (London: Quercus, 2008); *The 1755 Lisbon Earthquake: Revisited*, ed. by Luiz Mendes-Victor, Carlos Sousa

earthquakes, people could not resist the temptation of drawing a connection between the beginning of the new century, fears of decadence and the earthquake which had hit Lazio in July 1899, while the Etna volcano was erupting in Sicily at the same time:<sup>35</sup> all events occurring at the dawn of the century which would have been saluted on 1 January 1901 by another earthquake hitting San Remo, Genoa, Savona and other cities nearby. *La Stampa* registered: 'si udì dapprima un forte rombo seguito da scosse in senso ondulatorio', and they commented 'fu il saluto del secolo che muore al secolo che nasce',<sup>36</sup>

The millenarian-echoing vocabulary of the above-mentioned statements owed much to a religious rhetoric dating back to the first millennium and to the new century's celebrations. Religion was tightly connected to the turn-of-the-century issue since the century calculation was related to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar. As the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* noticed, 'If the world – or rather the Christian world, for non-Christian countries are out of reckoning, inasmuch as they have their own – contemplates turning over a new leaf with a new century, it will be cause for rejoicing'.<sup>37</sup> The main reason for rejoicing for the Christian world was the opening of the *Porta Sancta* of St. Peter's Basilica to celebrate the 1900 centennial Jubilee.

## 2.2 'La Chiesa di Roma chiama i fedeli alla celebrazione d'un rito secolare': the centennial 1900 Jubilee

'Buon Anno e Anno Santo' titled the *Osservatore romano* on 3 January 1900.<sup>38</sup> As we have seen in the opening of Chapter One, in 'Sul confine dei due secoli' Chiappelli emphasized that while France was preparing the celebrations for the passing of the century with 'saecular' – in the sense of laic – celebrations, 'la Chiesa di Roma chiama i fedeli alla celebrazione d'un rito secolare'.<sup>39</sup> When using the word 'secolare', the Italian philosopher intended to highlight the original range of years set for Christian Jubilees by Pope Boniface VIII. In our discourse about the century, it is crucial to recall that one

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Oliveira, João Azevedo, António Ribeiro ([Dordrecht] Springer, 2009); Mark Molesky, *This Gulf of Fire: The Destruction of Lisbon, or Apocalypse in the Age of Science and Reason* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015). For the cultural and philosophical influences that the event exerted on the Italian context in the eighteenth century, cf. Sabrina Ferri, *Ruins past: modernity in Italy, 1744-1836* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), pp. 10-11, 43-45, 54-58.

<sup>35</sup> [Unsigned] 'Il terremoto nel Lazio', *Corriere della Sera*, 20-21 July 1899 and [Unsigned] 'L'eruzione dell'Etna', *Corriere della Sera*, 20-21 July 1899.

<sup>36</sup> [Unsigned] 'Scosse di terremoto', *La Stampa*, 1 January 1901.

<sup>37</sup> [Unsigned] 'Fin de siècle', *The Atlantic Monthly*, p. 860.

<sup>38</sup> [Unsigned] 'Buon Anno e Anno Santo', *L'Osservatore romano*, 2-3 January 1900, 1; see also [Unsigned] 'Il Secolo Ventesimo', *L'Osservatore romano*, 3-4 January 1900, 1; [Unsigned] 'Christus imperat', *L'Osservatore romano*, 1 January 1901, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 620.

of the seminal stages of the development of the *Begriff* of 'century'<sup>40</sup> was the institution of the Jubilee, since it was no earlier than end of the thirteenth century that the first 'event which can safely be described as a turn-of-the-century celebration'<sup>41</sup> took place, and this was indeed the Jubilee organised by Pope Boniface VIII. When calling for the Jubilee, he referred to a supposed tradition of preceding Popes of organising similar centennial celebrations aimed at waiving the sins of the sinners by means of pilgrimages and the request of indulgences. Although the Pope referenced a supposedly established tradition of papal celebrations at the turn of the century, scholars agree in identifying precisely in Boniface's bull the creation of a tradition. Commenting on the bull summoning the Jubilee, cultural historian Schwartz has rightly pointed out that 'regardless of its nod toward antiquity, the bull [...] did not build on custom. It established custom. For the Church: a Jubilee anchored to the '00 of the *Anno Domini* calendar, exclusive of paschal tables and all other gauges of ritual time. For Christian Europe: an expectation of momentous, once in-a-lifetime opportunities at century's turn'.<sup>42</sup>

The 1900 Jubilee was regarded as memorable not only for its doctrinal but also for its historical significance in relation to the century as a whole: indeed, the nineteenth century had seen only half of the planned Jubilees – two out of four. It did not witness the 1800 one because of the turmoil brought about by the Napoleonic wars that prevented Pius VII from announcing the Holy Year, which resulted in 1800 being the only hundredth year (since 1300) when a Jubilee was not celebrated: an event whose highly symbolical meaning was insistently and continuously highlighted throughout the century. The Jubilee was regularly held twenty-five years later, but subsequently was skipped once again in 1850 because of Pope Pius IX fleeing away as a consequence of the 1848 uprisings and of the establishment of the Roman Republic in Rome. However, the same Pope was able to call the Jubilee in 1875, although he did not distance himself from his predecessor's stance in regard to the new Italian State, self-proclaiming an imposed incarceration in the Vatican because of the presence of the Italian army on Vatican territories since the capture of Rome in 1870. For these reasons, the 1875 Jubilee was celebrated without the usual *grandeur* and without the

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<sup>40</sup> The *Begriffsgeschichte* approach, as Koselleck teaches, is founded on the research of the origins and first attestation of a concept through its subsequent re-elaborations (cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Cf. especially the essay, 'History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures', pp. 93-104 of the second part devoted to 'Theory and Method of the Historical Determination of Time'.

<sup>41</sup> Damian Thompson, *The End of Time. Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Random House, 1999), p. 106.

<sup>42</sup> Schwartz, *Century's End*, p. 58.

opening of the Holy doors; just a few pilgrims were able to reach Rome and the general sentiment of that time can be well summed up by the first words on the papal bull *Gravibus Ecclesiae et hujus saeculi calamitatibus* which, while announcing a merry occasion for the Catholic Church – namely the Jubilee –, also stressed that the nineteenth century had been a troublesome time for Christendom.

A completely different feeling was, on the contrary, the one voiced in the bull *Properante ad exitum saeculo* with which Pope Leo XIII – the first Pope to be born in the nineteenth century – called the twenty-second Christian Jubilee on 11 May 1899. In this bull, the century that was ‘fast running away’ (*properante ad exitum*) is presented as a turbulent and yet mostly beneficial age for humankind. Along the same lines, it is portrayed as ‘*cultrix bonarum nobilis artium [...] aetas*’, hence as a prosperous age in *A Iesu Christo ineuntis saeculi auspicia*,<sup>43</sup> a poem which the Pope wrote to celebrate both the Jubilee and the century’s turn by borrowing stylistic features from the Horatian model of *carmen saeculare* and re-elaborating them into a religious domain.

The opening on 24 December 1899 of the Holy Door of the Papal Basilica of St. Peter, which had been closed for the previous seventy-five years, was a gesture that was interpreted by many as heralding the outset of a new religious and political scenario. As for the former aspect, the Jubilee consolidated the image of a renovated Catholic Church, willing to open up to modernity and to the challenges that modernity entailed, a new trend which had begun in 1891 with the issue of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. From a political perspective, the Jubilee marked the first joint venture between the Vatican and the Italian laical authorities, which helped the organisation of the event and provided support for the pilgrims both in the city and beyond. Indeed, in order to prevent the logistical problems that occurred in the 1875 Jubilee – but also to respond to the more general urgency of upgrading the communication networks in the nation – the Italian government put in place a new section of the railway system, an action which had a considerable impact on the masses and which fostered on a national level the ideal of the nineteenth century as a ‘*secolo di lavoro umano e di operosità intensa*’.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Jubilee was the first occasion, since the Unification, in which an Italian King announced a religious initiative in an official speech. Indeed, in the address that King Umberto I delivered to the Italian Parliament on 14 November 1899,

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<sup>43</sup> Leo XIII’s ode, *A Iesu Christo ineuntis saeculi auspicia*, adopts the form of a *carmen saeculare*, and bears the date 31 December 1900 (‘An. Christi MCM. Pridie Kalendas Ianuarias’). The text was published in *La civiltà cattolica*, 2 February 1901 (series XVIII, vol. I, ‘quaderno’ 1215, year LII), 260-262 and preceded by a short introduction entitled ‘Il Papa e il nuovo secolo’ (257-260); it has been republished in Gioachimo [sic] Pecci [Pope’s birth name], *Le poesie latine di Papa Leone XIII*, trans. by Papiliunculus [Cesario Testa] (Milan: Sonzogno, n.d. [1902]), pp. 95-98.

<sup>44</sup> Chiappelli, ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, p. 624.

he made explicit mention of the Jubilee and acknowledged the importance of the event as a milestone in the history of Christendom, while also emphasizing its relevance from a political point of view,<sup>45</sup> which helped to smooth the frictions between the Vatican and the Italian government.

The king was speaking on behalf of the nation. It would be, nevertheless, incorrect to think that all Italians were supportive of the Jubilee celebrations and of Leo XIII, who still considered himself as a 'prisoner' of the Italian State – not differently from his predecessors. Many were, in fact, the internal forms of opposition, first and foremost in Rome. An eloquent example of these tensions was an initiative organised by Ernesto Nathan, Grand Master of the Masonic Grande Oriente d'Italia, and later Mayor of the capital.<sup>46</sup> Nathan planned a laical version of the Jubilee, which many criticized for being a parody of the Catholic rite: in order to respond to and counterbalance the Jubilee tradition of visiting the four papal basilicas in Rome provided with a Holy door (Saint Peter's, Saint John in the Lateran's, Santa Maria Maggiore's, and St. Paul outside the Walls's), Nathan arranged an itinerary which had as stops Porta Pia, the Gianicolo, the Pantheon, and the Campidoglio, four sites with high political significance for the Italian Unification process. Seemingly aimed at undermining each other, the Jubilee and the alternative form of 'pilgrimage' devised by Nathan ended up intertwining and influencing each other on the religious and political level. This overlapping is testified by Leo XIII's idea of building religious monuments in almost every Italian region throughout the year 1900. The aim of this initiative was to carry out a renewed unification of the country under an aegis other than the one of the House of Savoy. The Pope ordered to build nineteen monuments as nineteen were the centuries elapsed.<sup>47</sup> Such an initiative was a way for the Pope to reclaim the nineteenth

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<sup>45</sup> King Umberto I considered the Jubilee as an opportunity for Italian politicians to show the reliability of the government in keeping the promises made after the proclamation of Rome as the nation's capital city: 'la prossima ricorrenza di un anno che segna un'epoca nel mondo cattolico, sarà per noi occasione di dimostrare, ancora una volta, come sappiamo rispettare e far rispettare gli impegni da noi assunti, quando, compiendo la nostra unità, abbiamo affermato in Roma la capitale del Regno' (*I Discorsi della Corona con i Proclami alla Nazione dal 1848 al 1936*, ed. by Antonio Monti (Milan: Cedai, 1938), p. 205). For the point of view of the Vatican on the question, see [Unsigned [Gaetano Zocchi]] 'L'Anno Santo 1900 nel Parlamento italiano', *La civiltà cattolica*, 2 December 1899 (series XVII, vol. VIII, 'quaderno 1187', year L), 521-529; for the theorization of the State-Religion relationship, see Gaetano Zocchi, *Papa e re, ossia Le teoriche di conciliazione politico-religiosa* (Prato: Tip. Giachetti, 1899 'edizione arricchita' [1884, 1st edn]).

<sup>46</sup> For the stance which Nathan adopted towards the Vatican, see the biographies by Romano Ugolini, *Ernesto Nathan tra idealità e pragmatismo* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 2003) and by Nadia Ciani, *Da Mazzini al Campidoglio. Vita di Ernesto Nathan* (Rome: Ediesse, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> On 8 July 1899, the committee in charge of the project sent the following message to the Italian dioceses: 'Ora pertanto il Comitato ha prescelto dalle Alpi alle Madonie diciannove montagne – appunto quanti sono i secoli della Redenzione – adatti per innalzarvi un ricordo dell'Omaggio, in modo che nell'Italia venga a formarsi una simbolica corona sacra al Redentore.'

century – that had seen the Church’s structure shaking – and of pre-investing the twentieth century of the influence that the Church was hoping to regain. The Catholic Church had welcomed the new century with a solemn ceremony held in the St. Peter’s Basilica, described in detail in articles such as ‘L’ultima notte del secolo XIX’.<sup>48</sup> The atmosphere was torn between fears and hopes. In the *L’eredità del secolo*, orator and preacher Giovanni Semeria reflected on the legacy of the nineteenth century, namely in relation to the current social issues to which Christianity should devote greater attention, Semeria deemed.<sup>49</sup> In an article titled ‘Il nuovo secolo. Timori e speranze’ the author said: ‘stando al sentimento, espresso dal Papa Leone XIII nella Enciclica del 1° novembre scorso, il secolo che spira offre sì argomenti di timore e di speranza, ma più dell’uno, che dell’altra’,<sup>50</sup> by referring to the process of detachment between society and religion, which had characterized the nineteenth century as any other century before.

The reasons behind the urgency of welcoming the new century with such sumptuous religious celebrations is due to the need of the Church to counterbalance the events that had characterized the beginning of the nineteenth century, which had started, according to the Catholics, under the sign of an ‘Antichrist’. The Antichrist had been seen in Napoleon, whose political and military actions, especially with regard to the Holy City – Rome was occupied by the French army in 1798 – caused countless troubles for ecclesiastic hierarchies and Orders, and prevented the 1800 Jubilee from being held. The Napoleonic presence on the Italian territory had, however, been interpreted by others as the beginning of a form of ‘regeneration’<sup>51</sup> and ‘palingenesis’, which was thought possible thanks to the ‘thaumaturgic powers’ of ‘Bonaparte liberatore’, as a then-contemporary wrote in 1803.<sup>52</sup> This idealization of the French

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[...] Le alte cime dei monti che dominano le regioni italiche, si presentano come luoghi quant’altri mai adatti per collocarvi un imperituro ricordo dell’Omaggio al Redentore, attestante ai posteri la dedicazione a Gesù Cristo del sec. XX’. <<http://www.rerumnovarum.it/leonexiii/montilepini/capreo/capreo.html>>. The original plan was to build monuments on nineteen mountains from north to south (‘dalle Alpi alle Madonie’) in order to match the number of the nineteen ‘secoli della Redenzione’; eventually, twenty monuments were built because of the addition of the Capreo mountain near Carpineto, Leo XIII’s home town.

<sup>48</sup> [Unsigned] ‘Cronaca contemporanea – Cose romane: L’ultima notte del secolo XIX’, *La civiltà cattolica*, 19 January 1901 (series XVIII, vol. I, ‘quaderno’ 1214, year LII), 239-240.

<sup>49</sup> Giovanni Semeria, *L’eredità del secolo: conferenze intorno alla questione sociale* (Genoa: A. Donath, 1900).

<sup>50</sup> [Unsigned [Raffaele Ballerini]] ‘Il nuovo secolo. Timori e speranze’, *La civiltà cattolica*, 5 January 1901 (series XVIII, vol. I, ‘quaderno’ 1213, year LII), 16-29 (p. 17).

<sup>51</sup> For a close analysis of the use of the term ‘regeneration’, cf. Stefano Nutini, “‘Rigenerare’ e ‘rigenerazione’: alcune linee interpretative’, in *Idee e parole nel giacobinismo italiano*, ed. by Eluggero Pii (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1990), pp. 49-63.

<sup>52</sup> See Giovanni Gambini, *Pensieri politici*, with an introduction by Stefano Nutini, a preface by Salvo Mastellone (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1989). Napoleon’s legacy for the Italian Unification Process was crucial, indeed, as Marco Meriggi has noticed, ‘although barely featured in public discourse during the Risorgimento, the years 1796 to 1814 left an indelible mark on

general was contrasted by the Catholic counter-revolutionary propaganda which prophetised imminent calamities from God and prompted the expulsion of the Antichrist. Such texts had started to spread in relation to the French revolution since the early 1790s to contrast 'una curiosa letteratura di previsioni, collegata anche con la letteratura politica [...] di costruzione utopistica', as noticed by Delio Cantimori.<sup>53</sup> This literature insisted on the approaching of a catastrophic end of the old world through a radical revolution. Rome, depicted according to the *topos* as the apocalyptic Babylon, was the main centre of propagation of this kind of literature.<sup>54</sup> It is indeed significant that it is precisely in Rome that mystical-visionaries' experience spread, such as that of Ottavio Cappelli<sup>55</sup> or Suzette Labrousse, who believed that the Revolution was ushering in the Millennium and announced the approach of a comet to Earth in 1792 (a *topos* which would recur at the end of the century, as we have seen). This comet would have stayed visible for a year, during which the Pope should renounce his temporal power, otherwise a carnage would hit Europe. Once in Rome, she was imprisoned for preaching against the Pope and was liberated in 1798 by the French army occupying the city while waiting for the final age to come in the centennial year 1800.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, the *topos* of the Antichrist generated innumerable publications. In France, Ernest Renan had worked on the theme and published *L'Antechrist* (1873); in Germany, Nietzsche's philosophical research had brought to light the highly-debated work *The Antichrist* (1895, although written in 1888); in Russia, *A Story of Anti-Christ* by the poet and writer Vladimir Solovyov, praised by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, was written, interestingly enough, at the turn of the century (it bore the date 'Easter Sunday 1900'). By searching the catalogues of

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the structures of the states and societies' (Marco Meriggi, 'State and Society in Post-Napoleonic Italy', in *Napoleon's Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, ed. by David Laven and Lucy Riall (Oxford-New York: Berg, 2000), pp. 49-63 (p. 50)).

<sup>53</sup> Delio Cantimori, 'Illuministi e giacobini', *La cultura illuministica in Italia*, ed. by Mario Fubini (Turin: ERI, 1964 [2nd edn]), pp. 281-299 (p. 294).

<sup>54</sup> Marina Caffiero, 'La fine del mondo. Profezia, apocalisse e millennio nell'Italia rivoluzionaria', in *Chiesa italiana e Rivoluzione francese*, ed. by Daniele Menozzi (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1990), pp. 287-357 (pp. 318-319). See also Marina Caffiero, 'Rivoluzione e millennio. Tematiche millenaristiche in Italia nel periodo rivoluzionario', *Critica Storica*, 4 (October-December 1987), 584-602; Marina Caffiero, 'Rivoluzione e millennio. Le correnti millenaristiche in Italia nel periodo rivoluzionario', in *Pratiques religieuses, mentalités et spiritualités dans l'Europe révolutionnaire (1770-1820)*, ed. by Bernard Plongeron (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988), pp. 95-104; Marina Caffiero, 'Millénarisme, prophétie et politique en Europe (XVIIIe-début XIXe siècle)', in *L'attente des temps nouveaux. Eschatologie, millénarisme et visions du futur du Moyen Age au XXe siècle*, ed. by André Vauchez (Paris: Brepols, 2002), pp. 65-73.

<sup>55</sup> See Renzo De Felice, *Note e ricerche sugli Illuminati e il misticismo rivoluzionario (1789-1800)* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1960), pp. 71-96, 121-156 and Marina Caffiero, s.v. 'Ottavio Cappelli', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. XVIII (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Treccani, 1975).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: millenarians and the French revolution in France and England* (Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 31-76.

anglophone literature, Mario Reading has counted hundreds of books bearing 'Antichrist' in their titles,<sup>57</sup> and a similar search carried out on the national catalogue of Italian libraries from 1800 to 1902 has brought to light forty publications. A resurging interest for the theme also appears in the late 1900s, as testified by texts such as *La "città terrena" e la missione universale di Roma* by the writer Giuseppe Cimbali, who would later publish a novel titled *L'Anti-Cristo*,<sup>58</sup> although a few years earlier, in *L'agonia del secolo*, he had defined religion a 'benemerita indoratrice dell'amara pillola dell'esistenza'.<sup>59</sup> In a period of trouble and uncertainties, religion could be the safe harbor to which one could go back also according to A. Gaetano Fracassi, the author of a poem written in Dantean tercets titled *Fine di secolo. Poema*, where – in a perfect Dantean style – the protagonist, lost 'nel corso de la tenebrosa notte', meets with a figure sent from the afterworld. At the question 'Chi mai Ti Mosse dall'Eterno scranno?', the figure shows 'la scritta in foco accesa "Nel mio Nome / Ti mando"'.<sup>60</sup> It is the start of a peregrination of the protagonist, which finishes with the renewal of the faith 'nel sempiterno regno' leading to the triumph of an 'eterna pace'.<sup>61</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century had, in fact, witnessed very little peace for the Catholic Church. The resentment against the Papacy was particularly acute at the time of the proclamation of the dogma of the Papal Infallibility, set during the First Vatican Council (1870). Not surprisingly, the resentment of the Papacy towards the Italian government was equally strong at the very same time, as it was precisely during the Vatican Council that Rome was taken. The last thirty years leading to the 1900 Jubilee had, thus, been particularly hard for the Church. Not only did the nineteenth century begin without a Jubilee, but it also witnessed two more major events weakening the Holy See: the separation from the Roman Catholic Church of a group of Churches in central Europe, which did not accept the ecclesiastical doctrine of the papal infallibility, and the capture of Rome, which until that moment had been considered an inalienable property of the Catholic Church. Those events, which both occurred in 1870, made the Church face a hard time in the last decades of the century.

Such an atmosphere explains the longing for emblematic gestures calling for

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<sup>57</sup> For a complete account of texts featuring the Antichrist, see Mario Reading, *Nostradamus and the Third Antichrist: Napoleon, Hitler and the One Still to Come* (London: Watkins, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Giuseppe Cimbali, *La città terrena* (Rome-Turin: Casa editrice nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1906); Giuseppe Cimbali, *La 'città terrena' e la missione universale di Roma. Discorso tenuto il 3 febbraio 1907 nell'Aula Magna della Regia Università di Roma* (Rome-Turin: Società Tipografica-Editrice Nazionale [già Roux e Viarengo], 1907); Giuseppe Cimbali, *L'Anti-Cristo* (Rome: Tipografia Editrice Nazionale, 1912).

<sup>59</sup> Cimbali, *L'agonia del secolo*, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> A. Gaetano Fracassi, *Fine di secolo. Poema* (Milan: Società Editrice Lombarda, 1900), Canto I, lines 1, 33, 38-39, pp. 2-3.

<sup>61</sup> Fracassi, *Fine di secolo. Poema*, Canto LV, lines 116, 127, p. 288.

unification, as the one performed by the Pope during the closing ceremony of the 1900 Jubilee.<sup>62</sup> This rite required that the St. Peter's Holy Door should be walled up and the Pope decided to do so by using twenty bricks coming from the twenty locations across Italy where the above-mentioned monuments had been or were about to be built. Through this emblematic gesture he sought to recreate a form of unity across the nation. The ceremony of the closing of the Holy Door was held at the dawn of the twentieth century, on 24 December 1900, and had a strong impact on the public opinion. It was memorialised in paintings, medals and poems, among which the hymn *La Porta Santa* by Giovanni Pascoli, which is interesting for the discourse we are conducting about the century as this poem revolves around the century's turn and the expectations for the new century, a topic that was particularly close to Pascoli's heart and to which he had devoted a long public speech, *L'Èra nuova*, just a year earlier.<sup>63</sup> In *La Porta Santa* (published in *Il Marzocco* on 6 January 1901, in the journal's first issue of the of the new century), Pascoli depicts Leo XIII as 'immortalmente stanco' (stanza I, line 6 – Leo XIII had, indeed, just turned ninety, since he was born in 1810), speaking with a thin voice ('Uomo, che quando fievole / mormori', stanza I, lines 1-2), and closing the door with frail and shaking hands ('le pietre che tu muri / con la gracile mano', stanza II, lines 3-4; 'Oh! le tue mani tremano!', stanza III, line 1). Addressing him, the poet asks: 'Dove sarai tu, quando / un secol nuovo, orando, / toglierà le tre pietre? / Dove anche noi' (stanza III, lines 2-5). The poet wonders where the participants to the closing ceremony would be when a Jubilee is held again, that is to say in – at least – twenty-five years, or in fifty, seventy-five or even one hundred years (in light of the fact that the Holy Door was usually opened every twenty-five years but that the opening could also be delayed, as it had occurred between 1825 and 1900). This rhetorical question voices a concern about the uncertainty around the 'secol nuovo' (stanza III, line 3), but also entails a profound reflection on the relationship between life and death. The Pope died shortly after the turn of the century, in 1903, and on that occasion Pascoli devoted another poem to him, *La morte del Papa*.<sup>64</sup> The death of the Pope was

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<sup>62</sup> On the door, one could read the following inscription: 'LEONE XIII PONT.MAX. – PORTAM SANCTAM A LEONE XII PONT.MAX. – ANNO JUBILAEI MDCCCXXV RESERATAM ET CLAUSAM – APERUIT ET CLAUSIT ANNO JUBILAEI MDCM'. The inscription reminds of the fact that the Holy Door had not been opened since 1825, as we have illustrated.

<sup>63</sup> *La Porta Santa* was published in the periodical *Il Marzocco* in 1901 and later, in 1906, included in Pascoli's collection *Odi e inni* (cf. Giovanni Pascoli, *Poesie di Giovanni Pascoli. Odi e inni*, ed. by Francesca Latini, vol. III (Turin: UTET, 2008), pp. 338-346, from which I quote). On the speech *L'Èra nuova*, cf. below and Chapter 6 of the present thesis.

<sup>64</sup> Despite the title, the poem *La Morte del Papa* (published in 1903 in the periodical *Riviera Ligure* and in 1909 included in the collection *Nuovi poemetti*) was, however, not centered exclusively on Leo XIII; it rather presented a universal reflection on old age and passing away (cf. Giovanni Pascoli, *Poesie di Giovanni Pascoli. Primi poemetti – Nuovi poemetti*, ed. by

somehow expected, due to this old age, whereas another death, completely unanticipated, occurred in 1900: the death of King Umberto I, killed on 29 July 1900 in Monza by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci, an assassination that strongly marked the Italian end of the century.<sup>65</sup>

Pascoli commemorated the king's death in the hymn *Al Re Umberto* (first published in the review *Il Marzocco* on 12 August 1900 with the title *Inno funebre al Re Umberto*).<sup>66</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of this poem in relation to our discourse about the turn of the century's anxieties and forebodings is the presence of several typical elements of apocalyptic scenarios, which Pascoli uses as a symbol and a metaphor of the ills afflicting Italian society. In the sixth stanza of the poem, the poet introduces the image (stanza VI, lines 1-12) of a 'belva' recalling the figure of the apocalyptic Beast:

Oh! il Male! bramito di belva  
che in fondo al suo essere cupo  
ravvisa l'antica sua selva,  
ravvisa il nativo dirupo;  
  
e fiuta, la belva; e già crede  
che sia l'avvenire che odora  
nell'ombra; e d'un lancio si vede  
postato all'agguato d'allora;  
  
e l'ali vuol mettere e tenta  
l'abisso dei cieli, la fiera;  
e mostro, con l'ali, diventa,

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Francesca Latini, vol. II (Turin: UTET, 2008), pp. 443-469). For an overview of Leo XIII's biography, see Francesco Malgeri, s.v. 'Leone XIII, papa', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. LXIV (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Treccani, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> For a coeval account of the king's death, see Mario Paganetti, *L'assassinio di re Umberto I e l'avvenimento al trono di Vittorio Emanuele III* (Milan: Casa Edit. Cesare Cioffi, 1900). Umberto I had already outlived two attempts on his life: the first occurred in Naples in 1878 and the second in Rome in 1897.

<sup>66</sup> This poem was featured also in other periodicals (in *Resto del Carlino* on the same day as in *Il Marzocco*, in *Caffaro* on 12-13 August 1900, in *Lombardia* on 13 August 1900 – although only partially – and in the *Nuova Antologia* on 16 August 1900) and was later incorporated into the first edition of *Odi e inni* (1906), as *La Porta Santa*. Originally, Pascoli thought of stressing the sorrow relating to the event in the title of the poem, as attested by his notes reporting as possible titles the following ones: *Inno funebre*, *Al morto Re*, and *Inno funebre al Re Umberto I* (very close to the title chosen for the first publication of the text occurred in periodicals); in the end, however, Pascoli opted for a more neutral title, not openly referring to the king's death. I am quoting the poem from Pascoli, *Poesie di Giovanni Pascoli. Odi e inni*, pp. 274-287.

The opening of the stanza is devoted to the evil forces spanning the world, embodied by a brute able to take vampire-like and chimerical features, which is depicted while flying over 'the abyss of the skies' and its 'native crag' (according to a few commentators, the phrase 'mostro con l'ali' was as a reference to the warplanes that started to be developed and tested precisely in those years). The ferine creature is portrayed as lying in ambush in the shadow, ready to set off while 'smelling' the scent of a dark future. This future features a subverted Earth that has lost its bearings while floating in a boundless universe in which, however, the poet hopes that the king (and the country with him) would still be able to find a mainstay: 'Va, principe giovane e giovane / Italia! Nel pelago eterno, / va, cerca il tuo Polo; va, trova / nel mondo infinito il tuo perno!' (stanza XII, lines 5-8). The 'infinite world' is an element that was also present in *La Porta Santa*, where the cosmic dimension of Pascoli's poetry<sup>67</sup> finds one of the highest expressions as he describes the possible future following the closing of the Holy Door: 'Non ci lasciar nell'atrio / del viver nostro, avanti / la Porta chiusa, erranti', the poet says addressing the Pope 'ad aspettar che l'ultima / gelida e fosca aurora / chiuda alle genti ancora / la gran porta del Sole; / quando la Terra nera / girerà vuota, e ch'era / Terra, s'ignorerà' (stanza VI, lines 1-3, 5-11). The closure of the poem foregrounds a cosmic perspective featuring the Earth spinning around without a direction in a dark universe, while people continue their ordinary life unaware that a definitive end is fast approaching. Such apocalyptic framing responds to the 'aspettative di "palingenesi", di una nuova nascita, una sorta di "attesa millenaristica", oltre che l'Anno Santo' characterizing the centennial year, as Paradisi has stressed.<sup>68</sup>

A palingenesis was very much longed for at the turn of the century and was stated, among others, precisely by Pascoli who in his 1899 speech *L'Èra nuova* wondered whether a form of '*palingenesia*' might 'toccare a questi poveri e melanconici

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<sup>67</sup> Scholars have classified a strand of Pascoli's poetical production as 'cosmic' in light of the emphasis that in these poems, such as *Il bolide*, *L'aurora boreale*, *La vertigine*, *Il ciocco*, *Alla cometa di Halley* is placed on cosmic elements, like constellations, stars, comets. In this respect, see Marina Marcolini, 'Il peso della cultura scientifica di fine secolo nell'opera di G. Pascoli', *Filologia e critica*, 22 (1997), 358-422 (especially the paragraph 'La poesia degli astri' pp. 373-382), then re-elaborated in the paragraph 'Poesia copernicana' of her volume Marina Marcolini, *Pascoli prosatore. Indagini critiche su «Pensieri e Discorsi»* (Mucchi: Modena, 1992), pp. 246-264. See also Giovanni Getto, 'Giovanni Pascoli poeta astrale', in *Studi per il centenario della nascita di Giovanni Pascoli, pubblicati nel cinquantenario della morte (Convegno bolognese, 28-30 marzo 1958)*, vol. III (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1962), pp. 35-73; subsequently reprinted in Giovanni Getto, *Carducci e Pascoli* (Caltanissetta-Rome: Sciascia, 1977), pp. 77-136 and also appeared as an article, Giovanni Getto, 'Ispirazione cosmica nella poesia di Giovanni Pascoli', *Lettere italiane*, 10 (1958), 154-188.

<sup>68</sup> Patrizia Paradisi, 'La ricerca dell'assoluto nella letteratura: Giovanni Pascoli' <<https://www.ccdc.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/030306Paradisi.pdf>>, p. 2.

esseri che abitano così piccolo pianeta, il quale è sulla vita di tante comete distruggitrici'.<sup>69</sup> Pascoli's statement with reference to the 'comete distruggitrici' (in 1910 he would devote a poem to the Halley comet, *Alla cometa di Halley*) can be explained in light of the aforementioned scientific research on comets, which was rich in successful studies and discoveries at the fin de siècle. In the conclusion of his speech, Pascoli asked: 'Avverrà nel secolo che sta per aprirsi?'. The question was left open.

### 2.3 The Fin-de-siècle fever in printed media

The century's turn had been eagerly expected since the mid-1880s, and the expectation had continued to grow since then for roughly the following fifteen years, throughout the period known as 'fin de siècle'. The phrase started to be employed in France, where it was coined, with the meaning of 'modern' and 'contemporary' but then, over time, it began to be used in various different contexts, which made it very hard to attach a univocal meaning to it. Authors and critics alike voiced their difficulty in using the term properly due to the semantic extent that it had reached. 'Everywhere we are treated to dissertations on fin-de-siècle literature, fin-de-siècle statesmanship, fin-de-siècle morality', wrote an editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1891; 'people seem to take it for granted that a moribund century implies, not to say excuses, disenchantment, languor, literary, artistic and political weariness, and that in 1901 the world will make a fresh start', he stated by sketching in a few terms the core of the fin-de-siècle spirit based on 'disenchantment, languor' and literary, artistic, as well as political exhaustion, which would have – many hoped – eventually ended at the turn of the century.<sup>70</sup> Across the ocean, in the same year, a similar distress towards the phrase was felt. 'Fin de siècle! partout, partout / ...il sert à désigner tout',<sup>71</sup> one could read in a 'monologue en vers' titled, not surprisingly, *Fin de siècle*. In England, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde reflected on the fin de siècle being a 'fin du globe', while in Germany a character of Arne Garborg's novel *Müde Seelen* – a title placing the emphasis on the end-of-the-century 'weary souls' – put in place the following equivalence between fin de siècle, end of the century and end of European culture.<sup>72</sup> In Italy, in his analysis of the 'agony' of the century, Cimbali exclaimed 'momento solenne cotesto!' and, along the same lines, in his fin-de-siècle titled conference speech, Chelotti wrote:

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<sup>69</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, *La Ginestra. Pace! L'Èra nuova. Il focolare* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1900), pp. 74-75.

<sup>70</sup> [Unsigned] 'Fin de siècle', *The Atlantic Monthly*, p. 859.

<sup>71</sup> Paul Desachy and René Dubreuil, *Fin de siècle, monologue en vers dit par Félix Galipaux du Palais-Royal* (1891) quoted in Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> For more on this association, see Jens Malte Fischer, *Fin de siècle: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (Munich: Winkler, 1978).

L'espressione "Fin de siècle" [...] per quanto indeterminata (e forse appunto per questo le sorrise la fortuna) ed applicata capricciosamente ai più alti fenomeni morali, non meno che alle futilità della moda, ha però una ragione di essere nel fatto, *che i periodi simili a quello che attraversiamo, e che si potrebbero dire di transizione e di preparazione, possiedono caratteristiche proprie, che li distinguono da ogni altro.*<sup>73</sup>

Chelotti stressed the importance of the fin-de-siècle as a period of transition possessing its own peculiarities and features, and which, thus, deserved to be identified in its own respect with a specific phrase. A discordant opinion was, instead, that of Max Nordau who, in the early 1890s, lamented the 'extreme silliness of the term',<sup>74</sup> in his provocative and divisive work *Entartung* (1893-94) which, originally published in German, was swiftly translated into many foreign languages and became a pan-European success.<sup>75</sup> In this work, the notion of 'fin de siècle' is as highly deprecated as it is pivotal. Nordau, in fact, not only devoted the opening chapter 'The Dusk of the Nations' to the fin-de-siècle state of mind, but he also entitled the first book of his five-book treatise 'Fin de siècle'. Moreover, he could not stop noting that the fact that the phrase, which was born in France, where it was 'firstly consciously realized', and which had then 'flown from one hemisphere to the other and found its way into all civilized languages', was 'a proof [...] that the *need* of it existed'.<sup>76</sup> Nordau's contemporary and coeval author, Fritz Mauthner, also expressed his surprise about the timing with which the phrase fin de siècle – which had appeared more than a decade before the actual end of the century – came about, but he found an explanation to this phenomenon when reflecting attentively on the historical situation in which the turn-of-the-century society found itself. According to Mauthner, the birth of the term was a by-product of the necessity felt by the society and culture of the time to "“outfit for the twentieth century” by calling for a re-thinking of a common past'.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is in the pressing demand of rethinking one's past that the origin of the phrase 'fin de siècle' should be identified.

As Koselleck remarked in his study on the relationship between linguistic change and history, 'it is only *after taking on its linguistic form* that we can access all of the

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<sup>73</sup> Chelotti, *Fin de siècle*, p. 6 [my emphasis].

<sup>74</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> The Italian translation was one of the swiftest to be published: Max Nordau, *Degenerazione – Versione autorizzata sulla prima edizione tedesca per G. Oberosler*, 2 vols (Milan: Dumolard, 1893-94).

<sup>76</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 1 [my emphasis].

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Katherine Arens, *Functionalism and Fin de Siècle: Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language* (New York-Berne-Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), p. 22.

reasons that make the singular, often surprising course of a history explainable, evident, and comprehensible'; this is because 'these reasons last longer than the individual, singular events themselves'.<sup>78</sup> Koselleck's remarks can be perfectly applied to the formation of the phrase 'fin de siècle'. Indeed, the term appeared first (well before the actual end was occurring), and only *after* its linguistic form was devised, all the reasons making this period so crucial (a 'momento solenne', to speak in Cimbali's terms), all the fears, all the expectations, all the energies – or, as would be better said in Greenblatt's terms, the 'circulation of social energy'<sup>79</sup> – pervading the last decade of the nineteenth century became 'evident' and 'comprehensible'. In light of this aspect, we think that it is, thus, possible, to extend the observations that Claude Duchet and Isabella Tournier elaborated about the concept of nineteenth century to the notion of fin de siècle: when commenting on the nineteenth century self-invention process, they spoke of the 'dix-neuvième siècle' as an 'image-idée', 'concept opératoire soumis à des pratiques discursive hétérogènes', 'mot-valeur'.<sup>80</sup> The same could be said of the phrase 'fin de siècle' which has been subject to multiple interpretations, to writings and rewritings, which has appeared in a variety of texts and which, despite having shown to possess multiple identities, has nevertheless worked as an 'image-idée' and operated as a 'mot-valeur'.

The first meaning with which the term 'fin de siècle' was endowed is 'decadent', 'corrupted', and 'self-indulgent'. All these negative qualifiers can indeed appropriately describe the plots of adultery, underhand business, gambling and murders staged in 1888 in Francis de Jouvenot and H. Micard's play *Fin de Siècle*, as well as in Humbert de Gallier's 1889 novel *Fin de Siècle*.<sup>81</sup> The preferred set for fin-de-siècle stories was Paris, as in the piece 'Paris Fin de Siècle' staged in a Paris theatre in 1890.<sup>82</sup> The above-mentioned adjectives could equally apply to the core business of the financial weekly *Le Fin de Siècle* (first issued in 1890), guaranteeing exclusive and scandalous financial leaks, or to the *Fin de Siècle. Journal littéraire illustré* (first issued in 1891) claiming in

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<sup>78</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of time: on possible histories*, trans. and ed. by Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 153 [my emphasis].

<sup>79</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean negotiations: the circulation of social energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 1-20.

<sup>80</sup> Claude Duchet and Isabelle Tournier, 'Le «siècle» dans le siècle', in *L'Invention du XIXe siècle. Le XIXe siècle par lui-même (littérature, histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre Georgel, Stéphane Guégan, Stéphane Michaud, Max Milner, and Nicole Savy (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. 61-71 (p. 57).

<sup>81</sup> Francis de Jouvenot, H. [sic] Micard, *Fin de Siècle. Pièce en quatre actes* (Paris : E. Dentu, 1888); Humbert de Gallier, *Fin de Siècle* (Paris : Ollendorff, 1889).

<sup>82</sup> 'In February, 1890, M. Blum wrote for a Parisian theatre, a caustic picture of Parisian life, entitled *Paris Fin de Siècle*. The play was not unsuccessful, and part of its title, borrowed apparently from *Mensonges* by M. Bourget, who himself may have borrowed it, has gained world-wide currency' ([Unsigned] 'Fin de siècle', *The Atlantic Monthly*, p. 859 [my emphasis]).

its opening issue that being *fin de siècle* was a necessity, and that choosing not to adopt such an attitude would have meant to abandon whatever hope for success.<sup>83</sup> Similar observations could be appropriate to describe the plots of Italian works openly evoking the fin-de-siècle atmosphere in their titles, such as the play *Il giovanottino fin de siècle: monologhi*, or musical acts like *Ai bagni di mare: scene "Fin de siècle" in un atto*, as well as conference speeches like *Amore fin de siècle* or novels and short stories, such as *Fuoco di donna. Pubblicazione fin de siècle: scelte novelle umoristiche*, or *Peccati d'una Vergine. Novelle umoristiche fin de siècle*, responding to the French influence and translations of French novels such as *Una bigotta fin di secolo: romanzo*.<sup>84</sup> In such novels, 'belles dames sans merci' and 'femmes fatales' were mimicking their illustrious romantic predecessors in a conscious as well as ironic way (with a pronounced emphasis on humor in the titles themselves, such as the reference to 'humorous short stories'), an attitude which Holbrook Jackson's words help to describe: 'those who were most allied' with the 'moods and whims' of the fin de siècle, he said, 'were not only conscious of the fact, but in some cases capable of looking at themselves and laughing'.<sup>85</sup> In the 1890s, Jackson worked as a publisher and it is by looking back at the experience of those years that he wrote such a comment in a retrospective analysis that he conducted in the 1910s and which he collected in his volume *The Eighteen Nineties*. Although Jackson mainly had the English cultural production in mind, it appears that his words have a wider European scope and that they aptly apply to the French as well as to the Italian panorama. *Fuoco di donna. Pubblicazione fin de siècle* or *Amore fin de siècle* coexisted with major Romantic and decadent works, D'Annunzio's plays and novels first of all, and are equally populated by 'belles dames sans merci' and 'femmes fatales' who dominated the nineteenth century classics analysed by Praz in *La carne, la morte e il diavolo*.<sup>86</sup> The idea of writing a Praz-like literary criticism work about the above-mentioned novels might sound provocative, and yet it would not be completely inappropriate as it might appear at first. It is beyond doubt that these texts did not share any of the stylistic refinements of the major Romantic and decadent masterpieces

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<sup>83</sup> *Fin de Siècle. Journal littéraire illustré*, 17 January 1891.

<sup>84</sup> Adolfo Orvieto, *Il giovanottino fin de siècle-Un miope clandestino: monologhi* (Florence: Tip. cooperativa, 1896); *Ai bagni di mare: scene "Fin de siècle" in un atto; musica del maestro Gaetano Cappolino; parole di Diego Armando Meduri* (Reggio Calabria: Lombardi, 1893); Roberto Marvasi, *Amore fin de siècle: conferenza di Roberto Marvasi pronunciata al circolo filologico di Napoli il 23 aprile 1893, con preludio di Roberto Bracco* (Naples: Tocco, 1894); *Fuoco di donna. Pubblicazione fin de siècle: scelte novelle umoristiche* (Naples: Del Kikirik-Tocco, 1899); *Peccati d'una Vergine. Novelle umoristiche fin de siècle* (Naples: La Partenope-Tocco, 1900); Louise Gagneur, *Una bigotta fin di secolo: romanzo* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1892).

<sup>85</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties. A review of art and ideas at the close of the nineteenth century* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1913), p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> Mario Praz, *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (Florence: Sansoni, 1948 [3rd expanded edn]).

imbued with symbolism and mysticism; however, maybe, they did not aim to reach such a level and perhaps it is precisely in their deliberate self-positioning in this underworld that the key to understanding their popularity is to be found. Such self-positioning can indeed be considered as a response to the self-reflection in the mirror of the fin-de-siècle 'whims' and fashions, to speak in the words of Jackson, who also noticed that the habit of the contemporaries of "looking at themselves" went hand-in-hand with their ability to be self-ironical. Being ironic requires having a deep understanding, conscious or more often unconscious (as Freud claimed in his *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*), of a situation, of a condition, of a circumstance, which is then reversed through irony by means of inversion.<sup>87</sup> The above-emphasized idea of awareness is not in contradiction with the involvement of the unconscious because, as Freud has shown, the joke-formation is regulated by the same process operating during dream-work, when 'a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception'.<sup>88</sup> The result of such a process can be a joke, a mockery, which together form a more elaborate group of humorous short stories, which the above-mentioned 'nouvelle umoristiche' are. As Freud observed in his *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, irony consists in the 'representation by the opposite',<sup>89</sup> a representation which stands out in the title itself of the short stories collection *Peccati d'una Vergine. Nouvelle umoristiche fin de siècle*, boasting the juxtaposition between the main character, the virgin, and the sinful actions for which she is supposedly responsible. Such a title mocks the Romantic and decadent topoi by stretching them and taking them to the extreme, which was one of the ways in which the literary field responded to the spreading distress in the fin-de-siècle period. In a time dominated by fears of decadence and degeneration, irony can thus be seen as a weapon to face the fin-de-siècle malaise, and the ironic *pastiche* of Romantic and decadent-echoing atmospheres that inhabit the above-mentioned corpus can indeed be deemed as a strategy to fight back the languor and decline looming on the 'Dusk of the nations', to speak in Nordau's words. Indeed, as Chelotti observed when commenting on the fin de siècle mood, '*la fine è il compendio di tutti i pregi e i difetti del secolo, e spesso ne è l'esagerazione e la caricatura*',<sup>90</sup> and it is widely acknowledged that exaggeration and

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. the theorization about the 'unreliable narrator' by Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 364-374.

<sup>88</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious [1905]*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, vol. VIII of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960), p. 166.

<sup>89</sup> Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, p. 73.

<sup>90</sup> Chelotti, *Fin de siècle*, p. 6.

caricature practices find their means of expression *par excellence* in irony. Irony was also the tool that many, especially in the periodical press, adopted to mock the spread of various *maladies du siècle*, such as the writing obsession, which we have explored in Chapter One, and the ‘contagiosa [...] malattia poetica’ affecting countless people ‘in questi aneliti ultimi del secolo’, as one could read in a fin-de-siècle titled periodical.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, the fin-de-siècle wind also strongly blew over the pages of many Italian journals and inspired the flourishing of fin-de-siècle titles from the North to the South of the peninsula as well as in the islands. Such a geographical distribution attests a sensibility shared across the nation, which is telling from a sociological point of view, as it provides a form of litmus paper of how the nation-building process, strongly enhanced in the previous decade during the Crispin government age, was evolving in those years. Let us start a brief survey of these periodicals from the North. Milan counted, alone, four periodicals and pamphlets bearing a reference to the fin-de-siècle in their titles (both with the French form ‘fin de siècle’ and with the corresponding Italian translations ‘fine del secolo’ and ‘fin di secolo’): *La fine del secolo: giornale settimanale di Milano* (first issue 1893), which then changed its masthead and became *La fine del secolo. Politica – Scienza – Arte – Industria – Commercio – Sport; Psst, psst! [sic] Periodico quindicinale indipendente fin-de-siècle: letteratura, arte, critica* (first issue 1897); *La fine del secolo XIX* (first issue 1899); *Fine e principio di secolo* (1900). The fin-de-siècle fever had equally spread in cities usually considered less central than Milan, such as Genoa, where the first issue of *La fine del secolo: giornale politico, amministrativo, settimanale* was sold in 1893, or Naples, where *Il monitore sociale: rivista indipendente fin de siècle* saw the light in 1898. A similar excitement about the approaching end-of-the-century could be found in Sardinia, where the Cagliari weekly *Fine di secolo: giornale politico, letterario, artistico* appeared in 1897, as well as in Sicily, where the first number of the Palermo fortnightly *Fin de siècle* was published in 1892. These journals were not long-lived, in fact most of them lasted no more than a couple of years and some of them consisted in only two- or even a one-issue publications, as it happened frequently with the journals that came out in 1899 or 1900 (a phenomenon which was mainly due to the fact that the new century was drawing close and people felt that a publication named after the fin-de-siècle could not survive 1901). The existence of these periodicals – despite them being short-lived – and their diffusion all over the nation is significant and worth scholarly attention, as these two elements testify the emergence of a collective time-awareness in Italy in connection with both

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<sup>91</sup> Ettore Marangoni, ‘Due Poeti’, *Psst, psst! [sic] Periodico quindicinale indipendente fin-de-siècle*, 1 (July 1897), p. 2.

the national and the international context, which allows us to determine the fin-de-siècle 'atmosphere' and 'mood', to speak in Gumbrecht's terms.<sup>92</sup> As Thompson has highlighted, 'the sense of *fin de siècle* could not evolve until people began to feel that their lives were somehow shaped by the century in which they lived',<sup>93</sup> and this happened at the end of the nineteenth century as never before. We agree with Thompson in considering that 'it is no accident that the world had to wait until the end of the nineteenth century for the phrase *fin de siècle* to pass into common usage'<sup>94</sup> and that such a phenomenon could not occur but in this specific historical moment. Dismissing the fin de siècle as a pose would be inappropriate, as it was 'as much a pose as an event';<sup>95</sup> or rather, as Holbrook Jackson wrote in the 1910s in his cultural assessment of the last decade of the nineteenth century, it was 'a pose as well as a fact'.<sup>96</sup>

When tracking the above-mentioned end-of-the-century publications self-qualifying as 'fin de siècle', it has been important to never lose sight of the warning outlined by Claude Duchet and Isabelle Tournier who have conducted a similar lexicographic survey in nineteenth-century France by focusing on the use of the word '(dix-neuvième) siècle'. They have remarked that it is not possible to infer 'la conscience du siècle de la seule présence affichée d'un marqueur déterminé',<sup>97</sup> a claim whose scope goes beyond the specificity of the context herein addressed. They meant that, whatever lexeme one is researching, the presence of such a term in paratextual frames, like titles, subtitles, or image captions, cannot be considered a sufficient condition to develop an overall assessment of the text as whole, since texts possess their own autonomy from the graphical boundaries surrounding them. With this warning in mind, Duchet et Tournier have, nevertheless, also emphasized that the study of paratextual features is crucial, as paratexts are the result of rhetorical strategies geared to a specific target readership and respond to a collective economy of intentionalities emerging from choices shared among authors, editors, and publishers. Furthermore, paratexts are the most immediate *threshold* crossed by a reader, to speak in Genette's words,<sup>98</sup> hence they have an importance that cannot be overlooked as they represent 'the most socialized side of the practice of literature' and the organisation of the 'relationship

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<sup>92</sup> We are using both terms as corresponding of the German word 'Stimmung', as defined by Hans Gumbrecht (see Hans Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012)).

<sup>93</sup> Thompson, *The End of Time*, p. 104.

<sup>94</sup> Thompson, *The End of Time*, p. 104.

<sup>95</sup> Thompson, *The End of Time*, p. 118.

<sup>96</sup> Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> Duchet and Tournier, 'Le «siècle» dans le siècle', p. 60.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987).

with the public' lies in them.<sup>99</sup> For this reason, titles are indeed relevant, especially on a socio-critical level, and despite the fact that, as just highlighted, texts keep their own independence, it is undeniable that titles do provide a frame for the reader and a centerpiece around which all the other textual elements revolve.

Such centrality is particularly evident in the above-mentioned fin-de-siècle-titled publications, of which *Fine e principio di secolo* can be considered a representative case-study. Published in December 1900 and promoted by the 'Pro Milan' Committee for the 'Feste Ambrosiane', it was entirely devoted to the New Year's and New Century's celebrations. The choice of this case-study is due to the symbolic nature of the time of transition, set by the calendric convention, on which it focuses. 'The initial day of a calendar serves as a historical time-lapse camera',<sup>100</sup> Benjamin observed in his Thesis 15 while commenting on the new calendric system introduced during the French revolution, stressing that calendars subdivide time in 'nodal' points of 'concentration and condensation', which become 'moments of recollection and rupture'<sup>101</sup> for single individuals as well as for collectivity as a whole.

Famous authors, namely Matilde Serao and Antonio Fogazzaro, contributed to *Fine e principio di secolo*, as well as influential political figures, such as the former mayor of Milan and senator of the Kingdom of Italy Gaetano Negri (vice president of the Constitutional Association ruling the town council until 1899). The booklet refers to the end of the century not only in the fin-de-siècle title towering on the cover page elegantly framed by *Jugendstil*-flowery decorations, but also in a number of other paratextual elements, namely captions to images, subtitles, slogans, and advertisements. The second page hosts a long list of events planned in occasion of the fin-de-siècle-themed celebrations (conferences, concerts, torchlight walks). Through a carefully planned advertising choice, it is suggested that during these celebrations one could toast to the arrival of the new century by drinking the Cova champagne advertised on the back cover of the booklet, while eating a piece of 'torta fin de siècle' specifically prepared for the 'cene di fine anno', which have turned into 'cene fine di Secolo', as the advertisements just below the Cova champagne emphasize.

The festive atmosphere is represented not only discursively, but figuratively as

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<sup>99</sup> Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, 'Introduction to the Paratext', *New Literary History*, 22.2 (1991), 261-272 (p. 270).

<sup>100</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis 15', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World), p. 263.

<sup>101</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, 'The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries', in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 62-87 (p. 79). For the concept of recollection-and-rupture, cf. Richard Wolin, 'Experience and Materialism in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*', in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. by Gary Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), pp. 210-227 (especially, pp. 210-225).

well. The fourth page displays an image of a postcard that the Pro Milan Committee commissioned to the painter Arturo Taddio specifically for the end-of-the-year celebrations. The postcard features a 'meneghin' (as the caption placed below the postcard explains) standing on a balcony while holding a champagne glass and admiring the Duomo from afar. To the reader, that glass recalls the Cova champagne advertised on the back cover, a cross-reference which suggests that to solemnize properly the coming of the new year that was about to usher the new century, one should toast with that specific champagne and exchange new-century greetings with loved ones by using this specific postcard. In the foreground of the postcard, a closed book, whose spine says 'Secolo XIX', lies on a table behind the jubilant 'meneghin', while a writing saying 'Secolo XX' appears next to the Duomo rising on the horizon in a semi-circular form as a dawning sun. This postcard has a twofold identity: it is both a work of art and a commodity. On the one hand, it is a historically specific artifact designed for a specific occasion. Its originally devised visual character is openly praised: 'il bozzetto, opera del distinto pittore Arturo Taddio, è un lavoro veramente artistico, indovinatissimo per l'allegoria, caratteristico per la figura del *Meneghin*, e con una disposizione di tinte ben riuscita e di molto effetto'.<sup>102</sup> The fact of being expressly designed by a renowned painter for the turn-of-the-century celebrations makes it unique and of high artistic value. At the same time, this work of art can easily be reproduced on a large scale, thus reaching thousands of people. As Benjamin observed, 'technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain'.<sup>103</sup> The postcard could indeed be used in a variety of situations: it could be sent out to exchange the season's greetings, it could become a collectable and be purchased for oneself or for others; it could be framed and hung on the wall of a middle-class family's dining room and exhibited during the festive season. The turn of the century marks a point of arrival in the 'consummation of the interior'<sup>104</sup>, which occurred starting from the 1880s in middle-class interiors throughout Europe, as a consequence of the Jugendstil ideas taking hold. Paradoxically enough, this 'consummation' took place via the purchasing of commodities which, once inside the house, regain their original work-of-art identity. As Benjamin has brilliantly illustrated,

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<sup>102</sup> [Unsigned] 'Cartolina ufficiale del Comitato "Pro Milano"', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. Second version', in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, and others (Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19-55 (p. 21).

<sup>104</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, pp. 96-115 (p. 103).

one of the biggest concerns of the collector, 'the true resident of the interior', consists in the 'transfiguration of things': 'to him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them' which results in him bestowing on things 'only connoisseur value, rather than use value'.<sup>105</sup> Taddio's painting, applauded for being 'lavoro veramente artistico, indovinatissimo per l'allegoria,' is subject to a partial fading of its aura, to speak in Benjamin's terms, because it sees its character of uniqueness and unrepeatability disappear. This loss, however, is compensated by a growth in terms of popularity, and its 'unique existence', we could say by borrowing Benjamin's words again, is substituted by 'a mass existence'<sup>106</sup> made possible by the reproduction technology. The postcard was a commodity in itself, as its sale subsidized the end-of-the-year celebrations promoted by the Pro Milan Committee, but it also, although indirectly, contributed – by increasing a new awareness of time-perception – to the sale of fin-de-siècle cakes, fin-de-siècle dinners, and fin-de-siècle champagne, which entered, as we have just seen, the collective imagination through the *Fine e principio di secolo* advertisements. As Benjamin wrote, 'the advertisement is the ruse by which the dream forces itself on industry'.<sup>107</sup> Imagery and advertisement have a two-way relationship: in the first place, the former inspires the latter, which then in turn feeds back into the former, which is another way of saying that if advertising usually responds to needs, good advertising also makes new needs emerge. Because of this dual relationship, advertising not only impacts human agency, but is also able to create a new form of meaning. And the search of this meaning has prompted us to embark on the present investigation. What has triggered this analysis of what, objectively speaking, is a minor publication and has led us to focus even on minor details of this journal (such as paratext features, captions, secondary images, and advertisement), has been Benjamin's idea to recuperate the 'suppressed dream of utopia which the dead and reified artifacts are still capable of emitting'.<sup>108</sup> Another contributing factor has been Benjamin's idea that 'meaning takes shape and resides in the world of urban commodity capitalism *not only* in discursive, systematic form, but perhaps *even more significantly* in *flashes that leap out from the graphic forms of writing*' and that this writing can take new shapes in 'new eccentric figurativeness', which can be 'bodied forth in props on a stage, an engineering diagram,

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<sup>105</sup> Benjamin, 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', p. 104.

<sup>106</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 171.

<sup>108</sup> Harootunian, 'The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries', p. 79; cf. also Wolin, 'Experience and Materialism in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*', p. 213.

or an advertisement'.<sup>109</sup> When selecting the herein analysed case-study, we have also embraced Benjamin's idea according to which it is appropriate to consider as a 'medium' everything that can redefine perception modalities, determine new ways of looking and feeling, and contribute to reshaping any form of experience. Thus, also a half-work-of-art, half-commodity postcard, with its small caption and its short description placed in a minor city-newspaper, has revealed itself as a medium able to offer an exceptional vantage point to analyse the end-of-the-century sensitivity characterized by a marked time-shifting consciousness.

The title of the issue *Fine e principio di secolo*, placing emphasis on saying farewell to the old century and welcoming the new one, is taken up by Matilde Serao in her article 'Fine e principio d'anno'. The tones of her text, featuring the depiction of a moment nurtured by a 'mestizia segreta per l'anno che muore',<sup>110</sup> are rather dark but are counterbalanced just in the opposite page by the euphoria of the 'inno del secolo'<sup>111</sup> composed expressly for the occasion by the musician Alfredo Masi, one of the finest Milan-based composers. The expectation for the 'inno del secolo' is whiled away by two poetical hymns published in the following pages: the first relating to the passage of time with a lighter attitude, by saying 'che importa se il tempo qual turbine vola',<sup>112</sup> and the second hymn singing the praises of progress. The latter is followed by an article devoted to one of the icons of progress of the previous century, Alessandro Volta, from whose inventions a great number of scientific findings had descended throughout the nineteenth century. In this article, Gaetano Negri writes: 'Alessandro Volta, con la sua scoperta da cui tante altre sgorgano, ha fatto muovere un gran passo [...] Egli ha strappato il fulmine alla mano irata e capricciosa di Giove, e lo ha domato e reso servo dell'uomo'; speaking of the exceptional relevance of Volta's discoveries, Negri concludes by stating: 'se il secolo che muore volesse, con una sola parola, dare ai secoli venturi la chiave dell'azione trasformatrice da lui esercitata sulla storia del genere umano, gli basterebbe di chiamarsi il Secolo di Alessandro Volta'.<sup>113</sup> This strong connection between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, here outlined by Negri, had been honoured a year earlier, in 1899, when the centenary of the invention of the voltaic pile had been celebrated with an exhibition. The celebration had taken place in

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<sup>109</sup> Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, 'Editors' introduction', in Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, p. 6 [my emphasis].

<sup>110</sup> Matilde Serao, 'Fine e principio d'anno', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 5.

<sup>111</sup> [Unsigned] 'L'Inno al Secolo che sorge! Marcia del Maestro Cav. Alfredo Masi', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Alfredo [sic], 'Inno', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 6 and Alfredo [sic], 'Inno al Progresso', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 9.

<sup>113</sup> Gaetano Negri, 'Il Secolo di Alessandro Volta', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 10.

Como: it was a major event (so much so that Giacomo Puccini composed a march specifically for this occasion, meaningfully entitled *Scossa elettrica*) and was modelled on the European universal expositions. It can be considered the very first event of this kind held in Post-Unification Italy, indeed representatives of all national institutions took part in it, King Umberto I included. It is interesting to note that the figure of Umberto I and that of Alessandro Volta appear together once more, and not by chance, in *Fine e principio di secolo*, namely in the poem opening the booklet which, in accordance with its position in the journal, is titled 'Prolusione': the poem features a juxtaposition between the brightness of scientific discoveries and the darkness of nefarious historical facts – the king's assassination first of all – occurred in the century that is about to elapse. The first part of the poem reads as follows:

Tu scendi, o vecchio Secolo, ne la bieca voragine  
Del Nulla, e con te crolla de' Fasti la compagine.  
Ahi! fra [*sic*] crimini e glorie, sei travolto a morir!

Di Volta a cosa valse la più geniale e grande  
Opra ad immortalarti, se fra gare nefande  
Sei passato, lasciando ben acre il sovvenir?

A cosa valse il Genio l'aver strappato al sole  
La Luce, e a dar fulmineo il volo alle parole,  
Se, spettator di crimini nel mesto oblio ten vai?

Di ben diciotto secoli, tu, retroguardia, incedi  
Fra i robanti peani che sembrano epicedj  
Nato fra i lieti brindisi, muori fra i gretti lai.

Già la vindice Storia, nel suo gran libro, à [*sic*] scritto  
Col tuo Fasto di gloria il tuo «più gran delitto,»  
L'apoteòsi, o secolo, urge ben fosca a te!<sup>114</sup>

In the poem a strong tension can be sensed: it is the contrast between the glorious events, among which stands out 'l'opra geniale e grande' by Volta (who died in 1827),

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<sup>114</sup> C. A. Blengini [Mario Albani], 'Prolusione', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 3 (lines 1-15).

and the most recent criminal facts that the century had beheld. The resounding 'gretti lai' echoing an epicedium can be explained not only as a metaphorical way to refer to the 'death' of the century, but is directly connected to the still alive memory of the actual funeral procession and burial service celebrated in the last year of the century after 'il [...] «più gran delitto»' of the century. This phrase is put in quotation marks in the poem as it borrows Queen Margherita's expression, as a footnote clarifies: 'Si allude all'assassinio di Re Umberto (29 luglio 1900), che ben giustamente Margherita, la *Regina del dolore*, definiva «*il più gran delitto del secolo*».<sup>115</sup> What should be the peak moment of the century, the century's apotheosis, is thus marked by a tragic event ('L'apoteòsi, o secolo, urge ben fosca a te!'). The 'sovvenir' of this event is still 'acre' and is even more painful in Milan, since the king had been assassinated just a few miles away, in Monza. The dark aura of these tercets is eventually brightened by the last lines when the poet invokes the advent of a cloudless dawn welcoming a new age: 'Oh sorga almeno propizia l'alba dell'era nova' / 'foriera di letizia'.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Blengini [Mario Albani], 'Prolusione', p. 3 [original emphasis].

<sup>116</sup> Blengini [Mario Albani], 'Prolusione', p. 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### Shaping time perceptions

*Ciò che in altri secoli non avveniva, è avvenuto in questo: che gli uomini dell'ultima generazione possono guardare come dal di fuori l'opera delle generazioni precedenti.*<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.1 Turning points and historical junctures

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the pamphlet *Fine e principio di secolo* is rich in examples of how the turn of the century transition was processed as a collective memory. We have explored the cultural value of simple objects, such as a postcard, working as time devices shaping time perception. We will now explore another object whose value as a time-device is equally significant: a medal commissioned by the Pro Milan Committee to the sculptor Giuseppe Cantù as the official reward for all the prize-giving ceremonies to be held during the celebrations of the century's turn. It might appear as a minor element, not differently from the above-mentioned postcard, but in fact it deserves close attention. Despite its local circulation, the medal launch is representative of the several similar initiatives taking place nationwide to celebrate what was considered one of the biggest anniversaries in one's life, as the caption placed underneath the photo of the medal says: 'la singolare data del passaggio da un secolo all'altro, data che nessuno di noi vide mai e che nessuno di noi mai rivedrà'.<sup>2</sup>

As Briggs has remarked, it was in the nineteenth century that people started to 'become used to celebrating centenaries, jubilees and anniversaries in words, events, buildings, medals and other objects fashioned out of metal or pottery or silk'.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis placed by Briggs on the materials from which the objects were made is not redundant, as it stresses that the *physical* weight of such objects translated into an *intellectual* weight that each of these time occurrences – which such objects marked – gradually acquired in one's life. The operation of making a conventional time division physically tangible, through commemorative objects, and experienceable, through the organisation of events and celebrations, was part of a larger process of raising

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 621).

<sup>2</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Asa Briggs, 'Past, Present and Future in Headlines', in *Fins de Siècle. How Centuries End. 1400-2000*, ed. by Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 157-195 (p. 159).

awareness which changed time perception on a social level and made the nineteenth century the age of the 'triumph of time', speaking in Hamilton Buckley's terms.<sup>4</sup> The change of attitude towards time can be registered first of all in the public domain; then, gradually, the physical weight of medals, badges (speaking of which, we must recall that the Pro Milano Committee commissioned end-of-the-century 'distintivi', too)<sup>5</sup> and coins – which were entering everyone's houses – translated into the private domain as well, a trend which grew stronger towards the end of the nineteenth century, entered the twentieth century and from then on 'continued unabated.'<sup>6</sup>

In *Fine e principio di secolo*, the photo of the medal is placed side by side with the above-mentioned end-of-century festive postcard. This position is not haphazard, but rather aimed to emphasize an element that both the medal and the postcard share. The medal bears the effigy of a woman, symbolizing Hope, who stands above a large group of people and points forward towards the horizon where the sun is rising, an image which is similar to the 'Secolo XX'-named rising sun represented in the postcard. The ekphrasis framing the photo reads as follows:

Riproduciamo la bella medaglia coniata appositamente [...] per commemorare la singolare data del passaggio da un secolo all'altro, data che nessuno di noi vide mai e che nessuno di noi rivedrà. In essa [medaglia] è effigiata la speranza che addita alle turbe il nuovo secolo che sorge come sole nascente all'orizzonte del tempo. Tutti tendono verso il novello astro le braccia cercando in esso la soluzione dei problemi che affaticano in quest'epoca di vita intensa l'umanità pensante e sofferente, e le madri alzano verso il simbolo del secolo nascente i loro figli nella speranza che in esso trovino la felicità che la generazione ora adulta, nata e vissuta in quello che sta per morire, non vi ha trovato.<sup>7</sup>

The ekphrasis explains that the horizon represents the 'orizzonte del tempo' towards which the crowds stretch out their arms hoping to find 'la soluzione ai problemi che affaticano in quest'epoca di vita intensa l'umanità pensante e sofferente'. In the crowd, there is a group of mothers holding their children and raising them towards the sun, referred to as 'novello astro' as it belongs to a new century, 'nella speranza che in esso trovino la felicità che la generazione ora adulta, nata e vissuta in quello che sta per

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The triumph of Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, England: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> [Unsigned] 'Il distintivo del Comitato', *Fine e principio di secolo*, [December] 1900-1901, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton Buckley, *The triumph of Time*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', p. 4.

morire, non vi ha trovato'. The presence of such iconographical descriptions is interesting for its content and striking for its presence, especially if one considers that it is not strictly necessary because the photo of the medal is of a good quality and clearly visible in the newspaper. Its presence appears even more surprising considering that the author of such an ekphrasis considers the meaning of the medal easy to decode, as it was typical of the artistic production of Cantù, who preferred 'dire e manifestare chiaramente il pensiero anzichè [sic] nascondarlo "sotto il velame delli versi strani"'.<sup>8</sup> Despite the sculptor's aim of producing a self-explanatory representation which did not need additional elements to be appreciated, the ekphrasis is in fact helpful, as it provides further details to understand the sculptor's iconographical choices and thus deserves a close analysis. In conducting such an analysis, we have followed Benjamin's example: he indeed showed that, in order to produce an exhaustive iconographical analysis, one must never lose sight of all the elements accompanying it, especially the ones in a written form. As Brigid Doherty has rightly remarked, 'any consideration of an "image" or "picture" (*Bild*) in Benjamin's work remains closely bound to indeed intertwined with [...] his explorations of writing itself as a medium for the presentation of figural images and the communication of meaning'.<sup>9</sup> In our case-study, the 'medium for the presentation of figural images and the communication of meaning' is the ekphrasis, which adds explanatory elements that are absent or cannot be sensed by solely looking at the image that the medal represents.

The first detail concerns the way in which the crowd, which is portrayed in the medal, is described: the people herein depicted are said to represent 'umanità pensante e sofferente'. The adjective 'pensante' puts emphasis on an aspect which we have explored in Chapter One, that is the excess of self-reflection and doubt characterizing fin-de-siècle society, which led to a collective neurosis, as registered by Mantegazza in *Il Secolo nevrosico*. In addition to this element, there is one more reason why humankind is represented as 'sofferente'. This hardship can be explained in light of the difficult political and societal situation of late-nineteenth century Italy. Such a situation was experienced by the 'generazione ora adulta, nata e vissuta in quello [secolo] che sta per morire'. The specification of the adverb 'ora' in the phrase 'ora adulta' is the second detail on which the ekphrasis draws our attention: it indicates that the ones who suffer the most from this feeling of anxiety and disquiet are those who were born and raised

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<sup>8</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Brigid Doherty, 'Painting and graphics', in Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, and others (Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 195-217 (p. 195) [my emphasis].

in the second half of the nineteenth century. External elements, which we will now explore, help us identify that the 'generazione ora adulta' refers specifically to the people born in 1870, a date bearing a high symbolical value, both on a cultural and on a political level.

In 'Sul confine dei due secoli' Chiappelli stressed that 'chi ha vissuta la sua giovinezza *dopo il 1870* sa bene come e quanto l'orientamento della critica e della cultura sia cambiato da quegli anni ad oggi'.<sup>10</sup> He added that the people who were born in 1870 were the first to be able to gain a proper historical and cultural awareness of the past, which previous generations had never had:

Ciò che in altri secoli non avveniva, è avvenuto in questo: che gli uomini dell'ultima generazione possono guardare come dal di fuori l'opera delle generazioni precedenti; poiché lo spirito storico che colora di sè [*sic*] tutta la cultura del secolo, aiuta efficacemente codesta indagine retrospettiva.<sup>11</sup>

The same privileged position of being able to look at the past century as no one had been able to do before was attached to those who were born in 1870 by Mario Morasso who, born himself in 1871, addressed 'i nati dopo il 70' in one of his first ever articles on *Il Marzocco* with which he had recently started a collaboration. It was 1897: Morasso was a young poet, *La nuova arma (la macchina)* (1905) was yet a long way to come and *Uomini e idee del domani: l'egoarchia* (1898) was still to be published, but he already showed his peculiar pugnacious attitude and manifested a strong awareness of the task pending on the 1870s' generation. He ascribed to this generation the responsibility of triggering a 'terza reazione letteraria', which would eventually bring about a renewal in the literary field. The first and second literary 'reazioni' had seen first the opposition between Romanticism and Realism, and then the contrast between Spiritualism, Decadentism, Symbolism, and Mysticism versus Realism. In the late 1890s, Morasso considered that times were ready to start the third and final literary reaction of the nineteenth century: 'è la terza reazione che si forma e chi la imprende sono anime nuove: una data profonda assai più distaccante che non quella che segna la fine di un secolo, le separa dalle anime precedenti: il 70'.<sup>12</sup> He deemed that the year

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<sup>10</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 621 [my emphasis].

<sup>11</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 621.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Morasso, 'Ai nati dopo il 70. La terza reazione letteraria', *Il Marzocco*, 7 February 1897 [my emphasis]. Morasso's article was part of a larger literary debate involving high-profile figures such as Carducci, Capuana, Pascoli, and Ojetti. A month after Morasso's article, Ojetti published his response in the same journal (Ugo Ojetti 'La cenciata di Giosuè Carducci', *Il Marzocco*, 28 March 1897). In May 1897, it was the turn of Pascoli, who illustrated his point of view in the article 'Letteratura italiana o italo-europea?', *La Vita Italiana*, 1 May 1897, 846-852,

1870 should be considered as a historical juncture even more 'distaccante' – in the sense of determining a 'fracture', to speak in Hartog's terms,<sup>13</sup> with the past – than the end of the century itself. This was not to diminish the value of the latter as a *Wendepunkt* (to use a German word that was much used by Italians at the time to indicate transitional times), but a way to acknowledge that the change that was about to occur at the turn of the century had its origins in 1870 (since it was back then that the people, who – in Morasso's hope – would operate the third literary reaction in conjunction with the century's turn, had been born).

The literary reaction called by Morasso was aimed at contrasting literary trends such as Decadentism, Symbolism, and Mysticism, which had held the stage especially from 1890 to 1896 – as he stressed – and against the triumph of the foreign cultural production<sup>14</sup> for the benefit of a more nationalistic-oriented literature. In Morasso's argument, the literary discourse appears to be tightly connected with a political discourse, which makes the case for the use of a Foucauldian discourse analysis approach which is particularly fruitful to study power relationships as conveyed through language. Language always mirrors power relations; thus, literature – being one of the highest forms of language elaboration – often becomes the highest point of expression of politics and ideology. The ideology Morasso called for is the resurgence of a national spirit bringing about a form of 'arte nazionale'. In this respect, he considered Italy akin to France, as he saw both countries sharing the same undertaking, which is somehow surprising if one considers that the year 1870 – and actually the same month, namely September – saw the two countries in very different circumstances: on the one hand, France was mourning the Sedan defeat of 31 August – 2 September 1870, and on the other hand, Italy was celebrating the taking of Rome on 20 September 1870. Addressing the 'nati dopo il 70', Morasso wrote: 'tanto in Francia come in Italia due grandi fatti hanno dato una impronta peculiare all'anime nostre; *impronta che non può [sic] a meno di farci sentire e pensare in un modo a fatto diverso da quello della generazione che ci precedette anche di un solo anno*', and then he emphasized 'la data della nostra concezione, avvenuta *dopo il 1870*, separa con più nitido segno dai nati

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in which he addressed indirectly Morasso's and more directly Ogetti's views as expressed in 'L'avvenire della letteratura in Italia', *La Vita Italiana*, 10 June 1896, 113-115, subsequently republished as a volume in *L'avvenire della letteratura in Italia* (Rome: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1896)). A closer analysis of the literary aspects of this debate will be provided in Chapter Six of this thesis.

<sup>13</sup> See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> We will address the role played by foreign literature within the late-nineteenth century Italian cultural panorama more in depth in Chapter Six of the present thesis.

anteriori'.<sup>15</sup>

The importance attached to 1871 as a turning point is confirmed by Benedetto Croce's choice to start his account of the Italian Post-Unification history, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915*,<sup>16</sup> from this year and not from 1861 (the date of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy and of the first session of the Italian Parliament). The historiographical perspective according to which the Unification process had finally been achieved only after the newly-born Italian State had succeeded in reclaiming Rome confirms the above-mentioned feeling, proudly described by Morasso: the 1871 generation could truly feel differently from previous generations, even those preceding them '*di un solo anno*', because they were the generation born in a truly unified state.

The turn of the Seventies marked a crucial time not only for the Italian but for the European history. The Franco-Prussian conflict was the first *industrial war*<sup>17</sup> and was fought with machine and long-range guns, whose devastating power largely exceeded that of traditional weapons, which shook the positivists' faith into a peacemaker effect of progress by showing that technological inventions could be dangerously used for destructive purposes.<sup>18</sup> This new awareness, coupled with the military success of the

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<sup>15</sup> Morasso, 'Ai nati dopo il 70' [my emphasis]. On the emphasis put on being born *after* the year 1870, Pascoli commented in his article: 'Tu [Ojetti] sei nato *sotto il settanta*. Prima o dopo? Occorrerebbe saperlo, perché, secondo alcuni, solo quelli nati *dopo* il settanta possono [...] Dovrei forse dire col Morasso [...] C'è sotto una teorica, che annienta, a vostra gloria, o giovani di sotto o di dopo, gl'infelici che nacquero o prima o sopra il settanta. Questa teorica non è necessario che io la ripeta: ognuno, d'immaginativa pur corta, può formularla e ampliarla, se ricordi Sedan e Roma' (Pascoli, 'Letteratura italiana o italo-europea?').

<sup>16</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915* (Bari: Laterza, 1977 [1927]).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Raimondo Luraghi, 'L'ideologia della «guerra industriale», 1861-1945', in Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito-Ufficio storico, *Memorie storiche militari, 1980* (Rome: s.n., 1981), pp. 169-190. The Franco-Prussian conflict generated a debate about the impact of scientific advancements on warfare, which culminated with the publication of the six-volume study *Budushchaya voyna i yeyo ekonomicheskie posledstviya* [Future war and its economic consequences] (1898) by the Russian banker and manufacturer Jan Gotlib Bloch. The volume was translated into German, French, and English and exerted a large influence on the public opinion. The title of the English translation of the last volume – *Is war now impossible?* – explains (more clearly than its original title in Russian and in the French translation titled *La guerre future*), Bloch's point of view. By taking into account the economic, political, and strategic aspects involved in the organisation of a war, Bloch argued that a future war would start with a mass carnage and would eventually get stuck in a deadlock as none of the armies involved would have been able to launch a decisive attack, which would lead to a long and deteriorating situation. The more the nations involved were advanced from a technological point of view, the more the economic effort would be large and all-encompassing. He argued that a future war taking place in Europe would encompass the entire continent and change it forever. The only way to avoid a general catastrophe would be to opt for alternative solutions to resolve conflicts, such as international arbitration. For this reason, he prompted Tsar Nicholas II to organise a permanent Court for international arbitration. The Tsar welcomed Bloch's suggestions and in 1899 organised the First International Congress for Peace at Le Hague.

<sup>18</sup> See Brian Bond, *War and society in Europe, 1870-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998);

Prussian army leading to the Unification of the German State, the Sedan debacle following the Franco-Prussian War, the downfall of the Second French Empire, and the beginning of the Third Republic, whose birth was soon marked by the bloody revolts of the Paris Commune, determined a profound ‘cangiamento dello spirito pubblico europeo’, as Croce wrote in his *Storia d’Europa nel secolo decimonono*.<sup>19</sup> In his seminal work *The culture of Western Europe*, George Mosse recalled that Croce saw ‘in the years after 1870 a change in the public spirit of Europe which ended the nineteenth century and began the twentieth’.<sup>20</sup> By upholding Croce’s point of view, Mosse considered that the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century had started precisely in 1870.<sup>21</sup> Similarly to how 1789 had been considered by many as the actual beginning of the nineteenth century, as we have illustrated in Chapter One, so 1870 was considered as the ideal outset of the twentieth century, since, as Morasso emphasized in 1896, 1870 was ‘assai più distaccante che non quella che segna la fine di un secolo’.<sup>22</sup>

The 1870 events had a great impact on the 1871 generation, both in Italy and on the other side of the Alps. At Sedan, not only the identity of the French nation, but the identity of all Southern European countries appeared to be at stake, thus the final defeat represented not only the demise of a single country, already in great difficulty due to internal struggles and a substantial decrease of the population rate,<sup>23</sup> but the concretization of fears of decadence threatening the entire ‘Latin race’. The French failure became the metaphor of a ‘*finis Romae*’, as Croce wrote: ‘Lo schiacciamento, che seguì, della Francia da parte delle genti germaniche, e l’esegesi storico-filosofica che ne dettero i pensatori e professori d’oltre Reno, sembrarono avvolgere nel funebre sudario tutte le razze latine: la battaglia di Sedan prendeva l’aspetto di una *finis Romae*’.<sup>24</sup> The rhetoric used to describe the harsh defeat suffered by the French Empire was borrowed

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Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1st edn 1976]); J. F. C. Fuller, *The conduct of war 1789-1961: a study of the impact of the French industrial and Russian revolutions on war and its conduct* (Abington-New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Benedetto Croce, *Storia d’Europa nel secolo decimonono* (Bari: Laterza, 1981 [1st edn 1932]), pp. 217-233.

<sup>20</sup> George Mosse, *The culture of Western Europe. The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Boulder-London: Westview Press, 1988 [1st edn 1961]), p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> By openly recalling Croce’s stance, Mosse titles the first section of the second part of his volume (‘From the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century: 1870-1918’): ‘Change in the Public Spirit of Europe’ (Mosse, *The culture of Western Europe*, pp. 219-236).

<sup>22</sup> Mario Morasso, ‘Ai nati dopo il 70’.

<sup>23</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the French population growth gradually slowed down. The birthrate passed from 26.8% in 1850 to 24.6% in 1880, and eventually dropped to 18.8% in 1913 (these data are taken from *Storia della famiglia in Europa Il lungo Ottocento*, ed. by Marzio Barbagli and David I. Kertzer (Bari: Laterza, 2003), p. 21). See also Claude Diebolt and Faustine Perrin, *Understanding Demographic Transitions. An Overview of French Historical Statistics* (Cham: Springer, 2016). Various hypotheses of solution were made to address the issues; in the literary field this issue was addressed by Zola in his novel *Fécondité*, which we will analyse in Chapter Six.

<sup>24</sup> Croce, *Storia d’Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, pp. 102-103.

from and fashioned on Gibbon's of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789), which had entered the collective imagery through paintings like Thomas Couture's *Les Romains de la décadence* (1847). The *raising* rather than the *declining* Rome was instead the image that the Italian general and military historian Niccola [sic] Marselli had in mind when commenting on the issue of 'La Francia e la Prussia al cospetto della Civiltà'<sup>25</sup> in 1871 by outlining a comparison with the Greek-Roman opposition: 'quando la Civiltà latina venne a contatto con la greca e la sottopose, parve che un'aristocrazia militare avesse schiacciata una democrazia colta, che la forza brutale avesse soggiogata la regina dell'incivilimento; ma meditando sulla decadenza della Grecia all'epoca che precesse la sua caduta si è dovuto riconoscere che era la virtude latina che trionfava della corruzione greca'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Marselli draws a parallel between the Greeks and France, which during the Franco-Prussian war showed 'tutti i segni della decadenza' and appeared 'spoglia di tutti i principali ornamenti di una civiltà seria e robusta',<sup>27</sup> which had been instead proven by Prussia, which had made of war its principal medium for establishing its national unity. Marselli deemed war to be 'un instrumento necessario della Civiltà' and 'un fattore benanche di progresso' which, thus, could not be disjoined from the idea of Civilization itself – he affirmed in his *La guerra e la sua storia* (1875).<sup>28</sup> The same ideas were stressed in the early 1870s by historian Jacob Burckhardt while lecturing at the University of Basel, where a young Nietzsche had been among his students. Talking of *Historical crises*, Burckhardt described war as the response to a time of crisis for a nation but also as a 'momento necessario di superiore evoluzione'.<sup>29</sup>

The gloominess brought about by the Sedan defeat was, however, partially counterbalanced by the successful taking of Rome, which represented the *incipit* of a new era for the Italian nation. 'Nel 1871, fermata la sede del regno in Roma, si ebbe in Italia', Croce wrote, 'il sentimento che un intero sistema di fini, a lungo perseguiti, si era a pieno attuato, e che un periodo storico si chiudeva' and the 'intimo senso del romantico moto delle nazionalità nel secolo decimonono' could be considered fulfilled.<sup>30</sup> A new bright beginning for Rome was announced in volumes such as *Sullo splendido avvenire*

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<sup>25</sup> Niccola [sic] Marselli, *Gli avvenimenti del 1870-1871. Studio politico e militare*, vol. I (Rome-Turin-Florence: Loescher, 1875 [3rd edn]), pp. 10-22. Marselli explored the consequences of the Franco-Prussian war on the Italian situation, pp. 77-122.

<sup>26</sup> Marselli, *Gli avvenimenti del 1870-1871*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Marselli, *Gli avvenimenti del 1870-1871*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Niccola Marselli, *La guerra e la sua storia*, vol. I (Milan: Treves, 1875), p. 104.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *Considerazioni sulla storia universale*, trans. by Maria Teresa Mandalari, foreword by Joachim Fest (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), p. 170. On the development of a form of cult of war, see the chapter 'L'uomo marziale della rigenerazione' in Gentile, *L'apocalisse della modernità*, pp. 106-134.

<sup>30</sup> Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, p. 1 [my emphasis].

*di Roma capitale d'Italia e del mondo cattolico* (1870) by the historian and archaeologist Fabio Gori, whose life changed in 1870: after the Breach of Porta Pia, Gori – until that moment ‘suddito fedele del papa, collaboratore dell’*Osservatore romano*, teso soltanto all’illustrazione delle antichità di Roma e del Lazio’<sup>31</sup>, who had never been involved in political affairs – showed an interest in the ‘regole politiche e amministrative’,<sup>32</sup> by promoting city administrative models aimed at finding a balance between the sovereignty of the Italian monarchy, which he openly promoted, and the independence, despite the anticlerical past of his family, of the Vatican. Gori’s case can be considered illustrative of the many similar cases of change in the 1870s, which brought about a profound modification in the collective consciousness and started to shape new variations of the Risorgimento ideals, in concomitance with the death of high-profile figures who had played a crucial role in the Risorgimento, such as Mazzini (who died in 1872) and Manzoni (who died in 1873). Manzoni was the very last representative of the Romantic movement against which the first ‘literary reaction’ – of which we have seen Morasso speak in his article – had taken place. What is interesting and apparently oxymoronic is that the nationalistic-oriented reaction Morasso was calling for at the end of the 1890s was not too far from the ideas Manzoni had supported. As Dionisotti recalled, Manzoni had indeed ‘championed the cause of Italian unity when the overwhelming majority of his countrymen still clung to the idea of a federation of the Italian states’ and he had ‘unhesitatingly submitted to Piedmontese leadership’ while welcoming ‘a kingdom of Italy with Rome as its capital, when most of his countrymen were looking for something different’.<sup>33</sup> After Manzoni’s death, Italian literature traversed a declining phase, Zino Zini wrote in the *Nuova Antologia* in 1899.<sup>34</sup> The taking of Rome represented a milestone in the Italian history, but what happened after that was not up to the expectations, lamented Domenico Oliva when reviewing Ojetti’s *L’avvenire della letteratura in Italia* (1896): ‘Fino al 1870 si trattò di fare l’Italia: presa Roma, non si seppe più veramente che cosa si dovesse fare’; as a consequence ‘ci andammo a poco a poco disgregando, intellettualmente’.<sup>35</sup> As Elio Gioanola has remarked, post-Romantic crises occurred following national revolutions; such a crisis

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<sup>31</sup> Nicola Parise, s.v. ‘Fabio Gori’, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. LVIII (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Fiorella Bartoccini, *Roma nell’Ottocento: il tramonto della città santa, nascita di una capitale* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985), p. 451.

<sup>33</sup> Carlo Dionisotti, ‘Manzoni and the catholic revival’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 59 (1973), 341-353 (p. 342).

<sup>34</sup> Zini, Zino, ‘Leo Tolstoï e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo’, *Nuova Antologia*, 1 June 1899, 462-474.

<sup>35</sup> Domenico Oliva, ‘La letteratura italiana’, *Corriere della Sera* (13-14 September 1896) reprinted in *La critica letteraria e il Corriere della Sera (1876-1945)*, ed. by Bruno Pischetta, vol. I (Milan: Fondazione Corriere della Sera, 2011), pp. 343-351 (p. 347).

for Italy took place after the achievement of the process of national unification.<sup>36</sup> The disappointment had already been apparent shortly after the Porta Pia breach, both because of the long time waited by king Victor Emmanuel II before visiting the city after it was acquired (and his short stay once there) and because of the low-profile conduct of the Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Lanza in occasion of the transfer of the government to Rome.<sup>37</sup> This political dissatisfaction was famously epitomized by Carducci in the satiric lines targeted at Lanza in his *Canto dell'Italia che va in Campidoglio*, featuring a personification of Italy climbing up the Capitoline Hill in the nighttime; this chagrin came abreast of the corruption lurking in the new capital, notoriously described as a new Byzantium in *Per Vincenzo Caldesi* another poem by Carducci,<sup>38</sup> whose metaphor then informed the inspiring philosophy of the journal *Cronaca bizantina* prompting a new strand of literary and printed media production calling for renovation in literature and society.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Elio Gioanola, *Il Decadentismo* (Rome: Nuova Universale Studium, 1977), p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Despite the advice of Finance Minister Quintino Sella and of several other politicians, King Victor Emmanuel II did not travel to Rome after the Porta Pia breach and kept on postponing such a journey not to further embitter the Pope (re Victor Emmanuel's stance on the 'occupation' of Rome, cf. Denis Mack Smith, *Vittorio Emanuele II* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), pp. 203-257). The king's first appearance in the city was prompted by a contingent situation, that is the flooding of the Tiber river occurred in late December 1870 (cf. Silvio Bertoldi, *Il re che fece l'Italia: vita di Vittorio Emanuele II di Savoia* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2002), p. 285). The king arrived on 31 December overnight and showed his support to the population by visiting Rome 'non con insolente apparato, ma come principe pio e generoso' (cf. Agostino Gori, *Storia Politica d'Italia: Il Risorgimento italiano (1849-1860) - Il Regno d'Italia (1860-1900)* (Milan: Vallardi, n.d. [1904]), pp. 538-539), which many regarded as a strategic choice in terms of political image aimed at avoiding any possible additional tension with the Vatican. The king left just after a few hours and made his solemn entrance in Rome not earlier than seven months later, on 2 July 1871, when taking possession of his new residence at the Quirinale, following the approval of the Law n. 33, 3 February 1871 marking the transfer of the capital of the Kingdom of Italy from Florence to Rome. Many criticized Victor Emmanuel and Prime Minister Giovanni Lanza for having waited so long before officially relocating in Rome respectively the court – although the king did not spend much time in Rome afterwards anyway – and the government (cf. Adriano Viarengo, *Vittorio Emanuele II* (Rome: Salerno editrice, 2017), p. 379).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. lines 3-10 of *Canto dell'Italia che va in Campidoglio*: 'Oche del Campidoglio, zitte! Io sono / L'Italia grande e una. // Vengo di notte perché il dottor Lanza / Teme i colpi di sole: / Ei vuol tener la debita osservanza / In certi passi, e vuole / Che non si sbracci in Roma da signore / Oltre certi cancelli' (Giosuè Carducci, *Edizione nazionale delle opere*, vol. III: *Giambi ed epodi e Rime nuove* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1944), pp. 85-88). Carducci lamented the belated settlement of the Italian government in Rome (occurred in the summer 1871, hence the reference to the sunbeams in his poem) and teased Prime Minister Giovanni Lanza for his deference to the Pope (the 'cancelli' mentioned in the poem are the Vatican gates). With regard to the association between Rome and Byzantium, cf. the conclusion (lines 27-28) of Carducci's poem *Per Vincenzo Caldesi otto mesi dopo la sua morte*: 'Impronta Italia domandava Roma / Bisanzio essi le han dato' (Carducci, *Edizione nazionale delle opere*, vol. III: *Giambi ed epodi e Rime nuove*, pp. 76-77).

<sup>39</sup> 'Il disagio della modernità, la crisi degli ideali risorgimentali [...] ricevono una risposta sublimante, reattiva' in the *Cronaca bizantina*, 'chi scrive non intende affatto rispecchiare la degradazione della civiltà, ma esattamente all'opposto tratteggia obiettivi di tipo superiore, incarna miti ai quali – almeno nelle intenzioni – dovrebbe informarsi il comportamento della società civile (Paolo Giovannetti, *Decadentismo* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1994), pp. 32-33). See also Emanuela Scarano, *Dalla «Cronaca Bizantina» al «Convito»* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1970).

The political and cultural context of the end of the nineteenth century – when Oliva was writing – was different, and yet a comparable desire for renovation can be found in Oliva’s article, whose final sentence reads: ‘Roma non muore’.<sup>40</sup> A similar confident stance is the attitude shown a few months later by Morasso, who encouraged the resurgence of the Latin race. The burden of such a renaissance weighed more heavily on the Italians than on the shoulders of the French because, Morasso stated, the pride due to the finally reached political unification was more powerful than the *revanche* desire animating the French people: ‘A noi più ancora che ai giovani francesi si infiamma nell’anima rigogliosa il grande mistero della razza millenaria da tutelare, l’incommensurabile virtù dell’eroe latino da celebrare’.<sup>41</sup> Morasso’s perspective was in line with the stance taken on the issue in 1895 by Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, who had acknowledged the presence of signs of what he had baptized ‘renaissance latine’ precisely in the Italian literature – an opinion which, pronounced by a French, appeared to be even more powerful.<sup>42</sup> Two years earlier, another fellow French scholar, Édouard Rod, had expressed a similar trust in the Italian nation, which he described as a ‘pays jeune ou rajeuni’.<sup>43</sup>

Rod’s observation about the ‘rajeunissement’ of the Italian nation has a figurative value, but it also draws the attention to the actual upsurge of the young population, as a comparison between the figures of the 1881 and the 1901 census shows:<sup>44</sup> the total

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<sup>40</sup> Oliva, ‘La letteratura italiana’, p. 351.

<sup>41</sup> Morasso, ‘Ai nati dopo il 70’.

<sup>42</sup> Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, ‘La renaissance latine – Gabriel D’Annunzio: Poèmes et romans’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 January 1895, 187-206. On the phenomenon of the ‘rinascenza latina’, see Villa, Angela Ida, *Neoidealismo e rinascenza latina tra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Led, 1999), pp. 69-124 and Chapter Six of the present thesis.

<sup>43</sup> Édouard Rod, ‘L’évolution actuelle de la littérature italienne’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 July 1893.

<sup>44</sup> The census that should have been organised in 1891, in compliance with the ten-year census measurement tradition started after the Unification in 1861, was not carried out due to financial constraints of the Ufficio centrale di statistica, which, after a promising phase of development between 1873 and 1890, traversed a long period of crisis from an organisational and budgetary point of view, starting precisely in 1891 (cf. Roberto Fracassi, *Dal censimento dell’unità ai censimenti del centenario: un secolo di via della statistica italiana* (Rome: Istat, 1961), in particular pp. 89-126). In 1890, the economist and statistician Luigi Bodio, secretary of the Institute of Statistics, looked for alternative ways to reduce the costs of the 1891 census operations in light of the financial shortage and proposed to mechanize the required measurements by using the electric machines with punched paper tapes invented by Herman Hollerith (one of the fathers of IBM). This system had been already adopted in the United States and had been met with success. Unfortunately, rather than being an opportunity for technological advancement, the census was canceled, a decision which reflected the change of attitude towards statistical research of the government of the time, and of Crispi in particular (cf. Giovanni Favero, ‘Statistica ufficiale e politica nel secondo Ottocento’, *Sis-Magazine*, 25 February 2010). For a wider overview, see Giovanni Favero ‘La statistica fra scienza e amministrazione’, in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 26: Scienze e cultura dell’Italia unita*, ed. by Francesco Cassata e Claudio Pogliano (Turin: Einaudi), pp. 705-737 (p. 714 on Bodio’s attempt to conduct the 1891 population census). On the history of Italian statistics and on the role played by ‘a

number of people, both male and female, aged 20-25 had risen from 2.44 to 2.63 million and the number of those aged 25-30 had grown from 2.12 to 2.20 million.<sup>45</sup> Overall, the Italian population had increased from 28.45 million (31 December 1881) to 32.47 million (10 February 1901) at the turn of the century.<sup>46</sup> A further growth was expected a decade later, as illustrated by Rodolfo Benini who estimated that in 1911 the Italians would be 34.5 million. Considering that the population in 1800 was 18.12 million, he estimated the period necessary for the national population to double at around 120 years. When commenting on this datum, Benini made a comparison with the other Latin peoples and, despite the positive Italian trend, he manifested some concerns: 'nella gara abbiamo vinto i francesi, gli spagnuoli ed alcuni altri concorrenti; ma, per quanto notevole, il nostro progredire come numero è stato inferiore a quello della media delle nazioni europee, che raddoppiarono, a quanto sembra, in ottantacinque anni',<sup>47</sup> he concluded, while ascribing the main reason for this modest rise in the Italian population to the high level of emigration. Between the 1880s and the 1890s, the population growth went hand in hand with the increase of the 'Marriage fecundity rate',<sup>48</sup> which in an age of crisis and fears of degeneration for the Latin race –<sup>49</sup> stemming mainly from the plummeting of the French population, as we have seen – was a datum on which statisticians and politicians as well as artists kept an eye at the end of the century. The fin-de-siècle rhetoric saw a shift from the preoccupation with *one single* 'enfant du siècle', to paraphrase the title of Musset's celebrated novel, to *all* the children of the nation, *all* the 'enfants de la patrie', to borrow the famous opening phrase from the Marseillaise. This was true in France, where a serious demographic crisis was in full swing, as well as for the Italian nation, although for a different reason.

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science for the "civilizing" of nations', see Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood. Writing Statistics in nineteenth-century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia (1861-1965)*, 'Tavola 3: Stato della popolazione. Popolazione ai censimenti per sesso ed età' (Rome: Istituto Centrale di Statistica, 1968).

<sup>46</sup> Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia (1861-1965)*, 'Tavola 3: Stato della popolazione.

<sup>47</sup> Rodolfo Benini, 'La demografia italiana nell'ultimo cinquantennio', in *Cinquanta anni di storia italiana* (Milan: Hoepli-Accademia dei Lincei, 1911), p. 2 [the articles gathered in this collection are treated as 'monographies' (due to their length), thus the pagination starts over again for every single text].

<sup>48</sup> From 1888 to 1891 the rate measuring the 'Fecondità dei matrimoni' increased steadily from 4.54 in 1888 to 4.80 in 1891 (cf. Carl Ipsen, 'The Statistics of Population in Liberal Italy', *Bollettino di demografia storica*, 16 (1992), 7-34 (p. 25)). See also Mario De Vergottini, 'Natalità e fecondità', *Annali di statistica – Sviluppo della popolazione italiana dal 1861 al 1961*, 17 (1965), 399-440.

<sup>49</sup> Many were the texts that tackled the danger of a possible decadence of 'Latin races', among which the most influential was by Giuseppe Sergi, *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (Turin: Bocca, 1900); for an in-depth analysis of nineteenth century publications focusing on the same topic, cf. Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices. Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 20-107.

Speaking of images of children of the Italian nation, we shall now draw the attention back to the aforementioned Cantù's medal for the new century celebrations, displayed in *Fine e principio di secolo*, to analyse some additional details of its iconography, including the image of the mothers with the children. A closer examination of the medal's iconography and of the ekphrasis accompanying it will indeed be helpful to shed light on the so-called 'crisi di fine secolo', another time of transition considered as a *Wendepunkt* in Italian history, which saw bloody social uprisings from the South to the North of the nation and witnessed the apex of the conflict between government and working classes. This turning point links back with the previously explored 1870 *Wendepunkt* since, as Chiappelli noted, it was after that year that Socialism started to be 'dilagante nell'Europa continentale'.<sup>50</sup> This spread was due to political and economic factors operating both on a national and on an international level. The Paris Commune of 1871, repressed by liberals and democrats, determined an acute split between bourgeoisie and working class; shortly after, the formation of the First Spanish Republic (1873-74), although short-lived, enhanced the trust in the power of the First International. At the same time, 1873 witnessed the beginning of an unprecedented commercial crisis, which, coupled with an equally serious agricultural crisis (which came to an end only twenty years later, in 1896),<sup>51</sup> was described by the then-contemporaries in apocalyptic terms. What was a physiologic downward trend in the industrial economy cycle<sup>52</sup> was in fact perceived as a 'great depression', and people felt that for the first time in the nineteenth century the idea of linear and continuous progress appeared to come to an halt. What made the impact of such a crisis so powerful was 'its most noteworthy peculiarity', that is to say 'universality', as American scholar D. A. Wells emphasized when commenting on the formation of the Socialist International: the crisis indeed proved to be universal, as it affected all countries – the most and the less advanced, the ones involved and the ones not involved in wars, the nations equipped with more stable currencies as well as the

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<sup>50</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 632.

<sup>51</sup> For an extensive analysis of the industrial, economic and agricultural domain with specific reference to the Italian situation, cf. the following articles, respectively: Piero D'Angiolini, 'La svolta industriale italiana negli ultimi anni del secolo scorso e le reazioni dei contemporanei', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 1.2 (January-April 1971), 54-121; Giuseppe Barone, 'Sviluppo capitalistico e politica finanziaria in Italia nel decennio 1880-1890', *Studi Storici*, 3 (July-September 1972), 568-599; Piero D'Angiolini, 'L'Italia al termine della crisi agraria della fine del secolo XIX', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 3-4 (May-August 1969), 324-365.

<sup>52</sup> For a specific focus on Europe, see William Woodruff, *Impact of Western Man: A Study of Europe's Role in the World Economy 1750-1960* (London-Melbourne-New York: Macmillan, 1966); William Ashworth, *A Short History of the International Economy Since 1850* (London-New York: Longman 1987).

ones with less solid economies.<sup>53</sup> The economic crisis exacerbated social conflict, which led to the establishment of Socialist organisations across Europe: the German Social-democratic Party in 1875, a Marxist-inspired Socialist party in France in 1879, the Fabian Society in Great Britain in 1884. In Italy, the ‘socialist consciousness’ started to awake organically in 1881, when Andrea Costa founded the Revolutionary Socialist Party of Romagna, grew stronger in Lombardy where an Italian Workers’ Party was launched in 1885 and finally led to the formation in 1892 of the national Party of Workers, which three years later eventually became the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>54</sup> The Italian Socialist Party was formed at the dawn of a troubled period of social struggles culminating in the ‘Fasci siciliani’ (1893-94), which Prime Minister Francesco Crispi repressed with extreme violence by summoning the ‘stato d’assedio’ in the entire island – which meant to transfer all the executive power to the army and all the judiciary power to military tribunals – and by pushing through three so-called ‘anti-anarchist laws’, theoretically exclusively aimed at putting down the rebellion, but which in fact translated into an attempt to curtail the freedom of press and the freedom of association.<sup>55</sup>

It is interesting to remark that the above-mentioned fin-de-siècle titled Palermo journal voiced the widespread discontent among the population of the island due to the high fiscal pressure and pointed out the need to devote more attention to find solutions to the issues relating to the social question: ‘la politica l’abbiamo fatta e la facciamo tutti; ma più della politica si guardi al popolo sofferente, alla fame, alle miserie delle classi ultime; si studi davvero la questione sociale, perché non venga un giorno in cui non abbiamo a pentirci di non aver fatto il nostro dovere, quello di levare la voce a vantaggio del popolo’.<sup>56</sup> The element that strikes the most is that this call came from a journal which would normally focus on philosophical and artistic issues, providing accounts of theatre premières and delighting its erudite readers with poems in

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<sup>53</sup> David A. Wells, *Recent economic changes* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1889), pp. 1-2 quoted in Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire (1875-1914)* (New York: Random House, 1989 [1st edn 1987]), p. 34.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia moderna*, vol. VI: *Lo sviluppo del capitalismo e del movimento operaio* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970), pp. 383-388; for a complete overview of the history of the Socialist movement in Italy see Giulio Trevisani, *Lineamenti di una storia del movimento operaio italiano. Dalla 1ª Internazionale a fine secolo* (Milan: Edizioni Avanti, 1960); Aldo Romano, *Storia del movimento socialista in Italia*, 3 vols (Bari: Laterza, 1966); Renato Zangheri, *Storia del socialismo italiano*, vol. I: *Dalla rivoluzione francese a Andrea Costa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> See Salvatore Francesco Romano, *Storia dei Fasci siciliani* (Bari: Laterza, 1959); Francesco Renda, *I Fasci siciliani: 1892-94* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977); Giuseppe Astuto, *Crispi e lo stato d’assedio in Sicilia* (Milan: Dott. A. Giuffrè Editore, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> G. Simoncini Scaglione, ‘Giornalismo’, *Fin de siècle*, 16 April 1892.

French.<sup>57</sup> The fact that the journalists of a periodical which would not normally deal with economic-related and social issues felt the need to make the call for greater attention to be devoted to the financial pressure that was oppressing most of the population makes clear how serious and urgent the situation was. In the same issue of the Palermo *Fin de Siècle*, the journalist Mogavero discussed the question 'optimism versus pessimism' in an article which, although not openly mentioning it, has the phantom of the decadence of society in the background.

Soon afterwards, this phantom would materialise openly in Nordau's *Degeneration*, which suggests that the fin de siècle period was witnessing a 'fin de race' and a form of degeneration on multiple levels in politics and in society. In Italy, sociologist and criminologist Scipio Sighele echoed Nordau's point of view and the violence-related topics discussed in fin-de-siècle periodicals with a great popular appeal by emphasizing that the high rate of violent murders measured both in the upper and in the lower classes were phenomena due to 'quel complesso di cause che i francesi definiscono *fine di secolo*, il Nordau *fine di razza*, e che a me pare si potrebbero definire [...] *fine del regime borghese*'.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.2 'Crisi di fine secolo': a troubled century's end

Sighele had perfectly grasped the mood of fin-de-siècle Italy. Indeed, a year later, a so-called 'colpo di stato della borghesia'<sup>59</sup> took place in Milan between 6 and 10 May 1898. In those days General Bava-Beccaris brutally repressed protests due to the increase of food prices (especially bread)<sup>60</sup> by ordering to the Italian army to shoot on the demonstrators – mainly, factory workers – who were marching in Piazza Duomo.<sup>61</sup> In

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<sup>57</sup> In the same issue of the Palermo *Fin de Siècle* journal there are pieces such as 'Pessimismo' and 'Ratio', articles devoted to the discussion of the ideas of pessimism and rationality, respectively, from a philosophical point of view; the poem *L'absence* by Pierre Vergès; an entire column titled 'Theatralia' reviewing the performance of *L'amico Fritz*, *Hernani*, *Rigoletto*.

<sup>58</sup> Scipio Sighele, *La delinquenza settaria* (Milan: Treves, 1897), pp. 19-20.

<sup>59</sup> Umberto Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia. La crisi politica di fine secolo in Italia 1896/1900* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), in particular pp. 121-184. This idea of the 'coup' of the bourgeoisie is highly debated by historians; see: Raffaele Colapietra, *Il Novantotto. La crisi politica di fine secolo (1896-1900)* (Milan-Rome: Edizioni dell'Avanti!, 1959), Franco Gaeta, *La crisi di fine secolo e l'età giolittiana* (Turin: UTET, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> For an analysis of the time on this issue, see *L'evoluzione economica nel secolo XIX. Versione e note di Alberto Geisser, con una appendice sui salari industriali in Italia nella seconda metà del secolo XIX* (Rome: Società Editrice Laziale, 1904) and Giulio Fioretti, *Pane, governo e tasse in Italia: considerazioni impopolari* (Naples: Pierro, 1898). For an accurate historical analysis, see Gastone Manacorda, *Dalla crisi alla crescita. Crisi economica e lotta politica in Italia 1892-1896* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), in particular pp. 95-115 with reference to the reaction against the Italian proletarian movements.

<sup>61</sup> For an extensive account of the events occurred in the city and in the Lombardy region, which culminated in the 'moti di Milano', see Alfredo Canavero, *Milano e la crisi di fine secolo (1896-1900)* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1998).

the entire Lombardy region a state of siege was declared by Prime Minister Antonio di Rudinì, and on 7 May 1898 the most aggressive reaction took place: a group of workers gathered in the Duomo square, where Bava-Beccaris had placed the artillery, which he ordered to fire on the crowd. According to the official estimates, eight people died and about 450 were wounded,<sup>62</sup> although probably the toll was twice as high.<sup>63</sup> When commenting on what happened, Eugenio Torelli Viollier wrote to Pasquale Villari: 'siamo dunque in pieno colpo di Stato fatto a beneficio della borghesia contro il popolo, ossia di una classe contro un'altra, dell'oppressore contro l'oppresso. Tutta la stampa europea c'è contraria',<sup>64</sup> he added. The echo these events had was so powerful as to reach the American shores, where the news was reported by *The New York Times*, which reported 300 people killed and 1,000 wounded.<sup>65</sup> The reaction of the new Prime Minister Luigi Pelloux (who took over from Rudinì in June 1898) and of the bourgeoisie was, however, stubborn: 'Ma la borghesia non vuol sentire parole che le riescano sgradite. [...] Siamo, a parer mio, in giorni d'incomparabile bruttezza e nulla ricordo d'analogo dacché ho l'età della ragione',<sup>66</sup> he stated, 'vedo cose che mi ricordano i Borboni', he recalled, since he was born in the Kingdom of the two Sicilies and, as a young man, had joined a patriotic insurrectional group to drive out the Bourbons. Historian Gaetano Salvemini, close to Socialist Filippo Turati (who was incarcerated and whose journal *Critica sociale* was sequestered), also spoke of a 'colpo di stato, di cui furono vittime i partiti popolari del maggio del '98'.<sup>67</sup> The demonstrations spread across the nation from North to South,<sup>68</sup> reaching Naples, where the situation had already been burning since the beginning of that year, as the journal *Il monitore sociale: rivista indipendente fin de siècle* had lamented in January 1898: 'Tutte le classi sociali si

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<sup>62</sup> Martin Clark, *Modern Italy. 1871 to the Present* (London-New York: Routledge, 1984), pp. 126-128; Roland Sarti, *Italy. A Reference Guide from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Facts On File, 2004), p. 271 (s.v. 'Fatti di maggio').

<sup>63</sup> Christopher Duggan, *The force of destiny. A history of Italy since 1796* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 348.

<sup>64</sup> Viollier's letter is quoted in Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia*, p. I; see also Lucio Villari, 'I fatti di Milano del 1898: la testimonianza di Eugenio Torelli Viollier', *Studi Storici*, 8 (1967), 534-549.

<sup>65</sup> [Unsigned] 'Italy Verging on Anarchy; Bread Rioters in Milan Throw Tiles from the Roofs on the Heads of the Soldiers, Who Retire; 300 Killed And 1,000 Injured', *The New York Times*, 9 May 1898 <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1898/05/09/102561098.pdf>>.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia*, p. I.

<sup>67</sup> Gaetano Salvemini, 'Le origini della reazione', *Critica sociale*, 1 July 1899.

<sup>68</sup> Many are the studies analysing singular regions or cities, such as Padova, Tuscany, Ancona, Bari: Angelo Gambasin, 'Il '98 a Padova', *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, 122 (1964), 23-62; Angelo Gambasin, 'Il '98 a Padova', *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, 123 (1965), 19-32; Angelo Gambasin, 'Il '98 a Padova', *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, 124 (1965), 33-56; Carlo Pinzani, *La crisi politica di fine secolo in Toscana* (Florence: Barbera, 1963); Sergio Anselmi, 'Ancona e la provincia nella crisi di fine secolo: i moti per il carovita', *Quaderni storici delle Marche*, 2 (1969), 265-332; Cesare Tortora, 'I tumulti del 1898 in Terra di Bari', *Archivio storico pugliese*, 1-4 (1969), 270-285.

organizzano per combattere ed atterrare i pessimi ed immorali governanti che da ben trentotto anni ci giocano, spogliano e s governano [sic].<sup>69</sup>

It was with these images in mind and with this sentiment that, in 1900, the Italian people prepared to welcome the new century and that, in Milan, people arranged the turn-of-the-century celebrations which we have described earlier. Among the ways for celebrating, we have previously mentioned the creation of a celebratory medal designed by the sculptor Cantù. In light of the political, economic, and social situation which we have just described, it is now useful to go back to that medal in order to better explain its iconography. Cantù's medal presented, indeed, two iconographic elements which are deeply rooted in a socialist cultural substratum. The first is the symbol of mothers lifting their babies towards the rising sun ('le madri alzano verso il simbolo del secolo nascente [il sole] i loro figli') hoping for a better future.<sup>70</sup> Despite the often anticlerical attitude of artists supporting socialist ideas, the image of the mother with the child is a constant presence in socialist iconology, which appears to be a sort of borrowing and secularization of the Christian image of the Virgin and child.<sup>71</sup> To spread its secular moral system, socialism borrowed 'decalogues' and 'catechisms', thus using practices as well as images from the religious sphere and applying them to its own domain where the new form of transcendence is the socialist utopia.<sup>72</sup> Symbolism and, in particular Divisionism, was very close to themes that were at the core of the socialist rhetoric, including maternity. At the fin de siècle, maternity was often represented in symbolist-pointillist art, where the iconography of the mother with the child was reworked in many paintings, among which Giovanni Segantini's *Le due madri* (1889) and Giovanni Pellizza da Volpedo's *Il Quarto Stato* (1901) emerge. The message

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<sup>69</sup> Matteo Melillo, 'Il monitore sociale', *Il monitore sociale: rivista indipendente fin de siècle*, 1.1, 12 January 1898. See also Walter Mocchi, *I moti italiani del 1898. Lo stato d'assedio a Napoli e le sue conseguenze* (Naples: Pierro, 1901) and for a modern historical account Gianfranco Volpe, 'Il movimento socialista a Napoli ed i moti del maggio '98', *Clio*, 4 (1966), 413-455 and Gianfranco Volpe, 'Il movimento socialista a Napoli dopo i moti del maggio '98', *Clio*, 3 (1967), 388-423.

<sup>70</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ettore Ciccotti, *La psicologia del movimento socialista: note ed osservazioni* (Bari: Laterza, 1903) can be considered as a precursor of the study of the analogies between Socialism and religion, as Maurizio Viroli has noticed (Maurizio Viroli, 'Socialismo e cultura', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 1 (1981), 179-197). For a closer examination of the relationship between religion and socialism, see Arnaldo Nesti, *Gesù socialista. Una tradizione popolare italiana (1880-1920)* (Turin: Claudiana, 1974); Enrico Decleva, 'Anticlericalismo e religiosità laica nel socialismo italiano', in *Prampolini e il socialismo riformista* (Rome: Edizioni Avanti!, 1979), pp. 259-279; Maurizio Torrini, 'Religione e religiosità nei primi anni del '900', in *Angelo Fortunato Formiggini. Un editore del Novecento*, ed. by Luigi Balsamo and Renzo Cremante (Bologna: il Mulino, 1981), pp. 363-389.

<sup>72</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the ethics and of the morale of Socialism, see the two studies by Patrizia Audenino, 'Etica laica e rappresentazione del futuro nella cultura socialista dei primi del Novecento', *Società e Storia*, 18 (1982), 877-919 and Patrizia Audenino, 'La cultura socialista: un nuovo sistema di valori', in *La cassetta degli strumenti. Ideologia e modelli sociali nell'industrialismo italiano*, ed. by Valerio Castronovo (Milan: Angeli, 1986), pp. 114-168.

springing up from Segantini's painting, featuring a woman holding her baby and a cow next to her calf, is the universality of maternal love, permeating nature all around. Despite the humbleness of the setting – a cattle shed – and the poverty of the ensemble, the sensation emanating from the painting is of peacefulness, which is perfectly attuned with the Utopian-humanitarian socialist trend aimed to 'ricomporre e conciliare' which was in vogue during the fin de siècle.<sup>73</sup> A less harmonious and more combative, and yet solemn, model of maternity is the one offered by Pellizza in *Il Quarto Stato*, previously prepared by earlier versions known as *Ambasciatori della fame* (1891-1895) and *Fiumana* (1896-86 and 1898, respectively). *Ambasciatori della fame*, showing a group of people led by two men acting as 'ambassadors' walking towards the front of the painting, ideally reconnects with the 1888-1890 popular risings against the increase of the price of bread and the unemployment following a serious agricultural crisis. Among the several interventions on the stylistic and iconographic level differentiating the very first version from the following ones, there is the addition of female figures. In a sketch dated 1892, a group of women is added to the picture, coherently with the scene of the workers' protest which Pellizza had witnessed in the Malaspina square of Volpedo, the town close to Alessandria where he was born. Pellizza wrote that he saw that the crowd was joined by a first woman showing her emaciated child, while a second woman lay on the ground vainly trying to feed her child.<sup>74</sup> In the final version, *Il Quarto Stato*, he retains the presence of the first woman with the child, but this time her look is brave and, with the gesture of her hand, she invites the crowd behind her to follow her. Many have interpreted the figure of the woman as a metaphor for humanity; indeed, the universality of the message that Pellizza aims to convey is confirmed by a poem which he himself added on the painting's canvas: 'La moglie il pargoletto teco conduci / ad ingrossare / la fiumana dell'Umanità assetata di / giustizia – di quella giustizia conculcata fin qui / e che ora miraggio lontano splende'.<sup>75</sup> 'Ora', Pellizza wrote to emphasize that the thirst for justice appeared to be particularly strong at the turn of the century. The same iconography populated publications and pamphlets in the years preceding the turn of century, among which we would like to recall Edmondo De

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<sup>73</sup> Renato Barilli, 'Arte e socialismo. Un percorso in cinque «stazioni»', in *L'immagine del socialismo nell'arte, nelle bandiere, nei simboli*, ed. by Renato Barilli, Giovanna Granati, Paola Pallottino, Maurizio Scaparro (Venice: Marsilio, 1982), pp. 17-24 (p. 20).

<sup>74</sup> Pellizza wrote: 'È giunta l'ora del riscatto, così pensano e non vogliono ottenere colla forza, ma colla ragione – qualcuno potrà alzare il pugno in atto di minaccia ma la folla non è, con lui, essa fida nei suoi ambasciatori – gli uomini intelligenti [...] Una donna accorso mostra il macilento bambino, un'altra, una terza, è per terra che tenta invano di allattare il bambino sfinito colle mammelle sterili – un'altra chiama impreca [...]»' (*Pellizza da Volpedo. Catalogo generale*, ed. by Aurora Scotti (Milan: Electa, 1986), p. 356).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Teresa Fiori, *Archivi del Divisionismo* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1968), p. 198.

Amicis's *Lotte civili* published in 1899<sup>76</sup> by the Socialist publisher Nerbini.<sup>77</sup> One of the illustrations of this volume<sup>78</sup> collecting De Amicis's socialist-themed writings and conferences features a crowd led by a man holding a lighted up torch in one hand and hoisting a flag in the other; next to him, one step behind, a woman carrying a child walks with him and above her head, on the background, a bright rising sun whose rays irradiate the sky.

In this illustration of De Amicis's *Lotte civili* are gathered all the most crucial elements of the socialist iconography, which we can indeed find in Cantù's medal: the mothers holding their children, the march of the crowd, and the hope for a brighter future illuminated by a brilliant sun whose rays project in all directions. In the medal description, the sun is presented as a 'novello astro': 'in essa [medaglia] è effigiata la speranza che addita alle turbe il nuovo secolo che sorge come il sole nascente all'orizzonte del tempo'.<sup>79</sup> What is, however, peculiar of this ekphrasis is the suggested association between the sun and the century. Normally, one would say that a century 'sorge' and the sun 'nasce' (on the horizon), whereas the ekphrasis presents a chiasmus and suggests that 'il secolo sorge' and 'il sole nasce'. The aim of this chiasmus is to strengthen the identification between the two elements of the century on the one hand and of the rising sun on the other.

In socialist heraldry, the 'sole nascente' or 'sol dell'avvenire' bore the promise of a society to come based on social justice. The rising sun was a pervasive presence in the socialist symbology of late-nineteenth century Italy: it featured the flags of all socialist circles throughout the nation<sup>80</sup> and from South to North, from Sicily to Piedmont, via Emilia-Romagna and Liguria, countless were the socialist periodicals named after it, such as: *Il Sole. Organo dei lavoratori* (Modica, 1893); *Il Sole dell'avvenire. Organo dei lavoratori. Settimanale, poi Organo dei lavoratori di Terranova, Niscemi, Vittoria, Comiso, Scoglitti, Scicli, Santa Croce, Modica* (1893); *Il Sole dell'avvenire. Organo popolare socialista* (Modica, 1897); *Sole dell'avvenire. Foglio socialista rivoluzionario* (Ravenna,

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<sup>76</sup> Edmondo De Amicis, *Lotte civili. Raccolta di bozzetti, scritti e conferenze socialistiche [con 24 tavole illustrate]* (Florence: Nerbini, n.d. [1899]; subsequently reissued a year later Edmondo De Amicis, *Lotte civili [con 39 illustrazioni]* (Florence: Nerbini, 1900)). The volume was later published again in 1910 by Treves (Edmondo De Amicis, *Lotte civili* (Milan: Treves, 1910) but with no illustrations).

<sup>77</sup> On the publisher Nerbini, see Gianfranco Tortorelli, 'Una casa editrice socialista: la Nerbini', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 2-3 (1980), 221-254. See also Giorgio Bertone, "'Parlare ai borghesi": De Amicis, il *Primo Maggio* e la propaganda socialista', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 2-3 (1980). 'Primo Maggio' is one of the writings included in the 1910 edition of *Lotte civili*; De Amicis devoted a novel to this topic which he did not publish and which saw the light posthumously (Edmondo De Amicis, *Il Primo Maggio*, ed. by Giorgio Bertone and Pino Boero (Milan: Garzanti, 1980)).

<sup>78</sup> De Amicis, *Lotte civili*, 'dispensa 17'.

<sup>79</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *L'immagine del socialismo nell'arte*, pp. 136-137, 140, 144.

1889-1890); *Il Sole dell'avvenire* (Mirandola, 1888); *Il Sole nascente. Giornale politico amministrativo settimanale di Sampierdarena* (Sampierdarena-Genoa, 1893); *Il Sole dell'avvenire* also known as *Il Sole dell'avvenire è il socialismo* (Alba, 1902).

At the turn-of-the-century, the 'avvenire' in which this sun would shine brighter appeared closer to many. Indeed, one of the accusations moved against Turati when he was arrested after the 'moti di Milano' was that he had suggested that the time for a socialist revolution had finally come. Although this version of the facts was not actually right, it was easy for the prosecutors to put in place such a charge as in that period this idea, in fact, found expression in a widespread new set of images entering the socialist iconography, which featured a personification of the new century instead of the rising sun. The personification of the new century was accompanied by the personification of the old century, such as it is shown in an illustration displayed in a 1900 issue of the satirical Rome-based magazine *L'asino*:<sup>81</sup> the illustration features an old man with 'XIX' written on his chest and surrounded by journals whose headlines are 'violenze-crudeltà', and 'schiavitù-miseria'. He is sitting in a coffin, holding a rosary in one hand while ready to lie down and pull up to his body a cover with a cross on it. In the high section of the image there is a man walking on top of a hill with the writing 'XX' on his chest, holding a scythe in one hand and in the other a banner, with the words 'benessere', 'giustizia', 'libertà', 'fratellanza' written on it. He is leading a group of people who are climbing up the hill following him; the closest to the front are holding shovels, while the ones in the background have indistinct features – which is an optical device aimed at conveying the idea that they are a high number. A writing at the bottom of the image gives voice to both 'characters' and reads as follows: 'Il XIX (prima di crepare): – Chi sei tu? Il XX: – Sono il secolo degli operai'. The entire image is filled with both irony and hope.

Hope is an element on which the ekphrasis of Cantù's medal insists a lot: 'la speranza che addita alle turbe', 'nella speranza che in esso [il nuovo secolo] trovino la felicità che la generazione ora adulta, nata e vissuta in quello che sta per morire, non vi ha trovato'.<sup>82</sup> The reasons for this discontent with the then-current condition of the 'adult generation' born in post-Unification Italy was that political promises of the Risorgimento appeared not to have been kept and the large-scale economic improvement brought about by industrialization was not as widespread throughout society as the working classes expected it to be. Such a contrast between ideals and

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<sup>81</sup> The author of the illustration is Rata Langa (Gabriele Galantra). Cf. *L'immagine del socialismo nell'arte, nelle bandiere, nei simboli*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>82</sup> [Unsigned] 'La medaglia destinata dal Comitato "Pro Milano" per le premiazioni', p. 4 [my emphasis].

reality, which translated into a class conflict, had been growing for some years and had exploded towards the end of the century, ushering the new century in a trail of blood. As we have seen, one of the most violent manifestations of these social struggles took place precisely in Milan, and it is in light of these events that the sorrow gleaming through the sentence of the medal ekphrasis, saying 'la felicità che la generazione ora adulta [...] non vi [nel secolo morente] ha trovato', can be explained. The generation of the then-grown-ups was the generation whose fathers might have been among the 5000 Italian soldiers who fought and died in Adua in a war strongly sought by Prime Minister Crispi, or among the eighty that were shot dead, and the 450 wounded, in Milan during the 'tumulti del pane'. It is interesting to remark the fact that in the medal ekphrasis all these socialist-related elements are hinted at, but not openly mentioned. We think that the reason for this might be found in Gaetano Negri's involvement in the new century's celebrations and, probably, also in the preparation of the pamphlet *Fine e principio di secolo*. Negri's position must, indeed, be recalled: in 1898, he was among those who supported the mayor of Milan, Giuseppe Vigoni, in his applause to General Bava-Beccaris's actions to settle the riots, not to mention that fact that when Negri was still in charge of the public administration of the city he was never particularly open to finding agreements with democratic parties and even enforced a law aimed at imposing a particular tax on workers coming from outside the city who, he claimed, benefited from the city's services without, up until that moment, economically contributing to them.<sup>83</sup>

The presence in *Fine e principio di secolo* of contrasting points of view makes it even more representative of the opposite positions characterizing the end-of-the-century Italian panorama: in the same journal we find socialist-inclined iconography, but at the same time, on the first page, there is a poem mourning the death of Umberto I, the king whom many saw as a 'bloody' king, since he had been very favourable to declare the 'stato d'assedio' in Sicily during the Fasci siciliani and had openly praised Bava-Beccaris's conduct in Milan and even awarded him the medal of the Great Cross of the Order of Savoy for it.<sup>84</sup> The coexistence of these two-fold traumatic memories (the deaths and the incarcerations on the one hand, and the assassination of the king on the other) is interesting both in light of its *form* and *content*. The form, or rather the *means* used to convey such messages, is the journal which becomes a meeting point among intellectual élites (Negri, Fogazzaro, Serao) and the wider population – indeed, being a

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<sup>83</sup> Marco Soresina, s.v. 'Gaetano Negri', in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. LXXVIII (Rome: Istituto Treccani, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> Trevisani, *Lineamenti di una storia del movimento operaio italiano. Dalla 1ª Internazionale a fine secolo*, p. 259 and p. 297.

short booklet, almost pamphlet, and also having advertising in it, it is not unlikely that it was distributed for free in order to grant it the widest possible circulation. The connection between high and low is one of the biggest challenges that journals faced, but also one of the greatest opportunities, which made a newspaper a site of cross-social and cross-cultural encounter, as periodical studies have extensively demonstrated.<sup>85</sup> From a content-point of view, we are in presence of a double social trauma affecting separate and yet possibly partially overlapping segments of society. A social trauma is perceived as a 'wound to the broader collectivity', as Jeffrey Alexander has observed.<sup>86</sup> Social trauma is not disjoint from cultural trauma, which occurs 'when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways'.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusions: a 'fecund' crisis

We can safely state that the spread of the riots from the North to the South, as shown earlier, and the harsh way in which they were settled constitute a nationally widespread memory; the same can be said of the death of the king, considering the symbolic status of the monarchy, in which relied the core of the unity of the nation, as Crispi – whose politics strongly marked the national life<sup>88</sup> – said during the inaugural speech for a statue honoring Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1897.<sup>89</sup> Through his call to unity, while referring to a crucial moment in the nation's history (the 'spedizione dei Mille'), Crispi put in place the form of 'awakening', to speak in Benjamin's terms, which consists in the 'mobilization of a political purpose in the present' of elements that 'were

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<sup>85</sup> See *Giornalismo italiano (Volume Primo: 1860-1901, Volume Secondo: 1901-1939)*, ed. by Franco Contorbia (Milan: Mondadori, 2007); *La stampa italiana del Risorgimento*, ed. by Alessandro Galante Garrone and Franco Della Peruta (Bari: Laterza, 1979); Nicola Tranfaglia, *Stampa e sistema politico nell'Italia unita: la metamorfosi del quarto potere* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1986); Valerio Castronovo, *La stampa italiana dall'Unità al fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1984).

<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: a social theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 119.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander, *Trauma: a social theory*, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> See the extremely rich biography of Crispi by Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901: from nation to nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>89</sup> Crispi was asked to inaugurate the monument to Garibaldi erected in Milazzo and presented to the public on 20 July 1897; on that occasion, Crispi said: 'in Italia la questione della forma di governo non tocca soltanto il reggimento della cosa pubblica, ma include la esistenza stessa della nazione. [...] dopo 27 anni non sono sparite le cuciture dei sette Stati [...] Noi al 1860 abbiamo accettato la monarchia e le saremo fedeli. Non la lasceremo se non quando essa rinnegasse l'Italia' (Francesco Crispi, 'Adua: una sconfitta non irreparabile', in *"Sotto i Borbone non soffrii tanto". Lettere di Francesco Crispi dopo Adua (1896-1898)*, ed. by Lauro Rossi (Rome: Carocci, 2000) pp. 87-98 (pp. 92-93)).

once dispersed across the blank seriality of time'.<sup>90</sup> On that occasion, Crispi made clear that Italy was facing a severe crisis, from a political, governmental, economic and societal point of view. 'La crisi ci minaccia da tutte le parti', wrote journalist Simoncini Scaglione in 1892, in the *Fin de Siècle* Palermo journal.<sup>91</sup> 'Giammai crisi morale fu più grande, più dolorosa di quella dell'epoca nostra' Vincenzo Mangano proclaimed in a speech centred on the end of the century.<sup>92</sup>

For some years the crisis seemed unstoppable, not differently from the apparently 'endless crisis'<sup>93</sup> once experienced by the neighbour country of France across the Alps. But, as Kern has observed, 'no age can sustain continual crisis'; even more, crises can be transformed into opportunities: 'the crises of the generation at the turn of the century were also part of an essentially constructive process, as the most daring innovators put a crow bar to the ironwork of traditional forms to clear the way for all the rebuilding ahead'.<sup>94</sup> The theoretical framework herein outlined by Kern is fully applicable to the Italian context and to the turn-of-the-century period, which we are here examining, as testified by Chiappelli's statement in 'Sul confine dei due secoli', that the 'vita civile' was 'prossima ad una delle sue crisi, feconde di ordine nuovo'.<sup>95</sup> Chiappelli sees the turn-of-the-century crisis as a transitional phase which could be fecund and 'give birth' to a whole new state of affairs: 'se il mondo di oggi soffre [...] i dolori di una nuova creazione e par vicino a sciogliere il grembo doloroso', then 'la promessa del frutto che se ne aspetta deve cercarsi in questa più profonda coscienza della vita, del diritto e della dignità umana, quale si è venuta maturando lungo il corso del secolo'.<sup>96</sup> In order to fully appreciate the potentialities brought about by this crisis, it is necessary to analyse, or rather *criticise* (in the etymological sense of the word) the 'coscienza della vita, del diritto e della dignità umana, quale si è venuta maturando lungo il corso del secolo', and this is precisely the aim of all the publications on the end

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<sup>90</sup> Harootunian, 'The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries', p. 79.

<sup>91</sup> G. Simoncini Scaglione, 'Giornalismo', *Fin de siècle*, 16 April 1892. As Bobbio has observed, 'l'avvicinarsi della fine del secolo, che è obiettivamente parlando soltanto la fine di una serie temporale arbitrariamente scelta, è di solito percepito come il risolversi di una crisi o spirituale o morale o politica o economica' (Norberto Bobbio, 'La cultura italiana fra Ottocento e Novecento', in *La cultura italiana tra '800 e '900 e le origini del nazionalismo* (Florence: Olschki, 1981), pp. 1-19 (pp. 1-2)).

<sup>92</sup> Vincenzo Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà nel pensiero di Nietzsche, di Ibsen e di Tolstoj - Conferenza letta al Circolo Univers. Cattolico di Napoli il 17 Febbraio 1901* (Rome: Società italiana cattolica di cultura editrice, 1902), p. 43. We will come back and analyse more in depth this speech in Chapter Five of the present thesis.

<sup>93</sup> Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 105-129.

<sup>94</sup> Stephen Kern, *The culture of time and space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 207.

<sup>95</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 637.

<sup>96</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 637.

of the century which we have so far explored and which were conceived with precisely this *critical* aim in mind. As Koselleck has extensively shown, *crisis* is the other side of *criticism*, from which we have started our research in Chapter One.<sup>97</sup> As Victor Gourevitch has emphasized when commenting on Koselleck's view, in periods when the distance between State and society increases, 'the challenge – the *critique*' leads to 'the eventual subversion – the *crisis* – of the political by the social, cultural and moral realms'.<sup>98</sup> This defines a 'critical society', to use Auguste Comte's terms, or 'transitional society', to use John Stuart Mill's expression, living in an 'age of transition',<sup>99</sup> which is a 'time pregnant with change'.<sup>100</sup> The image of a 'pregnant' crisis suggested by Mill is echoed by the image of 'fecund' crisis suggested by Chiappelli. The crisis slowly came to an end in 1900, which marked the end of the 'decennio di sangue'<sup>101</sup> and of the particularly sanguinary two-year period 1898-1900. Two factors changed the political scenario completely: first, the accession to the throne of king Victor Emmanuel II, who decided not to follow up on the severe actions which had been taken against all those who took part in the riots and even granted an amnesty to all those who had been imprisoned and for this reason was seen as a 'socialist king' by men such as Pelloux; second, the actions by Giovanni Giolitti – first as Minister of the Interior (1901-1903) and then as Prime Minister from 1903 – who opened up to the Socialist party and to the democrats, an action which considerably changed the political alliances and the population's perception of the government. Already in 1899, Claudio Treves was writing in the *Critica Sociale*: 'c'è dall'altra riva un uomo che ci ha capito'. Despite the fact that the 'età giolittiana'<sup>102</sup> – as Giolitti's long period at the helm of the country would later be called – had its shadows and critical moments, as the 'età crispina' which preceded it, its starting point still marked a solid change in the public consciousness.

As Ottavio Bariè has observed, every historical epoch is conventionally determined by two dates, one of beginning and one of end, respectively. 'Nel caso dell'Italia del primo Novecento', Bariè has remarked, 'l'inizio [l'età giolittiana] è nettamente segnato, perché il passato tende a fornire una antitesi convincente fino ad

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<sup>97</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and crisis: enlightenment and the pathogenesis of modern society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 102-104.

<sup>98</sup> Victor Gourevitch, 'Foreward', in Koselleck, *Critique and crisis*, p. vii [my emphasis].

<sup>99</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', in John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture*, ed. by Gertrude Himmelfarb (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 3 (first published in the *Examiner*, January 6 – May 29, 1831).

<sup>100</sup> Stuart Mill, 'The Spirit of the Age', p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia*, p. 399.

<sup>102</sup> The bibliography on Giolitti is extremely vast; for a comprehensive overview see Giampiero Carocci, *Giolitti e l'età giolittiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987); Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'Italia contemporanea. L'età giolittiana* (Bari: Laterza, 2003).

apparire drammatica'.<sup>103</sup> This 'dramatic' antithesis separating the past from a new moment coincides with events which took place at the end of the twentieth century and which we have explored in the present and previous chapter to illustrate how and why the turn of the century has been a *Wendepunkt* in Italian history. 'L'ultima fase – degenerativa – del post-Risorgimento' coincides with the 'crispismo nelle sue ultime manifestazioni autoritarie' and with the events that took place 'con e dopo Crispi' (post the 1896 Adua defeat), which marks a before-and-after. We agree with him in noticing that:

Malgrado [...] *historia non facit saltus*, [...], si può dire che la crisi politica di fine secolo costituì lo spartiacque fondamentale fra due epoche e i governi che iniziarono la loro opera con il 1901 sottolinearono e in parte promossero un salto di qualità decisivo nello sviluppo della società italiana.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the fact that symbolic dates are arbitrarily defined to set periodizations, which are a psychological convention – not differently from the division of time in centuries, as we have shown at the beginning of this chapter, they do possess a high psychological value.<sup>105</sup> In this respect, it can be said that the assassination of Umberto I in 1900 and Crispi's death in 1901 appear to be in a way comparable – in terms of symbolical value – to Queen Victoria's death, which occurred in the same year, or to Empress Elizabeth II's assassination and Bismarck's death in 1898. These events would have been considered as watershed in their own respect, but the fact that they occurred at the turn of the century further enhanced their echo and set them as marking an *antithesis* between a past and a future.

In his article 'Problemi moderni', Chiappelli conveyed this idea by claiming that 'i tempi volgono a forme complesse e sintetiche. Le acute e dolorose antitesi ideali e sociali, che lo spirito critico, cresciuto gigante lungo il secolo XIX, ci ha fatte sentire più vive, sono state e sono una sosta; ma anche un impulso a future e più alte sintesi umane'; and then he specifies that 'la sintesi non è solo revisione del passato', but also 'preparazione dell'avvenire'.<sup>106</sup> The twofold nature of turning points, which are points

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<sup>103</sup> Ottavio Bariè, 'L'Italia nell'Europa del secolo XX', in *Cultura e società in Italia nel primo Novecento (1900-1915). Atti del secondo Convegno del Centro di ricerca "Letteratura e cultura dell'Italia Unita" (Milano, 7-11 settembre 1981)* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1984), pp. 20-40 (p. 23).

<sup>104</sup> Bariè, 'L'Italia nell'Europa del secolo XX', p. 24 [original emphasis].

<sup>105</sup> With respect to the meaning and the value of periodizations, see Ezio Raimondi, s.v. 'Periodizzamento', in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Turin: UTET, 1986).

<sup>106</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Problemi moderni', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 June 1902, 410-422 (p. 417).

of connection and, at the same time, moments of antithesis and rupture, can be explained in light of what Alexander has defined the 'Janus-faced character of modernity'.<sup>107</sup> In ancient Roman religion, Janus was the god of transitions, the god one would pray and invoke when embarking on a new commitment, and was represented as two-faced, with one face looking backwards and one facing forward. The image of Janus enjoyed a discrete popularity at the turn of the century and because of its iconographical power it was used across different media. For instance, the British influential periodical named *The Nineteenth Century* placed it on the cover of the issue of January 1901 and, since a new century had started, the editors decided to change the title of the journal and opted for *The Nineteenth Century and after*; they used the Janus face in order to account figuratively for the change of title and accompanied the image with a small note saying: 'this Janiform head [...] tells, in a figure, all that need be said of the alteration made to-day in the title of the Review'.<sup>108</sup> Despite the pamphlet *Fine e principio di secolo* not providing an equally image-wise power representation, it somehow equals the British periodical *The Nineteenth Century and after* in its title, by presenting a reference to the 'Fine' of the century drawing to a close and to the 'Principio' of the one beginning. This is the reason which had led us to consider it as epitomizing the Janus-like atmosphere of the Italian fin de siècle.

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<sup>107</sup> See Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The dark side of modernity* (Cambridge, UK-Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2013) and Thompson's observations about the 'Janus-like features of the Turn of the Century, which looks backwards with nostalgia and forwards with bright-eyed anticipation' (Damian Thompson, *The End of Time. Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Random House, 1999), p. 107).

<sup>108</sup> Cover of *The Nineteenth Century and after*, no. CCLXXXVII (January 1901).

## CHAPTER 4

### Scientific oneirology at the Century's End (and beyond): Sante De Sanctis's studies on dreams and on the unconscious

*Explorer les plus secrètes profondeurs de l'inconscient, travailler dans [...] le sous-sol de la conscience, voilà quelle sera la tâche principale de la psychologie dans le siècle qui s'ouvre.<sup>1</sup>*

#### 4.1 'Penetrare più al fondo nei misteri interni dell'essere nostro'

In 'Sul confine dei due secoli', Chiappelli remarked how 'l'avanzare della coscienza storica' – the phenomenon which we have explored in the previous three chapters – had revealed 'tutto un mondo di spontaneità istintiva, di energie misteriose, che hanno le loro sorgenti profonde nell'intimo dell'essere nostro', namely, 'in quella virtù riposta che, a dirla col poeta antico, *latet arcana non enarrabile fibra*', as he said by quoting Lucretius.<sup>2</sup> One might indeed say that the nineteenth century had a two-fold nature: it was the most self-conscious of all ages, as we have shown in Chapter One, but at the same time it also paved the way to 'the age of the insight into the unconscious',<sup>3</sup> since one of the highest goals set by scientific research was 'penetrare più al fondo nei misteri interni dell'essere nostro'.<sup>4</sup>

The interest for the 'sorgenti profonde nell'intimo dell'essere nostro' described by Chiappelli became a primary concern at the turn of the century, as testified by the words of scholars like Henri Bergson who, precisely at the dawn of the century, in 1901, put the study of the unconscious among the top-priorities of psychologists' research agenda for the twentieth century: 'explorer les plus secrètes profondeurs de l'inconscient, travailler dans [...] le sous-sol de la conscience, voilà quelle sera la tâche principale de la psychologie dans le siècle qui s'ouvre'.<sup>5</sup> Bergson also added: 'je ne doute pas que de belles découvertes l'y [au siècle qui s'ouvre] attendent, aussi

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, 'Le Rêve. Conférence faite à l'Institut Psychologique le 26 Mars 1901', *Bulletin de l'Institut Psychologique International*, 1.3 (May 1901), 103-122 (p. 122).

<sup>2</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 635).

<sup>3</sup> Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain. From Vienna 1900 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 2012); translated into Italian as *L'età dell'inconscio: arte, mente e cervello dalla grande Vienna ai nostri giorni* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 629.

<sup>5</sup> Bergson, 'Le Rêve. Conférence faite à l'Institut Psychologique le 26 Mars 1901', p. 122.

importantes peut-être que l'ont été, dans les siècles précédents, les découvertes des sciences physiques et naturelles'.<sup>6</sup> Expert in all questions about consciousness, which he had extensively discussed in his doctoral thesis *Les Données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), Bergson had also worked on the unconscious, to which he had devoted part of his *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (1896).<sup>7</sup>

In addition to holding the promise of being 'the century of the unconscious', the twentieth century also appeared as the 'century of dreams', since the two aspects were strictly related. It is, indeed, no accident that Bergson's above-quoted observation about the unconscious being the next 'hot topic' in psychological studies appeared in his study *Le rêve*, mainly centred on dreams. Dream studies experienced a pivotal *turn* during the *fin de siècle* and especially at the turn of the century during the so-called 'Great Year', 1900, as Henri Ellenberger has recalled in his seminal work *The Discovery of the Unconscious*:

The last fifteen years of the nineteenth century cannot be well understood without the notion of the *fin de siècle* that permeated the life and thought of that era. But as the century drew to an end, the preoccupation of *fin de siècle* was being replaced by that of the Great Year, which was to close the century and open the way to a new unknown era. The year 1900 acquired the value of a symbol, meaning at once the end of a century and the birth of a new one. Astronomers, of course, pointed out that the year 1900 would be a year like any other, but the popular feeling persisted with the symbolic meaning which the Etruscans or the Aztecs had given to the change of centuries and to the Great Year. It was at least the golden opportunity for philosophers, teachers, scientists, and writers to draw the balance of the nineteenth century and make their predictions for the twentieth.<sup>8</sup>

We have quoted this excerpt from Ellenberger's volume in its entirety because it appears to be extremely significant that, in a work devoted to the development of dynamic psychology from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, such centrality is attached to the notion of *fin de siècle* and such cruciality is attributed to the turn of the century as a time of transition. This persuaded us of the fact that, in order to provide an account as rich as possible of the *fin-de-siècle* Italian sensibility, it was necessary to

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<sup>6</sup> Bergson, 'Le Rêve. Conférence faite à l'Institut Psychologique le 26 Mars 1901', p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson, *Les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1889); Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Alcan, 1896).

<sup>8</sup> Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1994 [1st edn 1970]), pp. 318-319.

closely study the development of oneirology studies in that period.

In 1899, while Freud was completing the *Interpretation of Dreams* – which he deliberately dated ‘1900’, precisely to make it seem as the book had seen the light in the ‘Great Year’,<sup>9</sup> considering that according to many in the German-speaking world the twentieth century would start then<sup>10</sup> – the Italian psychologist and psychiatrist Sante De Sanctis (1862-1935), the first President of the Italian Society of Psychology and one of the ‘pillars’<sup>11</sup> of Italian psychology, published *I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici di un alienista*.<sup>12</sup> While positively reviewed internationally in top journals such as the French *Revue philosophique*,<sup>13</sup> and accredited as the best study on dreams in the American and English *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*,<sup>14</sup> De Sanctis’s work (translated into German in 1901)<sup>15</sup> was judged by Freud a ‘painstaking volume [...] totally deficient in ideas’<sup>16</sup> and far from his own psychoanalytic intuitions, a criticism which eventually caused a marginalization of De Sanctis’s work on dreams. I will conduct a reassessment of De Sanctis’s dreams studies, by following upon Pigman’s<sup>17</sup> recognition that De Sanctis was the only scholar, before Ellenberger,<sup>18</sup> to have challenged Freud’s self-proclamation of being the first to identify the meaning of dreams and their high potential for psychology. In the present chapter, I will explore this thesis by analysing De Sanctis’s publications, from the early ones of the 1890s to some of the ones of the late 1920s. The choice to go – when investigating some of these works – beyond the

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<sup>9</sup> Although released in 1899, *Die Traumdeutung* was dated 1900 on purpose: ‘It [*The Interpretation of Dreams*] was actually published on November 4, 1899, but the publisher chose to put the date 1900 on the title page’ (Ernest Jones, *The life and work of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and abridged by Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus, with an introduction by Lionel Trilling (New York: Basic Books, 1961), p. 234). On the publication history of the volume, see Lydia Marinelli and Andreas Mayer, *Dreaming by the Book: Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams and the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (New York: Other Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> For the choice of celebrating the new century in 1901 rather than in 1900, as Kaiser Wilhelm II decided to do, thus influencing all the German-speaking world, Austria included, cf. Chapter Two of the present thesis.

<sup>11</sup> This definition has been given by Sadi Marhaba, *Lineamenti della psicologia italiana (1870-1945)*, with a preface by Cesare Musatti (Florence: Giunti, 2003 [1st edn 1981]), p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici di un alienista* (Turin: Bocca, 1899).

<sup>13</sup> Théodule Ribot, ‘Compte rendu de Sante de Sanctis. *I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici*’, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger*, 48 (1899), 537-540.

<sup>14</sup> James Mark Baldwin and George Frederick Stout, s.v. ‘Dream’, in *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. by James Mark Baldwin, vol. I (New York-London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 297.

<sup>15</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *Die Träume. Medizinisch-psychologische Untersuchungen*, trans. by O. Schmidt, with a preface by Paul J. Möbius (Halle: Marhold, 1901).

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010 [1st edn 1955]), p. 119; this edition is a reprint of the edition included in the vols IV and V of *The Standard Edition*, trans. from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953).

<sup>17</sup> George W. Pigman, ‘The Dark Forest of Authors: Freud and Nineteenth-Century Dream Theory’, *Psychoanalysis and History*, 4.2 (2002), 141-165.

<sup>18</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 311.

threshold of 1901/1902 technically marking the turn of the century has emerged as a necessity in order to fully account for De Sanctis's stance in relation to Freud's self-positioning as the unique pioneer of dream studies. I will also investigate the relationship of De Sanctis's work with the research of other psychologists, namely of Janet who played an important role in the scrutiny of the uncharted regions of the subconscious in the 1880s and 1890s. I will illustrate De Sanctis's distinction of different levels of consciousness, particularly of the 'coscienza della veglia' and the 'coscienza onirica', and pinpoint the elements which make his definition of the 'subscosciente' differ from Freud's notion of sub- and un-conscious. Furthermore, this chapter suggests an interesting question for further research about what allowed Freud's theory to acquire an undiscussed centrality in oneiric research and what in the historical context can explain the limited exposure of the dream studies by De Sanctis, who was acknowledged by his contemporaries but not largely by the following generations of scholars, for a long time until a recent retrieval and reappraisal of his work on dreams. Finally, by building upon Lombardo and Foschi's reflection,<sup>19</sup> I will show how De Sanctis can be considered as having managed to flee the 'dark forest', in which Freud had grouped all his predecessors whose research had been conducted mainly in the 1880s and 1890 in the field of dream studies, and as having given an original and innovative contribution to dream psychology.

#### **4.2 Dreams as 'lo specchio più fedele di noi stessi'**

One of the founding fathers of Italian psychology, De Sanctis was known well beyond national borders. He was the Italian psychologist who obtained the most credit on an international platform, also if compared to other well-established Italian figures in the field.<sup>20</sup> His works, published in international journals,<sup>21</sup> were endorsed abroad by eminent philosophers, physicians, and psychologists, such as Ebbinghaus, Janet, James, Külpe, Wundt, Kraepelin – who praised the wide range of domains covered by De Sanctis's research – and Claparède – who described De Sanctis's *I Sogni* as 'a classic'. Even almost a decade after its publication, *I Sogni* was cited by major scholars, like Carl

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<sup>19</sup> Giovanni Pietro Lombardo and Renato Foschi, 'Escape from the dark forest: the experimentalist standpoint of Sante De Sanctis' psychology of dreams', *History of the Human Sciences*, 21.3 (2008), 45-69.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Riccardo Luccio, 'De Sanctis: il sogno', *Storia e critica della psicologia*, 2.2 (1981), 317-319.

<sup>21</sup> Some of De Sanctis's articles have been published in American, English, French, German, Scandinavian, and Swiss journals, and some of his volumes and extracts from his books have been translated into English and German.

Gustav Jung.<sup>22</sup>

*I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici di un alienista* had started to draw attention to De Sanctis's research as soon as it came out in 1899. In France, the volume was promptly reviewed in the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, a journal that was a reference point in the field, by the editor-in-chief in person, the psychologist Théodule Ribot, who judged the book to be 'certainement le plus complet qui existe' on the subject.<sup>23</sup> In 1901, the volume was regarded as 'possibly the best general work' about dreams,<sup>24</sup> by the influential American philosopher and psychologist James Mark Baldwin and by the English philosopher and psychologist George Frederick Stout, who assessed the state of the art of dream studies in the entry 'Dream' of the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*. In the same year, *I Sogni* appeared in German in a translation introduced by the leading neurologist and psychiatrist Paul J. Möbius who applauded the Italian author for having studied dreams 'mit edlem Eifer und staunenswerther Ausdauer'<sup>25</sup> and trusted that these qualities would earn De Sanctis' volume 'die freundliche Theilnahme'<sup>26</sup> which Möbius deemed that it rightly deserved. According to Möbius, De Sanctis was among the first to realize the disruptive impact that dream studies could have on clinical research and to prompt the awareness that dream life could serve as a diagnostic tool for researching mental states.

Ribot's endorsement, Baldwin and Stout's enthusiastic remarks, and Möbius's appreciative comments show that at the beginning of the twentieth century *I Sogni* circulated widely and earned De Sanctis the status of forerunner of dream studies, and pioneer in the field of the '*onirologia scientifica*'.<sup>27</sup>

When embarking on this venture, he merged his two-fold experience in the domains of psychology and psychopathology, as he had already previously done in his

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Carl Gustav Jung, *Über die Psychologie der Dementia praecox: ein Versuch* (Halle: Marhold, 1907), p. 106; Marhold is the same publisher who issued De Sanctis's German translation of *I Sogni*.

<sup>23</sup> Ribot, 'Compte rendu de Sante de Sanctis. *I Sogni: studi psicologici e clinici*', p. 537. This evaluation was significant not only for the positive consideration expressed, but also for the importance of the author and the prestige of the venue in which it was pronounced. The *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, founded by Ribot in 1876, in the 1890s was indeed an international cultural point of reference and the most up-to-date journal with regard to the developments of the European philosophical and psychological thought (Mara Meletti Bertolini, *Il pensiero e la memoria. Filosofia e Psicologia nella «Revue philosophique» di Théodule Ribot (1876-1916)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1991), p. 21). As the title attests, this periodical reached out far beyond the national borders by presenting, reviewing and commenting upon a high number of foreign publications, with a section specifically devoted to Italian publications (Meletti Bertolini, *Il pensiero e la memoria*, p. 16).

<sup>24</sup> Baldwin and Stout, 'Dream', p. 297.

<sup>25</sup> Paul J. Möbius, 'Einführung', in De Sanctis, *Die Träume*, pp. v-vii (p. vii).

<sup>26</sup> Paul J. Möbius, 'Einführung', in De Sanctis, *Die Träume*, p. v.

<sup>27</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 5.

1896 dissertation *I sogni e il sonno nell'isterismo e nell'epilessia*.<sup>28</sup> This volume proved to be decisive for the development of Italian psychopathology and represented the very first Italian experimental monograph on the subject.<sup>29</sup> Similarly to what would happen for *I Sogni* three years later, *I sogni e il sonno* received international praise. French scholars, who were considered the champions in the field of psychopathology, estimated that the volume work would mark 'un bon et solide jalon, dont il sera, par la suite, malaisé de se passer'.<sup>30</sup> Even Freud commented positively on De Sanctis's psychopathological research, namely, in the section of the literature review of his *Die Traumdeutung* devoted to 'The relations between dreams and mental diseases'.<sup>31</sup> De Sanctis placed great confidence in the therapeutical potentiality of dreams and strongly advocated for a dream-based psychotherapy. In 1897, during the International Congress of Neurology and Psychiatry held in Brussels, he stated: 'je crois que la psychothérapie par le rêve est appelée, dans un avenir rapproché, à de brillants succès'.<sup>32</sup>

Together with his long-standing scrutiny of dreams in pathological cases, he also cultivated an interest for the dreams of healthy subjects as he deemed that dreams could be considered the expression not only of 'eccezionali' psychological states (whereby 'exceptional' he meant connected to pathological conditions), but also of 'stati psichici comuni'.<sup>33</sup> In his 1898 article 'I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi', he argued that although it was undeniable that a great amount of research, including his own, had shown that believing in dreams was a typical feature of paranoid behaviour, this did not imply that whoever somehow trusted the emotions deriving from one's dreams should be considered paranoid. He indeed found enough evidence to claim that dreams play a crucial role in the life of normal subjects as well. He also ascertained that 'i sogni sono rivelatori degli stati psichici più intimi e più impenetrabili di un individuo' and that they are 'veri fattori di stati psichici',<sup>34</sup> thus elements conditioning and influencing the mood, the emotions and the development of the individual self.

<sup>28</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno nell'isterismo e nell'epilessia* (Rome: Società Dante Alighieri, 1896).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Antonio Marino Ferreri, 'Gli studi sui sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis', introduction of *I sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis*, ed. by Antonio Marino Ferreri, with a preface by Guido Cimino (Rome: Edizioni Magi, 2008), pp. 37-79 (p. 37).

<sup>30</sup> Dr Laupt [sic], 'IV. Psychologie pathologique', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 42 (1896), 548-549 (p. 548).

<sup>31</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 114.

<sup>32</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'Psychoses et rêves', in *Congrès International de Neurologie, de Psychiatrie, d'Électricité médicale et d'Hypnologie. Première Session tenue à Bruxelles du 14 au 21 septembre 1897. Rapports. Fascicule I publié par le Docteur Crocq Fils* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Germer, Baillière et Cie-Félix Alcan éditeur, 1898), pp. 137-160 (p. 157).

<sup>33</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi. Ricerche cliniche di Sante De Sanctis', *Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali ed Antropologia criminale*, 19 (1898), 382-408 (p. 406).

<sup>34</sup> De Sanctis, 'I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi', p. 406 [original emphasis].

De Sanctis had expressed his stance with regard to the influence of dream processes on the individual self already a few years earlier, in 1896, when he expressed his agreement with Fichte who argued that while the objective world was the creation of the Absolute I, the dream world was the creation of the individual I.<sup>35</sup> In 1899, De Sanctis reinforced this position, by arguing that ‘la vita del sogno è una *storia individuale*’<sup>36</sup> since everyone enters his own individual world while dreaming, as he had noticed three years earlier.<sup>37</sup> He also followed the line of thought prompted by Maury, according to whom during the oneiric activity ‘l’homme se révèle tout entier à lui-même dans sa nudité et sa misère natives’.<sup>38</sup> De Sanctis was persuaded that ‘la vita del sogno [...] è rivelatrice’<sup>39</sup> and that dreams are ‘lo specchio più fedele di noi stessi’.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, he suggested that the dream activity could be considered a valid investigative tool for individual psychology, although it had never been considered as such before.<sup>41</sup> He considered dreams not a haphazard association of images or an incoherent and asystematic ensemble, despite a number of scientists considered them as such. He, rather conceived them as a psychophysiological by-product determined by a combination of factors producing, as a ‘resultante necessaria’,<sup>42</sup> dreaming outcomes. These results would be specific to each individual and would find different expressions depending on the different layers of consciousness involved.

### 4.3 Subconscious states and ‘coscienza onirica’

De Sanctis admitted the existence of ‘une infinité de degrés de conscience’,<sup>43</sup> differing from each other depending on the high or low levels of self-awareness with which individuals perceive them. He encouraged psychologists to investigate not only the states of consciousness ‘complets et clairs’, but also the ‘partiels et crépusculaires, c’est-à-dire des *états subscients*’.<sup>44</sup> De Sanctis supported the experimental psychology

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<sup>35</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 6 [my emphasis].

<sup>37</sup> Sante De Sanctis, ‘I sogni nei delinquenti’, *Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze penali ed Antropologia criminale*, 17.5 (1896), 488-498 (p. 488).

<sup>38</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 287.

<sup>40</sup> De Sanctis, ‘I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi’, p. 406.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Mancavano nella letteratura delle ricerche tendenti a studiare i sogni dal punto di vista della psicologia individuale; io ho particolarmente inteso a colmare questa lacuna’ (De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 6).

<sup>42</sup> De Sanctis, ‘I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi’, p. 406.

<sup>43</sup> Sante De Sanctis, ‘Le problème de la conscience dans la psychologie moderne’, *Archives de Psychologie*, 3 (1904), 379-388 (p. 385). See also Sante De Sanctis, ‘Il problema della coscienza nella Psicologia scientifica’, *Annali dell’Istituto Psichiatrico della R. Università di Roma*, 3.1 (1904), 35-45.

<sup>44</sup> De Sanctis, ‘Le problème de la conscience dans la psychologie moderne’, p. 386 [my emphasis].

approach, but regarding this specific idea he differed from Wilhelm Wundt, the father of the discipline of experimental psychology. According to Wundt, only the phenomena completely accessible to one's introspective skills deserved to be scrutinized. On the contrary, De Sanctis was persuaded that also the phenomena that 'que nous pouvons supposer [...] être accompagnés d'un *degré quelconque* de conscience'<sup>45</sup> were deserving of scientific analysis; he considered that both aspects (the most and the apparently least intelligible ones) of the Self were worth of inspection and called for a thorough examination of the conscience which would not leave any aspect of the individual self uncharted.

De Sanctis had started to closely study subconscious states since his 1899 volume on dreams. There he examined the visual and auditory sensations that, he pointed out, occur in everyone's pre-hypnic phase, but of which most people are unaware. He also noticed that many of the physical sensations and feelings that usually, when one is awake, lie beneath the level of consciousness, manifest themselves clearly in dreams. This is because when we are awake, he explained, most sensations stay almost unperceived and only the strongest ones stand out and get noticed, namely the most painful and the most pleasant ones. During the oneiric phase, on the contrary, all the other inner sensations manifest themselves with a similar vigour, thus ceasing to be *below* the level of consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

When commenting on subconsciousness in *I Sogni*, De Sanctis refers to a 'nota dottrina del sub-cosciente'<sup>47</sup> and stresses the difference between the subconscious and the 'physiological unconscious' as described by modern psychologists, on the one hand, and 'l'*Incosciente* di Hartmann e di molti *psichicisti* dei nostri giorni',<sup>48</sup> on the other. Although in this passage he does not openly mention any modern psychologist in particular, there is a series of hints that let us infer that the 'well-known theory' he had in mind was Pierre Janet's theory of the 'subscient'. A parallel can, indeed, be drawn between De Sanctis's words quoted above and a passage from Janet's essay *L'automatisme psychologique* (1st edn 1889, 2nd edn 1894). In the first chapter 'Les actes subscients' of the second part of *L'automatisme psychologique*,<sup>49</sup> Janet explored the work on un/sub-conscious states carried out by previous scholars: he referred to Hartmann's treatise, which he considered 'grand' insofar as it provided

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<sup>45</sup> De Sanctis, 'Le problème de la conscience dans la psychologie moderne', p. 386 [original emphasis].

<sup>46</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 339 and 347.

<sup>47</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 367.

<sup>48</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 370 [original emphasis].

<sup>49</sup> Pierre Janet, *L'automatisme psychologique. Essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l'activité humaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), pp. 223-269.

insightful reflections, and mentioned Maine de Biran's work, whose ideas Janet found that spoke with his own.<sup>50</sup> Janet, however, identified a limit of these previous studies in them being exclusively speculative and not being based on any kind of experiment, an observation that is in line with the difference outlined by De Sanctis between studies like Hartmann's and the ones by modern psychologists focusing on the 'physiological unconscious'. Janet also stressed how figures like exorcists had often had the opportunity to observe unconscious manifestations in the people they happened to examine, but he also remarked that they had always proved unable to understand the origin of those manifestations, an assertion that appear echoed by De Sanctis's denigration of the so-called 'psichicisti dei nostri giorni', a group of which exorcists might be considered part. On the top of these elements in common with *L'automatisme psychologique*, De Sanctis's 1899 volume on dreams is also strewn with multiple open references to Janet's findings, especially with regard to the 'idée fixe subcoscienti' of hysterical patients. This strand of research was of great interest for De Sanctis because Janet had pinpointed in dreams a possible origin of those subconscious fixed ideas, an opinion which tallied with De Sanctis's statements about the importance of oneirology for hysterical studies.<sup>51</sup>

Janet defined an 'acte inconscient' as 'une action ayant tous les caractères d'un fait psychologique sauf un, c'est qu'elle est toujours ignorée par la personne même qui l'exécute au moment même où elle l'exécute'.<sup>52</sup> Janet's reflections on the subconscious gained visibility with the publication of his doctoral thesis on psychological automatisms in 1889 – which was saluted since its first appearance as a 'classic' of psychology –<sup>53</sup> although he had previously, namely between 1886 and 1888, already expounded some of the outcomes of his research in several articles appeared in the *Revue philosophique*.<sup>54</sup> Janet asserted to have been the first deviser of the word *subconscious*. Many historians of psychology have supported this claim against the opinion of some other scholars who, instead, did not want to credit Janet with the creation of this neologism. Ellenberger has supported Janet's claim, affirms of not having found any use of the word prior to him and explains that Janet coined the term

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<sup>50</sup> Janet, *L'automatisme psychologique*, p. 226.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 148, 152-153.

<sup>52</sup> Janet, *L'automatisme psychologique*, p. 225.

<sup>53</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 361.

<sup>54</sup> See Pierre Janet's articles: 'Les actes inconscients et le dédoublement de la personnalité', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 22 (1886), 577-592; 'L'anesthésie systématisée et la dissociation des phénomènes psychologiques', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 23 (1887), 449-472; 'Les actes inconscients et la mémoire pendant le somnambulisme', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 25 (1888), 238-279. In *L'automatisme psychologique*, Janet recalls some of the results exposed in those articles, by further elaborating on them and framing them within a wider theory.

'apparently in order to show that he used a psychological approach quite distinct from the metaphysical concept of the unconscious of Von Hartmann, which was so fashionable at that time'.<sup>55</sup> Janet's intent became more intelligible in 1909 during the Sixth International Congress of Psychology, focused on the Subconscious. Here Janet gave one of the opening keynote speeches: he articulated a clear distinction between the subconscious, which he wanted to be intended in clinical terms, and the unconscious, which he saw as falling within the philosophical domain, instead.<sup>56</sup>

Janet had already introduced his theory of the different layers of consciousness in the paper that he presented at the Fifth Congress of Psychology, held in Rome, where De Sanctis must have certainly heard and read it, having been the Congress secretary and having later edited the conference proceedings himself. Janet challenged the idea according to which one's consciousness stays always the same during short time spans and significant modifications can be registered on a long term only. On the contrary, Janet believed that continuous changes could take place in one's consciousness also during short periods of time, for instance within the same day: he describes a process of 'changement continuuel de l'esprit qui se modifie à chaque instant dans sa force, dans son étendue, dans sa perfection, qui monte et qui descend sous mille influences et suivant mille lois que nous soupçonnons à peine'.<sup>57</sup> Signs of those 'lois que nous soupçonnons à peine' often appear in patients with mental disorders, whereas in normal subjects there are less occasions in which they manifest themselves openly. These laws do actually operate, however, also in the latter group with the same frequency, and possibly even on a more regular basis. There are mainly two situations in which they become visible in normal subjects: times of mental as well as physical fatigue and when dreaming. Janet does not openly classify dreams as manifestations of the sub/un-conscious but the description that he provides of the sleep activity leaves no doubt that he saw a strong connection between dreams and sub/un-conscious

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<sup>55</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 413, n. 82.

<sup>56</sup> Pierre Janet, *Rapport au VI<sup>me</sup> [sic] Congrès International de Psychologie. Genève, 3-7 Août 1909. Les problèmes du subconscient par M. le Dr Pierre Janet – Extrait des Comptes Rendus du Congrès* (Genève: Secrétariat du Congrès, 22 July 1909), p. 3. Janet's paper was also included in the conference proceedings (Pierre Janet, 'Les problèmes du subconscient', *VI<sup>me</sup> [sic] Congrès International de Psychologie. Tenu à Genève du 2 au 7 Août 1909 sous la Présidence de Th. Flournoy. Rapports et comptes rendus publiés par les soins de Ed. Claparède, Secrétaire général du Congrès* (Genève: Librairie Künding, 1910), pp. 57-70). There were no psychoanalysts taking part in the congress, and perhaps their absence lies at the origin of a misunderstanding between them and Janet; indeed, as Ellenberger has highlighted, psychoanalysts 'misinterpreted Janet as having rejected his previous views and denied the existence of the unconscious' (Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 800).

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Janet, 'Les oscillations du niveau mental', in *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di psicologia, tenuto in Roma dal 26 al 30 aprile 1905 sotto la presidenza del prof. Giuseppe Sergi*, ed. by Sante De Sanctis (Rome: Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato editori, 1906), pp. 110-126 (p. 110).

states. He noticed that when dreaming an 'affaiblissement', a sort of 'rétrécissement du champ de la conscience' occurs.<sup>58</sup> He considered this phenomenon as the consequence of will and attention giving up their control, and of rational thinking losing its usually predominant decision-power. In the oneiric activity, there is no resistance or control and dreams respond to subconscious phenomena, such as memory alterations and short retrograde amnesia.

When exploring the relationship between memory and dreams, Janet referred to De Sanctis who had studied how the memory of striking events and of the intense emotions connected to them seldom condition the dreams occurring on the same day. De Sanctis had, indeed, found out that before resurfacing in dreams, these memories need first to undergo a re-elaboration process. Janet agreed with De Sanctis about the fact that the more those emotions were important for the subject the more they conditioned the oneiric activity and manifested themselves in dreams. Janet stated with emphasis the importance of the study of dreams for psychological research and, similarly to De Sanctis, encouraged the scientific community not to consider sleep and dreams as 'curiosités bizarres'<sup>59</sup> but as phenomena helpful in the study of one's (un)consciousness. In the following years, De Sanctis continued to be in tune with Janet's research. Indeed, still a decade later and after the diffusion of psychoanalytic studies, he wrote: 'accettiamo il «subcosciente» [...] nel senso di P. Janet'.<sup>60</sup>

De Sanctis's and Janet's reflections were brought together by Paul Sollier in the paper that Sollier presented, right after Janet, at the 1905 Psychology Congress in Rome. In his presentation 'La conscience et ses degrés', Sollier recalls De Sanctis's observations on the nature of consciousness<sup>61</sup> and acknowledges that 'tout processus psychologique est en partie au moins inconscient'.<sup>62</sup> He maintains that 'la subconscience et l'inconscience ne sont pas des termes absolus mais relatifs' and sees no barrier between conscious and unconscious,<sup>63</sup> while supporting the idea that the transition from one to the other is gradual and passes through an infinite number of

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<sup>58</sup> Janet, 'Les oscillations du niveau mental', p. 111.

<sup>59</sup> Janet, 'Les oscillations du niveau mental', p. 126.

<sup>60</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', *Rivista di Antropologia* (jubilee volume in honour of Giuseppe Sergi), 20 (1916), 1-53, later reprinted, with an introduction by Riccardo Luccio, *Storia e critica della psicologia*, 2.2 (1981), 317-368, from where I am quoting (p. 363). De Sanctis partially re-elaborated this article in 'Struktur und Dynamik des Traumes' in his 'Psychologie des Traumes', appeared in the *Handbuch der vergleichenden Psychologie*, ed. by Gustav Kafka, vol. III (München: Reinhardt, 1922), pp. 233-329 (pp. 266-294) (Italian translation available: Sante De Sanctis, 'Struttura e dinamica del sogno', in Sante De Sanctis, *La psicologia del sogno*, ed. by Renato Foschi and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, trans. by Maria Nigro (Turin: Antigone Edizioni, 2006), pp. 86-122).

<sup>61</sup> Paul Sollier, 'La conscience et ses degrés', in *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di psicologia*, pp. 126-143 (p. 127).

<sup>62</sup> Sollier, 'La conscience et ses degrés', p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> Sollier, 'La conscience et ses degrés', p. 138.

stages.<sup>64</sup>

This same notion of a continuous transition from conscious to unconscious states was upheld by De Sanctis. This connection becomes clearly apparent when looking at the distinction that De Sanctis traced between the waking and what he called 'oneiric' consciousness, which he firstly introduced in his 1896 article 'Emozioni e sogni'.<sup>65</sup> De Sanctis classified the 'coscienza della veglia' and the 'coscienza onirica' as two distinct and yet interconnected 'modalità di funzionamento della coscienza'<sup>66</sup> and worked hard for discovering the ways in which this interconnection worked. As Pareti has highlighted, 'a De Sanctis stava soprattutto a cuore indagare la «fragile passerella» che riuniva le due coscienze, quella della veglia e quella onirica, le quali pur «così diverse», sono legate attraverso la memoria'.<sup>67</sup> In his 1899 volume, De Sanctis maintained that when talking of a 'oneiric consciousness' he did not mean the complete formation of a new personality during sleep. He just aimed to point out that 'il contenuto cosciente della veglia è diverso dal contenuto cosciente del sogno [...] e siccome [...] contenuto di coscienza equivale a coscienza (quantunque non sia esatto [...]), così non esito punto a parlare [...] di una *coscienza onirica* in opposizione alla *coscienza della veglia*'.<sup>68</sup> By supporting this thesis, De Sanctis opposed other scholars, such as Giovanni Dandolo who voiced his position on the subject in his volume *La coscienza nel sonno* (1889). Dandolo contrasted the idea that any form of consciousness could be active when sleeping and in chapter five of his book, focusing specifically on 'La coscienza e il sogno', he suggested that consciousness stays inalterable, also during the oneiric activity. He encouraged his readers to try and debunk the content of a dream by forcing it within the limits of ordinary thinking. As a consequence, Dandolo told his readers, 'vedrete quei fantasmi, quelle larve, quelle immagini tutte sparire o correggersi [...] mentre la vostra coscienza, tolto via quel contenuto che l'aveva dinanzi occupata, rimane la stessa'.<sup>69</sup> De Sanctis does not contradict Dandolo by denying the unity of consciousness. His criticism is subtler. In his view, it is precisely that group of

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<sup>64</sup> Sollier, 'La conscience et ses degrés', p. 133.

<sup>65</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'Emozioni e sogni', *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria*, 22.3 (1896), 566-590 (p. 568); the article has recently been reprinted in the *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria. The Italian Journal of Mental Health*, 141.2 (2017), 11-35.

<sup>66</sup> Giovanni Pietro Lombardo and Renato Foschi, 'La psicofisiologia dei sogni di Sante De Sanctis', *Medicina nei secoli*, 21.2 (2009), 591-609 (p. 598).

<sup>67</sup> Germana Pareti, 'Livelli di coscienza. Tra filosofia e psicologia: quale via per l'indagine sulla mente?', in *Filosofia e Psicologia in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. by Piero Di Giovanni (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015), pp. 65-83 (p. 79).

<sup>68</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 250 [my emphasis].

<sup>69</sup> Giovanni Dandolo, *La coscienza nel sonno. Studio di Psicologia* (Padova: Draghi, 1889), p. 123; the year before this book, Dandolo had published an article with almost the same title in which he focused closely on the relationship sleeping consciousness-unconscious (Giovanni Dandolo, 'La coscienza nel sonno. L'inconscio fisiologico e la psicologia del sonno', *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, 7 (1888), 722-741).

manifestations that Dandolo considers 'fantasmi' and 'larve' that do not deserve any attention, which actually constitute a different environment, unique in its own terms and yet connected to the daily consciousness. The individual self adapts to this environment without even realizing it: 'un ambiente nuovo speciale, al quale la personalità del dormiente si adatta, *senza accorgersi*, [...] nè [*sic*] della novità dell'ambiente, nè del suo adattamento'.<sup>70</sup>

A few years later, De Sanctis articulated his definition of oneiric and waking consciousness in more detail, in light of his further research and of psychoanalytic studies that had meanwhile developed and spread throughout Europe. In 1928, he devoted an entire paper to the exploration of the oneiric consciousness. 'La «scena» del sogno', De Sanctis wrote by speaking in Fechner's words, or 'il «luogo psichico»', better said in Freudian terms, is different from that of the waking life because 'nei sogni si affacciano ricordi pei quali la coscienza della veglia è impervia'.<sup>71</sup> By outlining this distinction, De Sanctis did not imply, though, that he deemed the two forms of consciousness as disjointed, as we have already had the chance to see. He did recognize that there are times when the oneiric consciousness crosses over to the waking one and manifests itself in ecstatic experiences, heroic acts and aesthetic moments.<sup>72</sup> He maintained that between dreams and wake there is a 'flusso e riflusso', a 'vicenda continua, la quale dimostra il mutuo compenetrarsi delle due coscienze' and he also claimed that the everyday life is full of dreams 'come il sogno è pieno di realtà'.<sup>73</sup> He also found out that the oneiric consciousness could condition the 'diurnal stimuli' within a certain 'latency time'.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, he argued that the dream activity elaborates on feelings and sensations that are not always intelligible to the waking consciousness and that the emotional states that we experience when awake are often experienced in an 'allotropic' way when dreaming, meaning that they might acquire a different value.<sup>75</sup> He concluded that the oneiric consciousness is an allotropic state of the waking consciousness.<sup>76</sup> De Sanctis borrowed the concept of allotropism from Janet (although in this essay he does not acknowledge it), as he had previously done in 1916, when he had defined the 'coscienza del sogno' as a '*stato allotropico della coscienza vigile*'<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> De Sanctis, 'Emozioni e sogni', p. 568 [my emphasis].

<sup>71</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'La coscienza onirica', *Scientia* (1928), 17-24 reprinted in *I sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis*, pp. 319-326, from where I am quoting (p. 321).

<sup>72</sup> In 1916, De Sanctis had already expressed himself along the same lines: 'L'esteta, l'ispirato, l'estatico, l'appassionato, l'eroe nei loro momenti creativi sono quasi sognatori' (De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 367).

<sup>73</sup> De Sanctis, 'La coscienza onirica', pp. 322-323.

<sup>74</sup> Lombardo and Foschi, 'Escape from the dark forest', p. 56.

<sup>75</sup> De Sanctis, 'La coscienza onirica', p. 323.

<sup>76</sup> De Sanctis, 'La coscienza onirica', p. 324, 326.

<sup>77</sup> De Sanctis, 'Sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 362.

determined by the absence in dreams of the constraints conditioning the waking life.

According to De Sanctis, the trait d'union between the waking and the oneiric self was to be found in emotions, which had been on the top of his research agenda since the beginning of his career in the late 1890s. The results of this investigation appeared in the above-mentioned 1896 article 'Emozioni e sogni' focusing on the relationship between the emotional content of the waking life and that of the oneiric life, which De Sanctis saw as reciprocally influencing each other. His answer to the question of whether emotions produced in dreams have repercussions on the waking life was definitely positive. He suggested that the connection between the former and the latter was determined by the 'emozione onirica protratta' and the 'emozione postonirica o di ricordo'.<sup>78</sup> To study the opposite phenomenon, that is the influence of the emotions experienced when awake on the emotions guiding the dream activity, De Sanctis relied not only on the memory of the individual under observation – whom he enquired by means of questionnaires – but also through a direct observation of the subject when asleep, a method that he considered particularly productive as he had realized that the emotions ruling the oneiric life are often accompanied by physical changes that come into view more evidently during sleep, when the 'corrective' action of the senses does not operate.<sup>79</sup> Three years later, he expanded on this article about dreams and emotions, and included it in his 1899 volume *I Sogni*, where he also explored the method of the 'eccitazioni emozionali' consisting of monitoring the sleep activity of an individual in whom unpleasant emotions had been induced just before or during sleep. As a result, he discovered that those emotions widely reverberated in dreams in many different forms.<sup>80</sup>

These outcomes further convinced De Sanctis of the existence of a continuity between the waking and the oneiric life, a finding in line with the theories of some of his colleagues, in particular of American psychologist Mary Whiton Calkins, who had found out that in more than eighty percent of cases the content of dreams could be reconnected to elements deriving from the waking experience. In 1916, De Sanctis built precisely on Calkins's work when researching the structure and the dynamics of the oneiric activity. He ascertained that Calkins's statistic could rise to ninety percent when considering the experiences a subject has not only on the day of the dream, but also in the prior twenty or thirty days, a discovery which made De Sanctis conclude that dreams build on the waking experience with 'trasformazioni e spostamenti'.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> De Sanctis, 'Emozioni e sogni', p. 584.

<sup>79</sup> De Sanctis, 'Emozioni e sogni', p. 574.

<sup>80</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 351-352.

<sup>81</sup> De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 364.

This concept of 'spostamento' appears to be linked to another process involving emotions: the 'transfert'. In his 1899 volume, De Sanctis explained that he borrowed this term from James Sully, who coined it to designate the phenomenon occurring when the feelings targeted to a subject/object are *transferred* to a different subject/object, while keeping the same distinctive features and intensity. De Sanctis wrote: 'il fatto del *transfert* che per me è indubbio, dimostra che nel sogno può verificarsi una dissociazione tra la rappresentazione e la emozione che nella veglia è ad essa legata'.<sup>82</sup> According to De Sanctis, this 'potere dissociante del sogno' was deserving of the greatest interest.<sup>83</sup> He considered this shift from the oneiric to the waking consciousness fairly frequent, namely during 'stati emozionali od allucinatori onirici protratti' or 'post-onirici', as well as in 'stati transitori di credenza onirica'.<sup>84</sup> De Sanctis provided several examples of 'transferts' occurring in dreams. He mentioned the case of a man who, the night after having being chased by a bull, dreamt of being chased and attacked by a group of bandits. De Sanctis observed that the same feeling of fear experienced by the subject in real life had also manifested itself in the dream, although via an alternative image. Moreover, he described the dream of one of his friends, who at the end of a day of big financial trouble, dreamt of being infested by lice of which he tried to get rid. When making remarks on this dream, De Sanctis pointed out that the lice were substitutes, or better said a 'transfert', for the creditors from whom his friend wanted to escape.<sup>85</sup> Appicciafuoco observed that these examples present 'accenni di schietto sapore freudiano, tali da poter dichiarare il De Sanctis precursore della psicanalisi',<sup>86</sup> an idea which he emphasized further by adding references to other dreams recounted in *I Sogni*, whose formation De Sanctis commented by placing particular emphasis on the role played by childhood experiences, not differently from what Freud would later do.<sup>87</sup>

In 1914, De Sanctis reconnected the concept of 'spostamento' to that of 'cambiamento dei valori', by speaking in psychoanalytic terms.<sup>88</sup> He verified that the 'transfert' was a shift that could occur in different forms. For instance, he discovered

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<sup>82</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 257 [original emphasis].

<sup>83</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 257.

<sup>84</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 316.

<sup>85</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 254. The same examples are provided already in the 1896 article 'Emozioni e sogni', p. 571.

<sup>86</sup> Romolo Appicciafuoco, *La psicologia sperimentale di Sante De Sanctis* (Rome: Orsa Maggiore, 1946), p. 140.

<sup>87</sup> Appicciafuoco, *La psicologia sperimentale di Sante De Sanctis*, p. 141.

<sup>88</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'oniologia scientifica', *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, 1.7 (1914), 289-297 reprinted in *I sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis*, pp. 207-219, from where I am quoting (p. 211). For some of the pre-psychoanalytic theories about the transference, see Renato Foschi, 'La "prima" psicologia di Alfred Binet: la "doppia coscienza" e la "personalità"', *Teorie & Modelli*, 8 (2003), 31-48.

some cases of physical pain being perceived in a dream-like as moral discomfort. The same happened reversely with joy: when he was interacting with subjects in their oneiric phase, he remarked that a physical sensation of pleasure felt by the subject (when, for example, the researcher brought close to the sleeper's nostrils an agreeable fragrance) usually led to pleasant dreams. In this case, the positive feeling transmigrated from the physical to the moral level. De Sanctis ascribed this displacement to a form of dissociation between the emotion experienced when awake and its oneiric representation. He made the claim that similarly to how we consider the waking life impinging upon the dream life, we can deem the opposite influence as equally strong and, thus, we should consider 'il contenuto rappresentativo *abituale* dei sogni' as 'rivelatore delle tendenze e delle idee dominanti del sognatore'.<sup>89</sup> He contrasted the psychologists who considered self-awareness ceasing to be active in sleepers as he believed that the oneiric consciousness could have 'determinazioni volontarie e perfino logica [...] percezioni esatte e chiare, riconoscimenti, distinzioni'.<sup>90</sup> In this respect, he recalled several cases mentioned in the literature and situations that he had himself studied showing that the same 'attività sintetica'<sup>91</sup> which develops while awake takes place also during sleep. The difference lies in the fact that the cerebral conditions of sleeping prevent and limit the intervention of the sensorial processes typical of conscious activity. As a consequence, 'i contenuti subcoscienti acquistano tale vivezza da trasformare e magari assorbire la debole realtà attuale' and 'i sentimenti, le tendenze, le abitudini, gli *istinti repressi* risorgono ed operano nel sogno'.<sup>92</sup> De Sanctis concluded that dreams do not create new states, but, by partially altering the usual working of psychical operations, allow for subconscious states to emerge and for 'lo svolgersi di associazioni automatiche, l'affermarsi [...] delle tendenze e dei complessi, il cambiamento delle valutazioni, la credenza nell'assurdo'.<sup>93</sup> This 1916 study, with its emphasis on the 'contenuti subcoscienti' and on the 'istinti repressi', shows clear traces of psychoanalytic readings, on which De Sanctis had started to comment two years earlier, as we will now see.

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<sup>89</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 257 [original emphasis].

<sup>90</sup> De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 364.

<sup>91</sup> De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 365.

<sup>92</sup> De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 367 [my emphasis].

<sup>93</sup> De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 367 [my emphasis].

#### 4.4 De Sanctis's assessment of the psychoanalytic influence on scientific oneirology

De Sanctis openly voiced his opinion on Freud in two articles published in 1914.<sup>94</sup> In the former, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', he admitted the boost given by the Viennese School to oneirology studies but he also referred to his own volume *I Sogni* and emphasized its year of publication. He, indeed, aimed to foreground the precedence of his book over Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The stress on this point was an indirect response to the postscript of the 1909 edition of *Die Traumdeutung*, where Freud had written: "The extensive monograph on dreams by Sante De Sanctis (1899), of which a German translation appeared soon after its issue, was published almost simultaneously with my *Interpretation of Dreams*, so that neither I nor the Italian author was able to comment upon each other's work".<sup>95</sup> De Sanctis expressed disappointment towards this statement and Freud's self-fashioning as the only pioneer of dream studies. He stated: 'Freud ritiene di essere stato lui il paladino che ha rivendicato la «logicità» del sogno di fronte alla credenza [...] degli scienziati che ritenevano [...] il sogno fenomeno inesplicabile, perché fatto di urti casuali di «rappresentazioni»'.<sup>96</sup> De Sanctis did not consider this self-positioning accurate because many scientists before Freud ('fra cui io stesso prima di lui' – he emphasized) had acknowledged 'la «serietà» dei fenomeni onirici, la loro possibile spiegazione in rapporto alle condizioni del sognatore'.<sup>97</sup> De Sanctis thought that scholars such as Wilhelm Stekel, one of earliest supporters of psychoanalysis, had overrated Freud's role when describing Freud as the first to have attempted dream interpretation.<sup>98</sup> De Sanctis also disagreed with the centrality attached to sexuality, as he trusted that other physiological factors were influencing dreams. He mentioned Freud's analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's dream of flying which, according to the psychoanalytic interpretation, concealed an unconfessed sexual desire. To oppose this exegesis, De Sanctis recounted three of his own dreams in which he dreamt to be flying and that he commented by stating: 'posso dire (beninteso, con quel grado di sicurezza che può

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<sup>94</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', *Rivista di Psicologia*, 10.5-6 (1914), 358-375 reprinted in *I sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis*, pp. 221-237 (from where I am quoting) and 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'oniologia scientifica'.

<sup>95</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 119.

<sup>96</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 227.

<sup>97</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 227.

<sup>98</sup> In his 1916 essay about the dynamics of dreams, De Sanctis would pick again on Stekel because in *Die Sprache des Traumes* Stekel had analysed some of the personal dreams that De Sanctis had described in *I Sogni* (which Stekel had read in the German translation) by explaining them in light of a sexual symbology and by providing a supposedly psychoanalytic interpretation that De Sanctis considered faulty and tendentious (cf. Wilhelm Stekel, *Die Sprache des Traumes* (Wiesbaden: Verlag von J. F. Bergmann, 1911), pp. 489-490 quoted in De Sanctis, 'Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica', p. 334).

avere l'autopsicoanalisi) che essi [sogni] si riferivano a condizioni organiche con esclusione della sfera genitale'.<sup>99</sup> He concluded that psychoanalysts often ran the risk of interpreting dreams assuming a perfect correspondence between a certain dream scenario and a specific meaning. He esteemed this correspondence as not scientifically provable and upheld that the meaning of a dream was not determined by a situation or a symbol per se, but by a number of circumstances concerning mainly three aspects: the 'fundamental state' of the dreamer (past experiences, habits, level of intelligence, aspirations, passions); the 'momentary state' (state of health, the most recent thoughts had and the most recent actions performed before going to sleep), and the 'immediate experience' (organs' conditions and the extrinsic stimuli affecting the dreamer when sleeping).<sup>100</sup> He maintained that understanding a dream could be possible only within a research framework accounting for all these factors. The careful scientific assessment of both physical and psychological elements represents a strength of De Sanctis's research method informed by a holistic phenomenological approach which appears to be lacking, instead, in some psychoanalytic applications.

It is precisely with this methodological concern in mind that De Sanctis wrote his second essay devoted to psychoanalysis, 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'oniologia scientifica'. He recounted to have tried out psychoanalysis both on normal subjects and on psychasthenics for therapeutic purposes. He found that it was a productive practice but he also stressed that it was comparable to other methods. Moreover, he questioned the shift psychoanalysis underwent from *method* to *doctrine*. The most doctrinal aspect of Freudism that De Sanctis criticized was teleologism, as he found that most psychoanalytic theories were nurtured by the assumption that 'tutto accade nel sogno [...] secondo un fine prestabilito e ben noto al medico (filosofo, beninteso)'.<sup>101</sup>

According to De Sanctis, teleologism surfaced on several occasions. First, during a typical psychoanalytic session, especially in cases of meetings taking place long after the dream that was going to be analysed had taken place. In this circumstance, chances were that the dreaming subject could not recall all dreams in detail but ended up by creating particulars to respond to the psychoanalyst's questions. As a consequence, psychoanalysts might find themselves in the situation of not *uncovering* but, through their questions, *co-creating* the answers of a patient. A second manifestation of teleologism could be traced in some psychoanalysts' questions stemming from the assumption that in dreams the influence of an emotion related to a childhood memory

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<sup>99</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 233.

<sup>100</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 236.

<sup>101</sup> De Sanctis, 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'oniologia scientifica', p. 210.

was to be found. Finally, a third finalist perspective could be identified in catharsis and censorship, two fundamental concepts of Freudism which, despite been considered by many at that time as new acquisitions of psychoanalysis, had in fact a long-lived philosophical pedigree. Moreover, De Sanctis underlined that even the founding theory of psychoanalytic studies (known as ‘Wunscherfüllung’), which many saluted as a groundbreaking discovery, had in fact been known long before Freud and had appeared in previous studies, such as Cardano’s *Somniorum synesiorum omnis generis insomnia explicantes libri IV*. Another idea that De Sanctis elaborated prior to Freud concerned dreams being oriented towards an aim. De Sanctis had indeed discovered that a dreaming subject is guided towards a ‘mèta’<sup>102</sup> by a ‘forza motrice’, also defined as ‘forza dirigente’.<sup>103</sup> According to De Sanctis, the expression of this driving force was to be found in the oneiric consciousness, which he described as operating through a process of ‘revivescenza di ricordi’ and of ‘irruzione di contenuti subcoscienti’.<sup>104</sup> While Freud believed that this was the case for all dreams, De Sanctis deemed that there were many exceptions. After a series of tests, he had indeed reached the conclusion that dreams can also be self-induced. This realization strengthened his persuasion that the relationship between the waking and the oneiric consciousness could be framed in constructivist terms, a perspective which marked a profound difference with psychoanalytic theories, as highlighted by Foschi and Lombardo.<sup>105</sup>

Other differences between De Sanctis’s and Freud’s viewpoints emerge when looking at their thoughts on the unconscious. De Sanctis delved in depth into this subject in 1929, in the first book of his two-volume psychology treatise *Psicologia sperimentale*. He devoted the fourth chapter specifically to the psychophysiology of consciousness and to un- and subconscious-related issues.<sup>106</sup> In the section ‘Subcoscienza e Incosciente’, he recalls Leibniz’s theory about the unconscious perceptions, Wundt’s work on the ‘unconscious reasoning’, James’s concept of ‘psychic fringe’, Ribot’s ‘unconscious feeling’, Stout’s ‘implicit apprehensions’ and concludes that it is undeniable that ‘al di fuori delle situazioni di coscienza esistono [...] situazioni oscure o latenti; come: istinti, tendenze, tracce di esperienze ereditarie e personali, di cose sommerse e rimosse automaticamente, o per decisa volontà già represses’.<sup>107</sup> Despite talking in psychoanalytical-sounding terms of ‘latent’ and ‘repressed’ experiences, De

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<sup>102</sup> De Sanctis, ‘La coscienza onirica’, p. 321.

<sup>103</sup> De Sanctis, ‘Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica’, p. 361.

<sup>104</sup> De Sanctis, ‘Il sogno. Struttura e dinamica’, p. 362.

<sup>105</sup> Lombardo and Foschi, ‘Escape from the dark forest’, p. 56.

<sup>106</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I: *Psicologia generale* (Rome: Stock, 1929), pp. 97-122.

<sup>107</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 108 [my emphasis].

Sanctis's employment of the terms 'unconscious' and 'subconscious' differed from Freud's use. By 'incosciente (*Unbewusst, Unconscious*)', De Sanctis referred to 'quei fatti o fenomeni che [...] non potranno mai cadere sotto il raggio luminoso della coscienza'<sup>108</sup> because, according to him, 'l'incosciente propriamente detto è l'insieme dei fenomeni biologici che non hanno attitudine a divenir parte delle situazioni coscienti',<sup>109</sup> despite these biological phenomena being the organic base for conscious feelings. Cimino has pointed out that in the unconscious as described by De Sanctis 'semmai, è possibile trovare l'eco dell'idea freudiana di una parte istintuale [...] della psiche, un'assonanza con la nozione di Es',<sup>110</sup> and a hint of what would be later defined by Jung as 'collective unconscious'.

To the term 'inconscio', De Sanctis preferred the word 'subcosciente', which he defined as a 'massa disposizionale attiva'<sup>111</sup> made of multiple layers or dispositions that could be 'actualized', i.e. become conscious. He traced a parallel between this idea of subconscious and the psychoanalytic concept of 'Vorbewusste' (which Freud used to identify precisely the unconscious representations that can become conscious). De Sanctis affirmed that, framed within this context and broadly intended, the term 'unconscious' could refer to the 'incosciente ereditario e fetale preformato', to the 'inconscio della prima e seconda infanzia, della puerizia, dell'adolescenza', and to the unconscious 'di formazione recente o attuale'.<sup>112</sup> He deemed that the transition of cognitive and affective experiences from the non-conscious to the conscious level occurred via attention, which he considered as a 'potente strumento della coscienza'.<sup>113</sup> He pinpointed a distinction between 'fields of attention' and 'fields of conscience', based on 'interests' working as a 'forza motrice per la formazione incessante dei campi di coscienza'.<sup>114</sup> He identified two kinds of attention: a *passive* attention and an *active* attention; the former operating in case interests emerging in an automatic way; the latter, when one was somehow aware of one's interests. Active as well as passive attention could generate fields of consciousness.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 112.

<sup>109</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, pp. 112-113.

<sup>110</sup> Guido Cimino, 'L'impostazione epistemologica e la teoria psicologica di De Sanctis', in *Sante De Sanctis tra psicologia generale e psicologia applicata*, ed. by Guido Cimino and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2004), pp. 19-59 (p. 32).

<sup>111</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 118.

<sup>112</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 116.

<sup>113</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 104.

<sup>114</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 104. The relationship conscience-attention is further explored in three sections of chapter 6: 'L'Attenzione, come strumento di conoscenza'; 'Forza motrice e apparecchio dell'Attenzione'; 'Campo di attenzione e Campo di coscienza. Le oscillazioni attentive' (De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, pp. 194-206).

<sup>115</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 105. De Sanctis had commented on the different ways of classifying attention when he had reviewed the study 'Mécanisme anatomique de

According to De Sanctis, the subconscious content could be 'systematized' and come to the light of consciousness in cases of mental disorders as well as when dreaming; in this respect, he specified: 'il sistemattizzarsi del subsciente vuol dire il suo realizzarsi durevolmente in campi di *coscienza ridotta* tanto da formarsi un io empirico abbastanza coerente che in paragone dell'io ordinario, cioè della coscienza vigile, può essere detto *io-empirico secondario*'.<sup>116</sup> De Sanctis drew these conclusions about the subconscious from his own studies on dreams and on clinical cases. This reminds us of how much he was working autonomously on topics falling within a domain that was considered as an area of almost exclusive expertise of psychoanalysis which was, however, regarded with suspicion in Italy at that time.<sup>117</sup>

In this respect, it must be pointed out that De Sanctis was a sympathizer of psychoanalysis despite the negative judgement about his work expressed in the postscript of the 1909 edition of the *Die Traumdeutung*, where Freud wrote: 'I have unfortunately been unable to escape the conclusion that his [De Sanctis's] painstaking volume is totally deficient in ideas – so much so, in fact, that it would not even lead one to suspect the existence of the problems with which I have dealt'.<sup>118</sup> This harsh criticism certainly weighed negatively on De Sanctis's research on dreams. It has been stressed that Freud's comments, technically, could also be seen as somehow conveying an appraisal of De Sanctis's work or rather, I would say, they emphasize elements of De Sanctis's research approach which were actually methodological strengths and not weaknesses. Indeed, 'painstaking' can mean 'punctilious' with a negative nuance, but it can also stand for 'scrupulous' and 'diligent', a meaning which, as Cimino has stressed,<sup>119</sup> would reflect De Sanctis's working style. Actually, Freud himself in 1900 had recommended reading De Sanctis's work to those who had a particular interest in the literature about dreams, precisely because of De Sanctis's renowned meticulousness in providing detailed accounts.<sup>120</sup> In addition, if one interprets 'totally deficient in ideas' as meaning 'lacking in audacious hypotheses', then, even such a

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l'attention' (1898) by Joanny Roux, who had identified three kinds of attention: 'attenzione organica incosciente', 'attenzione cosciente e involontaria', and 'attenzione cosciente volontaria'; De Sanctis had remarked that, interestingly enough, according to Roux also the conscious and voluntary attention was in the end a reflex, thus an automatism; cf. Sante De Sanctis's review of Joanny Roux's 'Mécanisme anatomique de l'attention' published in *Rivista quindicinale di Psicologia, Psichiatria, Neuropatologia* (May 1898 – April 1899), 310-311.

<sup>116</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 109 [original emphasis].

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Federico Bianchi di Castelbianco, Magda Di Renzo, Rossella Prestinenzi Parisi, and Bruno Tagliacozzi, *Sante de Sanctis. Conoscenza ed esperienza in una prospettiva psicologica* (Rome: Edizioni Scientifiche Ma.Gi, 1998), p. 24.

<sup>118</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 119.

<sup>119</sup> Cimino, Guido, 'Prefazione. Sante de Sanctis e la fondazione della «oniologia scientifica»', in *I sogni nella psicologia di Sante de Sanctis*, pp. 9-35 (p. 32).

<sup>120</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Il sogno', in Sante De Sanctis, *Opere. 1900-05. Tre saggi sulla teoria sessuale e altri scritti* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1982 [1st edn 1970]) pp. 5-49 (p. 48).

comment can be seen as describing one of De Sanctis's methodological strength as he was indeed extremely careful in putting forth theses and suppositions, unless they were supported by abundant experimental evidence.

Freud's criticism of De Sanctis's work never led De Sanctis to condemn psychoanalysis as a whole nor prevented him from trying out psychoanalytic techniques, whose application he described in the article *I metodi onirologici*.<sup>121</sup> In this essay, he praised psychoanalysis for accomplishing a valuable undertaking: connecting incomplete and scattered 'representational groups' and forming a 'synthesis' of a dreamer's consciousness. He praised psychoanalysts for taking on the difficult task of attempting to identify the components, hidden in a dreamer's subconscious, that could represent the key decoding 'intermediaries' to interpret dreams.

For his interest in psychoanalytic studies, De Sanctis has been considered 'il più sereno dei cattedratici italiani nei confronti della psicoanalisi'.<sup>122</sup> In 1906, he personally met Freud, with whom he had been corresponding, as Marhaba has recalled.<sup>123</sup> He was also one of the first Italian psychologists to actually practise psychoanalysis and he has been included by Michel David among the four 'pioneers' of Italian Freudism, together with Luigi Baroncini, Gustavo Modena, and Roberto Greco Assagioli.<sup>124</sup> Those scholars were the first ones to divulge psychoanalytic theories in Italy and they led the first phase of Italian Freudism, running from 1908 (the year of publication of the first two articles written in Italy about Freud, authored by Baroncini and Modena respectively) to the outburst of the First World War.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'I metodi onirologici', *Rivista di Psicologia*, 1 (March 1920), 1-30; this essay presents a section entirely devoted to the assessment of psychoanalytic methods, including De Sanctis's experience in applying them (De Sanctis, 'I metodi onirologici', pp. 13-20).

<sup>122</sup> Michel David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, with a preface by Cesare Musatti (Turin: Boringhieri, 1966), p. 151; for this consideration about De Sanctis, David relies on Ettore Rieti who wrote 'tra i cattedratici italiani, il Maestro di Roma è certamente il più sereno' and added that De Sanctis kept 'una posizione imparziale, ma simpatizzante, di osservatore estraneo' towards psychoanalysis (Ettore Rieti, 'La psicoanalisi in Italia. Rassegna critica', *Neuropsichiatria. Annali dell'Ospedale psichiatrico della provincia di Genova*, 4.11 (1933), 183-203 (p. 192).

<sup>123</sup> Marhaba (*Lineamenti della psicologia italiana*, p. 34) writes the De Sanctis had been corresponding with Freud since 1900, but actually there had been prior contacts between the two. This is proved by a postcard dated 27 July 1895, in which Freud thanks De Sanctis for the interest that the latter had shown towards his studies: 'Illustre Professore, sono di molto contento dell'interesse che i miei [studi] hanno suscitato in Lei / Secondo me l'idea in questione riguardante l'origine dei ticks non è stata mai discussa da nessuno in Germania / Con osservanza, il Suo devotissimo Dr. Freud' (the letter has been published and translated from German into Italian in the appendix of *Sante De Sanctis tra psicologia generale e psicologia applicata*, p. 301).

<sup>124</sup> David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, pp. 151, 154.

<sup>125</sup> Luigi Baroncini, 'Il fondamento e il meccanismo della psico-analisi', *Rivista di Psicologia Applicata*, 4 (1908), 211-231; Gustavo Modena, 'Psicopatologia ed etiologia dei fenomeni psiconeurotici. Contributo alla dottrina di S. Freud', *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina*

In the 1910s, when De Sanctis resumed his studies on dreams after a pause of almost a decade, he could not help acknowledging that psychoanalysis had changed dream psychology 'by overshadowing any other possible alternative approach'.<sup>126</sup> Later on, he again emphasized the same idea by stressing that all modern psychopathological studies were imbued with Freudism, even those by scholars contrasting Freud.<sup>127</sup> De Sanctis was also one of the first in Italy to acknowledge the disruptive power of the psychoanalytic investigation and to favour a connection between psychoanalysis and experimental psychology.<sup>128</sup> He aimed to link the psychoanalytic approach with the psychiatric and psychophysiological research on sleep and dreams, thus setting up a 'dialectical relationship' between the two<sup>129</sup> and, in a recent reassessment, he has even been recognized as a precursor of some modern currents in neuropsychanalysis,<sup>130</sup> geared to recontextualize *Die Traumdeutung* in the contemporary psychophysiological research.

De Sanctis was also involved in the publication of *Psiche. Rivista di Studi psicologici* of which he became co-director together with Enrico Morselli and Guido Villa. The journal showed a notable interest for the development of the psychoanalytic movement to which the second issue was entirely devoted. It featured a Morselli's piece on the 'free associations' method, the translation of a Freud's essay, and an Assagioli's article on the subconscious.<sup>131</sup> The latter reconnects with the booklet *Il subcosciente* (1911),<sup>132</sup> published a year earlier, where Assagioli had illustrated the various existing standpoints on the matter which are particularly noteworthy for reconstructing an *archaeology of the unconscious* before Freud. The interest for the non-conscious was, indeed, considerable in the Italian philosophical and psychological circles, as the works by Ardigò, Marchesini, De Sarlo, Fanciulli, Sergi, Renda, Ferrari, Patini, Ghillini, Aliotta,

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*legale delle alienazioni mentali*, 45.34 (1908), 657-670 and 46.35 (1909), 204-218. Cf. also David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, p. 247.

<sup>126</sup> Lombardo and Foschi, 'Escape from the dark forest', p. 62.

<sup>127</sup> Sante De Sanctis, 'Istinto e incoscienze. Discussione critica', *Archivio italiano di Psicologia*, 5 (1927), 71-93 (p. 73).

<sup>128</sup> Appicciafuoco, *La psicologia sperimentale di Sante De Sanctis*, p. 135; Appicciafuoco also emphasized that De Sanctis included psychoanalysis among the methods of experimental psychology (Appicciafuoco, *La psicologia sperimentale di Sante De Sanctis*, p. 157).

<sup>129</sup> Lombardo, Foschi, 'Escape from the dark forest', p. 62.

<sup>130</sup> Here we are speaking in Mark Solms's terms: well-known for his work on the forebrain mechanisms of dreaming, Solms is considered the deviser of the word 'neuropsychanalysis', which accounts for the combination of psychoanalysis and neuroscience; see Mark Solms, *The Feeling Brain: Selected Papers on Neuropsychanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>131</sup> Enrico Morselli, 'Alcune osservazioni sul "metodo delle associazioni" applicato alla psicoanalisi', *Psiche. Rivista di Studi psicologici*, 1.2 (March-April 1912), 77-105; Roberto Assagioli, 'La psicologia del subcosciente', *Psiche*, 106-128; Sigmund Freud, 'Il metodo psicoanalitico (traduzione autorizzata di R. Assagioli)', *Psiche*, 129-135.

<sup>132</sup> Roberto Assagioli, *Il subcosciente* (Florence: Biblioteca filosofica, 1911); the text corresponds almost entirely to the article with the same title published by Assagioli in the *Rivista di filosofia*, 3 (1911), 197-206.

and Del Torto show.<sup>133</sup> It is worth recalling that Aliotta and Del Torto presented their research in 1905 at the Fifth Congress of Psychology, where De Sanctis could have most probably heard them.<sup>134</sup>

By that time, De Sanctis already had been experimenting different research methodologies for some years and he was known for having integrated different methods in an eclectic way. Thanks to this integration, he broadened – and was the only Italian scholar to do so<sup>135</sup> – the Wundtian paradigm of experimental psychology. In *I Sogni*, he motivated his pluralistic choice by explaining that combining different research methods was crucial for obtaining more rigorous conclusions. He had offered a methodological reflection already in his 1896 dissertation,<sup>136</sup> where he had commented on the subjective – also defined ‘introspective direct’ – method firstly applied by Hervey de Saint-Denys (*Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger*, 1867) and Maury (*Le sommeil et les rêves*, 1861, 1878 revised edition). As Ellenberger has noticed, De Sanctis detected a remarkable risk attached to such a method: he had realized that the high expectation on the part of the experimenter applying it ‘to have certain dreams sufficed to create in the dreamer dreams fit to confirm the theory of the dreamer-experimenter’.<sup>137</sup> The concept of ‘dreamer-experimenter’ has been developed further by Carroy who has divided the dream specialists of the late nineteenth century into two

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<sup>133</sup> Roberto Ardigò, ‘L’inconscio’, *Rivista di Filosofia e Scienze Affini*, 18.5-6 (May – June 1908), 297-332; Roberto Ardigò, ‘L’equivoco dell’inconscio di alcuni moderni’, *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, 7.7 (1888), 1-14; Giovanni Marchesini, ‘Conscio ed inconscio’, *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, 8 (November 1889), 641-650; Francesco De Sarlo, ‘Sull’incoscienza’, *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina legale*, 16 (1890), 352-359; Francesco De Sarlo, ‘L’attività psichica incoscienza in patologia mentale’, *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina legale*, 17 (1891), 97-124, 201-230; Francesco De Sarlo, ‘Coscienza e subcoscienza’, *La Cultura filosofica*, 2.7 (July 1908), 328-335; Francesco De Sarlo and Vincenzo Berrettoni, ‘I movimenti incoscienti nelle varie forme di attività psichica’, *Ricerche di Psicologia* (1905), 70-91; Giuseppe Fanciulli, ‘L’incoscienza e l’Arte’, *La Cultura filosofica*, 2.3 (March 1908), 138-144; Giuseppe Sergi, ‘Pensare senza coscienza’, *Rivista Moderna*, 2.1 (January 1899), 1-18; Antonio Renda, *La dissociazione psicologica* (Turin: Bocca, 1905); Giulio Cesare Ferrari, ‘L’educazione dell’incoscienza’, *Rivista di Psicologia applicata*, 2.2 (March-April 1906), 73-76; Giulio Cesare Ferrari, ‘Le emozioni e la vita del subcosciente’, *Rivista di Psicologia* (1912), 93-118; Ettore Patini, ‘Coscienza, subcoscienza, incoscienza ed apsicchia’, *Rivista di Psicologia applicata*, 6.1 (January-February 1910), 24-45; A. Ghillini, ‘Considerazioni intorno al problema del sub-coscienza’, *Rivista di Psicologia*, 12.1-2 (January-February 1916), 141-151.

<sup>134</sup> Antonio Aliotta, ‘Il pensiero e la personalità nei sogni. Contributo allo studio scientifico dei sogni’, *Ricerche di Psicologia* (1905), 208-227; Antonio Aliotta, ‘Ufficio dell’incoscienza nella spiegazione dei fenomeni e dei nessi tra fenomeni psichici’, in *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di psicologia*, pp. 394-396; Olindo Del Torto, ‘I ricorsi mnemonici incoscienti’, in *Atti del V Congresso internazionale di psicologia*, pp. 554-557.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Chiara Bartolucci, Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, and Giorgia Morgese, ‘Sante De Sanctis’ contribution to the study of dreams between ‘800 and ‘900 century: The originality of the integrated method’, *International Journal of Dream Research*, 9.1 (2016), 22-33 (pp. 22, 30).

<sup>136</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 15-23.

<sup>137</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 306 [my emphasis].

groups: the ‘dreaming scientists’ and the ‘scientific dreamers’.<sup>138</sup> In the first group, Carroy has included Maury, Maine de Biran, Théodore Jouffroy, and Freud. De Sanctis was interested in Maine de Biran’s and Jouffroy’s works, especially with regard to whether the faculties of attention and will would cease to be active during sleep. In particular, he was intrigued by how attention worked, a subject which he had been studying for years.<sup>139</sup> The idea that attention and will would resume only during the awakening phase and that they would be suspended during sleep was a widespread belief (‘il sonno è la sospensione dell’attenzione’,<sup>140</sup> De Sanctis stated by quoting Jouffroy).<sup>141</sup> But there were also scholars who were convinced of the contrary. Among those, there was Hervey de Saint-Denys who had been conducting an imposing dream self-analysis by taking notes about his dreams for more than twenty years. He admitted that while it would be unrealistic to think that one can constantly exercise attention and will while dreaming, it would be, however, inaccurate to esteem that these two faculties are completely inactive during sleep, as his experience of dream self-analysis showed.<sup>142</sup> De Sanctis believed in the potentialities of the subjective method, nevertheless, he was also aware that it was subject to a high margin of error. Thus, he employed it together with other methods, namely with the ‘introspective indirect’

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<sup>138</sup> Jacqueline Carroy, ‘Dreaming Scientists and Scientific Dreamers: Freud as a Reader of French Dream Literature’, *Science in Context*, 19.1 (2006), 15-35.

<sup>139</sup> The first studies about attention published by De Sanctis date 1894: ‘Il metodo grafico dello studio dell’attenzione’, *Riforma medica*, 2.115 (1894), 470-472; ‘Lo studio sperimentale dell’Attenzione’, *Bullettino della Società Lancisiana degli Ospedali di Roma*, 14.1 (1894), 22-41. Subsequently, De Sanctis also published: ‘Sopra un disturbo dell’attenzione in un degenerato’, *Bullettino della Società Lancisiana degli Ospedali di Roma*, 16.2 (1896), 113-122; ‘L’attenzione e i suoi disturbi. Saggio di Psicopatologia clinica’, *Atti della Società Romana di Antropologia*, 4.1 (1896-97), 37-78; ‘Lo studio dell’attenzione conativa. Ricerche sperimentali’, *Atti della Società Romana di Antropologia*, 4.2 (1896-97), 281-299; ‘Ricerche psicofisiologiche sull’Attenzione dei normali e dei [sic] psicopatici’, *Bullettino della Società Lancisiana degli Ospedali di Roma*, 17.2 (1897), 1-15. De Sanctis’s interest for attention continued in the following years, as testified by him reading and commenting studies on the subject as in the following collective review: ‘Rivista critica: F. E. Moyer, “A study of certain methods of distracting the Attention. Addition and cognate exercises: discrimination of odors”, *The American Journal of Psychology*, 8.3 (April 1897); L. G. Birch, “Distractions by odors”, *The American Journal of Psychology*, 9.1 (October 1897)’ published in *Rivista quindicinale di Psicologia, Psichiatria, Neuropatologia*, 1 (May 1897 – April 1898), 281-286. De Sanctis continued to develop his own reflection on attention till 1929-30, when – in his psychology treatise – he tackled extensively the above-mentioned notion of passive and active attention (cf. notes 114-115 of the present chapter).

<sup>140</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 333.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 168. On this point, it must be recalled that in his review of Dugas’s research on the unconscious cerebration, De Sanctis remarked that, according to Dugas, sleep and wake would be ‘*correnti diverse di attenzione*’ (De Sanctis, review of Dugas’s ‘Le sommeil et la cérébration inconscient durant le sommeil’, *Rivista quindicinale di Psicologia, Psichiatria, Neuropatologia*, 1 (May 1897 – April 1898), 26-27 (p. 26) [my emphasis]). On the complex relationship between wake and sleep, see also De Sanctis’s comments on Dugas’s work in *I Sogni*, p. 317.

<sup>142</sup> [Hervey de Saint-Denys] *Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (Paris: Amyot, 1867), p. 291.

method – whose first scientific application he found in Calkins’s work (1893) –<sup>143</sup> and with the questionnaire enquiry method used by Francis Galton (1883), Friedrich Heerwagen (1888), Joseph Jastrow (1888), and Charles Child (1892).<sup>144</sup>

The fruitfulness of the combination of these methods was acknowledged by De Sanctis’s contemporaries, namely by Nicolas Vaschide who in 1911 carried out an assessment of the studies on dreams. He described De Sanctis as ‘le plus digne représentant’ of the eclectic method, ‘autant par le bon emploi qu’il en fait, que par la persévérance de ses recherches’.<sup>145</sup> In the 1920s, however, De Sanctis felt the need to amend the definition that he had provided in 1899 by substituting ‘eclectic’ with ‘integral’<sup>146</sup> and by further developing what he had already pointed out in the 1910s, when he had called for a ‘reciproca integrazione dei metodi’,<sup>147</sup> a demand which he would re-emphasize again in 1929.<sup>148</sup>

Through the integration of the above-mentioned methods, De Sanctis was able to collect an impressive number of facts and figures about the dream activity. His perseverance, coupled with his scrupulousness, was endorsed by the psychoanalyst-to-be Sándor Ferenczi, who praised De Sanctis for having gathered countless data about the physiological, psychological, and pathological aspects of dream processes, and for having strongly contributed to inform oneiric studies, which had for long been considered of exclusive literary and philosophical interest, with a properly organised scientific structure.<sup>149</sup>

De Sanctis included also psychometric tests and psychoanalysis in his methodology. He considered psychoanalysis as a ‘eterointrospeetivo’ method executed by putting the subject in the condition to recount dream features for which, without ‘un interrogatorio disciplinato da certe norme’,<sup>150</sup> a subject would have not been able to

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<sup>143</sup> Mary Whiton Calkins, ‘Statistics of dreams’, *The American Journal of Psychology*, 5.3 (April 1893), 311-343.

<sup>144</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 20-1 and De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 30-32. See Francis Galton, *Inquiry into Human Faculty, and its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883); Friedrich Heerwagen, ‘Statistische Untersuchungen über Träume und Schlaf’, *Philosophische Studien*, 5 (1889), 301-320; Joseph Jastrow, ‘The Dreams of the Blind’, *The New Princeton Review*, 5.1 (1888), 18-34; Charles M. Child, ‘Statistics of “Unconscious Cerebration”’, *The American Journal of Psychology*, 5.2 (1892), 249-259.

<sup>145</sup> Nicolas Vaschide, *Le Sommeil et les Rêves* (Paris: Flammarion, 1918 [1st edn 1911]), p. 101.

<sup>146</sup> De Sanctis, ‘I metodi onirologici’, pp. 1-2 [original emphasis].

<sup>147</sup> Sante De Sanctis, ‘I metodi della psicologia moderna’, *Rivista di Psicologia*, 8 (1912), 10-26 (p. 24).

<sup>148</sup> See De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 58; cf. also p. 51. Foschi and Lombardo clarify that by ‘integralismo metodologico’, De Sanctis meant ‘l’uso concertato di più metodi adattati e selezionati in base ai gruppi di soggetti da esaminare’ (Foschi and Lombardo, introduction of De Sanctis, *La psicologia del sogno*, p. 18, n. 3).

<sup>149</sup> Sándor Ferenczi, *La mia amicizia con Miksa Schächter. Scritti preanalitici 1899-1908*, ed. by Judit Mészáros and Marco Casonato (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1992), p. 86.

<sup>150</sup> De Sanctis, ‘I metodi onirologici’, p. 13.

account. Nevertheless, he warned about the risk of resorting excessively to symbolic and analogic interpretations while conducting psychoanalytic dream analyses. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, there was a limitation equally embedded in De Sanctis's reflection, that consisted in the lack of a global theory. This limitation was actually the direct consequence of De Sanctis's reluctance to reach all-encompassing conclusions, an approach that led him to a very gradual release of his results and that did not encourage the elaboration of a comprehensive theory – a strategy that, although successful in its own respect, was not of a kind with which Freud, more inclined towards all-embracing explanations, could sympathize.

#### **4.5 Conclusions: away from the 'dark forest'**

De Sanctis was the only non-psychoanalyst Italian psychologist who devoted a substantial part of his research to dreams, as Ferreri has stressed.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, as we have illustrated, De Sanctis showed a vivid interest in psychoanalysis despite having been criticized by Freud and despite having identified some pitfalls in the psychoanalytic theory. In the late 1920s, after having researched for the previous twenty years the 'oneiric consciousness' by elaborating on Morton Prince's idea of the 'coconscious',<sup>152</sup> he stated that 'la «coscienza onirica» non è [...] che l'insieme delle realizzazioni delle disposizioni individuali latenti che si verificano nel sogno e che la coscienza primaria in parte fa sue ricordandole dopo il risveglio'.<sup>153</sup> Such Freudian-echoing terms show that some of the ideas on which De Sanctis had been working autonomously were actually convergent with notions that had emerged as essential in the psychoanalytic dream theory. According to the official psychoanalytic historiographic reconstruction, however, authors with an interest in dreams had been groping in the dark in a 'shadowy forest' before the arrival of Freud, who was regarded as the only one to have opened the way to the 'high ground' and the 'view'<sup>154</sup> or, better

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<sup>151</sup> Ferreri, 'Sante De Sanctis', p. 257.

<sup>152</sup> 'Nel sogno la subcoscienza si svolge con determinati contenuti i quali, a volte, son del tutto coordinati fra loro come a costituire un insieme strutturale che fu detto coscienza subliminale o «cocoscienza» (Morton Prince), che noi appunto perciò dicemmo *coscienza onirica*' (De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 119 [original emphasis]).

<sup>153</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 109.

<sup>154</sup> 'The whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. At the beginning, the dark forest of authors (who do not see the trees), hopelessly lost on wrong tracks. Then a concealed pass through which I lead the reader – my specimen dream with its peculiarities, details, indiscretions, bad jokes – and then suddenly the high ground and the view and the question: which way do you wish to go now?' (Sigmund Freud, *The complete letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess [1887-1904]*, trans. and ed. by Jeffrey M. Masson (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 365).

said, to the 'royal road'<sup>155</sup> leading up to the discovery of the unconscious.

This autopoietic myth of Freud as *the* discoverer of the meaningfulness of dreams has been challenged and, similarly, Ernest Jones's claims about Freud not having had any forerunners<sup>156</sup> have been disputed. Sulloway has remarked that Freud's theory of dreams had been prepared 'piecemeal in almost every major constituent by prior specialists of the problem'.<sup>157</sup> Sand has found evidence of several scientists who had reflected on the idea of the meaningfulness of dreams, namely, Charcot, Janet, and Krafft-Ebing.<sup>158</sup> Carroy has shown that self-analysis was not a 'brand new heroic undertaking' initiated by Freud, but that it was an original reworking of a 'scientific experimenting with the self that already existed with certain dreaming scientists of the nineteenth century'.<sup>159</sup> Ellenberger has tracked down, prior to all other scholars, many of the key constituents of Freud's and Jung's theories in prior works by other dream specialists of the nineteenth century.<sup>160</sup> Ellenberger's stance has been upheld by Pigman, who has made an important claim in this respect in relation to De Sanctis: Pigman has stated that before Ellenberger 'the only challenge to Freud's originality in attributing meaning to the dream' came precisely from De Sanctis.<sup>161</sup> Pigman's statement finds confirmation in the many *loci* in which De Sanctis contrasted the Freudian myth. For example, in the above-mentioned 1914 article on psychoanalysis, De Sanctis analysed some of the supposed Freudian 'originalities' and stressed that many of them were already known to the scientific community before Freud. In particular, he emphasized that concepts such as 'complex' or 'constellation', which were central in Freud's reflection, had actually been already suggested by Janet and Ziehen, respectively. The same could be said of other ideas that were instead presented as brand new by some of Freud's followers, like Jung and Stekel. For instance, the method of associations that – De Sanctis admits – Jung had the merit of having spread on a large scale in the field of individual psychology, had in fact been already observed in the past (namely in the work by Kraepelin, Aschaffenburg, Sommer, Taalman Kip); the concept

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<sup>155</sup> 'The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind' (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 604); on this point, cf. the analysis by Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), p. 200.

<sup>156</sup> See Jones, *The life and work of Sigmund Freud*.

<sup>157</sup> Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: beyond the psychoanalytic legend* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992 [1st edn 1979]), pp. 322-327 (p. 322).

<sup>158</sup> Rosemarie Sand, 'Pre-Freudian Discovery of Dream Meaning. The achievements of Charcot, Janet, and Krafft-Ebing', in *Freud and the History of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Toby Gelfand and John Kerr (Hillsdale, New Jersey-London: Analytic Press, 1992), pp. 215-229; see also Rosemarie Sand, 'The interpretation of dreams: Freud and the Western Dream Tradition', *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 9.6 (1999), 725-747.

<sup>159</sup> Carroy, 'Dreaming Scientists and Scientific Dreamers', p. 32.

<sup>160</sup> Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, p. 311.

<sup>161</sup> Pigman, 'The Dark Forest of Authors', p. 160.

of bipolarity, which Stekel showed off, was actually very close to that of 'psychical contrast' with which psychologists were already familiar and on which De Sanctis had worked back in 1895 himself.<sup>162</sup> The same was true for the concept of 'transfert' on which De Sanctis commented in his 1899 volume, after borrowing the term from James Sully and having worked further on it, as we have shown early on. The pioneering research of all these scholars mentioned by De Sanctis grants them the status of 'scienziati del sogno' rather than that of 'scienziati sognatori' – to say it in Carroy's terms – and the same consideration applies to De Sanctis himself, as stressed by Foschi and Lombardo.<sup>163</sup>

De Sanctis can, indeed, be rightly considered as a member of the learned community of dream scientists who managed to flee away from the 'dark forest of authors' into which Freud had grouped his predecessors, by claiming his leadership in three main domains. First, he claimed that all his predecessors had adopted a solely medical approach and had in most cases considered dreams as symptomatic epiphenomena to be reconducted to mental diseases. He believed that this *modus operandi* was liable for the exclusion from psychology of many elements ruling dream processes which were in fact crucial to fully understand one's innermost thoughts and feelings. Such a stand on Freud's part shows that he was overlooking many of the theories and methodologies elaborated by other dream specialists before him, including the ones designed by De Sanctis, who regarded dreams as a psychological phenomenon that could be elucidated from a psychophysiological point of view (especially in the third phase of his dream studies),<sup>164</sup> but also from an 'interpretative' perspective, as Lombardo and Foschi have highlighted.<sup>165</sup>

Two other elements on which Freud claimed his primacy were the logicity of dreams and their revealing potential. With regard to the first aspect, De Sanctis

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<sup>162</sup> See Sante De Sanctis, 'I fenomeni di contrasto in Psicologia', *Atti della Società Romana di Antropologia*, vol. II (1894-95), 199-280. In this article, De Sanctis, however, gives Freud the credit of having been the first, in 1892-93, to define as 'gegenwillen' the alterations of will occurring in neurotic subjects affected by forms of abulia and to explain them as psychological contrast phenomena due to contrast-representations, i.e. 'Contrastvorstellung' (De Sanctis, 'I fenomeni di contrasto in Psicologia', pp. 230-231).

<sup>163</sup> Renato Foschi and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, 'Sante De Sanctis e lo studio sperimentale del sogno', in *Le origini della psicologia italiana*, ed. by Nino Dazzi and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011), pp. 99-125 (p. 124).

<sup>164</sup> De Sanctis's dream studies can be divided into three phases: the first was inspired by the psychopathological approach adopted by the French school, whose influence was very substantial on De Sanctis's work; the second phase was based on the combination of clinical research and psychometric experimental measures; and the third phase was informed by the integration of psychophysiology and psychodynamics of dreams (cf. Elisabetta Cicciola and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, 'Sante De Sanctis, Vittorio Benussi e l'istituzione della «quarta cattedra» di Psicologia sperimentale nell'Università di Padova', in *Le origini della psicologia italiana*, pp. 169-186 (p. 184)).

<sup>165</sup> Lombardo and Foschi, 'Escape from the dark forest', p. 62.

acknowledged that Freud had had the merit of drawing the attention to the fact that dreams were not a 'giuoco caotico e fortuito',<sup>166</sup> but that oneiric representations were determined by psychological conditions and forces that could be studied. On the other hand, he however also stressed that the existence of a logic regulating oneiric phenomena had been discovered by other scientists before Freud, him included. He proudly affirmed: 'La verità era stata detta più o meno apertamente, prima di Freud, da parecchi psicologi – me compreso; poiché anch'io avevo esplicitamente scritto che il sogno è in concatenazione con tutto il contenuto psichico del dormiente'.<sup>167</sup>

De Sanctis had been working independently also on the second of the above-mentioned notions, that of the revealing potential of dreams, as we have previously shown.<sup>168</sup> He expounded the idea of 'sogno rivelatore' already in his 1896 dissertation,<sup>169</sup> which Freud appreciated. Moreover, in another essay dating 1896, De Sanctis emphasized the same concept: 'la vita del sogno [...] è rivelatrice'<sup>170</sup> and thus, he claimed, it can provide psychologists with a precious investigation tool. It is worth recalling that in his 1898 essay 'I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi'<sup>171</sup> as well De Sanctis claimed that dreams can unveil the profoundest psychological states and it must be stressed that Freud openly referred to this essay in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*. After the emergence of psychoanalysis, De Sanctis emphasized this potential even more. Indeed, in his article on *Die Traumdeutung*, he reasserted that dreams can reveal the 'situazione psicologica ignota alla coscienza della veglia del sognatore'.<sup>172</sup> On this point, he agreed with Adler who in 1908 had commented on the 'prophetic' function of dreams,<sup>173</sup> and whom De Sanctis considered a talented Freudian who had been able to preserve an independent spirit. This consonance with Adler, nevertheless, did not imply De Sanctis's involvement with any kind of metaphysics insofar as he thought that 'il sogno non prevede le azioni, ma riflette come uno specchio gli avvenimenti e le attitudini del corpo che sono in rapporto intimo con le nostre azioni'.<sup>174</sup> Then he also specified that the psychoanalytic *interpretative* intent, consisting in 'formare nella coscienza una sintesi'<sup>175</sup> could be seen as a *revelatory* aim because '[la sintesi] può

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<sup>166</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 236.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. above and see De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 237.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 21, 257, 287.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 16; cf. also De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>170</sup> De Sanctis, 'Emozioni e sogni', p. 587, which will be incorporated in De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 287 [my emphasis].

<sup>171</sup> De Sanctis, 'I sogni dei neuropatici e dei pazzi', p. 406 [original emphasis].

<sup>172</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 227.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Alfred Adler, 'Die Individualpsychologie, ihre Voraussetzungen und Ergebnisse', *Scientia*, 16 (1914), 74-87.

<sup>174</sup> De Sanctis, 'L'interpretazione dei sogni', p. 227 [my emphasis].

<sup>175</sup> De Sanctis, 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'onirologia scientifica', p. 217.

rivelare il significato del sogno'.<sup>176</sup> Finally, since identifying a dream's meaning could help to shed light on the inner self, then it is possible to conclude that dream interpretation could sharpen psychological investigation tools.

In *I Sogni*, De Sanctis placed a renewed emphasis on the idea that dreams are able to provide the most faithful image of one's inner world, accounting for both the conscious and less conscious aspects of the self: 'il sogno è il racconto più genuino di ciò che l'individuo è, di ciò ch'esso abitualmente pensa o desidera, di ciò a cui più o meno *coscientemente esso tende*'.<sup>177</sup> In the late 1920s, he revisited this point and emphasized that the domain of consciousness is narrow compared to that of subconsciousness. He pointed out that this limitation depended on the conscious thought being 'troppa piccola cosa in confronto del [...] vasto campo subcosciente'.<sup>178</sup> He saw this constraint as an integral part of our individual selves and affirmed that denying this aspect would mean refusing to acknowledge human nature itself, since an individual who is conscious of everything would be omniscient, 'insomma divino', being able to look backwards to the past and forward to the future.<sup>179</sup> The same Janus-like approach can be found at the origin of the *Interpretation of dreams*. As Hillel Schwartz has recalled, Freud wrote that 'dreams [...] felt forward but looked backward'.<sup>180</sup> Interestingly enough, in July 1899 his love for ancient Rome and for archaeology made Freud secure objects representing Roman gods, among which was also a Janus-shaped stone 'who looks at me' – Freud wrote – 'with his two faces in a very superior manner' while sitting on the pages of his almost finished *Tramdeutung* draft. The *Interpretation of dreams* saw, thus, the light under the auspices of the Roman two-faced god whose figure – as we have illustrated in Chapter Three – might be considered as the epitome of the turn-of-the-century time experience. The Janus-metaphor also applies to the double-nature of dreams which, while projecting thoughts and images *outside* ourselves, lets us look *inside* ourselves. De Sanctis was strongly convinced of the potentiality of dreams in this respect. He believed that they were pivotal to exploring the subconscious and he insisted that 'nessun fenomeno meglio del sogno è capace di dar chiara ragione della sistemazione subcosciente',<sup>181</sup> a statement which epitomizes the tenacious belief in the power of dreams that has firmly driven the research of De Sanctis throughout his career as a scientist of dreams and as a pioneer of scientific oneirology since the late

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<sup>176</sup> De Sanctis, 'La psico-analisi e il suo valore come metodo dell'oniologia scientifica', p. 217 [original emphasis].

<sup>177</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, p. 6 [my emphasis].

<sup>178</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 106.

<sup>179</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 106.

<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End. A cultural history of the Fin de Siècle from the 990s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 188.

<sup>181</sup> De Sanctis, *Psicologia sperimentale*, vol. I, p. 109.

1890s, when dreams were still considered as falling within the domain of mystic and artistic trends.

## CHAPTER 5

### A 'triste fine del secolo' between 'bisogno del sogno', mysticism, and *Arte Aristocratica*: Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* and the power of dreams

*L'arte, esprimendo con più forza e con più lucidità quel che la natura esprime oscuramente [...], può fornire alla scienza non soltanto indizii preziosi ma rendere evidente ciò che ancora non è dimostrabile.<sup>1</sup>*

*[L'anima contemporanea] non soltanto contiene l'immenso flutto delle idee, delle sensazioni [...] – accumulato dalle innumerevoli generazioni anteriori – ma anche un oscuro viluppo di germi nuovi [...]. E dal contrasto delle vecchie e delle nuove energie si producono ogni giorno forme di vita spirituale mirabili, non mai conosciute prima, o al meno non mai osservate e rivelate.<sup>2</sup>*

#### 5.1 'Una traduzione nel campo della creazione estetica di un bisogno dello spirito'

Dreams have always had a longstanding relationship with the mystical tradition and throughout the centuries have been subject to symbolical interpretations. In Chapter Four, we have seen how even positivism-oriented psychologists like De Sanctis could not help but attach a symbolical value to dreams and acknowledge that 'il sogno è un simbolo [...] anzi, è un prezioso simbolo', since in dreams 'l'homme se révèle tout entier à lui-même dans sa nudité et sa misère natives', as Maury used to say.<sup>3</sup> However, the same psychologists also warned against the risk of leaning excessively towards mystical-oriented constructions that might result in misleading interpretations comparable to those given to dreams in the ancient times which, if considered as rightly deserving historical interest, were not considered acceptable from a scientific point of view. De Sanctis, for instance, specified that the dreams represented a symbol 'per il medico e non per l'astrologo, o per il sacerdote, o per lo spiritista'.<sup>4</sup> In the late

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<sup>1</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca'; see also Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', *Il Mattino*, 30-31 January 1893.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', *La Tribuna*, 23 June 1893; see also the interview given to Ugo Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati* (Milan: Dumolard, 1895), pp. 297-331 (p. 324).

<sup>3</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici di un alienista* (Turin: Bocca, 1899), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno nell'isterismo e nell'epilessia* (Rome: Società Dante Alighieri, 1896), p. 14.

nineteenth century, one of the major concerns appeared, indeed, to be debunking beliefs proclaimed ‘in opere che s’intitolano alla scienza psicologica sperimentale e che invece non sono che *pullulazioni nuove (spiritismo, occultismo, animismo, ecc.) del misticismo antico*’.<sup>5</sup> The importance that De Sanctis attached to this issue, which he described as ‘riacutizzazione del misticismo’,<sup>6</sup> is testified by the prominent position of the chapters tackling it, which opened the volumes of both of his major works on dreams – *I sogni e il sonno* (1896) and *I Sogni* (1899).<sup>7</sup> The preoccupation with the new mystic trend was felt across Europe, as testified by the success of texts inquiring it, such as Wundt’s *Hypnotismus und Suggestion* (1892) and the controversial Nordau’s *Entartung* (both translated into many European languages),<sup>8</sup> as well as by the responses to the supposed ‘science bankruptcy’ denounced by Ferdinand Brunetière to which, in Italy, Enrico Morselli provided an exhaustive reply, highly appreciated by De Sanctis.<sup>9</sup>

The anxieties related to the ‘riacutizzazione del misticismo’ reached a critical point at the turn of the century. Time-wise, it is symptomatic that Erminio Troilo’s *Il misticismo moderno*<sup>10</sup> – a volume entirely devoted to the phenomenon of modern mysticism which in part built upon Nordau’s famous treatment of the topic in *Degeneration*<sup>11</sup> – was published in 1899, the same year in which De Sanctis was completing his second book on dreams, *I Sogni*. The concurrent publication of the two Italian volumes even drew attention from the foreign press, as testified by the fact that, in a major foreign periodical as the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger*, the review of De Sanctis’s book signed by the editor-in-chief himself Théodule Ribot – the psychologist holding the first chair ever of Experimental Psychology at the Sorbonne in Paris – was followed by a review of Troilo’s *Il misticismo moderno*. It was no accident,

<sup>5</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 13 [my emphasis].

<sup>6</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 13, note 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the chapter ‘Sogni e misticismo’ in De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 5-15 and the chapter ‘Il sogno e il misticismo antico e moderno’ in De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 9-24.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Hypnotismus und Suggestion* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1892); Max Nordau, *Degenerazione – Versione autorizzata sulla prima edizione tedesca per G. Oberosler*, 2 vols (Milan: Dumolard, 1893-94).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ferdinand Brunetière, ‘Après une visite au Vatican’, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 65.127, 1 January 1895 and Enrico Morselli, ‘La pretesa bancarotta della scienza’, *Rivista di sociologia. Scienze sociali, politiche e morali, biologia, psicologia, antropologia, pedagogia, igiene, storia della cultura*, 2.1 (1895), 81-100, reprinted in *Storia e «crisi» della psicologia scientifica in Italia*, ed. by Giovanni Pietro Lombardo (Milan: LED, 2014), pp. 195-211.

<sup>10</sup> Erminio Troilo, *Il misticismo moderno* (Turin: Bocca, 1899).

<sup>11</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1895), pp. 45-240. ‘Mysticism’ is the second section of *Degeneration*, after the introductory part ‘Fin de siècle’, and is divided in subsections devoted respectively to: ‘The Psychology of Mysticism’, ‘The Pre-Raphaelites’, ‘Symbolism’, ‘Tolstoism’, ‘The Richard Wagner Cult’, ‘Parodies of Mysticism’. The theses presented in these pages by Nordau were highly controversial and yet, or perhaps precisely because of this, prompted an international debate and had an incredible diffusion in the late nineteenth-century Western culture.

noticed Ribot, that the last section of De Sanctis's volume was devoted to the thorny question of the 'meraviglioso' in dreams, which, Ribot observed, led the reader back to the point of departure, 'c'est-à-dire au seuil du mysticisme' hovering above the fin-de-siècle society.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the century, mystical artistic trends enjoyed great favour as they appeared to respond to one of the soul's deepest demands: 'L'arte simbolica e mistica oggi così in fiore, non è [...] che una traduzione nel campo della creazione estetica di questo bisogno dello spirito',<sup>13</sup> Chiappelli remarked in his 'Sul confine dei due secoli'. This artistic trend presented itself as addressed mainly to an élite, to a group of few 'noble' souls anxious to find 'acute e raffinate emozioni, [...] squisite dilettazioni estetiche'.<sup>14</sup> Those few deemed to be 'cenacoli eletti e superumani', self-identifying as the only ones capable of fully disclosing the meaning of symbols and self-fashioning themselves as the only recipients of symbolic art, viewed as a form of 'arte aristocratica'.<sup>15</sup> The phrase 'arte aristocratica' was coined in the early 1890s by the literary and art critic Vittorio Pica, the first to introduce French symbolism and the poets Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine to the mid-1880s Italian cultural milieu. He committed to providing an always up-to-date state of the art of what he considered a form of 'letteratura d'avanguardia', which he baptized 'letteratura d'eccezione', as shown by the titles of two of his essay collections (published in 1890 and 1898 respectively).<sup>16</sup> In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Pica engaged in an intense critical activity and equipped the Italian readership with prompt reviews of the latest literary works from abroad, as well as previews and extracts from still unpublished foreign works, often adding his own translations into Italian (whenever no translations were already available on the publishing market), and critical profiles of foreign authors, mainly French poets and novelists, such as Paul Bourget, Alphonse

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<sup>12</sup> Théodule Ribot, 'Compte rendu de Sante de Sanctis. *I Sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici*', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 48 (1899), 537-540 (p. 540).

<sup>13</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 635).

<sup>14</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 632.

<sup>15</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 632.

<sup>16</sup> See Vittorio Pica, *All'Avanguardia. Studi sulla letteratura contemporanea* (Naples: Pierro, 1890), reprinted in Vittorio Pica, *All'Avanguardia*, with an introduction by Toni Iermano (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 1993); Vittorio Pica, *Letteratura d'eccezione* (Milan: Baldini, Castoldi & C., 1899 [1898]) also available in the following modern edition: Vittorio Pica, *Letteratura d'eccezione*, with an introduction by Ernesto Citro and a presentation by Luciano Erba (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1987). On the extensive critical activity of Vittorio Pica and on his role as a mediator between the Italian culture and French Decadentism, see Fabio Finotti, 'Vittorio Pica e la diffusione del Decadentismo in Italia', in Fabio Finotti, *Sistema letterario e diffusione del decadentismo nell'Italia di fine '800: il carteggio Vittorio Pica-Neera* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1988), pp. 61-122; Nicola D'Antuono, *Vittorio Pica. Un visionario tra Napoli e l'Europa* (Rome: Carocci, 2002) and Alessandro Gaudio, *La sinistra estrema nell'arte. Vittorio Pica alle origini dell'estetismo in Italia* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2006).

Daudet, Anatole France, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Francis Poictevin, just to mention a few. On 3 April 1892, he held a lecture at the Circolo filologico in Naples<sup>17</sup> where he explored the topic of 'arte aristocratica', which he defined in opposition to the concept of 'arte democratica'. He considered these two artistic ideals as completing each other and objected to the trend of the 'ultra-aristocratica' art, prompted by those 'spiriti raffinati' who identified the response to the risk of homologation, which they saw as a spectre dangerously taking over art in modern cities, in the cult of a beauty that was unattainable in reality. If, on the one hand, Pica was critical of the 'ultra-aristocratici' artists, he, however, shared with those 'spiriti raffinati' the concern about the spreading homologation risk and did not feel immune to the form of intellectual neurosis apparently affecting every fin-de-siècle soul and making sensitivity 'più acuta, più intensa' in a society picturing itself as a 'civiltà estrema inclinante fortemente alla decadenza'.<sup>18</sup>

Pica's authors 'd'eccezione' were mainly foreign, namely French, British and American, with only two Italian exceptions: Carlo Dossi and Gabriele D'Annunzio.<sup>19</sup> In D'Annunzio, in particular, Pica saw 'spiccate tendenze verso un'arte aristocratica'.<sup>20</sup> Also in 1892, a few months after Pica's presentation at the Circolo filologico in Naples, D'Annunzio wrote in the newly-born Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino* (first issue, 16 March 1892) that 'l'eccesso di sensibilità' and the desire of eschewing 'l'angustia della vita comune', was typical of 'epoche di decadenza, delle epoche di estrema civiltà e di estrema debolezza'.<sup>21</sup> It is impressive how D'Annunzio's words appear to echo Pica's conference speech both on a conceptual level, with the emphasis on the same two elements (first, the need for an extra-ordinary – in the etymological sense of the word – life; second, the fear for an unrelenting decadence), and on a stylistic level as well, through the re-use of phases such as 'estrema civiltà' recalling Pica's 'civiltà estrema'. These might just appear as small clues of a connection between the two texts, but the contact is actually also supported by external factors if one recalls that by the time Pica

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<sup>17</sup> Ruggiero Bonghi, who at the end of the same year would deliver his conference speech 'Questa fin di secolo' which we have analysed in Chapter One, very likely might have heard Pica's presentation as Bonghi was President of the Circolo at the time.

<sup>18</sup> Vittorio Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', in Vittorio Pica, «Arte aristocratica» e altri scritti su naturalismo, sibaritismo e giapponismo (1881-1892), ed. by Nicola D'Antuono (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1995), pp. 243-270 (p. 244).

<sup>19</sup> 'In verità in Italia io non scorgo che due artisti soltanto che possano venir compresi nella bizzarra famiglia degli artisti d'eccezione: Carlo Dossi e Gabriele d'Annunzio' (Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 265).

<sup>20</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 266.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno', *Il Mattino*, 31 August-1 September 1892, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, ed. and with an introduction by Annamaria Andreoli, texts gathered by Giorgio Zanetti (Milan, Mondadori, 2003), pp. 72-76 (p. 73). D'Annunzio would continue his collaboration with *Il Mattino* by publishing instalments of *Trionfo della morte* in 1893 and 1894.

delivered his speech D'Annunzio was in Naples – he had arrived there in August 1890<sup>22</sup> – and thus he might have had the opportunity to hear Pica's talk or, in any case, have accessed the printed version of the conference text, which had been promptly issued and was already out in the spring of 1892.<sup>23</sup> Time-wise, it is also interesting to remark that Benedetto Croce, whose neo-idealistically informed critical judgment on Decadentism would weigh negatively on the literature of this period for a long time, started his shift from Positivism towards more idealistic-oriented positions in the same city and in the same years. Indeed, he read his conference 'La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte' (in which he departed from the positivistic stance he had adopted up until that moment and, by paraphrasing Pasquale Villari's claim that history was *also* art,<sup>24</sup> stated that history *was* art)<sup>25</sup> at the Accademia Pontiniana in Naples on 5 March 1893 – just one year after Pica's conference, and less than a year after D'Annunzio's article.

In 'Arte aristocratica', Pica stressed that D'Annunzio had introduced in his works, and for the first time in Italy, the moral issues which were puzzling 'tante elevate menti di letterati e di pensatori'<sup>26</sup> such as Tolstoy and Ibsen,<sup>27</sup> and he also expressed appreciation for D'Annunzio's attention towards the intellectual evolution of the

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<sup>22</sup> For a thorough account of D'Annunzio's stay in Naples, see Emma Giammattei, 'D'Annunzio a Napoli', in Emma Giammattei, *Retorica e idealismo. Croce nel primo Novecento* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1987), pp. 165-205 and Gianni Infusino, *D'Annunzio a Napoli. Poesia, narrativa, giornalismo, donne negli anni della «splendida miseria»* (Naples: Liguori, 1988); cf. also Benedetto Croce e la cultura a Napoli nel secondo Ottocento. *Continuità e rotture (1902-1915)*, ed. by Francesco Bruni (Naples: Macchiaroli, 1983), pp. 33-36 and Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Lettere da Napoli (1891-1893)*, ed. by Angelo R. Pupino (Naples: Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Vittorio Pica, *Arte aristocratica: conferenza letta li 3 aprile 1892 nel Circolo filologico di Napoli* (Naples: Pierro, 1892). The exact date of the publication is unknown, but it was for sure already circulating by early May, since the French literary critic Rémy De Gourmont confirmed to Pica that he had received his volume in a letter dated 9 May 1892 (cf. Ernesto Citro, 'Lettere inedite di alcuni corrispondenti francesi a Vittorio Pica (Hennique, Alexis, Rod, Tailhade, Dierx, Rémy e Jean de Gourmont)', *Revue des études italiennes*, 36.1-4 (January-December 1991), 105-124 (p. 122).

<sup>24</sup> Pasquale Villari, *La storia è una scienza?* (Rome: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1891). See also Pasquale Villari, *La storia è una scienza?*, ed. by Maurizio Martirano, presentation by Fulvio Tessitore (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte: memoria letta all'Accademia pontiniana nella tornata del 5 marzo 1893 dal socio Benedetto Croce', in *Atti della medesima accademia*, vol. XXIII, pp. 1-29; in the same year, Croce published the text in the Neapolitan journal *La Tavola Rotonda* between July and October 1893 and the essay 'La storia è una scienza o un'arte', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 9 July 1893. Subsequently, Croce reprinted the essay with a few amendments as *Il concetto della storia nelle sue relazioni con l'arte. Ricerche e discussioni* (Turin: Loescher: 1894 [2nd edn 1896]) and then in *Primi saggi* (Bari: Laterza: 1919); see also the more recent edition Benedetto Croce, *La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte*, ed. by Giuseppe Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 266.

<sup>27</sup> We will come back to the importance of this comparison between D'Annunzio on the one hand, and Tolstoy and Ibsen on the other in Chapter Six of the present thesis.

'torbida, irrequieta, mutabilissima fine di secolo'<sup>28</sup> and towards the 'generazione irrequieta'<sup>29</sup> of the end of the century. Pica's emphasis on the centrality in D'Annunzio's work of the fin de siècle as a time of complex mutation is more than appropriate if D'Annunzio himself, a year later, emphasized that many of his contemporaries felt oppressed by the 'triste fine del secolo' and feared that a 'decadenza irreparabile' would lead to 'il naufragio di tutte le cose belle e di tutte le idealità soprane', while suffering from the impression of 'esser nato troppo tardi o troppo presto',<sup>30</sup> as we have shown in Chapter One. The same uneasiness due to the feeling of living in an age of transition was described by Pica, who ascribed it to the sharpening of the rift between 'democratic' and 'aristocratic' art:

Del resto ogni considerazione pro o contra è superflua dinanzi al fatto che il dissidio [...] si va sempre più affermando, forse perché attraversiamo un angoscioso periodo di transazione, un periodo di dubbio e di scoraggiamento morale.<sup>31</sup>

As Giovannetti has remarked, despite the countless interpretations that have been given of the term 'decadence' and 'Decadentism',<sup>32</sup> it is beyond any doubt that the Italian 'età del decadentismo' possessed its own identifying features and 'la specificità d'una età di transizione'<sup>33</sup>, leading to a 'cultura della crisi', as Gino Tellini has rightly stated.<sup>34</sup> 'La crisi letteraria' was indeed the title chosen by Arturo Graf for the inaugural lecture of the academic year 1888 at the University of Turin where he stated: 'Come più innoltra [*sic*] il secolo, più il moto si fa precipitoso e confuso, sinchè [*sic*] giungono questi giorni presenti, giorni turbati e febbrili, pieni di audace focose e di stanchezze profonde'.<sup>35</sup> In these words, it is possible to find early references – as Graf was writing in the 1880s – of the turmoil and the feverish atmosphere which Pica and D'Annunzio described in the 1890s with similar words, as we have just seen. 'Il secolo in cui

<sup>28</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 266.

<sup>29</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 267.

<sup>30</sup> All quotations are from Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', *La Tribuna*, 23 June 1893, in D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, pp. 201-207 (p. 201).

<sup>31</sup> Pica, 'Arte aristocratica', p. 245 [my emphasis] (in his writings Pica uses 'transazione' and 'transizione' without distinction).

<sup>32</sup> On the definition of the concept of decadentism, see Marina Paladini Musitelli, 'Il concetto di decadentismo nella critica italiana', *Problemi*, 59 (September-December 1980), 221-245 and Giuseppe Petronio, 'Il «decadentismo»: la parola e la cosa', *Quaderni del Vittoriale*, 36 (November-December 1982), 9-24. For a more extensive bibliography on the topic, cf. the Introduction of the thesis.

<sup>33</sup> Paolo Giovannetti, *Decadentismo* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1994), p. 57.

<sup>34</sup> Gino Tellini, 'I "cavalieri" dello spirito e la cultura della crisi', in Gino Tellini, *Il romanzo italiano dell'Ottocento e Novecento* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 210-246.

<sup>35</sup> Arturo Graf, *La crisi letteraria* (Turin: Loescher, 1888), p. 8.

viviamo’, Graf added, ‘è, fra quanti ne ricorda la storia, quello per certo in cui la variazione delle idee e delle forme letterarie appare più sollecita’.<sup>36</sup> He was saddened because of the end of the supremacy of the classics and of the literary tradition. He reviewed the major artistic trends of the nineteenth century – from Romanticism to Naturalism – and concluded on the ‘bande irregolari dei *decadenti*, dei *simbolisti*’ called to be ‘forse, i trionfatori di domani...’.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting that when tackling the same question in 1897, he denied whatsoever influence of French symbolists and English Pre-Raphaelites on Italian literature, D’Annunzio included.<sup>38</sup>

Symbolists and Pre-Raphaelites, however, had their fair share of influence and, despite all the flaws and drawbacks that the critics of the time ascribed to them, their form of ‘arte aristocratica’ could be credited ‘per un misterioso consenso della storia’ to support a process of ‘elevazione umana’, as Chiappelli noticed.<sup>39</sup> It is well known that the mid-1890s saw both the triumph of D’Annunzio’s *Übermensch*-inspired philosophy calling for a renewed humankind (expounded, for instance, in *Le vergini delle rocce* (1895) whose first part is devoted to react to the phenomenon of the so-called ‘decadenza latina’) and the development of a ‘Rinascimento latino’ program (promoted by journals such as the *Convito*, which D’Annunzio directed from January 1895 to December 1896 and where *Le Vergini* were published in instalments) addressed to a small élite of ‘exceptional’ individuals distancing themselves from the masses in the name of the cult of Beauty. When talking of ‘elevazione umana’, however, Chiappelli – and herein lies the originality of his point of view – did not refer to such trends of thought. He identified the trigger of this ‘elevazione’ in what appeared to be the paradox hidden below the surface of resounding declarations of aristocratic art. In ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, he explained:

se prescindiamo dalla sua forma paradossale, dall’annunziarsi ch’essa [l’arte aristocratica e simbolica] fa come un rinnovamento solitario dell’arte, e dall’apparire come un redivivo umanismo rivelatore della pura bellezza, per chi guardi oltre la superficie esso significa un bisogno di raffinamento dello spirito, un istinto educato ad indovinare la vita profonda nelle cose, come anima segreta delle forme belle, rispondente, per un consenso profondo, all’anima umana. Codesto quasi afflato religioso traspare anche da alcune pagine del *Sogno d’un mattino di*

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<sup>36</sup> Graf, *La crisi letteraria*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Graf, *La crisi letteraria*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Artufo Graf, ‘Preraffaelliti, simbolisti ed esteti’, *Nuova Antologia*, 16 January 1897.

<sup>39</sup> Chiappelli, ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, p. 633.

Chiappelli observed that, once one managed to escape the paradoxical forms in which the 'arte aristocratica' presented itself, one would find out that such authors were also calling for a deeper change to take place in art: finding a way to grasp the 'vita profonda delle cose' and the 'anima segreta delle forme' as well as of the individual self. By this objective, novelists were led to the investigation of dreams and to the study of madness, hysteria, and the mourning processes. This was the same research that was being carried out by psychologists in those years – as we have seen in Chapter Four – and novelists, poets and playwrights drew from it abundantly.<sup>41</sup> D'Annunzio, in particular, had shown his interest in psychological issues in *Il Piacere* (1889), *Giovanni Episcopo* (1892), *L'Innocente* (1892), *Trionfo della morte* (1894).<sup>42</sup> By the time Chiappelli was writing, D'Annunzio had already published all these novels, and yet the critic chose to refer to a less known and less popular work, the play *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* composed and published in 1897.

*Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* was republished in 1899,<sup>43</sup> so very close to the

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<sup>40</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 633.

<sup>41</sup> See Annamaria Cavalli Pasini, *La scienza del romanzo. Romanzo e cultura scientifica tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Bologna: Patron, 1982); Vittorio Roda, *Il soggetto centrifugo. Studi sulla letteratura italiana tra Otto e Novecento* (Bologna: Patron, 1984); Laura Nay, *Fantasmî del corpo fantasmî della mente. La malattia fra analisi e racconto (1870-1900)* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999); Edwige Comoy Fusaro, *La nevrosi tra medicina e letteratura. Approccio epistemologico alle malattie nervose nella narrativa italiana (1865-1922)* (Florence: Polistampa, 2007); Federica Adriano, *La narrativa tra psicopatologia e paranormale. Da Tarchetti a Pirandello* (Pisa: ETS, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> See Mario Giannantoni, *La medicina nell'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Florence: Stabilimento tipografico Bandettini, 1929) and Adriano, *La narrativa tra psicopatologia e paranormale*, pp. 179-228. See also Manuele Marinoni, *D'Annunzio lettore di psicologia sperimentale. Intrecci culturali: da Bayreuth alla Salpêtrière* (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2018), which builds on Marinoni's previous articles devoted to D'Annunzio's interest in psychology.

<sup>43</sup> The text of the *Sogno*, which D'Annunzio already mentioned to his translator H  relle in 1896, was written for Eleonora Duse in April 1897, in just ten days, according to Giuseppe Primoli (cf. Giuseppe Primoli, 'La Duse', *Revue de Paris*, 1 June 1897). Published in French in *Revue de Paris* on 1 June 1897 and in Italian in the periodicals *Convito* and *L'Italia. Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 1.1, 1 July 1897, the *Sogno* started to circulate autonomously as an extract of the latter in a not-for-sale edition (Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* (Rome: Tipografia Cooperativa Sociale, 1897)). In 1899, it was published by Treves as part of a cycle titled 'I Sogni delle Stagioni', which was supposed to be constituted of four 'poemi tragici' devoted to each of the seasons, but of which only the spring- and autumn-themed ones saw the light: Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* (Milan: Treves, 1899); Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno. Poema tragico* (Milan: Treves, 1899). There are just a few fragments of the hypothesized *Sogno d'un meriggio d'estate* and nothing more than a project of *Sogno d'una notte d'inverno* (both announced in the inner cover of the above-mentioned Treves editions). For more details about the structure and inspiration sources of the play, see Pietro Gibellini, 'Per i due «sogni»: dal buio della psiche al chiarore della parola', in Pietro Gibellini, *D'Annunzio dal gesto al testo* (Milan: Mursia, 1995), pp. 102-113 and Francesco Erspamer, 'L'esordio teatrale di Gabriele D'Annunzio', in *D'Annunzio a cinquant'anni dalla morte. Atti dell'XI Convegno*

date of publication of Chiappelli's article in which, it is worth remarking, it is the only Italian text – apart from Morselli's essay *L'eredità materiale, intellettuale e morale del secolo XIX* – to be mentioned (an element which is indicative of the representativeness Chiappelli attached to it, considering that in the same year 1897 another crucial text for Decadentism, Pascoli's *Il fanciullino*, had also been published). The 'quasi afflato religioso' that Chiappelli detected in the play has no relation with religion strictly speaking,<sup>44</sup> but rather with the 'forme oscure di un misticismo neoplatonico, della teosofia e dell'occultismo' typical of authors such as Maurice Maeterlinck,<sup>45</sup> Chiappelli specified by referring to the Belgian playwright who was one of the major sources of inspiration for D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*.

In the late 1890s, mystical influences permeated an increasing number of works, all longing for the advent in art of the 'reign' of the 'metempirico e metaspirituale', as Walter Binni remarked.<sup>46</sup> In 1893, D'Annunzio claimed that 'gli artisti futuri saranno gli uomini *rappresentativi*' and the 'messaggeri del loro tempo'.<sup>47</sup> If, after the turn of the century, the aspect that he foregrounded in his *Laudi* (1903) and considered most 'representative' of the time was the industrial progress that was reshaping cities and life habits,<sup>48</sup> in the late 1890s the focus appeared to be more oriented towards the individual self and centred on dream studies as well as hypnosis and spiritistic research. D'Annunzio had always been fascinated by such domains and had been immersed in an atmosphere that favoured his interest for the occult, particularly during his Neapolitan stay. This is testified by the previously-mentioned 1892 article 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno', which he published in *Il Mattino*. Here he outlined his view on what the guidelines about the future literary development should be and recognized the task of future authors in the harmonization of 'tutte le varietà della conoscenza e tutte le varietà del mistero, rappresentando tutta la vita e nel tempo

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*internazionale di studi dannunziani* (Pescara: Centro nazionale di studi dannunziani, 1989), pp. 473-495.

<sup>44</sup> In the present chapter we will not tackle religious-related mystical manifestations. Our approach to the question will be, instead, devoted to the analysis of the relationship between mysticism and artistic creation, namely to the exploration of that mystical power – which Decadent artists thought to possess – enabling them to see 'beyond the veil' of reality (cf. Cavalli Pasini, *La scienza del romanzo*, p. 171).

<sup>45</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 633.

<sup>46</sup> Walter Binni, *La poetica del decadentismo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1989 [1st edn 1936]), p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', *Il Mattino*, 30-31 January 1893, in D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, pp. 122-126 (p. 126). See also D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 205.

<sup>48</sup> With regard to D'Annunzio's consideration of modernity, see the conference proceedings *D'Annunzio et la modernité. Actes du Colloque International – Université de Caen Basse-Normandie, IMEC, Abbaye d'Ardenne (10-11 Décembre 2008)*, ed. by Laura Oliva and Marie-José Tramuta as a special issue of *Studi Medievali e Moderni*, 13.2 (2009) and cf. in particular the article by Nicolas Bonnet, 'D'Annunzio tra i due secoli', in *D'Annunzio et la modernité*, pp. 89-100. See also the volume by Vittorio Roda, *La strategia della totalità. Saggio su Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Bologna: Massimiliano Boni Editore, 1978), namely pp. 85-97.

*medesimo suggerendo tutti i sogni*'.<sup>49</sup> To achieve such an aim, he identified dreams as crucial elements because he saw that it was precisely 'in un'atmosfera di sogno'<sup>50</sup> that the future literature would be able to find 'indizii di verità ancora nascoste' as well as 'documenti rivelatori' – as he had already said at the beginning of the same year in another Neapolitan journal.<sup>51</sup> Two years later, in the dedicatory letter of the *Trionfo della morte* addressed to Francesco Michetti, he reemphasized the same concepts and stated that future writers had the mission of integrating 'tutte le varietà del conoscimento e tutte le varietà del mistero',<sup>52</sup> and reproducing reality while at the same time stimulating imagination. This would be possible through the reclaim of an 'antico elemento che oggi manca all'arte', that is to say 'il meraviglioso',<sup>53</sup> as it responded to the 'acuito bisogno del sogno' of the readers, who were more and more avid of 'fantasticherie' and 'evocazioni spiritiche'.<sup>54</sup>

This evoking of the oneiric and imaginative dimension ('fantasticherie'), coupled with the reference to séances ('evocazioni spiritiche'), does not surprise if one thinks that precisely in 1892, year of publication of the article 'Il bisogno del sogno', D'Annunzio took part in several spiritualist sessions during his stay in Naples. The first séance he partook in, held in Madame Polozov's salon, in the presence of the well-known medium Eusapia Palladino, ended in a comic *bagarre*;<sup>55</sup> however, subsequent experiences of supposed contact with the supernatural were taken more seriously by D'Annunzio, as shown by some of his letters. In a letter he wrote in August 1892 (it should be noticed that he wrote 'Il bisogno del sogno' at the end of the same month), he commented on a séance in which he had partaken: 'La catena ebbe successo. *L'invisibile si è manifestato*. Ho visto volare oggetti pesanti; ho avvertito calore al collo [...] poi parole sommesse [...] *Mi sgomenta il pensiero del domani, di una vita diversa*'.<sup>56</sup> As Giglio

<sup>49</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno', p. 76 [my emphasis].

<sup>50</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno', p. 75.

<sup>51</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Il romanzo futuro. Frammento d'uno studio su l'arte nuova', *La Domenica del Don Marzio*, 31 January 1892, available in D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, pp. 17-21, from where we are quoting (p. 20).

<sup>52</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, *A Francesco Paolo Michetti*, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Trionfo della morte* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1983), p. 49. In this introductory letter as well as in the body of the text – and the same applies to the *Vergini delle rocce* – it is possible to find concepts and excerpts from the articles that D'Annunzio published in the early 1890s, which differentiate themselves from the mundane chronicles of D'Annunzio's early days as a journalist for tackling complex issues and for having a marked programmatic value.

<sup>53</sup> D'Annunzio, *A Francesco Paolo Michetti*, p. 76.

<sup>54</sup> D'Annunzio, *A Francesco Paolo Michetti*, p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> Si veda Federico Verdinois, 'Ricordi giornalistici', *Varietas*, 14 May 1919; available also in Camillo Antona-Traversi, *Foglie dannunziane* (Naples: Guida, 1932), pp. 26-31 and in Federico Verdinois, *Profili letterari e ricordi giornalistici*, ed. by Elena Craveri Croce (Florence: Le Monnier, 1949), pp. 277-283.

<sup>56</sup> Raffaele Giglio, 'Per l'esoterismo dannunziano', in *D'Annunzio a Napoli*, ed. by Angelo R. Pupino (Naples: Liguori, 2005), pp. 139-154 (p. 149 [my emphasis]).

has emphasized,<sup>57</sup> D'Annunzio appears startled by the perspective of a *post mortem* life and yet, after the revelation of the 'invisible' that occurred during the séance, he accepted such an idea as truthful. Such a stance contrasts with the scepticism displayed by D'Annunzio in other circumstances,<sup>58</sup> however it appears to be coherent with the fascination for the occult that, as stressed by Attilio Mazza, D'Annunzio had been nurturing since a young age.<sup>59</sup>

One of the manifestations of the unknown that attracted D'Annunzio the most was the mystery of death. D'Annunzio's thanatological interest, deeply-engrained in his writings, transpires on manifold fronts: it is macroscopic – starting from the titles – in works such *Trionfo della morte* and *La città morta*, but it emerges, albeit in a subtler way, also in a number of other texts and widely permeates his essayistic, novelistic, poetic and dramatic production on which we will now focus.

## 5.2 'Tutte le varietà del mistero' in *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*

We will analyse D'Annunzio's under-studied first-ever-staged play *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*,<sup>60</sup> since this play constitutes a specimen of the interlacement of the above-mentioned 'bisogno del sogno' and of the 'meraviglioso' with 'tutte le varietà del mistero' (life-death relationship, prophetic dreams, oneiric (un)consciousness, hypnosis, Mesmer- and thaumaturgy-like influences, interest for the occult, ghosts and metempsychosis) that were on the top of the artists' agenda at the end of the century. In addition to this reason and to the reasons highlighted by Chiappelli in 'Sul confine dei due secoli', which we have previously outlined, one more element must be added as

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<sup>57</sup> Giglio, 'Per l'esoterismo dannunziano', p. 150.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Giglio, 'Per l'esoterismo dannunziano'.

<sup>59</sup> See Attilio Mazza, *D'Annunzio e l'occulto* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1995), p. 37; Attilio Mazza has devoted many studies to this topic, such as Attilio Mazza, *D'Annunzio sciamano* (Milan: Bietti, 2001), which, however, sometimes risks leaning excessively towards a mystical interpretation by picturing D'Annunzio as 'dotato di indefinibili poteri di predizione', as highlighted by Mario Cimini (cf. Mario Cimini, "Il bisogno del sogno": d'Annunzio e i contorni mediatici del fatto letterario', *Studi medievali e moderni*, 26.2 (2009), 105-121 (p. 105)).

<sup>60</sup> The first ever play that D'Annunzio wrote was *La nemica*; later, in 1896, he wrote *La città morta*, which was staged later in 1898. Meanwhile, D'Annunzio's debut on the stage was marked by *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, staged on 15 June 1897 at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris by the Duse Company and later in Italy, in Trieste (28 October 1897), Venice (3 November 1897), Milan (11 November 1897), Rome (11 January 1898) at the Teatro Valle in the presence of Queen Margherita, and finally in Florence (March 1898). These performances were not very successful as the text was considered too hard to understand due to its high level of symbolism-coded language (for a closer examination of the play's reception, cf. Valentina Valentini 'Sogno di un mattino di primavera: un pur rêve de poésie', in Valentina Valentini, *Il Poema visibile. Le prime messe in scena delle tragedie di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1993), pp. 179-197 and cf. section '5.6 Conclusions: "forze psichiche che non si sanno spiegare e noi non sappiamo comprendere"' of the present chapter).

it helps appreciating why the *Sogno* is particularly representative of the fin-de-siècle sensibility. As observed by Stéphane Michaud in his discussion of the question concerning the ‘invention du XIXe siècle’, when one embarks on the search of the nineteenth century identity, one looks at the ‘sérieux, du côté de ses hommes de science, de ses philosophes, politiques et sociologues’ – and this is the task we have undertaken in the previous chapters. Michaud, nevertheless, also remarks that the nineteenth century often eludes such critical examination ‘s’échappant dans l’exploration du rêve et de la folie’,<sup>61</sup> and D’Annunzio’s *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera* mirrors perfectly this trend. D’Annunzio’s ‘mito della totalità spazio-temporale’, to use Vittorio Roda’s definition,<sup>62</sup> might be associated with the concept of *Zeitraum* elaborated by Walter Benjamin who described the nineteenth century as ‘a spacetime <Zeitraum> (a dreamtime <Zeit-traum>) in which the individual consciousness more and more secures itself in reflecting, while the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep’.<sup>63</sup> Benjamin esteemed that for an in-depth analysis of the nineteenth century, it was necessary to take into account its threefold space-time-dream nature and speculated that the nineteenth century as a whole should be considered as the ‘outcome of its dream visions’,<sup>64</sup> or, as could be said in D’Annunzio’s terms, as the result of ‘uno smisurato flutto d’idee, d’immagini, di aspirazioni, di divinazioni, di trasfigurazioni [...]’.<sup>65</sup>

*Sogno d’un mattino di primavera* is rich in ‘divinazioni’ and ‘trasfigurazioni’, phantasmic and metamorphic appearances, revenants, characters with thaumaturgic and mesmerizing powers, staged – both metaphorically and physically – against a mystic-inspired backdrop of ‘rêve’ and ‘folie’, to speak in Michaud’s terms. The present analysis of the ‘poema tragico’,<sup>66</sup> as D’Annunzio defined the play, highlights the presence in the text of *topoi* belonging to the gothic literary tradition, both the Italian and the foreign one, and explores D’Annunzio’s personal elaboration of them. In light of the author’s interest in occult and spiritistic research, this chapter also explores the

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<sup>61</sup> Stéphane Michaud, ‘Préface’, in *L’Invention du XIXe siècle. Le XIXe siècle par lui-même (littérature, histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre Georgel, Stéphane Guégan, Stéphane Michaud, Max Milner, and Nicole Savy (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. vii-xiii (p. vii).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Roda, *La strategia della totalità. Saggio su Gabriele D’Annunzio*, pp. 11-35.

<sup>63</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin Mclaughlin, prepared on the basis of the German volume edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 389.

<sup>64</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 389.

<sup>65</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Libro ascetico*, in Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Prose di ricerca*, ed. by Egidio Bianchetti, vol. I (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1958), p. 464.

<sup>66</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera. Poema tragico*, in Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Tragedie, Sogni e Misteri*, ed. by Annamaria Andreoli and with the collaboration of Giorgio Zanetti, vol. I (Milan: Mondadori, 2013), pp. 3-47 (p. 3).

psychological and psychopathological sources that D'Annunzio consulted as sources of inspiration and which he combined with hypnotic and mesmeric practices. In addition, it scrutinizes the role played by the oneiric dimension, which constitutes a key component of the play. We will see how D'Annunzio used dreams both as a narrative strategy and as a primary investigation tool for looking into the *liminality* area of dream phantasies and foolish 'veglie oniriche', to speak in De Sanctis's terms (we will indeed also suggest connections with De Sanctis's work), often used as a strategy to cope with overwhelming pain due to the loss of a beloved, which is exactly the case of Isabella, the *Sogno's* protagonist.

The tragedy has already occurred when the curtain rises: it is a warm spring morning in the Tuscan villa of Armiranda, and Simonetta, the young villa keeper, tells Panfilo, the estate gardener, about the sleepless night she spent in the vain attempt to comfort Donna Isabella, who has been crying all night for the death of her lover Giuliano, killed by her husband. Isabella has fallen into a state of madness after having spent an entire night next to Giuliano's bloody corpse after the killing occurred. Since then, she has shown no signs of recovery. Several people are taking care of her: Beatrice, Isabella's sister; Virginio, Giuliano's (almost)-twin brother, who often travels to the villa to see Isabella; Teodata, the old caretaker of the house to whom Isabella's dying mother entrusted her daughter some years earlier; the Doctor (whose proper name is never mentioned) who is nursing the 'demente'.

Isabella is called by Panfilo 'demente' (thus, etymologically, as 'distanced from her own mind')<sup>67</sup> and in the list of the *Dramatis Personae* of the script she is referred to with this epithet. But, interestingly enough, she is never defined as such by the only person who could potentially be entitled to do so, that is the Doctor. On the contrary, the Doctor attaches to Isabella's psychological condition a privileged rather than a constricted observing position on reality. This stance is testified by the words he uses to comment on Isabella's psychological state: 'Ella forse vive di una vita più profonda e più vasta della nostra', he says to Teodata, 'ella non è morta, ma è discesa nell'assoluto mistero. Noi non conosciamo le leggi a cui obbedisce ora la sua vita. Certo, esse sono divine'.<sup>68</sup> In the Doctor's lines two elements interlace: the appropriation on D'Annunzio's part of the symbolist rhetoric and an early-romantic influence. To enlighten the former aspect, it helps to look at one of D'Annunzio's articles dating back to 1893, where D'Annunzio expounds his own interpretation of the function of art.

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<sup>67</sup> On the philosophical and religious implications of the use of such language, cf. Paolo Valesio, *Gabriele D'Annunzio: the dark flame* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 49-50.

<sup>68</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 15.

'L'arte, esprimendo con più forza e con più lucidità quel che la natura esprime oscuramente', he said, 'può fornire alla scienza non soltanto indizii preziosi ma rendere evidente ciò che ancora non è dimostrabile'; art can do that in two ways: first, 'rappresentando con la maggior possibile esattezza verbale i più complessi fenomeni interiori per rendere visibili i loro rapporti nascosti' and by discovering 'nelle rappresentazioni delle analogie che le collegano l'una all'altra'.<sup>69</sup> The references to the 'hidden relations', the 'analogies' and to the power of the Word not only as a medium for *conveying* meaning but also as a way for *discovering* meaning are all indications that D'Annunzio embraced the symbolist logic. This appears even more clearly in the passage where he states that, in addition to the five senses, there are 'sensi intermedii le cui percezioni sottilissime scoprono un mondo finora sconosciuto' while 'nuovi misteri [...] paiono dare un significato profondo ai piccoli fatti di cui si compone l'esistenza comune'.<sup>70</sup>

D'Annunzio considered that the late-nineteenth century society experienced 'new mysteries' because 'l'anima contemporanea [...] non soltanto contiene l'immenso flutto delle idee, delle sensazioni [...] – accumulato dalle innumerevoli generazioni anteriori – ma anche un oscuro viluppo di germi nuovi dei quali taluno già si va schiudendo con vigore subitaneo e sta per invadere le più lucide sfere della coscienza'. The legacy of past centuries interweaves with new elements and new forces, which are seen as unique to the then-current age. The result of the contrast between the 'old' and the 'new energies' is that 'si producono ogni giorno forme di vita spirituale mirabili, non mai conosciute prima, o al meno non mai osservate e rivelate'.<sup>71</sup> This means that the then-contemporary soul was perceived as more varied and multi-faceted compared to the past: 'la vastità e la profondità dell'anima contemporanea sono inconcepibili' if compared with the one of the previous centuries, D'Annunzio stated by expressing a praising stance towards the contemporary age, which the reader could anticipate since the beginning of the article, tellingly titled 'Elogio dell'epoca'.<sup>72</sup> This reference to the 'vastità' and the 'profondità' recalls the Doctor's words about Isabella's life, which he defined as 'più profonda e più vasta' than the life lived by the average person. Before being resumed in the *Sogno*, this same observation had been used by D'Annunzio in the interview that he gave to Ugo Ojetti<sup>73</sup> (in which he included many ideas expressed in

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<sup>69</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 205.

<sup>70</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 206.

<sup>71</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', pp. 205-206.

<sup>72</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 205. D'Annunzio would re-emphasize the same two elements in the interview with Ojetti in 1895.

<sup>73</sup> Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p. 324. The interview can be also read Ugo Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati – Ristampa anastatica*, afterword by Nicola Merola (Rome: Gela, 1987) and in D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici (1889-1938)*, pp. 1375-1390.

this as well as other articles that he had published from the early- to the mid-1890s).

It is very likely that in the same year 1895, D'Annunzio learnt about a text by Novalis, which drew his attention to such a degree, that a couple of years later he included it in the *Sogno*. The early-romantic influence, which we have mentioned earlier, descends precisely from this source. This influence can be traced thanks to D'Annunzio's use of the phrase 'assoluto mistero' pronounced by the Doctor, which appears to be borrowed from one of Novalis's fragments that D'Annunzio is very likely to have read in a 1895 Maeterlinck's French translation (still part of D'Annunzio collection at the Vittoriale, which we have consulted). The translation reads: 'Un homme mort est un homme élevé à l'état de *mystère absolu*'.<sup>74</sup> These words had for sure captured D'Annunzio's attention, as confirmed by their inclusion in two letters that the author wrote precisely in 1895. This time coincidence clearly shows that not only had he memorized Novalis's phrase, but he had also incorporated it within his own artistic reflection. The first letter, written on 23 October 1895, is addressed to Vincenzo Morello and informs him about the narrative choices concerning the *Vergini delle rocce* and the idea of a possible sequel to the novel. D'Annunzio wrote that he intended 'piegare l'anima possente di Claudio Cantelmo verso le cose che si svolgono "di là del velo"', because 'la follia, come la morte, anzi più della morte, eleva la creatura umana allo stato di *mistero assoluto*'.<sup>75</sup> Such statement makes clear that according to D'Annunzio the dimension of the 'mistero assoluto', normally considered as the domain *par excellence* of the dead, could become accessible to the living as well thanks to madness, which D'Annunzio equalled to death precisely for its power of making available to the living the mysterious dimension 'di là del velo'. The same idea resurfaces in a second letter written in 1895, where the echo of Novalis's words is even more evident as in this epistle, addressed to Ferdinand Brunetière and thus written in French, D'Annunzio faithfully follows Maeterlinck's translation: 'la folie, autant et plus que la mort, élève la créature humaine à l'état de *mystère absolu*'.<sup>76</sup>

In *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, drafted two years later, D'Annunzio even further reinforced the association death-madness: he stressed that the former could be a possible origin of the latter and exemplified such a situation in the character of Isabella. After Giuliano's death, she has fallen into such a psychological state of

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<sup>74</sup> Novalis, *Les Disciples à Saïs et les Fragments de Novalis, traduits de l'allemand et précédés d'une introduction par Maurice Maeterlinck* (Bruxelles: Paul Lacomblez éditeur, 1895 [2nd edn]), p. 78 [my emphasis].

<sup>75</sup> Vincenzo Morello [Rastignac], *Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Rome: Società editrice nazionale, 1910), p. 62 e p. 69 (Morello's letter can be read on pp. 66-73) [my emphasis].

<sup>76</sup> See Annamaria Andreoli, *Il vivere inimitabile: vita di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), p. 251.

derangement that she has accessed, the Doctor says, the ‘assoluto mistero’ whose laws ‘noi non conosciamo’ because they are usually unknown to the living. The condition of being far away and positioned ‘di là del velo’ is described by the protagonist’s sister Beatrice who speaks of Isabella as ‘vivente’ and yet ‘di là separata’, in a position which is almost unreachable: ‘i suoi occhi viventi mi guardano e implorano, e io non posso richiamarla, non posso trarla a me!’.<sup>77</sup> Rescuing Isabella from her state of chronic pain is so difficult that, compared to this task, getting in touch with the dead appears to be easier, Teodota affirms in a paradoxical way: ‘ella [Isabella] è più lontana da noi che se fosse in una tomba’.<sup>78</sup> At a closer look, however, Teodata’s line looks less paradoxical if it is explained in light of the point of view of the Doctor who does not refute the possibility of the existence of an afterlife accessible to the living, a stance which reflects D’Annunzio’s belief in the contact with a *post mortem* world which the author affirmed to have experienced on several occasions and, namely, during the above-mentioned séances of the early 1890s.

### **5.3 The power of dreams: oneirology, mesmerism, and psychopathology**

In the *Sogno*, D’Annunzio combined elements deriving from both literature and psychology. He drew on gothic motifs, such as metempsychosis and apparent death – which we will closely examine in the section below<sup>79</sup> – and merged them with psychology-related issues, namely, the mourning process and the dream-madness relationship. In the above-mentioned article ‘Elogio dell’epoca, D’Annunzio praised the study of psychic disorders by observing that they contributed to enlarge ‘il campo della conoscenza’.<sup>80</sup> He believed that ‘lo studio dei degenerati, [...] dei pazzi, è per la psicologia contemporanea uno dei più efficaci mezzi di speculazione perché la malattia aiuta l’opera dell’analisi decomponendo lo spirito’; precisely because of this, ‘le conquiste più notevoli della psicologia contemporanea sono dovute a psichiatri’, he concluded.<sup>81</sup> In the article ‘Una tendenza’, published a few months earlier, D’Annunzio had also praised authors treating the ‘malattie dello spirito’ in their works as he deemed that they contributed to making psychology – which he considered ‘la più

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<sup>77</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 37.

<sup>78</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 5.4 ‘Gothic motifs: larvae, revenants, and phantasmic apparitions’.

<sup>80</sup> D’Annunzio, ‘Elogio dell’epoca’, p. 206. The same ideas are included in the interview that D’Annunzio gave to Ojetti (Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p. 326).

<sup>81</sup> D’Annunzio, ‘Elogio dell’epoca’, pp. 206-207. The same ideas are included in the interview that D’Annunzio gave to Ojetti (Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p. 326).

affascinante delle scienze moderne' – progress.<sup>82</sup> Artists, in D'Annunzio view, even had an edge over scientists. The latter were often blinded by the excess of analysis, as we have seen in Chapter One, whereas the former could properly be considered as 'uomini rappresentativi, per adoperare la parola dell'Emerson' and 'gli interpreti e i messaggeri di questo tempo', as for them science was not 'a formula, ma la stessa vita': it was the artists's task to merge apparently opposite terms such as 'analisi e sintesi, sentimento e pensiero'.<sup>83</sup> There were various ways for artists of being interested in psychological issues, though. Authors like Luigi Capuana, Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, Antonio Fogazzaro had abundantly drawn on (para)psychological and psychiatric treatises and had often integrated the medical discourse into their fictional worlds through a number of characters, especially doctors. D'Annunzio, however, made a different artistic choice. As a playwright, he chose to *allude* instead of *explaining*, as he found explanations more appropriate to novels – due to the use of the prose form – than to plays. Despite the fact that, strictly speaking, the *Sogno* play-script is also written in prose, it was not conceived as a standard 'dramma', but rather as a poem, namely as a 'poema drammatico' – as the author himself defined it. The phrase 'poema drammatico' uncovers the aesthetics informing the *Sogno*: the play needed to be 'drammatico', thus it should have the immediacy of a theatre piece, as well as presenting itself as a 'poema', thus being built around the allusive language typical of the poetical form.<sup>84</sup> To describe this twofold nature of the play, Pietro Gibellini has spoken of 'lirica da scena' and 'teatro di parola' built in the wake of Maeterlinck's symbolic theatre.<sup>85</sup> On the same note, Giorgio Zanetti has described the play as a 'poème dialogué' because it is indeed structured as a poem in dialogic form. Zanetti sees in the *Sogno* an example of 'grande psicodrama lirico', a kind of play that in 1896 Hermann Ubell had highly anticipated as the next stage in drama writing. Ubell hypothesized that such a great renewal would have been likely to occur no earlier than the following century, but the fact that he identified precisely in D'Annunzio's *Poema paradisiaco* (1893) a specimen of the kind of

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<sup>82</sup> "Tra i rimproveri che i critici ignoranti muovono a un eletto gruppo di romanzieri contemporanei il più comunemente e stupidamente ripetuto si riferisce alla predilizione [*sic*] di quegli studiosi per le ricerche esatte su le più acute malattie dello spirito, su le "psicopatie". Ora è che certo che, se quegli studiosi hanno un merito, hanno a punto il merito nel proposito di portare con le loro esperienze e con le loro intuizioni personali un contributo alla più ardita, alla più complessa e alla più affascinante delle scienze moderne. Lo sforzo ch'essi tentano, per rendere la vita interiore nella sua ricchezza e nella sua diversità, ha un valore che oltrepassa quello della pura rappresentazione estetica" (D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 122).

<sup>83</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 205. See also D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 126.

<sup>84</sup> For an extensive analysis of the meaning of the terminology shift from 'dramma' to 'poema drammatico', see Aldo Capasso, *Dramma e poema drammatico: poesia lirico-drammatica* (Rome: Edizioni Aternine, 1964).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Gibellini, 'Per i due «sogni»: dal buio della psiche al chiarore della parola', pp. 103-104, 107.

art he was hoping for, proves that Ubell deemed that D'Annunzio was indeed moving towards the direction for producing a 'psicodrama lirico'.<sup>86</sup>

Consistently with D'Annunzio's lyrical intent, the *Sogno* is completely free of medical diagnoses and even the Doctor, who should ideally study Isabella's condition objectively in order to provide a cure, is actually one of the main promoters of a metaphorical-literary interpretation of the young woman's madness. Indeed, very few are the elements available to scientifically decode Isabella's symptomatology. The element which is, on the contrary, placed in the foreground is the power of imagination combined with supposed occult powers, such as foresight and thaumaturgic skills, considered as real in the fictional world of the *Sogno* in accordance with the mystical atmosphere in which the play is immersed.

Isabella is, indeed, described as possessing the gift of foresight and as having felt a 'presentimento funesto'<sup>87</sup> before the tragic event. This narrative choice might not surprise, since madness is often coupled with visionary powers in the literary tradition. What, however, makes the *Sogno* peculiar in this respect is that such alleged powers are not exclusive to the 'demente-veggente', but are actually shared by almost all characters. Isabella might have inherited such power from her mother who, on her deathbed, confided to Teodata to have had a similar dark premonition: '*Dalla soglia della morte, la madre presentiva il pericolo oscuro a cui andava incontro nella vita quell'anima [of her daughter]*'.<sup>88</sup> Also Teodata is presented as endowed with foresight skills which are credited to her by the *auctoritas* of the play, embodied by the Doctor: 'Nulla è oscuro pel vostro cuore indovino',<sup>89</sup> he tells her, 'Voi siete sempre attentissima... La vita vi si rivela per apparizioni fulminee, come a una veggente', he adds.<sup>90</sup> It is known that D'Annunzio believed in the alleged powers of 'veggenti' and visionaries;<sup>91</sup> moreover, he could count on a vast and flourishing literature devoted to

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<sup>86</sup> Giorgio Zanetti, comment to D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, in D'Annunzio, *Tragedie, Sogni e Misteri*, vol. I, pp. 1039-1061 (p. 1050 and p. 1045). This comment descends from Giorgio Zanetti, '«Leggende d'amore». Le origini del *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*', *Sinestesia. Rivista di studi sulle letterature e le arti europee* (2008-2009), 410-463.

<sup>87</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 15 [my emphasis].

<sup>89</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Mazza, *D'Annunzio e l'occulto*, pp. 37-41 offering references to Lillina Rospigliosi (p. 23), Madame Fraya (p. 29), Alfonsine De La Fontaine (p. 57), Madame de Thèbes (p. 58). D'Annunzio believed to be himself endowed with a 'Terzo occhio', 'acquired' after the accident occurred during one of his flights (see Attilio Mazza, *D'Annunzio orbo veggente*, with a preface by Franco Di Tizio (Pescara: Ianieri, 2008)). D'Annunzio defined himself 'orbo veggente', cf. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Libro segreto*, in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Prose scelte*, ed. by Gianni Oliva (Rome: Newton Compton, 1995), p. 441. D'Annunzio also defined himself 'alibus de fratribus unus oculus' and 'praeco', thus 'il più veggente' and 'indovino', as an inscription which D'Annunzio

clairvoyance and telepathy in whose trustworthiness he consistently believed, until the very late years of his life, unmindful of the criticisms and the reservations coming from both the scientific and the religious field.

The same apparently unshakeable trust by D'Annunzio placed in the existence of individuals with mesmeric-like thaumaturgic abilities,<sup>92</sup> as emerges from many of his letters where he often self-fashions himself as endowed of miraculous powers.<sup>93</sup> In the *Sogno*, D'Annunzio ascribes such skills to the Doctor whom Isabella sees as a healer, not due to his scientific knowledge but because she sees some innate skill of releasing salutary energy in the space around him: 'La vostra voce non è mai discorde', she tells him, 'le vostre parole accompagnano sempre un coro naturale che è nell'aria, intorno a chi vi ode. Tutto diviene calmo e puro. Qualche volta io vorrei sedermi ai vostri piedi come ai piedi d'una collina, come alla foce d'un fiume, per ricevere non so quale infinito bene'.<sup>94</sup> The Doctor, whom Sergio Blazina has defined a 'sacerdote del mistero, interprete di forze profonde e nascoste',<sup>95</sup> replies to Isabella's words with a form of religious-echoing blessing: 'Tutto il bene che è nel mondo scenda sul vostro capo e colmi la vostra anima!'.<sup>96</sup> The Doctor is far from the typical figure of physician with a positivist creed, which can quite often be found in the Naturalistic novels;<sup>97</sup> in fact, in the late 1890s, the positivistic faith was collapsing. The situation was epitomized by Brunetière's phrase 'banqueroute de la science' coined in his popular article 'Après une visite au Vatican', published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in the same year 1895, when D'Annunzio was exchanging ideas with him about the essence of the 'mystère absolu'.<sup>98</sup> D'Annunzio's position cannot, however, be described as a refusal of scientific knowledge, but rather as the adoption of a stance more 'flessuosa e astuta', as stressed

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put in a hidden corner of the *Vittoriale* reads (cf. Tom Antongini, *Vita segreta di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1938), p. 814).

<sup>92</sup> Mesmer's supposed thaumaturgical powers had been an object of discussion since the time when he operated as a physician. The same debate was taken up again during the late 1880s (cf. Enrico Morselli, *Il magnetismo animale, la fascinazione e gli stati ipnotici* (Turin: Roux e Favale, 1886), p. 127) and in the late 1890s, when D'Annunzio was working on the *Sogno* (cf. Angelo Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo. Conferenza', in A.A. V.V., *La vita italiana durante la Rivoluzione Francese e l'Impero* (Milan: Treves, 1897), pp. 57-95 (pp. 71, 95)).

<sup>93</sup> See Attilio Mazza, *La religione di D'Annunzio* (Pescara: Ianieri, 2015).

<sup>94</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> Sergio Blazina, 'Il sogno in scena: D'Annunzio, Pirandello, Svevo', in *La letteratura in scena. Il teatro del Novecento*, ed. by Giorgio Barbèri Squarotti (Turin: Tirrenia Stampatori, 1985), pp. 79-103 (p. 81).

<sup>96</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 29.

<sup>97</sup> Benedetta Montagni, *Angelo consolatore e ammazzapazienti. La figura del medico nella letteratura italiana dell'Ottocento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1999).

<sup>98</sup> The phrase 'banqueroute de la science' was coined by Ferdinand Brunetière in his article 'Après une visite au Vatican'. For an extended analysis of the discussion about this subject, cf. Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo. La cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 3-17. It is interesting to remark that Brunetière's article was published at the beginning of the same year of Brunetière's letter to D'Annunzio.

by Zanetti<sup>99</sup> who has remarked how D'Annunzio thought that to the pretension of an all-encompassing objective knowledge put forward by science one must respond with the 'scepsi e l'estro del contingente e del probabile, accettando impavidi il prospettivismo irrimediabile inerente a una verità che in perpetuo si sottrae'.<sup>100</sup> We believe that Zanetti is right in remarking such an openness on the part of D'Annunzio because he actually believed that, in order to investigate reality, it was necessary to adopt a multi-perspective investigative technique based on art, religion and science (namely psychology and psychiatry) altogether. To better elucidate the kind of the interaction that he envisaged between these three components, it is helpful to recall an extract from an article written in 1893 where D'Annunzio had dealt with the art-science relationship and had lingered on the study of the 'psicopatie' and the 'malattie dello spirito'.<sup>101</sup> In this article, he stressed how scientific hypotheses were 'opera spontanea dell'immaginazione'<sup>102</sup> and how art would communicate what nature 'esprime oscuramente', by making visible 'i rapporti nascosti' of the 'fenomeni interiori' and by making evident 'ciò che ancora non è dimostrabile'.<sup>103</sup> The emphasis placed on the 'oscuro', 'nascosto', 'non dimostrabile' aspects shows how D'Annunzio was persuaded of the existence in nature of occult elements, which could not be scientifically studied and yet could be 'divinato'. Indeed, quoting Leibniz, D'Annunzio wrote that, in order to make scientific research, 'una certa arte di divinazione'<sup>104</sup> was needed, precisely as to make art. This belief was strengthened two years later from what D'Annunzio could read in a fragment by Novalis, which said that in one's intelligence hides a divining talent which is constantly stimulated by the mysteries of nature: 'Les mystères sont l'armature, les condensateurs de la faculté divinatrice, de l'intelligence'.<sup>105</sup> D'Annunzio's reflection on such topics, which had already reached a high level of awareness and theoretical elaboration in the early 1890s, as we have seen, combined with his readings of Novalis in 1895 and resulted in the divination-imbued atmosphere of the 1897 *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*.

The leading character Isabella considers herself to be endowed with divinatory powers and thaumaturgic abilities, which put her in the condition of helping others. These powers, however, can operate only when she is asleep and is dreaming, as it appears from the description of Isabella's second dream. In *Sogno d'un mattino di*

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<sup>99</sup> Giorgio Zanetti, 'D'Annunzio, Conti e la critica', in *D'Annunzio a Napoli*, ed. by Angelo R. Pupino, pp. 315-331 (p. 325).

<sup>100</sup> Zanetti, 'D'Annunzio, Conti e la critica', p. 325.

<sup>101</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 122.

<sup>102</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 125.

<sup>103</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 123.

<sup>104</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Una tendenza', p. 125.

<sup>105</sup> Novalis, *Fragments*, p. 78.

*primavera*, there are three dreams: the first is the ‘sogno meraviglioso’ and ‘divino’ endowed with ‘potere occulto’<sup>106</sup> that Virginio dreams for Isabella; the other two dreams are Isabella’s own. Her first dream is the very first topic of conversation when she comes on stage. The first character she meets is the Doctor, who welcomes her by holding her hands and telling her: ‘Quando io sono venuto, dormivate presso il davanzale, d’un sonno calmo, tanto calmo...’; Isabella then tells him about her dream and asks him: ‘L’avete veduta, è vero? L’avete veduta passare e ripassare sulla mia fronte? Io la sentivo, nel sonno, passare e ripassare, la farfalla bianca. Quando ho aperto gli occhi, era posata sul davanzale. Ah [...] è fuggita, è sparita, nel sole... [...] Mi manca [...] Dormivo così bene mentre la sentivo aliare aliare... Voi l’avete veduta, è vero, dottore? E il mio sonno era calmo, tanto calmo, voi dite... Sognavo d’essere un fiore su l’acqua’.<sup>107</sup> The white butterfly is both real and imagined: from Isabella’s account, it seems that it was real (‘Quando ho aperto gli occhi, era posata sul davanzale’), whereas the Doctor relates to her sentence ‘la sentivo, nel sonno’ as if the butterfly was present only in her dreams, which seems actually true in light of Isabella’s insistent question ‘Voi l’avete veduta, è vero, dottore?’ and of Doctor’s answer ‘essa tornerà, quando voi chiuderete gli occhi un’altra volta...’.<sup>108</sup> This conversation is aimed to make the boundary between dreams and reality blurred for the reader/theatre-goer and to summon on stage ‘una regione lieve di fantasmi del trasognamento, sospesi tra la natura e la psiche’, as Zanetti has noticed.<sup>109</sup>

Isabella’s second dream is different from the first, not only because of the content, but because of its origin. It is a special dream that Isabella announces she *wants* to have and that she *commits* to have to thank her sister for having sewn a dress for her. ‘In compenso io ti darò un bel sogno’,<sup>110</sup> Isabella tells Beatrice, while promising to dream for her a ‘sogno di gioia’ and ‘sogno d’oro’<sup>111</sup> about Beatrice’s future husband. What is interesting about the set-up of this scene is that the dream is presented as a voluntary act which contrasts with the unconsciousness characterizing the oneiric dimension and makes it, instead, much closer to a self-induced hypnotical cataleptic sleep similar to the cases described in the psychological treatises of the time.<sup>112</sup> This process of oneiric

<sup>106</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 12.

<sup>107</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>108</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 21.

<sup>109</sup> Zanetti, comment to D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 1056 [my emphasis]. D’Annunzio’s choice to describe the scene featuring a woman dreaming at dawn by the window is a clear reference to the classic and medieval tradition of the ‘*somnium* o del *phantasma*’ (Zanetti, comment to D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 1055).

<sup>110</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 22.

<sup>111</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 25 and p. 40, respectively.

<sup>112</sup> On the relationship between literature and studies on magnetism and hypnosis, cf. Stefano Ferrari, *Psicologia come romanzo* (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 1987), pp. 19-47 and 49-92.

autopoiesis follows a precise ritual: she first wears the dress made by Beatrice; she then goes to the window where she eventually falls asleep to 'produce' the prophetic dream about her sister's future companion. Isabella interprets her dreams as revealing the future, not differently from what a popular figure whom D'Annunzio knew very well used to do:<sup>113</sup> Madame de Thèbes (pseudonym of Anne Victorine Savigny), who expounded her theories about dream interpretation in what proved to be quite a popular volume: *L'énigme du rêve. Explication des songes*.<sup>114</sup> Every Christmas, Madame de Thèbes used to publish almanacs about the following year<sup>115</sup> in which many believed to have spotted premonitions about many events which actually took place.<sup>116</sup> She was so famous that across the ocean she became known as the 'world-famous French prophetess' and as possessing supernatural skills: 'in the eyes of thousands of French people and of many others all over the world Mme. de Thebes [*sic*] is considered an infallible seeress unquestionably gifted with occult powers'.<sup>117</sup>

Isabella's idea of thanking her sister by *donating* her a dream shows Isabella's belief in the possibility of dreams having effects on reality, as her sentence 'La [Beatrice] vedrò al fianco dello sposo che il mio sogno le ha dato'<sup>118</sup> makes clear. These words shed light on the two principles informing Isabella's logic: first, dreams impact reality; second, they have a prophetic power. In other words, for Isabella the autopoiesis of a dream means autopoiesis of a reality that can be foreseen. Isabella considers herself the bearer of 'l'annunziamento' of a world that she could make 'rinascere [...] trasfigurato in un miracolo di gioia'.<sup>119</sup> We should emphasise the use of religious terms such as 'annunziamento', 'trasfigurazione' and, in particular, 'miracolo', a term which in the play

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. Mazza, *D'Annunzio e l'occulto*, p. 58.

<sup>114</sup> Madame de Thèbes, *L'énigme du rêve. Explication des songes* (Paris: Félix Juven, n.d. [1908]); the book was co-produced by the author herself, as it appears from the cover reading: 'Société d'édition et de publications / Librairie Félix Juven / 13, rue de l'Odéon, 13 / et chez l'auteur / 29, avenue de Wagram, 29 (avenue de Wagram was the place where Madame de Thèbes practised her activity as a clairvoyant e palmist)'.  
<sup>115</sup> These almanacs were met with success and increased the popularity of the 'prophetess', as one can read in an article of *The New York Times* at the end of 1914, commenting an almanac about 1915: 'the anteroom of her home in Paris is often crowded with visitors, some of high standing, eager to have her read their future, her mail brings her heaps of letters with like requests, and the Almanacs and other writings which she issues from time to time sell by the thousand' ([unsigned] 'Mme. de Thebes's [*sic*] War Prophecies. Famous French Seeress, Who Predicted Present War, Tells What is in Store for World in 1915', *The New York Times*, 21 March 1915, 11).

<sup>116</sup> The historical events which she supposedly was able to foresee were the outbreak of the first World War, the deaths of famous people (the violent death of the general Boulanger, the tragic death of the writer Catulle Mendès) as well as a sensational process followed by popular uprisings which could be identified with the *affaire* Caillaux (cf. [unsigned] 'Mme. de Thebes's [*sic*] War Prophecies').  
<sup>117</sup> [Unsigned] 'Mme. de Thebes's [*sic*] War Prophecies'.  
<sup>118</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 29.  
<sup>119</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 40 and p. 29, respectively.

is used for the first time by the Doctor,<sup>120</sup> who uses it to refer to the regenerative effect that Virginio, seen as the second-Giuliano, hopes to have on Isabella through his 'sogno miracoloso'. This sequence highlights that another element of the mystical logic informing the play is that dreams can operate vicariously: Virginio dreams for Isabella a 'sogno meraviglioso', and Isabella highlights several times that she is dreaming a prophetic dream for her sister ('Mentre io sognavo *per te* [Beatrice] presso il davanzale').<sup>121</sup>

The emphasis that D'Annunzio places on motifs such as prophetic dreams, clairvoyance, and thaumaturgic powers is part of his strategy of favouring the 'meraviglioso'<sup>122</sup> which he believed art should reclaim after a long period of Naturalism, in which it had been banned. To start this reclaiming process, D'Annunzio uses the vocabulary and the main leitmotifs of mesmerism. The issue of prophetic dreams, for instance, had been at the centre of the mesmeric debate, so much so that the Marquis de Puységur, one of Mesmer's followers, had often noted, in patients in whom he had induced cataleptic sleep, the presence of premonitory skills and thaumaturgic abilities, which disappeared as soon as the trance was interrupted. In the eighteenth century, Mesmerism derived its extreme popularity precisely from its ambiguous status between therapy, on the one hand, and 'spettacolarizzazione del meraviglioso',<sup>123</sup> on the other. Between these two extremes was a space which literature appropriated, and precisely in this hybrid area D'Annunzio places his form of 'meraviglioso', which retains mesmerism's healing objective while putting aside the theatrical practices characterizing its operational mode.

D'Annunzio, however, manages to leave space to express his own original way of dealing with mesmeric motifs. Isabella, in fact, is not a 'sonnambula meravigliosa', despite feeling as '*non morta e non viva*'<sup>124</sup> and despite the fact that precisely the 'morta-viva' was one of the most widespread and famous circus acts – centered on a woman in a (presumed) state of somnambulism – and one of the most famous manifestations of 'meraviglioso sulle scene', as illustrated by Clara Gallini in her rich analysis on magnetism in the nineteenth century.<sup>125</sup> The kind of 'meraviglioso' that

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<sup>120</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 42 [my emphasis].

<sup>122</sup> Cf. D'Annunzio, 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno', p. 76.

<sup>123</sup> Ugo Olivieri, 'Il romanzo interiore. Parapsicologia del personaggio nel romanzo tra fine '800 e inizio '900', in *Riscrittura – Intertestualità – Transcodificazione. Personaggi e scenari (Atti del Seminario di Studi, Pisa: Febbraio-Maggio 1993, Facoltà di Lingue e Letterature straniere)*, ed. by Emanuela Scarano and Donatella Diamanti (Pisa: Tipografia Editrice Pisana, 1994), pp. 221-250 (p. 221).

<sup>124</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 15.

<sup>125</sup> In the 'morta-viva' act, a woman would fall into a somnambulist trance and lie down on two distant chairs, on which she put her head and her feet, while keeping a position of 'catalessi

D'Annunzio had in mind was different. Isabella, in fact, does not need mesmeric fluids to fall into a self-induced sleep: her own will is sufficient. D'Annunzio deprives the figure of the doctor of the control on magnetic sleep, a control that is fully brought back into the hands of the subject. Isabella elaborates her own oneiric dimension to escape her sorrow, thus, in a way, becoming the therapist of herself. The origin of the 'meraviglioso' as intended by D'Annunzio is, thus, an altered state of mind, which, far from being considered negatively, is instead viewed as the best condition to give back the power to the 'imagination' responding to the 'bisogno del sogno', which he had put at the centre of his artistic research in the early 1890s.<sup>126</sup>

The importance attached to imagination is an additional element that works as an implicit reference to mesmerism, where imagination was one of the key-factors, as shown by the report of the commission of inquiry summoned by Louis XVI in 1784 to judge the level of reliability of mesmeric practices. The members of the commission – among whom there were scientists like Lavoisier, Bailly and Franklin – experimented the mesmeric experience firsthand by immersing themselves in the *baquet* (a large wooden barrel) of the Institute of Dr. Deslon, one of Mesmer's pupils. During one of the ensuing interviews, Deslon himself admitted that 'l'immaginazione aveva la più grande parte negli effetti del magnetismo, e disse che questo nuovo agente forse non era altro che l'immaginazione stessa, la potenza della quale era altrettanto grande, quanto era poco conosciuta'.<sup>127</sup> In his *Observations sur le magnétisme animal* (1780), Deslon had expressed the same concept: 'Se la medicina dell'immaginazione è la migliore, perché non dobbiamo servircene?'.<sup>128</sup> The final report of the commission stated that the real causes of animal magnetism were 'toccamenti, immaginazione, imitazione' and emphasized the crucial role of imagination in the mesmeric process: 'si deve credere che l'immaginazione sia la principale di queste tre cause del magnetismo. La pressione e i toccamenti servono di preparazione [...] ma la immaginazione è quella potenza attiva e terribile che opera i grandi effetti che osserviamo. Questi effetti sorprendono tutto il mondo, mentre la causa loro rimane oscura ed occulta'.<sup>129</sup>

These causes are still 'obscure' and 'occult' after a century, affirmed physician and physiologist Angelo Mosso, whom D'Annunzio knew well<sup>130</sup> and of whose works it

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tetanica'; her muscles were so rigid that up to four men could sit on top of her (cf. Clara Gallini, *La sonnambula meravigliosa: magnetismo e ipnotismo nell'Ottocento italiano* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), p. 119).

<sup>126</sup> See D'Annunzio, 'Note su l'arte. Il bisogno del sogno'.

<sup>127</sup> As Mosso explains in his conference speech (cf. Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 85).

<sup>128</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 85 (the translation is by Mosso).

<sup>129</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 86.

<sup>130</sup> Michele Nani, s.v. 'Angelo Mosso', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. LXXVII (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2012).

is possible to find traces in D'Annunzio's novels *Giovanni Episcopo*, *L'Innocente* and the *Trionfo della morte*<sup>131</sup> (since the drafting of the *Invincibile*).<sup>132</sup> Mosso comments on the power of imagination in a speech devoted to *Mesmer e il magnetismo*, held at the Società Fiorentina di Pubbliche Letture in 1896. It is worth noting that this was just one year before the writing of the *Sogno* (1897) and, moreover, that Mosso's speech was printed in 1897 in a volume<sup>133</sup> that is present in D'Annunzio's library at the Vittoriale. When commenting on the final report of the royal inquiry commission on mesmerism, Mosso claims that, even after one hundred years, 'nessuno dei medici moderni saprebbe esprimere un giudizio sull'ipnotismo con maggior chiarezza e verità. Invece della parola *immaginazione* si adopera adesso la parola *suggestione*, ma in fondo la cosa rimane la stessa'.<sup>134</sup> He recalls how already Cardano, in early modern Italy, was able to describe his experiments of self-hypnosis. And it is precisely as an application of self-hypnosis, rather than a manifestation of an unruly madness, that what we might call the state of *hypnotic wake* that Isabella induces in herself in order to reduce her suffering can be read. Reducing pain was the main and original goal of mesmerists, as Mosso recalls: 'dopo Mesmer il magnetismo trovò qualche applicazione nella medicina, perché fu provato che per mezzo della immaginazione l'uomo può cadere in uno stato di sonno morboso chiamato ipnotismo nel quale è meno sensibile al dolore'.<sup>135</sup> How mesmerism would help this process remains, however, a mystery: 'in che modo diminuisca la sensibilità nell'ipnotismo e come si estrinsechi la suggestione non si è ancora venuti in chiaro'.<sup>136</sup> Mosso believed that the research on the causes and effects of hypnotism would only progress when the functions that regulate natural sleep became better studied, a direction towards which many scholars were looking while Mosso was writing: 'stiamo raccogliendo le prime pietre che serviranno a gettare le fondamenta per una fisiologia del sonno che forse si scriverà nel secolo venturo'.<sup>137</sup>

1900 did not disappoint Mosso's expectations, however it was not necessary to wait until the turn of the century to find studies that were laying the basis for a scientific study of the physiology of sleep. Among the 'prime pietre' evoked by Mosso, we could mention De Sancti's studies on dreams, which we have analysed in Chapter Four. When creating Isabella's dream featuring the white butterfly, D'Annunzio might have drawn inspiration from Richer's and Charchot's studies on dreams of hysterical

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. Adriano, *La narrativa tra psicopatologia e paranormale*, pp. 186, 196, 201-210, 224-227.

<sup>132</sup> Andreoli, *Il vivere inimitabile*, p. 171.

<sup>133</sup> The volume is A.A. V.V., *La vita italiana durante la Rivoluzione Francese e l'Impero* (Milan: Treves, 1897).

<sup>134</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 86.

<sup>135</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', pp. 86-87.

<sup>136</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 87.

<sup>137</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 87.

women, on which De Sanctis had drawn attention in his 1896 volume *I sogni e il sonno. Nell'isterismo e nell'epilessia* published just one year before the drafting of the *Sogno*. De Sanctis recalled Richer's research on hysterical women's 'sogni zooscopici' and Charcot's study about the animals appearing more often in these kind of dreams, among which – interestingly enough – butterflies have a primary position.<sup>138</sup> The trust placed by the insane Isabella in the reality of her dream stays intact even once she awakens; scientific evidence of this aspect can be found in a number of cases; De Sanctis refers to the fact that 'il Richer [...] ed altri allievi della Salpêtrière notarono altresì come nel periodo allucinatorio dell'attacco ed anche nella piena calma, le isteriche sovente affermino di credere ai loro sogni'.<sup>139</sup> Such dreams are populated by *revenantes* (a figure that we will analyse later on) as already noticed by Thomas Sydenham, as De Sanctis recalls: 'le isteriche, egli [Sydenham] dice, han sogni terrorizzanti i quali per lo più si aggirano sui *révenants*, su cari amici dannati all'inferno, o costretti a morire sul più bello della vita'.<sup>140</sup>

About Richer's studies on hallucinations people have when awake, D'Annunzio could also read in *Spiritismo?* (1884) by Luigi Capuana.<sup>141</sup> In *Spiritismo?*, Capuana extensively commented on these studies<sup>142</sup> and, moreover, provided a detailed account of the spiritual apparitions of the young Beppina, not only the ones she had while she was hypnotized, but also the ones she had when awake.<sup>143</sup> Besides visual hallucinations, hysteric subjects often experienced 'audizioni ipnagogiche' as well, in particular 'rumori ritmici di pendolo, armonie lontane monotone [...] bisbigli'.<sup>144</sup> Isabella's auditory hallucination fits perfectly within this category. She affirms to hear an uninterrupted 'tintinnò argentino' which she associates with blossoming flowers, so to an image of life and joy, but which she also considers as a foreshadow of death. Addressing the Doctor 'con una voce sommessa e misteriosa', she asks him 'udite questo tintinnò argentino? Sono i mille e mille campanelli dei mughetti, che tintinnano all'aria che li muove. Udite? Somiglia a quel tintinnò fuggitivo che s'ode a traverso le

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<sup>138</sup> Sante De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>139</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 31.

<sup>140</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 27.

<sup>141</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Spiritismo?* (Catania, Giannotta, 1884), reprinted in Luigi Capuana, *Mondo occulto*, ed. by Simona Cigliana (Catania: Edizioni del Prisma, 1995), pp. 55-146 from where we are quoting.

<sup>142</sup> 'L'allucinazione sparita [...] mi fece sospettare che non era forse indispensabile addormentare la sonnambula per farle subire gli effetti della *suggestione allucinatoria*' (Capuana, *Spiritismo?*, p. 74 [original emphasis]).

<sup>143</sup> Capuana emphasizes the exceptionality of such apparitions occurring when the subject was awake, if compared with similar events occurring when the subject was driven into a hypnotic state: '*Questa volta* la Beppina era ben desta, e l'apparizione le si riproduceva dinanzi, come le tante e tante allucinazioni da me ripetutamente provocate' (Capuana, *Spiritismo?*, p. 84).

<sup>144</sup> Capuana, *Spiritismo?*, p. 63.

stanze quiete della casa dove qualcuno deve morire'.<sup>145</sup> The question 'Udite?' had already been posed by Isabella once before, when she had insistently asked the Doctor: 'Udite questo tintinnio d'argento? [...] Com'è sottile! Udite?'.<sup>146</sup> To the Doctor's answer 'è il sussurro delle api', she had reacted disappointedly by claiming 'Oh, no, no... Voi non udite', a stance to which the Doctor had replied by taking an accommodating position and saying 'Io sono vecchio omai: il mio orecchio è ottuso'.<sup>147</sup>

Seconding Isabella's delirium is a stance that the Doctor adopts consistently throughout the piece. He does not contrast the distortion of reality that she operates as he considers it as a coping strategy adopted by the young woman for self-defense purposes. He provides no scientific diagnosis, despite being entitled to do so, nor does he call Isabella 'pazza' or 'demente' (as, instead, other characters do), but refers to her with a poetical periphrasis by calling her 'quella che è smarrita'.<sup>148</sup> Such bewilderment is revealed by Isabella's convulsive laughter that frightens the old Teodata, who is reminded of the time when she washed Isabella's plaits soaked with Giuliano's blood ('Ella rideva, rideva nel bagno [...] rideva di continuo, senza respiro. La vedo ancora, la sento ancora... Ah, lo sentirò sempre quel riso, quello strido... Era come la catena d'una secchia che scorre scorre e non trova più fondo').<sup>149</sup> The same 'strido' also reappears in the *Sogno* as a 'breve riso infantile'<sup>150</sup> which eventually manifests its true nature in the final scene as 'un'espressione di frenetico terrore'<sup>151</sup> associated with a crisis. To stage such a scene, D'Annunzio provides the actors with the following indications: 'La sua bocca si contrae come se le mascelle fossero dolorose',<sup>152</sup> an image which would have certainly reminded the Parisian audience – to which the *Sogno* was addressed in the first place and in front of whom it was first staged – of the crises of the hysterical women studied by Charcot at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, whom he talked about in his *Leçons du mardi* (1888-89).<sup>153</sup> D'Annunzio's depiction of Isabella's malaise is so accurate that, when analysing the *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* in his study *L'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio davanti alla psichiatria*, psychologist Scipio Sighele praised D'Annunzio for the way in which he had described the protagonist's condition: 'Isabella – o meglio la sua pazzia – è disegnata', Sighele wrote, 'nei suoi grandi tratti con una

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<sup>145</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>146</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 22.

<sup>147</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 23.

<sup>148</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 12.

<sup>149</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 10.

<sup>150</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 22.

<sup>151</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 43.

<sup>152</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 46.

<sup>153</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *Leçons du mardi* (Paris: Bureaux du Progrès médical, 1888-89).

rigorosa esattezza psichiatrica'.<sup>154</sup> He highlighted that such medical precision informed both the description of the repression experienced by Isabella after the traumatic event and the description of the very moment when the 'scigno dei suoi [Isabella's] ricordi, chiuso dalla pazzia'<sup>155</sup> opened up again, which occurred when Virginio arrived at the villa and was mistaken by her for Giuliano. The same accuracy was also present, Sighele noticed, in the representation of Isabella's talking which was made of 'delirio vago nei discorsi' and fixed ideas emerging 'per associazioni fortuite'.<sup>156</sup>

In De Sanctis's *I sogni e il sonno*, D'Annunzio could read about similar cases of hyperactivity, in particular with reference to Krafft-Ebing who, De Sanctis recalled, had registered 'iperattività fantastica [...] e [...] vivacità dei sogni nelle isteriche', not only in night dreams but also in 'sogni ad occhi aperti', which another scholar, Schüle, described as 'sogni vivaci che conservano la loro plastica allucinatoria anche durante la veglia'.<sup>157</sup> The influence of oneiric activity on the wake state is a topic which very much interested De Sanctis who, as we have seen in the previous chapter, studied how often dreams create 'autosuggestioni durevoli' consisting in 'sprazzi di luce incosciente che cadono [...] nella vita conscia del giorno, restandovi talora anche per lungo tempo sotto forma di veri deliri', which Ball defined 'sogni prolungati', Faure 'sogni persistenti' and De Sanctis 'allucinazioni oniriche protratte'.<sup>158</sup> In *I sogni. Studi psicologici e clinici di un alienista* (1899), De Sanctis delved more in depth into the issue – as we have seen in Chapter Four – by distinguishing between 'coscienza del sogno' and 'coscienza della veglia': 'Non si può negare che, durante l'attività onirica, si crei un ambiente nuovo speciale, al quale la personalità del dormiente si adatta, senza accorgersi, per lo più, [...] della novità dell'ambiente, [...] del suo adattamento. Data questa condizione, mi pare sia lecito parlare di una coscienza del sogno, in contrapposto alla coscienza della veglia'.<sup>159</sup> Blazina has described Isabella's situation as a 'veglia allucinata';<sup>160</sup> we think that De Sanctis's distinction between oneiric and waking consciousness can help us elucidate Isabella's state of mind, which we believe can be defined by the expression 'oneiric waking', which aptly describes the coexistence of both dimensions of dreaming and being awake. All these elements let us conclude that the dream evoked in the title of the piece is not a specific dream among the ones described in the piece: it is not only Virginio's dream 'dal potere occulto', or Isabella's dreams with the white butterfly, or

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<sup>154</sup> Scipio Sighele, 'L'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio davanti alla psichiatria', in Scipio Sighele, *Letteratura tragica* (Milan: Treves, 1906), pp. 3-94 (p. 25).

<sup>155</sup> Sighele, 'L'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio davanti alla psichiatria', p. 27.

<sup>156</sup> Sighele, 'L'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio davanti alla psichiatria', p. 26.

<sup>157</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, p. 34.

<sup>158</sup> De Sanctis, *I sogni e il sonno*, pp. 189-190.

<sup>159</sup> De Sanctis, *I Sogni*, pp. 249-250.

<sup>160</sup> Blazina, 'Il sogno in scena', p. 80.

the 'sogno di gioia' for Beatrice. The dream is something more. We believe that in D'Annunzio's intentions 'sogno' becomes an umbrella-term encompassing all aspects of the hallucinatory-oneiric state in which Isabella has found herself after Giuliano's death and in which she has, in a way, involved all the people surrounding her. Isabella's series of *dreams* is not conceived as the byproduct of *madness* but rather as an 'onirica veglia' representing her new state of the mind and of the soul. Through the artistic medium, madness loses its medical connotation and becomes the normality of one's condition. This idea can be aptly expressed by using Foucauldian terms: 'where there is a work of art, there is no madness', Foucault stated: 'and yet madness is contemporary with the work of art, since it inaugurates the time of its truth'.<sup>161</sup> Isabella's 'time of truth' coincides with her waking-oneiric state.

D'Annunzio could read about the symbolic function of dreams in De Sanctis's works. De Sanctis had, however, also criticized the excess of mystical tendencies at the turn of the century, as we have illustrated. With regard to this issue, we would like to draw attention to the point of view of Mosso, as Mosso's stance adds another perspective and helps to have a more complete picture of the debate on mysticism in art and society at the turn of the century. According to Morasso, the root of the blossoming of modern mysticism was to be searched for in the eighteenth century, when 'negli strati inferiori [...] si preparava lentamente la reazione contro la scienza'.<sup>162</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, indeed, Mosso found the same need for mysticism that had determined the success of mesmerism one century earlier: 'la sua fortuna Mesmer la deve al misticismo, all'aspirazione verso le cose occulte', Mosso wrote, 'che ha tormentato in ogni tempo l'umanità'<sup>163</sup> and which tormented people in different nations, in particular in the historical moment when 'il pubblico era stanco e stizzito per il trionfo dello spirito scientifico che aveva invaso la società'.<sup>164</sup> In light of this, the distance between the late-eighteenth and late-nineteenth century cultural climate – when Mosso was writing – does not appear to be so long: 'Mesmer fu un mistico. In questo momento nel quale per cause eguali a quelle del secolo scorso, va riaccendendosi il misticismo, non sarà inutile spiegare la vita di questo medico'.<sup>165</sup>

At the end of the century, in a time of mysticism renaissance, but in the absence of Mesmer-like figures, Mosso feels the need to investigate Mesmer's life more in depth, while D'Annunzio offers his own version of a mystical doctor in his *Sogno*. By

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<sup>161</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A history of insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1967 [1st edn 1961]), pp. 288-289.

<sup>162</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 71.

<sup>163</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', pp. 68-69.

<sup>164</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 70.

<sup>165</sup> Mosso, 'Mesmer e il magnetismo', p. 68.

commenting on the character of the Doctor, Sighele wrote: 'quel dottore [...] *non è un dottore ma un mistico*, [...] non è un alienista moderno ma un medico medievale, il quale, invece di curare la demente, la vede un'illuminata secondo il pregiudizio antico'.<sup>166</sup> D'Annunzio had originally called the Doctor 'Dottor angelico'<sup>167</sup> and 'Dottor mistico', a choice which appears coherent with the healing and premonitory skills that he is supposed to have and which are precisely the main characteristics of the mystics, as Mircea Eliade highlighted.<sup>168</sup> In order to make the Doctor's skills appear as a form of 'meraviglioso', D'Annunzio devises the following way: he makes Isabella – whose logic is 'affrettata e deperibile',<sup>169</sup> as an autograph note testifies – ascribe all these qualities to the Doctor.

The choice of creating a kind of Doctor who is much closer to mysticism than to science can be explained by extending to the *Sogno* the remarks that Curreri has put forward with regard to the *Trionfo della morte*. Curreri has stressed how D'Annunzio avoided making the novel a form of '«anatomia», analisi metodica e minuziosa del sistema nervoso, dissezione di un fenomeno psicofisiologico come l'istero-epilessia' by using scientific studies as a way to *suggest* but not *dictate* a way to access the peculiar dimension of madness, considered as a dimension constituted by an 'incoercibile sogno'.<sup>170</sup> *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* can be considered as a specimen of 'théâtre du rêve', to speak in Albert Béguin's words as he described *L'âme romantique et le rêve*.<sup>171</sup> As a matter of fact, the interpreters of Virginio and Isabella's dreams are two characters, the Doctor and Teodata, imbued with 'misticismo neoromantico e

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<sup>166</sup> Sighele, 'L'opera di Gabriele D'Annunzio davanti alla psichiatria', p. 25 [my emphasis].

<sup>167</sup> Such a denomination appears in D'Annunzio's autograph (Gabriele D'Annunzio, Archivio Personale del Vittoriale, Nuove acquisizioni, fondo CAB, starting from 'carta 17'); an anastatic reprint is available in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera – Sogno d'un tramonto d'autunno. Facsimile degli autografi* (Verona: Fondazione Banca di Credito Agrario Bresciano-Istituto di cultura Giovanni Folonari, 1994) and in Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera – Edizione anastatica del manoscritto originale a cura della Fondazione Banca Credito Agrario Bresciano-Istituto di Cultura Giovanni Folonari* (Brescia: Industrie Grafiche Bresciane, 1988).

<sup>168</sup> See Mircea Eliade, *Lo sciamanismo e le tecniche dell'estasi* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2005 [1st edn 1954]).

<sup>169</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, Archivio Personale del Vittoriale, 'lemma 1966'. This is a note in the margin commenting scene V in which Isabella tries to persuade her sister Beatrice of the fact that Virginio is the ideal husband for Beatrice. See Renée Lelièvre, 'Un commentaire de D'Annunzio en marge du "Sogno d'un mattino di primavera"', *Quaderni dannunziani*, 8.9 (1958), 74-77.

<sup>170</sup> Luciano Curreri, 'Le "precisioni della scienza" e le "seduzioni del sogno". Isterismo sterilità e illusione nel "Trionfo della morte". Appunti sul romanzo, la malattia e l'interpretazione', in *Nevrosi e follia nella letteratura moderna*, ed. by Anna Dolfi (Rome: Bulzoni, 1993), pp. 281-314 (p. 293). Of the same author, see also Luciano Curreri, *Metamorfosi della seduzione. La donna, il corpo malato, la statua in D'Annunzio e dintorni* (Pisa: ETS, 2008).

<sup>171</sup> See Albert Béguin, *L'âme romantique et le rêve: essai sur le romantisme allemand et la poésie française* (Paris: José Corti, 1946).

#### 5.4 Gothic motifs: *larvae*, revenants, and phantasmic apparitions

A further manifestation of the neoromantic mysticism, which we have identified as key in the *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, is the retrieval of *topoi* typical of gothic literature relating to the domain of the Unknown and the after-life, which the 'mystic-kind' of 'degenerate' – as Nordau would say in *Degeneration* – sought to connect with. When commenting on Nordau's book, Scipio Sighele wrote in an article – which he included in his volume *Mentre il secolo muore* (1899) – that according to Nordau the degenerate 'vive come se fosse attorniato da maschere moleste dietro alle cui larve brillano occhi misteriosi ch'egli guarda con paura, poichè [*sic*] non è mai sicuro di riconoscere sotto quel travestimento le forme che lo circondano'.<sup>173</sup> Sighele's review accounts for the widespread idea of neoromantic mysticism that had penetrated the Italian culture. Sighele, as many others, did not share Nordau's sharp attacks against art, but the amount of details of his account testifies the level of pervasiveness of Nordau's reflection in the Italian cultural milieu.<sup>174</sup> In this panorama, the operation put in place by D'Annunzio is original and personal: he plays on the elements put on the plate by Nordau, which by the late 1890s had been so highly debated to have become almost common place, and makes them reacquire their original literary status by reconnecting them to their true origin, which, we deem, has to be looked for in gothic literature.

The *Sogno* is, indeed, populated by *larvae*, which in the Roman religion were ghost-like apparitions of the wandering spirits of dead people. The first phantasmic apparition is that of Virginio. Despite him being alive, he is considered by Isabella as an apparition. In order to make the reader/audience feel part of such a perspective, D'Annunzio works on the language and on a number of specific choices about the staging, such as making Virginio suddenly appear and immediately after disappear at once. His entrance before Isabella's eyes takes place in 'un gran silenzio [...] quasi *mortale*' and is described as an apparition which '*non aveva alcuna evidenza di verità*'.<sup>175</sup> Such a phrase is ambiguous as much as interesting, insofar as in the gothic literature it was used both in relation to manifestations of people who were dead and

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<sup>172</sup> Zanetti, comment to D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 1054.

<sup>173</sup> Scipio Sighele, *Mentre il secolo muore* (Palermo: Sandron, 1899), p. 278.

<sup>174</sup> In this respect, it is possible to speak, in Acocella's terms, of an 'effetto Nordau'; for an in-depth analysis of this notion, see Silvia Acocella, *Effetto Nordau. Figure della degenerazione nella letteratura italiana tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Naples: Liguori, 2012) and cf. also Chapter Six of this thesis.

<sup>175</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 14.

with regard to people who were alive but which to some appear as spectres. This apparent contrast is explained by the subjective nature of the phenomenon since 'apparitional encounters are highly individualistic and subjective', thus 'the phantom exists to him who has the perception of it'.<sup>176</sup> Considering Isabella's peculiar state of mind, it does not surprise that for her Virginio was 'un'apparizione fantasmatica',<sup>177</sup> let alone his extraordinary resemblance with the dead brother Giuliano, an element which enhances the association with the latter. If on the one hand, a character strongly anchored to reality like Panfilo cannot consider Isabella's visions acceptable, on the other hand for a neoromantic character like Teodoata the answer should be found in the oneiric dimension. By commenting on Virginio's arrival, she asks: 'Comprese ella [Isabella]? Oppure *quell'apparizione - che non aveva alcuna evidenza di verità - si confuse per sempre nel sogno violento che la dominava?*'.<sup>178</sup>

Isabella appears indeed to be dominated by a violent dream since the opening scene, where she is sleepless and cannot find the courage to cross the threshold of the bedroom, where Simonetta tries to persuade her to go: 'si alzava, faceva qualche passo verso la soglia; ma la paura la prendeva all'improvviso. E gridava: «No, no... È là, è là, dietro la porta...»', Simonetta says, by adding 'Ah, se voi sentiste la sua voce in quei momenti! Pare che qualcuno veramente sia dietro la porta...'.<sup>179</sup> Ghosts like hiding '*oltre la soglia*', to speak in Annamaria Cavalli's words.<sup>180</sup> The threshold can be anything: it could be a proper door threshold (like the one of the room where Isabella does not want to go) or a bush (like the one behind which Virginio hides and waits before showing himself to Isabella). The threshold can also not be a physical one, but metaphorical and operate like a connecting element between the land of the living and the afterlife. In the *Sogno*, Giuliano's corpse acts as a metaphorical threshold:<sup>181</sup> by spending the night close to it, 'sommersa in un sangue adorato', and by feeling the

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<sup>176</sup> Mackenzie Bartlett, s.v. 'Apparition', in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, vol. I (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 35-38 (p. 36 [my emphasis]); cf. also the definition of 'apparition' herein provided: 'an apparition is a sudden visual manifestation of an ethereal and transient figure, most often someone who is deceased, but also sometimes a living person, an animal, or an inanimate object' (pp. 35-36).

<sup>177</sup> The etymological connection between the terms 'apparition', 'phantom', 'spectre' is explored by Dani Cavallaro: "'Spectre" derives from the Latin *spectare* and *specere* ("to look at") and its association with looking is confirmed by the fact that, as well as being synonymous with "ghost", it also signifies an "apparition" (from the Latin *apparere*, "to come forth") or a "phantom" (from the Greek *phos*, "light")' (Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision. Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (London-New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 74).

<sup>178</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 14 [my emphasis].

<sup>179</sup> Both quotations are taken from D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 7.

<sup>180</sup> See Annamaria Cavalli, *Oltre la soglia. Fantastico, sogno e femminile nella letteratura italiana e dintorni* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2002).

<sup>181</sup> On the image of the corpse in D'Annunzio's literary production, see Francesca Mellone, 'Epifanie del cadavere nelle prose di Gabriele D'Annunzio', in *Geografia, storia e poetiche del fantastico*, ed. by Monica Farnetti (Florence: Olschki, 1995), pp. 193-206.

corpse's temperature drop, Isabella has experienced the transition from life to death, an event which has left her in a limbo, *'non morta e non viva'*.<sup>182</sup> Beatrice is sorry about this condition of suspension in which she finds her sister and considers to suffer more from that, than Giuliano's mother from the death of her son: 'Quale è il dolore più crudele? Ella [la madre dell'ucciso] almeno lo sa in pace nel sepolcro. E anch'io la so *in un sepolcro buio, mia sorella, ma vivente*, ma tutta palpitante e sanguinante d'un sangue inesausto'.<sup>183</sup> Beatrice's words testify D'Annunzio's fascination for the occult and for the idea of continuity between life and death.

Such continuity manifests itself through the reference – echoing Lady Macbeth – to the 'sangue inesausto' that Isabella still sees on her hands: for Isabella, Giuliano 'non è interamente perito', as she finds 'ancóra sopra di sé qualche cosa di lui, qualche cosa di vivo e di caldo e d'indelebile che la fa delirare').<sup>184</sup> Such a narrative choice unveils D'Annunzio's aim of going beyond one of his main models, that is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. In the *Hypnerotomachia* it is the male protagonist who can see his dead lover, and only while dreaming; in D'Annunzio's text, on the contrary, the situation is the opposite, as it is the woman who can – or rather she believes she can – see her dead lover. D'Annunzio pushes the situation to the extreme when he makes Isabella claim not only to see but also to feel Giuliano still close to her, as one can deduce from Isabella's reaction when Virginio arrives: 'Perché è venuto?' she asks Beatrice by referring to Virginio, 'Per riprenderlo? Per strapparmelo?'.<sup>185</sup> This scene is preceded by the one in which Isabella mistakes Virginio for Giuliano: 'Chi? Chi? Giuliano? Chi è in piedi davanti a me?'<sup>186</sup> she asks. Then, terror-stricken, she goes through the pain of her loss once again: 'Ho sentito un'altra volta il peso della morte su le mie mani'.<sup>187</sup> The apparition with 'no evidence of truth' of Virginio, *doppelgänger* of his dead brother, takes Isabella back to the origin of her suffering and causes the disintegration of the fictional dimension which she had created to find relief. The break-up of this dimension is emblematically represented by her getting rid of the flowers in which she had covered herself to operate, in her intentions, a vegetal metamorphosis which would have led her to a total fusion with nature, which – she hoped – would make all her suffering disappear. The peak, and at the same time the end, of Isabella's metamorphosis is marked by her fainting: in the very moment when she *'tocca il suolo*

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<sup>182</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 15.

<sup>183</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 37 [my emphasis].

<sup>184</sup> Both quotations are taken from D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, from p. 35.

<sup>185</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 44.

<sup>186</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 43.

<sup>187</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 43.

con una tempia',<sup>188</sup> she unites with the ground: 'Ero laggiù...come l'erba...Qualcuno mi ha calpestata...Certo, qualcuno mi ha calpestata',<sup>189</sup> she tells the Doctor. In this scene, in which Isabella is described as falling onto, and rejoining with, the ground,<sup>190</sup> D'Annunzio uses the gothic leitmotif of the motion towards the underground, traditionally inhabited by mysterious entities, which traverse the entire *Sogno*. This leitmotif is introduced at the beginning when she is described as '*discesa nell'assoluto mistero*'<sup>191</sup>, and becomes central in the fifth scene of the play where she begs to be buried next to Giuliano's corpse: 'Lasciatemi così! Voglio rimanere così [...] *così sepolta...*'<sup>192</sup> she says, and then she adds: 'portate anche me nella medesima bara, *seppellite con lui anche me che non sono più viva*'.<sup>193</sup>

We believe that, when writing these lines, D'Annunzio aimed to play with and appeal to a theme which was extremely popular at the time when he was writing the *Sogno*: the topic of apparent death and of people buried when still alive. Just one year before the *Sogno*, a volume which was met with extraordinary success saw the light: *La sepolta viva* (1896) by Carolina Invernizio who had once more taken up a theme on which she had been working since her career debut as a writer when she had titled the first episode of her novel *Il bacio di una morta* (1886) 'La morta viva', where she had taken up the archetypal Shakesperian *topos* of the awakening after burial.<sup>194</sup> To an Italian reader, the title of Invernizio's novel *La sepolta viva* sounded familiar, since it echoed the homonymous *La sepolta viva* (1877, then republished in 1889) by Francesco Mastriani who drew inspiration from the habit of burying sinful nuns alive.<sup>195</sup> Interestingly enough, Mastriani added 'romanzo storico contemporaneo' as a subtitle to the novel, which is striking because of its oxymoronic nature. If one examines the production of those years, however, it appears that such a clarification provided by the subtitle was indeed needed to differentiate the book from other

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<sup>188</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 46.

<sup>189</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 47.

<sup>190</sup> D'Annunzio had a strong interest for mythology, religion and also for the vegetal world, nurtured by the reading of volumes such as Angelo De Gubernatis, *Mythologie des plantes* (Paris: Reinwald, 1878-1882) and André Lefèvre, *La Religion* (Paris: Reinwald, 1892).

<sup>191</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 15 [my emphasis].

<sup>192</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 45-46 [my emphasis].

<sup>193</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 45 [my emphasis].

<sup>194</sup> As Silvia Contarini has noted (cf. Silvia Contarini, s.v. 'Cimitero', in *Luoghi della letteratura italiana*, introduced and ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi and Gino Ruozzi (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), pp. 116-131 (p. 126)).

<sup>195</sup> Fearful of the danger of being buried alive, both Mastriani and Invernizio asked to not be buried immediately after their death (Mastriani expressly required a waiting time of forty-eight hours), which shows a contiguity 'fra fantasie di tutti e fantasmi individuali' in a time when the motif of the 'morta-viva' enjoyed great popularity in popular literature (Luca Clerici, *Libri per tutti. L'Italia della divulgazione dall'Unità al nuovo secolo* (Bari: Laterza, 2018), p. 105).

historical novels centred on the same theme but set in a faraway past.<sup>196</sup> In the artistic production revolving around the topic of buried alive women, another cluster can be identified: the cluster of texts proudly self-fashioning themselves as truthful accounts. Such an aspect was emphasized in the titles, such as in *Elisabetta Galigari sepolta viva per anni 30. Triste fatto avvenuto in Udine* (1890), through the use of the word 'fatto', a term used to act as a guarantee of accuracy for the reader. Being a 'fact', thus an event which occurred for real, did not reduce but, on the contrary, appeared to boost the literary potential of the events recounted, so much so that they were re-elaborated further in a variety of forms (both prose and poetry).<sup>197</sup> The misadventures of buried alive women did not populate only novels and poems, but also theatres, as testified by works such as the musical drama in two acts by Filippo Falangola *Viva sepolta* (1833) and the *Opera grande in quattro atti: Ginevra degli Amieri* (staged in the very early nineteenth century with music by Ferdinando Paër, and then reworked a number of times until the late 1880s)<sup>198</sup>, inspired by a 'fatto storico accaduto in Firenze nel Secolo XIV' recounted in accounts dating back to the sixteenth century.<sup>199</sup>

The *topos* of the woman buried alive was widespread across the nation. In addition to the above-mentioned cases of Udine and Florence, there are accounts of

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<sup>196</sup> Here are some of the texts that we have tracked down: *Aida: come fosse liberata dalla schiavitù, suoi amori con Radamés, e come morisse sepolta viva, in un sotterraneo, insieme al suo amante* (1878, republished in 1879 and in 1894); *Senatori e tribuni di Roma, ovvero La sepolta viva di Sant'Urbano: racconto storico del secolo 14* (1894); *La monaca di Cracovia Barbara Ubrik ovvero La sepolta viva: romanzo storico* (1872), and subsequently republished as *La Monaca di Cracovia, Barbara Ubryck sepolta viva: narrazione storica* (1881, 1891, 1894, 1896 and in 1897, the latter two in years very close to the time when D'Annunzio wrote the *Sogno*).

<sup>197</sup> The event was recounted in 'ottava rima' in *Fatto vero, posto in ottava rima da Raffaello Poggiali* (1890, 1891 and then 1893). In 1893 the publisher Salani reprinted the novel as *Fatto strepitoso di una ragazza sepolta viva per causa d'amore*, by deleting from the title all specific references, such as name of the girl and place, but without renouncing to the word 'fatto'. In the following years the re-elaborations were so many that important details, such as the number of years presumably spent by Elisabetta as 'sepolta viva', also underwent some changes and passed from thirty to thirty-two: *Elisabetta Galigari, sepolta viva per 32 anni: Fatto avvenuto in Udine* (1895).

<sup>198</sup> I have identified all the following editions and rewritings of the same story: *Ginevra degli Amieri, tragicommedia per musica [sic] in tre atti poesia di Giuseppe Foppa, da rappresentarsi in San Moise nell'autunno dell'anno 1812* with music by Giuseppe Farinelli; *Ginevra degli Almieri sepolta viva in Firenze con Stenterello: commedia in quattro atti di Luigi Del Buono* (1817) re-elaborated in 1857 and again later in the century (*Ginevra degli Almieri ossia La viva sepolta con Stenterello: commedia in quattro atti*, 1865, 1866 and 1868), with some interventions aimed at adapting it to the 'taste of the time' (*Ginevra Degli Armieri ossia la viva sepolta con Pulcinella ladro di sepoltura, e spaventato dallo spirito immaginario: commedia novissima secondo il buon gusto moderno* (1864)). In later rewritings, the title became even more detailed: *Ginevra degli Almieri sepolta viva in Firenze, con Stenterello ladro in sepoltura, spaventato dai morti e giudice spropositato: commedia in quattro atti* (1881, 1889). Meanwhile, Antonio De Napoli had reworked the plot in the form of 'racconto storico' in *Ginevra degli Amieri, ovvero la sepolta viva nella terribile peste di Firenze del 1400: Racconto storico* (1871, 4 vols, republished in 1887).

<sup>199</sup> *La historia di Gineura degli Amieri che fu seppellita per morta nella città di Firenze, stampata in Firenze: appresso Giouanni Baleni* (1584) e in *La historia di Gineuera de gli Amieri, che fu seppellita morta nella città di Firenze, In Fiorenza: alle Scalee di Badia*, (1587)).

similar events which occurred in a town close to Rome, in *Una donna sepolta viva. La tragedia di Artena presso Roma* (1888), and in Venice, in the play *Natalina di Venezia, ovvero La sepolta viva a San Barnaba: dramma storico, diviso in sette atti e otto quadri dell'artista drammatico Giuseppe Lorenzetti veneziano* (1864). Francesca Billiani has noticed that, geographically-speaking, the Italian gothic literature, was mainly a Milanese phenomenon (especially if one thinks of the Scapigliati)<sup>200</sup> but also reached Piedmont and Naples<sup>201</sup> and responded to a need, albeit often frustrated, of creating figures of national heroes.<sup>202</sup> The above-mentioned texts – although they represent a small group tackling a specific theme within the wider gothic literature – confirm the national diffusion of such production. Chronologically speaking, Billiani has noticed that ‘the nineteenth-century Italian gothic and fantastic can be located after the political unification of the country as a nation-state and on the threshold between romanticism and positivism’.<sup>203</sup> We would add that, as the group of texts we have just mentioned shows, this production reached a peak moment in the 1880s.

The apparent death was a hot topic at the turn of the century, so much so that it even became the core-theme of a section of the 1898 Turin exhibition.<sup>204</sup> The news spread quickly across the nation, islands included, and reached as far as Cagliari, where the Sardinian weekly *Fine di secolo* devoted an entire article to the issue. The article, titled ‘All’Esposizione di Torino – la morte apparente’, explained: ‘a questa esposizione nazionale sarà dedicata una apposita sezione alla *morte apparente*, con un concorso a premio per la migliore proposta, tendente a rendere impossibili i seppellimenti prematuri. La questione è della più alta importanza. Il terribile dubbio che si possa seppellire, come morta, una persona tutt’ora in vita, ha sempre preoccupata [*sic*] la mente dei dotti: ai tempi nostri non solo, ma pur ancor nella più remota antichità imperocchè [*sic*] – come ben nota un distinto scrittore in una recente sua rivista intorno a questa grave questione “non vi è comune, villaggio, parrocchia, in cui non si abbia memoria di qualche individuo creduto defunto e risuscitato per fortuite e

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<sup>200</sup> See Francesca Billiani, ‘Il testo fantasticizzato e goticizzato come metafora della destrutturazione del discorso ‘nazione’: attorno agli scrittori scapigliati’, *California Italian Studies*, 2.1 (2010) <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5zt6q9nm>>; see also the extensive research on Milanese fantastic literature in Post-Unification Italy by Morena Corradi, *Spettri d'Italia: scenari del fantastico nella pubblicistica postunitaria milanese* (Ravenna: Longo, 2016).

<sup>201</sup> Francesca Billiani, ‘The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: an inquiry into the notions of literary and cultural traditions (1869-1997)’, in *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic. Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Traditions*, ed. by Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis (Madison-Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), pp. 15-31 (p. 20).

<sup>202</sup> In this respect, see also Francesca Billiani, ‘Eroi ed eroine nazionali *manquée* in *Fosca* di Iginio Ugo Tarchetti e *Senso* di Camillo Boito’, *Italica*, 88.2 (2011), 178-196.

<sup>203</sup> Billiani, ‘The Italian Gothic and Fantastic’, p. 20.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Catalogo generale: esposizione nazionale del 1898* (Turin: Roux Frassati C., 1898) and *Torino e l'Esposizione 1898: album ricordo con vedute dell'Esposizione e soggetti artistici dal vero* (Milan: The Artistic International Advertising - Turin: G. B. Paravia e C., 1898).

provvidenziali circostanze [...]”.<sup>205</sup> The adjective ‘risuscitato’, which should not be intended religiously, however, mirrors the discomfort of the society of the time relating to the still unfinished process of metabolization of the separation between the living and the dead. This separation had begun in the second half of the eighteenth century, when places of burial and cemeteries had started to be positioned outside urban areas. The main aim of this measure was related to environmental health reasons, but it also aimed to eradicate the idea (which would however survive and find its full expression in the spiritualistic movement of the 1890s) that there was a continuity between the living and the dead, with the latter appearing to the former in the guise of ghosts or in dreams.<sup>206</sup>

The above-mentioned texts revolving around the theme of the *morts-vivants* and the ‘buried alive’ shows the popularity of such a motif in the nineteenth-century Italian culture and the existence of a native Italian production in this respect. Such a production often interlaced with foreign influences because, as Billiani has stressed with specific reference to the gothic genre, in this period, in foreign literature Italian authors found ‘themes, motifs, and narrative structures’ as well as ‘a set of models to imitate and rewrite’.<sup>207</sup>

In this respect, Edgar Allan Poe stands out as one of the main sources of inspiration for many writers, D’Annunzio included. A text in which the topic of the buried alive woman is absolutely central in Poe’s production is *The Fall of the House of Usher* (published in 1839 and included in a short-stories collection in 1840). Roderick Usher is apprehensive about the fact that his sister Madeline has been buried while still being alive. He, indeed, fears that she was not buried when she was actually dead, but had just fallen into a cataleptic state. In the last scene of the story, as soon as Madeline appears at the door, Roderick is in a state of complete shock and, right after their meeting, the Usher house falls apart. Before actually seeing Madeline, Roderick had heard some noise and exclaimed: ‘Ah noi l’abbiamo seppellita viva, ... [sic] viva! [...] Essa ora è là, là dietro la porta!’,<sup>208</sup> thinking that the noise was coming from his sister’s coffin. Scholars have highlighted the influence of *The Fall of the House of Usher* on D’Annunzio’s *Sopra un «Adagio» [di Johannes Brahms]* from the *Poema paradisiaco*

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<sup>205</sup> [Unsigned] ‘All’Esposizione di Torino – la morte apparente’, *Fine di Secolo. Giornale Politico, Letterario ed Artistico Settimanale* [Cagliari], II.2 (January 1898) [original emphasis].

<sup>206</sup> See Claudio Milanese, ‘Tra la vita e la morte. Religione, cultura popolare e medicina nella seconda metà del ‘700’, *Quaderni Storici*, 50 (1982), 615-628.

<sup>207</sup> Billiani, ‘The Italian Gothic and Fantastic’, pp. 15-16.

<sup>208</sup> Edgardo Poe, *Storie incredibili. Saggio e versione di B. E. Maineri* (Milan: Tipografia Pirola, 1869), p. 155.

(1893).<sup>209</sup> However, it has never been noticed that the sentence ‘È là, è là, dietro la porta...’,<sup>210</sup> pronounced in the *Sogno* by Isabella when she sees – or believes that she is seeing – the phantom of Giuliano’s murder in front of her, is borrowed *verbatim* from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which D’Annunzio might have read in an Italian translation published in 1869 (from which we have taken the above-mentioned extracts of Poe’s text in Italian). This Italian translation is present in the Prioria Library of the Vittoriale, and it is indeed remarkable that it bears exactly the same words that are present in the opening scene of the *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, which leads us to think that D’Annunzio made this choice deliberately to emphasize Poe’s influence on his own play. From this crucial scene from *La caduta della casa Usher*, D’Annunzio not only borrows the idea of the phantasmic apparition at the door, but also the same rhetoric; indeed, other parallelism can be found in addition to the already mentioned coincidence of the final exclamation: as Roderick ‘urlava’, so Isabella ‘gridava’; as Roderick exclaims ‘insensato!’ to express his surprise when seeing his sister, so Isabella manifests her aversion and will to disbelieve that she is actually seeing a ghost by vehemently reiterating ‘No, no...’, as if the power of her Word could made it disappear. This rhetorical strategy builds up an atmosphere of suspense whose acme is represented by the scream ‘È là, è là, dietro la porta...’, which D’Annunzio leaves identical to the source text. This sentence sums up the power of imagination, or – to speak in D’Annunzio’s words – of ‘imuginosità’ on which, as we have shown at the beginning of the present chapter, he had been reflecting since the 1890s. Among the readings that are likely to have influenced D’Annunzio about this specific aspect, there might be also the introduction to the above-mentioned Italian translation of Poe’s *Storie incredibili*, which we can still find in the Vittoriale library collection. In this introduction, the editor B. E. Maineri stresses the powerfulness of the ‘imuginativa’ and the uniqueness of the fantastic genre: ‘tra le facoltà più atte a destare in noi il sentimento della meraviglia [...] vuoi per certo annoverare la fantasia o, a dirla altramente, l’imuginativa. [...] È in essa e per essa che, in arte, abbiamo *il genere fantastico, il meraviglioso*, genere tanto più raro e difficile quanto più facili e spessi possono essere gli scogli in cui s’imbatte l’artista’.<sup>211</sup> Maineri states that the fantastic literature has a bright future: ‘la letteratura che convenientemente appropriasi le qualità del meraviglioso e le doti felici del fantastico, otterrà sempre gli effetti più forti

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<sup>209</sup> Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Sopra un «Adagio» [di Johannes Brahms] (Poema paradisiaco)* in Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Versi d’amore e di gloria*, ed. by Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini, edition directed by Luciano Anceschi, with an introduction by Luciano Anceschi, vol. I (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), pp. 624-625.

<sup>210</sup> D’Annunzio, *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*, p. 7.

<sup>211</sup> B. E. Maineri, ‘Edgardo Poe’, in Poe, *Storie incredibili*, pp. 3-46 (p. 3 [original emphasis]).

e ammirabili'.<sup>212</sup>

The interest of D'Annunzio for the marvellous and the fantastic genre is proven by the high number of volumes by Poe – namely, sixteen – which he owned. Only one of these volumes is in the original language, but that is not surprising because it is known that D'Annunzio did not master English very well. To overcome this gap, he relied on translations: some of them are Italian translations – such as the above-mentioned collection *Storie incredibili* edited by Maineri – but most of them are French translations, both because they came out sooner and because they were authored by Charles Baudelaire.<sup>213</sup> Costanza Melani has noticed that it is possible to find Poe's influence in D'Annunzio's work both in terms of themes and of 'motivi ornamentali', from the 1880s through to the 1900s.<sup>214</sup> In the 1880s, he met Enrico Nencioni, who played a crucial role in spreading the anglophone literature among Italian Decadents,<sup>215</sup> including D'Annunzio. Moreover, in the years immediately preceding the *Sogno di un mattino di primavera*, namely between 1895 and 1896, D'Annunzio befriended and worked with Adolfo De Bosis, who was fond of English and American literature. De Bosis was the 'soul' of the review *Il Convito*, which gathered artists such as the sculptor Moses Ezeckiel (who made Poe's statue in Baltimore) and the painter Doucet who, in those years, was working on a painting inspired by Poe's gothic tale *Morella*, telling the story of a case of supposed reincarnation of a dead mother into the body of her daughter.<sup>216</sup> In addition to *The Fall of the House of Usher*, as we have seen, D'Annunzio might have also been influenced by the tale *Morella*, tackling the topic of metempsychosis (which is crucial in the *Sogno*, as we will show). Finally, we believe

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<sup>212</sup> Maineri, 'Edgardo Poe', p. 4.

<sup>213</sup> Here is the list of the French translations of the Vittoriale Library preceding 1897 (which is the date of the *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*): *Histoires extraordinaires. Traduit par Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Lemerre, 1891); *Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym, Eureka. Traduction de Charles Baudelaire. Éd. définitive* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1892); *Histoires extraordinaires. Traduction de Charles Baudelaire. Éd. définitive augmentée d'un grand nombre de poèmes nouveaux* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1893); *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires. Traduction de Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1896).

<sup>214</sup> Costanza Melani, *Effetto Poe: influssi dello scrittore americano sulla letteratura italiana* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2006), p. 85. The sentence 'più che l'amore' in D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* (1900) clearly refers to Poe's *Annabel Lee*; the same influence becomes clearer in D'Annunzio's prose drama titled *Più che l'amore* (1906). The novel *Forse che sì forse che no* (1910) presents many references to Poe's work as well, namely to the *The Tell-Tale Heart*. These references are from D'Annunzio's works published in the 1900s but it must be recalled that D'Annunzio had been nurturing an interest in Poe's work already in the 1880s, as his journalistic production testifies. 'Grotteschi e rabeschi' was the title that he chose for his column on *La Tribuna*, which obviously recalls Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*; moreover, D'Annunzio used 'Vere de Vere' and 'Sir. Ch. Vere de Vere' as one of his pen names, by drawing inspiration from Guy de Vere, one of the characters of Poe's *Lenore*.

<sup>215</sup> Isabella Nardi, *Un critico vittoriano: Enrico Nencioni* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1985), pp. 17-18.

<sup>216</sup> Filippo Donini, 'Il Poe nella letteratura italiana', *Maestrale*, 2 (December 1941), 45-52 and 3 (January 1942), 37-47.

that D'Annunzio might have also been affected by Poe's *The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar* (1845) whose main topics are the apparent death and the possibility of stopping a corpse's decay through mesmeric practices allowing the spirit of a dead person to come back among the living.<sup>217</sup> We believe that this theme might have influenced D'Annunzio when working on the character of Isabella who shares many features with one of the main figures of the gothic literature: the *revenant*.

In the gothic tradition, by *revenant* one refers to a dead person returning on earth. As Daniel Sangsue has illustrated in his study of 'pneumatologie' – that is the science of spectres and incorporeal visions – there are two kinds of *revenants*: the '*revenants en corps*', who are the ones 'qui sortent de leur tombe avec leur enveloppe corporelle', like vampires and zombies, and the ghosts, who manifest themselves to the living 'sous la forme d'un fantôme ou d'un spectre, c'est-à-dire d'une image, d'une vision'.<sup>218</sup> The reason of this return is usually to be found in unresolved issues, namely the lack of an appropriate burial.<sup>219</sup> Isabella's condition can be figuratively interpreted as *revenant*-like. She is, indeed, described by her sister Beatrice as trapped in a 'sepulcro buio'<sup>220</sup> placed in a faraway dimension, from which she is ideally 'irrevocabile'<sup>221</sup>, but from which she comes back asking for a burial next to her dead beloved. Isabella describes herself as dead multiple times: 'mille volte io sono morta in un'ora sola', she claims, 'tutto il mio corpo è una ferita straziante; e io stessa, io stessa non ho più una stilla nelle mie vene... Io non sono viva'.<sup>222</sup>

It is interesting to see how Isabella combines both the *passive* features of those who are haunted by phantoms ('È là, è là, dietro la porta...', she said to Simonetta)<sup>223</sup> and, at the same time, the *active* role of the *revenant*, who calls for her burial ('portate anche me nella medesima bara, seppellite con lui anche me che non sono più viva')<sup>224</sup> in order to rest in peace and escape madness. Madness was considered as the consequence of a *revenant*'s apparition, as D'Annunzio might have read in Angelo De

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<sup>217</sup> When translated into French, this tale by Poe – who, at the time, was not yet famous in France – was considered an authentic account and used by a French physician as proof of the reliability of Mesmerism. The physician was G. Mabru and he mentioned Mr. Valdemar's case in G. Mabru, *Les Magnétiseurs jugés par eux-mêmes. Nouvelle enquête sur le magnétisme animal* (Paris: Mallet-Bachelier, 1858), pp. 512-517; for more information about this, cf. Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1994), p. 162.

<sup>218</sup> Daniel Sangsue, *Fantômes, esprits et autres morts-vivants. Essai de pneumatologie littéraire* (Paris: Éditions José Corti, 2011), p. 19.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Gothic Literature* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), pp. 290-291 (s.v. 'revenant').

<sup>220</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 37.

<sup>221</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 37.

<sup>222</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 44.

<sup>223</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 7.

<sup>224</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 45.

Gubernatis's *Storia comparata degli usi funebri in Italia e presso gli altri popoli indo-europei* (1878), where he could have also found information about the *larvae* of the Roman religion, described as a sort of 'genio maligno' tormenting 'i morti come i vivi, che lo scongiuravano con penitenze e lustrazioni, a fine di non essere dalla medesima trascinati alla pazzia'.<sup>225</sup>

One additional reading which might have prompted D'Annunzio to introduce revenant-like features in *Isabella* is the legend of the *Orrori di Menelesta*,<sup>226</sup> of which D'Annunzio speaks in a letter to Luigi Capuana in 1884. The *Orrori* are set on a mountain where there are graves from which 'pareva che gli Spiriti perversi sortissero dei luoghi a loro destinati e si rizzassero pei loro consigli o sedessero nelle loro radunanze' like 'ombre erranti'.<sup>227</sup> These 'spiriti malefici', 'aeree ombre', 'spiriti dormenti [...] spesso vengono espulsi da quelle tombe'.<sup>228</sup> Capuana, who had introduced D'Annunzio to the *Orrori di Menelesta*, had tackled paranormal manifestations in his 1882 articles which were published in the *Fanfulla della Domenica*, and which he included in his volume *Spiritismo?* (1884) two years later. It is not unlikely that Capuana – who, in *Mondo Occulto* (1896), defined himself as 'forse primo in Italia [...] fra coloro che non erano apostoli o irragionevoli impostori'<sup>229</sup> to address phenomena related to magnetism and somnambulism – played a major role in drawing D'Annunzio's attention to such subjects, considering that he asked D'Annunzio to transform the legend of the *Orrori*, written in prose, into a poem. Despite the fact that D'Annunzio did not eventually complete this task, his discussion with Capuana about the *Orrori* shows D'Annunzio's keen interest for legends and for the fantastic.

## 5.5 The reader's hesitation of the fantastic

In *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, D'Annunzio included a legend featuring Dianora dei Bardi, which he had most likely discovered thanks to Corrado Ricci's analysis of a group of Italian *Leggende d'amore*.<sup>230</sup> In the *Sogno*, D'Annunzio retains the original structure of the *novella* and keeps some fable elements, such as the presence of a ladder made of silk 'sottile come una tela di ragno, forte come una cotta d'arme',<sup>231</sup> which Dianora uses

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<sup>225</sup> Angelo De Gubernatis, *Storia comparata degli usi funebri in Italia e presso gli altri popoli indo-europei* (Milan: Treves, 1878 [2nd edn]), p. 133.

<sup>226</sup> Franco Monetti-Giovanni Tesio, 'Lettere inedite di Gabriele D'Annunzio', *Quaderni del Vittoriale*, 14 (March-April 1979) 17-28.

<sup>227</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Spiritismo?*, p. 94.

<sup>228</sup> Capuana, *Spiritismo?*, p. 95 [my emphasis].

<sup>229</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Mondo occulto* (Naples: Pierro, 1896), reprinted in Capuana, *Mondo occulto*, ed. by Cigliana, pp. 163-204 (p. 165).

<sup>230</sup> Corrado Ricci, 'Leggende d'amore', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 May 1892, 339-355 (p. 346).

<sup>231</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 24.

to lower herself to her beloved from the window of her room. D'Annunzio, however, modifies the epilogue of the *novella* by replacing the happy ending (the marriage of Dianora with her beloved, despite all the obstacles that stood in the way) with a tragic event: in the version proposed in the *Sogno*, Dianora is discovered by Messer Braccio who 'ritrasse la scala complice, ne fece un capestro per il collo chino' and, as a consequence, 'Dianora penzolò dalla ringhiera, tutta la notte, sotto gli occhi delle stelle, lamentata dagli usignuoli'.<sup>232</sup> After the protagonist's tragic death, an unexpected event occurs: 'All'alba, come sonavano le campane dell'Impruneta, qualcuno vide involarsi dall'Armiranda un bel paone bianco verso l'oriente; e Messer Braccio ritrovò il suo capestro vuoto. Da allora un paone bianco visita la villa di tratto in tratto'.<sup>233</sup>

By enriching the legend with the animal metempsychosis of Dianora into a peacock, D'Annunzio adds a new fable element to the plot, which increases the fantastic component of the tale. From Isabella's point of view, Madonna Dianora is a ghost-like *larva* which returns on earth because she has died of a violent death, which does not allow her to rest in peace in the other world. By addressing the Doctor, Isabella says: 'E dicevo a Simonetta: "Tu vedi quel paone bianco su la ringhiera? È lo spirito di Madonna Dianora, che torna al luogo della sua passione"'.<sup>234</sup> Isabella calls Dianora 'cara sorella'<sup>235</sup> and feels a connection with her, both because she is what Dianora used to be – that is, Lady of Villa Armiranda -, and also because of the tragic ends of their respective love stories. Isabella then adds 'cara sorella *del tempo che non è più*',<sup>236</sup> by using an expression which recalls the phrase '*che non sono più*' recurring in D'Annunzio's *Hortus larvarum*,<sup>237</sup> a poem devoted to the *larvae*, that is to say to those who continue to come back among the living, in dreams or in other forms, such as the animal form taken by Dianora.

By addressing the peacock, Isabella asks: 'O paone, o Dianora, dolce anima, perché piangete?';<sup>238</sup> the use of the vocative 'O paone, o Dianora' shows that, in Isabella's mind, the identification between Dianora and the bird is accomplished. Nonetheless, the reader's *hesitation* – to speak in Tzvetan Todorov's words<sup>239</sup> – disappears not long after having been established, as Isabella's own account testifies.

<sup>232</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 24.

<sup>233</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 24.

<sup>234</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>235</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 25.

<sup>236</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 25 [my emphasis].

<sup>237</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Hortus Larvarum (Poema Paradisiaco)*, in D'Annunzio, *Versi d'amore e di gloria*, pp. 631-632 (lines 9, 17, 25, 33 e 8, 16, 24, 32, 40).

<sup>238</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 25.

<sup>239</sup> Todorov has defined the *fantastic* as a 'genere evanescente' lasting 'soltanto il tempo di un'esitazione' (Tzvetan Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica. Definizione e grammatica di un genere letterario* (Milan: Garzanti, 1983), pp. 45, 46).

She, indeed, tells the Doctor that the previous night the peacock's tears had dropped on her hands until she heard a voice saying 'Sono io; sono Beatrice'.<sup>240</sup> This sentence, bearing an evident Dantesque echo,<sup>241</sup> marks the shift in two opposite directions on the axis of the fantastic.

I am speaking of the 'axis of the fantastic' by adopting Todorov's perspective which has the *uncanny* (which is a form of 'supernatural explained') on the one hand, and the *marvellous* (which is a form 'supernatural accepted') on the other.<sup>242</sup> According to Todorov, the *hesitation* of the fantastic between these poles is experienced by the reader as well as by the character: 'alla fine della storia, il lettore, se non il personaggio, prende comunque una decisione, opta per l'una o l'altra soluzione e quindi, in tal modo, evade dal fantastico'.<sup>243</sup> In the *Sogno*, this form of 'evasione dal fantastico' takes place at the end of Isabella's dialogue with the peacock-Dianora. At this time, for the reader the supernatural becomes *explained* (as it appears clear that the tears are Beatrice's and not the peacock's), whereas for Isabella the situation is the opposite. Her point of view can be, thus, placed on the other end of the spectrum, that of the *marvellous* or 'supernatural explained' (because she fully believes in, and *accepts*, the connection of Dianora with the peacock).<sup>244</sup> Her acceptance is testified by the absence of surprise on her part, which is precisely one of the main features of the marvellous genre, as Todorov illustrates.<sup>245</sup>

In addition to the animal metamorphosis, among the supernatural actions performed by Dianora which Isabella *accepts* (in Todorov's terms) as true, we also find Dianora entering a 'cerchio magico nella foresta'.<sup>246</sup> This magic circle is described as 'una tazza sacra, una tazza di scorza dove la foresta versa il suo vino d'aromi'; Isabella says that 'chi ne beve, s'inebria e s'addormenta, se è solo, in un sogno inaudito, sentendo tutte le radici della foresta partirsi dall'intimo del suo cuore. Ma se non è solo...', and here she stops.<sup>247</sup> The image of the 'tazza' at the centre of a forest that works as a meeting point for lovers (which maybe had worked as such for herself and

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<sup>240</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 25.

<sup>241</sup> Isabella's sister says: 'Sono io; sono Beatrice', and to the eye of the reader – as well as the ear of the theatre audience – the syntagm 'io sono Beatrice' clearly evokes the *Divine Comedy* lines 'I son Beatrice che ti faccio andare' (*Inferno* II, line 70), (despite the fact that in D'Annunzio's version there is a pause, marked by the semicolon).

<sup>242</sup> For a graphic representation of Todorov's theorization, cf. Christine Brooke-Rose, *A rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in narrative and structure, especially of the fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 234.

<sup>243</sup> Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, p. 45 [my emphasis].

<sup>244</sup> Todorov defines the 'supernatural explained' as 'étrange' and the 'supernatural accepted' as 'marvellous' (Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, p. 45).

<sup>245</sup> Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, p. 57.

<sup>246</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 27.

<sup>247</sup> D'Annunzio, *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, p. 27.

Giuliano as well) recalls the painting *The Baleful Head* (1886-87) by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, featuring Perseus and Andromeda, whose figures stand out against a rich floral backdrop – recalling precisely a forest – mirroring themselves in the water of a well. The atmosphere is hieratic and the figures seem suspended in a supernatural dimension, which makes the well a sort of ‘tazza sacra’. The connection between the above-mentioned scene from the *Sogno* and this painting has not been registered in the literature so far, but we believe that it is very likely, especially because the Perseus cycle by Burne-Jones, to which this canvas belongs, triggered a heated debate between 1893 and 1895, and D’Annunzio’s interest in the Pre-Raphaelite movement in these years has been proved,<sup>248</sup> hence it would not have been surprising that a couple of years later this image might have influenced the iconography of one of the scenes of the *Sogno*.

D’Annunzio’s reference to the ‘tazza sacra’ and the ‘cerchio magico’ recalls the ancestral relationship between the sacred and the magical, which would also inform the following piece of the *Sogno* cycle, which is the *Sogno d’un tramonto d’autunno* (written in 1897 and published in 1898). Set in Venice, it features the dogaressa Gradeniga who, having fallen in love with a young man, obtains an evil sorcery from a sorceress to make her husband die; shortly after, however, she is abandoned by her lover who has fallen in love with a courtesan whom Gradeniga tries to kill with another evil potion.<sup>249</sup> While in the *Sogno d’un tramonto d’autunno* the fantastic is actually mediated by magic, in the *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera* D’Annunzio does not use any kind of mediation and turns directly to nature, which he sees as a repository of messages which are disguised as symbols (a well as a ‘tazza sacra’, a glade in the forest as a ‘cerchio magico’, animals as reincarnations). The origins of D’Annunzio’s fascination with the fantastic are to be searched in the magic and archaic Abruzzo described in *Terra vergine* (1882) and *Novelle della Pescara* (1902), where it is possible to find the twofold relationship with the supernatural which, as we have just seen, D’Annunzio also puts in place in the *Sogno d’un mattino di primavera*: at times, the supernatural is ‘explained’ (or rather ‘smascherato, as stressed by D’Arcangelo), and

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<sup>248</sup> The focus of the 1893-95 debate was the criticism against Pre-Raphaelitism, especially by Gustave Geffroy and Gustave Mirbeau (cf. Giuliana Pieri, *The Influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on Fin de Siècle Italy. Art, Beauty and Culture* (London: Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007) p. 19 note 27 and the chapter 3 ‘Gabriele D’Annunzio and the Pre-Raphaelitism in Rome’, pp. 59-84).

<sup>249</sup> *Sogno d’un tramonto d’autunno* is influenced by Jules Michelet’s essay *La Sorcière* (published in 1862, and translated into Italian in 1863), which had already impacted on Tarchetti, a pioneer of the Italian fantastic genre.

sometimes it is fully 'accepted' with all its symbolical power.<sup>250</sup> D'Annunzio, indeed, believed that 'le cose non sono se non i simboli dei nostri sentimenti, e ci aiutano a scoprire il mistero che ciascuno di noi in sé chiude'.<sup>251</sup>

## 5.6 Conclusions: 'forze psichiche che non si sanno spiegare e noi non sappiamo comprendere'

The symbolism informing the *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* represents one of the main features of the piece. The twofold nature of the text as a 'poema tragico' (merging poetry and tragedy) was considered a positive feature by D'Annunzio, whereas it was held responsible by many critics for the little success that the play had in theatres. When reviewing the première performed at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris, on 15 June 1897, starring Eleonora Duse, Giovanni Pozza wrote that the applause was mainly for the actress rather than for the piece itself. Pozza was confident in the success of the play as a literary text thanks to its 'incomparabile ricchezza di immagini poetiche and 'mirabili delicatezza psicologiche e espressione',<sup>252</sup> but he doubted the potentiality of the *Sogno* as a theatrical performance. He, indeed, believed that the high level of *poeticalness* of the script would have reduced its efficacy on stage, the reason being that 'i personaggi D'Annunziani [sic] parlano misteriosamente [...]; esaltati da una sensibilità iperbolica, agitati da ansie, da terrori, da forze psichiche che non si sanno spiegare e noi non sappiamo comprendere'.<sup>253</sup> By identifying what appeared to be a negative aspect (putting events and emotions on stage whose meaning was hard to grasp), Pozza indirectly confirmed that D'Annunzio had succeeded in describing the 'forme di vita spirituale mirabili [...] non mai osservate e rivelate'<sup>254</sup>, which the author had already envisaged to tackle in 1893, and which translated into the mysterious and mystical laws of the soul evoked by the Doctor in the *Sogno*.

As we have illustrated, at the turn of the century, symbolist literary trends and mystical revivals were considered negatively by many critics. In *Il misticismo moderno* (1899), Troilo described the tendency of all symbolism-oriented artists of aiming to open 'uno spiraglio misterioso che faccia intravedere il fondo dell'assoluto' as 'pensieri

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<sup>250</sup> Lucio D'Arcangelo, 'Introduction' to Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il mistico sogno*, with an introduction by Lucio D'Arcangelo (Chieti: Marino Solfanelli Editore, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>251</sup> D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca', p. 206.

<sup>252</sup> Giovanni Pozza, 'Corriere teatrale - "Il sogno d'un mattino di primavera" di G. D'Annunzio, a Parigi. Il trionfo della Duse', *Corriere della Sera*, 16-17 June 1897, from where we are quoting (the text has been reprinted in Giovanni Pozza, *Cronache di teatro (1886-1913)* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1971), pp. 264-266 and 269-273).

<sup>253</sup> Pozza, 'Corriere teatrale - "Il sogno d'un mattino di primavera" di G. D'Annunzio, a Parigi. Il trionfo della Duse' [my emphasis].

<sup>254</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, 'Elogio dell'epoca'; the same words can be found in the interview given to Ojetti, *Alla scoperta dei letterati*, p. 324.

vaghi'.<sup>255</sup> This task was, instead, considered as the main mission of art by those artists, as it responded to an essential need of the soul. 'Il rifiorire del misticismo nella letteratura contemporanea che a Max Nordau par segno di degenerazione, è invece legittimo bisogno della coscienza',<sup>256</sup> Chiappelli wrote in 1895, thus illustrating his stance on the subject, which he subsequently reemphasized in his 'Sul confine dei due secoli', which has prompted our study of D'Annunzio's play.

*Sogno d'un mattino di primavera* has proven a unique vantage point to analyse the nineteenth century from the point of view 'du rêve et de la folie'.<sup>257</sup> The analysis carried out in the present chapter has brought to light a tension between dreams of regeneration and fears of degeneration, which were widespread in fin-de-siècle Italy. The former has emerged from Chiappelli's reference to a forthcoming process of 'elevazione umana' prompted by a form of 'arte aristocratica'.<sup>258</sup> The latter has emerged from all the criticism addressed to such artistic trends by critics, such as Troilo, who borrowed the same arguments suggested in *Entartung* by Nordau, who had identified in mystical works one of the main triggers of degeneration in art and in society. Interestingly enough, Nordau's definition of mysticism is perfectly mirrored in D'Annunzio's *Sogno*. Nordau had defined mysticism as a 'condition of mind [...] always connected with strong emotional excitement, which consciousness conceives to be the result of its presentiments'.<sup>259</sup> *Il Sogno* is rich with presentiments, especially those about death, as we have illustrated with reference to Teodata, Isabella, and Isabella's mother. The second element used by Nordau to describe mysticism is the notion of 'a state of mind in which the subject imagines that he perceives or divines unknown and inexplicable relations amongst phenomena, discerns in things hints at mysteries, and regards them as symbols, by which a dark power seeks to unveil or, at least, to indicate all sorts of marvels'.<sup>260</sup> In the *Sogno*, almost all characters share the above-mentioned features: Isabella 'perceives inexplicable relations among phenomena'; Teodata is described as 'divining the unknown'; Virginio 'discerns in things hints at mysteries and regards them as symbols' and all characters (except Panfilo and Simonetta) are driven – in the wake of Isabella's approach – to experience reality as made of 'all sorts of marvels'. Such an attitude reflects the 'bisogno del sogno' and of 'meraviglioso', which D'Annunzio felt that society needed, and, interestingly enough, this happened in the very same years when Nordau was denouncing the same exact literary trend as leading

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<sup>255</sup> Troilo, *Il misticismo moderno*, p. 152.

<sup>256</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Socialismo e arte', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 August 1895.

<sup>257</sup> Stéphane Michaud, 'Préface', p. vii.

<sup>258</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 633.

<sup>259</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 45.

<sup>260</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 45.

to the 'Dusk of the Nations'.<sup>261</sup>

D'Annunzio's 'meraviglioso' can be considered as one of the possible declinations of the fantastic expressing 'the fragmentation of temporal continuity (as was described in realist narrative)'.<sup>262</sup> Fragmentation follows a trauma and determines a fracture. In Chapter Three, we have seen how the notions of 'fracture' – as defined by Hartog – and of 'trauma' – as described by Alexander – help to describe how society processes traumatic events. In the *Sogno*, the same process occurs, but on an individual level: here, the fracture following the trauma is represented by Giuliano's death; such trauma breaks the 'temporal continuity' and transfers all the characters to a dimension of suspension between life and death framed by Isabella's oneiric dimension. The oneiric dimension acts as a self-protecting strategy fighting decay (to which madness would inevitably lead). Thus, far from being only of aesthetical nature, Isabella's 'bisogno del sogno' is shared by all those around her, as it responds to a deeper need emerging from the 'reconditi abissi della vita', to speak in Chiappelli's words,<sup>263</sup> whose study was one of the top priorities of fin-de-siècle artists and psychologists, as we have seen in the present chapter and in Chapter Four, respectively. In the next chapter, we will explore how the fear of degeneration and the obsession with death – which was 'a central motif of fin-de-siècle Decadence'<sup>264</sup> and a crucial component of all *decadent subjects'* mindset<sup>265</sup> – was overturned at the turn of the century by regenerative aspirations.

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<sup>261</sup> As we have seen, D'Annunzio started to express these ideas in his works in 1892, which is the year of publication of Nordau's first volume (containing the section devoted to mysticism) of *Entartung* (in its original and first edition in German).

<sup>262</sup> Billiani, 'The Italian Gothic and Fantastic', p. 21.

<sup>263</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 633.

<sup>264</sup> Christopher Nissen and Marja Härmänmaa, 'The Empire at the End of decadence', in *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End. Studies in the European Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

<sup>265</sup> Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent subjects. The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. by T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

## CHAPTER 6

### Turn of the century's hopes for regeneration: metaphors of (re)birth coming from abroad

La *Resurrezione* del Tolstói, la *Fecondità* di Zola e *Quando noi resuscitiamo* di Ibsen [...] s'incontrano per diverse vie [...] in quell'impulso al rinnovamento che fa dell'opera loro come un nuovo evangelio della società e della vita.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.1 'A new regenerating era may arise'

At the close of the nineteenth century, preoccupation with the 'End' was pervasive. The approaching *finis saeculi* gave rise to fears of degeneration, both on an individual and a collective level, that permeated discourses on history, science, and the arts. In the 1880s and 1890s, despite material progress, anxieties about the end of civilization loomed on the horizon and mingled with fears of physical, social, political, economic, and cultural decay. Printed media popularized statistics, surveys, and chronological indices about declining birth rates and rising rates of criminality<sup>2</sup> and mental issues.<sup>3</sup> In *Degeneration*, Max Nordau devoted considerable space to the widespread feeling of a crumbling present where ideologies vanished in the 'shadows', 'night', and 'darkness',<sup>4</sup> as the world seemed to move towards an inexorable 'Dusk of the Nations, in which all suns and all stars were gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations was perishing in the midst of a dying world'.<sup>5</sup> This discourse engendered a fear that Western society was relentlessly debilitating, and, even possibly, at risk of

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 632).

<sup>2</sup> In Italy, it was the series of Cesare Lombroso's studies of criminal anthropology which held the stage throughout the last two decades of the century; see: Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente studiato in rapporto alla antropologia, alla medicina legale ed alle discipline carcerarie* (Milan: Hoepli, 1876), Cesare Lombroso, *La donna delinquente* (Turin: Stamperia dell'Unione tip-editrice, 1891), Cesare Lombroso, *Le più recenti scoperte ed applicazioni della psichiatria ed antropologia criminale* (Turin: Bocca, 1893). It is interesting to recall that in his *Mentre il secolo muore* – which included also criminology-themed essays – Scipio Sighele affirmed: 'noi siamo senilmente perversi', hence 'chiedere alla società attuale di produrre una gioventù sana ed onesta, è chiedere forse cosa che essa non può dare' (Scipio Sighele, *Mentre il secolo muore* (Palermo: Sandron, 1899), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> The last two decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid development of studies in dynamic psychology and psychiatry; cf. Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (London: Fontana Press, 1994 [1st edn 1970]) and Chapter Four of the present thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1895), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 2.

dying out. As this 'sense of an ending' – in Kermode's terms<sup>6</sup> – moved beyond the personal to a communal sentiment, it became what Schwartz describes as 'an active agent for historical thought'.<sup>7</sup> As Härmänmaa has observed, a curt 'denial of the hope of resurrection'<sup>8</sup> seemed to firmly take hold.

There were, however, those who discerned a stream of light and hoped that the turn of the century would both end the decline and harken a new era. This chapter demonstrates how, at the *fin de siècle*, the cultural *mood* in Italy was more optimistic than the decadent vulgate would lead us to believe.<sup>9</sup> Ferment was in the air, and it brought with it more than resignation and myths of death. Indeed, many people described themselves as living on the verge of a new era and trusted that the popularized downward evolutionary spiral could be redressed. To foster this positive attitude, many Italian critics surveyed foreign publications looking for reactions to the moral weakness of the *fin-de-siècle* society.<sup>10</sup> Their search suggests that Italian examples were in short supply. In this chapter, I explore how three particular foreign texts – all relating to motifs of rebirth and resurrection – entered the Italian cultural milieu and were incorporated into the discourse about the *fin de siècle*. They are: the play *When We Dead Awaken* by the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, the novel *Resurrection* by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, and the novel *Fécondité* by the French writer Émile Zola. By examining articles about, and reviews of, these three works in the Italian printed media, I explore both how, and why, Ibsen's, Tolstoy's, and Zola's works helped to contrast the widespread belief in decadence. In addition, I illustrate how an Italian audience interpreted these writers' understanding of the new century as heralding a regenerative march of progress against the backdrop of Nordau's *Degeneration* and in light of other European forward-looking works.

In Germany, the reaction to the bitter disillusionment portrayed in Wagner's *Twilight of the Gods* was strong, powerful as the choral finale of Mahler's symphony no.

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End. A cultural history of the Fin de Siècle from the 1990s through the 1990s* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Marja Härmänmaa, 'The Seduction of Thanatos: Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Decadent Death', in *Decadence, Degeneration, and the End. Studies in the European Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Marja Härmänmaa and Christopher Nissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 225-243 (p. 233).

<sup>9</sup> 'Mood' should be intended as 'Stimmung', see Hans Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: on a hidden potential of literature*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> As Chiappelli highlights 'chi guarda [...] alla educazione della volontà, può aver ragione di lamentare il decadimento delle anime' ('Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 626). Although not explicit, the phrase 'educazione della volontà' refers to Jules Payot's *L'éducation de la volonté* (1895) which builds upon *Les maladies de la volonté* (1883) by Théodule Ribot, one of the first psychologists to provide a detailed study of abulia and other psychic states connected to the weakness of will.

2, *Resurrection* (1895), announcing redemption rather than the destruction following the Apocalypse. In Russia, Merezhkovsky followed his *The Death of the Gods* (1895) with the publication of *The Resurrection of the Gods* in 1900. Even in France, the cradle of *fin-de-siècle* fashion, there was a call for greater optimism in such works as *Régénérescence* (1894) by Saint-Pol-Roux that expressed hope that an apparently crumbling *fin-de-siècle* society would emerge from its ashes and embark on an entirely new historical era. In England, Shaw defended *The Sanity of Art* (1895) and, concurrently, an anonymous writer – later identified as Egmont Hake – offered an articulate response to Nordau’s claims in a volume aptly entitled *Regeneration. A reply to Max Nordau* (1895). Hake’s text mirrors *Degeneration*’s own structure: each chapter addresses a key topic discussed by Nordau (mysticism, Symbolism, Tolstoism, Ibsenism, Wagnerism, egotism, etc.) and, after a close reading of some specific passages, provides a punctual refutation of each. In the final chapter, ‘Regeneration’, Hake proclaims that ‘there are already unmistakable signs that the period of scepticism, selfishness, and rant will end with the century’, to conclude that ‘a new regenerating era may arise’.<sup>11</sup>

In Italy, the reaction to the ‘effetto Nordau’<sup>12</sup> took many different forms. Notably, the theme of degeneration was rarely invoked without its binary: regeneration. In 1899, for instance, Svevo wrote the outline for a comedy entitled *Degenerazione*, likely building upon an earlier project named *La rigenerazione*.<sup>13</sup> There was also growing interest in regeneration, including myths of rebirth and resurrection, in such historical and theological works as Chiappelli’s *La dottrina della resurrezione della carne nei primi secoli della Chiesa* (1894), *L’umana rigenerazione secondo le dottrine della Chiesa odierna e della nuova Chiesa* (1899), and Fogazzaro’s *Ascensioni umane* (1899).<sup>14</sup> Italians were pulled in opposite directions, oscillating between a longing for the lost golden age evoked in such books as *La perdita età dell’oro* (1896)<sup>15</sup> and the hope for a

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<sup>11</sup> [Egmont Hake] *Regeneration. A reply to Max Nordau* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1895), pp. 314, 312.

<sup>12</sup> This phrase was coined by Silvia Acocella in *Effetto Nordau. Figure della degenerazione nella letteratura italiana tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Naples: Liguori, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Svevo returned to this project many years later; see Italo Svevo, *Commedie*, ed. by Umberto Apollonio (Milan: Mondadori, 1960), pp. 479-615. With regard to *Degenerazione*, see Italo Svevo, *Degenerazione*, in *Teatro e saggi*, ed. by Federico Bertoni and Mario Lavagetto (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), pp. 777-785.

<sup>14</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, *La dottrina della resurrezione della carne nei primi secoli della Chiesa. Memoria letta all’Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche della Società Reale di Napoli* (Naples: Tipografia della Regia Università, 1894); [unsigned] *L’umana rigenerazione secondo le dottrine della Chiesa odierna e della nuova Chiesa* (Florence: Tip. di M. Ricci, 1899); Antonio Fogazzaro, *Ascensioni umane* (Milan: Baldini, Castoldi & C., 1899). Fogazzaro’s collection was actually released in 1898.

<sup>15</sup> [Unsigned] *La perdita età dell’oro* (Florence: Tip. di M. Ricci, 1896) appeared in the same series ‘Biblioteca della Nuova epoca’ as the above-mentioned *L’umana rigenerazione*.

more religious future as presented by Pope Leo XIII in his 1900 poem *A Iesu Christo ineuntis saeculi auspicia*.<sup>16</sup> Concurrently, the Pope called for the new century to begin under the auspices of Christ, 'salus, vita, resurrectio nostra' in the bull 'Properante ad exitum saeculo' that announced the 1900 Jubilee.<sup>17</sup> Although resurrection through Christ is both an essential and unsurprising part of Christian doctrine, the Pope's Christianized version of a *carmen saeculare* and the solemnity of the Jubilee celebrations in 1900 can be interpreted as an attempt by the Catholic Church to reappropriate, at the end of the nineteenth century, a rhetoric about time largely forfeited since the era of the French Revolution. Indeed, the See of Rome fought hard to reclaim its waning authority throughout these years.

The *topos* of nostalgia was taken up by many Italian writers. The public speech *L'Èra nuova*, delivered by Pascoli in 1899, epitomizes the kind of expectation fostered by the waiting of the forthcoming century.<sup>18</sup> Pascoli too refers to Horace's *carmen saeculare*, before evoking the myth of the golden age by quoting Virgil's fourth eclogue, famous for its palingenetic motif. Pascoli hopes that the new century would engender a palingenesis of the human race as men reacquire an awareness of their mortal nature. In this way, they would continue their 'ascension' towards the transformation from 'homo sapiens' to 'homo humanus', as he suggests in a later essay, *L'Avvento* (1901). In *L'Èra nuova*, Pascoli adopts Fogazzaro's phrase, 'ascension', employs it as synonym of 'evolution', and explains that the 'poeti dell'avvenire' ought to help men rediscover their original brotherhood and enlighten the way to progress. In the conclusion of the speech, he not only hopes for, but also beckons a forthcoming palingenesis:

[...] sarà la *palingenesia*; la povera e melanconica *palingenesia* che sola può toccare a questi poveri e melanconici esseri che abitano così piccolo pianeta, il quale è sulla via di tante comete distruggitrici. Avverrà nel secolo che sta per aprirsi? Aspettiamo che il secolo si apra, e speriamo che quella

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<sup>16</sup> Leo XIII's ode, *A Iesu Christo ineuntis saeculi auspicia*, adopts the form of a *carmen saeculare*, and bears the date 31 December 1900 ('An. Christi MCM. Pridie Kalendas Ianuarias'). The text was published in *La civiltà cattolica*, 2 February 1901 (series XVIII, vol. I, 'quaderno' 1215, year LII), 260-262 and preceded by a short introduction entitled 'Il Papa e il nuovo secolo' (257-260); it has been republished in Gioachimo [*sic*] Pecci [Pope's birth name], *Le poesie latine di Papa Leone XIII*, trans. by Papiliunculus [Cesario Testa] (Milan: Sonzogno, n.d. [1902]), pp. 95-98.

<sup>17</sup> [Unsigned] 'Promulgazione del giubileo universale dell'anno santo mille e novecento', *La civiltà cattolica*, 20 May 1899 (series XVII, vol. VI, 'quaderno' 1174, year L), 1-XII (p. VI).

<sup>18</sup> The speech was delivered on 5 February 1899 in Messina, as the opening event for the Società Dante Alighieri's series of conferences centred on the topic 'L'eredità del secolo'. It was then published in Giovanni Pascoli, *La Ginestra. Pace! L'Èra nuova. Il focolare* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1900). The volume was ready in 1899, but was intentionally not put on the market until 1900 in order to stress the symbolic connection with the 'new era', which was, incidentally, also evoked by the logo of the publishing house Sandron displaying the motto 'Alteri Saeculo'.

avvenga.<sup>19</sup>

Foreign literature also fuelled an expectation of palingenesis, as many reviews published in Italian periodicals demonstrate. For instance, in a review for the *Nuova Antologia*, Ernesto Masi salutes Zola's *Fécondité*: 'ecco ora i quattro nuovi Evangeli secundum Zola: *Fecondità, Lavoro, Verità, Giustizia*, specie d'apocalisse palingenesiaca, nella quale il genere umano avrebbe a trovar la pienezza del suo destino'.<sup>20</sup> *Fécondité* was the first of Zola's novel-series, *Les Quatre Évangiles*. Masi here classifies the underlying model informing Zola's project as utopian, insofar as the writer envisages a moment of destruction as the necessary precursor to the process of gradual rebirth. 'Palingenesis' literally means 'rebirth' (*palin*, meaning 'again', and *genesis*, meaning 'birth'), and it is precisely in the Gospel of Matthew, to which *Fécondité* as the first in the series of four symbolically relates, that the term appears several times to describe the period following the establishment of God's kingdom (26: 29) and the Last Judgement that would precede a regeneration of the world (19: 28). In its long history, 'palingenesis' has indicated renewal both on an individual and universal level. Here, Masi uses the word in both senses to identify Zola's dual aim of changing both individuals' and society's beliefs. Masi informs the readers of the *Nuova Antologia* that unlike Zola's earlier cycle of novels, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, which depict the degeneration of society without offering any solutions as an 'eredità patologica senza rimedio',<sup>21</sup> this new series nurtures 'alti ideali di rinnovazione totale'.<sup>22</sup> Zola himself identified this change while working on the *Quatre Évangiles* project: 'Je voudrais un optimisme éclatant. C'est la conclusion naturelle de toute mon œuvre : [...] une prolongation dans demain [...]. Puis, je finis le siècle, j'ouvre le siècle prochain'.<sup>23</sup> This note foregrounds the author's sense of living in a time of transition ('je finis le siècle, j'ouvre le siècle prochain'). He trusts that his work would help navigate this moment by functioning as a 'prolongation dans demain' and by showing society the way forward. Zola's yearning for 'una solenne e totale rigenerazione morale'<sup>24</sup> was also emphatically praised in an 1899 review of *Fécondité* by Silvio Picozzi in the *Gazzetta Letteraria*.

The expectation of a palingenetic event, which *Fécondité* engenders, is further

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<sup>19</sup> Pascoli, *L'Èra nuova*, pp. 74-75. Unless otherwise indicated, in the present chapter English translations are mine.

<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Masi, "'Fécondité" di Emilio Zola', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 640-653 (p. 640). Masi reviews the French edition of the book: Émile Zola, *Fécondité* (Paris: Fasquelle, Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1899).

<sup>21</sup> Masi, "'Fécondité" di Emilio Zola', p. 641.

<sup>22</sup> Masi, "'Fécondité" di Emilio Zola', p. 641.

<sup>23</sup> Émile Zola, *Les Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mitterand, vol. VIII (Paris: Le cercle du livre précieux, 1968), p. 506.

<sup>24</sup> Silvio Picozzi, 'Il nuovo romanzo di Emilio Zola', *Gazzetta Letteraria*, 22 July 1899, 230.

fostered in *Travail*, the second novel of the Zolian cycle, which was equally praised by Lucio D'Ambra in the *Fanfulla della Domenica*, the literary supplement of the reputable daily newspaper *Fanfulla*. Indeed, D'Ambra places *Travail* alongside More's *Utopia* and other visionary books of the 'biblioteche della palingenesi sociale'.<sup>25</sup> D'Ambra juxtaposes the position of French critics who had ironically stated that a new world order would require the extermination all the living human beings with his interpretation of Zola's work. To D'Ambra, Zola's cycle offered different routes to the 'sogno dell'avvenire', to a 'umanità rigenerata', and to a 'city of the future' not in a distant future, but in the century that had just begun ('città futura [...] durante il secolo testè incominciato').<sup>26</sup>

## 6.2 'Una rigenerazione profonda degli animi'

A demand for change gained traction in Italian cultural debate of the 1890s. At the turn of the century, there was a conspicuous interest in literary works interpreted as a *vade mecum* from the old to the new century. Zola's *Évangile* was far from being the only volume to be associated with this trend, and in the periodical press was most frequently placed side by side with two other texts, namely Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*.

Alessandro Chiappelli's article 'Sul confine dei due secoli' best illustrates this phenomenon. At first, he contends that 'il secolo nostro non è stato certamente un secolo artistico, se per arte s'intende non un'opera individuale o un ornamento della vita, ma una forma viva, una necessità universalmente sentita'.<sup>27</sup> This evaluation of the nineteenth century was an *idée reçue* widely recorded. For instance, in a review of Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, Italian critic Carlo Segrè comments: 'Nessun secolo forse è stato più grande e glorioso di questo [...] ma la stupenda attività sua s'è concentrata e spiegata, *in sulla fine in ispecie*, sopra campi diversi e lontani dal limpido, sereno e ridente monte delle Muse'.<sup>28</sup> Segrè underlines that the shift of energies from art to science took place 'in sulla fine in ispecie', thus during the *fin de siècle*. He also underlines how this shift is recurrent in history and takes place in almost regular cycles: 'com'è accaduto nel Seicento quand'è fiorito Galileo [...], com'è accaduto in Francia alla seconda metà del secolo scorso [...], anche nell'età nostra lo sviluppo della scienza, sviluppo prodigioso [...] ha soffocate e inaridite le fonti vive della produzione

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<sup>25</sup> Lucio D'Ambra, "'Travail' di Emilio Zola', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 21 July 1901.

<sup>26</sup> D'Ambra, "'Travail' di Emilio Zola'.

<sup>27</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 628.

<sup>28</sup> Carlo Segrè, 'Le idee del Tolstoï su l'arte', *Fanfulla della domenica*, 24 July 1898.

artistica', he highlights.<sup>29</sup> But he also observes that 'l'arte odierna non s'acconcia alla condizione di fievolezza, d'umiltà, a cui è ridotta', thus a form of reaction and regeneration of art is to be sought. A possible viable way was that suggested by Tolstoy in essay of aesthetics *What is Art?*.

Originally published in Russian in 1897 and translated into Italian in 1899 with the title *Che cosa è l'arte?*, the volume voices Tolstoy's discontent with the state of the art of the time and his severe accusations against most of his coeval authors, poets, playwrights, painters and musicians, namely Zola, the French Decadents, Ibsen, the Impressionists, Burne-Jones, Wagner, Brahms, and Richard Strauss, just to name a few. Tolstoy harshly criticizes 'art for art's sake' and any other form of art proud of its 'exclusivity' and 'obscurity', and deliberately aimed at the only happy few who are able to understand it. According to him, art should respond to the needs of the largest possible number of people and should be aimed at enhancing the feeling of reciprocal brotherliness among humans. He dreams of an art that could be *catholic* in the etymological sense of the word, hence *universal*.

In the Italian Catholic environment, Tolstoy's text received a lukewarm response. The first time some members of the Catholic Church commented on Tolstoy's oeuvre was precisely on the occasion of the publication of *What is Art?*.<sup>30</sup> From the pages of the Jesuit bimonthly cultural periodical *La civiltà cattolica*, Gaetano Zocchi illustrated a certain consonance between Tolstoy's view of modern artistic trends and the Catholic establishment's concerns about the 'decadence and deprivation of the Art'<sup>31</sup> in an age of utmost laicization. On the same note, the priest Domenico Conti noticed that the committed literature hoped for by Tolstoy could turn to be very helpful for catechistic purposes, notwithstanding Tolstoy's denial of the Sacraments and dogmas.<sup>32</sup>

As soon as it was translated into various languages, Tolstoy's text quickly gained popularity, engendering both appraisals and discordant responses. Even before the publication of the Italian *Che cosa è l'Arte?*, the book was already well-known to the Italian public via its two French translations *Qu'est-ce que l'art?*,<sup>33</sup> released one year

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<sup>29</sup> Segrè, 'Le idee del Tolstoï su l'arte'.

<sup>30</sup> Antonella Salomoni, *Il pensiero religioso e politico di Tolstoj in Italia* (Florence: Olschki, 1996), p. 119.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. [Unsigned [Gaetano Zocchi]] 'Decadenza e depravazione dell'arte', *La civiltà cattolica*, 1 July 1899 (series XVII, vol. VII, 'quaderno' 1177, year L), 5-20; this article was not signed, as was usual practice in this periodical, but it is possible to identify the author, Gaetano Zocchi, who also wrote a follow up in a following issue: [Unsigned [Gaetano Zocchi]] 'Decadenza e depravazione dell'arte', *La civiltà cattolica*, 5 August 1899 (series XVII, vol. VII, 'quaderno' 1179, year L), 292-313.

<sup>32</sup> Domenico Conti, 'Il bene e il delitto nell'arte', *La rassegna nazionale*, 1 June 1900, 479.

<sup>33</sup> Two French translations were circulating: Comte Léon Tolstoï, *Qu'est-ce que l'Art?*, 'traduit du manuscrit original russe par E. Halpérine-Kaminsky' (Paris: Ollendorff, 1898) and Comte Leon

before and promptly reviewed across several Italian journals, such as the *Nuova Antologia*, where, in 1898, the literary critic Enrico Panzacchi had published two articles about Tolstoy and his volume – articles that would later constitute the preface to the Italian translation of the pamphlet.<sup>34</sup> The Italian critic highlighted Tolstoy's consideration of modern art as humanity's most terrible illness, deserving to be suppressed.<sup>35</sup> However, the Russian author did not dismiss art as a whole: he still considered it crucial for the improvement of civilization ('mezzo di perfezionamento dell'umanità').<sup>36</sup> Arturo Graf, despite writing an extremely severe review one year later in the same journal, also praised Tolstoy's belief in the power of art, deemed 'cosa necessaria alla dignità e felicità degli uomini'.<sup>37</sup> Along the same lines, Felice Momigliano took a critical stance towards some of Tolstoy's remarks, and yet applauded the trust that the author placed in the 'progresso evolutivo dell'umanità', which should be promoted by the 'arte dell'avvenire' that he considered 'alleata del rinnovamento'.<sup>38</sup> The Italian critics appreciated the great importance that the Russian author attached to art, and to literature in particular. Tolstoy conceived it as a medium for regeneration, as he illustrated in the two final chapters of *Che cosa è l'Arte?*, titled respectively 'Possibilità d'un rinnovamento artistico' (chapter XVII) and 'Che cosa dovrà essere l'arte dell'avvenire' (chapter XVIII) where he suggested some ways to trigger an artistic renewal and put forward his view about what the art of the future should look like.

The idea of art as 'alleata del rinnovamento' influenced Chiappelli's view. Indeed, despite acknowledging – as we have seen – that the nineteenth century could not be considered as a 'secolo artistico', in 'Sul confine dei due secoli' Chiappelli also highlights that art cannot but play a crucial role in the march of progress, insofar as it is a sign of 'una nuova inquietudine degli spiriti' that can channel 'quel rivolgimento degli spiriti

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Tolstoï, *Qu'est-ce que l'Art?*, 'traduit du russe et précédé d'une introduction par Teodor de Wyzewa (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier, Perrin et C.ie, Libraires éditeurs, 1898).

<sup>34</sup> The cover page of the Italian translation reads: Leone Tolstoj, *Che cosa è l'Arte?*, 'traduzione autorizzata dall'autore. Preceduto da un saggio di Enrico Panzacchi': *Tolstoj e Manzoni nell'idea morale dell'Arte* (Milan: Treves, 1899). Panzacchi reviewed the translation by Halpérine-Kaminsky in his essay 'Tolstoj e l'arte' published in the *Nuova Antologia* on 16 June 1898, 705-716, which was then republished as the first part of the book's preface, with the title 'Il libro di Tolstoj: Che cosa è l'Arte?'. This was followed by the essay 'Manzoni e Tolstoj nell'idea morale dell'arte', also previously published by Panzacchi in the *Nuova Antologia*, 16 December 1898, 581-595, where Panzacchi compares Tolstoy's conception of art with Manzoni's moral ideal of art.

<sup>35</sup> Tolstoj, *Che cosa è l'Arte?*, p. xxi.

<sup>36</sup> Tolstoj, *Che cosa è l'Arte?*, pp. 233, 235.

<sup>37</sup> Arturo Graf, 'Sofismi di Leone Tolstoj in fatto d'arte e di critica', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 September 1899, 310-324 (p. 311).

<sup>38</sup> Felice Momigliano, 'L'arte secondo Leone Tolstoj', *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 January 1899, 6-8 (p. 8).

che oggi è promessa di nuove forme nella vita intellettuale e sociale'.<sup>39</sup> He identifies traces of these new forms of intellectual and social life in three recently published literary works:

Di codesta condizione dello spirito moderno uno dei più grandi esponenti di oggi è l'arte. [...] Le tre più notevoli opere letterarie di quest'anno, la *Resurrezione* del Tolstoj, la *Fecondità* di Zola e *Quando noi resuscitiamo* di Ibsen, colla grandissima differenza dei propositi loro e dell'indole dei tre scrittori, lo scandinavo, il russo e il latino, s'incontrano per diverse vie in quello spirito di propaganda, in quell'impulso al rinnovamento che fa dell'opera loro come un nuovo evangelio della società e della vita.<sup>40</sup>

Later in the text, Chiappelli lists his reasons for the associations he draws between the Russian, the Scandinavian, and the French author (the latter referred to as 'Latin', an adjective epitomizing the Southern continental European literary tradition). Chiappelli stresses that 'tutti gli sforzi del Tolstoj dall'*Anna Karenine* [sic] alla *Resurrezione*, e dell'Ibsen nei suoi drammi', as well as Zola in *Fécondité*, are attempts 'per significare la vittoria dell'uomo sui fatti, e per rinfrancare le energie morali interiori affralite'.<sup>41</sup> 'Sul confine dei due secoli' might be considered as a hitherto unexplored expression of the 'Nordau effect', an Italian response in keeping with trends in France led by Saint-Pol-Roux and in England by Shaw and Hake. Chiappelli specifically shared much with Hake, who juxtaposed the belief in a forthcoming aurora against Nordau's fear of a fast advancing twilight of the *fin-de-siècle* society. Hake too regarded Zola's, Tolstoj's, and Ibsen's works as a promising medium for renovation rather than a symptom of degeneration. Similarly, in his conference paper *Progresso e Civiltà nel pensiero di Nietzsche, di Ibsen e di Tolstoj*, Vincenzo Mangano had Nordau's categorization in mind when he referred to Tolstoj as a mystic,<sup>42</sup> but he detached himself from Nordau's point of view when remarking that Tolstoism was animated by a progressive stance. Indeed, he claimed that Tolstoj carried out 'una critica della civiltà moderna, esagerata ma non

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<sup>39</sup> Both quotations are from Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 632.

<sup>40</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 632.

<sup>41</sup> Both quotations are from Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 627.

<sup>42</sup> Being a mystic was precisely the accusation that Nordau levelled at Tolstoj (indeed the chapter 'Tolstoism' falls within the 'book II' of *Degeneration* titled precisely 'Mysticism'); Nordau lamented that, if applied in reality, the principles of Tolstoism would have inevitably led to the destruction of the entire society.

folle, eccessiva ma non demolitrice'.<sup>43</sup> In so doing, Mangano positioned himself in relation to Hake who referred to Tolstoy as 'the light of Russia'<sup>44</sup> striving to 'regenerate' and 'uplift'<sup>45</sup> society and 'who devotes both his life and his work, with almost superhuman energy, to the regeneration of his race'.<sup>46</sup>

Chiappelli's essay, Mangano's conference, along with the many other articles and reviews published in Italian periodicals between 1899 and 1901 about the three works which we examine in the present chapter, allow for the exploration of an aspect of *fin-de-siècle* Italian culture that has not yet been widely investigated. However different, together these texts contribute to defining what Hans Gumbrecht would consider the 'atmosphere', the 'mood', the 'climate', more exactly the 'Stimmung' (to use the proper and hardly translatable German word) of the epoch. Gumbrecht's analysis focuses on literature, but his discourse might be well and fruitfully applied to other texts which, although not being *literary* – strictly speaking – do conjure up what the critic has described as the 'immediacy' of 'past presents'.<sup>47</sup> It is interesting that, when retracing the history of the various semantic layers that the concept of *Stimmung* has acquired throughout history, Gumbrecht lingers precisely over the nineteenth century, which he defines as 'a time whose complexity seemed to escape' and when 'the desire for individual points of access to harmony became more pronounced'.<sup>48</sup>

Gumbrecht's claim about the people of the nineteenth century looking for harmony finds confirmation in 'Sul confine dei due secoli', where Chiappelli voices his belief that 'gli elementi discordanti nella compagine presente, dovranno comporsi in una sintesi sociale lungo il secolo che nasce' and identifies the main duty of the coming century ('l'ufficio del secolo nuovo') in the effort for reaching this harmony.<sup>49</sup> Although Chiappelli acknowledges that it is a challenging task, he feels confident that a long-awaited renovation of society would take place in the twentieth century and that an '*armonico sistema di civiltà*' and an '*armonico coordinamento finale*'<sup>50</sup> would be finally achieved. Contrariwise, the present is depicted as a time of 'elementi discordanti' and 'dissidi degli ordini sociali' featuring many contrasts such as the one between 'la tendenza cosmopolitica e lo spirito nazionale' and 'la critica positiva e l'impulso

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<sup>43</sup> Vincenzo Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà nel pensiero di Nietzsche, di Ibsen e di Tolstoj – Conferenza letta al Circolo Univers. Cattolico di Napoli il 17 Febbraio 1901* (Rome: Società italiana cattolica di cultura editrice, 1902), p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> As he entitles an entire chapter meant to be the reply to Nordau's chapter 'Tolstoism' ([Hake], *Regeneration*, pp. 111–135).

<sup>45</sup> [Hake] *Regeneration*, pp. 116–117.

<sup>46</sup> [Hake] *Regeneration*, p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung*, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', pp. 623, 624.

<sup>50</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', pp. 623–624 [my emphasis].

religioso'.<sup>51</sup>

While there is no doubt that these antitheses represented an element of internal conflict in society which was, in addition, pervaded by a fascination with decay – which was a key-component of late nineteenth-century Italian culture – and that, as Gioanola has pointed out, death was its ‘emotional epicenter and inspiring source’,<sup>52</sup> nevertheless, an antithetical hope for regeneration exerted considerable influence. Its intensity and centrality grew as the end of the century approached, and foreign literature was integral to this process, leading – as many hoped – to a ‘rigenerazione profonda degli animi’.<sup>53</sup>

### **6.3 The ‘therapeutics’ for the *fin-de-siècle* society via Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken*, Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, and Zola’s *Fécondité***

Seeing in *Resurrection*, *Fécondité*, and *When We Dead Awaken* ‘a new gospel for society and life’ was not unique to Chiappelli. As the following analysis will show, end-of-the-century Italian literary criticism demonstrates a widespread belief that the oeuvres of Tolstoy, Zola, and Ibsen could, against all gloomy predictions, map unexplored routes to a future rebirth.

In *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen stages the artistic and personal crisis of a sculptor whose creation, *The Resurrection Day*, garnered an extraordinary success; the play explores the ways in which a process of self-rediscovery can insidiously drift into self-annihilation. In *Resurrection*, Tolstoy describes the moral uplifting of Prince Nekhlyudov, followed his realization that he ruined the life of a woman whom he had corrupted at a young age. Nekhlyudov sets out to compensate for his mistakes by promoting changes in the judicial and economic system of his country and rejects his once dissolute life for empathy, friendship, self-sacrifice, and the love that every human being should nurture for their fellow men, irrespective of their origins. In *Fécondité*, Zola not only explores and condemns the consequences of Malthusian-inspired birth control, but also argues that families with many children would play a crucial role in the regeneration of the debauched and degraded *fin-de-siècle* society.

In his appraisal of ‘Il nuovo dramma d’Ibsen. *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*’, Cesare De Lollis not only explored how ‘il mondo accolse il suo [di Ibsen] Vangelo’,<sup>54</sup> but also how Ibsen’s play might trigger a process of ‘redenzione sociale’ and ‘elevazione

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<sup>51</sup> Chiappelli, ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, pp. 623-624.

<sup>52</sup> Elio Gioanola, *Il Decadentismo* (Rome: Nuova Universale Studium, 1977), p. 176.

<sup>53</sup> Chiappelli, ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, p. 634.

<sup>54</sup> Cesare De Lollis, ‘Il nuovo dramma d’Ibsen. *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*’, *Nuova Antologia*, 16 January 1900, pp. 307-316 (p. 308).

morale' akin to the Christian Gospel.<sup>55</sup> This opinion was echoed by Mario Borsa, a theatre critic for the Milanese newspaper *La Perseveranza*, who in his book *Verso il sole di mezzanotte. Note scandinave* (a reportage of his trip to some Scandinavian countries and his in-person discussions with Ibsen) affirmed that Ibsen's characters embodied 'temperamenti eletti e apostolici'.<sup>56</sup> At a conference held in Naples in 1901, Mangano commented that 'Ibsen fa la critica della civiltà nostra convenzionale e fittizia; egli in ciò si avvicina a Tolstoi'.<sup>57</sup> He considered 'le idee ibseniane' as 'il verbo nuovo dell'Europa giovane',<sup>58</sup> whereby 'Europa giovane' likely referred to Guglielmo Ferrero's *L'Europa giovane. Studi e viaggi nei paesi del Nord* (1897). Ferrero's travel notes from his tour of Scandinavia, Russia, and other northern European countries were also presented as a model for social and political renovation for Southern Europe.<sup>59</sup> This 'septentriomanie' reached its zenith in France in the 1870s and subsequently swept over Italy.<sup>60</sup> As Zino Zini argued in 1899 in an article entitled 'Leo Tolstoï e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo':

Forse l'arte dei popoli settentrionali ha trovato la strada, che deve condurci alla nuova Rinascenza, ma non è certo quella scoperta da Melchiorre de Vogüé dall'alto delle colonne della *Revue des deux Mondes*.<sup>61</sup>

Zini opens this discussion with a series of rhetorical questions about a process of purification: 'L'età evangelica è per rifiorire tra noi? [...] Ma che cosa potrebbe fare il Cristo [...] in questo suo ritorno, sul termine del secolo, dinanzi allo spettacolo della

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<sup>55</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 313.

<sup>56</sup> Mario Borsa, *Verso il sole di mezzanotte. Note scandinave* (Milan: Treves, 1902 [1st edn 1899]), p. 122.

<sup>57</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> The alleged inferiority of Southern Europe is a trope that dates back to Montesquieu and was reinvigorated by Madame de Staël as the distinction between a *modern* European literature – coming from the North – and a *pre-modern* European literature of the South; see Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (in theory)* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). In the 1880s and 1890s, there were many publications about the supposed degeneration of the Latins and the contrast between northern and Southern European peoples. Two of the most influential books were Gustave Le Bon's *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1894) and Edmond Demolins's *À quoi tient la supériorité des Anglo-Saxons* (1897), both widely read and commented on in Italy together with such *domestic* publications as Ferrero's *L'Europa giovane* (1897), Giuseppe Sergi's *Arii e Italici* (1898) and Sergi's *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (1900). These discourses were challenged by later scholars like Napoleone Colajanni, whose *Razze inferiori e razze superiori, o, latini e anglo-sassoni* (1903) largely dismissed the supposed inferiority of certain peoples and reignited self-confidence in Italian public debate.

<sup>60</sup> Angela Ida Villa, *Neoidealismo e rinascenza latina tra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Led, 1999), pp. 69-71.

<sup>61</sup> Zino Zini, 'Leo Tolstoï e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 June 1899, 462-474 (p. 468).

civiltà moderna così distante dai semplici sogni del “regno dei cieli”?.<sup>62</sup> The reader might expect an analysis of Tolstoy’s oeuvre within the traditional texts of the Russian messianic tradition to follow. Instead, Zini provides an examination of contemporary literature whereby Tolstoy’s, Ibsen’s, and Strindberg’s works emerge as the ‘evangelical’ texts of the nineteenth century.

In the second half of the 1890s, however, this fascination with northern cultures inspired a peninsular response, what Giovannetti has described as ‘un ambiguo programma di rinascita reazionaria’.<sup>63</sup> Many periodical articles made such appeals. For example, Mario Morasso’s ‘Ai nati dopo il 70’, published in *Il Marzocco* in 1897, called for the ‘risurrezione del sentimento nazionale [...] nella visione del robusto eroe latino che accenda la gloria futura di nostra gente’<sup>64</sup> and for the ‘rinnovazione gioconda della coscienza nazionale’.<sup>65</sup> Morasso specifically mentions Ibsen and Tolstoy in his lament: ‘[L]e schiere ausiliarie scese dal Nord sotto grandi capitani, Wagner, Ibsen, Tolstoi [...] occupavano le grandi capitali latine’; ‘le falangi nordiche [...] mediante l’adito letterario [...] stavano per opprimere la latinità’. Morasso’s criticisms targeted Italian men of letters who adopted a cosmopolitan perspective in their work: he complained that ‘giovani simbolistici, mistici [...] esagerarono nel cosmopolitismo’.<sup>66</sup>

Morasso’s text participated in a larger debate begun a year earlier by Ugo Ojetti in an article that appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, where he was calling for a European and cosmopolitan literature in Italy.<sup>67</sup> Authors and critics like Pascoli, Carducci,

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<sup>62</sup> Both quotations are from Zini, ‘Leo Tolstoj e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo’, p. 463.

<sup>63</sup> Paolo Giovannetti, *Decadentismo* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1994), p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> Mario Morasso, ‘Ai nati dopo il 70. La terza reazione letteraria’, *Il Marzocco*, 7 February 1897. The article is replete with such iterative forms as ‘rifiore’, ‘ringagliardire lo spirito nazionale’, ‘rifecondare [...] germi della Latinità’, ‘resurrezione’, and ‘rinnovazione’. On parallels with the arguments for political unification widespread between 1796 and 1799, see Stefano Nutini, ‘“Rigenerare” e “rigenerazione”: alcune linee interpretative’, in *Idee e parole nel giacobinismo italiano*, ed. by Eluggero Pii (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1990), pp. 49-63. There was a powerful political connotation to terms like ‘resurrection’ and ‘renovation’, which were often used interchangeably with ‘regeneration’, particularly between 1796 and 1799 (see Erasmo Leso, *Lingua e rivoluzione. Ricerche sul vocabolario politico italiano nel triennio rivoluzionario 1796-1799* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1991), pp. 153-154). However, ‘Risorgimento’ eventually superceded its synonyms; in this respect, see also Patriarca’s research about a series of metaphors informing the patriotic rhetoric of Risorgimento (Silvana Patriarca, ‘Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism’, *The American Historical Review*, 110.2 (April 2005), 380-408 (p. 382)); as for the vices which were held responsible from preventing the formation of a modern nation State in Italy see Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices. Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), especially pp. 20-107.

<sup>65</sup> Morasso, ‘Ai nati dopo il 70’.

<sup>66</sup> Morasso, ‘Ai nati dopo il 70’.

<sup>67</sup> The debate started off after Ugo Ojetti’s article ‘Quelques littérateurs italiens’ appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, 15 February 1896. Ojetti later presented it at a conference held in Venice, whose text was published with the title ‘L’avvenire della letteratura in Italia’ first in *La Vita Italiana*, 10 June 1896, 113-115 and eventually in a volume titled *L’avvenire della letteratura in Italia* (Rome: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1896).

Capuana, and Domenico Oliva all joined the discussion. In 'Letteratura italiana o italo-europea?', Pascoli responded to Ojetti's criticism of the Italian language and style and of Carducci's poetry.<sup>68</sup> Capuana and Oliva challenged Ojetti's stance from a more general perspective and presented the case for a thriving future for Italian literature. In his response, Capuana too explicitly mentioned Ibsen and Tolstoy, whose fictional characters he described as 'figure vive, consistenti';<sup>69</sup> nevertheless, Capuana disparaged the cosmopolitan literati for their tendency to 'norvegizzare'<sup>70</sup> European theatre and 'russificare'<sup>71</sup> European novel. He expressed nostalgia for the Renaissance when 'la letteratura europea era quasi tutta italiana'.<sup>72</sup> Oliva also proudly declared 'Roma non muore'<sup>73</sup> and praised de Vogüé for having recognized signs of a general revival of the Latin spirit and having envisaged 'en Italie un présage certain de la Renaissance latine', namely in D'Annunzio's works.<sup>74</sup>

On the contrary, the socialist Ettore Fabietti was far from any nationalistic-inclined reaction and was more aligned with Zini's point of view. In his introduction 'Leone Tolstói e i segni di una rinascenza ideale'<sup>75</sup> to an Italian translation of *Resurrection*, he claimed that Italy and France might be 'purified' thanks to a process of awakening triggered by an author coming from the North, like Tolstoy. Similarly, Zini described Tolstoy as an author who promoted better living conditions thanks to a 'vangelo' that 'annienta lo Stato e dissolve la società con una sola massima: non resistete al male colla violenza'.<sup>76</sup> Zini, however, went so far as to describe the Russian novelist as a fifth Evangelist because 'la sua riforma rinnova la lotta tra lo spirito del

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<sup>68</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, 'Letteratura italiana o italo-europea?', *La Vita Italiana*, 1 May 1897, 846-852; also Carducci replied to Ojetti – see Giosuè Carducci, 'Mosche cocchiere', *La Vita Italiana*, 16 March 1897, 577-585 – and Ojetti responded to him with another article – see Ugo Ojetti 'La cenciata di Giosuè Carducci', *Il Marzocco*, 28 March 1897.

<sup>69</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei (Verismo, Simbolismo, Idealismo, Cosmopolitismo) ed altri saggi di critica letteraria ed artistica* (Catania: Giannotta, 1898), p. 24.

<sup>70</sup> Capuana, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp. 23, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Capuana, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Capuana, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> Domenico Oliva, 'La letteratura italiana', *Corriere della Sera*, 13-14 September 1896 reprinted in *La critica letteraria e il Corriere della Sera (1876-1945)*, ed. by Bruno Pischedda, vol. I (Milan: Fondazione Corriere della Sera, 2011), pp. 343-351 (p. 351).

<sup>74</sup> Eugene-Melchior de Vogüé, 'La renaissance latine – Gabriel D'Annunzio: Poèmes et romans', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 January 1895, 187-206 (p. 206); de Vogüé refers to Jules Lemaitre, 'De l'influence récente des littératures du Nord', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 December 1894. On D'Annunzio and the Latin Renaissance, see Giovanni Gullace, *D'Annunzio in France* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 13-25.

<sup>75</sup> Ettore Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstói e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', in Leone Tolstói, *Resurrezione – Romanzo tradotto dal russo da Sofia Puritz ed Ettore Fabietti con prefazione di Ettore Fabietti. Edizione completa* (Florence: Salani, 1901), pp. 7-24 (p. 21). First presented as 'Tolstói e la rinascenza ideale' (Society Gaetana Agnesi, 30 April 1901).

<sup>76</sup> Zini, 'Leo Tolstói e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo', p. 472.

vecchio Testamento e del nuovo'.<sup>77</sup>

The Gospels were, of course, crucial to not only Tolstoy's essays, but also to his fiction, especially in the latter stage of his career. *Resurrection*, his last novel, invokes the Gospel from its first page and an early draft opened with *John*, 11: 25, 'I am the resurrection and the life' as the opening sentence. This verse was replaced in later drafts with four different verses from the Gospels on the qualities of a good Christian: forgiveness and humility.<sup>78</sup> These qualities are praised throughout the narrative that culminates in the last pages with the protagonist's reflection on the Sermon of the Mount, when Prince Nekhlyudov reads *Matthew* 18: 21–27<sup>79</sup> and claims that the actualization of the Sermon's precepts would have created 'un'umanità affatto nuova'.<sup>80</sup>

The centrality of the Gospels to Tolstoy's project was clear to any reader with the exceptionally faithful, three-volume Italian edition of *Resurrection* edited by the Treves brothers.<sup>81</sup> The Treves' choice of paratext not only includes the four quotations from the Gospels in the opening page of the first chapter of the first volume, as one might expect, but also incorporates them into the frontispieces of the second and third volumes. By displaying the four quotations in a position of prominence next to both the work's title and translator, the Italian editors encouraged every reader to consider the continuity between the novel and Tolstoy's theoretical reflection about the Holy Scriptures. Italian readers familiar with Tolstoy also would have been aware of his stance, expressed in *Les Évangiles*, that the Gospels should be interpreted and appreciated for their messages, without overloading them with doctrinal additions. Alongside *Les Évangiles*, Tolstoy discussed religion in many of his other works which reached Italy: both *Ma confession* and *Ma religion* circulated in Italy as French translations; the essay *Il regno di Dio è in voi*, although censored in Russia, was translated into French and Italian, and caused a great stir.<sup>82</sup>

When reviewing *Resurrezione*, Italian critics openly compare Tolstoy's final novel to his previous works and draw attention to the increasingly evangelical nature of his

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<sup>77</sup> Zini, 'Leo Tolstoj e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo', pp. 473-474.

<sup>78</sup> The first version of the exergue was from *John* 11: 25–6; the second version bears extracts from *Matthew* 18:21 and 7:3; *John* 8:7; *Luke* 6:40.

<sup>79</sup> The same verses prominently appeared on the front page of volumes II and III of the Italian translation.

<sup>80</sup> Tolstoj, *Resurrezione. Romanzo di Leone Tolstoj – Traduzione di Nina Romanowsky sul manoscritto russo autorizzata dall'autore* (Milan: Treves, 1900), 'parte terza', p. 135.

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Tolstoy authorized the translation himself. This is stressed both in the 'Avvertenza', at the beginning of the first part, and in the 'Avvertenza degli editori' that opens the third part of the translation, where the editors vaunt the superiority of the Italian translation over the American, French, German, and Russian editions (*Resurrezione*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, 'parte terza', p. vi).

<sup>82</sup> Léon Tolstoï, *Les Évangiles – Traduits du russe par T. de Wyzewa et G. Art* (Paris: Perrin, 1896 [2nd edn]); *Ma confession* (Paris: Savine, 1887); *Ma religion* (Paris: Fishbacher, 1885); *Il regno di Dio è in voi – Traduzione di Sofia Behr autorizzata dall'autore con ritratto* (Turin: Bocca, 1894).

writing. For instance, in *Il Marzocco*, Angiolo Orvieto compares *Resurrection* to *Il regno di Dio*, claiming that Tolstoy has put ‘tutto il fuoco della sua anima d’apostolo’<sup>83</sup> into the newer work and suggesting that: “La salvezza è in voi”, geniale e tremenda critica della società moderna giudicata alla luce della più pura dottrina evangelica, è l’esposizione teorica di quegli stessi principî, che nella *Resurrezione* s’incarnano in una stupenda opera d’arte’.<sup>84</sup> Dino Mantovani, instead interprets *Resurrection* as the culmination of ‘Tolstoi apostolo’<sup>85</sup> who first emerges in *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*. Mantovani describes Tolstoy as an apostle operating on many fronts and professing an ‘apostolato morale, politico, artistico’.<sup>86</sup> Here, we hear echoes of Chiappelli seeing Tolstoy’s work as ‘un nuovo evangelio della società e della vita’.<sup>87</sup>

Zola also elicited praise in Italian periodicals for an advocacy that some described as an ‘apostolato’ as, for example, in the case of Capra Boscarini in *Zola. Lo scrittore in raffronto all’apostolato civile* (1899),<sup>88</sup> or a critic using the pseudonym L’Italico who described *Fécondité* as ‘un tentativo di apostolato umano e sociale’.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Ugo Tombesi argued that France might be emitting not only ‘fasci di luce intellettuale’, but also ‘pionieri di nuove idee, apostoli di giustizia e di libertà’.<sup>90</sup>

A new version of the Word updated for a modern society was precisely the project that Zola had in mind when he conceived *Fécondité*, the first of four works that comprise the four-novel-series, *Four Gospels*. The *Four Gospels* are presented as a sequel to *The Three Cities* (*Lourdes, Rome, and Paris*), a cycle about Abbot Pierre Froment’s religious crisis. In the third novel, Pierre abandons the priesthood and marries a woman named Marie, who gives birth to a child named Jean. In *Fécondité*, the reader learns that Marie bore three other children: Mathieu, Marc, and Luc. Such critics as Ernesto Masi devoted much attention to the symbolism of these names. In his article, which appeared in the same issue of the *Nuova Antologia* as Chiappelli’s ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, Masi correctly speculates that Marc, Luc, and Jean would feature in the following books of the *Quatre Évangiles* cycle.<sup>91</sup> L’Italico goes so far as to entitle his

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<sup>83</sup> Angiolo Orvieto, ‘Resurrezione’, *Il Marzocco*, 28 January 1900. This review was included in the preface to the third part of *Resurrection*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, pp. xii-xv (p. xiv).

<sup>84</sup> Orvieto, ‘Resurrezione’, p. xv.

<sup>85</sup> Dino Mantovani’s review (untitled) is in Tolstoi, *Resurrezione*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, pp. VII-XII (p. VIII).

<sup>86</sup> Mantovani’s review (untitled) in Tolstoi, *Resurrezione*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, p. viii.

<sup>87</sup> Chiappelli, ‘Sul confine dei due secoli’, p. 632.

<sup>88</sup> Giulio Capra Boscarini, *Il misticismo nella scienza: Zola. Lo scrittore in raffronto all’apostolato civile. Johanna ambrosius. Conferenze* (Catania: Tip. Edit. S. Di Mattei, 1899).

<sup>89</sup> L’Italico [Primo Levi], ‘La Santa Legge. Les quatre évangiles. – Fécondité, par Émile Zola’, *Rivista Politica e Letteraria*, 1 November 1899, 109-120 (p. 111).

<sup>90</sup> Ugo Tombesi, ‘Emilio Zola e la moderna Demografia’, *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 March 1900, 129-132 (p. 129).

<sup>91</sup> Luc is the protagonist of *Travail*; Marc of *Vérité*.

review of *Fécondité* for the *Rivista Politica e Letteraria*, 'La Santa Legge' and summarizes the novel as 'un libro biblico'.<sup>92</sup> L'Italico underlines that Zola's 'libro biblico' relates more to the Old Testament than to the New, despite Zola's description of *Fécondité* as *évangile*. L'Italico highlights several parallels to substantiate his point: first, Mathieu and Marianne have twelve children, the same number as Jacob; second, *Fécondité* employs a number of such Old Testament literary forms, like eulogies of the patriarchs and glorifications of the Promised Land; third, Zola repeats several times phrases that act as a refrain, a stylistic feature of Biblical language. Ugo Ojetti also emphasizes these same connections and draws the readers' attention to specific stylistic choices like how 'À Chantebled, Mathieu et Marianne fondaient, créaient, enfantaient' works as a 'versetto biblico'.<sup>93</sup> Contemporary scholars continue to examine how Zola's Biblical style allowed him to 'openly pose as the Messiah of the twentieth century'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, in the 1990s Cosset remarked that the protagonists of the *Évangiles* are such 'êtres providentiels'<sup>95</sup> endowed with a universal mission that they might impact all new generations.

In this respect, it should be remembered that Zola called for the coming of a long-awaited messiah in an earlier work, *Le Docteur Pascal* (1893), where such themes as fecundity, motherhood, and regeneration – crucial in *Fécondité* – played important roles. In the very last pages of this last volume of the Rougon-Macquart series, the author describes a 'messie que le prochain siècle attendait, qui tirerait les peuples [...] de leur souffrance [...] bâtirait la cité de justice, où l'unique loi du travail assurerait le bonheur'.<sup>96</sup> The birth of this *enfant inconnu*, the son of the eponymous Doctor Pascal and of Clotilde Rougon, epitomizes the hope that the Rougon-Macquart family might finally be regenerated after years and years of hereditary diseases. Zola's use of the image of Clotilde breastfeeding her child, in the novel's final scene, emblematically serves this purpose by emphatically presenting Clotilde as the 'embodiment of a regenerative motherhood'.<sup>97</sup> This longing for renovation contrasts with the 'fine di secolo, accasciata, snervata dallo spaventevole cumulo di conoscenze nuove che ha

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<sup>92</sup> L'Italico, 'La Santa Legge', pp. 109, 110.

<sup>93</sup> Ugo Ojetti, 'Fecondità', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 5 November 1899.

<sup>94</sup> F. W. J. Hemmings, *Émile Zola* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 294.

<sup>95</sup> Evelyne Cosset, 'Réflexions sur la problématique du nom propre dans les *Quatre Évangiles* d'Émile Zola', *Nineteenth Century French Studies*, 21.1-2 (Autumn–Winter 1992–1993), 142–148 (p. 147); see also Evelyne Cosset, *Les quatre évangiles d'Émile Zola: espace, temps, personnages* (Geneva: Droz, 1990).

<sup>96</sup> Émile Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier (Charpentier et Fasquelle éditeurs), 1893), p. 389.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of degeneration: a European disorder, c.1848–c.1918* (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 82.

smosse'<sup>98</sup> at the core of much of the scientific literature of the time. It also engaged with such texts as Morel's *Traité des Dégénérescences* (1857) and the controversial Nordau's *Degeneration*. Zola's *Le Doctor Pascal* and the second volume of Nordau's *Degeneration* were both published in Italian in 1894. In the second volume of *Degeneration*, Nordau devotes a long chapter to what he calls 'Zolismo', that is, Zola and his school. It is interesting to note that Nordau argues that 'Zola e il suo verismo sono l'equivalente francese di Schopenhauer e del suo pessimismo filosofico'.<sup>99</sup> To be clear, this means that in the very same year that Italian readers were reading Nordau accusing Zola of being a Schopenhauerian pessimist, Zola was offering, instead, a confident and forward-looking message in the final scene of his last novel of the Rougon-Macquart cycle. Moreover, Nordau was proved wrong a few years later, in 1896, when Zola explicitly distanced himself from Schopenhauer for having made it such that 'donner la vie à un être devient un crime'.<sup>100</sup> The contrast between the message conveyed by Zola himself and the way Nordau summarized it is striking and yet Nordau's *Degeneration* was held responsible for a certain popularized version of Zola's oeuvre.

In *Degeneration*, Nordau launches equally harsh criticisms at Tolstoy and Ibsen in the chapters 'Tolstoism' and 'Ibsenism', accusing them of fostering the degenerative *mal du siècle*, and excluding them from the 'Therapeutics' to the *fin-de-siècle* illness, which he offered at the end of his two-volume treatise (Book V, chapter II). The close reading of the reviews and articles of these works by Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Zola, however, shows that many Italian readers went beyond Nordau's popularized reading of the three authors' works and were also able to identify many commonalities between the projects envisaged by Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Zola, despite the rare mutual appraisals of the three authors.<sup>101</sup> It also shows that not all Italian critics read Zola, Tolstoy, and Ibsen

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<sup>98</sup> Émile Zola, *Il dottor Pascal*, vol. I (Milan: Treves, 1894), p. 117.

<sup>99</sup> Max Nordau, *Degenerazione - Versione autorizzata sulla prima edizione tedesca per G. Oberosler*, vol. II (Milan: Dumolard, 1894), p. 476.

<sup>100</sup> Émile Zola, 'Dépopulation', *Le Figaro*, 23 May 1896.

<sup>101</sup> In *What is Art?* (1897) Tolstoy harshly criticized his French and Norwegian colleagues. In his *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) and *On the sexual question* (1901), Tolstoy stood in strict opposition to Zola's celebration of fecundity because, as the critic and political Giustino Fortunato pointed out, one of the fundamental principles of the 'nuove tavole della legge' prompted by the Russian author was precisely 'non desiderare di aver prole' (Giustino Fortunato's synthesis is transmitted by Raffaele Garofalo in his review "'Risurrezione" di Tolstoi', *Flegrea*, 3 (1900), 185-210 (p. 187)). Neither did Tolstoy appreciate Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, according to the Italian daily newspaper *La Stampa* which quoted the Russian novelist as saying, 'Quando ci sveglieremo di fra i morti [...] a me è parso il discorso di un pazzo [...] pazzia di decadente' ([unsigned] 'Un aspro giudizio di Tolstoi sull'ultimo lavoro di Ibsen', *La Stampa* (31 January 1900)). The same contrast was voiced by an anonymous reviewer in the *Nuova Antologia* who emphasized the antagonism existing between Tolstoy and Ibsen: 'Ibsen for ever! Il piccolo e arcigno uomo del Nord [...] riempie di sé il mondo, come il suo collega e antagonista d'idee Tolstoi' ([Unsigned] 'Tra Libri e Riviste: Enrico Ibsen', *Nuova Antologia*, 1 May 1902, 153-158 (p. 153)). Similarly, Zola only thought highly of Tolstoy's early works (on Zola's criticism of

through Nordau's perspective, despite the considerable success of Nordau's book. This evidence challenges the widespread assumption that the 'effetto Nordau' on the Italian public was pervasive and somehow uncontested. Indeed, critics like Chiappelli, L'Italico, Mangano, and the many others we have referred to, saw in Tolstoy, Zola, and Ibsen the best *theraputists* to the *fin-de-siècle* illness, precisely the opposite of what Nordau claimed. They interpreted these works as sharing a common goal in opposition to Nordau's gloomy visions of a forthcoming 'Dusk of the Nations'.

#### 6.4 Ascensions and resurrections: forms of regeneration at the turn of the century

Tolstoy's and Ibsen's ideas of regeneration crossed Russian and Scandinavian borders and were adapted by other nations. In Italy, as Salomoni has pointed out, Tolstoy's essays and novels, especially *Resurrection*, were used by both socialists and Catholics alike.<sup>102</sup> Just as Fabietti is a glaring example of the reception of Tolstoy in the socialist milieu, Mangano's conference speech too offers an intriguing case study. On the one hand, Mangano's message is deeply rooted in Catholicism. On the other hand, it assembles an eclectic combination of progressive views. Mangano concludes his speech by claiming:

E noi contiamo metter la civiltà nostra sulla luminosa via di quelle ascensioni umane, per le quali l'uomo si eleva e con passo sicuro si avvanza sull'erta aspra e scoscesa di quell'Etna simbolico [...] purificato da nevi immacolate, e nel nostro cammino [...] al profumo inebriante delle ginestre [...] si unirà il zeffiro [...] che suona [...] inno sublime [...] auspicante i trionfi veri del progresso dell'uomo.<sup>103</sup>

The syntagm 'ascensioni umane' here certainly refers to *Ascensioni umane* by Fogazzaro, who had reinterpreted the Christian myth ascension with evolutionistic

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Tolstoy's in the 1890s, see F. W. J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel in France (1884–1914)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) and David Baguley, *Fécondité d'Émile Zola* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 50-53). Indeed, the French novelist described himself as 'pas septentrional pour deux sous, latin dans le cœur et dans le cerveau' (Émile Zola, *Les Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mitterand, vol. XIV (Paris: Le cercle du livre précieux, 1969), p. 725).

<sup>102</sup> Salomoni, *Il pensiero religioso e politico di Tolstoj in Italia*, pp. 125, 229-238. The socialist periodical *Avanti!* published the first Italian translation of *Resurrezione* in the form of *feuilleton* and then as a volume that was part of a book series sponsored by the periodical: Leone Tolstoj, *Resurrezione*, trans. by Augusto Carelli (Rome: Tipografia dell'*Avanti!*, 1899). This translation was, however, not based on the original text, but on a Russian edition strongly modified by tsarist censorship.

<sup>103</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 49.

theories in an effort to bridge the divide between religion and science.<sup>104</sup> Fogazzaro's text circulated widely and quickly became a common reference in debates about decadence and progress.<sup>105</sup> In the above-quoted passage, Mangano juxtaposes Fogazzaro's stance with a gloomier vision of the future, one epitomized by Leopardi's poem *La Ginestra*, which he implicitly evokes with the reference to 'brooms'. Mangano wittily changes the setting by referring to a broom growing, not on Vesuvius, as in Leopardi's poem, but rather on Sicily's Mt. Etna (Mangano was Sicilian). By undermining Leopardi's criticism of the 'magnifiche sorti e progressive', Mangano placed his own trust in 'i trionfi veri del progresso dell'uomo'. This progress-oriented view is represented by the image of a man confidently climbing up an 'Etna simbolico [...] purificato da nevi immacolate'.

This way of visualizing 'human ascensions' is particularly interesting for how it echoes Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken*, wherein two out of three acts (II and III) occur as the main characters scale a snow-topped mountain. It is likely that while listening to Mangano's speech, many of the Italian public would remember Irene's words to Rubek: 'Va piuttosto in montagna ... più in alto che puoi; più in alto ... sempre più in alto'.<sup>106</sup> The action of climbing a mountain plays a major role in Ibsen's plot, as highlighted by Cesare De Lollis, who wrote the first Italian review of *When We Dead Awaken* shortly after its original publication in Dano-Norwegian and in French and German translations, indeed, even before the world première on 26 January 1900. The timeliness of this review reflects Italian public's great interest in Ibsen.<sup>107</sup> De Lollis underscores the symbolic opposition between high and low that runs throughout the play from its outset, when Maja complains that her husband, Rubek, had long promised

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<sup>104</sup> See Stefano Bertani, *L'ascensione della modernità. Antonio Fogazzaro tra santità ed evoluzionismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006) and *Antonio Fogazzaro e il modernismo*, ed. by Paolo Marangon (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 2003).

<sup>105</sup> This same passage was also referenced in Pascoli, *L'Èra nuova*, as we have seen, and in Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli'. Chiappelli agrees with Fogazzaro and describes the progress made at the end of the nineteenth century as 'un passo nuovo nella via delle grandi ascensioni umane', and praises the 'linea ascendente' (Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 629) that mankind has embarked upon.

<sup>106</sup> Enrico Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo – Epilogo drammatico in tre atti, versione autorizzata di Mario Buzzi* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1902), p. 32. Prior to this edition, another Italian translation by Piero Ottolini (see note number 102 for more details) was published. In 'Sul confine dei due secoli' Chiappelli quotes Ibsen's play with the title *Quando noi resuscitiamo*, however, there is no evidence of a publication with this title; it is likely that Chiappelli recalled the title incorrectly. Such a mistake is telling in that it exemplifies just how central resurrection was to his and others' readings of the text.

<sup>107</sup> The *Nuova Antologia* contributed to the 'process of Ibsen's *littérisation* in the Italian literary field' (Giuliano D'Amico, *Domesticating Ibsen for Italy* (Bari: Edizioni-dipagina, 2013), p. 283). Indeed, the very first Italian essay devoted to Ibsen appeared in this periodical and was penned by Giuseppe Chiarini who commented on a recently published biography of Ibsen by Heinrich Zschalig in his 'Rassegna delle letterature straniere', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 February 1891, 767-789 (pp. 773-786).

to take her to the top of a mountain to admire the beauty of life: ‘Tu mi dicesti di volermi condurre su un altissimo monte per mostrarmi tutte le meraviglie della terra’,<sup>108</sup> Maja recalls, but Rubek harshly replies, ‘[non sei fatta per le ascensioni sui monti].’<sup>109</sup> In the second act, it appears that Rubek made the same promise to another woman, with whom he does eventually ascend the mountain. This is not his wife, but Irene, the model for his famed sculpture ‘The Resurrection Day’, after which Ibsen had originally named his play.<sup>110</sup> Despite Ibsen having eventually renounced the word ‘resurrection’, he retained the idea of returning to life in his final title *When We Dead Awaken* (*Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, in the Italian translation). Rubek climbs up the mountain with Irene and this ascension feels like a coming back to life after having being dead for a long time. Irene claims, ‘quando noi, morti, ci destiamo! [...] Ci accorgiamo di non aver mai vissuto!’.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, when working on his sculpture *Il Giorno della Resurrezione*, Rubek thought of Irene as ‘risorta’,<sup>112</sup> ‘trasfigurata’,<sup>113</sup> ‘la resurrezione personificata’,<sup>114</sup> a woman coming back to life after being ‘sepolta [...] sui campi della morte’<sup>115</sup> and lying in the ‘sonno della morte’<sup>116</sup> in the ‘regno dei morti’.<sup>117</sup> While Rubek and Irene are ascending the mountain, they are told that they are risking their lives on a dangerous path, but Rubek confidently replies: ‘Malgrado ciò, noi abbiamo tentato l’ascensione’.<sup>118</sup> In the play, two parallel ascensions take place, the one featuring Rubek, the other Maja. Rubek’s ascension starts off after he finally declared his love for Irene, whereas it begins concomitantly for Maja when she is freed from the ties of a dissatisfying marriage and fulfils her husband’s unkept promise to scale a mountain. In his introduction to this ‘dramma simbolico’, the Italian translator Ottolini claims that the ‘ideale grandioso di felicità’ is symbolized ‘nello sguardo alle gioie della vita dall’alto della montagna’.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the storyline’s focus on but a few characters, De Lollis stresses that the play depicts an ‘elevazione morale’ and ‘redenzione sociale’, both of an individual and a

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<sup>108</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 12.

<sup>109</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 13.

<sup>110</sup> See Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts. A Public enemy. When we dead wake*, trans. by Peter Watts (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 298 and Henrik Ibsen, *Opere teatrali (1882–1899)*, ed. by Alfild Motzfeldt Tidemand-Johannessen, with an introduction by Francis Bull (Milan: Mursia, 1962–1986), p. 748.

<sup>111</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 63.

<sup>112</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, pp. 30, 48.

<sup>113</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 48.

<sup>114</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 47.

<sup>115</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, pp. 30, 31.

<sup>117</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 28.

<sup>118</sup> Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 73.

<sup>119</sup> Piero Ottolini, ‘Prefazione’, in *Quando noi morti ci destiamo – Epilogo drammatico in tre atti*, trans. by Piero Ottolini (Milan: La Poligrafica, 1900), pp. ix–xviii (pp. xiv, xiii).

society.<sup>120</sup> De Lollis indeed presents this as a double perspective that constitutes the most important difference between Ibsen's play and D'Annunzio's *La Gioconda*. The two texts share many similarities, and both are about sculptors (Rubek and Lucio Settala) and their models (Irene and Gioconda). According to De Lollis, however, D'Annunzio glorifies 'l'"idea" estetica',<sup>121</sup> whereas Ibsen emphasizes a moral one. Ibsen offers 'un riformatore del viver sociale',<sup>122</sup> whereas Settala 'non volle fare e non fece che opera di bellezza'.<sup>123</sup>

Discontent with D'Annunzio's work had been voiced a year earlier, before the publication of *La Gioconda*, by Olindo Malagodi in an article entitled 'Il Vangelo della Bellezza'. Malagodi's analysis of D'Annunzio's work compares Italian and foreign literatures, with explicit references to Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Zola: 'il D'Annunzio, non saprei se per nostra fortuna o per disgrazia, è diventato il rappresentante dell'Italia letteraria all'estero; come il Tolstoj è della Russia, l'Ibsen della Norvegia, lo Zola della Francia'.<sup>124</sup> D'Annunzio's 'Vangelo' is different, however, because it is a 'Vangelo della Bellezza'. Malagodi laments that this cult of beauty, which de Vogüé describes as characteristic of the 'Renaissance Latine', as leading not to a form of rebirth, but rather death, as exemplified by D'Annunzio latest novels: 'in questi tre libri [il *Piacere*, l'*Innocente*, e il *Trionfo della morte*] è espresso egualmente il culto della bellezza, del senso, del piacere; e in tutti tre i frutti lugubri della sensualità, del piacere, del culto esclusivo della bellezza sono: il disgusto, la dissoluzione e la morte'.<sup>125</sup> Malagodi's words are emblematic of the reasons why many detected limits in the 'Renaissance latine' that de Vogüé identified with D'Annunzio. *When We Dead Awaken* might at first glance not appear as part of this trend of regeneration. Death is indeed as equally present in Ibsen's play as in D'Annunzio's work. *When We Dead Awaken* ends with the double death of Rubek and Irene, who continued their climb despite having been warned of the dangers of an imminent storm and avalanche. Moreover, in Ibsen's text, as well as in D'Annunzio's play, much emphasis is placed on the discussion about artistic ideals.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, many Italians agreed with De Lollis's identification of a

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<sup>120</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 313.

<sup>121</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 314.

<sup>122</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 314.

<sup>123</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 315.

<sup>124</sup> Olindo Malagodi, 'Il Vangelo della Bellezza', *La Vita Internazionale*, 5 June 1898, 327-329 (p. 327).

<sup>125</sup> Malagodi, 'Il Vangelo della Bellezza', 328. On the motif of death in D'Annunzio's oeuvre, see Härmänmaa, 'The Seduction of Thanatos: Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Decadent Death'.

<sup>126</sup> Rubek and Irene often talk about what being an artist and being a model entails, what it means to give birth to a new life that is subsequently immortalized and then 'buried' in a museum. Irene refers to the statue 'The Resurrection Day' as 'la nostra creatura, il nostro bambino, il mio e il tuo!' (Ibsen, *Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo*, p. 51) and compares museums to

key difference between Ibsen's and D'Annunzio's plays with regard to the ideals prompted herein because Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* goes far beyond the literal meaning of Rubek's discourse about the 'ideali d'arte'.<sup>127</sup> According to De Lollis, in Ibsen's play, there are social ideals behind the artistic: 'intendi fuori simbolo: ideali sociali'.<sup>128</sup> The critic argues that, in *When We Dead Awaken*, art is a symbol and that Ibsen criticizes contemporary society at large through the character of Rubek who, not unlike Rosmer (the protagonist of *Rosmersholm*) and Solness (*The Master Builder*), is described as pondering a 'programma rivoluzionario'.<sup>129</sup> Rubek aims to build a new society living a new life ('società nuova' and 'nuova vita').<sup>130</sup> The literary critic Arcari likewise identifies a major difference between the 'simbolismo nordico' and the Symbolism by 'nostri esteti latini', embodied by the 'decadentismo dannunziano'. The first is described as an authentic means of expressing complex conceptualizations, whereas the latter is considered an 'oscurità ricercata ed assunta per celare la meschinità del concetto primitivo'. Arcari uses *La Gioconda* as an example of how Italian literature conveys the message that 'l'artista può, anzi deve, spezzare ogni principio morale'.<sup>131</sup> This opposition between Nordic and Latin writers is in quite sharp terms, and his praise for the former is as strong as his contempt for the latter: the influential Latin (Italian) playwright, D'Annunzio, is criticized as 'vuoto' and 'sterile'.<sup>132</sup> Arcari also remarks that Ibsen fosters 'la morale d'una società nuova'<sup>133</sup> through his character Rubek, whose 'statua rigeneratrice'<sup>134</sup> 'vuol far opera di rigenerazione umana'.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, Mangano as well flags how Ibsen promotes 'una Società Nuova',<sup>136</sup> alongside an individual and social regeneration.

Prompting a renewal of society was also Tolstoy's aim, as emphasized by Garofalo in his 1900 review of *Resurrection*, where he emphasizes that 'l'interesse concentrato su quelle due figure umane [Nekhludov e la Maslova], si estende a tutta intera la società' and 'il risveglio dell'anima di Nekhludov ha per effetto il suo sacrificio

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'sepolcri' (p. 52); as a matter of fact, when talking about visiting the museum where the sculpture for which she posed as a model is stored, she says: 'Voglio andare in pellegrinaggio nel luogo dove sono sepolti la mia anima ed il bambino della mia anima' (p. 52).

<sup>127</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 313.

<sup>128</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 313.

<sup>129</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 312.

<sup>130</sup> De Lollis, 'Il nuovo dramma d'Ibsen', p. 313.

<sup>131</sup> All quotations are from Arcari, "Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo" di Enrico Ibsen', p. 211.

<sup>132</sup> Arcari, "Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo" di Enrico Ibsen' in Paolo Arcari, *Alle soglie del secolo. Problemi d'anime e d'arte* (Milan: Libreria Editrice Nazionale, 1902), pp. 199-212 (p. 211).

<sup>133</sup> Arcari, "Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo" di Enrico Ibsen', p. 200.

<sup>134</sup> Arcari, "Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo" di Enrico Ibsen', p. 208.

<sup>135</sup> Arcari, "Quando noi, morti, ci destiamo" di Enrico Ibsen', p. 206.

<sup>136</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 35.

all'intera umanità'.<sup>137</sup> It is precisely the motif of 'risveglio' that Ibsen's play and Tolstoy's novel share. In both texts, an awakening is the consequence of the same plot strategy: a man has made a woman deeply unhappy because of his actions; both couples meet and recognize each other by chance (Nekhlyudov met with Katusha in tribunal; Rubek with Irene in a spa); both couples undergo a process of *ascension* that is both spiritual and physical (Nekhlyudov goes up North to Siberia following the convoy of convicts of which Katusha is a member; Rubek and Irene scale a mountain together). In Tolstoy's novel, the Ascension has also a religious meaning flagged by the timing of Nekhlyudov and Katusha's first kiss on Ascension Day.<sup>138</sup>

Ibsen's play and Tolstoy's texts also share the motif of resurrection. Indeed, in Tolstoy's novel this is more than just a title, but also a turning point in the story. The paschal paradigm punctuates Tolstoy's entire novel from the first page's description of the power of nature in spring. Tolstoy describes both a real spring and a metaphoric spring, as highlighted by Fabietti, who comments on the 'rinascenza ideale' to take place in a 'primavera ideale'.<sup>139</sup> It is significant that it is precisely in this moment, when nature awakens, that the innocent Katusha stands trial and is condemned, an event which recalls the unjust trial of Christ preceding his crucifixion. The paschal timing is critical to Katusha and Nekhlyudov's next encounter. They meet again precisely at Easter mass three years after that first kiss on Ascension Day. On this occasion, they kiss once more, although this time the kiss is part of the traditional paschal greeting in Russia, where people kiss each other and say 'Cristo è risorto!' and 'In verità, è risorto'<sup>140</sup>). On Easter night, Nekhlyudov breaks into Katusha's room and changes her life forever. Paradoxically, in *Resurrection*, the day of resurrection is not a time of ascension, but of fall that only in the longer term leads to an authentic rebirth for both Nekhlyudov and Katusha. In *Confession*, Tolstoy expresses frustration that in Russian 'Sunday' is 'voskresenje', directly translated as 'Resurrection', when he believes that the resurrection of the body is devoid of truth. Tolstoy's own understanding of resurrection in his novel is manifold (indeed there are multiple resurrections) and it takes place in this world and not the next.

As we have shown, the paschal paradigm evident in Leo XIII's 1900 Jubilee bull is also present in *Fécondité*, *Resurrection*, and *When We Dead Awaken*, despite their

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<sup>137</sup> Raffaele Garofalo in his review "Risurrezione" di Tolstói', p. 195.

<sup>138</sup> Tolstói, *Resurrezione*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, 'parte prima', pp. 63-64.

<sup>139</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstói e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 18.

<sup>140</sup> Tolstói, *Resurrezione*, trans. by Nina Romanowsky, 'parte prima', p. 81. With regard to the importance attached to the celebration of the Passion and of the Resurrection of Christ in the Russian tradition, see Guglielmo Guariglia, *Il messianismo russo* (Rome: Universale Studium, 1956), pp. 52-54.

respective authors having all had tense relations with religious authorities. Indeed, Zola's novel *Lourdes* was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books; Tolstoy was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901 and Ibsen did not spare sharp observations concerning religion in many of his plays. Yet, rebirth is transversal to the three texts analysed here which were regarded as the 'Vangeli' of the dying century. They appear as lay versions of the 1900 papal *carmen saeculare* in their own way because they are all equally 'properante[s] ad exitum saeculo' at the end of a century holding the promise of a bright future.

In his introduction to *Resurrection*, Fabietti compares the fearful crowds waiting for 'la prima alba del millennio, di cui le sette trombe apocalittiche dovevano suonar la diana terribile' with a *fin-de-siècle* society awaiting that 'il secolo nuovo dia un nuovo codice morale all'umanità'.<sup>141</sup> He argues that society expects this new moral code from people like Tolstoy, portrayed as a judge sitting 'sul culmine di due secoli':<sup>142</sup> 'ritto sul culmine di due secoli, con la maestà di giudice e di giustiziere, nell'atto di lanciare una parola di condanna inesorabile a quello che s'inabissa nella voragine del tempo e d'indicare a quello che sorge le vie dell'umana redenzione'.<sup>143</sup> Fabietti depicts Tolstoy as a biblical prophet opening the '*novus ordo*'<sup>144</sup> and lighting the way for others: 'per illuminare il mondo ch'è giunto al termine d'una via e deve sceglierne un'altra'.<sup>145</sup> The crisis of the end of the nineteenth century is also depicted as extreme in Mangano's description of Tolstoy's work: 'giammai crisi morale fu più grande, più dolorosa di quella dell'epoca nostra'.<sup>146</sup> Mangano considers the nineteenth century one of the most important epochs in history: 'il secolo XIX rappresenta una delle epoche più tipiche e più importanti nella storia del pensiero, la quale è altresì storia del progresso e della

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<sup>141</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoj e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoj e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 16.

<sup>143</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoj e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 7.

<sup>144</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoj e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 7.

<sup>145</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoj e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 8. The idea that a *new order of things* was imminent to Tolstoy is also evident in his writings following the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 Russian Revolution. 'C'est bien la *fin d'un monde* et le commencement d'un autre' as 'la vie des peuples chrétiens a atteint cette limite qui marque la *fin d'une ère et le commencement d'une autre*' (Léon Tolstoj, *Guerre et révolution. La fin d'un monde – Traduit du russe par E. Halpérine-Kaminsky* (Paris: Fasquelle, Bibliothèque- Charpentier, 1906), p. 128 and p. 125 [emphasis added]). The emphasis on regenerative apocalypse foreshadows the second part of the essay *Guerre et révolution*, significantly titled 'La fin d'un monde', which was also published separately in a book titled *La Fin de Notre Ère – Traduit du manuscrit original par J.-W. Bienstock* (Paris: Bibliothèque indépendante d'édition, 1906), where the previous quotations occur, although in a slightly modified form, on p. 6 and p. 4 respectively. On the reception of Tolstoy's *Guerre et révolution*, especially in Italy, see Roberto Coaloa, 'Lev Tolstoj, tra guerra, pace e rivoluzione. Alla scoperta del profeta di Jasnaja Poljana', in *Lev Tolstoj, Guerra e rivoluzione*, ed. by Roberto Coaloa (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015), pp. 135-157.

<sup>146</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 43.

civiltà'.<sup>147</sup> Such statements confirm Thompson's claim that 'the sense of *fin de siècle* could not evolve until people began to feel that their lives were somehow shaped by the century in which they lived'.<sup>148</sup> The essays, the conference speeches, the articles, and the reviews here examined show that this temporal awareness was widespread among Italians. Indeed, it would seem that Weber's and Thompson's conclusions drawn from French, English, and American sources concerning how many people expected that at the *fin de siècle* the century would be 'mysteriously regenerated by its turn',<sup>149</sup> are even more universal than once thought.

## 6.5 Conclusions: a regeneration wind blowing from abroad

This chapter challenges the claim that *fin-de-siècle* Italian literature was dominated exclusively by Decadent models that lamented the degeneracy and dissolution of society. Contrary to the conclusions drawn from readings and interpretations of Nordau's *Degeneration*, it has shown how, in fact, the century's turn was regarded as a moment with the potential for a much-awaited and hoped-for regeneration, either in the form of an *ascension* (in evolutionary terms) or a resurrection (in moral terms).

In late nineteenth-century Italy, two confronting aspirations of renewal were present: on the one hand, a nationalistic-oriented literary trend; on the other hand, an outward-looking call for regeneration that embraced foreign influences and built upon the motifs of ascension and resurrection presented therein. This chapter investigated the latter to demonstrate how the publication in the years immediately preceding the turn of the century (1899–1900) of three such volumes as *Fécondité*, *Resurrection*, and *When We Dead Awaken*, hailing from such different cultures and yet showing the same preoccupation with how to trigger a rejuvenation of society, had a considerable impact on the Italian public. Two Nordic authors were recognized alongside a Latin writer as offering 'un nuovo evangelio della società e della vita', able to elicit 'una rigenerazione profonda degli animi', as Chiappelli claimed in 1900.<sup>150</sup>

This happened despite nationalistic reactions and the expectations of a 'Latin Renaissance', which critics like de Vogüé believed could be fostered by D'Annunzio's works. As Arcari noted, many of the 'Latin peoples' looked to the North in order to escape D'Annunzio's immorality and his 'Vangelo della Bellezza', which – as Malagodi highlighted – rather than paving the way for a regeneration, was seen as leading to

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<sup>147</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> Damian Thompson, *The End of Time. Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London: Random House, 1999), p. 104.

<sup>149</sup> Thompson, *The End of Time*, p. 104.

<sup>150</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', pp. 632, 634.

dissolution and death.

On the contrary, in order to find 'Vangeli' that could help *fin-de-siècle* society move towards the new century with hope and confidence, Italians often looked beyond their national borders and into the distance, as Borsa remarked: 'Come abbiamo accettato e studiato Wagner così abbiamo accettato e studiato Tolstoi e Ibsen. C'è nella nostra giovane generazione, se non erro, questo desiderio di spingere lo sguardo lontano, magari a traverso l'opera d'arte, per conoscere [...] la vita, il pensiero, l'idealità degli altri popoli, per [...] assimilarne il meglio'.<sup>151</sup> Borsa felt confident that opening up national barriers would enrich Italian culture; hence, he called for more translations. The same point of view was adopted by Zini, who opposed the Latin Renaissance endorsed by de Vogüé and claimed that 'Tolstoi ed Ibsen sono forse i due unici e grandissimi artisti che abbiano penetrato qualche parte di questo mistero'<sup>152</sup> of human nature. Mangano commented along the same lines on the trends characterizing 'the epoch of cosmopolitanism': 'In questa epoca di cosmopolitismo [...], il pensiero slavo [...] acuendo la sensibilità nostra, indebolita nei languori romantici e negli eccessi naturalistici, ci riporta [...] più gagliardo e più vivo il senso della civiltà, il bisogno del progresso'.<sup>153</sup> The wind of regeneration was blowing from the North according to Guido Villa, who wrote in 1900: 'E dal nord ci viene ora il rinnovamento del teatro, ci viene la grandiosa creazione drammatica dell'Ibsen';<sup>154</sup> Ibsen was defined as 'genio nordico' and compared to 'quel possente rinnovatore della letteratura moderna che è Leone Tolstoi'.<sup>155</sup> Fabietti was of the same opinion. Indeed, he saw in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* the main source for a 'rinascenza ideale'.<sup>156</sup>

This trend of thought was the direct continuation of the 'septentrio-manie', which arose in France in the 1870s, and subsequently arrived in Italy, where it continued to exert a strong influence on the culture well into the 1890s. Far from being seen as a cause of degeneration, as Nordau and his followers had claimed, Slavonic and Scandinavian literature were seen as part of the 'therapeutics' – to use Nordau's terms – for *fin-de-siècle* malaise, insofar as they were deemed able to heal moral weakness and foster progress.

This philo-Nordic stance was not mutually exclusive to the rhetoric of Latin degeneration. Italian critics did engage with examples of Southern European literature (namely, French) and identified examples of regeneration in this foreign corpus as well,

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<sup>151</sup> Borsa, *Verso il sole di mezzanotte*, p. 119.

<sup>152</sup> Zini, 'Leo Tolstoi e la letteratura evangelica del XIX secolo', p. 468.

<sup>153</sup> Mangano, *Progresso e Civiltà*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>154</sup> Guido Villa, *I Drammi di Enrico Ibsen* (Bellinzona: Stab. Tip.-Lit. Carlo Salvioni, 1900), p. 20.

<sup>155</sup> Villa, *I Drammi di Enrico Ibsen*, p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> Fabietti, 'Leone Tolstoi e i segni di una rinascenza ideale', p. 5.

indeed Zola's *Fècondité* was considered by many a new 'Gospel' for society. Among the many examples of panegyrics of *Fècondité* that have been analysed here, it is worth recalling the article by the critic L'Italico who, despite his pseudonym, did not support the view of a strictly national literature and openly praised Zola. He believed that with *Fècondité*, the French author created a completely new literary form, different not only from his past works, but also 'da quant'altre [forme] hanno composto il comune patrimonio intellettuale del nostro tempo'.<sup>157</sup> What is most striking about this comment is that Zola's novel is not compared to other works of a specific national literature, but to the vaster 'patrimonio intellettuale del nostro tempo' instead. Such an extensive term of comparison shows that the hope for cultural renovation went well beyond the limited horizon of national boundaries and it aimed at universalism.

Thus, it appears that at the turn of the century the cosmopolitan literature envisaged by Ojetti in his 1896 *L'avvenire della letteratura in Italia* was in the process of actualization: 'l'artista non è più nè italiano, nè francese, nè norvegiano'.<sup>158</sup> Ojetti flagged the importance of French and Norwegian literature precisely to exemplify the North-South literary rivalry which he and others sought to expunge. The reviews, articles, and essays examined in this chapter demonstrate that Ojetti and many others like him opposed the reactionary stances of such authors as Morasso, who dreaded the 'combattenti scesi dal Nord per dare il colpo di grazia all'antico immenso genio latino'.<sup>159</sup> At the dawn of the new century, they believed that artists could be appreciated not for a 'Nordic' or 'Latin' genius, but simply for their 'human' genius, regardless of their nationalities: 'il [...] genio [di un artista] è umano' as 'l'arte è universale'.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> L'Italico, 'La Santa Legge', p. 111.

<sup>158</sup> Ojetti's words as recalled by Capuana who commented on Ojetti's article in his essay 'Idealismo e cosmopolitismo'; cf. Capuana, *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, pp. 9-33 (p. 17).

<sup>159</sup> Morasso, 'Ai nati dopo il 70'.

<sup>160</sup> Ojetti's words as recalled by Capuana in his *Gli 'ismi' contemporanei*, p. 17.

## Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to provide an account of the end-of-the-nineteenth century Italian sensibility. To achieve this objective, we have explored the self-fashioning design of the end of the nineteenth century as 'fin de siècle' and as an epochal turning point, with a specific focus on the characteristic features of the Italian cultural climate in this respect, and, more specifically, we have investigated the circumstances which, in this time lapse, brought about a new time awareness. The turn of the century represented a moment of transition and offered the 'historic' (in the sense of *unique*) opportunity to pause and look both to the past and to the future, which has led to the production of a variety of texts (essays, scientific articles and treatises, literary works – poems, novels and plays –, public presentations, conference speeches, and periodical articles) devoted to this topic. I have selected and grouped these texts, often very different from each other in terms of typology, structure, organisation and cultural orientation, as they all shared the same focus: that is, an assessment of the fin-de-siècle period, of the century as a whole, and of the turn of the century as a *Wendepunkt*.

Despite the focus being on the Italian context, whenever it has been necessary to set out the context within which the Italian discussion was developing, we have drawn abundantly on foreign texts, namely English, French, German, and American, but also Swedish and Russian. The adoption of such a comparative perspective has helped us to point out the connections and the reciprocal influences – sometimes openly declared, while in other occasions indirect or not acknowledged at all – of Italian texts with foreign works. Putting the Italian debate into this wider arena has proven fruitful in two respects: firstly, it has provided evidence in support of the process of 'deprovincialization' of Italy, which was in place in that period and has been explored only partially so far;<sup>1</sup> secondly, it has, at the same time, allowed to identify the specificity of the Italian cultural context with respect to the other countries.

As set out in the Introduction, this thesis has been inspired and informed by the approach suggested by the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*), Reinhart Koselleck's studies, and Stephen Kern's research, jointly adopted under the aegis of Foucaultian 'discursive fields' and Benjamin 'constellations'. The focus has been on a

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<sup>1</sup> I am borrowing the term from Eric Bulson, cf. Eric Bulson, 'Milan, the "Rivista", and the Deprovincialization of Italy: *Le Papyrus* (1894-6); *Poesia* (1905-9); *Il Convegno* (1920-40); *Pan* (1933-5); and *Corrente di vita giovanile* (1938-40), in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. III, ed. by Peter Brooker, Sasha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 511-535.

*concept*, rather than on a single textual typology or on a specific domain. The adoption of such a methodology has led us to take into consideration sources belonging to very different fields.

In order to not make the reader lose sight of the overarching subject and to show the underlying unity connecting the variety of topics and issues which have emerged from the vast array of materials considered in the thesis, I have used Chiappelli's article as a roadmap to help the reader navigate the chapters. Each chapter of the thesis moves from an idea suggested in 'Sul confine dei due secoli' which could be considered representative, insofar as it not only reflects the author's opinion, but also opinions which were widely shared at the time. Chiappelli's essay works simultaneously as a source originating light and a prism through which this light is irradiated in different directions.

In the first chapter we have explored the 'self-awareness' of the century. Through the analysis of this sentiment, we have found that the distress of having been born 'too late or too early' felt by many at the fin de siècle was pervasive and involved the perception of the self as well as that of the community, and that it has been precisely this pervasiveness which has granted a wide diffusion to the notion of 'fin de siècle' and made it a ubiquitous 'narrative' – to speak in Hayden White's terms – throughout the end of the century.

After having explored the theoretical background framing the widespread interest for the turn of the century in the first chapter, in the second chapter we have focused the attention on what the specific objects of debate were. First, we have shown that there was no agreement about the dates marking the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. This question might appear as purely numerical, but it actually mirrors the different views and schools of thought which let emerge the idiosyncrasies of both individuals and nations, as in the case of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who refused to follow arithmetical calculations, and decided to celebrate the start of the twentieth century in 1900, rather than in 1901, to remark the political power of his Empire. Subsequently, we have shown how apocalyptic prognostications about a possible global End, related to comets likely to hit the Earth or to devastating earthquakes, had entered the collective imagery – despite being openly denied by scientists and ecclesiastic institutions alike, a sign that millenarianist expectations resurface at the turn of century, regardless of the level of advancement reached by society. Subsequently, we have then explored the peculiar atmosphere in which the Holy See celebrated the 1900 Jubilee, and investigated the relationship which the death of the two highest authorities in the two respective fields – the King and the Pope –

exerted on the collective consciousness. We have shown how the assassination of King Umberto I, in particular, marked the Italian turn of the century, together with the death, in 1901, of former Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, who had ruled the country in the previous years, until 1896. The historical analysis of the events which unrolled between the early 1890s and the turn of the century has accounted for the complexity of the situation in which Italy welcomed the end of the century by living its own 'crisi di fine secolo'. The level of social tension had started to grow in conjunction with the economic, commercial, and agricultural crisis and with the incautious management of the public finance. The fiscal pressure and the rise of food prices determined the outbreak of social riots across the nation, which were violently stopped from the South to the North and culminated in the repression of the 'moti di Milano' whose memory was still present in publications such as *Fine e principio di secolo* which, while boosting a festive facies on the one hand, on the other presented traces of the trauma of the collective memory (to speak in Alexander's terms), which was still being elaborated, both consciously and unconsciously.

To the advancement in the study of the unconscious, we have devoted the fourth chapter focusing on psychologists who during the fin de siècle contributed to shedding light on still unexplored areas of the human self. The 1900, the so-called 'Great Year', saw the publication of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and his self-positioning as the only and unique pioneer in the field of psychology with regard to the discovery of the unconscious and of a new way of conceiving oneirology studies. We have challenged such a claim, by exploring the studies on dreams carried out by Sante De Sanctis, whose *I Sogni* (1899) and studies on dream did not enjoy the same success as the *Traumdeutung* but which, as we have illustrated, provided groundbreaking contributions in the field of psychopathology and individual psychology.

Psychological and dream studies have impacted the end-of-the-century cultural and literary production, as we have stressed in the fifth chapter, which offers an analysis of D'Annunzio's *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, which has given us the opportunity to bring to light the darkest side of the fin de siècle, in which the belief in meta-empirical and mystical realities merged with fears of degeneration.

We have also shown how the latter were, however, partially opposed by a contrasting rhetoric centred instead on the myth of regeneration. In light of the almost absolute predominance of Decadent motifs in the fin-de-siècle Italian literature, many turned to foreign literature. By relying on Chiappelli's perspective, we have singled out three foreign texts, Zola's novel *Fécondité*, Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, and Ibsen's play *When We Dead Awaken*, and carried out an analysis on the cultural sentiment of the

time which has made evident that Chiappelli's point of view was not isolated. This has enabled us to account for all the components coexisting in the dynamic phase of transition of the fin de siècle.

This dynamism, made of different and sometimes contrasting perspectives, is well exemplified by the following extract, which voices the opinions of periodicals with different political and cultural orientations, which are thus representative of the different ways in which the end-of-the-century time perception was experienced in fin-de-siècle Italy:

I giornali formulano dei giudizi sul [...] secolo. *L'Avanti!* dice che il secolo che si chiude è quello della borghesia. Il secolo ventesimo sarà quello della civiltà proletaria. *L'Osservatore Romano* rimprovera il secolo XIX di aver dimenticato gli insegnamenti di Cristo, ma dice che l'umanità ritroverà nel nuovo secolo il sentiero smarrito. *La Tribuna* dice che il miglior augurio che si possa fare al popolo d'Italia, è che in esso si risvegli l'operosità e la volontà in un modo ed in un grado da armonizzare le idealità con la possibilità, e insieme da tradurre questa nei fatti.<sup>2</sup>

Bourgeoisie versus working class, religion versus laicism, are only two of the oppositions which have characterized the historical course of the nineteenth century, defined by many, Chiappelli included, as an age based on 'polarità di tendenze'.<sup>3</sup>

È un periodo di profonde ed *acute antitesi ideali*, determinate dal contrasto fra l'uomo antico e il nuovo, tra le forme, le credenze, i sentimenti delle generazioni che tramontano, e quelli, ancora incerti e vacillanti, delle altre che salgono all'orizzonte.<sup>4</sup>

These acute 'antitheses' merged and, as a result, produced a critical age of transition, as Chiappelli observed when writing: 'la sua [del secolo] fine, per chi guardi la struttura generale dell'età presente nelle sue linee organiche, ci offre i segni visibili d'una età di transizione'; he also added that this time of transition was 'un'epoca di grande

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<sup>2</sup> [Unsigned] 'Feste ed augurii per il nuovo secolo', *La Stampa*, 1 January 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', *Nuova Antologia*, 16 April 1900, 620-639 (p. 623).

<sup>4</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', p. 622 [my emphasis].

trasformazione'.<sup>5</sup> This stance can be aptly commented by Kermode's observations that there are situations in history when 'the belief that one's own age is transitional between two major periods turns into a belief that the transition itself becomes an age' and, as a response, people elevate an interstitial period to 'an age in its own right'.<sup>6</sup> The turn of the twentieth century became the 'fin de siècle' par excellence, thus definitely an age in its own right, which had its foundation in the 'dixneuviémité'. The 'dixneuviémité' was not just a way to indicate a period, but a state of mind, as Murray has observed,<sup>7</sup> and an 'image-idée', a 'mot-valeur', as Duchet and Toruner have demonstrated.<sup>8</sup> In the present thesis, we have shown how it is possible to extend this concept of 'image-idée' and 'mot-valeur' to the notion of the fin de siècle and, coherently with Duchet and Toruner's observation that this notion worked as a 'concept opératoire soumis à des pratiques discursive hétérogènes',<sup>9</sup> in the present thesis we have aimed to explore all the various and often contrasting aspects relating to the heterogenous discursive practices revolving around the fin-de-siècle awareness.

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<sup>5</sup> Chiappelli, 'Sul confine dei due secoli', pp. 622-623.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 101-102.

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Muray, *Le XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle à travers les âges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999 [1st edn 1984]), pp. 21-127.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Duchet and Isabelle Tournier, 'Le «siècle» dans le siècle', in *L'Invention du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle par lui-même (littérature, histoire, société)*, ed. by Alain Corbin, Pierre Georget, Stéphane Guégan, Stéphane Michaud, Max Milner, and Nicole Savy (Paris: Klincksieck-Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), pp. 61-71 (p. 57).

<sup>9</sup> Duchet and Tournier, 'Le «siècle» dans le siècle', p. 57.

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