Between Medicine and Spiritualism:
The Visible and the Invisible
in Italian Literature 1865-1901

by

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Contents

List of Illustrations

All illustrations included in this thesis are public domain pictures and are taken from the internet.

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Although they are long time dead, I would like to thank Luigi Capuana, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli, and Luigi Pirandello. If I hadn't have read – and liked – their novels and essays first, I wouldn't have decided to devote myself to such a topic.

Since I am at it, I would like to thank the Spirit World as well, that is, the world inhabited by such creatures as ghosts, which substantiate the second chapter of the present work. The nineteenth-century approach, which tried to explain their nature, contributed to make ghosts less 'supernatural' – more familiar – subjected to be seen during séances or to appear onto the written pages of scholars.

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work.

No part of this thesis has been previously published. Although I have already dealt with the Italian literature-science relationship in conference papers or as part of independent research, I never published any article, paper or book that deal with the materials that I tackle here. The reader may find thematic points of contact between the passage in which I discuss Fogazzaro's *Malombra* (in the third chapter) and an article that I published two years ago about the representation of suicide in Italian literature, from which I adapted and re-used a couple of sentences.[1] Despite this, however, the third chapter (which addresses only marginally the suicide topic) differs from the article. Even when it analyses the same novels as those in the article (e.g. Capuana's *Giacinta* and Serao's *Fantasia*), it focuses on different topics, privileges its own specific approach and avoids any blind imitation of the already published work.

This thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree at another university.

Signature of the candidate: _____

Date: 31 August 2015

[1] The sentences in object are those synthesising the plot of Fogazzaro's novel (in particular about Marina's belief to be the reincarnation of Cecilia) and her literary passion for French and English authors, which her uncle considers as full of sentimentalism. See Gabriele Scalessa, 'Representations of suicide in Italian narratives from the 1860s to the early twentieth century', in *Voglio morire! Suicide in Italian Literature, Culture, and Society 1789-1919*, ed. by Paolo L. Bernardini and Anita Virga (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 159-176 (pp. 164-165).

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the revisiting of several scientific theories on the part of Italian authors from 1865-1901, and illustrates how the process of assimilation was the effect of an accommodative process, which resulted in authors re-interpreting these theories in terms of a contrast between a visible and an invisible domain. The first chapter focuses on Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia' and Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo' in order to show how the visible-invisible contrast becomes a hermeneutical grid by which the female body is defined, this body being the field on which medical normativity and the artistic approach meet and come into conflict with each other. The second chapter analyses how the visible-invisible contrast subtends Italian *Spiritismo*, a discipline that was read in scientific terms and (as in Luigi Capuana's writings) as a theory concerning artistic – and literary – creation as well. Since the *Spiritismo* entails a process of 'feminisation' of the medium, which characterises both the 'scientific' and the 'artistic' facet of the discipline, the third chapter investigates the ways in which the female character has been represented as both a physical appearance and an elusive interiority (especially when dealing with the activity of reading) in Italian narrative from Tarchetti's *Fosca* to the early twentieth century. As a conclusion, the fourth chapter retraces the formation of the visible-invisible dichotomy as resulting from the assimilation of European science through the analysis of the figure of the physician in Paolo Mantegazza's *Un giorno a Madera*, Angelo Camillo De Meis's *Dopo la laurea* and Luigi Capuana's re-writing of his novel *Giacinta*. Moving from here, this thesis argues that the visible-invisible dichotomy is peculiar to the time span considered, as the twentieth-century will be distinguished by a general distrust towards – and trivialisation of – positivist science.

Introduction

Aims, objectives and some terminological clarification

In this work, I analyse the manner in which a wide selection of Italian writers from 1865-1901 – Arrigo and Camillo Boito, Paolo Mantegazza, Angelo Camillo De Meis, Igino Ugo Tarchetti, Luigi Capuana, Salvatore Di Giacomo, Federico De Roberto, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Antonio Fogazzaro, Matilde Serao, and Neera – re-elaborated Northern-European scientific topics concerning the representation of the human anatomy and the functioning of the mind, re-interpreting them in terms of a contrast between the visible (intended as the object of empiricist science) and the invisible (considered as the object of art and literature in particular). Such a re-interpretation falls within a general attitude that distinguishes Italian literature between the Unification and the *fin de siècle*, which implies a superiority of the invisible over the visible (in particular, that of literature over science), facilitated by the Catholic background of the country. Connected to these concepts, the accommodation of scientific topics proves to be articulated also in terms of a 'new-traditional' contrast, based on the attempt at reconciling the 'novelty' of Northern-European scientific theories with a cultural tradition that refers to Italian literature of the origins (thirteenth and fourteenth-century poetry), as well as with a 'local' thought (identifiable with Giambattista Vico's philosophy) that is relevant to the formation of national identity. The

promotion of this traditional background – related to a 'local' and 'autochthonous' knowledge, distinguishing a group of people or a country – in opposition to the novelty of 'foreign' knowledge is linked historically to Vincenzo Gioberti's idea of the 'primato degli italiani', supporting the supremacy of the 'genio pelasgico'[1] that substantiates Italian people and decrees their moral and intellectual mastery over other countries.

In addressing those topics as 'scientific', I use this word as historically determined – according to what science was supposed to be in nineteenth-century Europe, rather than in an 'a-historical' way, that is, as a set of premises and a conclusion connected logically by causal reasoning, as proposed by Carl Hempel's *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (1965).[2] Such a historicist attitude to the 'scientific' derives from recognising the wide use that several scholars made of this term in nineteenth-century Positivism, corresponding to an enlargement of the Cartesian and the Galilean scientific 'paradigm' as encompassing disciplines that would then be catalogued as 'non-scientific' or 'pseudo-science' after the epistemological demarcation of Karl Popper (1963).[3] An example of this 'a-

[1] Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani. Sopra la seconda edizione corretta e accresciuta dall'autore*, 2 vols (Capolago: Tipografia elvetica, 1846), II, p. 120.

[2] See Carl G. Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1965), pp. 1-46. As for the relevance of Hempel's position for our current ideas of science, see Samir Okasha, *Philosophy of Science: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 41-45.

[3] According to Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), 'paradigm' is what encompasses a group of theoretical achievements, concepts and laws that are shared by a community of scientists who work on a particular discipline. According to the famous epistemologist, 'paradigm' is the same as 'normal' or 'orthodox' science: see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3 edn (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 10-1. For the science-pseudoscience dichotomy, see Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 33-59.

critical' approach to science was the consideration of Spiritualism in the United States and Northern Europe and the *Spiritismo* in Italy as disciplines explainable with the same arguments as physics – which allowed scholars to consider them as scientific in their potential evidence and Galilean reproducibility under specific circumstances.[4] Such an approach, with subsequent wide use of science-related terminology, is found in Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Morselli and Paolo Mantegazza, whose works form one of the frameworks through which Italian authors visited and revised scientific topics. In the treatises of the first two, in particular, the ectoplasmic manifestations during Eusapia Palladino's séances are described according to the scientific normativity implemented after the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, based on a strong descriptivism and an attempt to explain phenomena starting from the belief in their repeatability.

In the 'visible-invisible' contrast, the former pole is the product of John Locke's empiricism and French Sensationalism, supporting the faith in senses (either alone or connected with intellectual reflection) as the first step to the construction of any human knowledge. On the contrary, the latter pole is intended generically as the realm of the imperceptible to the eye, as well as the place in which daydreams and reveries are expected to take shape. In the group of works that I analyse, accordingly, the visible-invisible opposition turns into an empiricist contrast between science – aiming at investigating the visible – and

[4] For a historical reconstruction of the Spiritualism-science relationship in the United States (where the spiritualistic phenomenon is thought to be born), see at least Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Future Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). For the case of Spiritualism in England, see Richard Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Brown and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 23-43. I provide bibliographic references to the Italian *Spiritismo* in the course of the second chapter.

figurative art – aiming at representing the invisible. This conceptualisation encompasses a pre-eminence given to one pole over the other, reflecting the viewpoint of authors that only art can represent the individual's interiority, to the detriment of science as what lingers on the human body in Cartesian and mechanical terms. In this way, the literary works that I take into account overturn the optimism implied in the positivist idea of science. Due to its inability to explain everything, in fact, science shows its limitations, and what was deemed as a 'virtue' of science by such positivist treatises as Roberto Ardigò's *La morale dei positivisti* (1879) – the direct observation of mere facts regardless of their origin[5] – stands out as a restriction.

My focus on dichotomies involves the use of the 'acculturation' concept, which I intend in the classic definition provided by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits in 1936, as indicating those phenomena 'which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups'.[6] Based on this, my use of the term entails the idea of a meeting of diverse cultural forces regardless of results, implying also a psychological adaptation as suggested by more recent theorisations.[7]

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[5] See Roberto Ardigò, *La morale dei positivisti*, ed. by Giorgio Giannini (Milan: Marzorati, 1973), p. 32: '[...] la teoria veramente scientifica è solamente quella "che risulta *direttamente dai fatti* ed è indipendente dalla teoria delle forze che li determinano" '.

[6] Robert Redfield and others, 'Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation', *American Anthropologist*, 1 (1936), 149-152 (p. 149).

[7] See the definition proposed by David L. Sam, 'Acculturation: Conceptual Background and core components', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, ed. by David L. Sam and John W. Berry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 11-26 (p. 11).

A question of time span

The time span that I consider in my thesis starts with 1865 – this is the year of Arrigo Boito's poem 'Lezione d'anatomia', in which the visible-invisible dichotomy finds one of the first and most accomplished expressions within Italian literature. In its fourteen stanzas, the clear-cut contrast between the 'visible' and the 'invisible' poles proves to be recognisable as resulting from an acculturation of post-Cartesian scientific thought, on the one hand, and a tradition that celebrates the effectiveness of poetry in terms of representing daydreams and wishful thinking (according to a late Romantic heritage), on the other hand. At least at the beginning, such an acculturation results in an epistemological irreducibility, as witnessed by the contrasting attitudes of the *dramatis personae* involved in the poem – a physician and a poet/artist. While the former believes that medical knowledge could illustrate even the inner mechanisms of the soul, thereby making them visible through deterministic explanation, the latter says that such mechanisms remain invisible in their substance – and in particular to science. By beginning with 'Lezione d'anatomia', I do not want to imply that this poem is the first one to tackle the idea of positivist science in such divergent terms. Actually, the visible-invisible antagonism was already present in Galileo's approach – as Marco Piccolino and Nicholas J. Wade remind us – as an ambiguous relationship, which did not necessarily coincide with what is perceivable to the senses and what is not, respectively.[8] Rather, I intend to highlight the breakthrough power of the poem,

[8] See Marco Piccolino and Nicholas J. Wade, *Galileo's Visions: Piercing the Spheres of the Heavens by Eye and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 24-36.

the problematic nature of the contrast in Arrigo Boito, involving the difficulty of finding a synthesis between the two positions, which opens a new direction in Italian literature, to be followed in the years to come by Capuana and Di Giacomo.

Whereas it is easy to find a starting-point, it seems a bit less so to indicate a *terminus ante quem* for my critical investigation. Interest in positivist science, re-read according to this angle, also runs through the works of other Italian authors, including narrators of the twentieth century, sometimes even bearing concepts borrowed from psychoanalysis. Yet, the visible-invisible contrast finds one of the latest expressions in Arturo Graf's *Il riscatto* (1901). In this novel, the deterministic and geneticist approach adopted by the main character Aurelio in order to explain his own depression and propensity to make suicide attempts is emblematic of the positivist celebration of what is openly explainable, evident and therefore visible in its functioning. Within such a constraining background, he seems to have the same destiny as the male members of his family, who committed suicide due to an inclination inscribed in their genes, reminiscent of the inescapable fate of Giorgio Aurispa in D'Annunzio's novel *Trionfo della morte* (1894). Nevertheless, meeting a woman at some point in the story makes this genetic predestination change – which did not happen in D'Annunzio's novel. By his not committing suicide anymore, Graf's character marks one of the first steps in emancipating literature from positivist science. In Italy, in fact, the *scienza positiva* had focused on suicide as strongly influenced by ideas of causality and 'necessitarianism', as in Enrico Morselli's *Il suicidio* (1879), which in turn recalled a Nietzschean approach in its denying deterministically the work

of free-will not only behind suicide but any other human choice as well.[9] With his unexpected fate, Aurelio discredits the pre-eminence of the measurable and visible forces of determinism, as well as any influence on the part of invisible and uncontrollable elements, engendered from the inner individual. In the intervention of an external force (love in this case) there lies not only the subversion of the dichotomy of 'Lezione d'anatomia', but a new way to represent character. In such a representation, the genesis of feelings due to extraneous forces – similar to the autonomous spirits involved in Guido Cavalcanti's love phenomenology – is able to change the balance between the poles, and determine an unpredictable upheaval. Due to this topical reshaping, *Il riscatto* plays a conclusive role. Of course, scientific subjects would appear in later works too, sometimes in terms of a visible-invisible contrast again. However, the impression that can be drawn from the novel is that of a 'boundary', alluding to the end of an era – which is remarked symbolically by the publication at the beginning of the century, as if Graf's work inaugurated a novel direction in the attitude to science.

The aforementioned chronological definition allows a precise identification of the authors involved in my inquiry. These authors are usually catalogued as part of the *Scapigliatura* (the Boito brothers and Tarchetti) and the *Verismo* literary movement (Capuana, Verga, De Roberto, Di Giacomo, Serao and Neera); they are considered as mainly philosophers (Mantegazza and De

[9] See Enrico Morselli, *Il suicidio. Saggio di statistica morale comparata* (Milan: Dumolard, 1879), p. 389: 'Noi crediamo che, se fosse possibile conoscere esattamente il temperamento fisiologico di tutti i suicidi, e in ispecie la trasmissione ereditaria diretta o indiretta dei germi morbosi, avrebbesi il mezzo di risalire dalla determinazione fatale del loro ultimo atto, alla sua vera ragione efficiente'. This passage recalls the famous aphorism 106 in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister* (1878-1879): see Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 57.

Meis) or included within a more modernist literary wave corresponding to the *fin-de-siècle* Decadentism (D'Annunzio and Fogazzaro) by scholarly criticism. Nonetheless, their grouping within my thesis responds only partially to such scholarly partitions – which is evident in my having recourse to the *Scapigliatura* and the *Verismo* labels just a few times. In my inquiry, the *fil rouge* that connects these authors is uniquely their attempt at revision and re-semantisation of positivist science, according to the perspective enunciated above.

The focus on the 1865-1901 time span does not prevent me from referring to literary works published after this period, whenever this connection provides further evidence relevant to my analysis, based on the privileged status that literature has boasted in Italy and the elective position of the 'intellectual' in front of society along the whole nineteenth and twentieth century, considered as able to express an illuminating interpretation on disparate subjects.[10] This methodological 'treachery' occurs when I discuss Di Giacomo's tale 'Vecchie conoscenze', which appeared in 1903, as adapting concepts that are present already in Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo' (first chapter), or when I refer to Luigi Pirandello's short story 'Personaggi' (1906), which owes something to Luigi Capuana in terms of the genesis of the literary character (second chapter). Similarly, my reference to Sibilla Aleramo, whose autobiography *Una donna* was completed in 1904 – and published two years later – is legitimised by the writer's conveying a specific representation of the nineteenth-century female

[10] For the prestige of the intellectual within Italian culture (if compared to the figure of the intellectual in England), see Pierpaolo Antonello, *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2012), pp. 39-66.

character, which finds emancipation in the activity of reading and writing and is forerun by Neera's *Teresa*.

A similar 'methodological accommodation' occurs with the literary genres that I consider – though this thesis mainly focuses on narrative, yet it begins with an analysis of Arrigo Boito's poem and includes several references to non-fictional works, responding again to the need to provide an overview that is as comprehensive as possible. An evidence of my crossing genres is in my approach to Capuana's essay 'Spiritismo?' (second chapter), due to its enclosing a peculiar re-reading of the visible-invisible dichotomy as well as a negotiation between the North-European Spiritualism and a national-identity context encompassed by the figures of Dante and Foscolo. In the same way, I centre the first section of the fourth chapter on the examination of two treatises, thus establishing a dialogue between them and the narrative works that deal with the figure of the physician (which is the topic of the chapter).

Bibliographic framework

As of yet, no one has examined the link between Italian literature and scientific thought with the perspective that I propose. The major books to show similar interest in the subject limited themselves to broad cultural-historical reconstructions, such as Annamaria Cavalli Pasini's *La scienza del romanzo* (1982), Laura Nay's, *Fantasmi del corpo, fantasmi della mente* (1999), and Federica Adriano's *La narrativa fra psicopatologia e paranormale* (2014). The justification of the cultural period that these scholars consider, which covers the

same time span that I take into account, is – without detracting in any way from the wealth of information included in these texts – only implied and committed to the intuitiveness of readers. Though effective in terms of companioning the topic and grounded largely on a literary-historical methodology, indeed, these essays scarcely account for the years analysed, and simply consider the 1870-1900 time span as the period during which new studies in physiology, psychology, Spiritualism, and evolutionism had deepest repercussions on European – not only Italian – narrative, determining a shift in literary subjects. This emerges from Cavalli Pasini's focusing on the 'malady problem', which led not only to an enlargement of the range of topics in Italian literature, but also to the choice of a new language to be adopted for the literary representation of illness and deviance.[11] Very similarly, Nay's identifying the last thirty years of the century as crucial for Italian literature is legitimised by the first meta-literary reflections on writing, which had recourse to psychological and psychiatric theories in order to explain literary genesis.[12] The same point applies to Adriano's essay, which tackles psychopathological studies from the nineteenth century as the starting-point for a cultural revolution that affected Italian literature as for the re-consideration of the novel as a renewed form of art. Accordingly, Adriano's book begins *in medias res*, finding in Capuana's and De Roberto's novels the first effects of European scientific investigations in the functioning of the psyche, and aligns with previous studies on the same subject

[11] See Annamaria Cavalli Pasini, *La scienza del romanzo* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1982), pp. 37-58.
[12] See Laura Nay, *Fantasmi del corpo, fantasmi della mente. La malattia fra analisi e racconto (1870-1900)* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1999), pp. 109-215.

based on its stressing the importance of Capuana's *Giacinta* (1879) as the first positivist work.[13]

Similarly, monographic essays have expressed only partial viewpoints on the relationship between Italian literature and science. Among them are those investigations into the literary figure of the physician such as Benedetta Montagni's *Angelo consolatore e ammazzapazienti* (1999), which focuses on the nineteenth-century and intertwines cultural history with literature. Based again on a thematic overview of the issues, this wide-ranging book is grounded on the idea that a real fracture with the twentieth century does not exist in terms of the representation of the physician, and Pirandello's work would only update the same distrust in medicine as the previous decades.

In general, these works take for granted that science is only a 'new' topic within narrative from Tarchetti on, as in Elena Coda's article 'La cultura medica ottocentesca nella *Fosca* di Igino Ugo Tarchetti', which points out that the medical language used in that novel is the evidence of the scientific paradigm to which Tarchetti referred while writing his famous book.[14] Similarly, other works move from the idea that a medical culture grounded in neuroses and references to hysteria is enough for several authors to be grouped together, connected by thematic links as in Annie Olive's article.[15]

[13] See Federica Adriano, *La narrativa tra psicopatologia e paranormale* (Pisa: ETS, 2014), pp. 107-177.
[14] See Elena Coda, 'La cultura medica nella *Fosca* di Igino Ugo Tarchetti', *Lettere italiane*, 3 (2000), 438-454.
[15] See Annie Olive, 'Hystérie et névrose. Capuana, Tarchetti, Pirandello', *Revue des études italiennes*, 3-4 (2001), 247-264.

Plan of the thesis and topic of each chapter

Departing from the 'visible-invisible' dichotomy, my thesis is articulated in four chapters, the content of which I enucleate below.

At the beginning, as witnessed by the analysis of Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia' and Camillo Boito's tale 'Un corpo', the visible-invisible contrast conforms to the first kind of dichotomy as identified by Raia Prokhovnik in terms of irreducibility between two polar constituents (e.g. the Cartesian mind-body duality), exerting, too, a repressive effect on other modes of thinking.[16] In detecting such a contrast in terms of a compartmental opposition between science and art – the former looking at the 'visible' and the latter aspiring to the 'invisible' – and their different way of approaching and re-constructing their subject, the Boito brothers' works prove to be crucial in breaking out of the Italian Romantic tradition, which focused only marginally on this epistemological aporia. In the Boito brothers, such a dichotomy encompasses a peculiar representation of the 'other' in terms of something that is constructed as a body to be 'read', 'understood', 'catalogued', and 'measured' by the gaze and through the knowledge of a scientist, as well as an inner soul that eludes scientific investigation, for this is the prerogative of artistic representation. In this dimidiation of the body-object, as both an anatomical mechanism and an inherent – more elusive – facet, it becomes clear why medicine (rather than generic scientific thought) and painting are, respectively, the disciplines involved in the

[16] See Raia Prokhovnik, *Rational Woman: A Feminist Critique of Dichotomy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 23-25. For the concept of 'dichotomy', see also Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan, *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (London: SAGE, 2004), pp. 24-26.

debate. Medicine, as I highlight by referring to Michel Foucault's thought,[17] expressed its power of knowledge through the dissection of the body as a mechanism. Differently from this, figurative art centred on the body as the object of reproducibility through idealisation. With their focus on 'alterity', medicine and art aim at defining their subject matter as the result of a progressive reification. The feminisation of such an object (the hectic girl in Arrigo Boito and the frail Carlotta in Camillo Boito), according to the patriarchal parameters that distinguish the nineteenth century, result of course in an increased reification of this 'otherness' – what, indeed, is more 'other' than a woman re-considered under a masculinist viewpoint?[18] In its being a corpse, furthermore, there is an even higher degree of alterity, since the necrophiliac attraction that the scientist of 'Un corpo' feels to it (which is adumbrated in the painter's attitude as well) is the expression again of a nineteenth-century masculinist approach. Accordingly, the final dispute in Camillo Boito's tale, with which I deal in the second section of my chapter, shows how any attempt at reconciling the two positions is impossible, unless it results from an abdication of either.

Moving from here, the second chapter centres on Italian *Spiritismo* as a cultural phenomenon focusing on the 'invisible'. In this discipline, addressed in

[17] References in the chapter are to Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1976).

[18] In the course of this thesis, I shall use the terms 'patriarchal' and 'masculinist' as synonyms or simply referring to each other, based on the equivalence pinpointed by Georgia Duerst-Lahti, 'Gender Ideology: Masculinism and Feminalism', in *Politics, Gender and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, ed. by Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 159-192 (pp. 164-166). As for the definition of 'patriarchy', Duerst-Lahti in turn recalls ideas expressed by Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 19-21. See also Pilcher and Whelehan, pp. 93-96 (part. p. 95), in which Walby is said to have defined patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'. As for Hélène Cixous's concept of 'logocentrism', see *infra* in the text and the following footnote.

Italy by Cesare Lombroso and Enrico Morselli, the phenomena of fluids and ectoplasmic materialisations prove to be interwoven with a precise idea of photography as the only way to represent what is physically invisible to eye. In this sense, *Spiritismo* supported a theoretical construct of the 'invisible region' as what is supposed to manifest itself occasionally – to become visible sometimes and for a short while (as in the materialisations during séances) – thereby implying different nuances and degrees in the former visible-invisible opposition, which is no longer made of two irreducible poles. Differently from this, Capuana's *Spiritismo* suggests an overlapping between the evocation of spirits and the artistic and literary invention. The coincidence between the artwork and the materialised ghost suggests a metaphorisation of the novel as a spectral entity, which remarks the mystery of its genesis. As a result of an unconscious mechanism, the work thus conceived implies a degree of hermeneutical uncertainty, allowing critical interpretations that may be ignored even by (a part of) the author. Furthermore, this novel as a spontaneous ghost proves to be intertwined with concerns raised by the new national identity – which is remarked by means of an opposition to other (less spontaneous) literary traditions (e.g. the French one), as well as by the celebration of the figure of Dante as a symbol of the *Risorgimento* for Italian writers. The spiritualistic characterisation of the literary work is the result of a long process, which starts with the first attempts to evoke the spirit of Ugo Foscolo by Capuana's assistant Beppina. The representation of this Foscolo as an 'a-historical' figure is linked with the literary features taken from contemporary criticism, describing the Greek-born poet as a passionate person. Such a representation also implies a re-

definition of the medium, to which the evocation is demanded, as a 'female character', being imposed the attribution of patriarchal features, and yet reacting to the patriarchal forces entailed by the impetuous spirit that wants to possess her. As characters emancipated from their creator, both the spirit and the female medium seem, at this point, to go beyond the page borders – a consideration that finds confirmation in the 'obscure region' in which characters are supposed to spring according to Capuana. In this manner, they forerun the idea of the artwork living a life of its own, which Capuana treats in the second part of his essay. Significantly evoked by a male character (Capuana himself, who discovers his own mediumistic power), this artwork undergoes a process of 'feminisation', not only because it is patriarchally provided with the characteristics of the female character, but for its being attributed a certain degree of subjection as well. Yet, in recognising the attempt, on the part of this female-artwork, to slip from the creator's control lies the awareness of the male observer about the substantial subjection of his creation. This foreruns a topic that I develop in the third chapter, in which the emancipation pertains to the female character in a set of novels distinguished by strong logocentrism, to re-use a term introduced by Hélène Cixous.[19] In this way, *Spiritismo*, which started in terms of a celebration of the 'invisible' over the 'visible', becomes a peculiar reflection on literature, as well as an intrinsic challenge to the power of knowledge of the observer, proving the complexity of the phenomenon as a whole.

The subject-matter of a series of studies, which aimed at documenting their inferiority to men, women are dealt with in France (e.g. Charcot's study in

[19] See Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. by Keith and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 4 (1976), 875-893.

La grand hystérie), in England (e.g. Henry Maudsley linking sexual dysfunction with the outbreak of nervous malady) and Italy (e.g. Paolo Mantegazza's coining the adjective *nevrosico* for both his century and women), not to mention Germany with its investigation in the *Psychopathia Sexualis* (by Richard Krafft-Ebing) and the first psychoanalytical studies in hysteria (by Breuer and Freud). As a result of this cultural frame, women feature in nineteenth-century literary works in terms of an otherness that stands opposite to the 'identity' of the male observer. As mere cultural constructs, in other words, they are the expression of a masculinist mind-set, which provides them with all the characteristics that several scholars such as Bram Dijkstra and Elizabeth Bronfen have identified as typical of nineteenth-century European literature and figurative art.[20] Yet, as I show in the third chapter, women's recurrent presence from Tarchetti to D'Annunzio responds again to the need for a personification of the 'invisible dimension', since the woman as an otherness is also something unknowable in its real essence, which slips from male control in the same way as the literary work from that of the writer-creator. In this sense, the connection between female characters and nervous malady (a generic and yet enigmatic hysteria, as explained by Roy Porter and Sander Gilman, to the works of whom I refer) provides women with such a higher degree of elusiveness, which in turn adumbrates male attraction to otherness.[21] This applies to Tarchetti's Fosca (who

[20] References in the chapters are to Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[21] See at least Roy Porter, 'The Body and the Mind, The Doctor and the Patient: Negotiating Hysteria', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. by Sander L. Gilman and others (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 225-266. I shall refer again to Porter's essay in the third chapter of this thesis.

becomes fascinating to Giorgio in spite of her ugliness) and D'Annunzio's Giuliana Hermil (in *L'innocente*), whose unpredictable malady results in cadaveric paleness and excessive thinness that arouse Tullio's sexual desire. Stereotypically, women's major unknowability occurs as a result of their being supposedly passionate about reading, which is traditionally a dangerous form of recreation. This activity is thought to trigger the work of women's imagination, thus disappointing the patriarchal construct of female nature as something passive, due to the insertion of elements that make women unpredictable beings (at least in terms of thoughts and aspirations). The gnoseological ambiguity of a woman reading finds evidence in several paintings made in Northern Europe and in Italy in particular (e.g. Federico Faruffini's *La lettrice*), to which I devote the second section of my chapter. In examining how this long-term stereotype undergoes an adaptation in Tarchetti, Capuana, De Roberto, Fogazzaro, D'Annunzio and Serao, I intend to highlight the logocentrism encompassed in masculinist representations, but also the problematic turn implied in male characters becoming conscious of the woman as a patriarchal construct at some point in the novel. In this manner, though not going beyond the male-female dichotomy, the 'man-made world' stereotype proves to be at least challenged, undergoing a 'problematisation' and a 'demythicisation'.[22] Though remaining invisible in her real essence to male observers, in other words, this problematised woman is no longer the result of complete subjection. An example of this becoming conscious is in narrators recognising the importance of fantasy for

[22] I adopt the concepts of 'problematisation' and 'demythicisation' from Michael Crotty's discussing Paulo Freire's Marxist pedagogy: see Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* (London: SAGE, 1998), pp. 147-159.

their female characters, which allows them to find a sort of escape from social conventions – an idea that will be developed in Judith Butler's work.[23] Only a couple of female writers, as I prove, are able to overcome, through their characters, the logocentrism in the contemporary works of other narrators. Among them are Neera's Teresa and Sibilla Aleramo's autobiographical character.

The peculiar position that relegates interiority and the female character to a mysteriously invisible dimension does not stem from nowhere – it is part of a process that manifests itself with the passage from the first to the second edition of Capuana's *Giacinta*. It is with this shift, indeed, that a kind of medical knowledge based on such dichotomies as body vs. soul and physician vs. patient establishes itself in Italian literature. It is due to such a passage, in addition, that such figures as doctor Follini (a character of *Giacinta*) can assert their ideas about the ungraspable interiority of women, the difficulty to understand female malady, and the stereotype of women's irrationality in opposition to male rationality. Of course, this chapter does not want to suggest that *Giacinta* is the first literary work to introduce such stereotypes – rather, it wants to state that Capuana's re-writing provides evidence of a process in action, the result of which is in Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo'. Body and soul prove to be still joined together as part of the person as a whole in several treatises in which a sort of 'moral medicine' serves to express both the physical and the spiritual health of

[23] In the chapter, I shall refer to Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York-London: Routledge, 2004).

an individual (I refer here, to George Sebastian Rousseau's studies).[24] Accordingly, the recurrent metaphorisation of medical practise as that of the priest in Italy speaks clearly for the wide competences attributed to this figure. In dealing with such a metaphorisation, Dazio Olivi's 'Dei doveri del medico' and Giosuè Marcacci's *Discorso inaugurale* present the 'sacred' activity of the physician as focusing on both men and women, whose – presumed – intellectual and moral differences are not yet pinpointed as in later literary representations. The whole characterisation is inscribed within a context in which medical activity is still a 'social fact', with its own theatrical and spectacular facet – as defined by Brant Wenegrat[25] – which 'promotes' the construction and 'framing' of malady (as defined, among others, by Charles E. Rosenberg).[26] Significantly, the physician's care of the individual as a whole fades away in the second edition of *Giacinta*, in which, as I show, the similitude between the doctor and the confessor undergoes a loss of meaning, and the power of knowledge of the former grows exponentially in spite of this semantic separation. In this reviewed representation, women are now the prevalent subject of medical approach. As part of a process of stereotypisation, the provision of female subjects with child-like features expresses, as I argue, the fear for the woman by diminishing her

[24] In the chapter, I shall provide references to Rousseau's Italian book, a series of lectures held at the University of Calabria in 1991 and translated from English by Antonello La Vergata: see George Sebastian Rousseau, *La medicina e le Muse* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993).

[25] See Brant Wenegrat, *Theater of Disorder: Patients, Doctors, and the Construction of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 3-28.

[26] For the 'framing' of malady, see Charles E. Rosenberg, 'Introduction. Framing Disease: Illness, Society, and History', in *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History*, ed. by Charles E. Rosenberg and Janet Golden (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992; repr. 1997), pp. xiii-xxvi. See also George Sebastian Rousseau, 'Introduction', in *Framing and Imagining Disease in Cultural History*, ed. by George Sebastian Rousseau and others (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1-48.

most unsettling features for patriarchal normativity. In the course of the chapter, I show that both the semantic re-shaping and the novel focus on women pass through two novels – Mantegazza's *Un giorno a Madera* and De Meis's *Dopo la laurea*. In their depiction of 'ideal' physicians, both introduce several stereotypes – e.g. the increased masculinity implied in the profession or the ethnocentric attitude towards the patient[27] – and, even when they espouse a Hegelian approach, their perspectives but conceal already the dichotomies with which I open my study. After these novels and the second edition of *Giacinta*, patriarchy will pervade increasingly the approach to science on the part of Italian authors and will support a long series of dichotomies, destined to be espoused and developed in the following century.

[27] Introduced by William G. Sumner in *Folkways* (1906), the concept of 'ethnocentrism' pertains mainly to social and anthropological studies, although it can be used in a wider meaning as referring to the attitude of superiority of an individual or a group towards other people (not necessarily within ethnic contexts). As it implies widely the question of the 'otherness', I shall adopt 'ethnocentrism' and 'ethnocentric' to denote the attitude of Mantegazza's physicians in *Un giorno a Madera* towards primitive cultures. For the ethnocentric attitude, see Alberto Maria Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne. Rassegna di studi sul mondo popolare tradizionale*, 2 edn (Palermo: Palumbo, 1973; repr. 1998), p. 18: 'L'atteggiamento etnocentrico (con le sue specificazioni storico-geografiche: euro-centrismo, italo-centrismo ecc.) consiste sostanzialmente in ciò: che le forme, i contenuti e più in genere i "valori" della *propria* cultura vengono assunti come metro di misura e di valutazione delle forme, dei contenuti e dei valori delle culture *altrui* (o "altre" dalla propria, come spesso si dice)'. Similarly, I shall use the term 'colonial' as referring to the mind-set implied in Mantegazza's novel again, in which the 'primitive' is an individual to dominate, control, educate, and align with the standards of Western culture. Both concepts fall under the umbrella of what Cirese defines 'cultura egemonica', alluding to cultural distances ('dislivelli di cultura') and the discrimination that the repository of a particular culture exerts over groups provided with their own cultural identity (Cirese, pp. 21-22).

I. The Visible and the Invisible in Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia' and Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo'

1.1. Medicine vs. Daydream: Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia'

Arrigo Boito's poem 'Lezione d'anatomia' (1865) – initially published in *Rivista minima* on 17 May 1874, and later included in the collection *Libro dei versi* (1877) – is one of the first literary documents testifying to the impact of Positivism on Italian literature, and consequently to the attempt at negotiating forms, themes, and motifs of the Italian literary canon with the 'modern' trends of science, in the early years of the newly founded nation.[1] Later examples of this vogue include Luigi Capuana's tale, 'Dottor Cymbalus' (1867), Camillo Boito's short story, 'Un corpo' (1870), which I will analyse later, and Salvatore Di Giacomo's, 'Vecchie conoscenze' (1903). In being published shortly after the *Unità d'Italia*, however, and given its specific nature as a poem, 'Lezione d'anatomia' can be taken as a paradigmatic text for investigating the relationship between Italian literature and modernity in the post-Unification age. Indeed, the text explicitly opposes medicine and poetry, thus outlining a more general opposition between science and literature, as well as between modernity and tradition. At the same time, however, Boito's poem does not resolve this opposition by choosing either the one or the other pole. By making scientific

[1] Arrigo Boito, 'Lezione d'anatomia', in *Opere letterarie*, ed. by Angela Ida Villa (Milan: Otto/Novecento, 2009), pp. 74-76, from which I quote between parentheses in the text.

knowledge collide with themes and motifs of the lyrical canon, indeed, 'Lezione d'anatomia' generates a tension in which both medical and poetic gazes clash against an image of femininity that is constructed as 'the superlative site of alterity'.[2]

More specifically, 'Lezione d'anatomia' hinges on the strong opposition between the anatomical description of the corpse of a consumptive girl – provided by a professor during a lecture – and her interiority, imaginatively reconstructed by the poetic subject. The shocking exposure of the interior of the girl's body – which is even more troubling given her angelic features – is matched against the arbitrary and idealised reconstruction of an alleged 'inner' life, thereby counterpoising to the 'visible' surface of her body the 'invisible' that remains inaccessible to science. As my analysis shows, this option for the 'invisible' is one of the most striking traits in the reception of positivist paradigms of science in late nineteenth-century Italy. In particular, by stressing the existence of a sphere that science can neither define nor control, these literary ventures defend the realm of 'poetry' against the violent impact of 'scientific modernity'.

In 'Lezione d'anatomia', the modern scientific 'paradigm' is embodied by the professor giving his lecture, which the title indicates as the main object of the poem. The doctor-professor fully epitomises the connection between knowledge and descriptive power as the main source of medical authority – a connection that is findable at least since the sixth chapter of Descartes's *Discours sur le Méthode* and is a crucial factor in the birth of the clinic, according to Michel

[2] Bronfen, p. xi.

Foucault.[3] On the one hand, in fact, the list of scientists made by the doctor at ll. 31-36 of the poem aims at legitimating his authority by claiming a place in the genealogy of medical knowledge from Hippocrates onwards, thereby supporting an abstract and a-historical perspective on science. According to his viewpoint, Francis Bacon – the author of the *Novum Organum* and the theorizer of inductive reasoning – is coupled with Andreas Vesalius and William Harvey, whose studies on the human anatomy as a *fabrica* and on blood circulation, respectively, had contributed to the construction of a mechanical (and mechanistic) conception of the human being. The presence in the list of Hermann Sprengel – the chemist who would work on picric acid in the 1870s – and Robert Koch – who would discover the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* in the 1880s – seems to prefigure the most recent, practical and sometimes even dangerous developments of scientific knowledge:

> Mentre urla il medico
> la sua lezione
> e cita *ad hoc*:
> Vesalio, Ippocrate,
> Harvey, Bacone,
> Sprengel e Koch,
>
> io penso ai teneri
> casi passati
> su quella testa,

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, transl. by A.M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1976), pp. 107-123.

ai sogni estatici

invan sognati

da quella mesta (ll. 31-42).

On the other hand, the lecture takes place over the girl's corpse, giving birth to a representation of the human body in which knowledge and description are combined. By replacing the pre-modern epistemology based on the concepts of 'resemblance' and 'similitude' with a new one relying in the concepts of 'identity' and 'difference' (as described by Foucault), post-Cartesian paradigms of scientificity construct representation as the cornerstone of scientific knowledge – the field in which both theory and practice are subsumed, aiming to give full account of the phenomenal sphere.[4]

The first-person narrator of the poem stands against the alleged neutrality and superiority of scientific knowledge, according to which a dead body is merely a machine that has stopped functioning. The notion of anatomy, evoked from the title, recalls the anatomical practices widespread in sixteenth-century Europe, performed both in public and in private as part of the medical *cursus studiorum*.[5] Furthermore, it recalls the North-European paintings on the subject of the 'anatomy lecture', including Pieter van Mierevelt's *Anatomy lesson of Dr.*

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock: 1970), p. 51: 'At the beginning of the seventeenth century [...], thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance. Similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error, the danger to which one exposes oneself when one does not examine the obscure region of confusions. "It is a frequent habit," says Descartes, in the first lines of his *Regulae*, "when we discover several resemblances between two things, to attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in reality different, that which we have recognised to be true of only one of them"'.

[5] See, on this subject, Cynthia Klestinec, 'Practical Esperience in Anatomy', in *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge: Embodied Empiricism in Early Modern Science*, ed. by Charles T. Wolfe and Ofer Gal (Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York: Springer, 2010), pp. 33-57.

Willem van der Meer (1617) and Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). However, the physicians in these Dutch paintings dissect the abdomen and the arm of a man, respectively, while the professor in Boito's poem has just anatomised a girl – which makes it possible that Boito had in mind the aforementioned Andreas Vesalius, since several illustrations in *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) depict the public dissection of a female body.[6] At the same time, the narrator may have had in mind those eighteenth-century wax sculptures that aimed at displaying human anatomy in beautiful and dismountable female figures. One of the most famous is that by Clemente Susini, which bears the telling title *Venere dei Medici* (1781-82) and is known as *La Sventrata*. By a similar tactic, in fact, 'Lezione d'anatomia' displays the contrast between the body's external beauty and its prosaic interiors by 'opening' – literally – Venus (to paraphrase Didi-Huberman) and revealing what lies hidden within us – 'les secrétats par excellence' (in Jacques Lacan's words) – thereby determining an indiscernible mixture of attraction and anguish in the observer.[7] Such a mixture is determined, of course, by the seminal overlapping between life and death, which is implied in both the waxen Venuses, used for scientific purposes during the modern age, and the dead girl of Arrigo Boito – an overlapping resulting in the sexualisation of the lifeless female body, which

[6] As pinpointed by Andrea Carlino, *Books of the Body: Anatomical Ritual and Renaissance Learning*, transl. by John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 39-53. For the French quotation, see p. 112.
[7] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus. Nudité, rêve, cruauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 100-121.

speaks for the pornography inscribed in the modern scientific discourse according to Roberta McGrath.[8]

Moving between these two spheres – the visible and the invisible, beauty and rawness, ideal and materiality – the poem explicitly opposes the scientist's gaze with that of the speaking subject, in a firm reaction against materialism and its questionable consolations.[9] Whereas, for the scientist's gaze, the surface of the dead body is the casing of a mechanism, whose emotional interior remains virtually unknowable – or simply uninteresting – the text affirms poetry as the only possible bulwark against the presumption of science, that is, the only guarantor of the import of dreams (*sogno*) and feelings (*anima*) against the cold medicalisation of death:

> Scïenza, vattene
> co' tuoi conforti!
> Ridammi i mondi
> del sogno e l'anima!
> Sia pace ai morti

[8] See Roberta McGrath, *Seeing Her Sex: Medical Archives and the Female Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 5-37 (pp. 16-17).

[9] Giulio Bollati makes the telling example of Giosue Carducci's poem *Giuseppe Mazzini*, written only seven years after Boito's 'Lezione', in 1872, in order to epitomize the origins of the later 'tempi difficili' in which 'l'idealismo, l'estetismo, il moralismo' take the upper hand, in late-nineteenth-century Italy, against materialism as the common enemy. See Giulio Bollati 'Note su fotografia e storia', in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 2: L'immagine fotografica 1845-1945*, ed. by Carlo Bertelli and Giulio Bollati, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), vol. I, pp. 3-55 (p. 43): 'Alla svolta del secolo, il "fatto" è guardato con sospetto, e sconta duramente la presunzione di essersi ritenuto, col positivismo, l'argomento decisivo. La scienza è atterrata dal suo piedistallo. Era lo strumento principe della conoscenza, diventa un servizio ausiliario privo di autonomia speculativa. I filosofi del neoidealismo italiano innalzano una barriera tra la cultura italiana e la cultura del mondo industrializzato, e al riparo di questo muro esteti di varia estrazione, letterati, moralisti scendono in campo contro il nemico comune: il materialismo'.

e ai moribondi (ll. 67-72).

The preference for the inward life of the mind against an alleged empirical knowledge of truth – a position strongly embedded in the Italian canon, if we only think of Giacomo Leopardi's philosophy – delineates a constitutive incompatibility between science and poetry, by which the scientist's perspective is implicitly declared as in- (and even anti-) human. Boito voices the same concerns as E. A. Poe's sonnet 'To Science' (1829), although in Poe the opposition between the two disciplines is still the outcome of a late Neoclassical approach and is played on the field of mythology (supposedly a prerogative of poetry), science being – symbolically – only able to drag Diana from her car and the Hamadryades from their trees.[10]

The science-poetry opposition is framed within the broader one between the visible and the invisible, whereby the recalcitrance of human feelings to be scientifically explainable entails the pre-eminence of the invisible – here generically synthesised by 'soul', from which human feelings are alleged to burgeon – over the visible – that is, the body. Such pre-eminence is what the poet is vindicating when, in the aforementioned stanza of the lyric, he impugns science for not taking account of the 'sogni estatici | invan sognati' (ll. 40-41) by the sad consumptive girl, and the intense daydreaming that she experienced (though, tellingly, in vain) while alive. The elusiveness of what lies beyond representation – that is, what is not directly observable, such as fancies and desires – mark a limit to scientific understanding, and thereby constitute an

[10] See Edgar Allan Poe, 'To Science', in *The Complete Stories and Poems* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 533.

ontological justification of poetry, which is able, contrariwise, to render perceptible what is not.

The difference in the spheres of jurisdiction of science and poetry is marked out by the series of symbolic elements in the poem, and by the language used to emphasise their antagonism. Primarily, such difference is embodied in the shadow-light contrast that dominates the first stanza. The gloom diffused all around, metonymically suggested by the 'negro tetto' (l. 2), symbolises the dark destiny of the dead girl. She was, in fact, the victim of the adversities of life (the detail of the dormitory discloses her humble origins), and is now the 'victim' of abuse of science – as suggested by Deirdre O'Grady – as she is reduced to be anatomised on a dissecting table, which is 'cold' as the scientific knowledge that presumes to take possession of her.[11] In contrast with it, the faint ray coming from a skylight in the dark ceiling seems to give a dim life to the corpse, thereby reviving the dreams and illusions that the girl had in life. More particularly, while darkness shadows the girl's inwardness, light seems to make it emerge, thus allowing a fleeting glimpse of the invisible. In a different scenario, Catholic religion would perform a specific function, worth mentioning – as the poet says, in fact, the girl has been stolen not only from the 'requie | dei cimiteri, | e al funerale' (ll. 10-12), but also from the priest's benediction. In the poem, however, religion does not provide any repose – this function is prerogative of death, which Catholic rituals only sanctify, and to which they allude metonymically. Leopardi's example is evident, confirmed by the opening of the

[11] Deirdre O'Grady, 'From deformity to madness: from deconstruction of form to "re-form". Hugo, Piave, Boito and Pirandello', *Testo. Studi di teoria e storia della letteratura e della critica*, 50 (2005), 33-49 (p. 39).

poem, which recalls a similar scenario in the *Operetta morale* 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie', in which the renowned anatomist discusses with the embalmed corpses in his study about death as a relieving event, able to soothe torments.[12] A novel published in 1841, Carlo Ravizza's *Il curato di campagna*, is also important to understand Arrigo Boito's poem. The parish priest of the novel, who combines religion with *ars medica*, symbolises the need for medicine not to be separated from ethics (*Schizzi morali* is the subheading of the novel), but to remain focused on the feelings that animate/animated a person, thereby establishing a contrast between this 'moral' medicine and anatomo-pathology.[13] With its drastic oppositions, thus, 'Lezione d'anatomia' denounces a – now irretrievable – cultural tear and a barbarisation of medical activity, which used to centre on the human being as a 'whole' and regardless of gender still in the 1850s, as I demonstrate in the fourth chapter.

Since the beginning, Positivism in Italy is perceived as an offence to human dignity – first in that it robs people of the peace that they deserve after death; second, in that the intentions on the behalf of which it acts are grounded on illusory principles. Though thinking to make knowledge advance, in fact, yet scientists (who let a beautiful body be desecrated by a scalpel) are only able obtain an adverse effect:

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[12] See Giacomo Leopardi, 'Dialogo di Federico Ruysch e delle sue mummie', in *Poesie e prose*, ed. by Rolando Damiani and Mario Andrea Rigoni, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1987-1988), vol. II (1988), pp. 116-122.

[13] As highlighted by Benedetta Montagni, *Angelo consolatore e ammazzapazienti. La figura del medico nella letteratura italiana dell'Ottocento* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1999), pp. 48-62. On the importance of Catholic religion in the priest's attitude towards his patients, see ch. XXVII ('Il popolo senza la religione'), in Carlo Ravizza, *Un curato di campagna. Schizzi morali, con un saggio Del duello*, ed. by Sabina Geiser Foglia (Pistoia: Can Bianco Niccolai, 2005), pp. 39-40.

Con quel cadavere

(steril connubio!

sapienza insana!)

tu accresci il numero

di qualche dubio,

scïenza umana! (ll. 25-30)

The contrast in the poem is further emphasised by the language adopted to present the opposite *dramatis personae*. The professor does not simply give a lesson – rather, he shouts arrogantly its presentation ('urla […] | la sua lezione', ll. 31-32). Everything in his attitude suggests materiality and is in tune with the brutal action that has previously profaned the girl's body. In making his representation more effective, the professor has recourse to a very technical jargon, resulting from the same paradigm as the list of scientists mentioned above. '*Valvole'*, '*celle'* and '*aòrta*' (ll. 58, 59, 60) adapt the metaphors that Descartes used in order to describe the human body as a machinery made of pieces, conduits, tubes, and holes in his 1664's *Traité de l'homme*, which but remarks the representation of the human being in terms of a mind-body dualism – as both a *res cogitans* and a *res extensa*.[14] In terms of history of poetry, nonetheless, these words are quite unusual – if not impossible to find – within the Italian tradition. If *celle* and *valvole* had little spread since then – though not in the medical sense of ventricles and valves, respectively – *aòrta* was practically unprecedented, at least based on the 'Bibliotecaitaliana.it' and the *LIZ* search

[14] See René Descartes, 'The Man', in *Philosophical Writings*, transl. by John Cottingham and others, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991), vol. I, pp. 99-108.

engines – which conveys the general impression of their extravagance and unfamiliarity. Furthermore, the Latin sentence on blood circulation – recalling Harvey, but also the Latin version of Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (which deals with heart and blood in the fifth chapter)[15] – has the effect of making medical knowledge foreign discipline to non-scientists. Traditionally a male prerogative, medicine becomes a more distant field of knowledge when it refers to an academic context – where lectures were given in Latin. With the difficulty of its language, medicine displays itself as a 'double alterity' to the factuality of the body of the girl, who, after all, could not share the same knowledge when alive due to both her gender and her low-class origin.

At the same time, poetry does not equally provide an answer to the mystery embodied by the young girl's corpse. Paradoxically, the vocabulary employed for describing the girl and her inner life are generic and conventional in the extreme, thus emphasising the limits of poetic speech as well in giving account of what lies beyond understanding. In terms of physical appearance, the girl was young, blond-haired and beautiful – features that stand out as more remarkable against the darkness diffused all around, and yet are nothing more ordinary. Although recalling the triad of adjectives describing Dante's Manfred (in *Purg*. III. 107), the girl's features can be traced back to Medieval lyrical conventions, and in particular to the τόποι or symbols forming what Giovanni Pozzi has termed the *cliché estetico* of female beauty.[16] In particular, it should be

[15] The Latin version of Descartes's *Discours* by Etienne de Courcelles (*Specimina Philosophiae seu Dissertatio De Methodo Recte regendae rationis et veritatis in scientiis investigandae*) appeared in Amsterdam in 1644.

[16] See Giovanni Pozzi, 'Temi, τόποι, stereotipi', in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa, 6 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1982-1986), vol. III (*Le forme del testo*)/1 (*Teoria e poesia*) (1984), pp. 391-436 (pp. 397-411).

noted how such aesthetic normativity in lyrical poetry aims at conveying, through external manifestations, most notably sexual and moral purity. The intertwinement between physical beauty and morality is recoverable *in nuce* since ancient Greek philosophical construction of the body, although a deep-rooted commonplace has long considered the thought from Polyclitus's canon onwards as mainly focused on the body as geometry and biometrics.[17] Thus, the physical description of the girl's angel-like beauty introduces the poetic subject's speculations about her inner life. When alive, he argues, the girl's imagination was caught by dreams ('sogni estatici', l. 40) and high hopes ('eterei | della speranza | mille universi!', ll. 43-45). This escape into fantasy was even more frequent in melancholic moments, when the girl retreated into herself ('come un santuario | chiuse il suo cuore', ll. 53-54), thus delineating an image of feminine introspection that I will discuss in more detail in the third chapter. Accordingly, *sogno* is a recurrent word in the poem, in that it characterises, though in a clichéd way, the girl's inner life, also representative of the conventionality by which the poet represents the invisible. Not by chance, the lexeme *sogno* recurs in Italian late Romanticism, and Giovanni Prati is the author who, based on another linguistic examination, used it more often in Italian literature from its origins to Gabriele D'Annunzio.[18] The generality of the whole representation is entailed in

[17] As pinpointed by George Boys-Stones, 'Polyclitus among the Philosophers: Canons of Classical Beauty', in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and others (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 11-24.

[18] This aspect has been highlighted by Giuseppe Farinelli, *"Perché tu mi dici poeta?". Storia e poesia del movimento crepuscolare* (Rome: Carocci, 2005), p. 503: 'Una digressione romantica nell'opera di Gozzano, proposta da Alfredo Galletti e da alcuni critici della prima metà del Novecento, non è così stravagante come d'acchito si potrebbe credere. Ci sono in essa qua e là sia le morbidezze del romanticismo decadente di un Prati (è forse un caso; ma è eloquentemente curioso che la più alta frequenza del lessema "sogno" nella letteratura italiana, stando al CD-ROM curato per Zanichelli da

the simple metaphors equally taken from poetry. The girl is as beautiful and ephemeral as a short poem ('fiore languente | di poësia', ll. 77-78). Her hopes are as fleeting as a four-line stanza – 'Finzion fuggevole | più che una stanza | di quattro versi' (ll. 46-48), where 'fuggevole' recalls a line from Niccolò Tommaseo's poem 'La donna' (from the 1836 collection *Confessioni*), in which the adjective refers to the woman as a transient spiritual creature ('fantasma').[19]

Thus, alongside rejecting medical science and Positivism as discursive practices that are intrinsically unable to give full account of what remains invisible – the girl's inner life – Boito's poem also sanctions the impossibility of conciliating the Ideal and the Real,[20] and, consequently, the uselessness of poetry too in grasping the alterity that the young girl's corpse embodies. The ending lines abruptly reveal the vainness of the subject's speculations, once the dissection discloses a thirty-day foetus in the girl's womb – no more a horrible crime, the surgical operation can give life, paradoxically, only to an already dead organism. This discovery puts a drastic end to the subject's fantasising about the girl, thus endorsing the final victory of the real (namely, sexualised) female character over her idealised image that the subject had arbitrarily constructed:

> E mentre suscito
>
> nel mio segreto

Pasquale Stoppelli ed Eugenio Picchi, appartenga a Prati che precede immediatamente Gozzano)' […] la chiaroveggenza di fronte al proprio destino […]'.

[19] See Niccolò Tommaseo, 'La donna. A Giorgio Sand', in *Confessioni*, ed. by Alberto Manai (Pisa-Roma: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1995), pp. 30-35 (l. 2: 'un fuggevole fantasma').

[20] This aspect had been already made explicit by Boito in 'Dualismo' (1863), a sort of *art poétique* manifesto in which Ideal and Real correspond to two completely different paths for art and poetry.

quei sogni adorni...

in quel cadavere

si scopre un feto

di trenta giorni. (ll. 79-84).

The tangible presence of the foetus brings art back to a very concrete level, highlighting the inanity of every equation between 'visible' features and 'invisible' purity as constructed by literary tradition. Indeed, the discovery of the girl's sexuality signals the triumph of 'materiality' against the ideal, thus forcing the reader to assess the dichotomies previously built up by the poem in a different light.

Through its abrupt ending, the poem states therefore the failure of both science and poetry, being both male forms of knowledge hampered by the impossibility of grasping the double alterity embodied by the dead girl. Whereas the sterile mechanicalism of science is unable to give account of the girl's inner life, the equally mechanical equation between the visible and the invisible of literary tradition is radically questioned by the evidence of feminine sexuality. As a quintessential site of alterity, the dead feminine body is constructed as a field of tensions, being the visible embodiment of the aporias of male discursive practices.

1.2. The Anatomical Rules of Abstract Qualities: Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo'

The opposition between science and art, subsumed into a visible-invisible dichotomy in relation to a feminine 'object', are equally in Camillo Boito's tale

'Un corpo'.[21] Originally published in June 1870 in *Nuova Antologia*, with the subheading 'Storiella di un artista', the tale was later included in *Storielle vane* (1876) and further revised for the third edition of the collection (1895).

As in Arrigo Boito's poem, 'Un corpo' witnesses a female body being made the object of two opposed male gazes, that of an anatomo-pathologist, Carlo Gulz, and of an artist (in this case, a painter), who is also the narrator. The attraction that they feel for the same girl, Carlotta, takes different shapes according to the viewpoint that they uphold. The scientist is materialistically interested in Carlotta as a physical being, following his theory that every abstract quality (such as beauty) or manifestation of human thought results from the clashes of atoms and by molecular aggregations. He believes, in other words, that everything can be anatomised and understood in its physical bases, thereby following the example of the staunch upholders of the materialism 'at any cost', even in the analysis of feelings, who are present not only in literature, but in late nineteenth-century painting as well (e.g. Enrique Simonet Lombardo's *Anatomía del corazon*, 1890). Grounded on a deterministic approach to the human being, Gulz believes each individual to be an autonomous system, whose functions are all bound together. The separation between the physical body and the mind is only of a linguistic kind – matter is the common element that substantiates both. The author of a juvenile paper on 'L'indole morale degli animali domestici ricercata anatomicamente' and of a treatise in 'aesthetic anatomy' (*Anatomia estetica*), Gulz explains his ideas by resorting to a curious statement at the end of the tale – that the life of a leaf and the mind of Friedrich Schiller share the same

[21] Camillo Boito, 'Un corpo', in *Storielle vane: tutti i racconti*, ed. by Roberto Bigazzi (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1971), pp. 25-63.

substructure and differ but in molecular complexity.[22] In contrast with this position, the painter believes that art is able to represent the 'ideal' – what science, on the contrary, disregards in its approach. Again, the invisible – Carlotta's inner qualities, which art makes emerge through a process of idealisation – reveals itself as something more complicated and elusive to catch in its shades than the visible (the girl's body as a machinery). In the tale, this opposition proves to be further stressed by Carlotta's cryptic personality, expression of her depth of mind, to which the scientific discipline supported by Gulz has a reductive attitude. The girl has a childlike passion for carousels, but also an irrational fear for death and for what may remind her of it. As if on purpose, this phobia brings her to death, as she happens to fall into the Danube in her attempt at avoiding a funeral procession that travels near her.

What has been said about 'Lezione d'anatomia' can be equally applied to this tale, if we can replace poetry with figurative art, which is the area of expertise of Carlotta's fiancé. From the artist's viewpoint, positivist science (and medicine in particular) is unable to catch what only the perspective given by art can discern. Not for nothing, the painter is the only one to provide details about Carlotta's character. On the contrary, Gulz is incurious about the personality that his bodies (among which he is thought to live ten hours per day) had in life. Since everything is reducible to particles, which connect to each other into infinite combinations, the only difference between an alive and a dead body is in fact its functioning as a mechanism. Moved by an abiding faith in science, Gulz even supposes that scientists will be able, one day, to replicate human feelings

[22] Camillo Boito, p. 62.

and the expressions of the human genius in a laboratory. However, despite the complaints of his interlocutor, he cannot demonstrate his point in the story. Although he imputes it to the inadequacy of the instruments that scientists currently have available, yet his inability is the proof that science is still behind in the investigation of the invisible. As a confirmation, in the final lines of the tale, the specificity of art is re-asserted in the action of the painter, who decides to re-purchase his portrait of Carlotta-Arethusa with the same amount of money that Gulz had paid for it. The specificity of art is also confirmed by the final episode, showing the painter letting a jasmine fall down into the Danube, thus implying that the life of a flower is much more nuanced than what positivist science had declared.[23]

At the same time, however – like 'Lezione d'anatomia' – 'Un corpo' also testifies to the limits of art. Indeed, the painter seems to be only able to transfigure Carlotta into a mere subject for his paintings and sculptures, thus undermining her inner life and almost her reality as a living woman. The awareness that Carlotta goes crazy for child's play and is terrified by corpses is a marginal aspect, for the narrator, compared to her beauty, which is tellingly equalled to such lifeless simulacra as ancient Greek statues. Based on this, he systematically transfigures the girl into mythological figures – as an Amazon, as

[23] The episode of the painter who looks at the jasmine in the Danube can be read in the third edition of *Storielle vane* (1895), which is the one to which I refer in this section. In the first edition, after the dialogue with Gulz, the main character lacerates the idealised portrait of Carlotta, thereby implying art to be just a support of science and its function to be depleted as soon as the anatomist's work has been accomplished. However, this final renunciation, which is close to the ending stanza of 'Lezione d'anatomia' – in which the poet's daydream is interrupted by the discovering of the foetus – does not change the structure of the tale in its basic dichotomies, rather suggesting the superiority of science over art (while the 1895 edition implies a criticism against both, as I demonstrate).

a hunting Diana (in the way the goddess appears in the sculptures by Scopas and Praxiteles), as a Venus Callipyge, or as a Psyche hugging Cupid. Equally, he compares Carlotta to Euterpe (not by chance, the Muse of lyrical poetry), and having the same blonde curly hair as the statue of the Muse that is kept in Berlin. In addition, the painter maintains the candour of Carlotta's skin can be appreciated only upon a comparison to the colours in Titian and Anthony van Dyck's works. Finally, he portrays her as the nymph Arethusa, immersed into a *locus amoenus* that she shares with rich vegetation.[24] From this angle, the narrator shows an attitude that parallels that of Gulz. In the same way as the scientist would need – for his scholarly work – the lifeless body of the girl in order to analyse the 'alchemy' of its perfection, the painter – by comparing or reducing her to equally lifeless works of art – deliberately places Carlotta in the position of an object, undermining her liveliness in favour of the work's inorganic state. As reminded by Daniela La Penna, both support a representation that 'simulates' Carlotta's physical appearance, which in turn is emblematic of the observer's self-deception.[25] Although apparently approaching the invisible in a more nuanced way than scientific approach, then, art cannot but refer to it in terms of a conventional description, by which Carlotta's body appears as crystallised into a progressive reification. The painter shows a similar attitude to other feminine subject – in passing among the infirm girls at the hospital of Vienna, indeed, he imagines the face of one of them to be resulting from a curious association between the techniques of Fra Angelico and of Donatello.

[24] Camillo Boito, pp. 27-28.
[25] Daniela La Penna, 'Aesthetic Discourse and the Paradox of Representation in Camillo Boito's *Un corpo*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 44 (2008), 460-479 (pp. 472-473).

Although he is convinced of the nobility of his art, the fact remains that the girl is a 'fleeting appearance' for him. This is what Gulz suggests when he declares that the painter has loved Carlotta as a transitory manifestation of matter – 'una manifestazione fuggevole della materia'.[26] By recalling a similar use of the adjective in 'Lezione d'anatomia', as seen above, Gulz's words imply that both the scientist and the painter have deprived Carlotta of her spirituality. Accordingly, the end of the tale, which features a dialogue between the two characters in front of the girl's corpse, puts up the conclusion that in their dealing with Carlotta both the painter and Gulz have loved something else – not a woman; yet, a simulacrum of a canonised beauty or of a (Cartesian) body machine, respectively.

Both Gulz and the narrator tend, thus, to see Carlotta as an inanimate and lifeless being. The anatomo-pathologist assumes to be more attracted to Carlotta as a corpse, since a cadaver is more analysable (and, therefore, 'controllable') than a living body, and allows him get closer to the truth, that is, the mathematical principles that stand behind every human being. This is the kind of truth that medicine started inquiring into when, with the practise of dissection, death was taken away from the realm of the symbolic and committed to the clinical gaze[27] – when death, in other words, was made, *via negationis*, the foundation of a knowledge investigating on life, and physicians were surrounded by the same religious halo as healers in primitive societies.[28] The painter, on the other hand, is attracted to what is 'transient' – as his antagonist reproaches him –

[26] Camillo Boito, p. 63.
[27] See Foucault, *The Brith of the Clinic*, pp. 124-125.
[28] This is also highlighted by Umberto Galimberti, *Il corpo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), pp. 53-54. Not by chance, in the tale Gulz is seen as a 'priest' of a new religion.

a term in which we can also include feelings and what in general stems from one's inner life. In his perspective, death is exactly what puts an end to the individual as a collection of manifestations and phenomena. Still, death is also something inscrutable to poetry too, in front of which it is better to leave (as the painter does at the end, leaving Carlotta's body in the hands of Gulz).

Due to their nuances, Arrigo and Camillo Boito's works occupy a crucial role – they provide a significant example of the shape that Positivism took upon its assimilation to Italian literature. It should be added the interpretation that they supported was not isolated, this way witnessing how authors shared a similar attitude to Positivism until the *fin de siècle*. The belief that science's intervention is anti-human due to its interfering with the domain of human feelings recurs in Luigi Capuana's debut tale 'Dottor Cymbalus', published in *La Nazione* on 3, 5, 8, 9 October 1867.[29] Following by two years 'Lezione d'anatomia', to which it is clearly connected, though having less deep implications, Capuana's tale is the story of William, who resorts to the physician of the title in order to dispose of two deep disillusionments – that of his girlfriend, who has married another man, and that of his mother, who has repudiated him. The idea behind the tale is the same as 'Un corpo' – there is a connection between the body and the mind, and both are made of matter, which is supposed to be always changing – 'si trasforma e trasforma […] quello che noi chiamiamo spirito, pensiero'[30] – in a way that reminds us of mechanical materialism and the material regeneration in Foscolo's

[29] See Luigi Capuana, *Racconti*, ed. by Enrico Ghidetti, 3 vols (Rome: Salerno, 1973), vol. I, pp. 231-249.
[30] Capuana, p. 239.

'Dei Sepolcri'.[31] In the same way as Descartes, who located materially soul in the pineal gland, Cymbalus believes that human feelings reside in a specific point of spine – by intervening on this point, it is possible to modify the emotional sphere of an individual. However, the end of the tale, in which William becomes completely insensitive to emotions after the operation, is the proof that the invisible remains a sphere of its own – for better and worse – and scientists, with their methodologies that are thought for the merely visible, should not meddle with it. In Capuana's tale, the effects of scientific intervention are in fact irreversible and able to spoil the life of an individual. Differently from Gulz's tireless persuasion, Cymbalus himself is aware of the collateralism implied in his discipline when he affirms that science is unable to provide men and women with the spiritual comforts that they need: 'La scienza sarà impotente a darvi il minimo aiuto. È la sua inferiorità di faccia alla natura, è la sua miseria attuale'[32]. And the fact that, at the end of the tale, William decides to put an end to his life with a gunshot means that he has understood that death is what remains to him to find comfort, proclaiming again the superiority of the invisible.

A similar interpretation applies, finally, to Salvatore Di Giacomo's tale 'Vecchie conoscenze', from the collection *Nella vita* (1903), which is also one of the latest re-interpretations of Positivism in Italian literature in terms of dichotomies. The tale features the friendship between the main character and a circus strongman, who goes crazy and undergoes internment after his wife's elopement with the clown of the circus company. Di Giacomo puts in opposition

[31] See Ugo Foscolo, 'Dei Sepolcri', in *Opere*, ed. by Enzo Bottasso, 2 vols (Turin: UTET, 1968), vol. I, pp. 83-100 (ll. 16-22).
[32] Capuana, p. 240.

the lecture on the strongman's head bumps, which a professor is conducting in terms of phrenology at the hospital, to the emotional implications in his behaviour and that of his wife. Whereas Gall's theory, a discipline that infers the traits of personality from the shape of one's head – the 'diagnosi da' caratteri fisici'[33] – concerns the directly observable, the affectivity behind a *ménage à trois* is something that scientific disciplines are unable to analyse – something that the main character rhetorically notices with himself: 'Ah, la vita, la vita!'.[34] But, as said above, that in Di Giacomo's tale is just one of the last examples of the dichotomous attitude to the modern scientific discourse. The beginning of the twentieth century will be characterised in fact by a general distrust and a rejection of the new theories elaborated in Northern Europe.

All these tendencies were sort of implicit in the Boito brothers' works of 1865-70, in which the problem of 'modern' science and that of 'modernising' literature and the arts was subsumed into the ambiguous triangle between a doctor, an artist/poet and a female corpse (already dead, or soon to be). Both medicine and art can only deal with the visible and outward aspects of the body-machine, and are intrinsically unable to grasp what lies beyond the realm of representation. In this sense, both texts depict a male *échec*, in that both show male subjects who can only cope with the woman as a lifeless and motionless being, her inner life being outside the controlling power of knowledge. As such, the doctor-artist-

[33] Salvatore Di Giacomo, 'Vecchie conoscenze', in *Le poesie e le novelle*, ed. by Francesco Flora and Mario Vinciguerra, 9th edn (Milan: Mondadori, 1971), pp. 604-616 (p. 614).
[34] Di Giacomo, p. 616.

woman triangle questions the visible-invisible dichotomy, interrogating the limits of representation and, in some sense, the aporias of masculinity.

In the next chapter, I shall explore a further declination of this triangle, namely the way literature gives account of spiritualistic experiences. A way of coping, again, with the problem of the 'invisible' – in a most literal way –, *Spiritismo* often stages highly gendered tensions, in that the medium (often, and especially in literature, a female subject) is made the object of male observer's control. At the same time, the body of the medium – an object of 'detached' description and 'scientific' analysis – is constructed as a quintessential site of alterity, in that it channels and is animated by forces (spirits, fluids and ectoplasms) that constantly escape the limits of representation, and can only be fleetingly captured by technical devices that indefinitely aim to turn what is, in its essence, invisible, into the realm of visibility. In Italy, the relationship between literature and *Spiritismo* dates back to Luigi Capuana's essay 'Spiritismo?', the analysis of which will consequently form the core of the following chapter.

II. The Body and the Unconscious, Mediumship and the Artwork: Perspectives on Italian Spiritismo

2.1. The Visible and the Invisible in Italian Spiritismo

On 17 July 2005 an Italian TV programme, *Voyager*, which is devoted to 'mysteries' in their broadest meaning – such as ghosts, UFO, cryptozoology, and demonic possession – reported that the portrait of a nineteenth-century woman had changed expression during the shooting. The presenter of the programme clarified that this portrait was kept in the house of a family that once hosted the Italian clairvoyant Adolfo Gustavo Rol, who was supposed to be in spiritual contact with the woman portrayed. Rol – who was told to be able to materialise things and paint artworks with the power of his mind[1] – had just spread the news that the woman's son, unjustly convicted in life, *de facto* was innocent. The woman's sudden smile on her face was, then, the sign of the happiness for the posthumous discovery of truth. The presenter specified that the transformation of the painting was not observed directly by the programme staff, but through the lens of a video camera, and that the camera operator photographed it immediately as soon as he realised that something 'strange' was occurring. Displayed during the programme, this picture (of a low-definition kind) really showed the figure in the portrait smiling, as the result of a transformation

[1] See Dino Buzzati, 'Un pittore morto da 70 anni ha dipinto un paesaggio a Torino', in *I misteri d'Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), pp. 49-60.

supposedly due to a mysterious force. The presenter assured the viewers that it was not the effect of a late manipulation and invited the public to trust the picture, which was therefore the reproduction of reproduction of a supernatural phenomenon.

Beyond implying the celebration of the virtues of Rol as an occultist, this episode presupposes that 'in the third millennium' visualisation is still the *sine qua non* for the approach to the so-called 'supernatural'. In order to be trusted, in other words, a ghost – which the presenter assumed to haunt the painting – needs to be seen. *De facto,* this does not necessarily mean that it must become immediately perceivable to sight – mechanical visual reproduction (even in the extreme of the reproduction of a reproduction) is considered as sufficient for ghosts to be ascertained. Indeed, since the official birth of Spiritualism in Europe and *Spiritismo* in Italy, the process of visualisation of psychic phenomena has levered mechanical reproduction provided by photography for the scientific proof of its reality.[2] As a mechanical means, the camera was attributed by common sense a power of reproducing the world that was much more accurate, in terms of objectivity, than the sense of sight – as noted by Walter Benjamin – which couples, however, with the simultaneous idea that photographs are generally more evocative than 'mere' reality.[3] In this sense, photography resulted from the development of the 'magic lantern' device, used in order to evoke an

[2] A wide number of these photographs, starting from the Victorian era, are in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*, ed. by Clement Cheroux and others (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005). The book refers to an exhibition held at the Harriette and Noel Levine Gallery and the Howard Gilman Gallery, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York, on 27 September-31 December 2005.

[3] See Benjamin, Walter, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings and others, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, MA-London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 19-55 (pp. 21-22).

imaginative sense of ghosts' presence (which replaced their actual perception),[4] compounded by the philosophy of observation that had been established from Galileo onwards, and was part of the 'lanternicity' philosophy that was relevant to Gothic narrative since the eighteenth century.[5]

These characteristics – reliability of cameras and suggestive power of photographs – explain why since their invention cameras were recurrent elements during séances as a proof for psychic phenomenology and, at the same time, were the spark for further – supposed – visualisations. On the contrary, eyes and human senses in general were (and still are) considered as misleading and untrustworthy for the perception of reality – an assumption that is counterbalanced by the commonplace about the virtually immense capacity of the brain, supposedly known in its potentiality only to a small percentage. The presenter's guarantee about the truth of what he showed in the programme falls within the same cultural background. No matter, in fact, if no-one saw the woman's face while it changed expression (if some had seen it directly, after all, they could have been questioned by appealing generally to the fallacy of their sight). The reproduction of the self-moving portrait, which may meet any recipient at any time and everywhere due to its potentially infinite reproducibility, enables the public to experience the supernatural event and debate the existence of an afterworld.

The key points of this episode – the solution of the visible-invisible dichotomy in favour of the latter pole (the ghost) – recur in Italian *Spiritismo*,

[4] See John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), p. 20.
[5] For the concept of 'lanternicity' in narrative and as a crucial element in the birth of cinema, see David J. Jones, *Sexuality and the Gothic Magic Lantern: Desire, Eroticism and Literary Visibilities from Byron to Bram Stoker* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 1-31.

which was not limited to the evocation of spirits, and rather encompassed a precise idea of literary tradition and a philosophy of artistic creation (as I show in the second part). The cultural construct of the (formerly) non-perceivable side of reality, which becomes perceptible under specific circumstances, implies that there are different levels of 'visibility', and the dichotomy highlighted in the analysis of Arrigo Boito's poem becomes here something more nuanced than a mere contrast between the completely perceivable and the wholly hidden.

Truly, the conceptualisation of this kind of 'multi-level' visible gave new meaning to Shakespeare's famous sentence from Hamlet's dialogue with Horatio on the great quantity of things that crowd both earth and heaven. People's unawareness of this abundance adumbrates exactly the different degrees of visibility, most of which it is impossible for people to perceive, at least at first blush. Accordingly, this quotation appears as an *exergum* at the beginning of Capuana's essay 'Spiritismo?' (which I analyse in the second part of this chapter) and undergoes an adaptation in Anselmo Vecchio's observation from the book *Spiritismo. Pagine sparse*, in which it alludes to a kind of superiority in the amount of things that still wait to be brought to light: 'Il dominio dell'invisibile è ben più vasto e più ricco di quello del mondo visibile'.[6] Vecchio's sentence suggests the concept of a world that is unknown to many, dramatically at the mercy of mysterious forces, where nonetheless visualisation works as a cognitive condition and form of acculturation. Furthermore, by entailing the reproducibility of its object (in this case, spirit materialisation), the mechanical device serves also the function of a democratisation of the object itself, which is burst out from

[6] Anselmo Vecchio, *Spiritismo. Pagine sparse* (New York: Italian American Printing, 1914), p. 184.

the circles in which it initially manifested (séances) for it to be experienced by everyone regardless of the social status and the education.[7] After all, the development of the daguerreotype was linked with the need for a documentation of 'other realities', such as those of Southern Italy (Verga himself was a photographer, willing to display the *Questione meridionale* through the pictures of its characters), and photography was bound to the pedagogical purposes of the new Italian Kingdom. Very likely, then, similar intentions were behind the 'democratic' pictures of ghosts, willing to prove the immense power of the brain (and that reality is not only what we see), and the photographs that wanted to demonstrate that the Unification was not as univocal an event as many were led to believe.

Indeed, the obsolescence of the static concept of the 'visible' in terms of mere phenomenon occurred on the ground of the possibilities opened by new media technologies, which – as we are reminded by Tatiana Kantou – contributed to the development of Spiritualism with their new theoretical implications and even new vocabulary that referred to such novel things as the wire and the telegraph.[8] In their creating 'new imaginations' and culture – to say it with Karin Littau[9] – media technologies in turn were boosted by the new studies on electricity, which had given account of a world in which the exterior features (e.g. colours) and the perceivability of something were not attributes of

[7] See Harvey, p. 30. See also Benjamin, pp. 21-22: '[…] technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain. Above all, it enables the original to meet the recipient halfway, whether in the form of a photograph or in that of a gramophone record'.

[8] See Tatiana Kantou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 147-171 (p. 150).

[9] See Karin Littau, 'The Ghost is the Machine: Media-Philosophy and Materialism', in *New Takes on Film-Philosophy*, ed. by Havi Carel and Greg Tuck (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 154-170 (pp. 155-156).

the substance, but derived from the light that they reflected. At the far end of this new 'visible-invisible' contrast – where ghosts are supposed to lie – it becomes easy to establish an identification between the electric spark and the sudden glare that precedes the materialisation of a spirit from the medium, if anything in that they come from the same invisible dimension. Such equivalence is implied in the *art-nouveau*'s commercials of the light bulb (e.g. Giovanni Maria Mataloni's poster for the *Società Anonima per la Incandescenza a Gas*), in which a lamp in front of a woman's forehead produces a glare, which, however, seems to receive energy from the woman herself and creates a halo around her, thereby making it difficult to understand whether the glare is a spirit or a simple light. The ambiguity is exhibited in Eugenio Prati's painting *Scintilla elettrica o elettricità* (1899), in which a woman concentrates upon the evocation of light from her head and hands, which in turn produces the name of inventor Alessandro Volta as if it was the result of an ectoplasmic formation. These commercials and paintings convey the idea that, due to light or mind power (or maybe due to both), some things become perceivable at some point by means of the female body, and their manifestation is only one phase in the mysterious passage from the invisible to the visible. In addition, these posters – inscribed in the exaltation of the technological progress that Carducci already tackled in his poetry (e.g. 'Inno a Satana', 1867) – lay bare once again the 'networking' between electricity and ghosts in terms of something that exists naturally regardless of its (initial) imperceptibility – which was one of the evidences added by nineteenth-century Spiritualists and *Spiritisti*.

Figure 1. Giovanni Maria Mataloni, Poster for the 'Società anonima per l'incandescenza a gas' (1895)

Figure 2. Eugenio Prati, 'Scintilla elettrica o elettricità' (1899)

2.2. Between Darkness and Light: The Cases of Eusapia Palladino and Linda Gazzera

As far as Italian *Spiritismo* is concerned, the clinical gaze – which played a fundamental role in Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia', in which it subsumed the scientific mind-set imposed by Positivism – exerted on the activities of mediums Eusapia Palladino and Linda Gazzera – both were observed in action and their 'miracles' witnessed by the Lombroso-Morselli duo and Enrico Imoda, respectively. In terms of the visible-invisible dichotomy, their activities represent two different phases in the visualisation of psychic phenomena, and attest the gradual replacement of direct observation with mechanical visual reproduction.

In this first step of the construction process of the otherness, the clinical gaze exerted on the entity materialised during séances, thereby implying the ghost as the mere epistemic object in need of a definition. Such a step relied (as in the case of Palladino) on a symbolic and synesthetic shift – from darkness, where séances resulted in mere auditory effects (raps and fist-like blows), to light, not only to check possible tricks on the part of the mediums, but to confirm previous conclusions on their powers through direct observation.[10] The passage from darkness to light symbolises the process itself of visualisation, moving from the 'obscurity' of the occult dimension to the 'clarity' of positivist knowledge, as symbolised by contemporary painting too (thinking of Gaetano Previati's *La creazione della luce* (1913), in which God not only separates light from darkness, but also – symbolically – knowledge from ignorance). By pinpointing this light-visibility-knowledge coincidence, such a process is reprised in contrastive terms

[10] See Cesare Lombroso, *Osservazioni sui fenomeni ipnotici e spiritici* (Milan: et al., 2010), pp. 142-145.

until the Futurist painting (e.g. Giacomo Balla's *Scienza contro oscurantismo*, 1920), alluding to the 'invisible discipline' in need for the 'light' of science as the only guarantee of reliability.[11]

In terms of the 'visible-invisible' dichotomy, the shift from the 'miracles' of Palladino to Gazzera's relies on the introduction of mechanical devices, since the 22-year-old medium could not be seen directly as she always acted in complete darkness, and yet was photographed during the materialisation of ectoplasms with a rudimental magnesium powder flash. The evidently altered pictures taken by Enrico Imoda denotes the pre-eminence attributed to the materialisation of the 'ghost-object' at any cost, since the pictures of Gazzera flanked by presumed ectoplasms or segments of a human body are but the outcome of evident photomontages, and the woman is reproduced along with depicted boards, porcelain dolls and glaring devices. Once more, the evident artificiality of the photographs reveals the need for an ontological evidence of the existence of ghosts through the fact that they are observable (regardless of the falsification of their object) – more in general that, to put it in Susan Sontag's terms, 'something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture'.[12]

In such a conceptualisation of the otherness, the fluids by which ghosts appear respond to the need for the materialisation of the unconscious, implying the supremacy of human interiority. In this way, Morselli's reference to the *Doppelgänger* – tackled in nineteenth-century literature (Hoffmann, Poe,

[11] On the scientific reliability of Spiritualism, see Enrico Morselli, *Psicologia e "Spiritismo". Impressioni e note critiche sui fenomeni medianici di Eusapia Palladino*, 2 vols (Turin: Bocca, 1908), vol. I, p. 68: 'È soltanto in uno studio dei *fatti*, scevro per adesso da premature generalizzazioni e da affrettate ipotesi esplicative, che si rinchiude la *corrente investigatrice* veramente seria, strettamente scientifica, dell'epoca attuale'. On this idea, see also Angelo Brofferio, *Per lo Spiritismo* (Milan: Briola, 1893), p. 91.
[12] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), p. 6.

Dostoevsky, Stevenson, etc.) – as an attempt to personify the unconscious on the part of primitive populations, works as a bridge between *Spiritismo* and the animistic beliefs. Indeed, both are linked on the field of a primeval necessity to personify our mysterious Double in every time and cultural context.[13] In this 'biology-based' representation of the 'ghost-other' in terms of ectoplasm lies certainly a recovery of Mesmerism, which supported holistic theories on fluids and flowing streams that affect human health, but also – picking up Matthew Pateman's interpretation on pornography – the 'ejaculocentric' philosophy on which sexual images and videos, with their insistence on bodily fluids, are grounded.[14] Accordingly, Morselli's interpretation of *Spiritismo* as a form of 'perpetuità dell'io cosciente'[15] and, above all, the 'funzioni effettuantisi a scariche (p. es. la sessuale)'[16] that distinguish the medium, seems to recall the abundance of seminal fluid that is characteristic of pornography, re-asserting male superiority over the female body with its copiousness of liquids. Mediums' being compelled to expel their own fluids displays, then, male supremacy (fluids being symbolic of male sexuality, even if in this case they are produced by women), as witnessed by the reported episodes of Palladino and Gazzera tired after séances, and nonetheless forced by scientists to evoke new spirits. The ghost as an otherness proves to be inscribed, then, within an economy-based system, as a serial product that the medium-worker is forced to generate, so to meet the requirements imposed by the observer-employer – which is recalled by

[13] See the examples collected by Morselli, pp. 52-53.
[14] See Matthew Patheman, ' "Coming on Strong": The Abjection of Pornography', in *Signs of Masculinity: Men in Literature 1700 to the Present*, ed. by Antony Rowland, Emma Iggins, Eriks Uskalis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 162-177 (p. 170).
[15] Morselli, p. 28.
[16] Morselli, p. 204.

the episode of Palladino demotivated and yet aware that it was the only way she had to make her living.[17]

Such a compulsion suggests a comparison between the medium who 'produces' ectoplasms and the hysterical person who 'produces' an assorted symptomatology, thus re-adapting an idea in Ernesto De Martino's *La fine del mondo* about the tendency to 'production' and 'repetition' that characterises our life at both a psychological (e.g. the neurotic) and a political level (e.g. the alienated worker, forced to produce according to capitalist directions).[18] The equivalence between mediums and hysterical characters – a further development of the idea of *Spiritismo* as related to the unconscious[19] – is synthesised by the words with which Morselli labels Palladino – '*isterica ipnotizzabile* e *autoipnotizzabile*'.[20] However, by shifting the construct of otherness from the 'product' (ghost/nervous malady) to the 'producer' (medium/hysterical person), such equivalence remarks the cultural process that consists in the feminisation of the medium, which runs parallel to that of the hysteric, as Morselli's words imply after all. Resulting from the same clinical gaze, mediums and hysterical patients

[17] This point is also discussed by Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Widenfeld and Nicolson: 1983), pp. 130-136 (p. 135).

[18] See Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 223-230.

[19] Angelo Brofferio hypothesises an unconscious source for psychic phenomena, pointing out that the existence of 'un'intelligenza incosciente' has been widely accepted as a 'dogma' since its introduction in Leibniz's philosophical thought: see Brofferio, p. 104.

[20] Morselli, p. 273. The equivalence between mediumship and hysteria is also detectable on the ground of methodology. See Morselli, p. 50: '[…] purtroppo anche nello spiritualismo sperimentale più arieggiante a scienza positiva, la tecnica è prefissata e sta alle soglie delle Cliniche neuro-psichiatriche, e talvolta anche del Manicomio'. On this point, see Molly McGarry, *Ghost of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 125-128. According to the author, the different states of trance 'mirrored the stages of hysteria as it was being diagnosed and codified […] in asylums and symposiums throughout United States and Europe' (McGarry, p. 126).

see themselves compounded by the presumed riddle in which female interiority *tout court* is supposed to consist, being patriarchally inscrutable and mainly referable to in terms of dreams and fancy. In this way, 'i mondi | del sogno e l'anima' are not only those from which reveries are generated, but those from which ghosts stem during séances. In the unconscious region thus defined, ghosts *are*, rather, those dreams – to which it is alluded with the attempts to explain the 'miracles' of Palladino as the expression of the woman's inmost desires.

Part of this process of reification, aiming at inspecting the female medium/hysteric, is the 'fragmentation' that the female figure undergoes, as long as we consider the analysis of hysterical symptoms as a 'dissection' of the female body through its exterior manifestations, in the same way as every single part of the physical medium was supposed to be involved actively during the psychic manifestations. (This is true for Gazzera, portrayed through her bodily details – a hand, an arm, her face, etc. – in the act of generating ectoplasmatic figures.) Accordingly, the height, the conformation of the skull, the temperament (defined as variable), and the intelligence (which was indicated as limited in the case of Palladino, according to Morselli and Lombroso) are emblematic of this anatomisation as crucial elements in the analysis of the medium's activity. In a similar way, the concept of 'disgregazione psicologica',[21] which was applied again by Morselli to Palladino, is the latest result of a process of dissection that involves the individual, and leads to the concepts of multiple-personality disorder

[21] Morselli, p. 219: 'Io penso più che mai alla teoria della disgregazione psicologica: – è la personalità inferiore, puerile, della *medium* quella che si manifesta nei fenomeni: questo pel contenuto, dirò così, intellettuale dei fenomeni. Quanto alla loro meccanica, parmi che si debba preferire sempre la spiegazione della esteriorizzazione del pensiero (subcosciente e automatismo)'.

and schizophrenia as explanations of the psychical miracles in terms of hallucinations.

However, it is on the ground of an ontological resistance, that is, an impenetrability to any attempt on the part of the clinical gaze to understand them in depth, that both the patient and the medium as 'alterities' find one of their major points of contact. While in 'Lezione d'anatomia' such resistance results in the inability to objectify the dead girl and in the gnoseological failure symbolised by the discovery of the foetus (as if this was what the interiority of the woman may reveal at most), in the case of *Spiritismo* it is the incapacity for scientists to subjugate the medium through a complete reification. Mediums remain inscrutable in their essence. In this escaping from the control of a superior *auctoritas* lie, too, the mystery represented by the medium and the fact that she is provided with an enormous power as long as she is what gives voice to the 'otherness' that substantiates male supremacy. In other words, the 'other-than-self' – historically provided with all the features that the clinical gaze attributes to it[22] – is a crucial construct in building the identity of the male observer as well, and precisely in the moment in which the observer wants to scrutinise and describe otherness.[23] However – and paradoxically – it is on this need for an

[22] See Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 7: 'The act of seeing is the act of the creation of historically determined (and therefore socially acceptable) images that permit a distinction to be made between the observer and the Other'.

[23] See Alice Jardine, 'Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology', in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 84-96 (p. 85): 'Since Lacan at the very least, it has been made quite clear, particularly in France, that One never writes without the Other, One never writes Alone; One is always at least two, usually more: One is always coupled with Others. […] the lonely image of the lone author, always male, remains alive only for die-hard romantics. The couple, therefore,

object on the part of the observer that the power of both the hysterical woman and the medium relies. In this kind of 'counter-transference' process, they overturn their initial condition of supposed inferiority, and 'keep in check' the physician and the psychiatrist, respectively, with their resistance to science-based exposure. This new – reversed – situation sees the replacement of the presumed rationality imposed by anatomical and psychological enquiries with a novel construct in which otherness – the medium as well as the *sonnambula*[24] – turns into something that remains even more impenetrable (and, therefore, powerful) behind the inevitable process of stereotypisation – a construct that eludes any attempt of patriarchal comprehension/control. In general, however, what eludes the attempt of comprehension is not only the woman's mind (or unconscious) while evoking spirits or abandoning itself to *reveries*, but the female figure as a whole, dangerously prone to escaping from male control during the activity that suits her less (according again to male observers) – the activity of reading (as I will show in the next chapter). Within such a framework, the construction of the female otherness is compounded by social status, which intersects with gender as long as the woman scrutinised comes from the people, and is able therefore to shake up the certainties of the male – aristocratic – observer even more consistently. Accordingly, Palladino's and Gazzera's 'illiteracy', pinpointed as an evidence of their social origin and a sign of their authenticity, has the effect to reinforce the mystery represented by medium's interiority, thereby updating the

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has not only become the privileged *object* of contemporary interpretive fascination, but has become its doubled *subject* as well'.

[24] See Clara Gallini, *La sonnambula meravigliosa. Magnetismo e ipnotismo nell'Ottocento italiano* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), pp. 43-48 (p. 45).

patriarchal overlapping between the woman and those individuals considered as close to a natural condition on the evolutionary scale.

2.3. The Literary Fathers and the Medium: Capuana's Essay 'Spiritismo?'

It is a sign of the deference to a deep-rooted cultural background that the *spiritisti* referred to a literary canon in their works and the spirits evoked during séances were not those of common people, but important authors of the past. This peculiarity is a distinguishing trait of Italian *Spiritismo*, if we can consider that on the *Annali dello Spiritismo italiano*'s review Dante is a recurrent character, acting as a tutelary deity for the *spiritisti*, who shared the spiritualist interpretation of the *Paradiso* diffused in the second half of the nineteenth century. Probably based on this, a sort of respect towards this political icon seemed to prevent the scholars of the *Annali* from the evocation, at least in the nineteenth century,[25] of this figure – a figure that was a *trait d'union* between political forces and those gathered around the spiritistic groups, as if both were animated by similar purposes and attitudes.[26]

[25] Dante is evoked several times in the psychic circle of Nella Doria Cambon, but in the 1920s (when the psychic sessions are supposed to take place), the political symbols previously identified in the figure of Dante and his works are mostly depleted. Significantly, in the séance on 26 October 1921, Dante is merely asked about some literary evaluations on his posterity, and describes Leopardi as an author who lacked '*l'ossatura ed il principio*': see Nella Doria Cambon, *Il convito spiritico* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1925), pp. 141-144 (p. 143).

[26] The literary figure of Dante was celebrated as 'an ethical and a political model' at least starting from a sonnet by Vittorio Alfieri in 1783, inaugurating a cultural trend that perpetuated throughout the *Ottocento* – think of Leopardi's 'Sopra il monumento di Dante' – establishing the author of the *Comedìa* as a symbol of the *Risorgimento* and the political unification. On this point, see Stefano Jossa, 'Politics vs. Literature: The Myth

In terms of history of culture, the particular deference to the past responds to the worship of the 'literary fathers', which crosses nineteenth-century Italian literature as expressing the demands of a nation that was looking for a cultural identity and needed to refer, therefore, to its glorious past. Examples of such worship are Foscolo's 'urne de' forti' in the poem 'Dei Sepolcri' – the illustrious personalities buried in Florentine Basilica of Santa Croce, reminding visitors of Italian virtues[27] – and Leopardi's 'padri' – elsewhere called 'antichi' in opposition to the 'moderni'[28] – in 'Ad Angelo Mai', who are brought to the present due to the philological work of a man of genius.[29] The need to engage with that literary and political tradition affects Italian Spiritualism too and arises from Capuana's essay 'Spiritismo?' (1884), in which the question mark in the title takes a polemical meaning as the whole book denies the definition of Spiritualism as a discipline on its own and rather considers it as a scientific

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of Dante and the Italian National Identity', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. by Aida Audeh and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 32-48 (p. 37).

[27] Ugo Foscolo, 'Dei Sepolcri', in *Opere*, ed. by Enzo Bottasso, 2 vols (Turin: UTET, 1968-1969), vol. I (*Poesie e prose d'arte*, 1968), pp. 83-100 (ll. 151-152: 'A egregie cose il forte animo accendono | l'urne de' forti [...]'.

[28] As for the *antichi-moderni* opposition (where the former pole is the equivalent of classical literature), see Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Rolando Damiani, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), vol. I, pp. 6-9.

[29] Giacomo Leopardi, 'Ad Angelo Mai, quand'ebbe trovato i libri di Cicerone della Repubblica', in *Poesie e prose*, vol. I, pp. 16-21. The examples of the Fathers are also present in Gabriele D'Annunzio's preface to the novel *Trionfo della morte* (1894), represented by the works of Agostino da Scarperia, Bono Giamboni, Caterina da Siena, Giordano da Rivalta, Domenico Cavalca, and Jacopo Passavanti. These authors form a precise canon, which D'Annunzio had already delineated in an article on 'L'arte letteraria nel 1892', published in *Il Mattino* on 28-29 December 1892, as an antidote to the mediocre literature that he observed at his time. See Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, ed. by Annamaria Andreoli, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1996-2003), vol. II (2003), pp. 110-115. In the dedication, these examples work in two different directions. First, they are meant to furnish a stylistic training for nineteenth-century authors, encouraging them to reproduce in their works the sentence structure of their predecessors and some of their linguistic archaisms. Second, they establish a sort of 'cultural legacy', with which authors need to cope if they want to make their novels more adherent to life in terms of representation.

branch. The obligation towards the tradition emerges in the conjuring of Foscolo on the part of Capuana's assistant Beppina Poggi – which confirms once more the interpretation of *Spiritismo* in terms of 'return' of past culture.[30] But this return includes other cultural forces too, such as those that convey a precise representation of the female figure, which permeates Italian literature since its first authorial expressions with the Sicilian School and is the object of reification in Capuana's personal spiritistic experience. However, such reification finds a sort of resistance on the part of the character evoked, which lives a life of its own as an artwork, and becomes conscious of its 'submission', thereby contradicting the initial patriarchal framework within which it was generated. In this kind of Spiritualism, no more responsible for the 'tavole che si sollevano e scricchiolano', the 'strumenti musicali che suonano', and the 'luci misteriose',[31] the unconscious becomes the place that, through a reaction to the patriarchal forces that oppress the medium, allows an appropriate form of resistance.

The importance of the literary tradition in the elaboration of Italian *Spiritismo* is clear if we understand that the writer conjured, during the psychic experimentations, was one in the work of whom the ethical-political issue was crucial, as can be seen from the epistolary novel *Ortis* – a writer who contributed to spreading the idea that the re-reading of Dante (and, to a lesser extent, Petrarch) in the nineteenth century played a prominent role in the foundation of the national identity in Italy.[32] Affected by contemporary literary criticism, the figure evoked by Beppina has the same characteristics as the writer described in

[30] Luigi Capuana, 'Spiritismo?', in *Mondo occulto*, ed. by Simona Cigliana (Catania: Edizioni del Prisma, 1995), pp. 55-162 (pp. 79-89).
[31] Capuana, p. 60.
[32] See Joseph Luzzi, 'Founders of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, and National Identity in Ugo Foscolo', in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century,* pp. 13-27.

Giuseppe Chiarini's *fin-de-siècle* essays on Foscolo (especially those on *Gli amori di Ugo Foscolo*, finally collected in 1892), which Capuana was reading while devoting himself to psychic experimentation. These characteristics include a passionate nature, impetuosity and even aggressiveness – those that, presumably suggested by Capuana to his assistant during the conjuring, we usually recognise in the stereotypical figure of Foscolo. In other words, the one evoked was not the ghost of Foscolo, but rather his literary figure, surrounded with all the mythography attributed to the character.

As a form of deference towards the poetical tradition – which contemplated love and a stereotypical image of the loved woman among the topics – the supposed spirit of the poet wants at some point to 'marry' Beppina (and the element of the marriage seems to provide a 'legalised' image of the possession). Based on the 'literalisation' of the episode, the spirit is said to bring the woman during her trance state into such places as sumptuous bridal rooms and cemeteries, that is, those that belong to the pre-Romantic and Romantic literary tradition, which establish a symbolical union between ἔρως and θάνατος (to which bridal rooms and cemeteries allude, respectively).[33] In compliance with this scene, Beppina is turned into a fictional character as well. Not only does she undergo the same destiny as Carlotta in Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo' – that of being objectified according to artistic canons pertaining to the cultural horizon of the (male) observer – but she is assimilated to the myth of Ophelia as well, which recurs in Decadent literature as referring to the patriarchal conceptualisation of the hysterical and yet magnetic woman. Affected by strabismus (Venus's

[33] See Capuana, p. 85.

characteristic trait of beauty), which significantly appears only during her trance state, and portrayed in typically-hysterical attitudes – as they were catalogued in the nineteenth century (with a lost gaze, fierce expression of the lips, a peculiar posture of the head, etc.) – Beppina has no better similitude that gives account of her beauty than the Shakespearian heroine. The hysterical features of her trance state, of course linked with her mutation into Ophelia (a 'disturbed' character herself), are symptomatic of the reification of Beppina as a male construct, and are part of the fascination that she exerts as an otherness. Based on this, the evaluation of Beppina's beauty by using the metaphor of photography obeys a cultural trend in which the female exteriority cannot be evaluated unless it is fixed either in an idealised painting (as in Camillo Boito's tale) or in a daguerreotype (which served the purpose to provide representations of hysterical women in asylums). What is more, beyond the 'evidence' of Beppina's hysterical symptomatology, the definition of this literary woman finds in the photography of her appearance the highest accuracy of representation, which no painter is said to be able to match:

> […] i caratteri della nevrosi isterica appaiono evidenti nello sguardo smarrito, nella fiera espressione delle labbra, nell'atteggiamento della testa e delle braccia. Nessun pittore ha mai dipinto un'Ofelia così terribilmente vera da poter reggere il paragone di questa fotografia della Beppina.[34]

Similarly to those places in Arrigo Boito's poem in which the consumptive girl is provided with deep interiority, the trance states of this

[34] Capuana, p. 86.

literary medium let foresee something that lies beneath the surface of her 'photography', and comes back in the form of the ghost. As a confirmation, the spirit that haunts Beppina, previously identified with Foscolo, becomes at some point simply a generic otherness, which seems to embody the woman's unconscious enemy and is indicated by masculine personal pronouns highlighted with italic font in the printed text. In this generic masculinisation of the unconscious lies an essential phase of Beppina's process of emancipation. That 'male' spirit is in fact the one with which Beppina is supposed to engage for her survival, that is, for her affirmation as an individual:

> La Beppina, nel sentirlo avvicinare, aggrappavasi, tremante, al mio braccio, invocando aiuto e difesa. Io aveva già steso intorno lei [*sic*] la mia solita cinta fluidica, ma *lui*, intanto *le fremeva attorno*, benché tenuto discosto.[35]

As a modern Daphne, Beppina escapes from an oppressive Apollo that wants to possess her – that is, she struggles every night not to be subjugated by male ruling. Only her final convulsions – which are frightful and able to induce an uncanny transformation in her essence – put an end to the spirit's attempts. Though not transforming her into a tree, as in the renowned myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, yet these convulsions – an unmistakable symptom of hysteria in several psychiatric studies, including Breuer's and Freud's 1895 work[36] – free Beppina from the initial reification and are able to turn her into something new, unknown and unknowable to the male observer. These convulsions are a form of

[35] Ibid.
[36] See Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 4.

pre-linguistic protest against patriarchy according to feminist thought – e.g. Elaine Showalter[37] – and adumbrate that the female character, initially codified as a stereotypical one, is now striving to assume an identity of her own. But they recall, too, a wider cultural context distinguished by the 'bodily control' problem, which, applied to women in terms of patriarchal normativity, has become crucial since the eighteenth century as related to the construction of male identity, as we are reminded by Stephen Gregg in his analysis of *Robinson Crusoe*'s representation of masculinity.[38] After this symbolic rebellion, the character of Beppina, is now owner of herself – which leaves Capuana significantly alone, in the following sections of the essay, in pursuing his psychic experiments and elaborating his own idea of artistic creation.

2.4. Mediumship and Artistic Creation: Capuana's Ghostly Narratives

The forces of the unconscious involved in mediumship, which previously emerged through an objectification of what prevented Beppina from emancipation, entails a constructive attitude too, which, however, seems to pertain mainly to male subjects and results in artistic creation. The literary work thus stemmed – definable as 'psychic narrative' – is not a 'pure' product, but is

[37] See Elaine Showalter, 'Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, pp. 286-335 (p. 286): 'Feminist understanding of hysteria has been influenced by work in semiotics and discourse theory, seeing hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, communicating through the body messages that cannot be verbalized. For some writers, hysteria has been claimed as the first step on the road to feminism, a specifically feminine pathology that speaks to and against patriarchy.'

[38] Stephen Gregg, ' "Strange Longing" and "Horror" in *Robinson Crusoe*', in *Signs of Masculinity*, pp. 37-63 (p. 45).

affected, again, by the same 'tradition' that is at work in the literalisation of the séance and its phenomena. Such a tradition includes in fact experiences that are close to the time of the medium, but also responding to the literary background that is deeply rooted in the cultural horizon of the *spiritista*. In addition, this idea of the unconscious is a bridge built with the following of the avant-gardes, which will aim to provide the automatic writing with a literary dignity (as in the surrealist theorisations of André Breton).

It is a significant passage in this process that, while attempting psychic experimentation without the help of any assistant, Capuana wanted to experiment on his own what Beppina had experienced under his observation. The shift from the previous masculinist objectification of the medium to this kind of self-analysis proves to be necessary in terms of approaching the final discovery of the unconscious. Freud himself, after all, would identify several psychoanalytical issues by focusing on what happened in his own mind, and Henri F. Ellenberger would ground his most famous research on this idea.[39] Such an 'individualised' progression was implied in the *cursus* of the nineteenth-century occultists, often intertwined with a degree of amateurishness that – as we are reminded by Simona Cigliana – spoke for the democratic nature of these kinds of studies.[40] Significantly, the 'internalisation' implied in this process develops as simultaneously as the one that is peculiar to the 'phantasmagoria' practice, which saw a gradual passage from a public/external dimension to a subjective/internal

[39] See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).
[40] See Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico. Contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Naples: Liguori, 2002), pp. 149-168 (p. 156).

one, as proved by Terry Castle in his historical analysis.[41] Both the subjectivation of the psychic phenomenon and the internalisation of the 'phantasmagoria' sourced, in other words, from the 'absorption of ghosts into the world of thought',[42] if we can understand these ghosts in their Greek and Latin meanings, that is, as εἴδωλα or *simulacra* that stem from somewhere. Both rely, indeed, on a progressive assimilation of the 'image', which could be either the one elaborated during dreams and deemed by psychoanalysis as the language of the unconscious, or that created with specific means such as cinema.

The idea of the unconscious developed in Capuana's essays as a literary tendency finds evidence first in the reported story of the illiterate fifteen-year-old boy, who is presented as a *medium intuitivo* and starts writing tales and fables unexpectedly.[43] However, an inspection of them reveals how these tales and fables are responding to the literary taste of the time and are filled with elements appertaining, on the one hand, to the Symbolistic and Pre-Raphaelite climate, and, on the other hand, to a more realistic literary wave. Pre-Raphaelitism, in particular, had access to Italian culture due to D'Annunzio's work first, although it must be remembered that several other authors including Enrico Nencioni and Arturo Graf contributed to acculturate the main features of this artistic movement in their literary works. Accordingly, the mysterious boy's narratives are traceable back to the revival of the Medieval prose – that of Giovanni Villani and Dino Compagni, whom Capuana mentions in a letter published at the beginning of his

[41] See Terry Castle, 'Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie', *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1988), 26-61. On the 'phantasmagoria', see also Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press 2000), pp. 136-175.
[42] Castle, p. 28.
[43] See Capuana, pp. 93-116.

essay[44] – that is, to the worship of the literary Fathers. But, as will be evident, this revival proves to be intertwined with religious concerns of a Catholic kind too. For example, the tale 'Gli orrori di Menelesta' relies on a Medieval use of symbols, embodied in the presence of a Tree of Life and an arcane Old Man of the Mountain in possession of miraculous skills, who is able to give and save life as a Redeemer. Similarly, the attempt to re-create an ancient Greek context in the following 'Il Re di Menefal' falls within another literary taste of the time, characterised by the presence of neo-Hellenistic and neo-Medievalist waves, which Angela Ida Villa has discussed as influencing the Italian literary movements especially in the first years of the twentieth century.[45] Moving from this, in the following paragraphs of the essay, this mysterious author, who is now disclosed as a certain Gordigiani, becomes a *medium meccanico* and is inspired by Fra Jacopone da Todi in his writing Medieval-like visions, updating symbols from the Middle Ages and the kind of language of the *Laudi*. In terms of content, the 'Visione terza' starts with the ascent to a hill, symbolically alluding to spiritual purification, which is accompanied by the typically Medieval contempt of body and matter, seen as mere obstacles for the soul's elevation: 'Miserello corpo, sempre tu m'infastidisti nel compiere alcuni ufficii, ma per altro ringrazioti dei sacrificii procacciatimi' .[46] The vision recalls the famous climb to Mont Ventoux narrated by Petrarch in a letter to Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro

[44] Capuana, p. 61: 'Quale potenza mirabile acquista a un tratto il suo stile di scolaretto svogliato, perché in un momento la sua prosa, che racconta, puta caso, un sollevamento di plebe ai tempi della repubblica fiorentina, acquisti un nerbo, una vigorìa, un colorito tali, che ricordano la lingua e lo stile d'un Dino Compagni o d'un Villani?'.
[45] The reference is to Angela Ida Villa, *Neoidealismo e rinascenza latina tra Otto e Novecento. La cerchia di Sergio Corazzini: poeti dimenticati e riviste del crepuscolarismo romano, 1903-1907* (Milan: LED, 1999).
[46] Capuana, p. 103.

– a spiritual climb that is difficult for Petrarch, who is still attached to earthly goods.[47] That, similar to this famous epistle, the ascent described is of a symbolic kind is confirmed by the following passage, in which several people are described as coming down again from the hill, thereby returning to the level ground, that is, to a beastly condition ('[…] gli vedevo sollazzare in recinto quasi ovile').[48] As in the Medieval literature that relies on the use of *exempla* (e.g. Bono Giamboni's thirteenth-century *Libro de' Vizî e delle virtudi*), in this 'Visione' it is possible to find the personification of virtues in the scene of the mysterious procession of small flames, which vary in dimension based on their strength and effectiveness. The fir standing in the centre of the scene is explained by Gordigiani upon his later reflection on the 'Visione' as an emblem of eternity due to its evergreen nature, and symbolises the timelessness of faith. The smaller trees that originate from its trunk are said to change in shape and size as long as they distance themselves from the centre (which emanates the 'light' of faith), until they reach deformity with the last exemplars – a sign of how faith becomes increasingly imperfect as far as it distances itself from the centre of its spiritual irradiation. With literary virtuosity, Gordigiani has recourse to old-fashioned and exquisite terms, generating a linguistic mixture that is affected by not only Symbolism, but also the literary mysticism and the Decadent trend of Italian neo-Franciscanism. On the same wavelength, his following 'Visioni' are interpretable as representations of the fight against the bestiality of humankind, expressed through the symbol of the rider (rationality), who submits to the caprice of his

[47] See Francesco Petrarca, 'Ad Dyonisium de Burgo Sancti Sepulcri ordinis sancti Augustini et sacre pagine professorem, de curis propriis', in *Prose*, ed. by Guido Martellotti and others (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1955), pp. 830-845.
[48] Capuana, p. 104.

horse (instinct). But there are also celebrations of Poverty – 'sirocchia Povertà'[49] – in the form of the narrator's spouse, as in Fransiscan literature ('Visione settima'), or visions of Heaven as a place where spirits go in procession as in Dante's own vision of afterlife. Something similar applies to Gordigiani's passages from *Cronaca della Guerra di Troia,* composed of prose and theatrical passages that re-write crucial episodes from Homer's *Iliad*. In this case, the literary preciosities of *Visioni di fra Iacopone da Todi* leave space for a concrete language and more realistic descriptions (in spite of the epic subject), which the narrator of 'Spiritismo?' interprets as gushing from the immense and still unknown power of the human mind. This shows how, though free from any science-based interpretation, the unconscious thus described is the place in which personal freedom interweaves with the cultural horizon of the experimenter. Mediumship, in other words, expresses itself by following the literary orientations of the time, whether they are a symbolic neo-mysticism or the effects of the literary climate created by Romanticism and *Verismo*.

Such a conceptualisation can be evaluated as soon as we consider Capuana's experiments with the technique of *écriture automatique*. The idea of a multi-faceted unconscious – 'sdoppiamento dello spirito', which is similar to a kind of 'concitazione d'animo'[50] – confirms again its definition in artistic terms, since it involves both a link with the existing literary tradition and a preview of the following experiences of the Avant-gardes. As for the former connection, it may be useful to consider the kind of achievements obtained by Capuana upon his progressive acquainting with his unconscious side. His 'automatic papers',

[49] Capuana, p. 109.
[50] Capuana, p. 91.

which he assumed to be dictated by one Giovanna Rachi possessing him, were not out-of-scheme compositions – yet they were the product of the experimenter's wide knowledge, resulting either in pseudo-Biblical quotations or the (inaccurate) reminiscence of Arrigo Boito's first stanza in the poem 'Dualismo': 'Son giuoco di Dio | son luce, son ombra'.[51] As for the connection with the Avant-gardes instead, it is worth taking into account how Capuana caught a primitive idea of automatic writing in artistic terms several decades earlier than its exploitation by part of Surrealists. Suffice it to say, he never considered his experiments as destined for the advancement of medicine.[52] This is even more interesting in comparison to the other *écriture automatique* techniques elaborated in England (Frederic William Henry Myers' automatisms) and France (Pierre Janet's *automatisme psychologique*) in the last twenty years of the century, which were developed for therapeutic purposes.

The connection between the literary work and the activity of the medium lies in what Capuana defines as a 'completa incoscienza',[53] that is, the region (*incoscienza* may be a synonym of unconscious) or the state (*incoscienza* may also indicate the condition of unawareness) in which they both take place. As far as literary works are concerned, this *incoscienza* results in the mental condition that consists in the complete liberation from thoughts and reflections, in order to allow the artwork to stem from mind as an impulsive product. This condition is but an altered state of consciousness, as inferred from the phrase 'allucinazione

[51] Capuana, p. 92. For the correct version of 'Dualismo' (already mentioned in the first chapter), see Arrigo Boito, pp. 53-55: 'Son luce ed ombra; angelica | farfalla o verme immondo, | sono un caduto chèrubo | dannato a errar sul mondo, | o un demone che sale, | affaticando l'ale, | verso un lontano ciel'.
[52] See Capuana, p. 91.
[53] Capuana, p. 119.

artistica',[54] which indicates the *sine qua non* for any artwork to be possible in its first manifestation and will be important for Pirandello's literary theory as well.[55] In the *modus operandi* that, thus delineated, leads to artistic creation, reflection (that is, any conscious interference from rationality) proves to be a secondary phase, which intervenes in order to modify – or even explain – the hallucinatory outcomes (as in the case of Gordigiani commenting on his own narratives by adding footnotes to his 'Visioni'). Reflection includes that expertise ('mestiere') and technicality ('tecnicismo') that refine the artwork, as in the experience of an author such as Balzac, the creation process of whom is seen as even painful due to the author's frequent changes of mind, or that of Zola, who is said to weave his literary works with a 'cold rationality'.[56]

Such passages from the essay 'Spiritismo?' configure, then, a dichotomy, which takes place within the male individual as it opposes the irrationality of the hallucinatory experience (the same observed in medium's performances) to the rationality given by later reflection and – specifically – the *labor limae* of the artist. Similarly to the previous dichotomies, this one presupposes the pre-eminence of one pole over the other, the superiority of one term (the same from which the daydreams of 'Lezione d'anatomia' stem) over its opposite (the one that leads to the cold scientific approach of Gulz). The celebration of the hallucinatory experience as the crucial input for artistic creation entails, in fact,

[54] Capuana, p. 120.
[55] As highlighted by Pupino, Pirandello will be picking up the concept of the hallucination just a little time later to denote the input for the genesis of his *personaggi*: see Angelo R. Pupino, *Pirandello: maschere e fantasmi* (Rome: Salerno, 2000), pp. 19-20. In the analysis of an 1887's letter, describing Pirandello's obsession with the characters originating from his mind, Pupino points out that 'i "fantasmi" coincidono con "persone" fittive che insorgono nel "cervello" come *allucinazioni'* (Pupino, p. 20).
[56] See Capuana, p. 120.

the devaluation of reflection, which is not always a prerequisite for creation, since very often artworks spring already accomplished in every single part from the *immaginazione* (a word that is interchangeable with *incoscienza* or simply refers to it in its being a completely irrational process).[57] To use Capuana's own words:

> Avviene non di rado che l'opera d'arte sgorghi fuor dell'immaginazione così intimamente compenetrata colla forma, così completamente formata, senza preparazioni od elaborazioni di sorta, che la quasi incoscienza del lavoro diventa una piacevolissima sorpresa.[58]

The hallucination-reflection contrast updates the visible-invisible one, if we can assume that the conscious (which generates reflection) is located in a more superficial (and therefore visible) level than the unconscious (the appropriate place for hallucination), in the same way as the top of an iceberg emerges from the waterline (and can be seen), while its bulk is submerged (and remains invisible), based on the metaphor by which the Freudian psychological pattern is popularised nowadays. But it is evident too that the refusal of the 'reflection' pole reveals a nineteenth-century Christian background (e.g. Antonio Rosmini and Niccolò Tommaseo), which manifests through the subjection of any partial re-elaboration or re-thinking over a given experience to the direct comprehension of it (*intelligenza attiva*) – which in turn is a way to criticise John

[57] See Luigi Capuana, 'Diario spiritico, ossia Comunicazioni ricevute dagli spiriti per medianità intuitiva' (1870), *Luce e ombra*, 7-8 (1916), 338-352 (p. 340): '[...] penetra coll'imaginazione e col sentimento la natura: è così e non altrimenti che l'anima tua potrà acquistare quell'elasticità di creazione che tu vai cercando.'
[58] Capuana, 'Spiritismo?', p. 126.

Locke's rationalist conceptualisation of reflection as a fundamental phase in the construction of knowledge.[59]

The hallucination-reflection opposition subtends, too, another contrast, which is internal to any artwork – the conventional one between content and form. A long-standing and trite dichotomy, which can be traced back to Plato's opinion on Forms as Ideas of Cosmos that exert an attraction on matter and shape it,[60] content and form are the outcome of the hallucinatory state and the conscious thought, respectively. This contrast proves to be solved in the works of such authors as the aforementioned Balzac, in the work of whom, in fact, the artist's hallucination is said to be deeply intertwined with the literary structure of the whole work.[61] The same contrast is solved in those happier cases in which the 'fantasma artistico individuale' (which sources from the initial state of unawareness) and the 'forma' (which results from the literary refinement) appear so involved with each other from the beginning, till the extent that there is no need for any conscious intervention on the part of the author.[62] According to Capuana, this would be the case of Salvatore Farina (the dedicatee of

[59] The voice 'Riflessione' in Tommaseo-Bellini dictionary reports Rosmini's (and Tommaseo's) thought. See Niccolò Tommaseo, Bernardo Bellini, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, 4 vols (Turin-Naples: UTET, 1861-1879), vol. IV/2, p. 235: 'La riflessione parziale è quella riflessione che tende a discoprire i rapporti che dividono od uniscono gli oggetti, sui quali ella cade, senza però che ella tenda ad avere per risultamento del suo operare i rapporti degli oggetti collo stesso essere universale ed essenziale'. See also *supra*: 'La visione immediata dell'intelletto precede alla riflessione.'

[60] See Charles Hanley, 'Form and content in the visual art: a psychoanalytic perspective', in *Art in Psychoanalysis: A Contemporary Approach to Creativity and Analytic Approach*, ed. by Gabriela Goldstein (London: Karnac, 2013), pp. 1-20 (p. 2).

[61] See Capuana, p. 121: 'L'*allucinazione* dell'artista si è lì così prodigiosamente condensata e solidificata nella forma, che l'impressione della lettura non solo eguaglia l'impressione diretta ma talvolta la vince, perché nell'opera di arte c'è come un concentramento di raggi in cui l'eccitata immaginazione dell'artista fa l'ufficio di lente'.

[62] For the phrase 'fantasma artistico individuale' and the term 'forma', see Capuana, p. 120.

'Spiritismo?' as well as of Verga's tale 'L'amante di Gramigna'), the literary art of whom has no need for refinement, and encompasses a facet of nationalistic pride in its representing an example of Italian art that emerges already accomplished from the artist, against the French tendency to continuous *labor limae* (a sign of artistic imperfection). The terms used to describe this phenomenology of the artwork are connected to those already adopted for the masculinisation and literalisation of the medium, and refer to the semantic field of natural and mechanical observation. On this ground, not only is the artwork supposed to be accomplished as long as it leaves a deep 'impression' on the reader – as the mirrors, which reflect light, or cameras, which 'impress' an image by using light – but it is another form of objectification of the unconscious, which lives at some point a life of its own through its product. Of course, in the same way as the literary medium, provided with a dimension that remains unknowable to the male observer, the artwork entails a degree of obscurity that remains ungraspable to the artist from whom it stemmed, and subsumes that uncanny nature that haunts the reader (in literature) and the observer (in figurative art).

The overlapping between the artwork and the female character proves to be manifest in the portraits of ladies that haunt the visitor of a museum, as in the account of the impressions from seeing Van Dyck's 'Portrait of a Lady', kept at that time at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome and representing a woman in typical seventeenth-century dress. The hallucination of the observer, who feels to be haunted by the mysterious woman of the portrait, is the sign of the success of artistic representation, which results in a deep impact as long as the artwork

pours out directly from the author's mind without any later re-working. Such a feeling is a form of mediumistic interaction between the artist and the audience, and witnesses the achievement of the author's purpose – to communicate something to the observer, who in turn may be inspired for the creation of another artwork in a virtually infinite concatenation. As proof of how a consistent literary tradition (such as Théophile Gautier's *Contes fantastiques*) may have inspired such a conceptualisation, the details of this haunting are affected by Gothic literature, and able to inspire a 'novella fantastica'.[63] They enclose, in fact, all the elements that in narrative usually prepare the ground for supernatural manifestations – the gloomy scene, the vague sense of fear, the perception of a warm breath on the narrator's cheek, etc. This finds a sort of continuity with the episode, described again in the essay, which had occurred in the first experiment of sixteen-year-old Capuana with black magic, when he evoked the spirits of three beautiful girls by means of the formulas of an obscure character – a sort of Gilles de Rais, who had kidnapped several women and had eluded justice.[64] These details convey an 'ancestral' sense of otherness, which is restricted to darkness and is invisible at the beginning. Even later, the apparition remains a bit nebulous and shows itself for a little while and under specific conditions, as in Maupassant's tale 'Le Horla.' Based on this invisibility or vagueness, the perception of otherness is accompanied by an increasingly deep sense of uncanniness in that it results from mnemonic re-evocation, dreamlike experience or re-creation by the power of imagination. The presence of darkness

[63] Capuana, p. 124.

[64] See Capuana, p. 67. See also Fabrizio Foni, 'Lo scrittore e/è il medium: appunti su Capuana spiritista', *Atti dell'Accademia roveretana degli Agiati*, VII (2007), 397-416 (pp. 399-400), which establishes a parallel between these beautiful girls and the three wives of Dracula.

in this mediumistic experience of the artwork recalls, of course, the gloom in which séances are usually arranged, but also the concept of *ombra*, which is connected to the genesis of the *personaggio*. Still far from the Jungian archetype, which alludes to the unexpressed side of the individual, *ombra* will denote another way to represent the character in Pirandello's tale 'Personaggi' (1906).[65] Obviously, the main reference is to *Das Unbewusste*, which recurs in later representations under the shape of different symbols, pertaining to different fields of knowledge and yet connoted with dark colour, if we think of Ernesto De Martino's analysis of the blackness of the tarantula (an unsettling personification of the unconscious) in *La terra del rimorso* (1961).[66]

The haunted essence of artistic experience, synthesised in the phrase *fantasma artistico individuale*, derives, not by chance, from the portrait of a woman, who comes to life as in the best tradition of the *tableaux vivants* (e.g. Gautier's *nouvelle fantastique* 'Omphale', 1834). This experience is sexually connoted from the first description of the mysterious woman, of whom Capuana remarks some erogenous details (the skin, lips, the breast, etc.). The eroticisation of art is connected again with several stereotypes of the literary representation of women since the Middle Ages, resulting in 'una bella testa dalla fronte liscia, dagli occhi vivissimi, dalla carnagione bianca e fina, dalle labbra sottili e semi aperte a un sorriso.'[67] Whereas the whiteness of skin and the redness of mouth

[65] See Pupino, pp. 25-31.

[66] See Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1996), pp. 59-80 (p. 63): 'Questo è nella sua sostanza il simbolo della taranta come orizzonte mitico-rituale di evocazione, di configurazione, di deflusso e di risoluzione dei conflitti psichici irrisoluti che "rimordono" nella oscurità dell'inconscio.'

[67] Capuana, p. 122. The episode updates the τόπος of the 'love for the image', which is traceable from the *Roman de la Rose* and also appears in Giacomo da Lentini's poem

recall the topical woman described by the *Troubadours* and the thirteenth-century Sicilian poetry, the references to sculpture provide the synesthetic idea of art that overpasses the boundaries of artistic genres by suggesting different sensorial experiences. Though portrayed in a painting, the woman's appearance relies on the concreteness of statues – her head is fitted in a large collar of lace, as if it was materially separated from the bust and put over a silver tray, which is finely cut. Furthermore, her eyes seem to be moving, 'quasi animantisi a poco a poco'[68] – which can be considered as a profane version of those images of the Virgin that are said to move their eyes by miracle, or simply a reminiscence of those creatures of nineteenth-century fantastic narrative (cadavers and inanimate artworks) the life of which concentrates in eyes, which move first to denote their sudden awakening.[69] This characteristic, which does not suit, of course, the static nature of painting, rather accomplishes the utopian ambition of Renaissance authors, who were in search of a mode of painting able to suggest even olfactory sensations (as in Poliziano's description of the frescoes in the *Stanze*).[70] In accordance with this, the woman's ivory skin, expression of her virginal condition (another masculinist myth), is '*non usata* e già diventata un po'

'Com'om che pone mente' in the form of the 'image of the loved woman' (*figura*), which lies impressed in the lover's heart as a picture for his worship. On this point, see Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze: la parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 73-83.

[68] Capuana, p. 122.

[69] This point is in an analysis of Gautier's short story 'La Cafetière' (1831) by Pierluigi Pellini, *Il quadro animato. Tematiche artistiche e letteratura fantastica* (Milan: Dell'Arco, 2001), pp. 67-103 (part. pp. 80-81).

[70] Let us remember the 'perfection' of paintings in Venus' house, as celebrated in Poliziano's *Stanze*, and the idea that human imagination is able to let feel those sensations that pictures do not convey originally (sound, smell, etc.). See Angelo Poliziano, 'Stanze per la giostra del Magnifico Giuliano di Piero de' Medici', in *Poesie*, ed. by Francesco Bausi (Turin: UTET, 2006), pp. 111-240 (I. 119): 'e quanto l'arte intra sé non comprende, | la mente imaginando chiaro intende.'

rigida',[71] as if the author had really experienced its consistency by touching it. In fictional terms, this synesthetic idea of art is transferred in the tale 'La redenzione dei capilavori' (1900), published in the collection entitled – significantly – *La voluttà di creare* (1911).[72] The fantastic story of the mesmerist scholar who is able to give life to those paintings that are more realistic (including those by Sebastiano del Piombo) fulfils the basic idea that artworks may live a life of their own under certain circumstances. There will come a time, in other words, when artworks are destined to leave the closed environment of their museum and even move around – they 'andranno attorno pel mondo, vivi, immortali, e genereranno altri esseri, immortali al pari di loro; e formeranno, forse, il nucleo dell'umanità futura'.[73] The subject of this painting is another woman, provided again with the concreteness that emerges from her eyes, lips, teeth, and skin, which are described as alive as if the woman had passed the limits of the original bi-dimensionality. The impression of the narrator, who feels a sense of familiarity with the woman, anticipates the Freudian concept of the 'Uncanny', which is the sense of being familiar with what is unknown to us, as well as the sudden unknowability of what was previously familiar as a mere – and motionless – painting.[74] More specifically, it lays bare the paradox inherent

[71] Capuana, p. 122.
[72] Luigi Capuana, 'La redenzione dei capilavori', in *Novelle*, vol. III, pp. 261-266.
[73] Capuana, p. 262.
[74] See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), vol. XVII, pp. 219-256 (part. p. 220).

in Naturalism – the fact that its mimetic utopia (symbolically encompassed in the τόπος of the 'living artwork') cannot but result in magical uncanniness.[75]

In the light of the framework delineated, the overlapping between the medium and the artwork, already connected by several common features, finds a strong confirmation in that they both are conceptualised according to the stereotypical horizon of a male perspective. However, as the previous sections have demonstrated, there is a moment in which both the experience of mediumship and the process that leads to the creation of an artwork slip from external control, that is, that of the male observer, which proves to be unable to let some psychic and artistic manifestations return into a given cultural system. As a matter of fact, the unconscious is the place the existence of which makes this slipping possible. The unconscious is, in fact, the region that shows itself through hysterical convulsions, manifestations of the trance state, which are able to turn the medium (as well as the woman interned in an asylum) into something unpredictable and unknowable to the observer. In addition, the unconscious is what provides any artwork (both a literary and a figurative one) with a dimension that haunts both the creator and the public due to its unknowability, as it is able, even for a short while, to escape from the stereotypes of a deep-rooted as well as intrusive tradition.

As the stereotypisation of both the medium and the artwork are expressions of a masculinist viewpoint, then, the hidden dimension of the

[75] For this idea, see Annamaria Carrega, 'Il "ritratto nel testo". Ragioni del racconto e trasgressione dell'immagine nella narrativa fantastica dell'Ottocento', *L'immagine riflessa. Testi, società, culture*, 1 (2003), 85-98 (pp. 91-93).

unconscious, impenetrable and unaccountable, is exactly what challenges masculinity with its degree of mysteriousness and unclassifiable nature.[76] This is strictly connected, of course, with the representation of the female character *tout court*, which, as will be seen in the next chapter, dominates the narrative from Tarchetti's *Fosca* to the end of the nineteenth century, not necessarily performing psychic experiments, but simply intent on reading books under the attentive eyes of men.

[76] See Budge's idea about the Pre-Raphaelite representation that challenges Romantic masculinity in Gavin Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 171-198 (pp. 187-193).

III. The Female Malady and the Reading Strategy: from Tarchetti's Fosca to Aleramo's Una donna

3.1. Repulsive Hysteria and Seductive Consumption: Tarchetti's Fosca and D'Annunzio's Female Characters

Published in episodes in the review *Il pungolo* in 1869, Tarchetti's major narrative work *Fosca* is one of the first representations of hysteria in Italian literature, resulting not only from the assimilation of psychiatric theories elaborated outside Italy, but from a number of nineteenth-century patriarchal stereotypes reinforced by the perspective of a logocentric narrator. The picturing therein implied of the 'isterismo'[1] as a typically female malady does not emerge from a coherent definition of the disease. Rather, it is presupposed in a number of characteristics, such as the tendency to unrestrained passion, which are usually attributed to hysteria – a disease that remains inexplicable in its real essence, and yet is considered strictly bound to a strong emotionality since the work of Philippe Pinel and Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol in France.[2] Such a representation of hysteria – a label subsuming a number of symptoms ascribable to its sexually-connoted etymology since Hippocratic medicine[3] – is connected, as I show by analysing a specific canon of narrative works, with the revision of a deep-rooted female aestheticism, as though the inner – mysterious – malady

[1] Igino Ugo Tarchetti, *Fosca*, in *Tutte le opere*, 2 vols, ed. by Enrico Ghidetti (Bologna: Cappelli, 1967), vol. II, pp. 235-427 (p. 271).
[2] See Louise Phillips, *Mental Illness and the Body: Beyond Diagnosis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 62-84 (p. 66).
[3] On this topic, see at least Helen King, 'Once upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates', in *Hysteria beyond Freud*, pp. 3-66.

might emerge from its invisible dimension not only through a peculiar symptomatology, but through specific physical features such as ugliness too. A paradigmatic work in its associating the 'female malady' with a novel construct of the woman (no longer the fair-haired one imposed by canonical poetry), this form of *isterismo* – which makes women unattractive – differs from those disturbances that put a woman on the verge of death and turn her into a more attractive being, as in the case of D'Annunzio's Giuliana, Tullio Hermil's wife (*L'innocente,* 1892), and Ippolita Sanzio (*Trionfo della morte*, 1894), who show signs of physical 'consumption'. In this cultural framework, the activity of reading associated with female characters – to which I devote the second part of the chapter, analysing its representation in both narrative and painting – works as a powerful form of emancipation from the masculinist reification of women, in that it triggers women's fantasy and extends their inner mysteriousness in the eyes of men. When it is a form of conscious reaction, reading pertains to those expressions of the *écriture féminine* (as in Neera's *Teresa*, 1886), becoming more effective when joined, in the same character, with the activity of writing (as in Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*, 1906), which links the 'passive' reading strategy with the more 'active' production implied in writing. Of course, the novels that I analyse starting from Tarchetti are not grouped on the basis of the so-called biological sex of the author (in my inquiry, in other words, I do not study novels written by male authors only and Serao's and Neera's works coexist with D'Annunzio's narrative). Rather, these novels form a canon based on the degree of patriarchy that they presuppose in terms of the representation of the female character, which emerges as soon as we let the text speak and reveal its

normativity through the narrative pattern. More specifically, my analysis implies the idea that both 'biological sex' and 'gender' are socially constructed categories, the relation between which is problematic and cannot be reduced to mere dichotomies, as we are reminded, among others, by Duerst-Lahti following in the wake of Judith Butler.[4]

Presented in a hyperbolic manner, as a woman endowed with extraordinary ugliness – 'bruttezza orrenda'[5] –, Tarchetti's Fosca is diagnosed as 'una collezione ambulante di tutti i mali possibili'[6] as well, one whose symptoms science is able to grasp only vaguely, yet unable to define properly. In such an exaggerated medical portrait, Fosca's ugliness assumes a peculiar relevance. It is, in fact, the character's most evident 'symptom', as well as the physical sign of her inner – and hidden – disturbance, which slips from any scientific definition ('fuori della scienza')[7] and is called hysteria ('il fondamento de' suoi mali')[8] based on the protean essence and the unpredictability stereotypically attributed to this disease by nineteenth-century medical normativity, as noticed by Roy Porter.[9]

[4] See Duerst-Lahti, p. 161, referring to the difference between sex and gender explained in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 8-17.
[5] Tarchetti, pp. 277-278.
[6] Tarchetti, p. 274.
[7] Tarchetti, p. 274.
[8] Tarchetti, p. 275.
[9] Among the symptoms of hysteria in the nineteenth-century mind-set there would be 'pains in the genitals and abdomen, shooting top to toe, or rising into the thorax and producing constrictions around the throat (globus hystericus); breathing irregularities; twitching, tics, and spasms; mounting anxiety and emotional outbursts, breathlessness, and floods of tears; more acute seizures, paralyses, convulsions, hemiplagias, or catalepsy – any or all of which might ring the changes in dizzying succession and often with no obvious organic source' (see Porter, p. 241).

In its variability and interchangeability – at least at the beginning – with the cultural construct of madness lies the dangerousness of this variant of hysteria, which makes Fosca's existence unstable – 'attaccata ad un filo'[10] – as well as her health 'così cagionevole che basterebbe un lieve sforzo di volontà ad ucciderla, come ne basterebbe uno contrario a salvarla'.[11] Such uncertainty in her life is compounded by the fact that, as a hysterical woman, she is unable to control her passions – thereby making her behaviour unacceptable in people's eyes – described as gushing like an overflowing river, being unconditionally directed to people and objects. The exceptionality of such a temperament – remarked by the main character Giorgio, who notices that Fosca wants to 'impose her affection' on him[12] – is recognised by the woman herself, as soon as she confesses her illness and her desire to 'grow fond' of her surroundings:

> Io nacqui malata; uno dei sintomi più gravi e più profondi della mia infermità era il bisogno che sentiva di affezionarmi a tutto ciò che mi circondava, ma in modo violento, subito, estremo. Non mi ricordo di un'epoca della mia vita in cui non abbia amato qualche cosa.[13]

After her parents have enrolled her in a *collegio* when she is twelve, Fosca falls in love with a classmate, and her precocious affection proves to be already excessive – even more resolute than any child who is the same age. Two

[10] Tarchetti, p. 311.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Tarchetti, p. 297: 'Quella sua costanza, quel difetto di amor proprio che mi pareva scorgere nel suo carattere, quell'ostinazione a volermi imporre il suo affetto, fecero sì che io la vedessi sotto un aspetto ancora più triste di quanto non me l'avesse già fatta vedere la sua bruttezza'.
[13] Tarchetti, p. 329.

years later, her passions head towards a 40-year-old man – a friend of her father – who does not suspect Fosca to be attracted to him, at least until the girl sends him a letter of love, which arouses her mother's concerns.[14] While growing up, Fosca's malady becomes even worse, as witnessed by the intensification of her love passions. During adolescence, the object of her attention becomes an obscure character – a poet, musician, gambler, and adventurer. This equivocal man steals Fosca's money after marrying her – which sounds as a moralistic warning against the side effects of hysteria, which may lead to transgression of social conventions (the woman has relationships not only with older men, but with outsiders too).[15]

Affected by contradictory behaviour – the 'incoherence and incongruity of ideas' in the outward conduct of the hysteric in Pinel's *Treatise of insanity*[16] – the character of Fosca provides a crucial example of the assimilation of the positivist theories dealing with the female malady to Italian literature – theories that are connected to the well-rooted representation of the woman as something

[14] Sexual precocity in young female characters, who feel attracted to adult men, is implied in Capuana's Giacinta – described with childlike features (as I show in the next chapter). The same topic is developed in the tale 'Precocità' (1884), forerunning Cesare Lombroso's idea of the degeneration of sexuality as connected to the delinquent woman (discussed in *La donna delinquente*, 1903). As for this point, see Edwige Fusaro, 'Intuizioni pre-freudiane nelle prime opera di Luigi Capuana (1879-1890)', *Versants: revue suisse des littératures romanes*, 39 (2001), 123-134 (part. p. 126 n.).

[15] A passionate nature distinguishes Capuana's Giacinta too, who is furthermore provided with deep contradictoriness, which shows in terms of inner struggles. Giacinta's behaviours are quintessentially conflicting – indeed, what she thinks or says today is not the same as what she will say or think tomorrow. Such attitude is seen as implicitly normal by the narrator, as if it were something widely known at that time. See Luigi Capuana, *Giacinta, secondo la 1ª edizione del 1879* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006), p. 82: 'Non era insolito in lei questo rapido passaggio da uno stato di animo a un altro opposto. Però, coll'incessante fermentazione del suo cervello, le idee si accavalcavano, si urtavano, si spingevano innanzi senza modo né misura [...]'.

[16] Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity, in Which Are Contained the Principles of a New and More Practical Nosology of Maniacal Disorders*, trans. by D.D. Davis (Sheffield: Todd, 1806), p. 17.

mysterious and internally obscure, in whom sexuality (when repressed) plays an important role. Such an example proves to be developed by D'Annunzio's heroines, including Giuliana, Tullio Hermil's wife in *L'innocente*. Involved in an extramarital affair, Tullio neglects Giuliana and would like her to restrain her sexuality. An expression of his self-love, Tullio's invitation for Giuliana to be a 'sister' – that is, to renounce any sexual intercourse with him – has certainly a role in the woman's producing hysterical symptoms and pondering suicide by poisoning at one point (suicide being but one of the ultimate outcomes of hysteria as a contradictory malady, when, of course, it pertains to women).[17] The influence of sexuality on the woman's illness is remarked by the narrator's stress on maladies of the womb and ovaries, which Giuliana suffers – maladies that are obscure and yet able to affect the whole life of a woman ('malattie complicate della matrice e dell'ovaia, […] che turbano in una donna tutte le funzioni della vita').[18] After undergoing surgery, Giuliana recovers from her physical problems, but her character is said to develop a psychological mutation, to which her sexual volubility is implicitly attributed. The connection between sexuality and hysteria relies further on the idea of sex as something not merely restricted to anatomy – that is, 'not simply a matter of physical parts, but something mysterious […] in need of investigation, attention, or control' in a patriarchal context, according to

[17] In a passage of *L'innocente*, Tullio challenges death by riding his horse at full gallop near a ravine. Significantly, his action is not properly a symptom of hysteria (or a death thought after depression) and is rather claimed as the result of his strong egotism. See Gabriele D'Annunzio, *L'innocente*, in *Prose di romanzi*, ed. by Ezio Raimondi, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1988-1989), vol. I, pp. 359-635 (pp. 500-501).
[18] D'Annunzio, p. 368.

Lisa Appignanesi[19] – in the same way as hysteria permeates the whole personality although it is initially engendered in specific parts of the body.

In spite of such deep implications, Giuliana's malady remains inaccessible in its real essence – '[...] qual era la sua malattia?',[20] Tullio asks himself at some point, after noticing Giuliana's changed attitude towards him. Like Fosca's narrator, he knows that a hysterical woman is unpredictable in her attitudes. Very similarly, Giorgio Aurispa in *Trionfo della morte* is aware that a late-stage hysterical woman runs the risk of being acted upon by her inner disease against her own will.[21] The idea, here supported, of hysteria as an 'intruder', a 'stranger',[22] which takes possession of a woman and deprives her of human dignity, is intertwined with an early conceptualisation of the unconscious as an enigmatic and weird host, being of course connected to similar ideas about the mysterious mind of the medium (see previous chapter), which would generate artworks. Such an idea seems to prelude broad definitions of the unconscious such as that implied in Nicholas Royle's 'enlargement' of the Freudian 'Uncanny' concept.[23] Not by chance, signs of hysteria emerge from Ippolita

[19] Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (London: Virago Press, 2008), p. 182.
[20] See D'Annunzio, p. 464: 'Ma qual era la sua malattia? L'antica, non distrutta dal ferro del chirurgo, complicata forse? Insanabile?'.
[21] See Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Trionfo della morte*, in *Prose di romanzi*, vol, I, pp. 637-1019 (p. 806): 'La sua sensualità è variabile, poiché ella è isterica; e il suo isterismo ha raggiunto, in altri tempi, il sommo dell'acuzie. Un organismo infermo come il suo passa, nel corso d'un sol giorno, per una gran quantità di stati fisici tra loro discordi e talvolta anche interamente opposti'.
[22] Something similar was in *L'innocente*, in a passage of which Tullio recognises Giuliana's mental change, as if the woman was possessed by an inscrutable intruder. As for this point, see D'Annunzio, p. 464: 'Un elemento estraneo, qualche cosa d'oscuro, di convulso, di eccessivo, aveva modificata, difformata la sua personalità. Dovevano queste alterazioni attribuirsi a uno stato morboso del suo organismo?'.
[23] See Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 1-38.

through not only a varied symptomatology, but also when the woman is sleeping – that is, when the unconscious is supposed to manifest itself – as in the episode of her dreaming while Giorgio is observing her.[24]

As my analysis of the aforementioned novels shows, the medical gaze that the doctor applies to the woman-object coexists with another – more 'profane' – gaze, that of such observers as Giorgio (in *Fosca*), Hermil and Aurispa, for whom the process of visualisation is still crucial in the approach to the female malady, and rather focuses on the most spectacular symptoms of hysteria, as in the passage on Ippolita Sanzio's orgasm-like convulsions.[25] Based on different cognitive parameters, such a gaze is distinguished by a lesser degree of scientificity and very often distances itself from that of the doctor. Indeed, whereas the latter centres on Fosca's symptoms as resulting from 'the fragmentation of the old monolithic descriptions of insanity',[26] Giorgio's focuses on different aspects of the woman's body and her physical appearance. In some sense, these gazes – already embodied by the (apparently) opposite characters of the painter and the scientist in Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo' – differ based on their capacity of penetration. If taken together, they both configure a process of reification of the woman that shifts from the internal to the external, implying a fracture within the former holistic representation that is detectable – as I show in the following chapter – since Capuana's *Giacinta*.

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[24] See D'Annunzio, p. 809.

[25] See D'Annunzio, pp. 694-695: 'Io *ti vedo* contorcerti, nell'accesso; *io vedo* i tuoi lineamenti scomporsi e illividirsi, i tuoi occhi volgersi disperatamente sotto le palpebre rosse di pianto... Io *vedo* tutta la terribilità del male, come s'io ti fossi vicino; e, per quanti sforzi io faccia, non riesco a scacciare l'orrida visione'.

[26] German Berrios, 'Descriptive Psychiatry and Psychiatric Nosology during the Nineteenth Century', in *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, With an Epilogue on Psychiatry and the Mind-Body Relation*, ed. by Edwin R. Wallace, IV and John Gach (New York: Springer, 2008), pp. 352-379 (p. 353).

In remarking again about the centrality of the female body, Giorgio's perspective follows a Western canonic tradition starting from the prehistoric Venus – as we are reminded by Susan Rubin Suleiman[27] – and reasserts the right of the (male) artist over the (female) object, which is deprived of any right in front of the observer, as pinpointed by Dorothy Kelly.[28] Accordingly, Giorgio's 'imposing' the quality of ugliness to Fosca – a quality that results from her excessive thinness and the effects of sorrow over her body[29] – individualises her as a woman in the same way as hysteria – a 'fashionable' and a paradigmatic disease among women – in the words of doctors.[30] As responding to the same aesthetic canon, Clara – Giorgio's previous lover – is a good-looking woman, as her name recalls an ideal of 'bright' beauty in contrast to Fosca, whose name evokes the 'obscurity' of ugliness instead.[31] The aesthetic definition of women in the novel occurs in the places in which the scientific gaze gives way to that of the artist. In such places, the narrator does not feel any need to investigate the

[27] See Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Introduction', in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, pp. 1-4 (p. 1): 'In the visual arts – from the prehistoric Venus of Willendorf to the countless representations of nymphs, goddesses, odalisques, and the Virgin Mother, right down to the images that grace our billboards and magazine covers – as in poetry, mythology, religious doctrine, medical and psychoanalytical treatises, and prose narratives of alla kinds, we find ample testimony to the fascination that the female body has exerted on our individual and collective consciousness'.

[28] See Dorothy Kelly, *Telling Glances: Voyeurism in the French Novel* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 119.

[29] Tarchetti, p. 277: 'Né tanto era brutta per difetti di natura, per disarmonia di fattezza – ché anzi erano in parte regolari – quanto per una magrezza eccessiva, direi quasi inconcepibile a chi non la vide; per la rovina che il dolore fisico e le malattie avevano prodotto sulla sua persona ancora così giovine'.

[30] See Tarchetti, p. 275, where the doctor defines hysteria as 'un male di moda nella donna'.

[31] The contrast between Clara and Fosca is highlighted by Ann Caesar, who notices, too, how the presence of similar features in the female protagonists (e.g. the fact they are the same age) makes them 'two faces of a single identity': see Ann Caesar, 'Construction of Character in Tarchetti's Fosca', *The Modern Language Review*, 1 (1987), 76-87 (pp. 77-78).

women's insight and the analysis lingers over the surface of the women's body, cataloguing its flaws and disproportions or illustrating its qualities.

This approach to beauty reveals the change that occurred in the nineteenth century, when – to adapt Baudelaire's suggestion – eyes become a window open over the 'infinite' hidden in our interiority – and Fosca's life is said to be concentrated in her eyes[32] – and beauty in turn becomes internalised, displayed by such cues – 'aesthetic symptoms' – as the spelling that refer to abstract qualities.[33] Accordingly, Fosca's ugliness is part of a cultural construct as it lays bare not only the woman's state of health, but her inner wickedness as well, thus responding to those 'good-healthy-beautiful' and 'bad-ill-ugly' associations that were typical of the nineteenth and the twentieth-century aestheticism[34] and resulted from a moral connotation of the prevailing canon of beauty (that of Johann Joachim Wincklemann).[35] In addition, Fosca's being black-haired works in the same way as the breaking example of Manzoni's Lucia Mondella, that is, as overturning a long-term and invasive poetic tradition, which spread in Italy starting from the Sicilian School and imposed a canon of blonde-haired, snobbish and aristocratically mannered women, further etherealised by

[32] See Tarchetti, p. 278: 'Tutta la sua vita era ne' suoi occhi, che erano nerissimi, grandi, velati – occhi d'una beltà sorprendente'. In a following passage of the novel, Fosca's eyes are remarked as 'la sola beltà di quel viso' (Tarchetti, p. 305).
[33] See Georges Vigarello, *Histoire de la beauté* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), pp. 135-139.
[34] See Sander L. Gilman, *Picturing Health and Illness: Images of Identity and Difference* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 54: 'The dichotomy between the beautiful and the ugly seems to be inherent in all of the cultural constructs of health and disease in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.
[35] The association with ugliness pertains to hysteria, but not madness, as implied in the recurrent archetype of Shakespearian Ophelia in paintings, usually embodied by fascinating women floating on rivers and surrounded by flowers scattered all around. An example is Federico Faruffini's *La vergine al Nilo*, 1865, kept at Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome, clearly inspired by John Everett Millais's renowned *Ophelia*.

the Dolce Stil Novo.[36] By transgressing this tradition, Fosca's aestheticism recalls – and apparently re-elaborates – the female canon legitimised in Mme de Staël's *Corinne òu l'Italie* (1807) – as pinpointed by Stephen Gundle – which features an Italian woman endowed with black hair as well as beauty and talent, being expert on literature and history of art.[37] The link between black hair and education – in Fosca as well as in Corinne – is one with an emancipated view of sexuality (thinking of Fosca's sentimental volubility), of course linked to a nationalistic celebration of the Italian 'passionate nature' in comparison with the coldness of the northern-European behaviour (as evident in the case of de Staël's character). In this kind of representation, Fosca's falling in love with several men will be updated by later female characters, thinking about gnà Pina in Giovanni Verga's 'La lupa', whose raven-black hair exteriorises her anti-social sexual appetite and morbose attitudes to men, showing that this kind of emancipation does not pertain to high classes only. In implying the presence of a mysterious nature (in comparison with the ordinary one of the fair-haired woman), Fosca's temperament updats the European – and Kantian – stereotype about the black-haired person as a manifestation of the sublime,[38] which in Italy will be re-

[36] As for the case of Lucia Mondella, see Verina R. Jones, *Le dark ladies manzoniane e altri saggi sui* Promessi sposi (Rome: Salerno, 1998), p. 90. The conventional representation of the dark heroine and the light one is in a renowned passage of Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, 15th edn (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 101: '[…] one very common convention of the nineteenth-century novel is the use of two heroines, one dark and one light. The dark one is as a rule passionate, haughty, plain, foreign or Jewish and in some way associated with the undesirable or with some kind of forbidden fruit like incest'.

[37] See Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 5-9.

[38] See Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011), p. 54, according to which 'dark coloring and black eyes are more closely related to the sublime, blue eyes and blonde coloring to the beautiful'. An Italian translation of

proposed by Paolo Mantegazza's *Fisiologia della donna,* supporting the idea that brunettes are naturally provided with an instinctive and provocative temperament.[39]

The insertion of Fosca within this cultural framework made of emancipated – preferably Italian – beauties struggles only apparently with her presumed ugliness – something that is proved by analysing the passage in which Giorgio considers the woman's ugliness as the result of a persisting illness and the degeneration of an 'ancient' beauty: 'Non era possibile credere che ella avesse mai potuto essere bella, ma era evidente che la sua bruttezza era per la massima parte effetto della malattia, e che, giovinetta, aveva potuto forse esser piaciuta'.[40] What is this explanation of Fosca's ugliness if not the first attempt to justify the horrid and make it somehow socially acceptable? With her ugliness, indeed, Fosca contradicts the prevailing aesthetic values too much for the male observer to be able to accept her body. Consequently, it is necessary for the woman's ugliness to be seen as what remains of an antique beauty, which is now lost. In this way, Fosca's body updates the case of the fallen angel, previously beautiful and now condemned to take on the monstrosity of a demon due to his arrogance against God – which in the woman's case could be read as a punishment against her contradicting male impositions. In the same way as the angel's previous attractiveness can still be discovered beneath the surface of monstrosity, Fosca's beauty is still detectable since the woman may have been pleasing at a young age.

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the *Observations* (1756) appeared in 1826 with the title *Considerazioni sul sentimento del sublime e del bello di Emmanuele Kant*.

[39] See Gundle, p. 56.

[40] Tarchetti, p. 278.

As a subsequent step of this process of accustoming, there inevitably follows the recognition that the woman who was formerly unappealing is actually a desirable object from a sexual point of view – as if to say that, even when they are unattractive, women have to become desirable objects at all costs in the eyes of men, as if even a simple friendship with them was impossible because of their aspect. As Giorgio says, upon visiting Fosca after one of her non-well described crises: 'Ella stessa non mi parve in quel momento sì brutta, come mi era sembrata nei primi giorni della nostra conoscenza'.[41] While ugliness would allow her to contradict a typically-masculinist aesthetic value – ugliness is, after all, a transgressive quality, since it contravenes what men consider as desirable in a woman's body – Fosca's being 'not that ugly' aligns Tarchetti's character with the expectations of men. This is made explicit by the debated forty-eighth chapter of the novel, written by Salvatore Farina, which alludes to sexual intercourse between Giorgio and Fosca (in spite of the declared repugnance of the latter). This final possession before the woman's death is the evidence that the formerly ugly woman is now appealing according to a specific aesthetic canon, and is the natural consequence of Fosca's ultimate accustoming to a masculinist society. As such, her process of objectification within a male-power society is completed.

From disease to death, the gap may be minimal. Accordingly, Fosca's closeness to passing away at any time is the direct consequence of her protean malady as well as one of the features of the nineteenth-century male representation of the female otherness. However, signs of death on her body are

[41] Tarchetti, p. 318.

not necessarily the expression of ugliness in the same way as her illness and wickedness. Indeed, death seems to work in the opposite direction – as the phenomenon able to restore the woman to a timeless dimension, where ugliness has faded away after a mysterious cleansing process. Linked to the Christian belief that suffering contributes to lifting one's soul – which sounds appropriate for a society that wants women to act as homemakers and angels of the hearth[42] – Fosca becomes more attractive in the eyes of Giorgio as soon as the woman approaches the ultimate moment. Not by chance, Giorgio's changing his aesthetic opinion about Fosca's appearance occurs upon visiting the woman after one of her enigmatic crises, which put her on the verge of death. In this scene, Fosca is convalescing in her bed, with her head sinking in the pillow, and her voluminous black hair is diffused all around.[43] In such a posture, partially hidden by sheets, it is impossible to recognise her disproportions and physical flaws. In addition, the woman is portrayed as surrounded by flowers, and her bed is spotless like snow, while a suffused light, emanating from a lamp, creates a very

[42] As evidence of the success of the 'angel-of-the-hearth' stereotype in the following century too, let us think about Vittorio Tedesco Zammarano's *Azanagò non pianse* (1934), a novel mentioned by Antonia Arslan in one of her articles on Italian women's writing. Such example of Italian 'colonial novel' (*romanzo d'Africa*) puts in contrast the white woman ('il modello della fidanzata perenne'), wholly devoted to her man, with the character of a black woman, object of male desire, a lover whom the narrator provides with sensuousness and exotic eroticism. See Antonia Arslan, *Dame, galline e regine. La scrittura femminile fra '800 e '900*, ed. by Marina Pasqui (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1988), pp. 19-42 (p. 27 n.). As for the novel in object, see Vittorio Tedesco Zammarano, *Azanagò non pianse. Romanzo d'Africa* (Milan: Mondadori, 1934).

[43] A manifestation of her sexual abandon, Fosca's loosened hair are explained by referring to Freud's essay on 'Medusa's Head' (1922) in David Del Principe, 'Heresy and "Hair-esy" in Ugo Tarchetti's *Fosca'*, *Italica*, 71 (1994), 43-55 (pp. 45-46). See also David Del Principe, *Rebellion, Death, and Aesthetics: The Demons of Scapigliatura* (Madison-Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), pp. 44-74 (pp. 49-50). The interpretation of Fosca's hair by referring to Freud's essay is also in Irene Zanini-Cordi, *Donne sciolte. Abbandono ed identità femminile nella letteratura italiana* (Ravenna: Longo, 2008), pp. 125-142 (pp. 131-132).

evocative effect inside the room.[44] This 'cult of invalidism', resulted from the *fin-de-siècle* connection between progressive consumption and attractiveness already described by Bram Djikstra,[45] relies on the powerful symbols of weakness (to which the recent illness alludes) and purity (evoked by the pale skin and the immaculate bed), which support the ideal of the submissive woman, wholly devoted to her man.[46] The presence of flowers all around introduces a higher degree of purification, as witnessed, a few years later, by the figurative example of Giovanni Segantini's painting 'Petalo di rosa' (1891), which features an ill woman who is literally enveloped by whiteness, while two petals fluctuate at her right, metonymically linked to the cross on her bedside:

[44] See Tarchetti, p. 316: 'La stanza era piena di fiori, il letto era bianco come neve, e pareva tutto di pizzo, una lampada posta in un angolo emanava una luce debole, ma chiara e trasparente come luce di notte lunata'.

[45] As regards this, Dijkstra specifies that the 'cult of feminine invalidism' began disappearing at the beginning of the twentieth century, due to the denunciation of feminists. See Dijkstra, pp. 25-63.

[46] This nineteenth-century myth is at work in the character of Elvira, the young girl suffering from hemoptysis to whom Andrea Gerace is attracted in the eleventh chapter of Capuana's *Giacinta* (1879). To Andrea's eyes, the consumptive girl is a combination between sensuality and spiritual perfection. This results in the implicit superiority of Elvira to Giacinta – who is, on the contrary, *only* a sensual girl to those who cannot ignore her lost virginity. Elvira spends time with her parents and loves embroidering, is virtuous and coughs up blood due to her illness – she is, in sum, a trustworthy woman to marry according to the nineteenth-century standards. For Andrea's recognition of Elvira's purity, see Capuana, p. 177.

Figure 3. Giovanni Segantini, 'Petalo di rosa' (private collection, 1891)

The beginning of Farina's chapter, in which Fosca appears as in praying attitude and a sudden movement of her head loosens her – Kantian – black hair, shows how the pious attitude exerts an undisputable power of fascination over men, especially when connected with more 'profane' elements. An extreme example is provided by D'Annunzio's *Il piacere* (1889), whose main character Andrea Sperelli is described as having sexual encounters with his former girlfriend Elena Muti in a big room of Palazzo Zuccari, which looks on to Trinità dei Monti in Rome, surrounded with holy images and sacred objects. Rather than inhibiting the character, such objects contribute to arouse him, who feels he has full power over Elena in such a peculiar environment.

Developing the example of Fosca, D'Annunzio's heroines share a lot with Dijkstra's 'idols of perversity', and might be put down to a similar deathly aestheticism, under which women are much more sexually attractive as they get closer to the moment of – or simply recall – death due to their bloodless appearance. Upon her arrival in a ballroom, Elena Muti is significantly described as a 'white' lady due to her paleness, and a few lines later her forehead (synecdoche for her whole face) is endowed with the characteristic of being 'esangue',[47] thus contributing to assimilating the woman to a lifeless statue and therefore to her reification.[48] More importantly, in several places of the novel, the dead-like aspect of Elena is linked to the exhaustion following an intense sexual activity, as observed in the passage in which the woman lies down on a bed and her arms are abandoned alongside her hips, insomuch that her hands look like they are those of a cadaver ('quasi morte').[49]

Several physical features in Giuliana Hermil's appearance recall death – these characteristics stimulate Tullio's sexual arousal, especially when contrasted with parts of the woman's body that evoke life.[50] Besides the places in which Giuliana is convalescent after a surgery and her aspect is compared to that of a

[47] See D'Annunzio, *Il piacere*, in *Prose di romanzi*, vol. I, pp. 1-358 (p. 76): 'Così bianca e semplice, nel passare volgeva il capo ai molti saluti, mostrando un'aria di stanchezza, sorridendo con un piccolo sforzo visibile che le increspava gli angoli della bocca, mentre gli occhi sembravan più larghi sotto la fronte esangue'.

[48] For this kind of figure, perpetuated by Nazi culture in the terms of the 'white nurse' as opposing to the 'castrating woman', see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. by Stephen Conway and others, 2 vols (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987-1989), vol. I (1987), pp. 90-100.

[49] See D'Annunzio, p. 86: 'Ella, giacendo, teneva le braccia fuori della coperta abbandonate lungo i fianchi, le mani supine, quasi morte, agitate di tratto in tratto da un lieve sussulto [...]'.

[50] See D'Annunzio, p. 447: 'E quella bocca umida, un po' gonfia, semiaperta, divenuta più rosea, atteggiata di languore, in quel viso così pallido e così tenue, mi diede veramente l'impressione indefinibile d'una cosa che sola fosse rimasta viva nella sembianza d'una morta'.

'sleepwalker', there are passages in *L'innocente* in which the woman looks like she has just risen from a coffin because of her sunken eyes, and resembles a ghost.[51] This is not to say about the last part of the novel, in which Giuliana is likely to die after giving life to a baby, and is consequently confined to bed. This part, indeed, is precisely where Tullio feels to be reconciled with, and therefore more attracted to his wife.

These episodes are ahead of those in *Trionfo della morte* in which Ippolita Sanzio is described as if she has been purified after ovarian surgery, which seems to provide her with new virginity. Like tuberculosis, a surgical operation leads Ippolita to gradual consumption, which is in turn the proof of her sexual abstinence. Though a woman may have had other sexual relations during her life, indeed, the fact that she has been far from sexual activity cleanses her from any contamination in the eyes of a man. In addition, in the same way as tuberculosis, consumption caused by a surgical operation associates Ippolita with death, the state in which, according to Giorgio Aurispa, the woman would find a novel purity and would reach the supreme expression of her beauty. Under a masculinist perspective, in fact, the ultimate moment saves a woman from the material world, thereby casting her into a dimension of spirituality. In this way, she remains definitively unattainable in her devotion to one single man and is liberated from the possibility of being concretely seduced by other admirers.[52]

[51] See D'Annunzio, p. 461: 'Pareva veramente ch'ella si fosse levata dalla bara, tanto era disfatta. I suoi occhi avevano un gran cerchio violaceo'.

[52] See D'Annunzio, pp. 804-805: 'Io penso che morta ella raggiungerà la suprema espressione della sua bellezza. Morta! – E s'ella morisse? Ella diventerebbe materia di pensiero, una pura idealità. Io l'amerei oltre la vita, senza gelosia, con un dolore pacato ed eguale'. To use the words of Dijkstra: 'Death became a woman's ultimate sacrifice of her being to the males she had been born to serve' (Dijkstra, p. 29).

The stereotypical connection between death and attractiveness in women recurs in women's narrative as well, when affected, of course, by that logocentrism pertaining to the typically masculinist conceptualisation of female characters, an example of which is in Matilde Serao's *Fantasia* (1883). The opposition between the two protagonists Lucia and Caterina is grounded in both their personality and physical appearance. Endowed with a daydreaming temperament, compounded by her tendency to *rêverie*, Lucia is a black-haired, pale – the colour of the skin contrasting with her red lips – thin, and sickly woman – in other words, she is attractive based on the *fin-de-siècle* deathly aestheticism. Furthermore, she is well educated and reads Leopardi – a literary taste that Lucia herself considers as appropriate for sensitive people and Caterina blames instead, she being afraid that the pessimistic attitude of the poet may affect negatively her friend's mood.[53] Nonetheless – or maybe as a consequence of this – Lucia is considered as a seductive woman by Andrea, Caterina's impetuous and rough husband, who has initially stigmatised the woman as an insubstantial, fragile, contrived, and melancholic person.[54] In the same way as Giorgio in *Fosca*, Andrea sees his contempt for the woman – who is affected by hysterical crises at the beginning of the novel – turn into a feeling of attraction, which lays bare his masculinist desire for possession: '[…] una voglia brutale lo afferrava alla gola, una voglia di stringere quella personcina sottile fra le sue

[53] See Matilde Serao, *Fantasia*, ed. by Alfredina D'Ascenzo (Bologna: Millennium, 2006), pp. 22-23: ' "Mi pare di aver vissuto assai, di aver provato assai, di essere diventata vecchia. Mi pare di aver trovato dappertutto cenere e fango. Sono nauseata. Siamo nati solo pel dolore." "È Leopardi ancora, Lucia. Mi avevi promesso di non leggerlo più." "Non lo leggerò più. Ma senti, noi siamo tutti esseri ciechi, miserabili, che vanno alla infelicità e alla morte." ' For the 'woman-reading' topic, see the following section of the chapter.

[54] See Serao, p. 40: '[…] la signorina Lucia Altimare, creatura magra, vaporosa, pungente ai gomiti, *posatrice* per eccellenza'.

braccia poderose per farle male, per sentirne scricchiolare le ossa, per stritolarla'.[55] A powerful element of attraction, Lucia's consumption puts her close to death, and turns her into a fascinating creature in the eyes of men. In addition to this, her temperament proves to be even more charming due to her extreme religiosity (Lucia reads the Bible, the autobiography of Teresa of Ávila and *De imitatione Christi*). In opposition to her, Caterina is – at least apparently – a modest and simple heart. However, her ultimate decision to commit suicide at the end of the novel reveals how her personality is more nuanced and complex than one may suppose initially, working as an element of unpredictability, rather than as a stereotypical symptom of hysteria. In this way, her complexity overturns the logocentrism implied in the character of Lucia, which proves to be more aligned with masculinist expectations instead (the woman responds positively to Andrea's approach, in fact, and does not hesitate to betray her friend Caterina).

3.2. Women Reading: from Faruffini's 'La lettrice' to Aleramo's Una donna

If – as showed above – the woman is what 'appears' to male observers as a beautiful or an ugly creature, then her privileged field will be the visual arts, as witnessed by the recurrence of the female subject in Italian painting throughout the nineteenth century. A conspicuous number of women represented are intent on reading – an activity usually considered as dangerous for them (according to

[55] Serao, p. 79.

male parameters), based on the triggering of imagination that reading (especially sentimental novels) is supposed to imply.[56] In this sense, the 'dangerous reading' stereotype is something ambiguous. On the one hand, in fact, it reveals male – presumed – control over women. On the other hand, it lays bare men's fear of the female-other.[57] In terms of history of ideas, this European τόπος is traceable back at least to Dante's episode of Paolo and Francesca, the two lustful spirits in the fifth Canto of *Inferno,* condemned to be carried here and there by an incessant storm down in the Second Circle of the Hell. Based on the episode (an unfaithfulness committed after reading the story of Sir Lancelot and Guinevere), they are the symbol of what the activity of reading can determine in terms of – side – effects (corruption of women), being the object of figurative representations as well (Mosè Bianchi's and Gaetano Previati's versions of 1877 and 1909, respectively).

[56] See at least, on this topic, Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader. 1837-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley, *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

[57] This is also a point in James Conlon, 'Man Reading Women Reading: Interpreting Images of Women Readers', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2 (2005), 37-58, with precise references to the traditional iconography of the Annunciation, a scene in which 'men are unnecessary not just for pleasure and wisdom, but even for children', and 'of complete male superfluity' (p. 40).

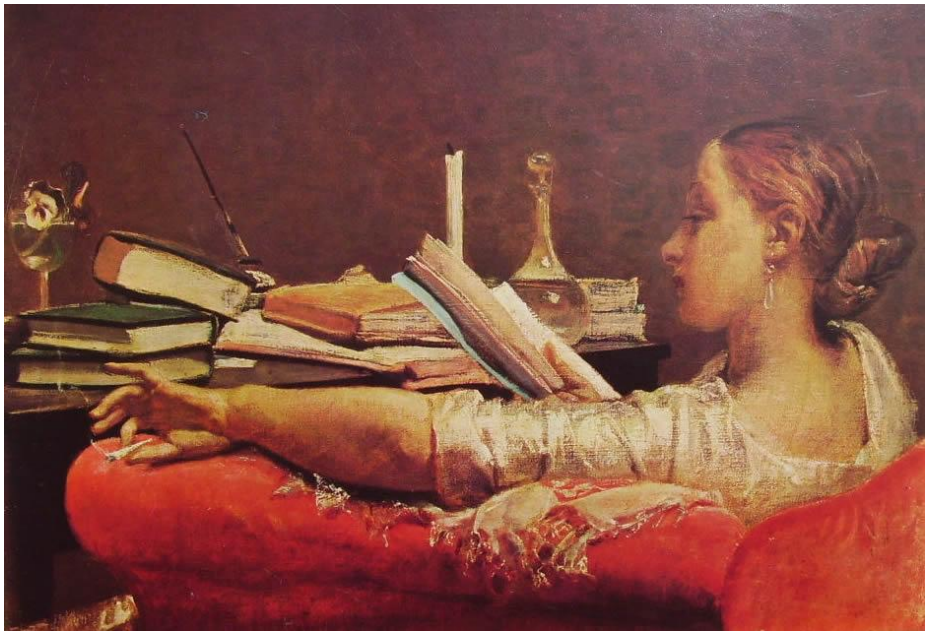

Figure 4. Federico Faruffini, 'La lettrice' (Milan: Civiche Raccolte d'Arte, 1864-1865)

Federico Faruffini's painting 'La lettrice' (1865) is one of the first artworks to give voice to the masculinist construct of the woman reading. Kept at Milan's Galleria d'Arte Moderna, it lays bare the eroticism that this activity symbolises, starting from the vaguely languorous posture of the woman (whose naked neck works as a sexual object under a male-fetishist perspective), who sits on a red armchair, being connected with a general impression of self-emancipation for the character represented. An element of this emancipation, smoking – a traditionally male activity – is able to get a woman closer to a man, assuming a very transgressive meaning when applied to female characters. As evidence, women smoking cigarettes, represented in cartoons in nineteenth-century European journals, were often suffragettes, bad wives, indifferent mothers, and sometimes even prostitutes (Émile Zola's Nana was, indeed, a heavy smoker). After all, it is not a coincidence that, in the same century as 'La

lettrice', 'caricatures of women smoking alone in their bedrooms sometimes show them in a state of collapse that suggest masturbation'.[58] Emancipation – connoted in sexual terms – is also symbolised by the pansy flower in the chalice on the left. Usually the flower of lovers, it is also the one that covered the earth – symbolising rebirth and fecundity – when Persephone used to spend every spring and summer on the earth with her mother Demeter. In this way, the flower represents the *trait d'union* between the activity of reading and an active sexuality, implying a threat for the stability of patriarchal conventions.

Other painters followed the model indicated by Faruffini, thereby confirming the deep-rootedness of this representation, including Giovanni Boldini's 'Liseuse dans un salon' (1876), which presents an even more evident eroticisation of the activity of reading in women. Boldini's woman is sitting in a slouched position, a black pillow behind her back – her posture is languorous and relaxed, literally abandoned to the pleasure provided by her hobby. Nonetheless, such a pleasure, which the painter underlines with the woman's satisfied smile, seems to go beyond the mere delectation given by reading a journal (which is the focus of the woman's attention). Her pleasure takes a sexual undertone, to which contribute the view of a sudden flush on the woman's face, her naked shoulder, and her ankle, not to say the general impression of idleness that she conveys, which recalls an exhausted and yet sexually-satisfied attitude:

[58] Dolores Mitchell, 'Women and Nineteenth-Century Images of Smoking', in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, ed. by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 294-303 (p. 297).

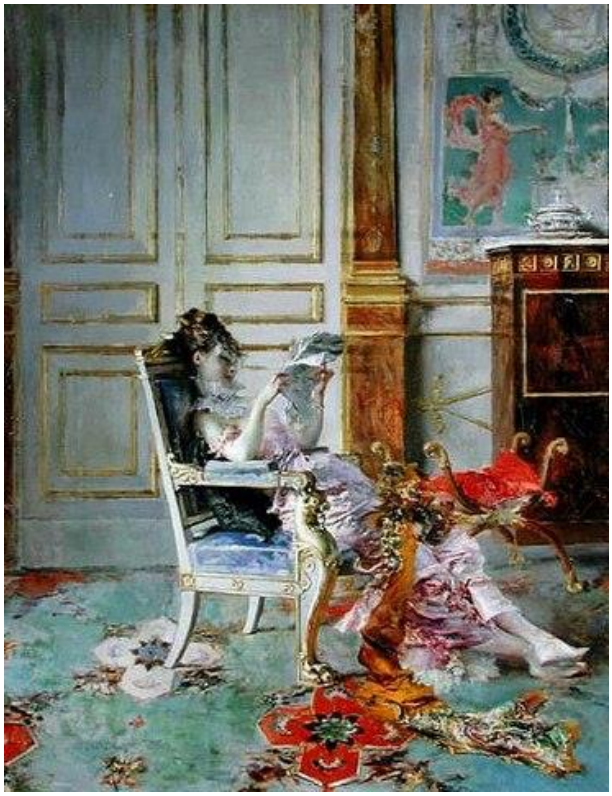

Figure 5. Giovanni Boldini, '*Liseuse dans un salon*' (Ferrara: Palazzo Massari, 1876)

That Boldini portrays this woman alone is not a coincidence, and alludes only marginally to the idea that reading is a lonely activity, either to be performed within the walls of a room (as in most cases) or *en plein air* (as in the case of 'La lettrice', 1865, by the *Macchiaiolo* painter Federico Zandomeneghi). Based on the details of the representation, in fact, Boldini's woman seems to have just withdrawn from men in order to seek her private pleasure. In her case, the activity of reading works as a continuation of the pleasure given by sex. In the same way as Faruffini's *lettrice*, Boldini's too is readable in terms of social status – the huge room in which the scene takes place clearly means that the woman's hobby may take root only among aristocratic classes. On the contrary, poor women are not expected to read, either due to their illiterateness or simply

to the unaffordability of books. Their task is, at worst, to be obliging, and to bring fruit to high-class women, thus adding a pleasure (that of food) to the one already provided by reading. An example of this is Odoardo Borrani's painting 'Le primizie' (1867), in which the contrast between a rich woman, who has just taken a break from her favourite occupation, and a girl of the people, who brings fruit in a basket, is remarked by the different fashion – and colour – of their dresses, disclosing the social status of both:

Figure 6. Odoardo Borrani, 'Le primizie' (Florence: Galleria La Stanzina, 1867)

Usually a solitary occupation (e.g. Silvestro Lega's 'La lettura', 1864) – which adumbrates again its symbolic connection with autoeroticism – to be kept hidden – out of men's sight (as in 'La lettura di soppiatto', 1863, by Federico Maldarelli) – reading is associated with hysteria due to its inner subversivity (as

well as to its connection with sex). Of such subversivity Fosca is aware – she reads Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise* (in which the problem of women's reading is posed) and admits that 'il meditare su molti [libri] non ha altro effetto che quello di renderci dubbiosi sulle nostre idee, incerti nei nostri pensamenti; non si sa più a che cosa credere, e spesso si finisce col non credere più a nulla'.[59] Fosca refers to books of philosophy, whose influence she considers as noxious as a bad medicine. But she modifies her position as soon as she discusses novels, which she admits to reading as a replacement for all the happiness that life has denied her. Reading in order to find gratification – 'fuggire dalla realtà, dimenticare molto, sognare molto'[60] – is a leitmotif that we will find again in the reading habits of young countess Teresa Uzeda, who replaces her life with French Feuilleton in Federigo De Roberto's *L'illusione* (1891), laying bare what the potential dangerousness of this activity is.[61] With novels, in fact, women find pleasure themselves, without men's participation. This is the kind of pleasure given by their own imagination, which excludes everyone else, and provides them, even for a short while, with independence from a male-dominated society.

The idea of reading as a source of imagination – and recreation – will keep up among later artists, including Vittorio Matteo Corcos, whose *Sogni* (1896) portrays a woman affected by *bovarysme* – her eyes stare into nothingness after reading three books published by French editor Garnier, which lie beside

[59] Tarchetti, p. 280.
[60] Tarchetti, p. 281.
[61] See Federico De Roberto, *L'illusione*, in *Romanzi, novelle e saggi*, ed. by Carlo A. Madrignani (Milan: Mondadori, 1984), pp. 1-410 (pp. 73-74).

her on a bench, while the rose petals lying on the ground allude to the end of a love story – which increases the dangerousness of reading for this woman:

Figure 7. Vittorio Corcos, 'Sogni' (Rome: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, 1896)

A passionate reader is Marina Crusnelli, the main character of Fogazzaro's *Malombra*, and her hobby has even the privilege to be condemned by her uncle, the severe count Cesare d'Ormengo, who is aware that there are 'good' and 'bad' books and that reading is – as will be reminded by Jacques Derrida – a 'transformational' process.[62] More in particular, uncle Cesare would like Marina to leave aside novels, which he believes to be full of affectivity and consequently disruptive to his niece's mind, his argumentations creating a

[62] See Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 6. For the quotation: 'Reading is transformational', see Jacques Derrida, 'Positions', in *Positions*. trans. and annotated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 63.

contrast between his ideal – mainly patriarchal – library and that of the girl, grounded on sentimental and gothic fiction.[63] Indeed, Marina reads George Byron, William Shakespeare, and – differently from Fosca, who refuses the books that recall death in their title[64] – Edgar Allan Poe. Still, she claims to be passionate about French authors – George Sand, Honoré de Balzac, François-René de Chateaubriand, and Charles Baudelaire – and yet her favourite writer is a British one – Benjamin Disraeli.[65] In the construction of her exasperated psychology, reading French novels – supposed to be sentimental since Catholic Romanticism – plays an important role, in that it seems to exacerbate her already nervous temperament. In the course of the story, in fact, Marina convinces herself of being the reincarnation of Cecilia, a woman who fell in love with an army officer and was confined by her husband (the father of Marina's uncle) because of her betrayal – which will lead her to kill her uncle and to her ultimate suicide. The masculinist representation of the character's psychology is confirmed by the first screen adaptation of *Malombra* by Carmine Gallone (1917), which stresses Marina's passion for reading and, therefore, the persistence of the stereotype still in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the sequence starting at 7'06", Marina (played by the silent film diva Lyda Borelli) rejects with disdain a book that her personal secretary hands her, and

[63] The contrast between Cesare's library and that of Marina has been analysed by Franco Fido, 'La biblioteca di Marina in *Malombra'*, in *Antonio Fogazzaro: le opere e i tempi. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio. Vicenza, 27-28-29 aprile 1992*, ed. by Fernando Bandini and Fabio Finotti (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 1994), pp. 415-424.
[64] See Tarchetti, p. 276.
[65] See Antonio Fogazzaro, *Malombra*, ed. by Vittore Branca (Milan: BUR, 1993), p. 63.

rather takes a French copy of Poe's tales of the grotesque – a choice that her uncle openly disapproves of in the following sequence.[66]

Enthusiastic about Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Giuliana in D'Annunzio's *L'innocente* is found out by her husband Tullio to have had sex with a critically acclaimed writer, Filippo Arborio – which reasserts the link between subversive sexual forces and literature in women. In the course of the story, which consists in Tullio's progressive awareness of Giuliana unfaithfulness, the man discovers a dedication from Arborio to Giuliana in the woman's copy of the novel *Il segreto*. The first occasion for Tullio's jealousy, this episode reasserts the nineteenth-century male representation of women's psychology. Giuliana, in fact, is regarded by her husband as potentially attracted to such novels as *Il segreto*, described as 'pieni d'una psicologia complicata, talora acutissima, spesso falsa'[67] – the kind of novels that a man thinks a woman might like. Such novels are those that allow a woman to escape her grim reality, and find a pleasure herself without any man's intervention. Consequently, their riskiness is evident, as Giuliana's case demonstrates after all. In the course of the novel, in fact, not only will Tullio discover his wife's intercourse with Arborio, but the woman will also admit to be pregnant by her lover. In this way, *L'innocente* re-establishes the patriarchal construct enunciated in the above-

[66] See Grazia Menechella, 'Scrittrici e lettrici 'malate di nervi' nell'800 e nel '900', *Forum Italicum*, 2 (2000), 372-401 (p. 383): 'Il primo adattamento di Malombra, l'adattamento cinematografico di Carmine Gallone, coglie e ben rappresenta la centralità sia dell'attività di lettura di Marina che della contrapposizione delle due biblioteche. Di rilievo, nel film, la scena in cui Marina visita la biblioteca dello zio (chiaramente luogo di "lavoro" e non di "evasione") e non riesce a trovare alcun libro interessante ad eccezione di un volume di Poe (che ovviamente prende in prestito). L'immagine della pericolosa donna fogazzariana (pericolosa per l'uomo, la famiglia e la società) è resa in maniera esemplare dalla diva Lyda Borelli nei panni di Marina, donna fatale portatrice di distruzione [...]'.

[67] D'Annunzio, p. 400.

mentioned narrative works, challenging the patriarchal normativity only in the passages in which the male character becomes aware of his position of power over the female counterpart (this happens when Tullio almost justifies Giuliana and considers her unfaithfulness as the consequence of his neglect).[68]

As an expression of nineteenth-century logocentrism, which is intertwined with a number of patriarchal stereotypes, the literary and figurative representation of women discussed above implies the idea of gender as a culturally-elaborated and historically-determined construct.[69] Accordingly, even when they imply criticism towards the role of social conventions in the behaviour of a woman, these novels seem to reassert the strength of conventions as something unavoidable through the example of female characters that do not dare as much as they would like in terms of the demonstration of love. This is evident in Neera's *Addio!*, published in 1886, the subject of which the author describes as audacious in the introduction to one of the novel's later editions.[70] Despite this, the behaviour of the main character of the story, Valeria, who is married to colonel Attilio but yet

[68] The picture delinated so far may be extended further and include the ambivalent attitude towards reading novels that we find in Neera's narrative. On this literary topic and its links with the author's biography, see Olivia Santovetti, 'Neera (1846-1918). The World Seen from the Window: Reading, Writing, and the Power of Fantasy', *The Italianist*, 33 (2013), 390-404 (pp. 395-397). Though not in all their works, women writers seemed to challenge the belief in the risk implied in the activity of reading. An example of such a revisionary attitude is at least in Matilde Serao's tale 'Il trionfo di Lulù', from the collection of *tranches de vie* and short stories *Dal vero* (1879). Here, in a dialogue between the main character Sofia and her future husband, the man asks the girl whether she is concerned that books may be dangerous to her, to which the girl answers that books give her peace, rather than affecting her mental health.

[69] For the difference between sex and gender, see Butler, pp. 8-17.

[70] See Neera [Anna Radius Zuccari], *Addio!*, 4th edn (Milan: Galli, 1886), p. 10: 'All'accusa che mi si fece di aver dato un carattere troppo sensuale a questo amore, risponderò che esso nacque nel mio cervello così o meglio così lo osservai in natura mia maestra; e non credetti di palliarne le tinte accese, per non togliere il contrasto che sta appunto nell'ardore della passione coll'ardore della virtù'.

is tempted by marquise Massimo, is audacious only to a certain extent. Although in one place of the novel Valeria even recognises that marriage is constraining and against human nature, she does not walk her own way until the end by fulfilling her dream of love with Massimo. In fact, when Attilio dies due to the consequences of a stagecoach accident, Valeria prefers 'sacrificing herself' – to paraphrase her words – and departing for Greece, rather than running to her lover, leaving just a card saying *addio* to him. For the whole story torn between Attilio and Massimo, Valeria is also influenced by a strong sense of guilt towards the former. Nonetheless, besides such painful emotion, it is very likely that social conventions have their role in her decision, although such conventions are so absorbed in the aristocratic context of the novel (and so implicit in the protagonist's mind) that the narrator does not even mention them as a possible deterrent to Valeria's and Massimo's elopement.

Another heroine who sacrifices herself, thus aligning with what men expected from a woman in the nineteenth century, is in Serao's brief novel *La virtù di Checchina*, which came out in 1884.[71] Like Neera's, Serao's story, which is set in Rome, focuses on social conventions in so far as the main character, Checca, proves to be unable to make up her mind and surrender to unfaithful love. Although she is married to an indifferent and greedy doctor, yet Checca feels attraction to the courteous and refined marquise Ugo d'Aragona. But when the woman, who mainly lives a life of sacrifices in spite of her bourgeois extraction, comes to a decision to go and visit her admirer at his home, she is frightened by the presence of Ugo's doorman. Consequently, she gives up on her

[71] See Matilde Serao, 'La virtù di Checchina', in *Serao*, ed. by Pietro Pancrazi, 2 vols (Milan: Garzanti, 1944-46), vol. I, pp. 863-908.

resolution and retraces her steps back home. Her change of mind is not due to a presumed integrity, and the 'virtue' alluded to in the title of the story should be rather intended ironically, as what masks a deep ineptitude in the character. Neither is such a change of mind to be put down to a fear of the door attendant. Constantly terrified by the fact that her maidservant may discover Ugo's letter of invitation or that some people may see her in the street near to the marquise's house, Checca's only concern is, ultimately, to keep up her social reputation. Thus, her shrinking from Ugo's place seems to work as an excuse – as what hides the woman's desire to be regarded as modest and faithful within the bourgeois society to which she belongs. It must be also added that the whole story stresses how human relationships are conditioned by economic rules, as witnessed by the episodes in which Checca complains that she does not have sufficient money to buy the clothes that she needs to make a good impression on Ugo d'Aragona. By changing her mind when she is in front of Ugo's building, not only does Checca renounce expressing herself as an individual, but she also implicitly accepts the economic rules of her society, according to which if a woman does not have money, she should better give up any dream of love with an aristocratic man.

Although this section has stated that women writers were influenced by a male-dominated culture, it is worth remembering that in nineteenth-century Italy there were, too, examples of what Hélène Cixous has defined as *écriture féminine* – examples of writing where it is the woman's body that expresses itself and writes, now redeemed from the masculinist thinking and from logocentrism. One of the examples in this direction is Neera's *Teresa* (1886), the story of an

all-female *éducation sentimentale* that centres on the progressive acquaintance of a girl with love and her thwarted sexuality. Although social conventions during Teresa's puberty and adult age have, in this novel too, their weight – personified in her father's severity – the representation of the girl slips by both the clinical and the artistic gazes that are at work in *Fosca*. Even in the points of the novel in which *Teresina* is caught by hysterical attacks, her malady is something clearly deriving from the obstacles that her father erected in order to prevent her from fulfilling her dream of love with Egidio. Far from being something 'mysterious' as in the words of logocentric novelists, such hysteria is rather a form of reaction against a *status quo* to which the girl refuses to concede, the ultimate effort of rebellion of a constrained individual. Proof is the fact that the young physician that accepts to heal her from her nervous disturbance does not try to assess her case based on predefined medical categories. Though 'addottorato nelle teorie moderne'[72] in the same way as Follini, Giacinta's doctor (for the character of whom see the next chapter), Teresa's follows a different approach, based on the holistic belief that in healing hysteria medicines are less important than the understanding of the context in which the patient lives.[73] From such an approach, which privileges talking and a benevolent attitude towards patients,[74] there emerges an unconventional representation of the female character, now intended as a whole and not as a mere body to heal and a mysterious – invisible –

[72] Neera [Anna Radius Zuccari], *Teresa*, ed. by Luigi Baldacci (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), p. 187.
[73] See Neera, p. 190: 'Quando si manifesta un perturbamento dei nervi così vivo, con caratteri francamente isterici, la miglior cura è quella di non abbandonare l'ammalata a se stessa. Io posso ordinare delle medicine, ma se non sono aiutato dal sistema...'.
[74] See Neera, p. 188: 'L'esame fu lungo e minuzioso. Incominciò con una quantità di domande; alcune fra le quali inaspettate, altre incomprensibili per la sofferente che si accontentava di crollare il capo, muta, sotto l'impressione penosa di un incubo'.

interiority (and it is significant, in fact, that the doctor does not linger over external symptoms in order to understand Teresa's disease). In the same way as the medical gaze does not prevail over the rest within the novel, there are, too, no physical descriptions of Teresa aiming to classify the girl according to nineteenth-century aesthetic categories. If, at some point, there is a remark that the girl is unattractive, this is attributed to girls that are jealous of her love story with Egidio, yet it is not an attempt to categorise the character in the same way as that observable in Tarchetti's novel.

Although she is aware that 'per perdere una donna basta un minuto; che l'onore delle fanciulle si appanna, come il cristallo, ad un soffio',[75] Teresa is yet convinced that the life of a woman is nothing without love. Thus, she pursues her sentimental dream by contravening the rigid rules imposed by her father, upon the death of whom she is able to take a train and reach Egidio at the end of the novel. Social conventions, as said above, remain decisive in the construction of her character, yet she is one of the few examples of literary heroines whose representation does not undergo masculinist categorisations and mainly develops in the interiority, thus going beyond logocentrism. Such an example will be compounded just a few years later by Sibilla Aleramo's autobiographic character in *Una donna*, which suggests that not only reading, but writing as well is a form of emancipation from a masculinist society, thereby giving voice to what is patriarchally considered as something mysterious and unfathomable.[76]

[75] Neera, pp. 103-104.

[76] This is the kind of book that the character in Aleramo's novel wants to write – a book of sorrow and love, which is different from those novels that women plan to write in imitation of 'male' stories. See Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), pp. 123-124: 'Un libro, *il libro*... Ah, non vagheggiavo di scriverlo, no!, ma mi struggevo, certe volte, contemplando nel mio spirito la visione di quel libro che sentivo

In Neera's story, the figure of the physician plays a fundamental role as far as he helps in understanding the character of the patient. However, this figure is the point of arrival of a cultural process, detectable in a series of prose writings (not only fictional ones). Mirroring the historical and social change that occurred in Italy upon the Unification, such a process is the object of the analysis that, in the following chapter, concludes the framework delineated so far.

necessario, di un libro di amore e di dolore, che fosse straziante e insieme fecondo, inesorabile e pietoso, che mostrasse al mondo intero l'anima femminile moderna, per la prima volta, e per la prima volta facesse palpitare di rimorso e di desiderio l'anima dell'uomo, del triste fratello...'.

IV. From the Individual as a Whole to the Visible-Invisible Dichotomy: the Evolution of the Physician at the Fin de Siècle

4.1. A Healer, an Artist and a Confessor: the Representation of the Physician in Dazio Olivi's and Giosuè Marcacci's Lectures

A speech by Dazio Olivi, 'Dei doveri del medico', published in 'L'ippocratico: giornale di medicina e chirurgia' on 31 May 1869, supports the nineteenth-century idea of the complementarity between the activity of the Catholic priest and that of the physician, focusing particularly on the latter, who is supposed to act as both a healer and a confessor.[1] In such a concurrence of aims, implying the overlapping between two fields, the visible-invisible contrast proves to be synthesised in a superior unity as well, since the task of the physician is to take care of both the body and the soul, as implied in the recourse to a number of 'noble' syntagmatic expressions in order to define medical activity – 'piaghe

[1] The complementarity between the activity of the physician and that of the priest is in Carlo Ravizza's *Un curato di campagna*, which I mention in the first chapter of this thesis, as well as in Niccolò Tommaseo's unfinished *Un medico*. The medicine-religion association is crucial in Giosuè Marcacci (the medical lecture of whom I discuss *infra* in the present section) and will be updated by Fascist culture, thinking about Eugenio Morelli's *discorso* 'Il medico nel Regime Fascista' (22 February 1934). For a history of the intersections between theology and medicine in nineteenth-century Europe as well as the metaphor of medical activity as a kind of priesthood, see at least Giorgio Cosmacini, *La religiosità della medicina. Dall'antichità a oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 2007), pp. 109-116. For Morelli's speech, see Cosmacini, pp. 142-146 (in part. pp. 143, 143n.).

dell'anima', 'spirito abbattuto' and 'ispirare una filosofica e pia rassegnazione'.[2] Emblematic of this intertwinement, the remaining speech is pervaded by a strong Christian background, insofar as the activity of the physician comes directly from moral integrity[3] and involves sacrifice and moderation ('Il medico dee rinunziare [...] ad ogni piacere, ad ogni divertimento, ad ogni riposo')[4] – qualities celebrated by means of bizarre exhortations, including that of the doctor who needs to 'uscire da un'orgia'[5] to be able to catch the aetiology of maladies. Olivi defines a physician who follows the precepts of the Gospel – a physician who sees the individual (regardless of sex) as resulting from the interconnection between the external and the internal, and malady as something affecting the individual as a whole (rather than single parts of the body). This model, adapted in the same decade by other theorists (e.g. Antigono Zappoli in his *Il medico di tutti i secoli*, 1855), was likely to become obsolete, turned into an epistemological approach based on dichotomies such as those observed in Arrigo and Camillo Boito (not only external and internal, but also male and female and the visible and the invisible).

By analysing this process of corruption in action, it becomes possible to see the genesis of the 'hegemonic' observer's perspective up close, that is, the one embodied by the anatomo-pathologist in 'Lezione d'anatomia' and Carlo Gulz in 'Un corpo'. In fact, beyond being in opposition to the 'subalterns' discussed in the previous chapters (female corpses, mediums and women

[2] Dazio Olivi, 'Dei doveri del medico. Discorso al ch. Professore Cav. Luigi Malagodi per tenue segno di profonda stima e d'inalterabile affetto', *L'ippocratico*, XV (1869), 458-467 (p. 458).
[3] 'Onesto' is the word used in the speech: see Olivi, p. 459.
[4] Olivi, p. 461.
[5] Ibid.

reading), the patriarchal perspective is the point of arrival of an evolution, and the dogmatic dichotomies that it implies are but the degradation of a previous unity or even of a more articulated relation of parts (e.g. a tripartition).[6] The transition from one epistemological model to the other, that is, from a dynamic one – aiming at finding syntheses – to a more static and dogmatic one – which tends to reduce everything to drastic oppositions – is at work in the late decades of the nineteenth century, emerging from the shift from the first to the second edition of Capuana's *Giacinta*. Such a passage lays bare a change in the definition of the female character as a medical subject torn between a visible and an invisible side as well as an increasing dogmatism in the mentality of the physician (Doctor Follini, in this case), leading to Gulz and the dissective power implied in his knowledge. Chronologically speaking, the transition to such a 'novel' construct is anticipated by two seminal books that still define the 'ideal' physician (the one who grounds his knowledge on syntheses) and yet already display a corruption of the first epistemological model – Paolo Mantegazza's novel *Un giorno a Madera* and Angelo Camillo De Meis's epistolary book *Dopo la laurea*.[7] Although it shows – at least at the beginning – a critical approach to the definition of malady, Mantegazza's book is grounded on a strong opposition between the doctor and the patient, paving the way to the feminisation of the

[6] To say it with Edward Shorter, it is too easy to conclude that 'doctors have become a lot of heartless brutes' as a result of a crisis – rather, it would be better for them to explain their reasons and 'tell their side as well'. For the quotations, see Edward Shorter, *Doctors and Their Patients: A Social History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher, 2006), p. 19.

[7] Mantegazza's and De Meis's works are already coupled in Montagni's *Angelo consolatore e ammazzapazienti* as both resulting from a reflection on the science-art dichotomy. In my chapter, however, the two books are traced back to a new understanding of the figure of the physician and the formation of the visible-invisible dualism.

latter, metaphorised in colonial terms as a savage in need of assistance and education. Similarly, De Meis's novel is responsible for providing the male-female opposition and the cultural construct of the substantial inferiority of women with philosophical bases, thereby identifying the female patient – who is inferior to the healthy (male) person – as characteristic of a precise age of humanity. This book proposes a dichotomic construct of malady, by putting the typically female one (hysteria) in contrast with a kind of 'spiritual' and 'ennobling' illness, which rather concerns the soul of male patients and leads them to ponder the great questions of life and feel ennui at most. Such a diffused oversimplification results in the character of Capuana's Giacinta, whose childlike features are the outcome of a masculinist objectification of female-otherness, connected to an attenuation of its most 'indecent' features, in turn linked with the moral needs of the newly born Italian Kingdom.

Exemplary of the first epistemological model is certainly the bond between medical activity and art – two fields that were well separated in 'Un corpo' – as witnessed by Giosuè Marcacci's *discorso inaugurale* at the University of Siena in the academic year 1868-1869. The medicine-art conjunction relies on the concept, therein included, that the best physicians are those who cultivate not only 'l'argomento arido, limitato, misero'[8] of their studies – reduced to a merely mechanical approach – but the Humanities as well, which provide them with the 'splendore oratorio', the 'bellezze di favella, o

[8] Giosuè Marcacci, *Principali doveri del medico. Discorso inaugurale letto alla solenne apertura degli studi nella R. Università di Siena nell'anno accademico 1868-69* (Siena: Mucci, 1869), p. 4.

dolcezze di stile'.[9] Such a concept is reinforced by the semantic ambiguity of the word *arte*, which the author uses in terms of both medical practise and focus on those inner aspects of the individual that only art – and poetry in particular – can catch. After all, the expressions used to describe some peculiar aspects of the discipline – such as 'perturbazioni prime'[10] to designate the first signs of disease – seem to be borrowed from poetry rather than from scientific handbooks. They recall, in fact, such poetical intrusions into scientific fields as those proposed by several poets in the nineteenth century (e.g. Tommaseo, who describes infections and viruses in poetical terms in his 1852 poem 'I contagii').[11] This consideration leads to another one – that about the literary cross-references by which Marcacci constructs his inaugural address. Indeed, all his work is weaved together with a number of authorial reminiscences, starting from the rhetorical statement at the beginning, declaring his unworthiness in dealing with so demanding a task, one which assimilates Dante's passage on Pope Celestine V's 'gran rifiuto'.[12] Similarly to *Spiritismo*, where he embodied the symbol of the Risorgimento's mind-set, Dante is an important figure for the nineteenth-century medical discipline too, as is shown by the numerous references to his fictional and philosophical works. For example, the duty of physicians that consists in providing medical apprentices with the 'food' of their discipline – 'dispensare la

[9] Marcacci, p. 5.
[10] Marcacci, p. 6.
[11] See Niccolò Tommaseo, 'I contagii', in *Opere*, ed. by Aldo Borlenghi (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1958), pp. 257-258.
[12] See Marcacci, p. 3: 'Io, inferiore di tanto, dubbioso e perplesso mi stetti gran pezza, se dovessi o no rifiutare un sì onorevole, ma grave ufficio per me, e non per viltà sarei sceso al gran rifiuto, sibbene per sentirmi sì povero di dottrina da non presumere nemmeno quel compatimento, di cui al certo non ebbero mestieri quei che mi precedettero'.

scienza come cibo alla gioventù'[13] – is formulated by recalling the beginning of the *Convivio*, in which Dante expresses his idea of the *mensa* that provides people with the *vivande* that are but pieces of knowledge.[14] In addition, while the aforementioned *perturbazioni* stand for maladies (intended as Aristotelian 'accidents'), the reference to 'il velame trasparente di certi sintomi'[15] (which the physician is supposed to lift in order to conduct any aetiological investigation) is reminiscent of the 'velame de li versi strani' in Dante's IX Canto of the *Inferno*. Such a connection implies a suggestive hypothesis, starting from René Guénon's debated thesis in *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* (1925), according to which the ll. 61-63 in the IX Canto would adumbrate an esoteric initiation of Alighieri – that the physician was to be intended as an 'enlightened' individual, the repository of a knowledge destined to a few people and endowed with his own thaumaturgy. Such a hypothesis, remarked by the following reference to the 'spiriti eletti'[16] (that is, the caste of major physicians), which quotes the penitents in Dante's *Purgatorio* III. 73, is not so fantastic. Indeed, the enormous power with which the physician was surrounded in nineteenth-century popular imagination leads us to consider him as almost a supernatural figure and his ability to 'look behind' the surface symptoms as but a unique prerogative, resulting from a special 'illumination'. As with the references to Dante, so too those to Greek and Latin literature remark the classical bases that are supposed to contribute to the

[13] Marcacci, p. 5.
[14] For the food-related metaphor, which characterises the 'Trattato primo' of Dante's work, See Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, in *Opere minori*, ed. by Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti and others, 2 vols (Turin: UTET, 1983-1986), vol. 2 (*Convivio. Epistole. Monarchia. Quaestio de aqua et terra*) (1986), pp. 63-322 (in part. pp. 66-67, where there are such word as *pane*, *vivanda*, *palato*, *stomaco*, *fame*, etc., clearly referring to the act of assimilating knowledge as it was food).
[15] Marcacci, p. 20.
[16] Marcacci, p. 9.

background of any effective doctor – a background that does not avoid recalling 'common sense' too, as in the first aphorism by Hippocrates, re-written by Seneca at the beginning of his *De brevitate vitae* and quoted in Marcacci's book.[17]

Within the aforementioned literary bases, the text is also structured upon the interferences with more modern works, some of which are declared openly within the speech. In particular, the one by clinician Maurizio Bufalini, supporting the similarity between medical activity (which gives life back to patients) and divine creation (which provides life for the first time), adapts the Biblical passage about the privileged position of the physician in front of God, celebrating him according to an idea of undisputed power that I am to discuss later.[18] Among the non-credited works are historical ones for such crystallised expressions as 'morbo implacabile' (which recalls the *Historia Siciliana* as alluding to the plague that hit Southern Italy in 1480), or surgical treatises for more common expressions such as 'dolore da mitigare', which is frequent in Italian poetry as well, referring mostly to sorrowful-love experience (but here echoing presumably *La chirurgia di Gabriel Fallopio* [*sic*] *modonese*, a part of which is devoted to the alleviation of pain).[19] Not to say that some other

[17] See Marcacci, p. 4: 'Io m'inchino però devoto, e reverente dinanzi a delle felici ed onorevoli eccezioni, che solitarie splendono come faci nel tenebroso sentiero di una pratica senza confini: *Vita brevis, ars longa, occasio praeceps, experimentum periculosum, iudicium difficile'*. (The reference in this passage is to those physicians who are able to synthesise scientific and artistic notions).

[18] Marcacci, p. 17. As far as the Biblical passage is concerned, see Ecclesiasticus/Sirach, 38. 1-15.

[19] Both expressions are in Marcacci, p. 4. See also, for the cross-references mentioned in the text, Giuseppe Buonfiglio Costanzo, *Dell'Historia Siciliana* [...] (Ciera: Venezia, 1604), p. 391, and Gabriele Falloppio and Giovanni Pietro Maffei, *La chirurgia di Gabriel Fallopio modonese, Fisico, Chirurgo, et Anathomico celeberrimo* [...] (Curti: Venezia, 1675), p. 660, respectively. As for the 'morbo implacabile' as an idiomatic

expressions, aligned with the results of the Spiritualistic viewpoint in their recalling Shakespeare's idea about the great variety of existing phenomena – 'infinita varietà dei fenomeni'[20] – interfered with following scientific studies. Among them is Roberto Ardigò's *La psicologia come scienza positiva* (1882), which would linger from a positivist perspective on 'la varietà e la moltiplicità infinita dei fenomeni naturali'[21] some time later, mixing significantly the new positivist forces with references to Greek philosophy (Democritus and Empedocles) to explain the substantial unity underlying the variety of phenomena.

As suggested by these examples, the synthesis between the field of science and that of art proves to be accomplished mainly in the field of language and literature – which confirms what is noted by Frigg and Hunter, according to whom scientific representations within the nineteenth-century epistemological tradition presume the centrality of the linguistic problem, all scientific representations being 'descriptions of their subject matter articulated in a concise formal language'.[22] As far as the Italian case is concerned, this art-medicine

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expression, it is significant that a search for the occurrences of the syntagma in the bibliotecaitaliana.it website reveals that the words *morbo* and *implacabile* are never coupled within Italian literature, and that their forming a pair in Giuseppe Buonfiglio Costanzo's book is something quite original in written works. Regarding the alleviation of pain instead, the tradition is quite long in Western medicine, due of course to the influence of Christian culture, as remarked again in Cosmacini, pp. 117-123. On the 'double face' of medical activity, implying both healing and the alleviation of pain, see Rousseau, *La medicina e le Muse*, pp. 11-19.

[20] See Marcacci, p. 8: 'Egli è in dovere d'interrogare, di assimilarsi, per così dire, la esperienza altrui per non esser sorpreso ad ogni istante dall'infinita varietà dei fenomeni per i quali si estrinsecano le malattie nelle loro molteplici ed oscure forme'.

[21] Roberto Ardigò, *La psicologia come scienza positiva* (Mantova: Guastalla, 1882), p. 356.

[22] Roman Frigg and Matthew C. Hunter, *Introduction*, in *Beyond Mimesis and Convention: Representation in Art and Science*, ed. by Roman Frigg and Matthew C. Hunter (New York: Springer, 2010), pp. xv-xxx (pp. xvi-xvii).

coincidence intersects, of course, with the animated history of language in the country, the most crucial step of which had occurred less than thirty years earlier due to the publication of Manzoni's 1840 edition of *I promessi sposi*. This intersection manifests itself in the language used in the most 'scientific' passages, which recall again a literature that was concerned about the application of a certain terminology, aiming at expressing the particular situation of the country – a situation characterised not only by the presence of a new language but also religious and political concerns. Within this framework, there find an easy explanation the references to Mazzini's civic vocabulary – as for the *diritti-doveri* dichotomy in particular – which present the physician not only as a pedagogical figure, but as a political one as well (as it was since the XVIII century according to Foucault),[23] whose importance takes a new semantic relevance in the aftermath of the 1861 turning point. The language used by Marcacci, resulting from this politics-pedagogy overlapping, has recourse to such words as *doveri* and *Società (degli uomini)* in order to remark on the intertwinement between the recognition of our duties as citizens and the importance of education for doctors, thus adapting Mazzini's *Dei doveri dell'uomo* (1860), according to which there is no individual duty whenever any society denies education to people.[24] Moreover, this new language provided by the Unification suggests the concept of right, which is what society exerts on the physician, asking him to heal sick members in order for society to grow and

[23] See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 52: 'The first task of the doctor is therefore political: the struggle against disease must begin with a war against government. Man will be totally and definitively cured only if he is first liberated [...]'.
[24] See Marcacci, p. 5: 'Ogn'uomo che esercita una professione, qualunque sia il grado, qualunque sia il posto che occupa ha dinanzi alla Società in mezzo alla quale esso vive dei doveri da compiere. […] Principale dovere del Medico io stimo sia quello di essere istruito, quanto sia possibile esserlo, ed addottrinato della scienza sua […].

develop as an organism, thereby implying the cultural construct of malady as a social issue.[25] As a political/pedagogical/social fact, the rights-duties dichotomy is synthesised in a superior unity that is legitimised by medicine itself and the physician, whose power of knowledge and exerting practise proves thus to be unquestionable.

4.2. The Incipient Degeneracy of Medical Activity: Paolo Mantegazza's Un giorno a Madera

The cultural implications pinpointed so far recur in Paolo Mantegazza's novel, *Un giorno a Madera. Una pagina dell'igiene dell'amore*, the importance of which is in its ideal definition of the physician, who, already provided with a number of stereotypes, shows now the progressive degeneracy of his activity and brings out its increasing 'colonial' attitude.[26] Published in 1868, the book responds to the 'strategic' dimension of medicine – as identified by Nikolas Rose in the wake of Foucault – witnessing the attempt of medical thought and activity to fulfil themselves through campaigns, reforms and warnings/exhortations to

[25] The idea of malady as a social issue resisted in Europe until the twentieth century, as evidenced by Héricourt's book on tuberculosis, syphilis, alcoholism and sterility as social rather than individual plagues: see Jules Héricourt, *The Social Disease: Tuberculosis, Syphilis, Alcoholism, Sterility*, trans. and with a final Chapter by Bernard Miall (London: Routledge, 1920).

[26] See Paolo Mantegazza, *Un giorno a Madera. Una pagina dell'igiene d'amore* (Milan: Bietti, 1925). The choice to analyse the 1925 edition of the novel is due to the presence of the preface 'Due parole ai miei elettori di Monza', which includes the medical metaphorisation noticed so far. Such a preface was expunged in the following editions of the book.

people, as usually resulting from a changed political/social situation.[27] Indeed, *Un giorno a Madera* was accompanied by high intentions, if we think that in a dedication as a newly-elected deputy in the Parliament of Italy, the author considered it as the outcome of 'il meglio del *suo* sangue, il meglio del *suo* tempo',[28] and a concrete contribution to a healthier and better Italy, as presumably requested seven years later than the accomplished Unification. More specifically, the metaphor of the novel as a furrow for sowing seeds, which in turn would result in bread for new generations – 'pane per l'avvenire'[29] – updates the food-related metaphorisation by which Marcacci had suggested something more than the mere idea of the educator as providing sustenance and the learner as a needy person. By disclosing a Christian background and the new political situation of the country, Mantegazza presents the new Italian citizen (the addressee of the book) in the same way as a savage in need of essential goods (both material and spiritual), which colonisers are supposed to provide – an interpretation supported by the ethnocentric approach that pervades the whole novel. In the wake of this, the physician/pedagogue-patient/learner dichotomy is shaped within a – wider – civilised-primitive contrast, where the latter pole is entailed in Madeira's archipelago, pictured as a paradise in the early expectations of the narrator and yet appearing abruptly to visitors as 'una scena dell'inferno dantesco'[30] in its being crowded with huge bare rocks, waste cliffs and hit by thunderous waves. Such an 'environmental' contrast is later compounded, as

[27] Nikolas Rose, 'Medicine, History and the Present', in *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*, ed. by Colin Jones and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 48-72 (p. 52).
[28] Mantegazza, p. 4.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Mantegazza, p. 9.

soon as the visitors reach Ponta de *São Lourenço* and find themselves in what updates the abused τόπος of the garden, the recurrent *locus amoenus* of Western literature, which would be expected to deny the typical manifestation of malady as conceived by European medicine due exactly to its being an *hortus conclusus*, that is, a place in which illness cannot take root. Unexpectedly, in fact, the 'profumo di giardino fiorito', the land as an 'incanto' and the 'sorriso di orto e di ville, di campi verdeggianti e di boschi bizzarri'[31] coexist with the racist representation of savages. These are a mass of naked vagabonds, beggars and dispossessed people – which makes the narrative voice quote anatomist Giambattista Morgagni and declare that 'l'istante della voluttà era consumato',[32] that is, the previous (and stereotypical) impression of an uncontaminated paradise had been corrupted. The Romantic link between the good/healthy savage and the non-civilised land – a commonplace resulting from the eighteenth-century exoticism[33] – is disappointed, then, for there are also wretched and sick savages. In this conscious challenge of the initial civilised-primitive dualism, which does not correspond necessarily to an illness-good health one, lies a kind of critical approach then. This approach results in the refusal to reduce everything to isolated blocks, even at the cost of creating an apparent clash, as in the unusual (in terms of history of ideas) bond between the morally miserable savages (and moral pathology was supposed to have links with the physiological one) and the beautiful and immaculate place that they dwell (which should

[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid. See also Giambattista Morgagni, *Delle sedi e cause delle malattie anatomicamente investigate* (Milan: Rusconi, 1825), IX, p. 272.
[33] On the re-semantisation of the *hortus conclusus* topic, intertwined with the modern exoticism, see Lea Ritter Santini, *Nel giardino della storia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988), pp. 41-83.

impede any malady based on its purity). This has to be said, of course, while keeping in mind that such a revised approach proves to be still inscribed within an ethnocentric perspective (as a matter of fact, savages are inferior to the observer in the novel), for which poetry – celebrated in 'Lezione d'anatomia' instead – no longer is effective: '[...] ora la realtà della vita mi chiamava alla difesa personale, allo studio pratico di Funchal; infine la poesia cedeva il posto all'amministrazione della vita'.[34]

I have noted the Christian background implied in Mantegazza's representation, which is displayed following the use of the metaphor of heaven to represent Madeira's archipelago, and confirms Jeffrey Burton Russell's idea of the cultural kinship between the Greco-Roman *locus amoenus* motif and the Christian concept of Heaven (the latter resulting from a re-semantisation of the former).[35] Such a background is, of course, adapted to the Italian case, as the word *dovere*, which is used – as it was in Marcacci – to denote the mission of the physician, has clearly the implications provided for it by the nineteenth-century liberal Catholicism, if we consider the emphasis on the existence of free-will, based on which the aiming at what is good results exclusively from a conscious decision of the physician and entails the object of his mission. This coexistence between free choice and the obligation towards 'good' relies, then, on the aforementioned Christian background, and becomes possible due to the Christian belief that a physician in his right mind cannot but choose consciously the good

[34] Mantegazza, p. 9.
[35] See Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 21-24.

health of patients rather than their suffering.[36] Yet, as if it was the effect of another – re-considered – dualism, the straight faith in free choice proves to be compatible with the one that relies on a strong and inexorable genetics, which in turn is interwoven with an early form of environmental determinism, and affects the person by shaping his/her attitudes and behaviours. This characterisation of the physician as both an individual and a professional figure has its parallel in the passage in which the main character declares his 'double' – therefore constraining – origin. A son of a Neapolitan woman and an English man – symbolised by the stereotypical Mount Vesuvius and 'le nebbie di Londra',[37] respectively – he can feel the presence of 'due nature, due mondi di pensieri, di sensazioni, di gioie e di dolori',[38] the Italian side of which is indicated with 'Dante e Leonardo, Macchiavelli e i Borgia'[39] (emblems of a strong national identity, torn between the genius and the propensity for intrigue). In this genetic-deterministic perspective lies, too, the aetiology and framing of malady, which may be transmitted from one generation to another, 'seminando la debolezza, il dolore, la maledizione contro la vita e chi ce l'ha data'.[40] There resides also the ethnocentric idea that some environmental characteristics may generate illnesses

[36] The bases of this concept (that men and women cannot but desire the best for themselves and their neighbours) can be found since the Christian tradition, if we read the passage in Saint Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*, in which it is said that no-one can hate him/herself. See Sant'Agostino (Augustine of Hippo), *L'istruzione cristiana*, ed. by M. Simonetti (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), p. 44: 'Nemo ergo se odit. Et hinc quidem nulla cum aliqua secta quaestio fuit. Sed neque corpus suum quisquam odit; verum est enim quod ait apostolus: "Nemo umquam carnem suam odio habuit" ' (Therefore, no-one hates themselves. For this reason, then, there was never any controversy with other philosophical schools over this point. Also, there is no-one who hates their body. Indeed, what the apostle says is true: no man ever hated his own flesh). (Translation mine. The quotation of Paul the Apostle is adapted from Ephesians, 5. 29).
[37] Mantegazza, p. 63.
[38] Mantegazza, p. 20.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Mantegazza, p. 29.

either alone or upon their mixing up with the effects of genetic forces. As evidence of this, one of the doctors whom Emma asks for consultation clarifies that Northern countries are immune to phthisis, thereby applying a colonial mind-set to medical power, which brings back some maladies not only to 'sexual inequality'[41] but also to specific areas of subaltern culture, which prove therefore to be more exposed to death. In this way, the dualism at the beginning is overturned again, since it implies that savages are not free from typically European illnesses, and rather undergo the same symptoms as women who live in civilised countries, including consumption and decline (which in the case of savages are displayed through the amorality described in their behaviours).

In such a framework, where the doctor appears free as an individual and, at the same time, compelled by higher and more powerful drives – obligations to his morality and compliance to genetic/environmental forces – the difference between him and his patients is even more marked in that the behaviour of the latter seems to follow other rules, such as those that come from gender and area of origin, thus slipping from any other mechanism but that coming from – and imposed by – the eye of the doctor. Coinciding with a kind of 'primitive', the patient does not seem to be provided with any free will and is inevitably destined to malady under specific circumstances – a malady that may be both physical (Emma) and moral (savages). In addition, the patient's character does not result from a superior synthesis between contradictions – this is the case of Emma, who

[41] The 'sexual inequality' evidence for consumption refers to Barnes's book on tuberculosis in nineteenth-century France, where there was the belief that being a woman – that is, provided with a weak complexion and very often poor – was an aggravating factor and contributed the diffusion of the so-called White Plague. On this point, see David S. Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease: Tubercolosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 37-41.

in the novel is presented as *only* a British person, affected by the fogs of her city. This physician-patient opposition legitimises the activity of the former, makes it necessary and inescapable due to the aforementioned moral and genetic obligations, thereby leaving the patient/uneducated savage in a completely passive position, which is even compounded by the Western awareness of the fallacy of human nature. Only an apparent paradox, indeed, the power of knowledge of medical activity becomes increasingly stronger due to such declarations as those about the imperfection or ignorance of medicine. This is exemplified in the passage in which one of the doctors in the novel states: '[...] in medicina non si sa nulla di certo',[42] thus recalling a famous *mythe* described by Roland Barthes, according to which intellectuals and the power of their knowledge emerge – paradoxically – fortified after having declared their inappropriateness.[43] As part of this cultural framework, the commonplace about the transience of human life sees an overlap between the 'civilised' and the 'primitive' world in the metaphor provided by Emma at some point, based on which we are but the oxen which see their flesh torn into pieces by the 'abitanti dell'Abissinia',[44] who are said to bear bad habits. The identification between medical power and the colonial mind-set is at work now, and is still endorsed by the exoticist trend, which was fuelled by the taste for adventure and the 'attraction to the unknown' provided by Italian literature of the period. In this

[42] Mantegazza, p. 40.
[43] See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, selected and trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1972), pp. 33-34.
[44] Mantegazza, p. 61.

way, we see evidence of a powerful drive in the colonial expansion of the early 1880s, as recorded by Nicola Labanca.[45]

Due to his Hegelian ability with the sublimation of contrasts, the physician (who is supposed to synthesise the extreme poles of the 'cieca fede di apostolo' and the 'scetticismo agghiacciato'[46]) displays his unreachable superiority to the patient. This emerges from the last section of Mantegazza's novel, in which the English-Roman *dottor Haug*, who has no recourse to the verbosity of his colleagues, keeps a scale model of Venus de' Medici in his studio (and, significantly, it is not specified whether it is the marble copy of the Greek one or that made of wax by the already mentioned Clemente Susini). If possible, then, the colonial attitude towards the female patient, mirrored by this Venus as a model of beauty, is more pervading due to the presence of a laurel and a myrtle plant, as well as the great number of books in the room. Defined by Emma in oxymoronic terms as a 'confusione sublime',[47] and interpreted as emblems of 'arte', 'natura' and 'scienza',[48] respectively, they are *de facto* the expressions of the patriarchy/ethnocentrism that substantiates the medical profession, which hides the submission of the patient behind a wide knowledge and the artistic sublimation. Such an attitude inscribes the subject of medical science within a familiar horizon, in which the patient as a 'text' becomes something 'readable' and intelligible at different levels,[49] adapting – based on

[45] Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), pp. 16-18.
[46] Mantegazza, p. 41.
[47] Mantegazza, p. 42.
[48] Ibid.
[49] For the contemporary metaphor of the patient as a 'text', in need for an exegetical approach on the part of the doctor-reader, see at least Kathryn Montgomery Hunter,

Curtius's renowned study – the Medieval and Renaissance's successful metaphor of living creatures as books, before Galileo shifted such a metaphor to the level of nature and Descartes turned it into the *livre du monde*.[50] In this cultural horizon, the subject is promoted to act as a 'canon' (e.g. the one endorsed by the Venus de' Medici), if it is not even dismembered in its single parts (as Susini's *sventrata*) for it to be studied more accurately. In addition, the medical subject undergoes an idealisation process due to its insertion within a 'natural' context in the same way as a savage in an uncontaminated island (significantly, Haug's office is described as full of plants). Finally, the medical subject is legitimised by the officiality of masculinist knowledge, such as that included in books, which provide a support for the hegemonic mind-set to express itself.

Still far from the merely mechanical dissection, the power of medical knowledge in Mantegazza exerts itself through an anatomisation of feelings and morality, which had proved ineffective in Arrigo Boito's poem instead, where *i mondi del sogno e l'anima* were a prerogative of the poet, confirming that spiritual anatomy – to say it with Elémire Zolla – has been always the key for every poetical tradition.[51] In such an anatomisation, the woman's interiority is reduced to the force of will that needs to heal from tuberculosis and to the 'tesori morali […] che fanno risparmiare a noi stessi e agli altri molti dolori'.[52] As

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Doctors' Stories: The Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 11-13.

[50] See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 302-347 (in part. pp. 319-326). As far as Italian medicine is concerned, see at least the words of Pietro Grocco (1856-1916): 'I malati sono i nostri libri', *apud* Corrado Tumiati, *Vite singolari di grandi medici dell'800* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1952), p. 104.

[51] See Elémire Zolla, *Le potenze dell'anima: anatomia dell'uomo spirituale*, ed. by Grazia Marchianò (Milan: BUR, 2008), pp. 51-54.

[52] Mantegazza, p. 43.

doctor Haug says, Emma has already what she needs in order to heal from her malady, and has only to find it within herself, this way metaphorising illness as something strictly related to moral qualities, according to a process that Susan Sontag would study a century later in her renowned book.[53] In this celebration of the miraculous potentialities of the individual for self-healing – another Western stereotype according to George Sebastian Rousseau[54] – the doctor-patient relationship is only apparently overturned in favour of the latter, and the patient is supposed to slip from a subaltern condition only at first blush. Indeed, the self-healing process is not bound to the emancipation of the patient as a person, but to the creation of a perfect wife and citizen – which reasserts the hegemony of medical knowledge – as the aim of Emma is that of a woman in the aftermath of the Italian Unification – 'dar la mano di sposa e divenir madre, senza il pericolo di aver figli malati di petto…'.[55] In such a restoration of the superiority of the physician, medical power was strengthened, then, and the doctor's approval of Emma's intentions, though subordinated to the need for a complete healing first,[56] underlines in general the patriarchal power encompassed by the figure, who puts emphasis on the generosity of the woman just because it is destined to be transmitted to the woman's sons, that is, the future Italians. After all, several features, including Haug's scant recourse to verbal language, contribute further to the celebration of the physician in such a way that recalls the literary characters of Cymbalus and Gulz, who are surrounded by something more than a

[53] See Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor: AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 1991).
[54] See Rousseau, pp. 21-27.
[55] Mantegazza, p. 43.
[56] See Mantegazza, p. 44: 'Di certo non pensate né oggi né domani a prender marito... Sarebbe una follia. Occupatevi di guarire, vogliate guarire e guarirete'.

Christian halo – an out-and-out 'glow of sacredness', which links them with the figure of the wizard. In this definition of the physician as almost a thaumaturgy practitioner, Emma's ultimate death in spite of Haug's advice and medical prescription takes a peculiar meaning. Rather than casting disrepute on the effectiveness of medical power, Emma's death configures itself as the natural conclusion of a trajectory of life defined and, therefore, 'imposed' by medical power. What would be a defeat and the effect of medicine's theoretical and practical faults in other contexts (the death of a patient) is *de facto* overturned by the cultural construct of death as the means for the final sublimation of the individual (as seen in the previous chapter), to which the recurrence of the Italian word *sublime* within the text – still recalling a Romantic context in its meaning a superior synthesis between the real and the ideal[57] – seems to contribute. Such a construct re-asserts medical power as able to decide over the life of a person, imposing death as a necessary pathway to spiritual apotheosis, thus putting Mantegazza's novel in the route that leads to the dualistic viewpoint on medicine (significantly, the patient is now a woman), which prefigures the second edition of Capuana's *Giacinta* (see later). As a part of this cultural construct, the colonial references spread throughout the book serve to promote identification between the patient and the savage as both alterities, which portrays the power of doctors as developed over the decades. Now moved to the background, the setting where the story takes place does not affect health anymore, since the 'natura-curans'

[57] See Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 90-114.

Western stereotype is openly contradicted (Madera does not work as a healing place),[58] thus confirming the sole focus on the figure of the physician.

4.3. The Philosophical Roots of Medical Activity: Angelo Camillo De Meis's Dopo la laurea

The above-illustrated negotiation between the physician-patient dualism and the new Italian cultural context proves to be developed in terms of a philosophical-historical approach and, if possible, taken to extremes in Angelo Camillo De Meis's *Dopo la laurea*, a two-volume epistolary and philosophical novel, which appeared in 1868-1869. In fact, in spite of the year of publication, which precedes chronologically such representations as Camillo Boito's Gulz or Capuana's novels, the one defined in *Dopo la laurea* works as one of the most accomplished definitions of the doctor of its time. Significantly, the appearance of this book seven years after the Unification of the Italian Kingdom confirms what is implied in *Un giorno a Madera* – the need of the newly born country for a novel figure, which was not only devoted to healing patients, but a leading character if not a prophet for the new citizens. In its categorising women as perfect wives and mothers on philosophical bases, furthermore, this work paves the ground for the shift, in the 1880s, to the masculinist literature that would found women's inferiority – and, therefore, social typification – on scientific bases. Accordingly, beyond mixing the 'new' philosophy of Hegel with the more

[58] This is reminded again by Rousseau, pp. 41-46.

'traditional' (and 'local') Vico, that is, the search for a superior synthesis between oppositions with the obligation towards the national identity, De Meis's book legitimises some of the contrasts that we have found so far (in particular the male-female one), thereby revealing already the barbarisation of medical activity with which I conclude this chapter.

The tracing of the story of humankind as passing through different steps, which are destined to repeat themselves in terms of cultural 'cycles' and 'recycles', is, of course, a Vichian legacy. More specifically, Vichian is this tripartite representation of the cultural development of humankind, which is supposed to move through religious, artistic and philosophical phases, as those through which manifested the mind-sets of the *popolo inferiore*, *popolo medio* and *popolo superiore*, respectively, which in turn were established during the Middle Ages, the Risorgimento and the nineteenth century. However, this multi-level tripartition conceals the dichotomies discussed so far, since the three terms can be easily reduced to two, based on the substantial analogy between religion and art, both of which are low expressions of historical-cultural development, and belong to large classes (while philosophy, on the contrary, is a prerogative of a few people, that is, 'un pugno di persone').[59] To re-use the words of De Meis, in the second cultural phase (the artistic one), which pertains to the 'popolo-risorgimento' (identifiable with the middle class before the Unification), there is some space left to religion too, although it is 'in forma di accidente, in via di semplice eccezione',[60] and does not reach the level of religiosity of the lowest

[59] Angelo Camillo De Meis, *Dopo la laurea*, 2 vols (Bologna: Monti, 1868-1869), vol. II, p. 65.
[60] De Meis, p. 66.

classes, within which religion is described as an instinct, that is, pure and innate. The similarities in composition and number, as well as the fact that their cultural manifestations are similar, allow the merging of the 'popolo inferiore' and the 'popolo medio' into a largest and inclusive class, since the people of the second half of the nineteenth century form a group apart due to their numerical scarceness and yet intellectual superiority based on the philosophical approach that they use. Accordingly, De Meis's original tripartition adumbrates but a poetry/religion-philosophy dualism, which results in the superiority of the latter pole. Such a philosophical pole encompasses in fact the celebration of the 'reason that dissects its object', since the kind of approach that it supports aims at the concreteness of science, which, speaking in Hegelian terms, reveals itself through the historical knowledge that decrees the superiority of the Western to the other countries ('la grande ragione, che non conosce altro metodo ed altro processo che la storia').[61] Although dissection is, too, a prerogative of the 'piccola riflessione',[62] which pertains to lowest classes (Middle Ages) and shares something with 'la grande ragione'[63] as well (pertaining to the second half of the nineteenth century), the kind of analysis operated by the philosophical approach brings everything to a superior level, in which *la grande ragione* is but the expression of higher civilisation. While it recalls the anatomising attitude of Carlo Gulz, the *grande ragione* banishes the *piccola riflessione* as rough and belonging to a kind of people that is 'tutt'insieme poetico e religioso'[64] (that is, inferior), and uses it as a manifestation of irreparable ignorance. In this way, the

[61] De Meis, p. 65.
[62] De Meis, p. 66.
[63] Ibid.
[64] De Meis, p. 67.

grande ragione seems to equate the *piccola riflessione* with the concept of *Entartung*, which Max Nordau would discuss some years later as distinguishing *fin-de-siècle* masses, providing individuals with such psychological characteristics as those usually attributed to women in a masculinist context (morbid sensitivity, mysticism, weakness, nervousness, etc.).[65]

A confirmation of how the initial tripartition is reducible to two single parts is in the male-female contrast, involving a celebration of the *maschile* as expressing itself in scientific reasoning and emblematic of a sharp-cutting superiority to the *femminile*, which, on the contrary, can make use only of the *piccola riflessione* approach since it lacks all the 'facoltà superiori, sì nell'ordine della vita, e sì nell'ordine della cognizione'.[66] In the identification with the *ceto medio*, which divides its objects during the analytical process (but does not recollect the single perspectives into a superior unity), the female character is condemned irreparably to the impossibility to understand reality at a superior level, thus being able to express only a partial viewpoint. Female perspective proves to be distant from the cultural construct that identifies philosophy with 'la scienza, tutta la scienza'[67] and aims to restore 'l'unità originaria della vita umana.'[68] Women's only way of expression through the *piccola riflessione* legitimises their being endowed (by men) with simple social tasks that consist in their being 'tutte buone, semplici, casalinghe, riservate, ubbidienti ai loro mariti, e senza tante bugie e tante fisime e ridicole albagie per la testa, quante ce ne

[65] See Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. from the Second Edition of the German Work (New York: Appleton, 1895), pp. 15-33.
[66] De Meis, p. 78.
[67] De Meis, p. 125.
[68] De Meis, p. 74.

hanno ora'.[69] In the definition of women's personality through their overlapping with 'middle class', in addition, emphasis is put even more on the leading role that men are supposed to play accordingly, based on men's identification with the 'popolo superiore, numericamente impercettibile',[70] that is, oligarchy of the second half of the nineteenth century, aiming at leading the huge masses through a 'civilisation process'. This male-female contrast is understandable in psychoanalytical terms *avant la lettre* following the identification, proposed at some point in the book, between women and nature *tout court*, that is, something from which it is necessary to separate oneself for the civilisation to be accomplished. By implying the men-culture identity as the opposite pole, such an archetypical stereotype (which Erich Neumann would discuss a few years later as manifesting through the symbology of the Great Mother)[71] highlights women's subjection insofar as 'nature' is no longer the Romantic place for freedom and happiness, but something to rule, for (male) culture to establish itself. As in Mantegazza's novel, the women-nature archetype, the assimilation of which would be a crucial step in the *principium individuationis* according to Jung, finds another masculinist application in the colonial mind-set, endorsing the image presented since the beginning of this chapter – that of the male ruler who provides knowledge as a pedagogue. In their being identified with nature, which is, broadly speaking, the object of medical discipline, rests also the impossibility for women to become physicians – how is it possible, in fact, to study something without being objectively separated from it? As a confirmation, the attempts on

[69] De Meis, p. 79.
[70] De Meis, p. 83.
[71] Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 3-17.

the part of inferior categories to devote themselves to medical practise result in failures, thinking for instance about what De Meis deems as the superficial medicine, that is, the medicine exerted by the 'alterities' – 'la medicina della plebe, delle donnicciuole, dei secretisti, dei preti esorcisti e scongiuratori, e di tutte sorte di ciarlatani e impostori'.[72]

In providing stereotypes with philosophical bases, De Meis's treatise is also responsible for founding the epistemology of the visible-invisible dichotomy. The dualism between the *grande ragione* philosophical approach and the poetical/religious perspective (aiming at the imperceptible) is finally solved in terms of a celebration of the former pole. The seminal impossibility to find the Kantian *Noumenon*, that is, the unknowable *par excellence*, substantiates a recurrent dualism proposed by a medical/ethnocentric/masculinist viewpoint. Such a dualism provides the 'visible' with the features of perceptibility, realism, practicality, and concreteness, usually attributed to science, and linked with an oligarchic form of government to be accomplished in the aftermath of the political unification. The same dualism, on the other hand, relegates the 'invisible' to such categories as imperceptibility, idealism, impracticability, and general vagueness, usually attributed to art (and poetry in particular), which prove to be linked with primitive mind-sets and ancient forms of government. Of course, the 'invisible' finds a privileged manifestation in the female character, due to the masculinist construct consisting in the difficulty with understanding 'what women want' – a difficulty that does not imply necessarily an elusiveness and, therefore, 'rehabilitation' of women based on a presumed superiority to men

[72] De Meis, p. 106.

though. The cultural construct of female 'problematicity' is again a patriarchal outcome, and in De Meis it proves to be immediately accompanied by the general idea of muliebral tardiness, which emerges from a comparison with men.

As expression of the patriarchal approach that permeates *Dopo la laurea*, the concept itself of malady is intertwined with a precise idea of the individual, based on the masculine-feminine and soul-body dualisms. Significantly, in De Meis's book the object of medical focus no longer is the female character – as it was in the examples from the previous chapter – but the male one, since one of the sections in the book reports the case of Giovanni Prati's poem *Armando*, which was published in the same year as *Dopo la laurea*, and deals exactly with the 'spiritual malady' of a young man in the aftermath of the Unification. Apparently a pretext for a criticism towards the historical and political change that occurred eight years earlier, the malady described is *de facto* something very different from other nineteenth-century illnesses, not only for its aetiology, but also for its concerning only the male soul (differently from the physiological bases of female hysteria). The masculinisation of malady involves of course a re-consideration of its object, which is now supposed to 'enrich' rather than to degrade the patient, due to its affecting interiority and leaving the body healthy. Based on the metaphorisation proposed by Sontag, we could say it is the kind of malady that provides those who are affected by it with an interesting personality – of course, nothing comparable with those hysterical women destined to a deprivation of dignity due to the sexual aetiology of their illness. In responding to the historical needs of European patriarchal and capitalist societies – as

suggested by Mark S. Micale[73] – which called for rational and pragmatic individuals, the masculine malady in *Dopo la laurea* is either something 'elevating' or so negligible that it cannot be invalidating in front of society. In both cases, however, it is something insignificant within the history of pathology (its presence being attested, in fact, in the 'Patologia Speciale'[74] category at most, which analyses only particular and small diseases), the effects of which are limited on health – in any case, not as wasting as nervous malady on women. In a dualism that groups maladies into spiritual and physical categories, implying the former to be less serious, is not a re-consideration of the 'invisible' as the field in which illnesses affecting the soul manifest. Rather, the idea of 'spiritual malady' encompasses in any case the construct of illness as something 'perceptible' in its effects, which are made visible as they meet specific requirements of the patriarchal context in which malady itself is defined. In this way, the mere 'accident' (in Aristotelian terms), which malady is supposed to be, is something enriching exactly due to its aetiology, bound to attest to the superiority of men in a society that celebrates (male) productivity as one of its values, and condemns (female) presumed tardiness on a Vichian scale.

[73] See Mark S. Micale, *Histerical Men: The Hidden History of Male Hidden Illness* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 49-58.
[74] De Meis, p. 201.

4.4. The Barbarisation of the Physician: from the First to the Second Edition of Giacinta

While it is possible to state that William in Mantegazza's novel and Giorgio in De Meis's philosophical work are related to the physician's figures with which this work opens, yet their complexity, though inserted within a masculinist context, proves to be something still far from the figure of Gulz, and distinguished with characteristics of its own. Of course, it is impossible to say whence this increased masculinisation of the physician, which led to a 'barbarisation' of medical activity and to its strong opposition with art and poetry, as displayed by Arrigo and Camillo Boito, had its beginning. It is possible, however, to observe the 'depreciation' in progress, moving from one perspective to the other. Although it will not try to solve the 'who-was-the-first' problem, this last section lingers on the shift from the aforementioned Hegelian representation of the physician to the dichotomous interpretation of medicine, which established itself as part of a more general visible-invisible contrast. Such a transition is observable in the complicated elaboration of *Giacinta*, written and published three times, officially due to the need on the part of Capuana to adapt his novel to the new language of the country (*toscanizzazione*), and to avoid the criticism of censorship. In particular, the passage from the first (1879) to the second (1886) and third edition (1889) – second and third re-writings differ slightly from each other – involved the presence of new implications and nuances, as well as a different representation of the physician, now closer to the one that Camillo Boito had proposed that time.

In the 'more distant' depiction of the female character as a ten-year-old girl, whose most embarrassing physical features are now omitted or toned down for the most part, lies the result of a detached and 'clinical' approach to the literary representation, which is intertwined with a peculiar gaze that displays through the eye of the doctor, aiming at the objectivity pursued by the Italian *Verismo*. It can be assumed, too, that the cutting out of the most sensual among Giacinta's characteristics is traceable back to a negotiation with censorship – which was the thesis of the contemporary Cletto Arrighi[75] – as well as to the need for a stylistic revision, for the purpose to eliminate the 'less inspired' places of the first edition. However, the suppression of Giacinta's feelings during her meetings with the rapist Beppe – e.g. 'i germi della fine sensualità della donna' and her 'compiacimento malsano'[76] in the first edition – is due to the need to make the bare facts emerge, at the cost of eliminating, too, the Lombrosian and bestial characterisation of the abuser as strictly linked to those facts.[77] Indeed, these facts respond now only to what is visible on the surface, which *de facto* proves to be much closer to Gulz's philosophy. In the episode of the girl and Beppe who come out from the small cavern in the park of the house, the narrative focalisation coincides with that of the governess, thus justifying the objectivity of the event through the perspective of an external – not-involved – observer, who

[75] On this aspect, see Marina Paglieri in her postface to Luigi Capuana, *Giacinta, secondo la 1ª edizione del 1879*, pp. 215-223. From now on, this edition (which reproduces the first of the novel) is indicated simply as *Giacinta* (1879). As far as the second edition of the novel is concerned, see Luigi Capuana, *Giacinta. Nuova edizione riveduta dall'autore* (Catania: Giannotta, 1886). From now on, this edition is indicated as *Giacinta* (1886).

[76] Both quotations are taken from *Giacinta* (1879), pp. 33.

[77] See *Giacinta* (1886), p. 27, where Beppe is 'only' a boy surrounded and influenced negatively by bad companies. In the first edition, his characterisation is more nuanced and affects the description of his body too, revealing a Lombrosian debt.

is able to record only the visible consequences of the rape just perpetrated.[78] By espousing the claim for objectivity of the medical viewpoint focusing on the surface body, in addition, the second edition of *Giacinta* preserves the ideal of innocence as implied in the male-adult stereotypical construction of childhood – to re-elaborate an idea of Sara Thornton[79] – a construction that was denied, instead, in the precocious sexuality manifested openly and made visible to the reader in the representation in the first edition. This invention of the child as an 'innocent otherness', which is guaranteed by the depthless approach of the physician (now unable to discover the 'filth' hidden in the interiority of a girl), proves to be effective in terms of supporting the mind-set implied in Italian culture after the Unification. Beyond revealing the fear for the grown woman and the sexual impotence of the male observer – which Angus McLaren applies to *fin-de-siècle* culture[80] – this construction of childhood lays bare the needs of a nation, which relied not only on a perfect wife (as in Mantegazza's novel) for its establishment, but on a pure child as well, free from perverse and polymorphous sexuality. As further evidence of this connection between medical power and national needs, not only does the clinical gaze over Giacinta's body minimise the representation of the girl's interiority, but also it re-interprets physical features in a childlike way. This is the emblematic case of the 'gambe, diritte e ben tornite'[81]

[78] See *Giacinta* (1886), p. 31.
[79] See Sara Thornton, 'The Vanity of Childhood: Constructing, Deconstructing, and Destroying the Child in the Novel of the 1840s', in *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood*, ed. by Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (Routledge: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 122-150 (128-129).
[80] See Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 101-125 (p. 103).
[81] *Giacinta* (1879), p. 29.

of the first edition, which turn into the 'gambine diritte, tornite'[82] of the 1886 one – a diminutive that Paul Barnaby reads as having the effect of 'mak*ing* Giacinta look a good deal younger'.[83] In this way, the re-writing of the novel implies the fear for the other *tout court*. It reveals, *via negationis*, its unsettling power for patriarchal normativity and identity – which is even more evident due to the overlapping, in *Giacinta*, between the child and the female character as both alterities, now sharing (to adapt an expression by Nancy H. Demand) the same identification with – and reduction to – the reproductive function.[84]

In this transition from the first to the later editions of the novel, the presumed objectivity of the 'new' medical perspective gets rid only apparently, then, of the patriarchal perspective implied inevitably in medical/male power. The passage, for instance, from the implication of the rape as a mechanical consequence of Beppe's bestial excitement after seeing Giacinta's naked legs and neck (first edition) to the further softening of the whole episode (second edition) does not stem, of course, from an elimination of masculinity overall, which proves to be assimilated in the story by other means.[85] It being said that the episode of the rape features in the 1886 edition too, providing the young female

[82] *Giacinta* (1886), p. 29.
[83] Paul Barnaby, 'Capuana's *Giacinta*: A Reformed Character?', *The Italianist*, 11 (1991), 70-89 (p. 76).
[84] In recalling, thematically speaking, the previous chapter of my work, the 'identification of women with their sexual and reproduction functions' is quoted from Nancy H. Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 64.
[85] In both the first and the second edition of the novel, in fact, Giacinta never condemns the behaviour of her rapist. In the 1886 version, in particular, the narrator abandons at some point the surface approach, which distinguishes the general attitude in the second edition, and describes the adolescent's feelings: '[…] quando le passava dinanzi agli occhi l'immagine di Beppe, con quel testone nero e quelle pupille nere che l'avevano tenuta così sottomessa, sentiva vibrare per tutto il corpo una sensazione strana, d'inesplicabile tenerezza verso quell'unico amico della sua infanzia che l'aveva tanto divertita e le aveva voluto un po' di bene!': see *Giacinta* (1886), p. 36.

victim with the social dangerousness implied in premature 'sexual knowledge', even when instilled after an assault,[86] the logocentrism is witnessed by the frequent standardisation of the female character in general. As a confirmation, the typhoid fever that affects Giacinta (which remains pretty unchanged throughout the three editions) results in desperation on the part of doctor Balbi, who in the second edition interprets female illness as something impenetrable due to its invisible nature. Such a conceptualisation of malady as something indefinable, along with the cultural construct of woman as a mysterious being, is part of a medical viewpoint that now is regulated on dichotomous approaches, definitely closer to the cultural climate that would produce such controversial works as Weininger's *Sex and Character* just a few years later, implying an irreducible male-female contrast. Beyond any apparent contradiction, indeed, the woman's insertion within a dualistic (and seemingly simplistic) perspective, within which she is identifiable with either pole, still allows male observers to keep considering her, paradoxically, as a problematic being, and her malady as something complex in spite of the naïveté of women's representation. In such an oversimplified construct, the adumbrated ineptitude of the physician (in the 1886 edition, Balbi is only able to contribute a medical advice that is grounded on worldly wisdom) finds its rationale in the chronic impossibility to analyse what lies beneath the visible surface, as well as in a micro-economic logic that proves

[86] This is another nineteenth-century stereotype. See Beth Bailey, 'The Vexed History of Children and Sex', in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. by Paula S. Fass (London; New York, 2013), pp. 191-210 (p. 199): 'While the rape of an innocent young girl was held to be the worst of crimes, that rape […] also corrupted her innocence, by giving her a precocious sexual knowledge. Thus the child victims of rape or incest – no matter how powerfully the crime was decried – were put outside the full protections of childhood, placed in different category. Those with sexual knowledge were seen as a threat to the innocence of other children, requiring separation from them, most often in institutions devoted to redemption and reform'.

to be crucial for this profession in Western countries.[87] Accordingly, the physician can only say that convalescence takes time to the newly healed, rubbing his hands for the satisfaction resulting from Giacinta's healing, which, of course, did not depend directly on his intervention.

Significantly, then, the apparent downsizing of the role of the physician as part of the plot – which results in the restriction of his range of interests, his progressive ignorance and his superficial approaching to malady – is intertwined with a 'chorality' of perspectives. Based on this, the viewpoint of Giacinta's servant in the second edition of the novel has the same narrative space as that of doctor Balbi. Yet, as witnessed by the following example of Follini, the presence of the physician is not reduced in terms of 'physicality'. In other words, his physical interference is still strong, and is crucial, too, as it is linked with the creation of an environment that suits the manifestation and management of malady, thus confirming the increasing medicalisation of life in Western countries and Ivan Illich's idea about illness as a 'social state'.[88] This revised importance of the physician is, at first sight, in the frequent presence of Follini within the second edition of the novel, while in the first he appeared only starting from Chapter X. More precisely, in the second edition Follini is initially introduced as part of a group of elder doctors, thereby emerging as the symbol of a new generation of scholars in comparison with a traditional and obsolete way

[87] An example of how the need for money is fundamental for the medical profession throughout the nineteenth century is found in France, as is seen in the analysis of Matthew Ramsey, 'Medical Power and Popular Medicine: Illegal Healers in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Social History*, 4 (1977), 560-587.

[88] See Ivan Illich, 'the Medicalization of Life', in *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), online version: http://www.darkpharma.nl/uploads/7/3/2/8/7328594/medical-nemesis-ivan-illitch.pdf [accessed 31 August 2015] (in part. ch. 2, 'The Medicalization of Life').

of practising medicine. However, no longer is his presence among his colleagues so upsetting for them. As a matter of fact, his prescription of a poison – which he calls 'curare'[89] – in order to heal from malady appears as less 'revolutionary' than the first edition, where Follini's unusual ideas engendered both jealousy and perplexity in his colleagues, and he himself had to specify that the 'curaro'[90] could be prescribed as a medicine though in small doses. Furthermore, in moving from the first to the second edition, there develops the idea of the physician as an *auctoritas* in spite of his manifest ignorance, as witnessed by the misspelled name of the poison that he mentions (*curare* in spite of the correct *curaro*). In such a re-definition, even the revision of Follini's cultural background in the 1886 edition, starting from his education abroad, is perfectly explainable. In the first edition, indeed, Follini was an expert in the new American pharmacopeia, and even able to inspire jealousy due to the accomplished medical training abroad. The 'medico filosofo'[91] and the upholder of a rich viewpoint that mixed up Bernard, Virchow, Moleschott, Hegel and Spencer, at the same time expressing admiration for De Meis's thought, Follini is now equated, in the second edition, with what appears as a common and even trivial physician. Of the former mixing materialistic anatomy (Bernard) with mechanism applied to the activity of the cells (Virchow), cultural evolutionism (Spencer) with physiology (Moleschott), all of which synthesised in De Meis's perspective, only the last one survived in the 1886 edition. But Follini's still following the teaching provided by *Dopo la laurea* sounds more like a 'remnant' of the first version of

[89] *Giacinta* (1886), p. 220.
[90] *Giacinta* (1879), p. 155.
[91] *Giacinta* (1879), p. 160.

the novel – indeed, the physician does not have the soul of a poet anymore.[92] Thus, though emerging from the group of his colleagues, he does not differ too much from them. His former interest in Giacinta as a 'caso di patologia morale'[93] is, of course, something new if we consider that, as a term, 'patologia' was pretty unusual in Italian literature (it had appeared in a few works, including Giuseppe Rovani's novel *Cento anni*, with reference to a 'trattato di patologia sulla natura intellettuale e morale degli uomini').[94] However, the original idea of pathology as applied to ethics, which cannot be explained by referring only to notions about natural inheritance, fades away in the 1886 edition, in which the construct of the girl as a 'caso di patologia morale non ordinario'[95] is attributed to *commendatore Mazzi*, a prosecutor (as if pathology was now more relevant to law). Significantly, even the overlapping between the physician and the 'confessore'[96], which Follini borrows from the girl in the first edition and recalls the Hegelian idea of Olivi, is attributed, in 1886, only to Giacinta, who defines her doctor as her strict 'confessore'.[97]

Follini's observations on Giacinta's *bel caso* – remaining more or less the same from the first to the second edition – result in quite a banal analysis of the woman's behaviour taken in its spontaneity, which foreruns something already *in nuce* in the cultural climate of Northern Europe, the result of a positivist attitude that would lead, *mutatis mutandis*, to psychoanalysis. As far as this point is

[92] See *Giacinta* (1879), p. 161: 'Quel giovane medico, ricco di tanta dottrina, aveva un'anima da poeta'.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Giuseppe Rovani, *Cento anni*, 3 vols (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, n.d.), vol. II, p. 116.
[95] *Giacinta* (1886), p. 237.
[96] *Giacinta* (1879), p. 162.
[97] *Giacinta* (1886), p. 239.

concerned, the mutual attraction between Giacinta and her doctor, mostly implied in the 1879 edition, is easily explainable in terms of the *transfert* process, as remarked several times by the critical literature on the author,[98] but *de facto* it does not suggest anything particularly innovative in comparison with what the common sense of an old physician may suggest in the nineteenth century. The triviality of this novel representation of the doctor, which in 1886 shows open attraction for the girl, displays a kinship with Gulz and his adumbrated attraction for Carlotta, as well as the behaviours of Verga's country physicians, though not matching the same level of meanness.

As showed by the analysis of *Giacinta*'s re-elaboration, the increasing exclusion of the inner representation of the female mind does not result in a challenge to the patriarchal stereotypes on the part of the narrator. Patriarchy emerges as even reinforced from the second edition of the novel, as if the 'obscenity' in the definition of the female character (in the first edition) was already assimilated and somehow 'metabolised' in Italian culture, after a negotiation with both logocentric structures, implied in nineteenth-century European culture, and historical needs instilled by the Unification. As a warrantor of this, the physician encapsulates different forces, then, inclining to a simplifying attitude that is grounded on dualism-based approaches to otherness and reality *tout court*. His role implies, of course, mediation with religion too, which was deeply grounded in the culture of the country, albeit Unification had imposed a deep separation

[98] See At least the article by Valeria Pappalardo, 'Dalle "eroine" di Capuana alle "isteriche" di Sigmund Freud', *Critica letteraria*, 95 (1997), 253-269.

between the spiritual and the secular dimensions. Based on this, the final suicide of Giacinta – due to a problematic adaptation to social convenience in the first edition of the novel – becomes something more 'troublesome' in the second edition, yet one still present and relevant to that cult of martyrs that played an important role – according to Lucy Riall – in shaping Italian culture during the unification process.[99] The contradiction with the Christian precept that forbids suicide as a mortal sin is overcome by the need to provide an example of sacrifice in any case – which makes it significant that, as demonstrated by the philological study of the novel's elaboration, suicide's episode has been restored as a conclusion after the original purpose to cross it out from the story.[100] Implied, too, in the female figure that dies due to tuberculosis in spite of medical advice, at the end of Mantegazza's novel, martyrdom proves to be an important factor in reinforcing medical activity, as if otherness (woman or child) had to be finally assimilated by the observer by means of an ultimate sublimation. As a confirmation, in the second edition of the novel Follini does not do anything to avoid Giacinta taking poison, almost hiding himself behind a fatalistic attitude, and yet becoming an impassive observer of the imminent tragedy, which he somehow foresees. Far from challenging medical authority, then, the nineteenth-century patriarchal stereotype of the woman's consumption and ultimate death needs a continuous updating and displays as functional to establishing the power of a doctor who considers suicide as not a form of revolt or deviance from normativity, but a necessary requirement in the definition of the female subject.

[99] See Lucy Riall, 'Martyr Cults in Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Journal of Modern History*, 2 (2010), 255-287.

[100] See Matteo Durante, 'Tra la prima e la seconda Giacinta di Capuana', in Aa.Vv., *Capuana verista.* Atti dell'Incontro di studio. Catania, 29-30 ottobre 1982 (Catania: Fondazione Verga, 1984), pp. 199-263 (pp. 215-216).

In this cultural construction of both consumption and suicide as both manifestations of sacrifice – when re-traced back under the social control of medical power[101] – lies in fact the re-definition of physicians' activity in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time, as my initial analysis of 'Lezione d'anatomia' has witnessed and the observations on *Giacinta*'s re-writings have confirmed, women were already being considered as the 'object' in opposition to the 'subjectivity' of the medical observer. As far as the physician is concerned, he had not hesitated to show his ignorance (although in the sense of Barthes) about pathology in the 1870s, appealing to a generic 'abisso del cuore umano',[102] which was already a topic in Tommaseo's idea of the *affetti* and Manzoni's 'guazzabuglio del cuore umano'.[103] The same physician would not hesitate, just a few years later, to tell a lie to his female patient with the apparent intention to calm her nerves (as Dottor Mola in Capuana's *Profumo*), and yet with the actual aim to re-establish his power which was simply challenged by the woman's – licit – enquiries.

[101] Terms used ('deviance' and 'social control') recall the entry 'Illness', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. by David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan & the Free Press, 1968-1979), VII (1968), pp. 90-96 (p. 92).
[102] *Giacinta* (1879), p. 172.
[103] Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1961), p. 230.

Conclusion

My thesis has illustrated how the North-European scientific theories concerning the representation of the human anatomy and the mind are re-interpreted by a group of Italian authors in 1865-1901 in terms of a contrast between the visible and the invisible. In particular, it has showed how such a contrast can be found since the delineation of the medical subject (as a female corpse) in Arrigo Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia', which plays a seminal role in Italian literature due to its adaptation – and re-elaboration – of the new positivist issues. The visible-invisible dichotomy, still grounded on two irreducible poles in Camillo Boito's 'Un corpo', is revised by Italian *Spiritismo*, which challenges the initial monolithic dichotomy by suggesting that there are different 'shades of visibility' (as implied by the new technology of the camera), and that the so-called invisible concerns also the region of the unconscious – that of the (female) medium, from which ghosts and ectoplasms originate, and that of the writer, in which artworks are conceived. Moving from here, the visible-invisible dichotomy becomes relevant to the definition of the female character in a number of novels from the *fin de siècle* (starting from Tarchetti's *Fosca*) – a character portrayed as a living (or dying) body, which reprises (or overturns) nineteenth-century aestheticism, and as a mysterious inwardness, capable of generating hysterical symptoms that are enigmatic to science. The same dichotomy is generally implied, of course, in the kind of knowledge upheld by the nineteenth-century physician, who in Italy

sees a re-definition of his literary version – from the healer-confessor described by Catholic authors, who exerts his social authority regardless of gender and espouses a holistic attitude towards the patient, to the figure in the second edition of Capuana's *Giacinta*, repository of a superficial knowledge based on dichotomies and the feminisation of the patient.

As witnessed by a number of passages in my thesis, my research could be expanded for several years beyond Graf's *Il riscatto*, which is the end-point of my inquiry due to its upsetting the visible-invisible contrast through a revision of the determinism connected to the positivist idea of suicide. It is not possible, in fact, to establish that the visible-invisible dichotomy disappears immediately from Italian literature after Graf's novel, thus decreeing a recognisable fracture between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. As evidence, Pirandello's *novella* 'Personaggi' adapts Capuana's concept of the 'spiritualistic invisible' that gives life to the literary work, thereby shifting the aforementioned dichotomy to the first decade of the twentieth century (or even to the first twenty years, if we think about the 1921 *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, which are affected by the same ideas about literary creation).

If it does not disappear completely, however, the visible-invisible contrast is 're-dimensioned', as can be seen in D'Annunzio's narrative, precisely through the dealing with the topic of suicide, which the author treats elsewhere too in his work. A subject matter already in *Trionfo della morte*, in which it is affected by the strict rules of geneticism, such a topic recurs in *Forse che sì forse che no* as well, published in 1910 and focusing on the love experiences of five characters – the aviator Paolo Tarsis and the siblings Isabella, Vanina, Lunetta, and Aldo

Inghirami. In this novel, suicide is connected to love, being either what may unite lovers *in aeternum* or a reaction to heartbreak. The former case is that of Paolo, who ponders to kill himself with Isabella while driving his car fast in the first pages of the novel. The latter case is evident in the temptation to suicide of Vanina and Aldo (Vanina loves Paolo and is not reciprocated, while Aldo feels incestuous attraction to Isabella) and in the real suicide of Vanina after revealing to Paolo the liaison between Isabella and Aldo. There is no proper analysis of the invisible side of the character, in which the motivations that lead to commit suicide are supposed to have their origin, nor is this ultimate action linked to any form of hysteria whatsoever (as it would be according to positivist science). Something similar applies to the representation of the female character, whose interiority is somehow 'flattened' in the novel, and no longer is the object of male investigation as in D'Annunzio's previous works. Still presented with comparisons to figurative art, this kind of woman maintains her degree of mysteriousness only in a few passages of the story, but does not re-affirm her identity by escaping patriarchal conceptualisation.[1] It happens seldom, in other words, that the observer in the novel recognises the elusiveness of female interiority, as can be found, on the contrary, in some passages from *L'innocente* and *Trionfo della morte*, in which the observer manifests his fear for the unknown woman instead. The loss of semantic consistence in the visible-

[1] See D'Annunzio, *Forse che sì forse che no*, in *Prose di romanzi*, vol. II, pp. 519-877 (p. 654), where Isabella is defined in this way, alluding to her mysteriousness: 'Ella era cangiante come il fianco del morello, come il colombo nell'ombra e nel sole. In un filo di verità ella infilava le sue fresche menzogne con l'arte rapida, ond'eran composte quelle collane mattutine di zàgare che amò avvolgersi al collo in due o tre giri. Ella possedeva un dono e una sapienza onnipotenti sul cuore maschile: sapeva essere e parere inverisimile'. See D'Annunzio, p. 660: 'Ah, di quante larve e di quanti segreti era composta quella creatura che poteva nascondersi dietro lo scuro delle sue ciglia meglio che dietro le pieghe delle sue vesti?'.

invisible dichotomy, connected to a kind of superficiality in the definition of characters, is remarkable in the representation of Isabella's madness, following her being beaten by Paolo. Permeated with Biblical references, Isabella's hallucinatory state is more like a form of expiation for the woman, but several aspects in this representation are superficial and 'exterior', and there is no accurate focus on the mind mechanisms that determine the altered state of conscience. The focus on the invisible is restricted, then, and this analysis of *Forse che sì forse che no* witnesses a process in action within the narrative corpus of a single author, who had offered more profound psychological analyses in previous works.

The progressive re-definition of the visible-invisible dichotomy falls within a general distrust towards positivist science *tout court*, which characterises the first decade of the twentieth century, as witnessed by the example of Futurism (to which D'Annunzio's celebration of the car and the plane in *Forse che sì forse che no* owes something after all). In glorifying the new technological discoveries, the first Italian and European avant-garde supported science as long as it allowed the invention of engines capable of producing significant speed and the elaboration of effective war strategies. Such a re-interpretation is intertwined with a degradation of the concept itself of science, as ascertained by the *Manifesto dei pittori futuristi*, proclaimed on 11 February 1910 by a group of painters including Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini. In one of its passages, science is praised as what has changed people's life as well as a symbol of modernity – a

concept correlated with a general aversion to 'past culture'.[2] By cleaning up the obsolescence of the past, science allows people to live freely without the burden of a heavy cultural tradition, which – as seen in the previous chapters – played a crucial role in the assimilation of positivist science in Italy instead (thinking about *Spiritismo*, which conjugated the new European disciplines with a traditional background encompassed by the figure of Dante).

The degradation of science is appreciable as soon as we can consider the attitude towards psychoanalysis (intended as a science by its creator Freud) on the part of Italian authors. Proverbially aiming at the invisible of the unconscious region, psychoanalysis, to which Enrico Morselli dedicated two volumes in 1926,[3] was belittled *in primis* by Italo Svevo.[4] In *La coscienza di Zeno*, indeed, there is no sign of the visible-invisible dichotomy and Freud's theory serves mainly to confirm the main character's *inettitudine* (or remark the

[2] See Umberto Boccioni and others, 'Manifesto dei pittori futuristi', in *Manifesti futuristi*, ed. by Guido Davico Bonino (Milan: BUR, 2009), pp. 67-70 (p. 67): 'Noi vi dichiariamo che il trionfante progresso delle scienze ha determinato nell'umanità mutamenti tanto profondi, da scavare un abisso fra i docili schiavi del passato e noi liberi, noi sicuri della radiosa magnificenza del futuro'.

[3] See Enrico Morselli, *La Psicanalisi. Studii ed appunti critici*, 2 vols (Turin: Bocca, 1926), vol. I, p. 20: '[…] noi alienisti e neurologi italiani non siamo sistematici avversari della Psicanalisi: siamo dispostissimi a riconoscere i lati originali, ma nel contempo vogliamo sottoporli, secondo i criteri del sano Positivismo scientifico e filosofico, ad un esame serio e sottile, massimamente in riguardo dei suoi principi generali; non possiamo accettare quelli che per ora ci sembrano paradossi o parti di fantasia'. In spite of this positivist declaration, Morselli distances from psychoanalysis several times in his work, considering Freud's theory as incompatible with the 'Latin mind-set'.

[4] On the relationship between psychoanalysis and Italian literature, see Michel David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, 2nd edn (Turin: Boringhieri, 1970), pp. 332-591 (pp. 348-356 and 379-404 for the relationship between Futurism and psychoanalysis and Svevo and psychoanalysis, respectively).

psychoanalyst's meanness and inadequacy).[5] Without generalising, it is the sign of a cultural change, which closes ideally the inquiry conducted so far.

[5] See the 'Prefazione', in Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*, in *Romanzi e "continuazioni"*, ed. by Nunzia Palmieri and Fabio Vittorini (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), pp. 623-1085 (p. 625).

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